

MULTI-PERIOD ARCHAEOLOGY AT PYNESFIELD, RICKMANSWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE

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Summary

Between April 2017 and July 2018, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) conducted an archaeological excavation on land at Pynesfield, Rickmansworth, adjacent to a site at Denham Park Farm previously excavated by AS between 2012 and 2017. Both sites are located within the Colne Valley, in an area that is considered to be archaeologically prolific for many periods. To the west, the excavation at Denham Park Farm recorded prehistoric struck flints and late Bronze Age and Romano-British features. The Pynesfield and Denham Park Farm sites represent two separate windows on to prehistoric and Romano-British activity on flanks of the valley of the river Colne. Activity at Pynesfield appears to be peripheral to the main focus of settlement particularly in the late Bronze/early Iron Age and the Romano-British periods. The activity at Denham was also considered peripheral, although perhaps less so than the current site, and it may be suggested that the main focus of occupation in these periods was located somewhere between the two sites. Activity preceding the late Bronze Age was limited to a small number of pits, perhaps representing episodic occupation of the area.

Following Roman occupation, there is no evidence of activity until the medieval period. This consisted of a series of ditches distributed across the site. Within the southern part of the site, a greater concentration of ditches can be seen to form an enclosure, possibly for the containment of animals. Post-medieval archaeology can be seen represent continued use and adaptation of this enclosure, the addition of new enclosures and the first evidence for gravel or chalk extraction.

Introduction

Between April 2017 and July 2018, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) carried out an archaeological excavation on land at Pynesfield, Maple Cross, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire (NGR TQ 0330 9040; Fig. 1), as part of measures to comply with a planning condition for gravel extraction at this location. Nearby to the west, but beyond the county boundary, lies Denham Park Farm, where, between 2012 and 2017, AS had conducted a phased excavation ahead of mineral extraction. Excavation at Pynesfield offered the opportunity to further investigate the archaeology of this landscape on the flanks of the valley of the river Colne. The excavation revealed archaeology, stretching across the site, of early and middle Bronze Age, late Bronze Age to early Iron Age, Romano-British, medieval, and post-medieval date (Fig. 2).

At the time of excavation, the Pynesfield site consisted of a c.9ha of land within a field bordered to the east by the A412 North Orbital Road and to the north and west by Tilehouse Lane (Fig. 1). The site lies on the western side of the Colne valley and so, to the east of the site, flows the river Colne. Within the valley lie various lakes which now occupy much of the lower lying land. With the exception of these lakes, which are used for a variety of purposes, and the quarry at Denham Park Farm to the west, the immediately surrounding area is overwhelmingly agricultural in character.

The site lies at c.42m AOD and slopes gently upwards from south to north with the land beyond the western boundary rising up dramatically to the west. Land to the east drops towards the Colne valley before climbing fairly steeply on the opposite side of the valley. The

majority of the site is located on Shepperton Gravel with Seaford and Newhaven chalk formations underlying its western edge (BGS 2005). The Shepperton gravel is the latest gravel formation in the complex sequence of terrace formation in the Middle Thames Valley and its tributaries (Wymer 1999).

Archaeological and Historical Background

The surrounding area

The lower Colne Valley has a varied archaeological background with the earliest human presence dating to the Palaeolithic period. Geologically, the river and gravel on the valley floor are a relatively modern event with reworking of the earlier gravel terrace deposits through which the river has cut but with older terrace and glacial outwash deposits present on the valley sides. Inspections of Rickmansworth gravel pits in the early 20th century revealed hundreds of Palaeolithic flint hand-axes, flakes and cores (Wymer 1968; Wymer 1999) and nearer to the excavation area, the construction of the A421 in 1928 required the digging of a cutting through Normer Hill between West Hyde and Denham. These works exposed a mix of clay and gravel which yielded a collection of almost 100 Palaeolithic tools, and the site has been subsequently identified by English Heritage-sponsored English Rivers Project as being of 'outstanding importance'.

Other excavations in the lower Colne Valley have found Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic tools and hunting evidence, both *in situ* and as unstratified finds (Holgate 1995; Jenkins 2005; Lacaille 1963; Lewis *et al* 1992; Silva and Farr 2010; Wymer 1968). Subsequent periods are also well represented in the valley, especially where mineral extraction has been subject to archaeological monitoring (Coleman *et al.* 2004; Ford and Pine 2003; Ford 2006; Wessex Archaeology 2006).

At the nearby Denham Park Farm, excavation revealed a multi-period archaeological landscape with the most extensive activity dating to the late Bronze Age and Romano-British periods. Further, but quite limited, evidence of Neolithic, medieval, post-medieval and modern activity was also recorded (Newton *et al.* 2018) Medieval settlement and industrial sites have been identified further to the west in Chalfont St Peter (Pine 2000) and upstream towards Rickmansworth (MoLAS 2000). Several manorial estates in the West Hyde area had their origins in the late Saxon and medieval periods although there has been very little archaeological investigation of these sites.

Post-medieval development is widespread in the lower Colne Valley with the growth of industry, particularly milling, along the banks of the Colne. These sites include the Grade II listed Harefield Copper Mill and Harefield Rubber Company buildings on the east side of the valley in Greater London (Greater London HER). Other sites have been noted away from the river.

Previous archaeological work at the Pynesfield site

In 2011 a desk-based assessment (Dawson 2011) was compiled to assess the archaeological potential of the Pynesfield site. This concluded that it was possible that archaeological deposits of almost any period could be expected within the site. This was followed by a detailed magnetic survey (gradiometry) of the site (Smalley 2012). This did not record any anomalies that could be confidently attributed as being of archaeological origin. Five discrete positive area anomalies of a possible archaeological origin were noted within the data set but these were considered equally likely to be related to changes in geology or pedology.

In April 2012, the site was subject to an archaeological trial trench evaluation (Platt and Pine 2012). The evaluation comprised 81 trial trenches and encountered limited archaeological evidence relative to the size of the assessment area. Possible late Bronze Age features comprised a ditch in Trench 12 at the north of the site which contained a single sherd of possible late Bronze Age pottery and a gully in Trench 62 at the south of the site which also contained a sherd of pottery of late Bronze Age date. Three struck flints were also recovered. There were a small number of undated features which were considered to possibly be of prehistoric date. Medieval activity was represented by substantial lengths of ditch. An east to west aligned ditch was recorded in several trenches representing a single feature, over 125m in length. Another stretch of medieval ditch was recorded in the south-eastern part of the site on a north-south axis. This too was evident in several trenches and was therefore considered to be in excess of 150m in length. It was dated by three sherds of medieval pottery.

The Excavation

Based on the results of the archaeological evaluation (Platt and Pine 2012), Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA) required a programme of open-area excavation to further investigate the archaeological features within the site. An area of excavation was identified and it was proposed to complete the works in several phases. Undifferentiated overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Thereafter, all investigation was undertaken by hand. Exposed surfaces were cleaned as and examined for archaeological features and finds. Deposits were recorded using *pro forma* recording sheets, drawn to scale and photographed as appropriate. Excavated spoil was checked for finds and the excavation area was scanned by metal detector.

The excavation revealed a fairly simple deposit model. The site was commonly overlain by Topsoil (L1000=L2000=L3000), a friable dark to mid grey brown silt with occasional to moderate, small and large, sub angular/sub-rounded flint (c.0.35m thick). Topsoil (L1000=L2000=L3000) overlay Subsoil (L1001=L2001=L3001), a deposit which varied in composition across the site (c.0.10m thick). During Excavation Phase 4 it was described as a firm, brown orange clayey silt with occasional chalk. In Excavation Phase 5, it was recorded as a mid brown clayey silt. During Excavation Phase 6, it was described as a firm, dark red brown sandy silt with occasional flint. Within the western part of the site Subsoil (L1001=L2001=L3001) overlay colluvial deposits (L1100, L1408, L1409, L2002 and L3213).

Stratigraphically sealed at the base of the sequence were natural deposits L1002=L2003=L3002, which varied across the site. During Excavation Phase 4, the deposit was identified as a firm, brown orange sandy clay and blue grey sand, with frequent gravel and small to large sub-angular/sub-rounded flint. During Excavation Phase 5, it was described as a mid brown sandy clay and very light brown silty clay with occasional flint. Work during Excavation Phase 6 recorded a firm, mid yellow brown sandy gravel with frequent flint.

On the basis of artefactual evidence and stratigraphic and spatial relationships, the archaeology that was recorded during the excavation was considered to represent seven distinct phases of activity (Table 1 and Figs. 3-5 & 7-10). However, all prehistoric activity recorded during the excavation was assigned to a single, overarching, phase (Phase 1) due to the highly fragmented nature of much of the flint-tempered pottery, and the lack of diagnostic sherds within that assemblage. On this basis, a significant proportion of prehistoric features were not closely dated and were assigned a generic prehistoric date spanning the Neolithic to early Iron Age. Where more closely dateable evidence was present, these features were

assigned to sub-phases representing the early Neolithic (Phase 1.1), the early Bronze Age (Phase 1.2), the middle Bronze Age (Phase 1.3) and the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (Phase 1.4). This is to some extent misleading as these sub-phases do not necessarily represent coherent development and continuation from one another. They are presented in this way as an expedient to understanding the potential relationships between features assigned to these sub-phases and the features which can only be assigned to the overarching 'prehistoric' phase of activity.

In addition, Romano-British (Phase 2), Saxo-Norman/medieval (Phase 3), and post-medieval (Phase 4) activity was recorded. The most significant phases were those assigned to the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (Phase 1.4), the Saxo-Norman to medieval (Phase 3), and the post-medieval (Phase 4) periods.

Phase	Period	Sub-Phase	Sub-Period	Date
1	Prehistory	1.1	Early Neolithic	4300BC – 3300BC
		1.2	Early Bronze Age	2100BC – 1700BC
		1.3	Middle Bronze Age	1700BC – 1300BC
		1.4	Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age	1300BC – 400BC
		Undated	Neolithic - Early Iron Age	4300BC – 400BC
2	Romano-British	-	-	43AD – 410AD
3	Medieval	-	-	11 th C – 15 th C
4	Post-medieval	-	-	15 th C – 19 th C

Table 1: The phases of activity represented at Pynesfield, Maple Cross, Rickmansworth

The archaeology

Phase 1.1 Early Neolithic

On the basis of ceramic evidence a single pit (F2146) and the anthropogenic fill of a natural depression (L1445) have been assigned an early Neolithic date (Figs. 3 & 4). The pottery from L1445 constituted a significant group of at least four Plain Bowls of the Grimston tradition. In contrast, F2146 contained only a small quantity of early Neolithic pottery in addition to less closely dateable prehistoric sherds. Ditch F1299, however, contained a significant assemblage of early Neolithic pottery, including a Peterborough Impressed ware bowl, but this appears to have been residual and the ditch was assigned a post-medieval date.

In addition to pottery, L1445 contained a notable group of struck flint, consisting mainly of debitage but also including a blade and a core. Further assemblages of struck flint, with technological traits consistent with early Neolithic origins were contained in Phase 1 Pit F1173 and probable post-medieval Ditch F1180. Six other groups of over 10 pieces of struck flint were present as residual material in late prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman features. The presence and quantity of early Neolithic pottery and struck flint within features of later phases of activity might indicate the level of truncation that has occurred across the site. However, some consideration has to be given to the possibility that this apparently residual material, particularly that from later prehistoric features, is in fact contemporary with the other dateable evidence found within the contexts from which it was recovered. At the nearby Denham Park Farm site (Newton *et al* 2018), twelve pieces (49g) of the total 41 fragments (360g) of flint were recovered from features which were dated as late Bronze Age. While it is feasible that this material was residual, it was considered equally possible that at least some of the assemblage represented late Bronze Age flintworking, perhaps to some extent mimicking, either by accident or design, earlier lithic technologies. A large proportion of the struck flint assemblage (304 fragments, 1396g) has been identified as blade-like debitage and as there is

evidence for substantially more occupation of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age date than of Neolithic date, it is possible that at least some of the lithic assemblage is of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age origin, as is considered to be the case at the nearby Denham Park Farm (Newton *et al.* 2018).

Pit F2146 was located at some distance (c.230m) from L1445 and was, therefore, isolated from the only other context assigned a contemporary date. While its basal fill contained sherds of an early Neolithic Plain Bowl, the upper fill (L2147) contained pottery dateable no more closely than early Neolithic to early Iron Age. A number of features in the immediately surrounding area also contained pottery that could only be assigned this general prehistoric date and it is quite possible that they were contemporary with this pit, forming a group at this location.

Pits form the majority of the evidence for Neolithic settlement sites in both the neighbouring Solent-Thames region (Bradley 2014, 92,101), within which the Denham Park Farm site falls, and in the East Anglian region, which includes Hertfordshire (Medlycott and Brown 2008, 16) and therefore the current site. Such pits can be found in isolation or as clearly-defined clusters. They may also be scattered over an extensive area of land (Bradley 2014, 92). Such patterns of pits constitute the most frequent evidence of settlement in Neolithic south-eastern England as a whole and often these pits have no coherent plan (Smith 1974, 105). Although it is hard to interpret the different patterns and plans in which these pits occur they presumably reflect differences in the duration and intensity of occupation (Bradley 2014, 92). A single pit would appear, therefore, to represent only very brief occupation of this area but the possibility that the presence of the other pits, which are only possibly of this date, might indicate more prolonged occupation. With similar activity recorded to the west at Denham Park Farm, these different locations of pit digging activity could represent episodic utilisation of the same approximate area by the same group, the same group moving only short distances within this area, or separate and distinct single episodes of occupation carried out by different groups. In keeping with this observation, it is worth noting that The struck flint and pottery assemblages from L1445 were considered to represent homogenous activity that has not been scattered far from its primary foci, probable representing peripheral or episodic (nomadic or seasonal) activity.

The content of these pits is often interpreted as material that was deposited in to them when a living site was abandoned (Bradley 2014, 92). Garrow (2006, 59) indicates that the process of depositing this apparent refuse material into the pits may have had some kind of significance to the people that were carrying out this act. It is possible that there is structure to the way in which this material was deposited and it is even possible that midden material or refuse was deliberately curated for use in acts of structured deposition (Garrow 2006). Garrow (2007, 12) has noted the characteristics of pit fills and the artefacts located therein from Neolithic sites in East Anglia. His study showed that whole pots, without exception, were not present, flint assemblages were comprised primarily of working waste, very few bones of any kind were present (although this may be explained by the acidic soils of the sites included in the study), and often the artefacts had been deposited within a soil matrix containing charcoal-rich material, including charred hazelnut shells and seeds. Just as was the case with the early Neolithic pits at the adjacent Denham Park Farm (Newton *et al* 2018), the fills of Pit F2146 appeared not to closely conform to the pattern observed by Garrow (2007). Only pottery was recovered from these fills, with no bone or other material. Charcoal was only present in small quantities and no hazelnut shell or seeds were present. It is possible that this represents regional variation, an area of the study of Neolithic pits which has only really started to emerge with the realisation that such features appear not to be limited only to certain regions of the British Isles (Garrow 2011, 219-222). However, it is possible that preservation conditions have obscured further evidence that might make it possible to identify the fills of Pit F2146 as this kind of material. The presence of an anthropogenic layer, L1445, of early Neolithic date might be considered to be representative of the remains of a midden or similar surface accumulation

of occupation refuse material, gathered together, and perhaps intended for structured or symbolic deposition into pits.

Phase 1.2

A single feature, Pit F1129, was assigned an early Bronze Age date (Figs. 3 & 4). Dating evidence consisted of the partial remains of an early Bronze Age Collared Urn. In the immediate vicinity, contemporary archaeology is not evident. Certainly no early Bronze Age remains were recorded at Denham Park Farm (Newton *et al* 2018). However, further afield, the period is fairly well-represented. Early Bronze Age archaeology was recorded during archaeological work associated with the Eton College Rowing Course Project and the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme and the Imperial College Sports Ground at Harlington was observed to contain a number of cremations associated with pottery of the type present in Pit F1129 (Leivers 2015). Despite the association between cremations and this type of pottery at Harlington (and at numerous other sites) there was no indication of a cremation within Pit F1129. This is not necessarily unusual despite common links between collared urns and cremation burials. Longworth (1984, 47) notes that there are sufficient examples of Collared Urns being demonstrably buried without any association with cremated material that they are not solely connected to funerary practices.

As is the case with the early Neolithic features it appears possible that Pit F1129 may represent short-term occupation of the site. A similar incident of a single early Bronze Age was considered to represent short-term, small-scale occupation at Mill House Farm, Chadwell St Mary, Essex, which is principally known for the late Bronze Age activity recorded there (Newton *forthcoming*). This form of temporary occupation might be considered to be in keeping with statements made by Ashwin (1998, 27) and Kitchen (2001, 110) that Bronze Age society was, to varying degrees, migratory and comprised group mobility and fluidity of landuse. It has been suggested that the groups who spread Beaker pottery through Europe and introduced it to Britain comprised small, mobile, armed groups of merchants travelling around the continent trading metals and precious materials (*c.f.* Briard 1979, 18). Although Briard's (1979) work is now somewhat outdated and has been subject to some scrutiny, this view is still supported to some extent. Fitzpatrick (2015, 41) indicates that the currently recorded distribution of Bell Beaker finds across Europe is extensive but discontinuous. This is considered (*ibid.*) to suggest that travel and migration played important roles in construction and maintenance of the Bell Beaker set. However, ideas about this are now changing and it is believed that, although there may have been a small amount of long distance migration, cultural transmission or the emulation of what may have seemed a more preferable way of life, played a significant role in the spread of Beaker cultural practices, however a high, sustained degree of multi-directional mobility within the British Isles is still understood to have occurred, much of it linked to mobile subsistence practices (Parker Pearson *et al* 2016, 633-634).

Further possible evidence of early Bronze Age activity was identified in the form of an unstratified plano-convex flint knife. Plano-convex knives, often with bi-facial, invasive flaking, are typically recorded in assemblages with early Bronze Age cultural associations. It is possible, therefore, that this object was lost or discarded by the same individuals that created Pit F1129. Plano-convex knives have been recovered from the early Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Staines (Robertson-Mackay 1987), so some possibility remains that this object may have been contemporary with the Phase 1.1 archaeology.

Phase 1.3 Middle Bronze Age

A layer of colluvium (L1408) (Figs. 3 & 4) was present in the south-western section of the site, extending from beyond the western limit of excavation and covering an area of more than 100m in width focussed on Grid Squares E22, E23, F22 and F23. It was composed of friable, dark red brown sandy gravel with frequent angular flint and occasional charcoal and contained a relatively large quantity of middle Bronze Age pottery (229; 702g) and struck flint (39; 140g). The pottery from the layer was exceptionally highly fragmented and friable, as to be expected within a colluvial deposit, and formed part of a single bucket urn identifiable as a Deverel-Rimbury or a Plain Cordoned Urn.

Although the term colluvium is generally described as relating to material transported by gravity (Whitten and Brooks 1975, 95) and is generally differentiated from alluvial sediment transported in well-defined channels, this distinction is difficult to make in practice, so colluvium is often identified on the basis of its geomorphological position and sedimentary characteristics rather than its origin. Indeed, in low energy environments, colluvial layers at the edges of a floodplain are most commonly deposited by overland flow (Brown 1992, 77). The sandy, gravelly characteristics of L1408 might suggest that it derives from weathering or erosion, further up the slope to the west, of the natural substrate and was deposited at this location through gravitational action or overland flow. However, the presence of cultural material in this deposit suggests that it was not just the natural substrate that that was disturbed and redeposited. It appears likely that L1408 was at least partly composed of a surface deposit, perhaps a midden, containing middle Bronze Age material originating in the area to the west of the excavated site. This raises the possibility that there was a focus of activity of this date to the west of the current site.

While the artefactual evidence present in Layer L1408 places it in the middle Bronze Age, following on chronologically from the early Neolithic (Phase 1.1) and early Bronze Age (Phase 1.2) activity and preceding the late Bronze Age (Phase 1.4) activity, the stratigraphic evidence suggests that this deposit was laid down during or after the late Bronze Age. L1408 overlay postholes, containing cultural material of late Bronze Age date, which formed a possible post-built structure. The processes which led to the deposition of L1408 therefore must have taken place following the abandonment/dismantling of the Phase 1.4 post-built structure.

Phase 1.4 Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age

The Character of the Phase 1.4 archaeology

In comparison to the preceding phases of prehistoric activity, the archaeology assigned a late Bronze Age to early Iron Age date was more extensive (Fig. 5). It consisted of a possible structure, represented group of 16 postholes and stakeholes (F1335, F1337, F1339, F1342, F1345, F1347, F1349, F1351, F1357, F1360, F1364, F1370, F1372, F1386, F1388 and F1390) in a sub-oval arrangement, a composite boundary formed of several lengths of ditch (F1013, F1051, F1064, and F2042), and several other features dispersed across the excavated area (L1452, F2029, F2118, F3134, F3136, and F3140). A similar array of features was recorded to the west at the Denham Park Farm site where two ditches, representing boundaries or enclosures, a concentration of posthole, possibly representing a post-built structure, and numerous dispersed pits and postholes were identified (Newton *et al* 2018). At the neighbouring site, it was possible to assign a more specific date of late Bronze Age to the archaeology. At the current site the diagnostic ceramic evidence, although similar, is much more limited and so a more precise date cannot be assigned to this phase of activity and a chronology extending into the early Iron Age cannot be discounted.

The Post-Built Structure

Noteworthy amongst the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age features is a group of 16 postholes and stakeholes (F1335, F1337, F1339, F1342, F1345, F1347, F1349, F1351, F1357, F1360, F1364, F1370, F1372, F1386, F1388 and F1390) in a sub-oval arrangement (Fig. 6). The regularity and similarity of the outer 11 postholes suggest that they formed a sub-oval structure with external dimensions of 6.90m (north to south) by 5.00m (east to west). Four stakeholes (F1345, F1386, F1388 and F1390) were recorded within the centre of the structure. Although this possible structure lies in close proximity to curvilinear Ditch F1315, it does not appear to have been enclosed in any way.

Located in Grid Squares E22 and E23, the remains of this structure were overlain by the colluvial deposit L1408 which contained pottery of middle Bronze Age date, clearly moved by natural processes following the dismantling of the building.

The roundhouse was the standardised form of domestic structure which predominated throughout the later Bronze Age and Iron Age (Brück 2000, 287). In this part of the country, simple post-built roundhouses, sometimes with porch-like structures marking their entrances, become apparent from the middle Bronze Age onwards and post-built roundhouses become much more common in the later Bronze Age (Lambrick 2014, 135). The structure would appear to conform to these patterns and can be considered to represent a possible roundhouse. The sub-oval form of the structure does not detract from such an interpretation as oval-shaped buildings are not uncommon in the Bronze Age (c.f. Drury 1977, 23; Bradley 1970, 322-323; Newton forthcoming, 125; Newton 2017).

Artefactual evidence was limited from these features. The same was observed with regard to a structure, initially considered to be a roundhouse, at the adjacent Denham Park Farm site (Newton *et al* 2018). However, scarcity of occupation debris is not necessarily inconsistent with settlement having occurred. At Lynton Way, Sawston and on the Fordham by-pass, both in Cambridgeshire, late Bronze Age roundhouses, otherwise devoid of finds, have been identified as domestic structures on the basis of associated evidence (Weston *et al* 2007, 16; Mortimer 2005). It is notable, however, that there was limited evidence for cereal processing, not just in association with this structure, but across the Pynesfield site as a whole. This has led to the suggestion that all of the activity represented here lay at some distance from areas of domestic occupation (Summers 2020). It is possible, therefore, that this apparent roundhouse was not used for domestic occupation. As Brück (2019, 125) notes, the term 'house' must be used advisedly as the social values or relationships given material form in these structures cannot be assumed to be similar to our own experience of 'houses'. With this statement Brück (2019, 125) is referring to the way in which late Bronze Age roundhouses were organised internally and to the activities which occurred within them. Equally, however, the same may be applied to the overall function of the buildings. It is conceivable that domestic-style buildings may have been used for non-domestic functions. A small circular structure adjacent to the middle Iron Age roundhouse at Blackhorse Farm, Sawtry, in Cambridgeshire, was interpreted as an ancillary structure despite its form in plan being similar to other roundhouses present at the same site (Newton 2018a, 18-19).

Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age ditches

Ditches F1013 (Grid Squares C3-C4), F1051 (GS C6-C7), F1064 (GS B8-B10) and F2042 (GS B11-B13) formed what appeared to be a single, but interrupted, line running north-north-east to south-south-west across the northern part of the site (Fig. 5). Ditch F2042, the most southerly of these features, was notably deeper than the others and was truncated by Phase 3 Ditch F2037.

These ditches cannot be seen to form part of an enclosure or field system, although it is possible that they functioned in conjunction with features present beyond the limits of

excavation. The frequent gaps between the various lengths of ditch might be considered to suggest that this composite boundary was not associated with pastoral agriculture, although it is possible that they are the result of plough truncation. It is possible that these features were not intended to form part of an enclosure and had an alternative function. Boundaries simply used to denote differences in the use of space are noted in the Iron Age; examples include the functionally illogical pit alignments that have been recorded at, for example, St Ives (Pollard 1996), Kilvington, Notts and Gardom's Edge, Derbyshire (Rylatt and Bevan 2007) which would not have served as an effective barrier are considered to represent a form of symbolic boundary definition (Pollard 1996, 110). Hingley (1990, 100) draws attention to the ritual and symbolic importance placed on boundaries of all kinds to Iron Age societies in northern Europe and so it is conceivable that similar importance was placed upon boundaries in the late Bronze Age. Brück (2019, 161) notes that the creation of boundaries and the definition of particular conceptual categories [of land] became an increasing concern over the course of the Bronze Age period.

Late Bronze Age enclosures were recorded at Denham Park Farm to the west (Newton *et al* 2018). It is possible that the Phase 1.4 ditches at the current site form part of the same system of enclosure. Bronze Age rectilinear field systems are considered to take one of two possible forms; either coaxial or aggregate (Yates 2007, 15). A coaxial field system is orientated on one dominant alignment with boundaries either following or running at right-angles to this. The coaxial field-systems of this period appear to have been laid out in a systematic manner (Brück 2019, 188). English (2013, 141) suggests that the construction of ditched boundaries as a symbol of property in the landscape may be the reason behind the construction of large rectilinear field systems. The Enclosures recorded within the Denham Park Farm site were not considered to conform to this pattern of coaxial, rectilinear fields. Instead they were considered to be similar to the more organic, undulating form of the enclosures recorded at sites such as Stratford Close, Aston Clinton, Bucks (Stansbie 2016, fig. 3), Mill House Farm, Chadwell St Mary, Essex (Newton *forthcoming*), and Game Farm, Brandon, Suffolk (Gibson 2004, fig. 10), which appear to have been directly associated with domestic activity and house structures. It is not possible to directly relate these enclosures to the west to the late Bronze Age ditches recorded at the current site (Fig. 11) but it appears possible that there is a distinct difference in the character of the enclosures formed by the late prehistoric ditches at the two sites. The linear character of the boundary represented at the current site could indicate that it was part of a rectilinear field system and therefore associated with agricultural activity. This would conform with the paucity of artefactual evidence and the suggestion given by the environmental sampling that domestic activity did not occur in the vicinity of these features.

The other late Bronze Age to early Iron Age features

Other features assigned to this phase of activity were dispersed fairly widely across the excavated area. The majority of these were pits containing finds assemblages that suggested that they were backfilled with refuse material. The deposition of refuse may not, however, have been their primary function. At the Reading Business Park site, Brossler *et al* (2004, 126) identified four different types of late Bronze Age pit, mainly on the basis of their shape in profile. They considered that the pits with a rectangular profile (steep sides and flat base) were potentially storage pits (*ibid.*). The only features to conform to this profile were the intercutting Pits F3134, F3136 and F3140, located in Grid Square K31. Their fills were considered to be suggestive of refuse material but it is possible that this was material deposited into them when their function as storage pits ceased. It may be that, as with the Neolithic features, this is material that was deposited into them when the site was abandoned (Bradley 2014, 92); however, the more permanent nature of late Bronze Age settlement might suggest that this was not required. It is possible that this refuse material had been deliberately curated for use in acts of structured deposition (Garrow 2006) and was, perhaps,

deposited as some kind of propitiatory offering to thank the earth for storing the original contents, in the same way that particular objects are considered to have been placed in Iron Age subterranean granaries (Cunliffe 2005). It may seem slightly unusual that storage pits would be located in area that appears not to be associated with domestic activity.

Pits F2029 and F2118, which were located amongst a cluster of features which could not be assigned a date closer than Neolithic to early Iron Age, did not conform to the pattern identified by Brossler *et al* (2004, 126). These features were irregular in profile with shallow sides and undulating bases. Both contained burnt material, alongside small quantities of pottery and struck flint, but displayed no evidence of *in situ* burning. These fills may well represent refuse deposits and, as the profiles of the features were not suggestive of any other function, it is possible that refuse deposition was the primary function of F2029 and F2118.

It is possible that the source of the burnt material in Pits F2029 and F2118 was undated Pit F2143. This was located to the north-west of these features close to two other undated features, F2138 and F2149, which also contained burnt material. Pit F2143 displayed evidence for *in situ* burning in the form of reddening of the underlying natural geology.

Experiments carried out by Canti and Linford (2000) indicate that simple fires built on a normal humic topsoil surface rarely heat the underlying soil enough to cause significant reddening. However, they achieved results that showed that a significant degree of reddening occurred on soils with almost no organic matter content (Canti and Linford 2000, 392). The results of Canti and Linford's (2000) experiments showed a band of reddened soil 2-3cm deep beneath fires that heated the underlying soil to temperatures of 433-436° C at a depth of 1cm below the surface and 276-289° C at 4cm below the surface. They conclude by stating that reddening of soils by fires may be related to the chemical composition and possibly the organic content of those soils but state that if it is solely due to high temperatures then it is unlikely to be due to ordinary surface fires and may indicate special circumstances such as burnt tree-stumps, hearths or industrial processes (Canti and Linford 2000, 393). During excavation, it was suggested that Pit F2143 could have represented the remnant of a simple charcoal burner or the remains of pottery clamp. Experimental work on closed pottery firing devices of Neolithic to Iron Age date recorded maximum temperatures within pottery clamps of between 632° C and 787° C (Thér 2004, 67, table 3). Based on the work of Canti and Linford (2000), a device of this type would have been sufficient to cause the reddening of the underlying substrate observed in relation to F2143, particularly given the sandy character of the natural deposits. Other devices associated with other activities, such as fire pits or pit ovens, could, potentially, have caused such reddening should they have achieved sufficient temperatures.

Phase 1. The other prehistoric features

Fifteen features recorded during the excavation could not be assigned a date any closer than Neolithic to early Iron Age (Phase 1; Fig. 7). They contained flint-tempered pottery, a fabric type consistent with dates spanning this period but diagnostic sherds, more closely indicative of date, were not present.

As the most intensive period of prehistoric occupation appears to have been the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (Phase 1.4), the balance of probability suggests that the majority of the Phase 1 features, that are not closely dateable, are most likely to be contemporary with the Phase 1.4 activity. This may be particularly true of the Phase 1 features in the vicinity of Ditch F2042, an area that contained a fairly dense concentration of prehistoric features (Grid Squares A11-B13). Of particular note is Pit F2044 which contained deposits of burnt material, and may be related to the Phase 1.4 burnt pits (F2118 and F2029). Similarly, it may be quite

likely that Ditch F1315, which was located close by to the north-east of the Phase 1.4 post-built structure, was contemporary with, and even functioned alongside, this possible building. Ditch F1315 contained a substantial quantity of struck flint (49; 281g) and while the majority of the lithic material from the site is considered to represent flint-working traditions of the early Neolithic period, this does not necessarily detract from the interpretation of this feature as being potentially of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age. The flint recovered from it could be residual; as Peachey (2020) notes, despite the date assigned to the lithic material, the bulk of the assemblage was contained in Roman and post-Roman field boundaries/ditches, pits, and as un-stratified material. Alternatively, this material may represent late Bronze Age flintworking which, because of the casual and opportunistic character of flintworking at this time, knapped only when needed and readily discarded (Young and Humphrey 1999) appears, at least superficially, more like a technology of earlier periods.

It cannot be stated with any certainty that all of the features assigned a Phase 1 date (rather than a more specific date) belong to Phase 1.4 and it remains possible that some of these features represent further activity of early Neolithic (Phase 1.1), early Bronze Age (Phase 1.2), or middle Bronze Age (Phase 1.3) date. The wide distribution of the struck flint assemblage, the characteristics of which are considered to be primarily consistent with early Neolithic flintworking, might indicate that early Neolithic activity was more widespread and is perhaps under-represented in terms of the number of cut features assigned to this date. However, while there is some possibility that some of the Phase 1 features are contemporary with the Phase 1.1 activity, consideration has to be given to the high degree of residuality of the struck flint assemblage and the possibility that this material, despite appearances, may have been generated in later phases.

Phase 2. Roman boundaries

Five ditches (F1071, F1231, F1235, F1313 and F2019=F2021), in addition to a large pit (F1321), were assigned a Roman date. These all ran on vaguely west-south-west to east-north-east alignments, broadly perpendicular to the slope of the valley side (Fig. 8). Their appearance and distribution is suggestive of field boundaries, although in each case, only a fairly short length of ditch was recorded, insufficient to trace the full extent of any field or enclosure that they might represent. No corresponding boundaries on the opposite alignment were present. It is possible that the fragmentary appearance of this putative boundary system is the result of plough truncation, a factor which is considered to have rendered large parts of the Denham Park Farm devoid of recognisable archaeological features (Newton *et al.* 2018). Despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it appears that the Roman features may not all have formed part of the same enclosure system but rather two separate ones. This is suggested by the very slight difference in alignment of the two most northerly ditches, F1071 and F2019=2021, in comparison to those further to the south.

Numerous undated ditches across the site followed the same broad west-south-west to east-north-east alignment (F1176, F1263, F1265, F1279, F1303, F1305 and F3005). Without material evidence or stratigraphic relationships, it is not possible to assign these features to Phase 2, as many Phase 3 features are of a similar orientation. Of particular note are F1303 and F1305, both of which ran parallel to F1313 approximately 12.50m to the south. It is possible that these features are of Phase 2 date, but with two further ditches on the same alignment cutting the Phase 4 curvilinear Ditch (F1299) this cannot be conclusively established.

The arrangement of Phase 2 Ditches F1231, F1238 and F1235, in close proximity to one another and defining a corridor of land approximately 8m in width, might be considered to represent some kind of delineated trackway (Fig. 8). Depending on the arrangement of the features beyond the limit of excavation, it is possible that they represent some kind of stock

management system similar to that identified by Pryor (2001, 417-418) at Storey's Bar Road in the Fengate area of Peterborough, although of later date. However, the very narrow width of F1238, even when augmented with a bank created from the upcast excavated from it, is unlikely to have been sufficient to prevent the passage of animals across it. A similar, but more effective, stock management system could have been created using a fenceline or wattle hurdles with a much lower investment of labour. Therefore, the suggestion that both this arrangement of features and that at Fengate functioned in this way should be questioned. Narrow corridors of land, like this example, delineated by paired ditches are often identified as 'droveways' when recorded on archaeological sites, the assumption being that the restriction of lateral movement created by the boundaries on either side will prevent the animals deviating from the desired route. Little consideration appears to be given to the arrangement of the features in relation to other features, their suitability for functioning in the way in which the term implies, or the stock-management techniques that may have been prevalent at the time. Humans have been capable of moving herd animals on foot, over long distances, without resorting to forcing them down artificially bounded and restricted routes since the beginning of pastoral agriculture (Newton *forthcoming*). Nonetheless, 'trackways' between and linking fields were suggested Denham Park Farm to the west (Newton *et al.* 2018). These were considered to have some similarities to examples recorded at sites such as Armthorpe, South Yorkshire (Chadwick 2013, fig. 3 after Hughes 2006 and Roberts 2008) and Dernford Farm, Sawston, Cambridgeshire (Newton 2018b) and, particularly, at Whitelands Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire (Martin 2011).

Pit F1321 is notable amongst the Roman features for the size of its finds assemblage, consisting of 133 sherds (228g) of pottery as well as presumably residual struck flint, in comparison to other features of this date. This was a large feature, measuring 8.07m in length, 4.06m in width, and 0.13m in depth. The artefactual assemblage recovered from it is large in comparison to the other features present at the site but not particularly large for a feature of this size. It is possible that this suggests that it was used for the deposition of refuse at some point later in its lifespan but, as the site appears to have lain at some distance from contemporary settlement activity, that this refuse contained little waste from domestic occupation with the pottery representing perhaps just material broken during use by individuals working in the fields that these features are considered to represent. This may explain why vessels associated with the production of food, such as *mortaria*, as opposed to those associated with the consumption or storage of food, are not present in the assemblage.

Little indication is given by the archaeobotanical evidence or faunal remains of the kinds of agricultural practices may have been carried out in the fields represented by these features. At the neighbouring Denham Park Farm (Newton *et al.* 2018), the combination of trackways and junctions between enclosures that could potentially have facilitated the movement animals, was considered to indicate that the enclosures were associated with pastoral agriculture. This was considered to be supported by supported by the limited artefactual (and specifically pottery) evidence from the enclosure ditches, which might be seen to indicate that the use of midden material for manuring purposes was not carried out (c.f. Gaffney and Tingle 1989, 224-225; Dark 2017, 21). The similarly limited artefactual assemblage at Pynesfield and the proximity of the Denham Park Farm site, suggests that the agricultural regime prevalent at the current site is likely to be largely the same as the adjacent site.

Pollen evidence from Dorney, approximately 13km to the south-west, indicates that during the late Iron Age and early Roman period, the landscape was predominantly open, with extensive meadowland and localised arable cultivation, but over the course of the Romano-British period levels of grass, herb, and cereal pollen increased dramatically (Parker *et al.* 2008; Rippon *et al.* 2015, 135-136). It is reasonable to suggest that a similar range of agricultural practices would have prevailed in the area surrounding the current site. Wachter (1978, 111) suggests that bounded enclosures may have been used in a type of crop-rotation system during which livestock was allowed in the fallow fields to feed off the stubble and weed growth, while at the

same time manuring the soil.

Phase 3. Medieval activity

Although it was fairly sparsely distributed, the character of the medieval pottery assemblage suggests a range spanning the medieval period from the 11th/12th centuries through to the 15th/16th centuries. The majority of the pottery consists of unsourced local coarsewares which are relatively common in the area and date mainly to the later 12th and 13th centuries. The most common medieval fabric was South Hertfordshire-type Flint Tempered ware. This material included a short flat topped everted jar rim from Ditch F1219 and a residual sherd of upright beaded jar rim from Ditch F1299. The preceding trial trench evaluation similarly recovered six sherds of 12th to 14th century pottery, but only identified a single ditch and a spread dating from this period (Platt and Pine 2012). Medieval archaeology was limited to a single feature at the adjacent Denham Park Farm site but the 12th to 14th century date assigned to this suggests that it was broadly contemporary with the activity recorded at the current site (Newton *et al.* 2018).

Medieval activity (Fig. 9) was concentrated towards the southern extent of the excavated area. In this part of the site Ditches F1281, F1275, F1267, F1289, F1219, F1229, F1225, F1242=3078, F3072, F3122, F3124, and F3126 formed an enclosure measuring slightly more than 100m in width and just under 140m in length. In the north-western corner of this enclosure, Ditches F1267 and F1281, in conjunction with the later F1289, formed a funnel-like arrangement. It is possible that this could have been associated with controlling the movement of animals into and out of this enclosure. However, any such interpretation, like that associated with Pryor's (2001, 417-418) prehistoric stock-handling system at Storey's Bar Road, must be treated with a good deal of caution and relies heavily upon the size and form of the banks and hedges/fences that would have been associated with these ditches. Notably, the closely spaced Roman (Phase 2) Ditches F1231, F1238 and F1235 could conceivably have formed a similar corresponding arrangement in the north-eastern corner of the enclosure (Figs. 8 & 12). This might suggest that the dating of these is inaccurate, despite the artefactual assemblage that they contained. However, it remains possible that these Roman ditches were deliberately incorporated into this enclosure. The re-use of Romano-British ditches has been observed within the medieval settlement at Wharram Percy, Yorkshire (Beresford and Hurst 1979, 79; Oosthuizen 2003, 42) and in Cambridgeshire's Bourn Valley the fragmentary remains of prehistoric, perhaps late Iron Age, linear land-divisions appear to have been re-used in the some of the boundaries of common fields (Oosthuizen 2003, 59). This phenomenon has also been noted at sites in closer proximity to Pynesfield, such as Chadwell Road, Norton Green, Stevenage (Newton 2018c). Karro *et al* (2014, 5) suggest that the adaptation of pre-existing landforms into the organisation of the medieval site can be considered to be a normal response to the presence of such features and part of the biography of the landscape.

A further possible example of the re-use of an earlier feature at Pynesfield is the complete re-cutting of Phase 1.4 Ditch F2042 by medieval Ditch F2037. F2037 appeared to be isolated from contemporary features, with the nearest being F1033 and F1039 around 120m to the south-east, although it is possible that corresponding features were present in closer proximity, beyond the limits of the excavated area. To the south-east of this, the paired ditches F1033 and F1039 would appear to have functioned in conjunction with one another. F1033 was devoid of finds and was dated on the basis of its relationship with F1039. What this shared function was is not immediately clear, it is possible that they mark the position of fence or hedgelines that formed part of some kind of system for the sorting of animals, similar to Pryor's (2001, 417-418) example at Storey's Bar Road, Peterborough or to the arrangement in the north-western corner of the southern enclosure. However, as these features appear to be isolated in the landscape, at a distance from other features, and

therefore enclosures, of medieval date, it appears unlikely that this arrangement could have functioned in this way.

Similarly, Ditch F1441 was also isolated from contemporary features, making its function unclear. It is possible that much of the site was subject to some degree of plough truncation, as was observed at Denham Park Farm to the west (Newton *et al.* 2018), leaving only fragmentary evidence of enclosure ditches. The clear presence of the enclosure at the southern end of the excavated area, however, suggests that any such plough truncation did not extend across the whole of the site.

The seat of the medieval manor of Pynesfield is located c.500m north of the excavated site (HER 1752). This consists of a late medieval manor house which was extensively altered between the 17th and 20th centuries. The medieval manorial site of La Troy (HER 838) is understood to lie nearby to the east of the excavated site. The estate was granted to St Albans abbey in 1314 as Le Troye but by 1718 it was known only as Troy Farm. It appears likely that the enclosure represented within the excavated site could have formed an element of this manorial farm. The most likely function for this enclosure is as a field or paddock for the containment of animals. There is little evidence for the kind of animals that would have been kept in this enclosure as only 8 fragments, weighing 6g, of animal bone was recovered from medieval contexts. Similarly, there was little evidence for the processing of arable products. This, however, is likely to be because the medieval archaeology present here was located at some remove from locations in which domestic occupation occurred, which is where such waste would have been generated.

Phase 4. Post-medieval

Post-medieval features, like those of Phase 3, were identified across the site, with particular concentrations within the southern section of the site and the area occupied by a post-medieval tree plantation (Figs. 2 & 10). A small number of dispersed and isolated Phase 4 features were also present.

The post-medieval archaeology recorded at the current site can be clearly seen to represent direct continuity from the preceding medieval period. This is demonstrable through the relationship between Ditches F3040, F3038 and F3080, which have been tentatively assigned to Phase 4, and the Phase 3 enclosure. These ditches appear to form a second enclosure appended to the east of the medieval enclosure while Ditch F1256 may represent adaptation of the northern edge of this enclosure.

Just as the post-medieval activity can be seen to represent continuity from the preceding medieval period, elements of the archaeology can be seen to be similar to more recent activity known in the vicinity. The new enclosure formed by Ditches F3040, F3038 and F3080 to the east of the medieval enclosure contained Pit F3166, which has been interpreted as a quarry pit, presumably intended to access the locally occurring sands and gravels. The presence of later quarrying activity is depicted on 1839 tithe map and the 1914 Ordnance Survey Map (not reproduced here) and it is understood that the remains of Troy Mill (HER 17654), which was located on the River Colne, were removed during gravel quarrying and that the area was renamed Troy Wharf.

Further to the north, Ditches F1309, F1299 and F1210 formed what appeared to be a playing-card shaped enclosure extending beyond the eastern limit of excavation. To the west, Ditches F1148 and F1410 may represent the remnant of a similar enclosure. Finds assemblages from post-medieval features are limited, consisting of 119 fragments of post-medieval CBM and eighteen post-medieval to early modern sherds of pottery, which suggests that the enclosures were utilised for agricultural purposes (the distribution of the CBM assemblage was considered

to be suggestive of processes such as manuring) or, as was the case with the enclosure containing Pit F3166, industrial purposes. The burial of a Boxer or small Bullmastiff-type dog in Pit F3142 appears most likely to represent the burial of a pet in the very late post-medieval/modern period.

Across the approximate centre of the site, excavation revealed a series of 300+ tree hollows. Dating evidence was limited to 49g of 18th to 19th century CBM, as well as a sherd of residual prehistoric pottery, from F1402. This, combined with cartographic evidence, suggests an 18th century or early 19th century date for the plantation.

Discussion

The Pynesfield site lies in close proximity to Denham Park Farm (Newton *et al.* 2018) and displays a similar range of prehistoric and Romano-British archaeology (Fig. 11). It appears likely that these two sites represent two separate windows on to prehistoric and Romano-British activity on flanks of the valley of the river Colne. Activity at Pynesfield appears to be peripheral to the main focus of settlement particularly in the late Bronze/early Iron Age and the Romano-British periods. The activity at Denham was also considered peripheral, although perhaps less so than the current site, and it may be suggested that the main focus of occupation in these periods was located somewhere between the two sites.

With the exception of a pair of intercutting pits at Denham Park Farm (Newton *et al.* 2018), the majority of the evidence for Neolithic occupation within an approximate 5km radius of the Pynesfield site takes the form of spot finds and surface scatters of lithic artefacts or such artefacts present as residual material in later features. There are occasional instances of finds of pottery as spot finds (e.g. Hertfordshire HER 31233) but these, along with cut features are much rarer. It is of note, therefore, that cut features have been recorded at Mopes Farm, which lies to the west-north-west. These include pits of Neolithic to Bronze Age date (Buckinghamshire HER 0532300000, 0532302000) and a possible former ground surface of this date (Buckinghamshire HER 0532301000). While the dating of these features and contexts is far from conclusive, it is possible that they are broadly contemporary with the pits at Denham Park Farm and Pit F2146 and layer L1445 at the current site. This could potentially represent a slight concentration of Neolithic activity or repeated reuse of this general area.

The presence of a possible round barrow at Savay Farm (Buckinghamshire HER 0015000000), to the south-east, and a possible long barrow at Bulstrode Camp (Buckinghamshire HER 0805600000), to the south-west demonstrate that there was a, presumably mobile or semi-mobile, community regularly using this area who wished to create a fixed communal focal point in the landscape (c.f. Cooney 1997). This landscape is unlikely to have been as heavily forested as it is generally considered to have been during the preceding Mesolithic (Field 2004, 155). The general trend seen in pollen and molluscan evidence suggest gradually increasing forest clearance but with notable regional variation and evidence for phases of regeneration in some areas (Whittle 1999, 60). As the Neolithic progressed, woodland management practices such as coppicing and pollarding would have had an impact on the presence and extent of woodland (Bradley 2014, 87). In light of evidence recovered from Denham Park Farm, it was suggested that the groups occupying this slightly more elevated landscape, with less concentrated and dense settlement evidence, may have had a more mobile lifestyle, potentially associated with a form of transhumant agriculture, in comparison to those occupying the riverine sites of the nearby Thames valley, such as the Eton Dorney Rowing Lake (Longworth and Cleal 1999, 179; Allen *et al.* 2004; Barclay 2013, 395).

The late Bronze Age archaeology recorded at the adjacent Denham Park Farm site was considered to represent activity adjacent to, or on the periphery of, a settlement. Based on the

positioning and distribution of the late Bronze Age features, it was considered most likely that any such settlement would have been located to the south or east of the area in which this activity was concentrated. Despite not being more closely dateable, it is unlikely that the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age activity at the current site was not, in some way, related to the late Bronze Age activity at Denham Park Farm. In light of the similarly peripheral nature of the archaeology recorded at Pynesfield, it would appear that the focus of settlement of this date may have been located somewhere between the two excavated areas.

As is noted in regard to the Denham Park Farm site (Newton *et al* 2018), the topographical position of the site, and in particular the area in which settlement may have been focussed, may have afforded commanding views of the surrounding landscape and particularly the valley of the river Colne. This potentially provided benefits in terms of defence, communication, control of the landscape, grazing strategies, and food procurement/hunting strategies. Limited contemporary settlement evidence is known in the surrounding area but the Colne Valley may have been an important communication link between this site and the settlement activity recorded in the Uxbridge area (Bucks HER 52349-50, 56024301, 50243). The various flint scatters that have been recorded in the surrounding area suggest greater utilisation of the landscape than is indicated by the number of known sites bearing evidence for cut features and finds of other types, including pottery (Bucks HER 50233) and a bronze palstave found in Rickmansworth (Rawlins 1976), are suggestive of notable levels of activity in these areas.

The Colne and Chess valleys were seemingly relatively well-populated in the Romano-British period, with a number of villa estates, industrial sites and other settlements. The Romano-British activity at Denham Park Farm site, which consisted of agricultural enclosures and evidence for the industrial production of iron, was considered to be associated with one of these villa estates. As is the case with the adjacent site to the west position of the site, above the Colne valley, and seemingly consisting of agricultural enclosures with a small amount of industrial activity might indicate that this is an outlying part of one of the villa estates known from the valley of the Colne. The Romano-British activity at Denham Park Farm site was dated to the mid to late 1st century AD while evidence from the current site has been dated to the mid 1st to early 2nd centuries AD. This broad correlation in dating evidence suggests that the fields/enclosures represented at the Pynesfield site may well form part of a wider site in conjunction with the agricultural and industrial site at Denham Park Farm.

Later activity, which was largely absent at the Denham Park Farm site, is dated to the medieval and post-medieval periods. The medieval archaeology would appear to represent at least one, and possibly more, enclosures. The most obvious function for these would be the containment of livestock. It appears likely that this activity was directly associated with one of the local manorial estates, most probably the manor of La Troy, which was located in close proximity. The post-medieval archaeology could also be associated with such estates. While it can clearly be seen to represent development from the medieval organisation and division of the landscape, the post-medieval evidence demonstrates some divergence from the agricultural practices that appear to have occurred in the preceding period with the establishment of some kind of plantation, the precise function of which remains uncertain, and early attempts to access and utilise the underlying sands and gravels, in the form of at least one possible quarry pit.

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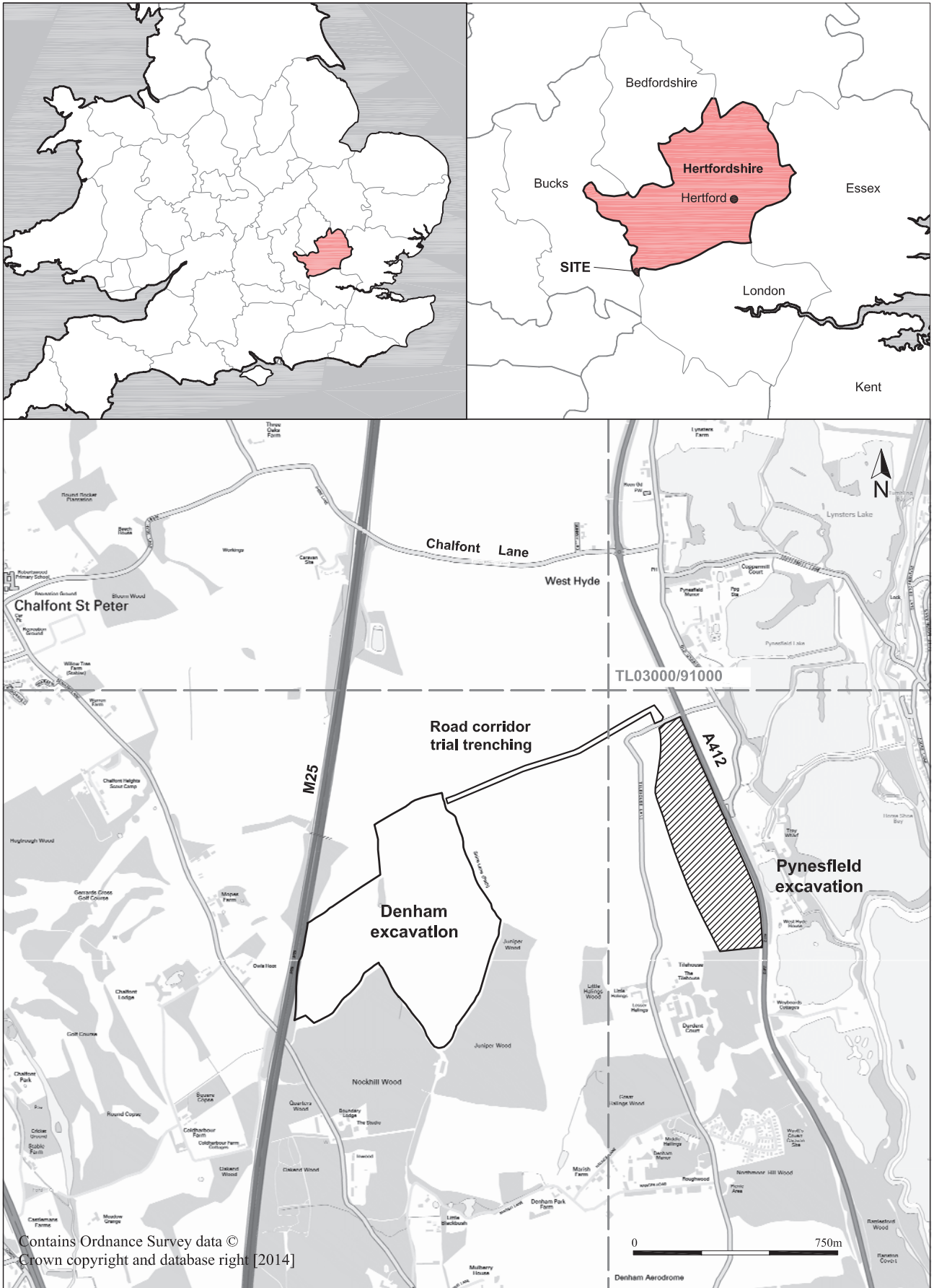


Figure 1 Site location plan



Figure 2 All features plan

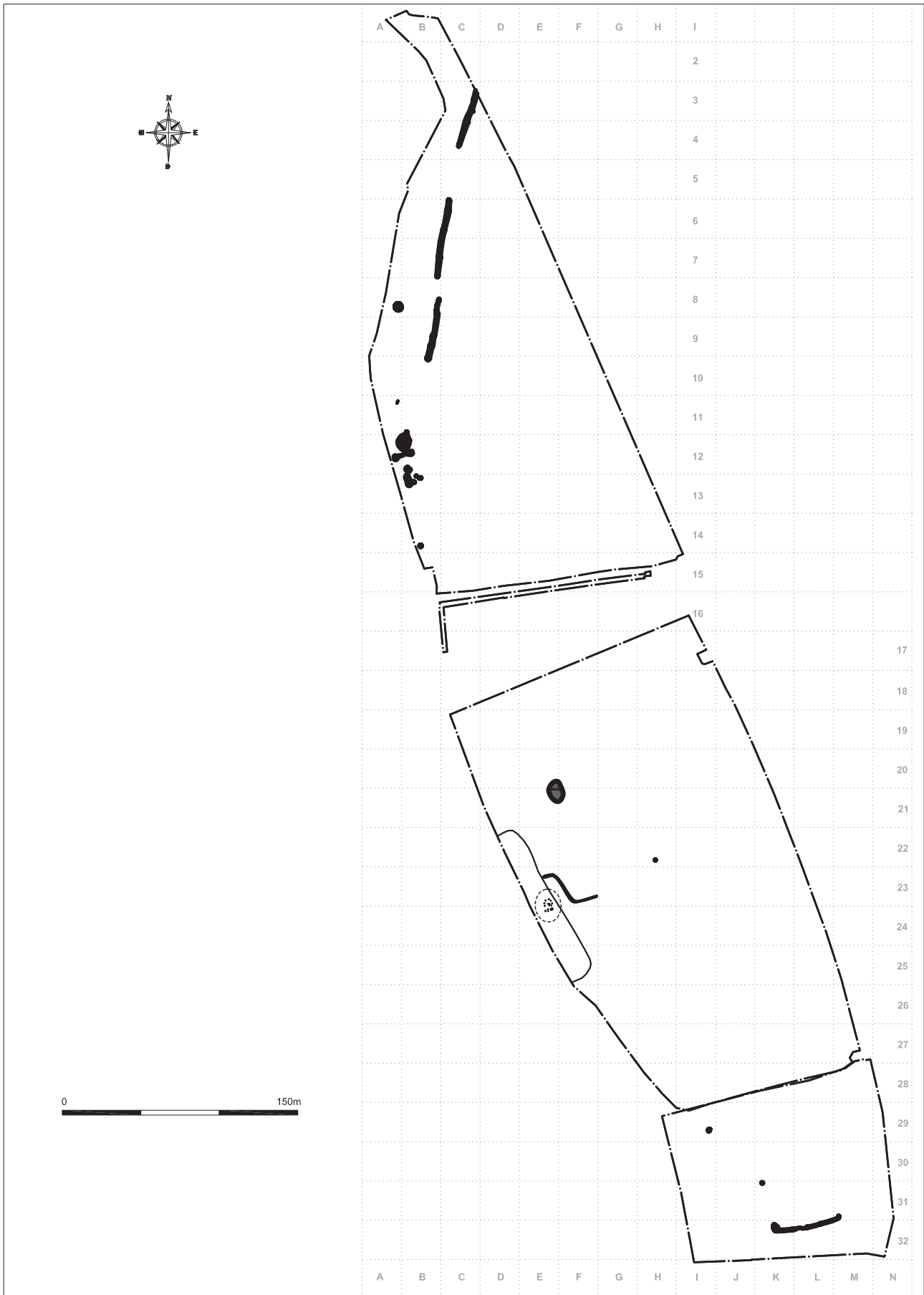


Figure 3 All prehistoric features



Figure 4 Prehistoric Phases 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

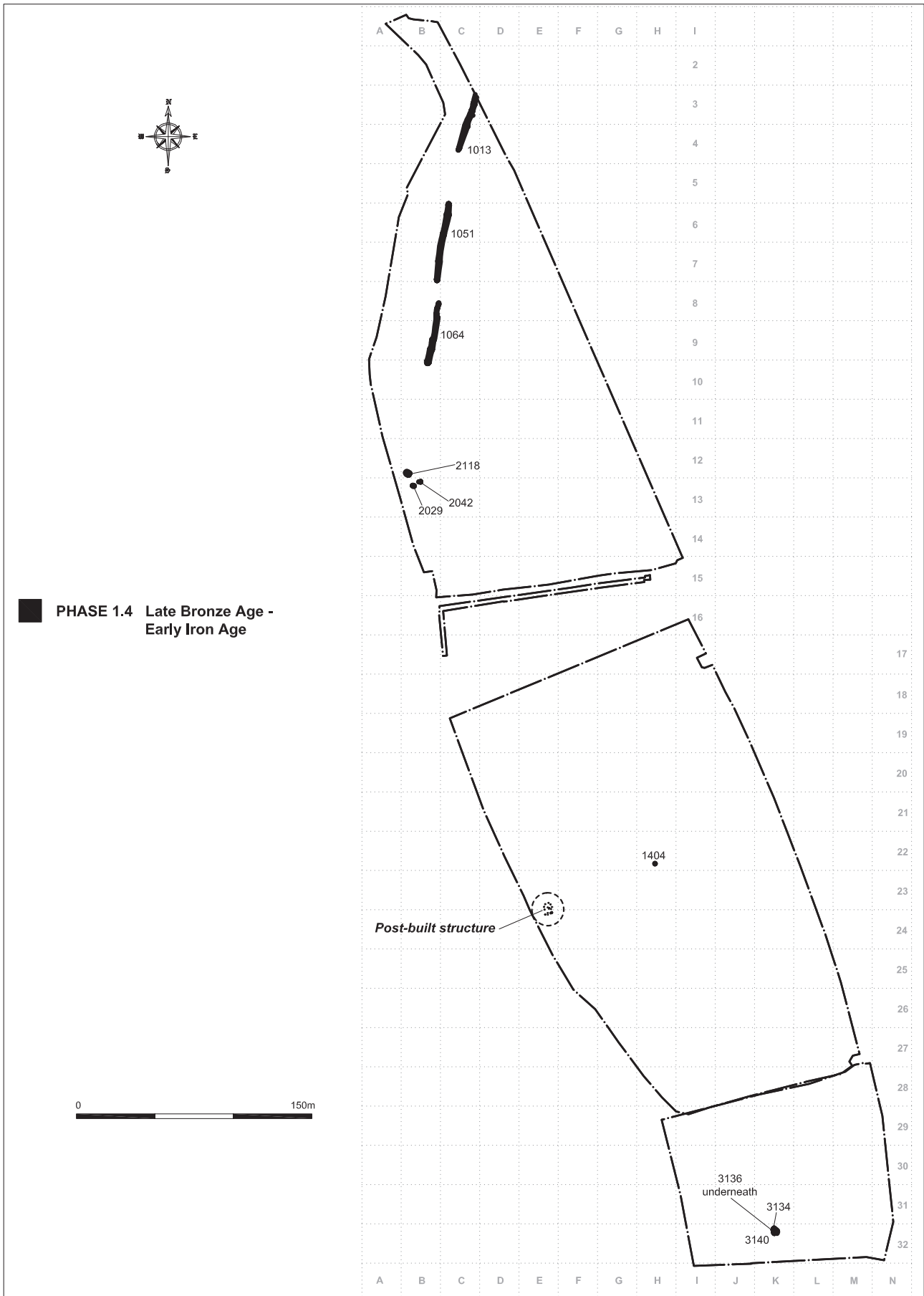


Figure 5 Prehistoric Phase 1.4

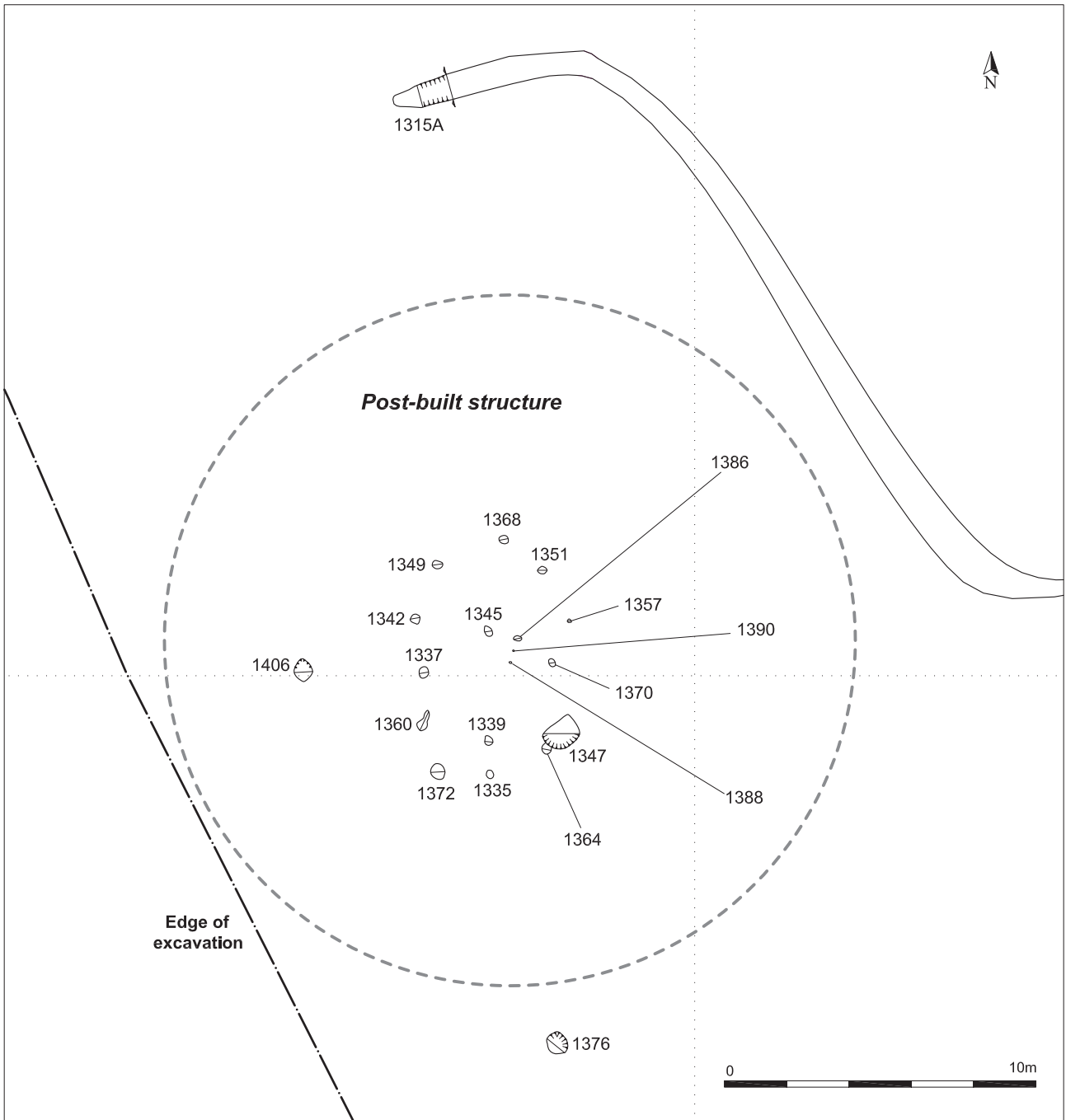


Figure 6 Post-built structure

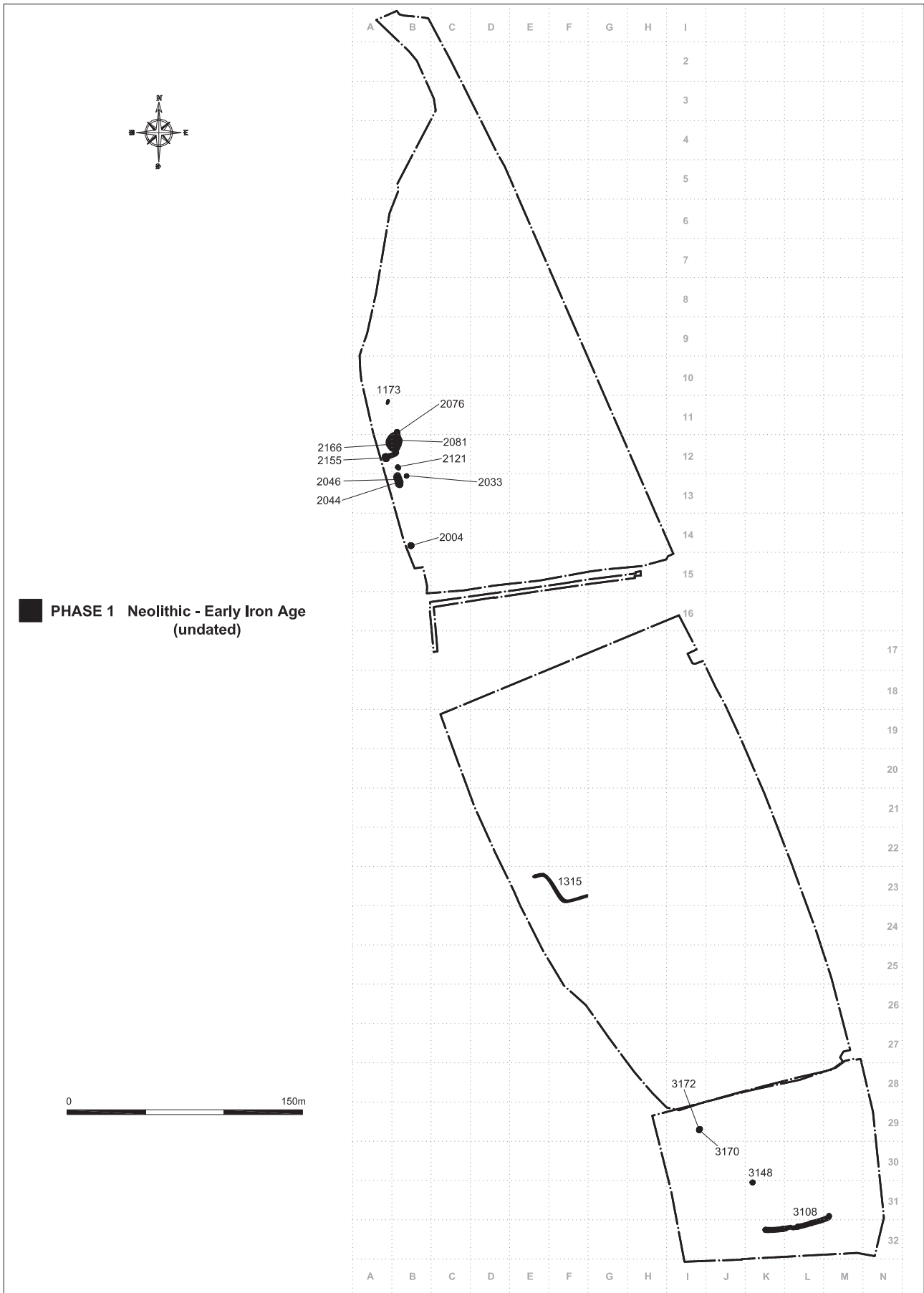


Figure 7 Prehistoric Phase 1 (undated)



Figure 8 Phase 2 Romano-British



Figure 9 Phase 3 Medieval

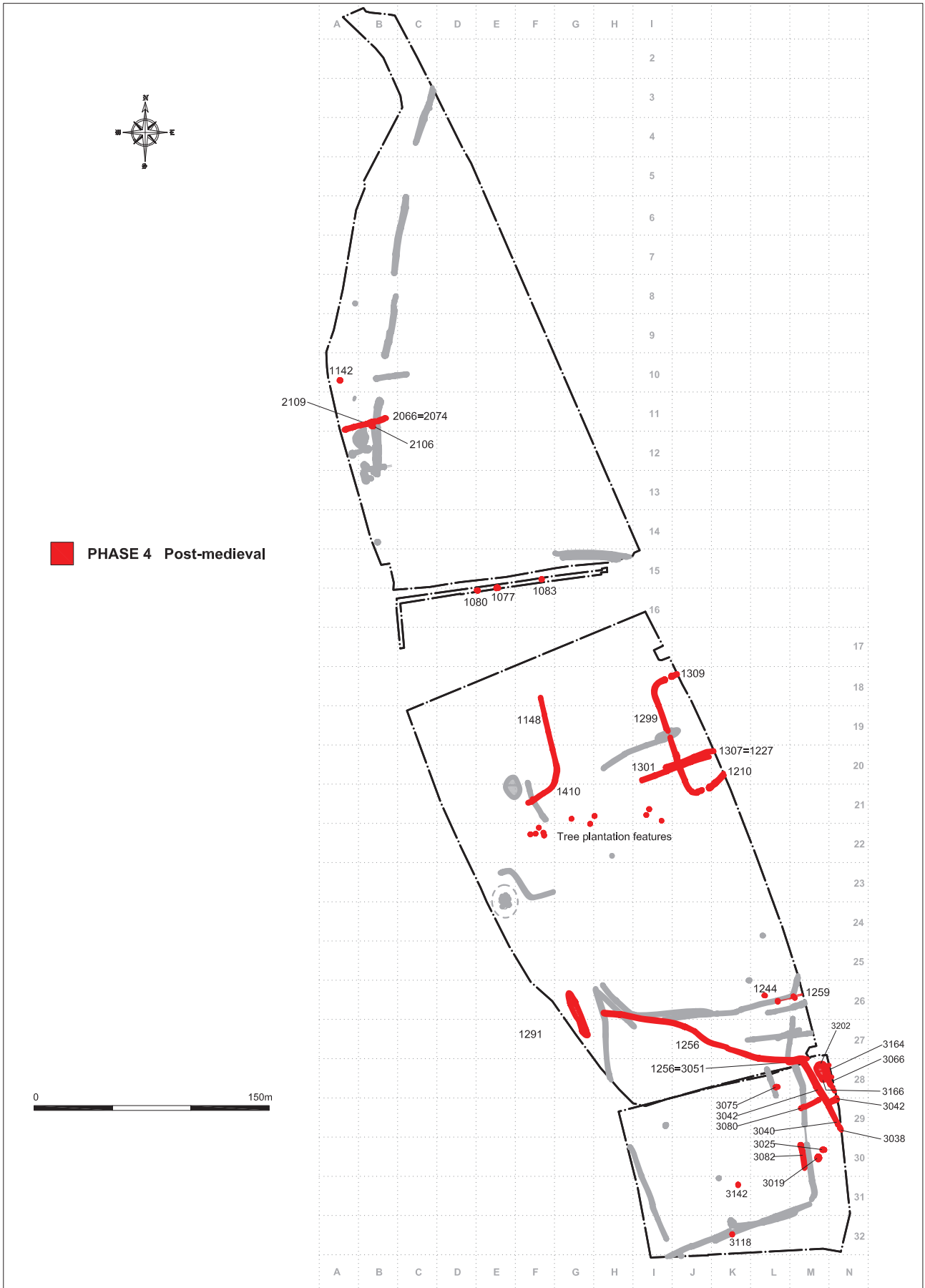


Figure 10 Phase 4 Post-medieval

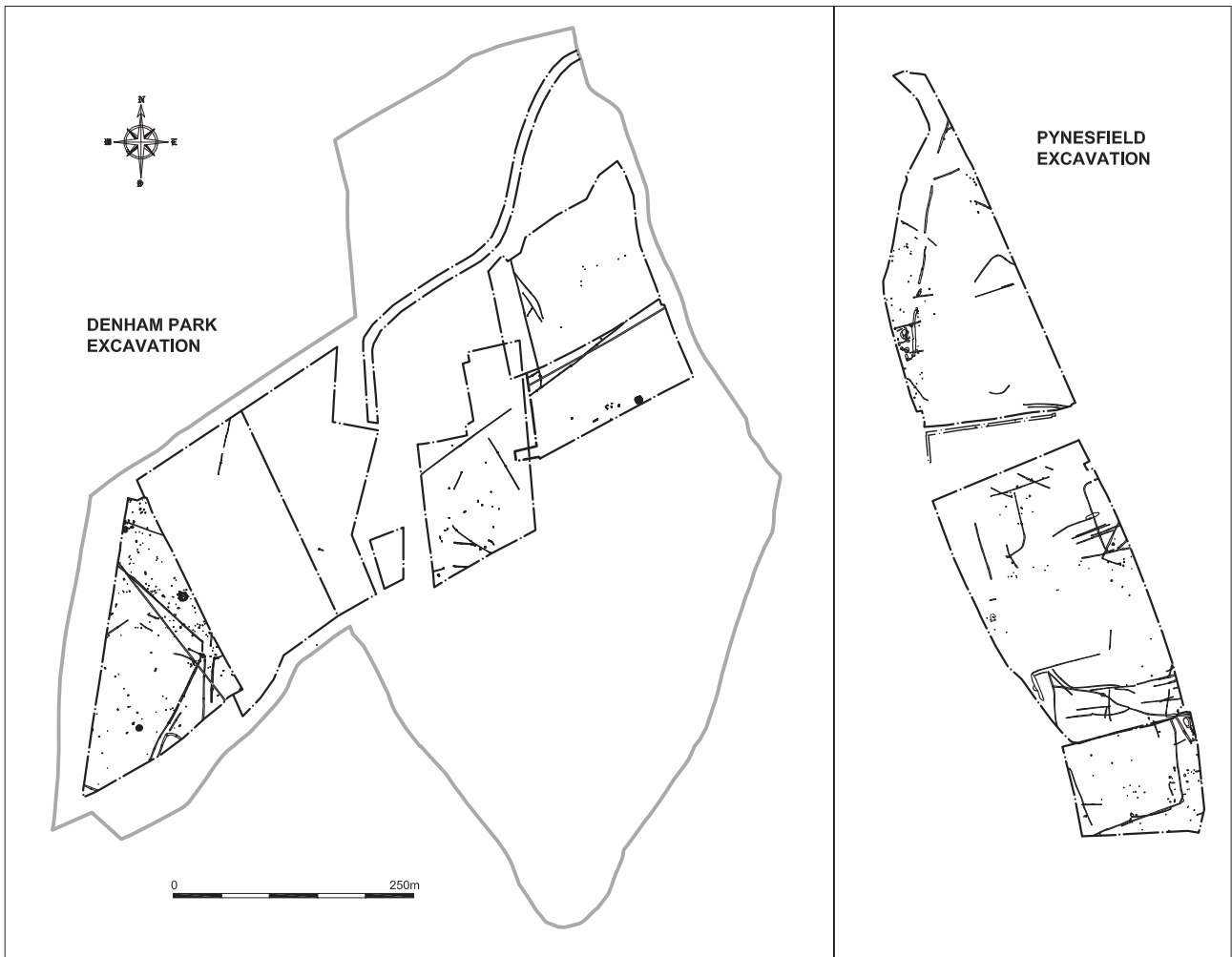


Figure 11 Comparison between Denham Park and Pynesfield excavations