

**MEOLE BRACE,
SHREWSBURY**
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATIONS 2005-6

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**MEOLE BRACE, SHREWSBURY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS 2005-6
POST-EXCAVATION ASSESSMENT**

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SUMMARY

An area excavation was undertaken in March-May 2005 to investigate a double ditched enclosure at Meole Brace, Shrewsbury (centred on NGR SJ 49401010), first recorded as a cropmarked feature. The excavation was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology under instruction from Jennings Estates LLP, with advice from Andy Josephs Ltd, Archaeological Consultants. The fieldwork was undertaken in advance of proposals for the development of a new football stadium. A watching brief was also undertaken during construction groundworks in Spring 2006.

The site was first identified by aerial photography, and selectively investigated by Jenks in 1968-9 (Sharpstones Site E). Jenks identified the earliest, Iron Age phase of occupation to comprise a shallow inner ditch and an associated palisade trench. The inner enclosure ditch and a circular eaves-drip gully were interpreted as belonging to the Late Iron Age- Early Roman or British period. The latest back fill of the innermost enclosure ditch, and the outer ditch were attributed by Jenks to the Romano-British period. More recently, the area surrounding the enclosure has been investigated by means of desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and trial-trenching.

The earliest features identified by excavation in 2005 comprised two concentric eaves-drip gulleys, probably dated to the Late Iron Age (Phase 1). The earliest Late Iron Age-early Roman activity was represented by a double-ditched enclosure, with an entry-gap on its southeastern side (Phase 2A). Pottery from this phase was dated to the 1st-2nd century AD. After both ditches had gone out of use and been backfilled, both ditches were re-cut (Phase 2B), mostly along their original alignment. The re-cut ditches were generally less substantial in size than their predecessors. The ditch re-cuts were backfilled with pottery of predominantly 2nd century date. Some later Roman material could have become incorporated into the ditch backfills as a result of manuring scatters. Overall, the 2005 excavation results demonstrate that the site had suffered considerable plough truncation since the earlier excavation in 1968-9, such that some of the less substantial features identified by Jenks had been entirely scoured-out by the time of excavation.

This report describes the results of the 2005-6 fieldwork and provides proposals to bring the results to publication.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Archaeological fieldwork

This report describes the results of the excavation of a double ditched cropmarked enclosure located to the south of the B 4380 Oteley Road, Meole Brace, Shrewsbury, Shropshire (centred on NGR SJ 49401010, Figs . 1-2). The southern site boundary is formed by the A5 (T) Shrewsbury Bypass, and the western boundary is defined by the Shrewsbury-Hereford Railway. To the east of the site is further agricultural land. The excavation was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on instruction from Jennings Estates LLP, with advice from Andy Josephs Ltd, archaeological consultants. The excavation was undertaken in March-May 2005, and was followed by an archaeological watching brief during the removal of overburden in March 2006. The work was undertaken in accordance with a Brief prepared by Shropshire County Council (2004), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2005), approved by the Council.

The area comprised agricultural land at the time of the investigations.

1.2 Background

The focus of the investigations was a double-ditched enclosure first identified by aerial photography. Selective trenching of the site was undertaken by Jenks in 1968-9 (Site E, Barker *et al.* 1991, 31-36). He recorded three phases of activity. The earliest phase, dated to the Iron Age, was represented by a small ditch and parallel palisade trench, located on the southern side of the later enclosure. Neither feature was recorded in the 2005 excavation, having been removed by plough truncation in the intervening period. The second phase of activity was attributed by Jenks to the Late Iron Age-Early Roman period. In this phase the innermost of the double ditches was dug. Jenks ascribed the earlier backfills of this ditch to this phase. Because of the small scale of his investigations Jenks did not identify the re-cut of this ditch. This early single ditched enclosure contained a single circular eaves-drip gully, also identified in the 2005 excavation despite severe plough truncation in the intervening period, together with a number of internal features which could not be identified in 2005. The uppermost backfills of the innermost ditch, and the outermost ditch were attributed by Jenks to the early Romano-British period. He did not identify the re-cut of the outer ditch. Jenks suggested that the outermost ditch was cut to channel water away from the site. Also identified in the 1968-9 investigations were traces of a rectangular building within the enclosure interior. Early Post-Roman activity comprised a Saxon hearth. More recently, an extensive episode of quarrying has resulted in the destruction of the northwestern angle of the double-ditched enclosure.

The majority of the dating evidence from the 1968-9 and 2005 excavations of the double ditched enclosure (Site E) belonged to the 1st-2nd century. Following this chronology, the double ditched enclosure is likely to have been occupied during the second half of the 1st century AD, when the adjoining military road was laid out between Wroxeter and Forden Gaer/Caersws (Margary 1973, 344). A roadside settlement extending for almost 200m was recorded alongside the road (Hughes 1994). The earliest buildings recorded within the roadside settlement were dated from the mid 2nd-early 3rd century. During the early 3rd century the settlement appears to have contracted within the area excavated, followed by evidence of continued settlement beyond the mid 3rd century.

More recent archaeological work has included a desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and trial-trenching (Northamptonshire CC 2004). This trial-trenching did not further examine the double-ditched cropmarked enclosure. Correlation was recorded between many of the field boundaries identified by trial-trenching and the pattern of field boundaries indicated by historic maps (Fig. 2). Roughly north-south aligned ditches recorded in Trenches 4, 5 and 7 may possibly be contemporary with the enclosure, in particular the ditch in the latter which contained Roman pottery (*ibid.*, 10).

1.3 Aims

The objectives of archaeological excavation and watching brief in 2005-6 were to preserve by record any known archaeological remains and also any archaeological remains that were newly identified during development groundworks. The specific aims of the archaeological fieldwork will be to provide an understanding of:

- A) the Iron Age/Romano-British enclosure and evidence of associated or possibly associated field systems.
- B) other features, including post-Roman features.

2 METHODOLOGY

A total area of 9,300 square metres was investigated by excavation (Figs. 2-3). The area was positioned to investigate the double-ditched enclosure, with the exception of its northwestern angle which had been disturbed by recent quarrying. All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a 360 degree tracked excavator, working under direct archaeological supervision at all times. This machining exposed the surface of the subsoil which was then selectively cleaned by hand to assist in the better definition of the features present, and to permit base-planning of the below-ground archaeology. Discrete features were half-sectioned. Other internal features were tested by hand-excavation, including those previously identified by Jenks, to confirm their form and assess the degree of plough truncation since the 1968-9 excavation. The strategy for sampling of the ditches by hand-excavation was agreed at on-site monitoring meetings during the fieldwork. Hand-excavated sampling of the enclosure ditches was supplemented by further, machine-dug trenches excavated with the approval of Shropshire County Council.

Features and deposits were planned (scales 1:20 and 1:50) and drawn in section (1:10 and 1:20). Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma record cards for contexts and features. These records were supplemented by monochrome and colour slide/print photography.

Twenty litre soil samples were collected from datable archaeological features for the recovery of plant remains. Recovered finds were cleaned, and marked.

A watching brief was also maintained during construction ground works in March 2006. The mechanical excavators undertaking the ground reduction at this time were fitted with toothed buckets, and worked by excavating in an irregular fashion across the site, and for these reasons no archaeological or possible archaeological features were identified. Accordingly, the watching brief was reduced from continuous monitoring to intermittent observation, before finally being terminated, in agreement with Shropshire County Council.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Phasing

A total of five phases of activity were defined on the basis of the observed stratigraphy and the spot-dating provided by assessment, as follows:

Phase 1	Late Iron Age
Phase 2A	First double ditched enclosure, Late Iron Age to 1st-2nd century AD
Phase 2B	Second double ditched enclosure, 2nd century AD
Phase 2C	Later Roman field boundaries
Phase 3	Post-Roman activity

The Phase 2A-3 features were cut into the natural subsoil, which comprised a clay-sand with frequent concentrations of large gravel and pebbles.

3.2 Description of Phase 1, Late Iron Age

Two incomplete eaves-drip gullies (Figs. 3-4, Plate 1) may be the earliest features identified. One circular eaves-drip gully, 1034, 1036 and 1038, measured 12m in diameter. It was defined by a U-shaped cut in profile, measuring a maximum of 0.3m in width and 0.16m in depth. The gully was backfilled with brown sand-clay-silt. A possible entry-gap was recorded on its western side, which could have been enlarged by modern truncation. The northeastern arc of a second, more truncated eaves-drip gully, 1002, was recorded just outside the first. This latter feature was cut to a U-shaped profile, and measured a maximum of 0.4m in width and 0.18m in depth. It was backfilled with brown sand-silt, flecked with charcoal. No internal features associated with either eaves-drip gully could be identified during the 2005 excavation.

This earliest activity was also represented by four sherds of mudstone tempered ware dated to the Mid-Late Iron Age, recovered from Phase 2A contexts. The circular eaves-drip gullies are attributed to this phase on the basis of the 17 sherds of VCP pottery (Barker, Haldon and Jenks 1991, 40) recovered from the innermost eaves-drip gully during the 1968-9 excavations, and also the absence of Roman material from the eaves-drip gully backfills during the 2005 excavation. The single sherd of Roman pottery from the larger eaves-drip gully recovered from the 1968-9 excavation was interpreted as intrusive by the excavator.

3.3 Description of Phase 2A, first double ditched enclosure, Late Iron Age to 1st-2nd century AD

The earliest Roman activity was represented by a roughly rectangular, double ditched enclosure (Figs. 3-4) which occupied the highest point in the local topography. The northwestern corner of the enclosure, dug away by a modern disturbance, was excluded from the 2005 excavation. Parts of the enclosure interior were disturbed by modern quarries, backfilled with rubbish.

The inner ditch enclosed an internal area measuring 60m square. The northeastern side, and the excavated lengths of the northwestern and southwestern sides of the inner ditch of the enclosure were largely regular in plan, as indicated by the cropmarked evidence. Excavation revealed that the southeastern side of the inner ditch was interrupted by an entry-gap measuring 0.5m in width, placed off-centre along this side. This side of the enclosure was also slightly intrenched, as previously suggested by the cropmarked evidence.

The inner ditch measured a maximum of 5m in width (Plate 2, segment 1006), and was notably enlarged at the corners. The depth and profile of the ditch varied along its circuit, although its original dimensions and profile could not be established because of re-cutting (see below). The northwestern ditch, 1006, was cut to a gently-sloping profile, and measured 1.1m in depth and 5m in width. Along the remaining sides of the enclosure the ditch was cut to a depth of 2m, increasing to 2.6m at the entrance terminals. Away from the northwestern side of the enclosure the ditch was cut to a stepped profile which suggested re-cutting, most notably at the entrance terminals.

The outer ditch defined an area measuring 85m square internally (Plate 3, segment 1007). It was cut approximately 12m outside the inner ditch (measured centre to centre), except along the more irregular southeastern side of the enclosure. In contrast to the inner ditch which was cut with nearly right-angled corners, the outer ditch had rounded corners, as also indicated by the cropmarked evidence. The southeastern side of the outer ditch was interrupted by an off-centre entry-gap, measuring a maximum of 0.8m in width, positioned flush with the inner ditch entry-gap. The southeastern entry-gap was further defined by a pebble path, 1109, which was recorded for a distance of 30m, but did not extend significantly within the enclosure interior. Beyond the southwestern angle of the enclosure, the presumed continuation of the Phase 2A outer ditch was scoured-out by Phase 2B re-cutting (see below).

The outer ditch measured an average of 5-6m in width along its entire length. The outer ditch varied in depth and profile along its length, although its original dimensions could not be recovered because of re-cutting (see below). As is also the case with the inner ditch, the northwestern outer ditch of the enclosure, 1007, was less deep than the other sides of the enclosure, measuring only 1.5m in depth, and was also more gently-sloping in profile. A length of the northeastern side of the ditch, 1182, was stepped in profile, probably as a result of re-cutting, and measured 1.8m in depth. The profiles of the southeastern and southwestern ditches of the enclosure were irregular, although more steeply-cut towards the entrances, as a result of re-cutting. Along these sides of the enclosure the ditch measured between 1.7m and 2.4m in depth.

Three gullies, 1057 (Plate 4), 1055 and 1000/1004, recorded within the enclosure interior could be associated with the Phase 2A enclosure or its successor (Phase 2B enclosure, see below). These gullies roughly followed an approximate east-west orientation. Their full plan could not be recovered because of extensive plough truncation, and modern disturbance. Feature 1057 could represent the westward continuation of gully 1000/1004. Feature 1000 was cut to a U-shaped profile, and measured a maximum of 0.55m in width, and 0.25m in depth. It was backfilled with brown silt-clay. Adjoining features 1057 and 1055 measured an average of 0.75m in width and 0.19m in depth. They were backfilled with charcoal-rich silt.

No *in situ* evidence was recorded of an earthwork bank associated with either ditch, probably because of plough truncation. The primary inner ditch backfills comprised blue-grey clay, flecked with charcoal in places. Most of this ditch was backfilled with red-brown silt-clay, flecked with charcoal. Along part of the ditch, particularly its northeastern side, the sequence of ditch backfills suggested slumping from an external bank formed of material dug out of the ditch. Over the remainder of the ditch circuit the ditch backfills suggested more or less even weathering of the ditch sides. Along the northwestern and northeastern segments of the outer ditch was possible evidence for the collapse of an internal bank. Elsewhere, along the outer ditch perimeter the sequence of ditch backfills suggested gradual weathering of the ditch sides. The primary backfills of the outer ditch comprised red-brown clay, sealed by grey-orange silt-sand with a very high stone content.

TABLE 1: Dating evidence from Phase 2A features

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Feature no</i>	<i>Spot date</i>
Inner ditch	1006	C1-C2
Inner ditch	1027	C2; C1-C2; M-LIA-Conquest
Inner ditch	1081	C1-C2; M-LIA-Conquest
Outer ditch	1182	C1-C2
Outer ditch	1094	C1-C3
Outer ditch	1131	C1-C2

Inner ditches 1006, 1072, and 1081, and outer ditch 1046 contained pottery identified as Roman, which could not be more closely dated. In addition, Phase 2A features contained an illegible, corroded copper alloy coin (1027), and two heavily corroded possible iron sword fragments (1110 and 1131).

3.4 Phase 2B Second double ditched enclosure, 2nd century

In Phase 2B both the Phase 2A inner and outer ditches were re-cut (Figs. 3-4) after they had been completely backfilled. Despite the re-cut, the position of the Phase 2A southeastern entry-gap continued to be maintained. The re-cut ditches were generally smaller and less steeply-cut than their Phase 2A predecessors.

The Phase 2B re-cut was recognised along the full length of the backfilled Phase 2A inner ditch, and mostly followed its line. The re-cut (Plate 2, segment 1180) was mostly cut slightly inside the line of the primary ditch. At the southeastern corner of the enclosure the re-cut was cut across the full width of the primary feature. At the southwestern angle, the re-cut was dug slightly to the northwest of the line of the primary ditch. In the westernmost excavated segment, traces of two possible Phase 2B re-cuts, 1164 and 1164A, were recorded. The re-cut ditch measured 4m in width, widening to 5-6m along the southeastern corner of the enclosure. Overall, the Phase 2B inner ditch was mostly cut to a gently-sloping, U-shaped profile, mostly measuring 0.6-0.8m in width. The ditch was more deeply-cut at its southwestern angle. The more deeply-cut lengths of the ditch adjoined the southeastern entry-gap, and towards its southwestern corner, where it measured between 1m and 1.2m in depth.

The outer re-cut ditch broadly followed the line of the Phase 2A outer enclosure ditch, maintaining the same distance from the inner re-cut ditch (12-15m, measured centre to centre) as along the Phase 2A enclosure. Along the northwestern side, and the northeastern and southwestern corners of the Phase 2B outer enclosure the re-cut (Plate 3, segment 1123; Plate 5, segment 1143) was dug slightly inside its predecessor. North of the southeastern corner of the enclosure the ditch was broader than its predecessor. The re-cut ditch measured an average of 4.5m in width, and 0.8m in depth. Along the northeastern, southeastern and southwestern corners the outer ditch was cut to a depth of 1m. This Phase 2B ditch was cut to a gently-sloping, U-shaped profile, except at the southeastern and southwestern corners of the enclosure, where the ditch had a flat base, and a more steeply-sloping western side, possibly as a result of re-cutting. The southwestern terminal of a second entry-gap located along the southwestern side of the outer ditch was defined by an out-turned ditch segment which was re-cut in Phase 2B (1143 and 1147). The opposing terminal of this entrance lay outside the area excavated. Similarly, Phase 2B re-cutting was recorded along the adjoining length of the contemporary inner ditch, 1164 and 1164A.

There was no *in situ* evidence of an earthwork bank associated with either Phase 2B ditch re-cut. The sequence of backfills varied along the inner re-cut ditch perimeter. The primary backfill mostly comprised a dark grey-brown silt. This was sealed by brown clay-sand, overlain by a brown clay-silt. All the ditch backfills had a high pebble content. The

character and profile of the inner ditch backfills suggest gradual infilling of the result of weathering, except at the northern ditch terminal, 1053, where the sequence of backfills suggest the collapse and weathering of an external bank into the southeastern side of the ditch. The primary backfill of the outer re-cut ditch was a red-brown silt-clay, with occasional gravel scatters. Above was a layer of dark brown silt-clay with rounded pebbles, sealed by a layer of yellow-brown silt-clay.

Pebble path 1009, recorded crossing the southwestern entry-gap may have continued in use in Phase 2B.

TABLE 2: Dating evidence from Phase 2B features

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Feature no</i>	<i>Spot date</i>
Inner ditch	1180	C2
Inner ditch	1154	C2
Inner ditch	1053	C1-C2; C1-C3
Inner ditch	1164	LC2-MC3; L1-E2
Inner ditch	1120	C1-C2
Outer ditch	1143	C2-C4

The only pottery from outer ditch segment 1124 was dated to the Roman period, but not more closely. Inner ditch 1142 also produced similarly broadly dated pottery.

3.5 Phase 2C: Latest Roman features

The latest identifiable Roman features comprised the northern terminals of two converging, roughly north-south aligned field boundaries, 1127 and 1129. Both of these features were cut into the backfilled south eastern terminal of the outer Phase 2B enclosure ditch, presumably after it went out of use. Neither of these field boundaries was recorded as extending within the enclosure interior. The field boundaries were cut to U-shaped profiles, and measured an average of 0.8m in width and 0.45m in depth. They were back filled with dark brown clay-silt. The only other Phase 2C feature was an irregularly-shaped re-cut, 1087 (not illustrated), dug into the back filled southwestern angle, 1120, of the Phase 2B inner ditch.

3.6 Phase 3: Post-Roman features

Post-Roman features comprised plough furrows (not illustrated) and areas of backfilled quarrying, 1059 (Fig. 3), not here described in detail.

3.7 Discussion

No evidence of pre-Iron Age activity was found during the 1968-9 and 2005 excavations at the site. Bronze Age activity is represented more widely in the surrounding landscape by ring-ditches and associated cremations (Site A, Barker, Haldon and Jenks 1991, 21-23; Site B, *ibid.*, 26-28; Hughes 1995). A circular eaves-drip gully (Barker, Haldon and Jenks 1991, fig. 7) and ditched enclosure of Iron Age/Roman date was found at Site A Sharpstones Hill, which formed a continuation of occupation, or re-occupation of a location in use during the Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age/Iron Age.

Jenks (Barker, Haldon and Jenks 1991, 33, Site E) attributed an Iron Age origin to the Sharpstones Site E enclosure, including an internal ditch, and a palisade trench, both scoured-out by ploughing by the time of the 2005 excavation, *ibid.*, fig. 12, F3-F4). Two sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered by Jenks, including one from the eaves-drip gully more fully tested in 2005, along with 18 sherds of VCP from the same feature.

Jenks suggested that the inner ditch also belonged to the Iron Age-Roman period, but that the outer ditch was of later, Roman date.

While Jenks did not identify the re-cutting of the enclosure ditches he did note that the uppermost backfill of the inner ditch contained later pottery than that found within the earlier backfills of the same ditch. The two eaves-drip gulleys excavated in 2005 were probably contained within an enclosure defined by the palisade trench and small ditch identified by Jenks, but scoured-out by the time of the 2005 excavation. The four sherds of Iron Age pottery recovered from the 2005 excavation were undoubtedly residual material from Phase 2A (Roman) contexts. An Iron Age origin for settlement at Site E is supported by the recovery of Iron Age pottery from the 2005 excavation at the site. Iron Age occupation at other enclosures is represented by few sherds of pottery. For example, only 32 sherds of pottery were recovered from extensive excavation at Preston Farm (Woodward 1994, 72). Furthermore, the presumed Iron Age at Prestonia Montford produced no pottery at excavation (Jones 1994). It is not clear if the Iron Age settlement was defined by the relatively shallow ditch and palisade identified by Jenks, or by an earlier cut of the more substantial ditches which were entirely re-cut in the Roman period.

In contrast to Sharpstones Site A, the majority of the dating evidence from the 1968-9 and 2005 excavations of the double ditched enclosure (Site E) was of 1st-2nd century AD in date. Following this chronology, the double ditched enclosure is likely to have been occupied during the second half of the 1st century AD, when the adjoining military road was laid out between Wroxeter and Forden Gaer/Caersws (Margary 1973, 344). A roadside settlement extending for almost 200m was recorded alongside the road (Hughes 1994). The earliest buildings recorded within the roadside settlement were dated from the mid 2nd-early 3rd century. During the early 3rd century the settlement appears to have contracted, or at least to have been re-located outside the areas excavated in 1989 and 1990. A possible aisled building of early-mid 3rd century date was also recorded, together with continued settlement evidence dating to the mid to late 3rd century, and beyond.

The dating evidence from the 2005 excavation suggests that occupation of the first double ditched enclosure ended in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD. The re-cut belongs to the final occupation of the site probably in the 2nd century. The latest dating evidence from Phase 2A comprises 18 sherds of 1st-3rd century date from outer ditch segment 1094. The latest pottery from Phase 2B features was 23 sherds of 1st-3rd century date from inner ditch segment 1053, two sherds from segment 1143 dating to the 2nd-4th century, and 32 sherds from segment 1164, dating from late 2nd to mid 3rd century. Therefore, the occupation of the double ditched enclosure may not have continued long after the establishment of the roadside settlement.

Another notable point from comparison of the relative chronologies of the double ditched enclosure and the roadside settlement is that occupation of the enclosure may have persisted for as long as a century after the layout of the Roman road. The possible field boundaries 1127 and 1129 were cut into the backfilled Phase 2B ditch. They may represent the cultivation of the area surrounding the roadside settlement, along with other ditched boundaries recorded as cropmarked features. This later cultivation, after abandonment of the enclosure, may provide a context for the deposition of some of the later Roman pottery sherds, possibly deriving from manuring scatters, mixed into the enclosure ditch backfills.

4 AS SESSMENTS

4.1 Quantifications

Tables 1-2 present quantifications of the paper records and finds archive.

TABLE 3: quantification of the paper archive

<i>Record type</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Contexts	132
Cuts	50
Plans and sections	31
Photographs	8 films
Administration	1 file
Environmental	1 file and flots
Survey data	1 file

TABLE 4: Quantification of the finds archive

<i>Material</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Tile	13
Brick	1
Fired clay	52
Flint	1
Stone	1
Charcoal	30
Cu Brooch	1 (in 7 fragments)
Cu Pin	1
Iron (nails an d scraps)	6 (4 nails)

4.2 Small finds by Amanda Forster

Two finds of very heavily corroded iron blades were made during the excavation, possibly originally from a single object. The six fragments were recovered from Phase 2A ditch terminals of the outer ditch (1110 fill 1117; 1131 fill 1151). Three fragments were recovered from each context.

At this stage, it is impossible to provide a full identification of the fragments but they may possibly form part of an Iron Age sword (R. White *pers. comm.*). If this tentative interpretation is correct, this would be an extremely rare find from Shropshire and would merit further work. Unfortunately, the preservation of the iron is very poor with the majority of the surface being very corroded on all fragments. It is possible to see the cross section reasonably clearly in the break and the x-rays provide evidence for a tapering edge along both sides.

Due to the poor preservation of the objects, it is recommended that they undergo detailed visual examination and identification. This would help identify the original form of the possible sword and, indeed, if the fragments are all from the same object.

In addition a small quantity of fragmentary iron nails were also recovered; these do not merit further work.

An unidentifiable copper alloy coin was also recovered (from 1027, fill 1030, Phase 2A ditch).

4.3 Conservation assessment by Sonia O'Connor

The iron and copper alloy coin were X-radiographed at the Department of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford. The objects were examined with their radiographic images for the conservation assessment.

Unfortunately the iron work had very little metal surviving. However, there was widespread evidence of mineral preserved organic remains (MPO), which may shed light on the material used for handles, and also other organic materials buried in contact with the bladed objects in particular.

The copper alloy coin was also very heavily corroded. Where original surface corrosion layer had survived the potential for revealing finer detail is good. However, below this layer most of the objects had formed a powdery, light green layer from which the compact surface layers had become detached.

TABLE 5: Conservation assessment

<i>Context</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Conservation suggested</i>
1030	Cu alloy coin	Very corroded with most of surface lost revealing powdery corrosion below. X-ray reveals little information but some surface detail may survive in areas below the covering of soil	Small amount of mechanical cleaning to reveal detail. Consolidation
1117	Fe Blade	Completely corroded. Incomplete fragmentary. Cross section visible in break surfaces, width and taper visible from radiographs	Investigate for MPO remains? – packaging needs improvement
1151	Fe Blade	Completely corroded. Incomplete fragmentary. Cross section visible in break surfaces, width and taper visible from radiographs	Investigate for MPO remains? – packaging needs improvement

4.4 Roman pottery by Jane Evans

Introduction

The excavations produced 356 sherds of Roman pottery weighing 2790g, all hand collected. This collection included 9 sherds of amphora, and 24 sherds of samian. For the purposes of this assessment the pottery was scanned, spot-dated and quantified by count. All of the pottery was fragmentary and abraded. The majority of the pottery came from excavation of the inner ditch (Table 6). Apart from seven sherds (five from Phase 3, and three unstratified) all the pottery was associated with Phase 2 activity, the majority relating to Phase 2A (Table 7).

TABLE 6: Pottery, spot dating

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Spot date</i>
2B	Inner ditch 1180	1008	1	C2
2B	Inner ditch 1006	1010	2	C1-C2
2A	Inner ditch 1006	1011	5	Roman
2A	Inner ditch 1006	1012	1	C1-C2
2B	Inner ditch 1154	1029	15	C2
2A	Inner ditch 1027	1030	25	C2
2A	Inner ditch 1027	1031	88	C1-C2
2A	Inner ditch 1027	1032	3	M-LIA/Conquest
2A	Inner ditch 1072	1075	9	Roman
2A	Inner ditch 1081	1043	2	C1-C2
2A	Inner ditch 1081	1086	1	M-LIA/Conquest
2A	Inner ditch 1081	1085	1	C1-C2
2B	Inner ditch 1142	1082	11	Roman
2A	Outer ditch 1182	1044	1	C1-C2
2A	Outer ditch 1182	1045	1	C1-C2
2A	Outer ditch 1046	1098	2	Roman
2A	Outer ditch 1094	1104	18	C1-C3
2B	Outer ditch 1124	1125	3	Roman
2A	Outer ditch 1131	1132	46	C1-C2
2B	Outer ditch 1143	1145	2	C2-C4
2A-B	Gully 1057	1058	16	C1-C2
2A	Inner ditch 1081	1042	1	Roman
2B	Inner ditch 1053	1054	1	C1-C2
2B	Inner ditch 1164	1167	32	Late C2-mid C3
2B	Inner ditch 1164	1168	17	Late C1-early C2?
2B	Outer ditch 1124	1047	1	Roman
2B	Outer ditch 1139	1048	1	Roman
2B	Inner ditch 1120	1073	2	C1-C2
2B	Inner ditch 1120	1074	2	Roman
2B	Inner ditch 1053	1054	23	C1-C3
2B	Inner ditch 1053	1111	16	Roman
-	U/S	-	2	C1-C2
3	Drain	1166	5	Roman

Dating

A number of contexts produced only undiagnostic body sherds, not closely datable. However, there was sufficient datable material to suggest a chronology for the site.

The earliest evidence came from two lower fills of the inner ditch, Phase 2A (1027, fill 1032; 1081, fill 1086), which produced sherds of mudstone tempered ware (Morris 1983). This fabric is typical of Middle and late Iron Age sites in the Welsh Marches (Woodward 1994, 74), but did not continue in use in the Roman period. It has been found at other sites in the Wroxeter hinterland, for example Sharnstones Hill site E (Morris 1991), Preston Farm and Duncote Farm (Woodward 1994, 74-5).

Most of the pottery (58% by sherd count) came from Phase 2A deposits. The outer ditch produced the only sherd of Black Burnished ware associated with this phase (1143, fill 1145); the rim of a WA type 20 dish (Seager Smith and Davies 1993, fig. 12.3) dating broadly to some time between the 2nd to 4th centuries. This provides a 2nd century *terminus post quem*.

for Phase 2A. The paucity of BB1 (< 1% in all of Phase 2 A/B) might suggest that Phase 2A/B activity in general was focused towards the beginning of the 2nd century. BB1 becomes more widely distributed after c AD 120, and is well represented at later 2nd to 3rd century rural sites in the vicinity (Evans 1994, table 9, fig. 4). However, with such a small assemblage negative evidence should be used with caution. Other Phase 2A forms date broadly to the 1st to 2nd centuries, though analysis of the samian may refine this dating. A fill immediately above one of the deposits containing Mid-Late Iron Age pottery (1027, fill 1031) produced a samian platter, probably dating to mid-late 1st century, and a Severn Valley ware jar dating to the 1st or 2nd century (Webster 1976, fig. 4.20). Another lower ditch fill (1006, fill 1012) produced the rim of a necked jar, similar to types predominantly associated with 1st century military deposits at Wroxeter (Timby *et al.* 2000, figs 4.59 and 4.60, JM7). Two upper fills of the inner ditch (1180, fill 1008, Phase 2B; and 1027, 1030, Phase 2A) produced ring-necked flagons, both with pronounced upper rings typical of the 2nd century (c.f. Evans 1994, fig. 36.2). Other datable forms from the outer ditch comprised 1st and 2nd century Severn Valley ware jars (c.f. Webster 1976, fig. 4. C20-22).

The Phase 2A-B gully (1057, fill 1058) produced handmade Malvernian ware, including a tubby cooking pot dating to the 1st or 2nd century (Peacock 1967, fig. 1.5, 7).

A total of 36% of the assemblage by sherd count related to Phase 2B deposits. A fill of the inner ditch (cut 1053) produced the only decorated samian from the site. The upper deposit of the re-cut inner ditch (1164, fill 1167) produced the diagnostically latest pottery from the site, a WA type 24, grooved rim bowl (*op. cit.* fig. 123; Timby *et al.* 2000, fig. 4.69, B23) dating to the late 2nd to mid 3rd century. However, the lower fill of the same feature (1168) contained a Dressel 20 amphora rim, probably dating to the late 1st or early 2nd century (to be confirmed by David Williams), presumably residual or curated. Another fill of the re-cut (cut 1120, fill 1073) produced a samian Dr 18/31 or DR18/31R dish dating broadly to the late 1st to mid 2nd century.

The Phase 3 drain produced very little pottery, and no diagnostic material.

Range and variety

The range of fabrics (Table 4) is similar to that found on other sites in the Wroxeter hinterland (Evans 1994; Evans 2001), though no mortaria were noted. Oxidised wares, Severn Valley ware and local sandy wares, accounted for 82% of the assemblage. Black burnished ware, from Dorset, and Malvernian ware, from Worcestershire, both reached the site reflecting its access to trade links. The proportions of samian (7%) and amphorae (2.5%) are less than at the nearby Meole Brace roadside settlement (Evans 1994, table 9), but higher than at the more typical rural site at Duncote Farm (*op. cit.*). A total of 16 diagnostic rims are included.

TABLE 7: Pottery, summary of the assemblage by fabric group

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Oxidised</i>	<i>Reduced</i>	<i>BB1</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Malvern</i>	<i>Mudstone</i>	<i>Amphorae</i>	<i>Samian</i>	<i>Total</i>
2A	1006	1011	5								5
2A	1006	1012	1								1
2A	1027	1030	25								25
2A	1027	1031	80			6			2		88
2A	1027	1032						3			3
2A	1081	1042	1								1
2A	1081	1043							2		2
2A	1182	1044							1		1
2A	1182	1045							1		1
2A	1072	1075	9								9
2A	1081	1085							1		1
2A	1081	1086						1			1
2A	1046	1098	2								2
2A	1094	1104	18								18
2A	1131	1132	42							4	46
2A	1143	1145			1				1		2
Total 2A			183	0	1	6	0	4	1	11	206
2A-B	1057	1058	4				9		3		16
Total 2A-B			4				9		3		16
2B	1139	1047	1								1
2B	1139	1048	1								1
2B	1180	1008	1								1
2B	1180	1010	2								2
2B	1154	1029	14				1				15
2B	1053	1054	17			2		1		3	23
2B	1120	1073								2	2
2B	1120	1074	2								2
2B	1142	1082	8	1		1				1	11
2B	1053	1111	12			2				2	16
2B	1164	1167	26		2					4	32
2B	1164	1168	12						5		17
2B	1124	1125	3								3
2B	1053	1054								1	1
Total 2B			99	1	2	5	1	1	5	13	127
	-	1166	5								5
Total 3			5								5
U/S	?	-	2								2
TOTAL			293	1	3	11	10	5	9	24	356

Statement of potential

Analysis of data from the Wroxeter hinterland project (Gaffney *et al.* 2001) has shown the value to Roman studies of data from rural sites in this region. This assemblage adds to the growing body of data, and should be recorded in full. Specialist analysis of the samian and amphorae will add to the existing dating evidence.

Storage and curation

The pottery will remain stable through time and poses no long-term storage problems.

4.5 Charred plant remains by Val Fryer

Introduction and methods

Samples for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from fills within the primary and re-cut ditches (Phases 2A and 2B), of which 13 were submitted for assessment.

The samples were bulk floated by Birmingham Archaeology and the flots were collected in a 500 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed on Tables 8 and 9. Nomenclature within the tables follows Stace (1997). Whilst most plant remains were charred, two assemblages (Samples 2 and 6) contained low densities of de-watered macrofossils. Modern contaminants including seeds and fibrous roots were present throughout.

Results

Plant macrofossils

Cereal grains/chaff and seeds of common weeds, wetland plants and tree/shrub species were recorded at a low to moderate density from all but two of the samples studied. Preservation was generally quite poor, with a high density of the grains and seeds being severely puffed and distorted, probably as a result of combustion at very high temperatures. De-watered macrofossils of seeds/fruits with very woody endocarps were recorded from two samples. As such material can survive for considerable periods within most archaeological horizons, their contemporaneity with the contexts is uncertain.

Oat (*Avena* sp.), rye (*Secale cereale*) and wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains were recorded with wheat occurring most frequently. Chaff was relatively uncommon, but spelt wheat (*T. spelta*) glume bases were noted within the assemblages from Samples 3, 7 and 12. Weed seeds were exceedingly scarce, occurring within only six of the assemblages studied. All were of common segetal taxa including corn cockle (*Agrostemma githago*), stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*), small legumes (Fabaceae), goosegrasses (*Galium aparine*) and indeterminate grasses (Poaceae). Individual nutlets of sedge (*Carex* sp.) and spike-rush (*Eleocharis* sp.), both wetland species, were noted within Samples 10 and 11. De-watered bramble (*Rubus* sect. *Glandulosus*) 'pips' and elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) seeds were present within Samples 2 and 6, and charred elderberry seeds were also noted within Samples 7 and 11. Other possible tree/shrub macrofossils included a fragment of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell and a fragmentary hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) stone. Charcoal/charred wood fragments were present in all but Sample 2. Other plant macrofossils were rare, but did include indeterminate charred stem fragments and buds.

Other materials

Other material types were generally rare. The fragments of black porous and tarry material noted within seven of the assemblages are probable residues of the combustion of organic remains (including cereal grains) at extremely high temperatures. Bone fragments, some of which were burnt, were noted within five assemblages and Samples 6 and 11 contained low densities of possible mineralised or faecal material.

Conclusions

The uniformity of composition of the assemblages, regardless of context type or phase, almost certainly indicates that the recovered material has a common source. As the density of material is so low, it appears most likely that the assemblages are derived from small quantities of scattered or wind blown refuse, some or all of which may have been generated by activities conducted within or adjacent to the ditched enclosure. The nature of these activities cannot accurately be specified, but it would appear that cereals, some of which were heavily burnt either during drying or culinary preparation, were of importance to the occupants of the site. As there is little or no evidence for the primary deposition of material within the ditch fills it is, perhaps, most likely that the ditches were reasonably well maintained, possibly as a result of their juxtaposition to the military road which adjoined the enclosure.

As none of the assemblages contain sufficient material for quantification (i. e. 100+ specimens), no further analysis is required. However, it is recommended that a written summary of this assessment is included within any publication of data from the site.

TABLE 8: Charred plant remains, details from Phase 2A

Sample No	2	3	6	8	11	14	4
Context No	1175	1085	1092	1031	1160	1089	1117
Feature No	1165	1081	1072	1027	1156	1072	1110
Feature type	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	ID	OD
Phase	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A
Cereals							
<i>Avena</i> sp. (grains)						x	
(awn frags.)		x					
<i>Triticum</i> sp. (grains)						x	
(glume bases)		x					
(spikelet base)					x		
(rachis internode frags.)		x					
<i>T. spelta</i> L. (glume bases)		x					
Cereal indet. (grains)					x	x	x
Herbs							
Chenopodiaceae indet.					x		
<i>Galeopsis</i> sp.			xw				
<i>Galium aparine</i> L.					x		
<i>Linum</i> sp.					xcf		
Small Poaceae indet.					x		
Wetland plants							
<i>Carex</i> sp.					x		
Tree/shrub macrofossils							
<i>Rubus</i> sect <i>Glandulosus</i> Wimmer & Grab	xw		xw				
<i>Sambucus nigra</i> L.	xxw		xxxw		xx		
Other plant macrofossils							
Charcoal <2mm		xx	x	xxx	xxx	xxx	xx
Charcoal >2mm		x		xx	xx	x	
Charred root/stem					x	x	
Waterlogged root/stem	xxxx		x				
Indet.buds					x		
Indet.seeds						x	
Other materials							
Black porous 'cokey' material		x				x	x
Black tarry material		x		x			
Bone				xb	xb	x	x
Mineralised/faecal concretions			xx		xx		
Vitrified material					x		
Waterlogged arthropods	x		x				
Sample volume (litres)							
Volume of flot (litres)	0.2	<0.1	<0.1	0.2	0.1	<0.1	<0.1
% flot sorted	50%	100%	100%	50%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 9: Charred plant remains, other contexts sampled

Sample No	1	12	7	9	10	5
Context No	1054	1083	1113	1058	1056	1051
Feature No	1053	1142	1115	1057	1055	1182
Feature type	ID	ID	OD	IG	IG	OD
Phase	2B	2B	2B	2A/B	2A/B	2A
Cereals						
<i>Avena</i> sp. (grains)			x			
<i>Secale cereale</i> L. (grains)	xcf					
<i>Triticum</i> sp. (grains)	xcf				xcf	
(glume bases)			x			
<i>T. spelta</i> L. (glume bases)		x	x			
Cereal indet. (grains)		x	x	Xcf	x	
Herbs						
<i>Agrostemma githago</i> L.	xcf					
<i>Anthemis cotula</i> L.						x
Fabaceae indet.		x		X		
Wetland plants						
<i>Carex</i> sp.					x	
<i>Eleocharis</i> sp.					x	
Tree/shrub macrofossils						
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.		xcf				
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i> Jacq.				Xcf		
<i>Sambucus nigra</i> L.			x			
Other plant macrofossils						
Charcoal <2mm	xx	xxx	xxx	Xxx	xxx	x
Charcoal >2mm		xx	xx	Xx	xx	x
Charred root/stem		x		X	x	
Indet.buds		x				
Indet.seeds		x		X	x	
Other materials						
Black porous 'cokey' material	x		x			x
Black tarry material			x			
Bone				X		
Burnt/fired clay				X		
Small coal frags.	x					
Vitrified material		x				
Sample volume (litres)						
Volume of flot (litres)	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
% flot sorted	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Key:

x = 1 – 10 specimens xx = 10 – 50 specimens xxx = 50 – 100 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens

cf = compare w = de-watered b = burnt

ID = inner ditch OD = outer ditch IG = inner gully

6 UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN

6.1 General

The site is particularly important as one of the few enclosures within the Wroxeter Hinterland to be extensively tested by excavation (Gaffney *et al* 2007); sampling at other enclosure sites in the hinterland has been limited, with the exception of Preston Farm (Jones 1994).

The following research themes may be highlighted for the Sharpstones Site E enclosure:

- 1) Evidence for Iron Age origins. The Mid-Late Iron Age pottery recovered from the 2005 excavation, and the small ditch and palisade trench enclosing an eaves-drip gully identified by Jenks, evidence the Iron Age origin of the settlement site. Although only a few sherds of Iron Age pottery was recovered in 2005, Iron Age occupation in Shropshire is typified by a small quantity of pottery from enclosure sites, for example at Preston Farm near Shrewsbury (Jones 1994). The Sharpstones E settlement should be set within its Iron Age landscape context, extending beyond the immediate context provided by earlier work at Sharpstones Hill.
- 2) Iron Age-Roman transition. Occupation of the site in the Iron Age and Roman periods has been established. It is not presently clear if the site was occupied during the Iron Age-Roman transition or if the Iron Age and Roman occupations are merely linked by the use and re-use of a raised plateau. Full analysis of the pottery may help to answer this question.
- 3) Dating evidence. Full analysis of the pottery, including the samian and mortaria will enhance our understanding of the site chronology, and enable it to be placed in its proper context.
- 4) Economy. The excavation has not provided clear information concerning the site economy. The recovered charred plant remains were relatively undiagnostic, being derived from scattered or wind-blown refuse. The economy of the site may however have involved the drying or cooking of cereals. The cropmark evidence indicates a pattern of ditches aligned on the enclosure, which may have been used for arable cultivation. Some of these ditched boundaries post-date the abandonment of the enclosure.
- 5) Roman use and abandonment. Preliminary study of the pottery from the enclosure could suggest that it went out of use around the time that the nearby Meole Brace roadside settlement was established; which could perhaps suggest a link between the two events. More broadly based parallels should be sought in an attempt to study the continuity or discontinuity of Roman rural settlement in the west midlands in the 2nd century.

6.2 Updated project design

The project design can be re-focussed to the following themes:

- 1) Evidence for Iron Age origins
- 2) Iron Age-Roman transition
- 3) Dating evidence
- 4) Economy
- 5) Roman use and abandonment

7 PUBLICATION SYNOPSIS

It is proposed to publish the results of the excavation as an article within the *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*.

The provisional title of the article will be:

Excavation of a Late Iron Age- Early Romano-British enclosure at Meole Brace, Shropshire, 2005-6
by Kate Bain and Jane Evans

Text

Summary (500w)

Introduction and methodology, the site, phasing and context (1,500w)

Results (5,000 words)

Description and interpretation of the evidence by phase

Finds

Small finds (1,000w)

The pottery, coarse and fine wares (3,000w)

Discussion (4,000w)

Conclusion (250w)

TOTAL 15,250w

Illustrations

- 1 Location of area investigated in relation to Shrewsbury
- 2 Sharpstones area, locations of sites investigated, and topography
- 3 Simplified site plan, including cropmarked features, trial-trenches, area excavation
- 4 Plan of all features
- 5 Phase 1 features plan and sections
- 6 Phase 2A features plan
- 7 Phase 2A and 2B features, sections
- 8 Phase 2A and 2B features, sections
- 9 Phase 2B features plan
- 10 Possible sword
- 11 Roman pottery
- 12 Roman pottery

12 Figs, 5 tables, 6 plates (half-page)

TOTAL, APPROX. 30 PAGES

8 TASK LIST

The task numbers below give the initials of the individual responsible for the completion of the task.

Task Details

Initials

1 Stratigraphic analysis	AEJ
2 Project management (ongoing)	AEJ
3 Update database and matrix	AEJ
4 Conservation of possible sword	CO
5 Samian, report	FW
6 Amphora report	DW
7 Coarse ware pottery, recording	JE
8 Coarse ware pottery, report	JE
9 Possible sword, report	BM
10 Draft final stratigraphic report illustrations	AEJ
11 Final stratigraphic illustrations	ND
12 Draw possible sword	ND
13 Draw pottery	ND
14 Prepare discussion	AEJ
15 Edit text; revisions and corrections	AEJ
16 Liaison with journal	AEJ
17 Prepare archive	AA
18 Deposit archive	AA

Completion August 2007.

AEJ=project manager/report editor; CO=conservator of possible sword; FW=Felicity Wild, samian special list; DW=David Williams, amphorae; BM=British Museum, report on possible sword; ND=Nigel Dodds, illustrator; AA=archive assistant, prepare/deposit archive.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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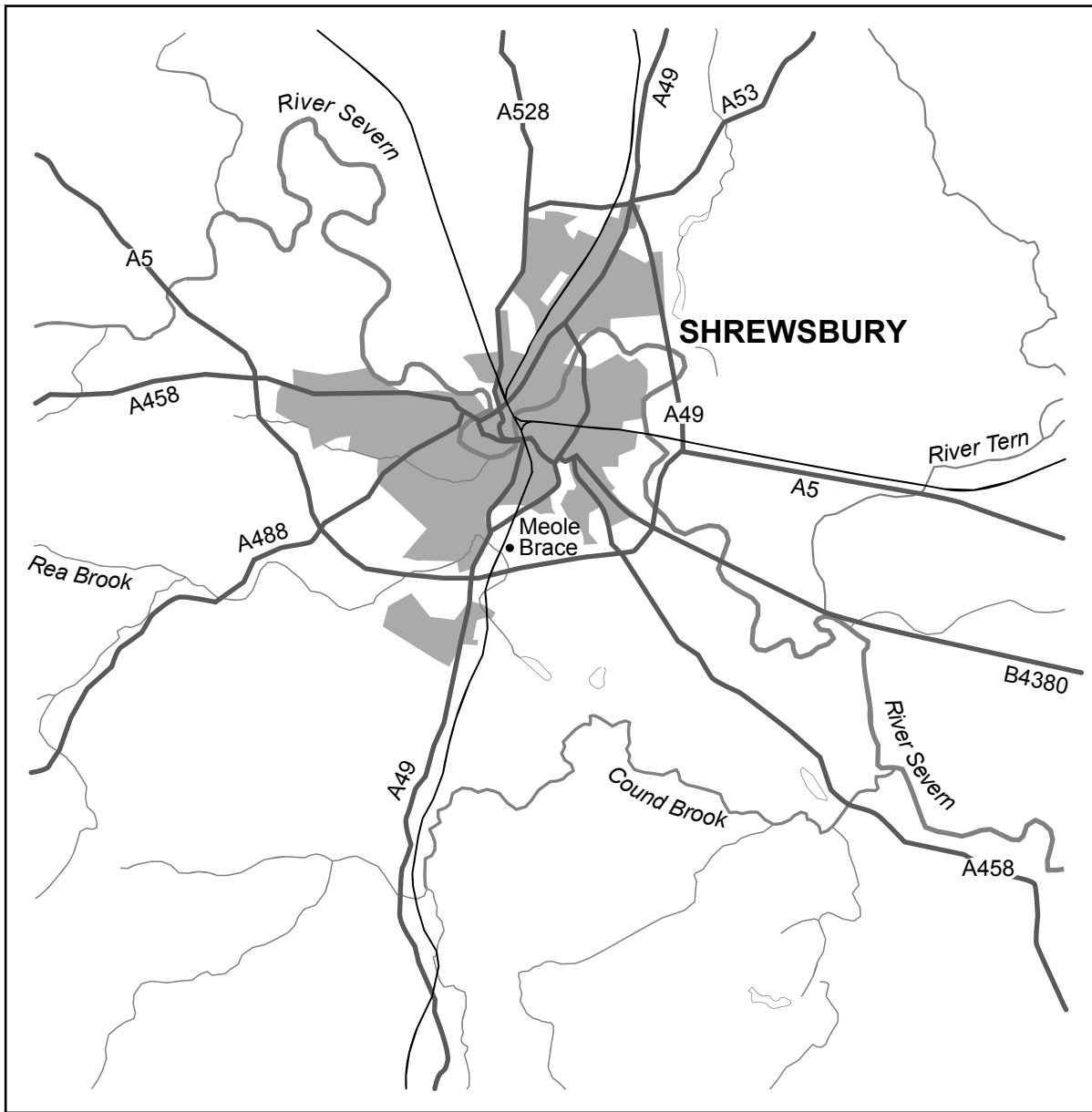


Fig.1

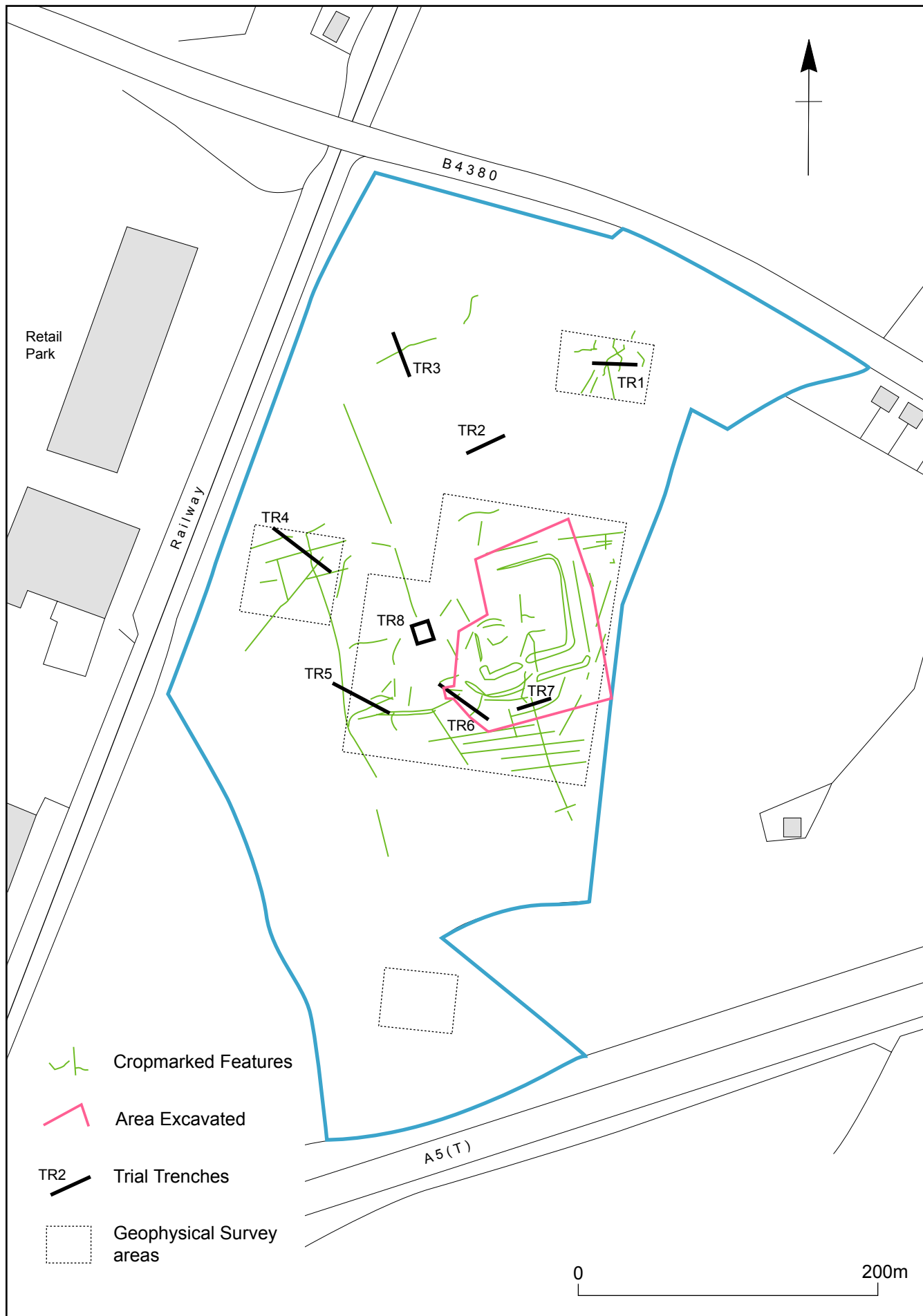
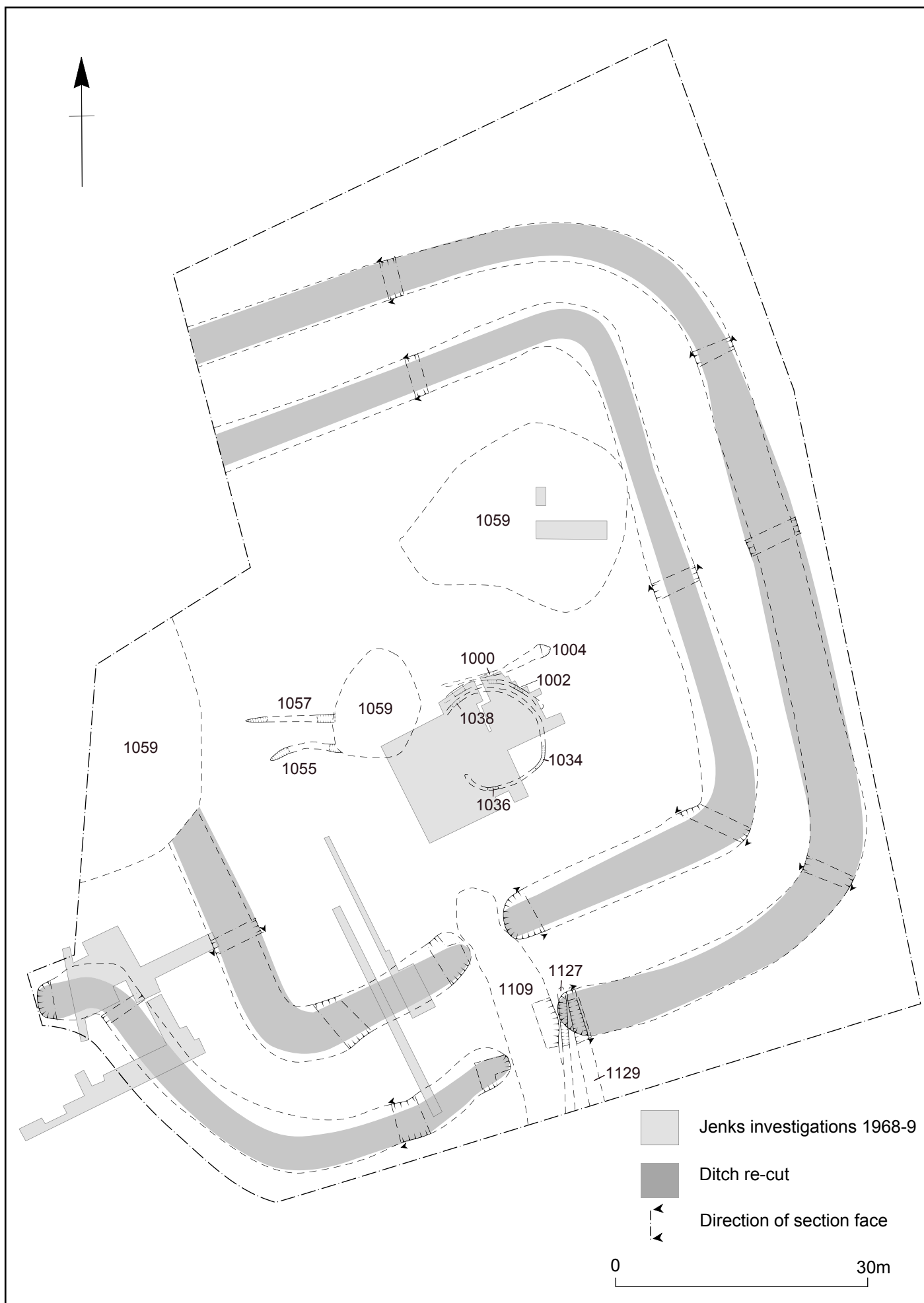


Fig.2



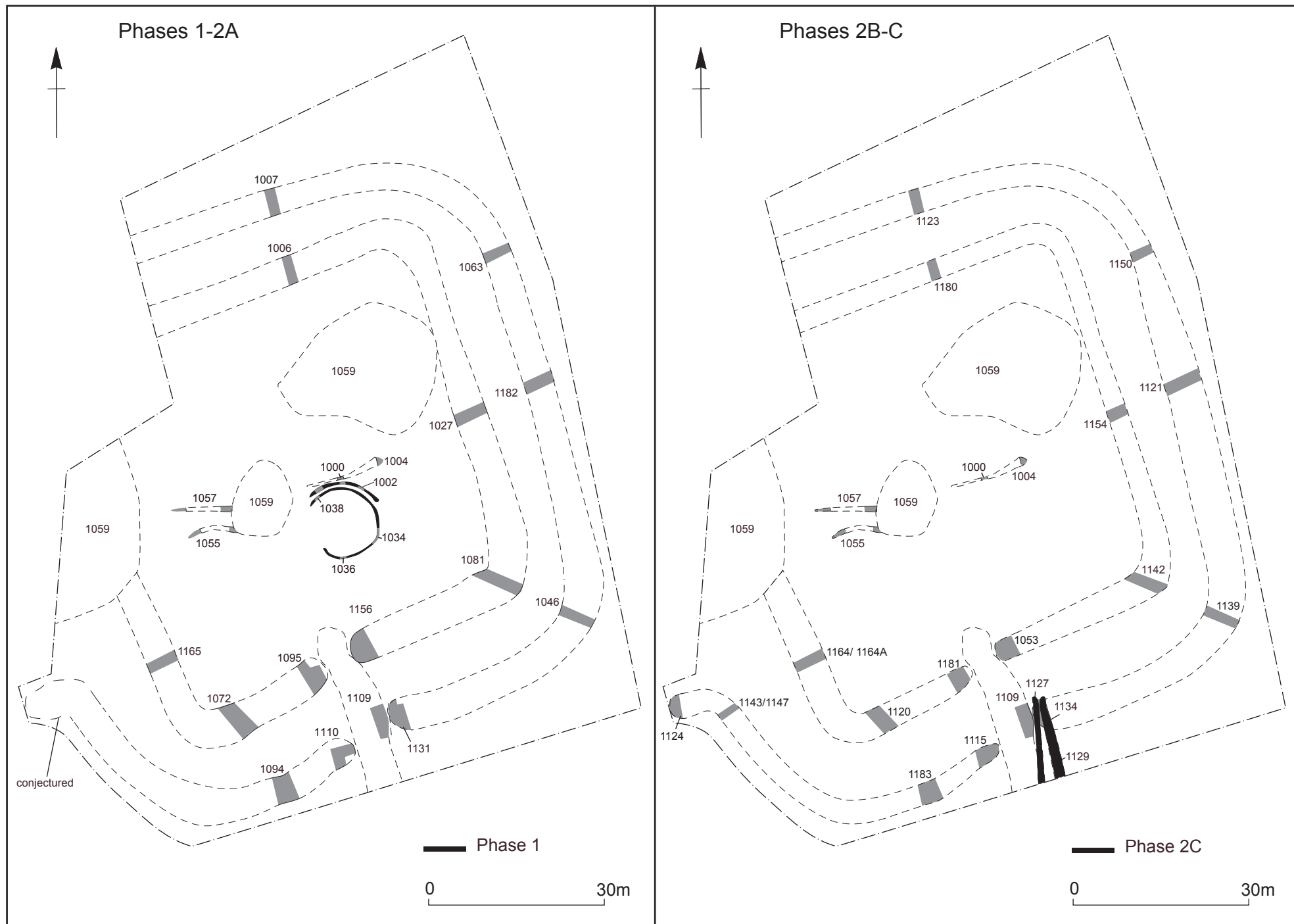


Fig.4



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5