

# Fieldwalking at Houghton Regis and Caddington, South Bedfordshire 1988-90

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## SUMMARY

*This paper is an interim report on fieldwork which is currently still in progress in South Bedfordshire.*

*Over the last two winters, a fieldwalking survey has been carried out on some of the remaining arable land in South Bedfordshire. So far, two areas have been surveyed: c3.75 km<sup>2</sup> on the chalkland around Houghton Regis, and c5 km<sup>2</sup> on the upland, covered by*

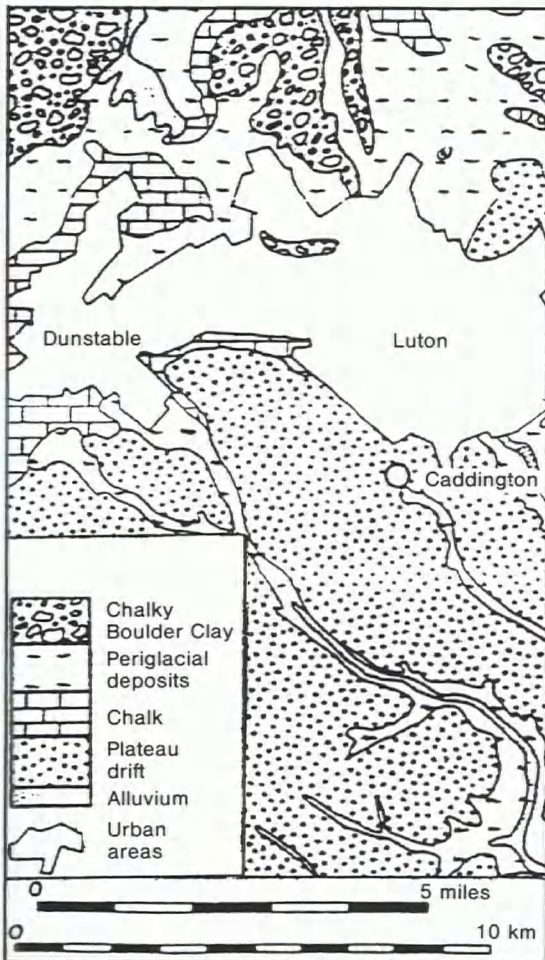


Fig 1 Map A: Superficial geology, South Bedfordshire (after Hagen, 1973)



Fig 2 Bedfordshire: the study area

*clay with flints, around Caddington. Half of this area was fieldwalked by members of the Manshead Archaeological Society; the rest of the survey work was completed by the writer.*

*The aim of the survey has been to try and recover, by fieldwalking, the evidence (and pattern) of settlements in the area from the mesolithic to medieval periods.*

## LOCATION

Caddington is situated on a clay with flints covered plateau, height 150-200 m OD. There are steep scarp slopes to the North and West, with a more gentle dip slope to the South East. The plateau is dissected by dry river valleys running North West-South East. The current land use is mainly arable with the landscape retaining some enclosure hedgerows and areas of woodland. Houghton Regis is situated on a chalk ridge, height 125m OD. The main features of the area are the Ouzel brook valley to the North, which rises to a clay covered ridge (height 130m OD). The Ouzel drains to the West; other streams

drain to the North from the ridge near Chalton, and South East from Houghton Regis. The current land use is arable; many of the enclosure hedges have been removed from fields in this area leaving large tracts of arable land.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Our knowledge of the area's archaeology derives from the pioneering fieldwork of W.G. Smith (*Dunstable: Its History and Surroundings*, 1904) and F. Gurney (various notebooks and map c1913-22 at Luton Museum). The Manshead Archaeological Society has recovered much information on the archaeology of Dunstable and its surrounding area, mainly from rescue excavations, over the past 40 years. The Society carried out limited fieldwalking around the two small excavation sites of Chalton and Bidwell' (Fig 4, nos 1 and 2). Land at Zouches Farm, Caddington, outside the survey area, has been walked by M. Wilmot and R. Holgate (pers comm). The discovery of several previously unrecorded sites in the survey area suggests that much of this area has not been extensively fieldwalked.

### METHOD

Due to time constraints the method chosen was simply linewalking at set distances apart, eg 12.5 m, 25 m or 50 m, giving an area sample size of 2%-8%. Finds were provisionally identified, recorded and mapped on site using standard survey forms. To average out the results, the figures were adjusted to give an overall 4% sample, then mapped by period on a quantity per hectare basis, with hectare squares based on the OS grid. These results, representing a visual summary of the survey, are illustrated in Figs 1-5. The areas with denser concentrations of artefacts, marked 11+ on Figs 1-5, generally yielded more than 20 finds per hectare, based on a 4% sample survey.

It must be stressed that the method used meant that only a small proportion of the total area was surveyed; likewise only a sample of the available artefacts was recovered. How much that sample is representative of the area's archaeology is a matter of inference.

A brief note and discussion of finds, by period, is given below.

### Mesolithic

A large flintworking scatter has been identified on the clay covered ridge near Chalton (TL 0226) (Fig 3, no 1). This probably represents a seasonal hunting encampment and dates to the mesolithic

period. The finds were mainly broken blades, waste flakes and a few cores. Other small scatters of mesolithic flintwork occur along the ridge, with occasional finds along the valley floor.

Only a small number of mesolithic flints has been found in the survey area at Caddington, although a mesolithic site has previously been recorded at Zouches Farm, Caddington (TL 0321) outside the survey area (Fig 3, A).

### Neolithic and Bronze Age

A large variety of worked flints, widely distributed, represent prehistoric activity in the areas surveyed. Finds included waste flakes, cores, retouched flakes, scrapers, blades and piercers. Many of the flints were crudely worked and probably represent "field tools" with a one-off usage. They are probably best dated to the Bronze Age. No neolithic pottery has been identified, but possible late Bronze Age pottery has been found along the ridge at Chalton.

These flintworkers, much like those of the mesolithic period, seem to have preferred the upland areas, although hillwash may have obscured potential sites along valley floors.

At Caddington, the dry valleys and associated ridges which dissect the plateau seem to have provided natural routeways, with possible occupation or activity sites along their slopes, as indicated by the denser flintworking scatters (Fig 4).

The wide distribution of finds suggests a landscape with large areas of woodland clearance. The heavy clay soils, though potentially rewarding, may not have been easily worked as arable; farming practice could have been largely pastoral, with hunting as a supplementary activity.

At Houghton Regis, a generally lower density of flint finds suggests the area was not so widely exploited in the neolithic or Bronze Age: apart from along the ridgeway at Chalton. Perhaps much of the land remained poorly drained and heavily wooded until the Iron Age, when there is firmer evidence for valley floor settlement.

### Iron Age

Two scatters of late Iron Age pottery (Fig 5, no 1) have been found close to the Ouzel brook near Houghton Regis (TL 0225). These may indicate occupation sites. Other occasional finds of Iron Age pottery may represent manuring scatters, from as yet unidentified settlement sites.

### Romano-British

At Houghton Regis two previously unrecorded occupation sites have been identified (TL 0325 and

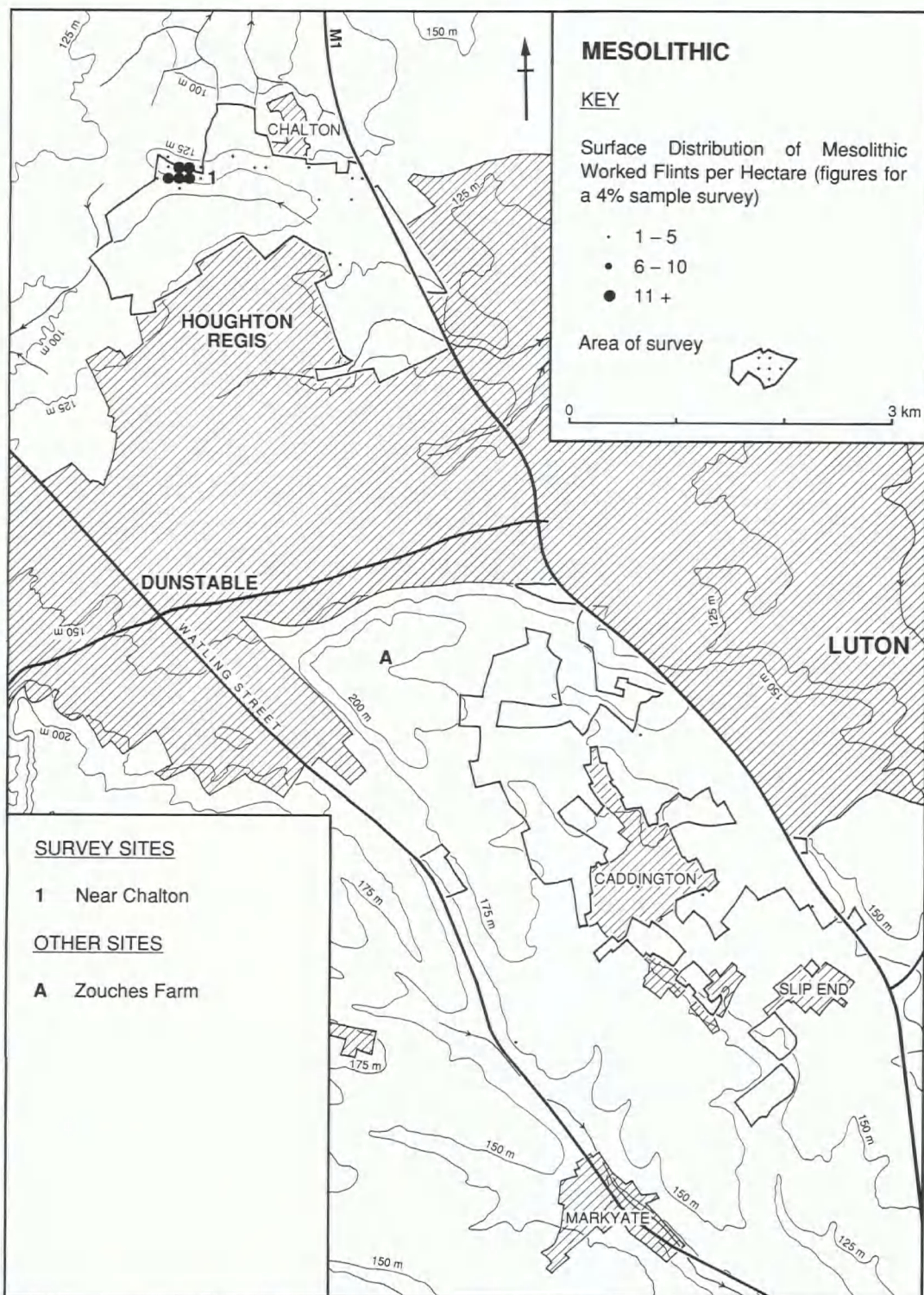


Fig 3 Fieldwalking: Mesolithic artefact distribution

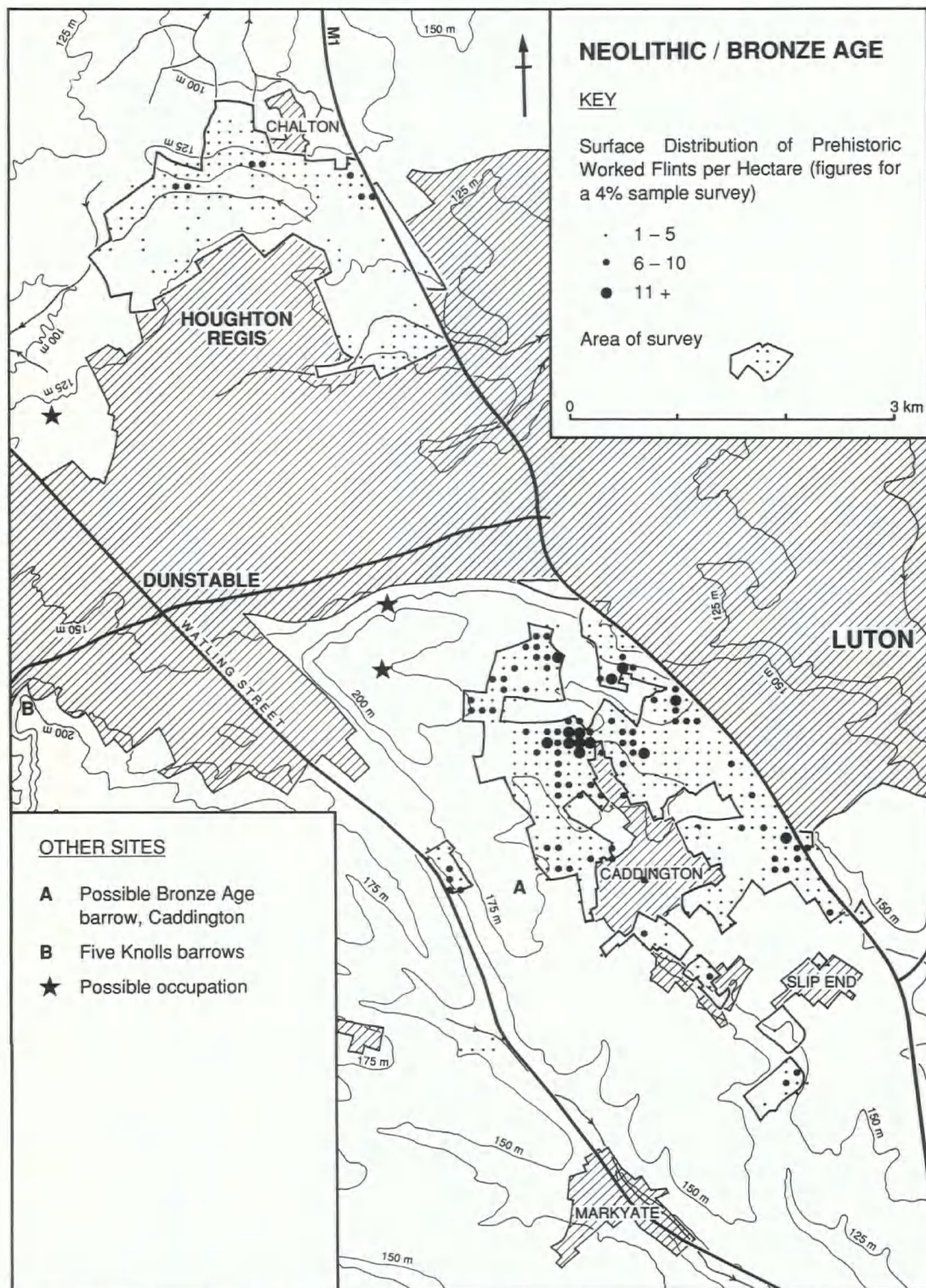


Fig 4 Fieldwalking: Neolithic/Bronze Age artefact distribution

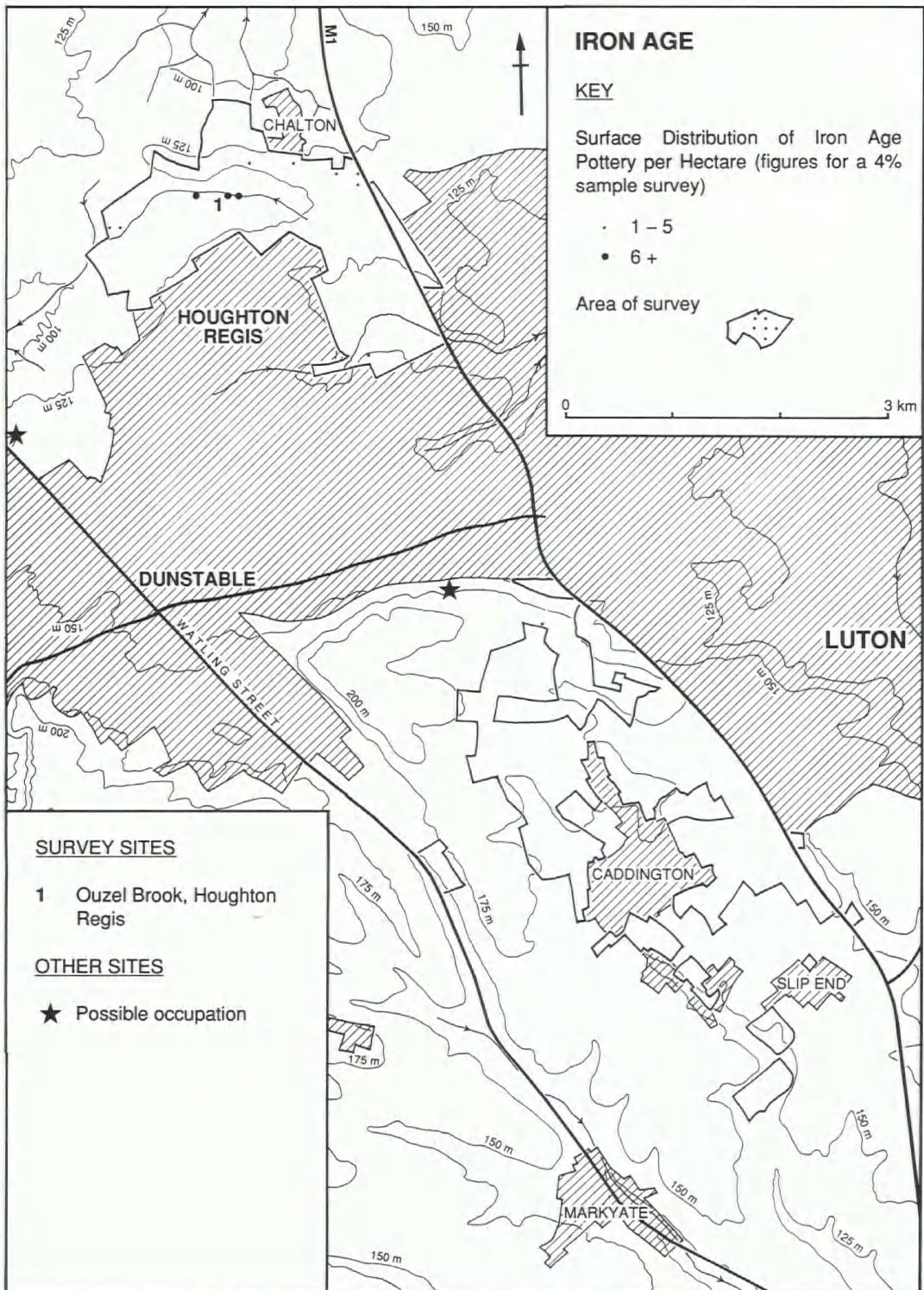


Fig 5 Fieldwalking: Iron Age pottery distribution

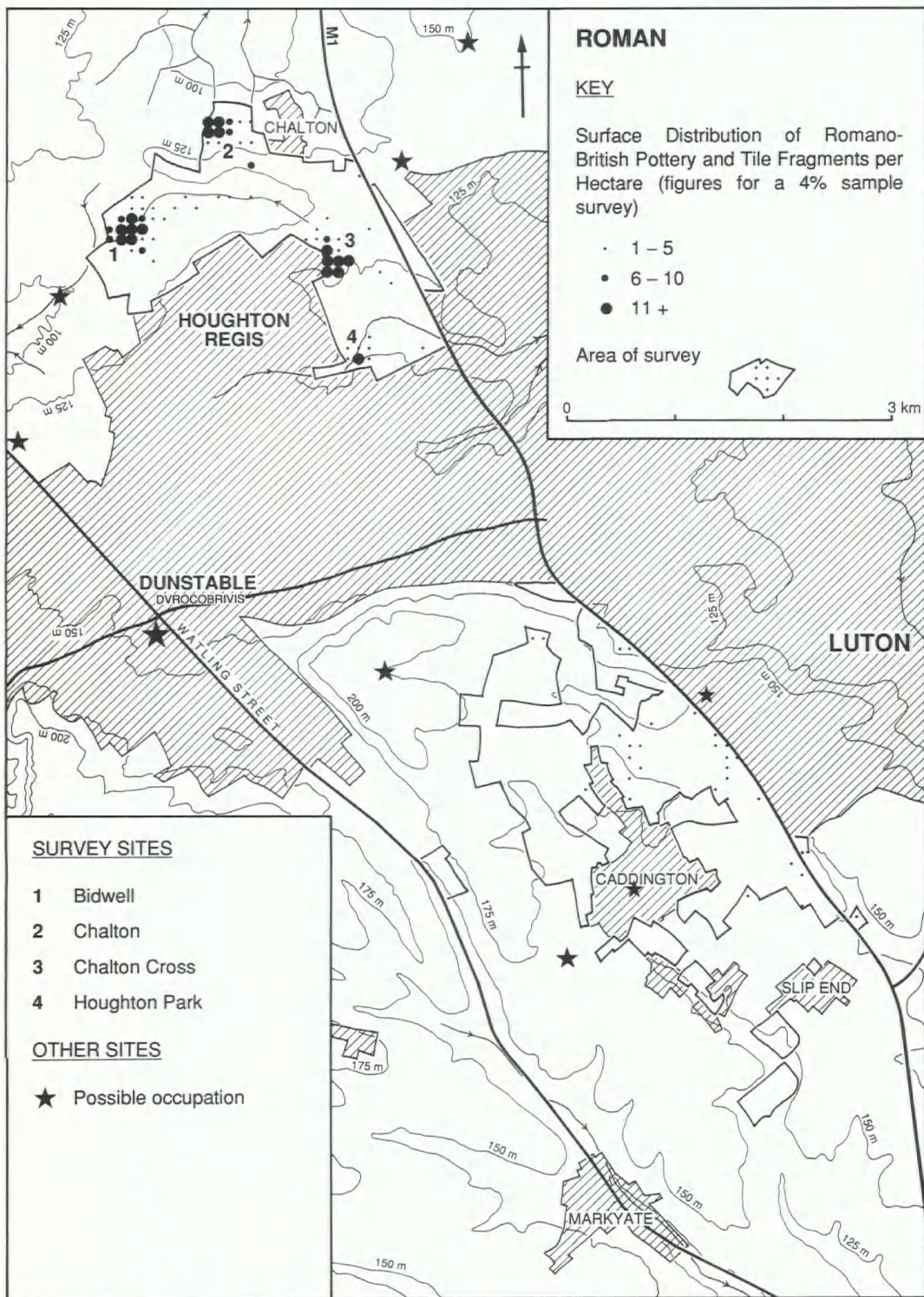


Fig 6 Fieldwalking: Roman ceramics distribution

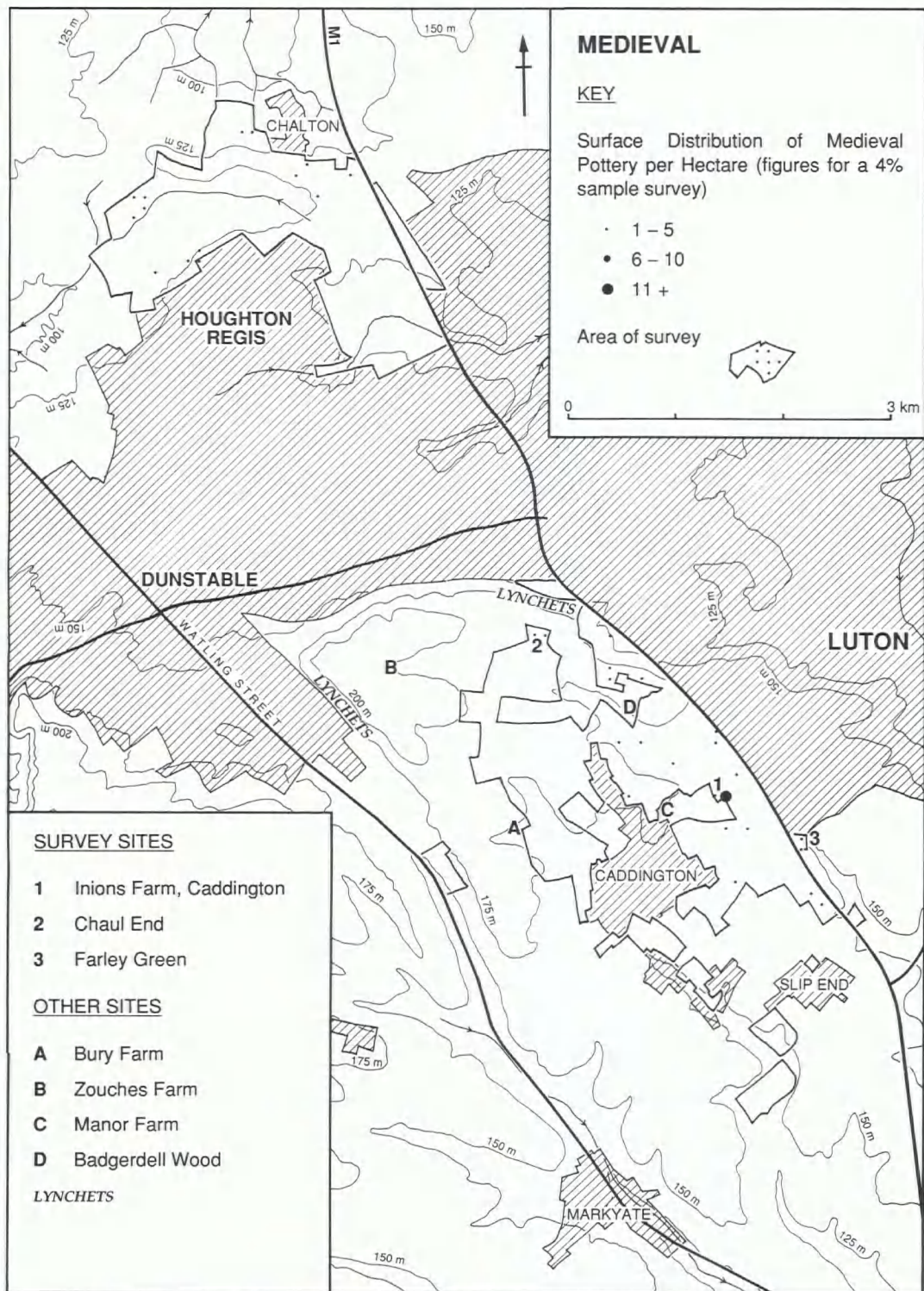


Fig 7 Fieldwalking: Medieval pottery distribution

TL 0324) (Fig 6, nos 3 and 4). These are marked by surface scatters of tile and pottery. A reassessment was also made of the extents of the known sites at Chalton and Bidwell (TL 0226 and TL 0125), both of which seem to cover a wider area than previously realised (Fig 6, nos 1 and 2). Small areas at both these sites have been investigated by trial excavation by the Manshead Society.<sup>1</sup>

The discovery of roof tile and other building materials indicates reasonably substantial buildings stood on these sites. The datable pottery seems to indicate occupation from at least the 3rd to late 4th centuries. The recovery of iron slag at two of the sites suggests industrial activity, and three of the sites are situated next to streams.

The amount of pottery found close to each site suggests intensive infield cultivation, with perhaps the greater part of the landholding under pasture or consisting of areas of managed woodland. These farmsteads seem to have been the centre of a land unit or holding of about 1km<sup>2</sup>. Whether these were independent holdings or part of a large estate can only be guessed.

At Caddington, not very much Roman material has been found in comparison with Houghton Regis. Occasional finds of pottery and tile fragments may indicate manuring scatters. Some larger fragments of roof tile (*tegulae*) have been found in the fields around Inions Farm (TL 0720), and may have come from a villa in the Farley Farm area (TL 0721). Other finds of Roman tile occur in a re-used context among spreads of flint and peg tile, which possibly represent the remains of medieval or post medieval buildings (Fig 7, nos 1-3 and A).

Finds of Roman occupation material have been recorded from brick earth pits at Caddington (Fig 6) and an occupation site is also known near Zouches Farm (TL 0321).

### Medieval

A scatter of early medieval pottery was found close to Inions Farm, Caddington (TL 0720) (Fig 7, no 1), near to a spread of flint and tile; a large rectangular cropmark was recently observed at this site. Other pottery find spots near possible building remains (Fig 7, nos 2 and 3) were Farley Green (TL 0719) and Chaul End (TL 0521).

There were only a few pottery finds throughout the survey areas, probably representing manuring scatters. Apart from the ubiquitous fragments of

peg tile, which may well have been later in date, there was little surface evidence to indicate widespread arable cultivation in the medieval period at either Caddington or Houghton Regis.

More tangible evidence survives in the form of strip lynchets, on the scarp slopes at Caddington (Fig 7). Some slight evidence of ridge and furrow remains at Caddington, and more visibly in fields at Bidwell, near Houghton Regis.

At Caddington, manorial earthworks are visible at Bury Farm (TL 0519) (Fig 7, A), Zouches Farm (TL 0321) (Fig 7, B) and possibly a moated site at Manor Farm (TL 0620) (Fig 7, C). A medieval building has been excavated at Badgerdell Wood by Mr D. Warren<sup>2</sup> (Fig 7, D).

"Saxo-Norman" pottery, 11th century in date, was the only type of Saxon pottery found in the survey areas.

### Post Medieval

A general scatter of 17th-20th century pottery and other material was found, confirming widespread arable cultivation over the past 400 years.

### Conclusion

The surveys outlined above have located previously unknown domestic sites of mesolithic, late prehistoric, Romano-British and possibly medieval date; and indicated the extent of cultivated land during some of these periods.

Further fieldwork in neighbouring areas is essential. In addition, more intensive survey work and trial excavations at some of the above sites should be undertaken in order to recover a larger sample of material and to assess the date, nature, and state of preservation of each site.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### NOTES

- 1 Chalton: *Manshead Magazine* No 9 p 17, No 10 p 12. Bidwell: *South Midlands Archaeology*, No 16 p 29.
- 2 D. Warren: "A medieval site at Caddington" (personal communication).

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