

**Archaeological Excavations at
Coleorton, Leicestershire**

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Introduction

This report concerns archaeological excavations undertaken at Coleorton between May and July 1992 (Figs 1-2). The excavations were in advance of the straightening of the Ashby to Loughborough Road (A512) which would go through an area of earthworks that had been recorded by Fred Hartley of Leicestershire Museums, and interpreted as possible medieval house-platforms. The area is part of extensive earthwork evidence including bell pits for coal extraction and to the north garden landscaping in the grounds of Coleorton Hall (Fig 3). The excavations comprised an initial three week evaluation period first negotiated between Leicestershire Museums and Leicestershire County Council Highways Department in December 1989, followed by a five week period of area excavations on the basis of the evaluation results. After the excavations were completed a watching brief was undertaken to the east of the earthworks with the cooperation of the contractors Midland Oak Construction (see below).

The area of the earthworks had been surveyed by direct current apparent resistivity and ground radar by the British geological survey in April 1990. The results of this work is available in their report (Busby, Royle and Allsop 1990); to summarise, some distinct radar reflection corresponding with resistivity variations were located at the east end of the earthworks and some 60 m to the west.

The area of earthworks included four identifiable platforms to the south of the existing Ashby-Loughborough road (A512). The area to the north of the road is now part of the grounds to Coleorton Hall and had been altered considerably by 18th century landscape gardening. To the south are traces of medieval strip fields, fish ponds and bell pits associated with coal extraction (Fig 2).

The local historian William Nichols writing in the early 18th century describes Coleorton as consisting of two townships; one called the Over Town or Coleorton Saucy; the other Nether Town or Coleorton Quatermarsh. Coleorton along with Swannington was a coalmining area in the early medieval period and particularly in the area of Coleorton Moor arose a pattern of dispersed settlement not known in other parts of Leicestershire (Hartley 1984, 21). Nichols describes these as follows: "The inhabitants, who are very numerous, are chiefly employed in getting coals. Most of them have a decent house, built either by their parents or themselves with a garden to each from an acre to an acre and a half taken out of the common" (Nichols 1804, 739).

Geology Clive R Jones

The bedrock geology consists of Triassic Keuper sandstone indicated by derived red and brown sands below the topsoil. The Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures form the ground to the east of the Triassic outcrop and were visible during the watching brief in a gully to the east of the excavation where grey and yellow sandstones outcropped. Elsewhere the Coal measures are indicated by derived grey and yellow clays admixed with varying quantities of mine waste including coal fragments, the waste increasing in the vicinity of the old pit shafts.

Aims

The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

1. To ascertain the character of the earthworks and the presence or absence of archaeological features associated with them within the proposed development areas.
2. To ascertain the extent and character of any archaeological deposits located.
3. To ascertain the state of preservation of these deposits including the potential for the survival of environmental information.
4. To assess what further work may be necessary in advance of the development.

Methods

Prior to the excavation of the site, a contour survey was undertaken using a TopCon GTS 3B Electronic Distance Measurer Theodolite, at five metre traverses East to West with readings taken at two metre intervals (more closely spaced on a judgemental survey across steep slopes); this survey was undertaken to provide a permanent record of the earthworks before they were destroyed. The results of the survey are illustrated in the form of a contour plan and computer aided three-dimensional plot (Figs 4-5).

Following the survey, trenches were excavated by JCB 3C with ditching bucket (Figs 5-6). The trenches were excavated to various levels on a judgemental basis, depending upon the nature of deposits encountered. The trenches were then hand cleaned in order to identify any archaeological features present. In some instances, machining continued following full recording.

The evaluation located three broad phases or groups of deposit consisting of (i) post-medieval dumping of quarried substrata with associated simple structural activity. (ii) very late medieval or early post-medieval earthworking also associated with small scale structural activity and boundary forms (iii) medieval settlement evidence and boundary forms. Following the evaluation larger areas were opened in Areas P, W and X (Figs 5-6). The excavations demonstrated the complex nature of the earthworks and their heterogenous rather than homogeneous nature. The large area covered by the excavations precluded total excavation, but a representative sample of deposits is believed to have been recorded.

Description of deposits is in phase order area by area. Phasing attributed to deposits is not definitive. No direct stratigraphic links were recorded across the whole site, and some phasing is therefore based upon extrapolation. Phasing within trenches/areas is based upon the stratigraphic relationships recorded in the process of excavation. Suggested dating is based upon dates provided by Deborah Sawday after examination of the medieval pottery.

Due to extremely arid conditions during the excavation of Area W not all physical relationships were recorded nor were all the deposits present recognised. Many of the deposits recorded in the extreme east of the site, came to light as the excavations drew to a close.

The natural subsoil (see above) of the area is Triassic Keuper sandstone which at its surface is weathered eroded to sand with small stone pockets. Marls, blue clays and coal seams are present in the substrata. The outcropping of coal around Coleorton led to its early exploitation (Hartley 1984:21). Charcoal is a common phenomenon on archaeological sites, but coal less so. Differentiation between coal and charcoal can be difficult when the particles are small. For this reason, some of references to charcoal within soil descriptions in the following report may be inaccurate.

Cut features are referred to by cut numbers, without brackets, whereas their fillings are referred to by numbers in brackets. Some features are referred to only by the fillings which defined their presence. Equated contexts are here placed separated by a slash, between one set of brackets.

Phase 1

Mid/Late 12th Century AD

Phase 1.1

Gully 439(437); Post Trench 438(414); Cut Feature (436)(430); Slots 421(399), 425(424), 423(422)

The above features would all seem to relate to medieval settlement. The features were located in the south-west of Area W, beneath later medieval deposits, and cutting natural. Linear cuts 439 and 437 represented two related cuts of a linear feature running broadly east-west. 439 survived later truncation to 2.4m in length, 0.35m in width and 0.15m deep. In the solitary segment excavated through (437), a dark brown sand silt, traces of four shallow post-holes surviving to 0.06m beneath (437) were identified. No postpipes were evident. (437) was cut away by 438 of which 3.4m in length, 0.75m in width and 0.15m in depth survived. In the west the feature ran into baulk, whereas in the east it was cut away by the later slot (374). 438 possessed a dished section with shallow northern and steeper southern edges. The feature was filled by (414) a dark brown fine sand that contained up to 90% pieces of angular sandstone up to 0.20m. A single sherd of Saxo-Norman pottery was recovered from (414).

To the south of these intercutting features was a discrete cut feature at least 0.90m in length and 0.50m wide, with a subrectangular shape partially obscured by the western baulk. The feature possessed an upper fill (430) of dark greyish and dark reddish brown clay sand silt 0.14m deep, with charcoal flecking, and large stones of granite/quartzite and sandstone to 0.20m. This was found to overlie a dark brown sand silt at least 0.05m deep. This not excavated. Aligned at 90° with 438, were three slots to the east, (421, 423 and 425) filled by greyish brown and dark brown sand silts. All were broadly parallel, cut natural and were overlain by later deposits. 2.2m of 423 (422) was exposed, 0.30m wide. Where excavated the feature was 0.08m deep with steep western edge at c.55° and flatter eastern at c.30°. The feature terminated with a square end, immediately adjacent to 438. (422) was probably cut by 425, a linear feature mostly obscured by the eastern baulk, of which 1.5m north-south, and 0.30m east-west were exposed. The cut was filled by (422), and was partially excavated; a steep western edge was found to be 0.15m deep. The most western slot of the three 421, was at least 5m in length, 0.40m wide and 0.08m deep. 12th - 13th century pottery was recovered from its filling (399).

Interpretation

These features are thought to represent structural remnants in the form of beam slots, and post-trenches. They indicate a rectilinear structure which was substantially rebuilt during its life with the renewal of earthfast elements. (430) and (436) most probably belong to a pit or post-pit.

Phase 1.2

Spread (345); Slots (374), (431)

This subphase is represented by a layer (345), at least 4.8m long and 2.2m wide, and 0.17 to 0.37m deep; the deposit was composed of a dark brown fine sand mottled with abundant reddish brown silty clay and rare charcoal flecks. This layer overlay the earlier structural features. An east west section excavated through the layer identified steep truncation in the east by a later ditch 454 and a continuous fall in level and tapering to the west albeit at a hallow angle. Truncation was also apparent in the north by later pitting. Twenty five sherds of various 12th to 13th century pottery types were recovered from the layer.

Perhaps also contemporary in part with the above, was the cutting of two narrow slots in the south-east of the site. These were cut through (345) on a northwest/southeast alignment. Between 0.40 and 0.50m wide, the slots had similar squared terminals in the southeast. The more easterly was segmented, and found to be a maximum of 0.25m deep, filled with a dark brown sand and sandstone filling (374). The westerly remnant was removed in plan, and was of maximum depth of 0.22m. The edge of (374) was cut at c. 50'.

Interpretation

The layer may represent a surface or beaten earth floor. This would appear to be supported by the impression of erosion or perhaps hollowing evident in the east west section. If a floor of some form, it represents a wholesale revamping of the earlier structure which it sealed. The later slots may represent floor beam trenches, although so little remained of their form that this interpretation is tentative. However it would represent a logical development at least in terms of flooring, and support the interpretation of (345).

Phase 2

Late 12th Century

Phase 2.1

Pit 409/411(427)(428)(429)(420)(407); Ditch 64(376)(392)(383)(337)(336)(342)(359)(45)

A shallow ditch was identified in the north west of the area aligned north-south, beneath later earthworking and cutting natural. The southern end of the ditch was not visible during the evaluation, and had been truncated by a machine cut (trench G). The northern end of the ditch was identified in the evaluation cutting the natural subsoil. The feature was sealed by 0.80m of loam subsoil which lay beneath 0.40m of topsoil. The ditch was hand excavated in the evaluation, (trench I) and formed the evidence on which area excavation was justified. The feature was at least 7m long, between 1.3 and 1.6m wide, and up to 0.25m deep. Considerable disturbance of the feature filling was evident along its eastern edge; this was resulting from the cutting of a

series of postholes in a later phase. Two segments were excavated from the ditch, 2.4m long in the north and 2.0m in the south. The former segment was filled by (45) a lone very dark greyish brown clay sand silt with sandstone flecking and charcoal lens. Despite disturbance from at least five postholes, cutting through (45) and the base of the feature, elements of the original cut were intact; this clearly shelved upwards towards the southern face of the segment, suggesting discontinuity. The southern segment contained four fillings, the most primary being (392) a dark brown clay silt sand, beneath two tip layers (383) a dark brown silt sand, and (337) a dark reddish brown sand silt clay. (337) was capped by (359) a very dark grey clay sand silt. Although (45) and (359) both contained elements of burnt material (flecks of charcoal and reddened flecks of sandstone) (383) and (337) appeared to be directly burnt in entirety. (These fillings lay immediately to the west of hearth 242 of a later phase; this hearth was clearly rebuilt during its life, and may equally have been sited on an earlier hearth contemporary with the ditch fillings). Contexts (392)(383)(359)(45)(342) all contained late 12th to 13th century pottery. Where truncated, ditch 64 turned perceptibly to the south west.

On a projected line and stratigraphically linked with the ditch cutting was pit 409. This feature was subcircular, 2.2m north/south and 2m east/west and 0.80m deep. The upper northern edge was very shallow, breaking to a 50' edge above 40' lower edges and a bowled base. The southern edge was slightly steeper. The pit was cut through (345). The feature contained six fills; (427) a primary sand wash, accumulated most thickly to 0.25m on the gentle northern slope, and presumably a natural redeposit derived from the shallow northern shoulder. This was sealed by (428) present against the southern edge of the pit, a brown sand clay silt 0.70m deep and 0.18m wide, sealed by (429) a probable small back-fill episode of dark brown sand silt 0.15m deep, with abundant sandstone inclusions to a depth of 0.08m; (420) a reddish brown sandy clay silt up to 0.20m deep, which contained patches of purer clay and sand again indicative of back-fill. (420) was overlain by (407) an extensive layer, up to 0.35m deep of dark greyish brown clay sand silt with red clay flecks and rare sandstone fragments. This layer was sealed by a probable slump layer to 0.14m deep of reddish brown silty clay with sandstone and charcoal flecks. Some eighty sherds of medieval pottery weighing over 3kg was recovered from the pit fills, the largest quantity coming from (427). The group included wares identifiable as products from Potters Marston, Chilvers Coton, Stanion Lyveden and Ticknall, and can be dated to the late 12th/13th centuries.

Interpretation

The cutting of the ditch perhaps marks the delineation of an area. This may have accompanied other parallel boundaries to form a strip or plot. The ditch appears to be running towards the pit and is possible that pit had a primary function related to the draining action of the ditch, an hypothesis supported by its profile. The shallowness of the surviving northern shoulder of the pit 409 indicates that it was open for a period of time prior to being backfilled. If the interpretation of ditch 64 and pit 409 is correct, the area is most probably lying at the back of a property, and represents the backyard. This marks a shift from the Phase 1.1 activity.

Phase 2.2

Layers (406)(326)(324); Ditch 454,453,404 (338)(401)(398)(317)(415)(417)(447)(453)

(406), a 0.14m deep subcircular deposit of reddish brown silty clay 1.02m by 0.70m was a slumped tertiary deposit, overlying pit 409 secondary backfills. (326) and (324) were dark yellowish brown sand silts, the later with higher densities of stone inclusions and clay patches. The direct relationship between the two layers was not ascertained. Both overlay late pit fills, and postdate (406). (326) which varied from 0.30 to 0.40m in depth was up to 3.0m north-south, and 2.20m east-west, whereas (324) was 0.36m deep, and 4.0m north-south and 2.58m east-west. A very small quantity of medieval (12th/13th century) pottery was recovered from (324).

Contexts (338),(401),(398),(317),(415),(417),(447), and (453) were all slight variations on a dark brown sandy silt, located on the eastern and southern edges of W. It is thought that all these deposits were filling a shallow linear feature that skirted the east and south of the site although the excavated evidence is not unequivocal. In general fill clarity was poor and few of the plan boundaries of the deposits were clearly defined other than where contrasted with natural. Contexts (398), (415) and (417) all clearly belonged to parallel ditch cuts in the east. (415) and (417) filled cut 404 in an east-west segment excavated in the northeast, clearly revealing three phases of ditch/gully cutting of which 404 was stratigraphically the earliest. The surviving cut was very gradual where surviving in the west at 20', with a gently rounded base at depth of 0.40m. Within fill 417 was a continuous linear concentration of sandstone cobbles with a maximum diameter of 0.20m. The lower c.0.10m of the feature was hand-excavated in trench F revealing a shallow cut filled by (398) a dark brown silty sand. Machining had ceased at natural which appeared halfway up the trench as a discrete pocket on the west side (256), at a depth of c 0.45m below the base of topsoil. The positioning of this pocket along with evidence within the southwest trench evidence that a linear feature (454) was turning in to the west. Part of a similar and presumably the same cut was located immediately to the north filled by (338), cutting slot (374) and indirectly spread (345). The angle of cut was consistently 20' on the western side. In the south, the feature was represented by (434), a roughly east-west oriented butt-ended deposit of reddish brown sandy silt in the extreme south of the site up to 0.15m deep. This layer continued into the southern edge of excavation. There was clearly no ditch in the south of the site within the excavation area, but a slight lowering of natural that continued into the southern limits of excavation.

No part of an 'external' edge to the feature was located other than in the northeast. It is possible that the feature effected more of a terrace than a ditch in the south.

12th - 14th century pottery was recovered from (338), (398) and (417). Due to the nature of the feature (including a probable long lifespan) and the very poor definition of contexts, a degree of contamination is thought possible.

Interpretation

The spreads recorded perhaps represent dumps of material from a property to the north, suggesting continued backyard activity, and further building of a terrace or platform. This process is consistent with the ditch cutting which also marks further property demarcation. Phase 2.3 Slot 446½(416)(397); Layers½(312)(305)(306) Evident in the segment excavated through linear features in the northeast of the site cut wholly through the filling of ditch 404, and also in plan at two points to the north of this, was a cut feature, at least 3.2m long. The excavated segment revealed 80' < 90' sides above a slightly V shaped base. The feature was filled by a very dark brown silty sand with abundant charcoal flecking. This distinctively loose dark fill was present on the same alignment at the same width to the north (397), and is thought to represent the continuation of the feature. One sherd of Cistercian ware was recovered from (416), and two sherds of 13th/14th Century pottery from (397). (312)(305) and (306) were all poorly defined layers most probably all part of the same feature, c.0.80m wide running north-south along the western shoulder of and sealing (397)/(416). The layers consisted of dark yellowish to dark greyish brown sandy silts with charcoal and sandstone flecking. Interpretation The slot is probably related to drainage with the very loose nature and dark colour of the filling perhaps representing a closed drain with wooden lining since lost. The Cistercian ware may either result from later intrusion or contamination from overlying contexts. An inadequate part of (305)(306)(312) were recorded to facilitate meaningful interpretation of their deposition. They may relate to the structure of phase 3.

Phase 3

13th Century

The third broad phase of activity is by far the most complex part and probably the most interesting. In essence, a long narrow structure is erected and undergoes many aspects of change. Despite structural elements outlined below, the building lacks overall coherence. It is not clear whether the deposits relate to one or more structures on close alignment. The stratigraphy resulting from the intercutting features identified (that would all seem to relate to a building at various stages in its life) was complex. To facilitate description, subphases here are not used. Instead, description relates to particular components or elements of structure.

Phase 3.1

Western structural element

Postholes 357(356), 355(354)(358), 236(234)(233), 413(412), 251(250), 341(340), (450), (451), 235(232)(231), 331(332), 391(381), 285(288), 287(217); Cut feature 410(408)

This element consists of a line of postholes varying between 0.25 and 0.50m in diameter (bar one clearly enlarged in disuse), and 0.15 to 0.37m deep (bar the southerly post in trench G truncated to 0.05m).

All the posts in the line other than the two postholes which lay below machined levels in trench G, and whose stratigraphic relationships were lost, were cut through the fillings of ditch 64 on its eastern shoulder. The postholes were filled by variations of yellowish brown and to dark brown silty sands with charcoal and sandstone flecking. Recognition of the postholes relied in part on the slightly greater densities of charcoal in their fillings compared to the ditch fills. Some retained larger pieces of sandstone which formed packing pieces, and one retained a very clear postpipe (355). All the postholes identified within the ditch filling, were cut to a deeper level than the earlier ditch. This was particularly evident where the base of the ditch had been shelving up (see Phase 2.1). One posthole 413, looked to have had its upright removed. A cut feature 410 was identified within the uppermost filling of pit 409, a shallow subsquare depression 0.22m x 0.15m x 0.05m filled with similar filling (408) to the above postholes. This may relate to the structure. Sherds of 12th to 13th century pottery were recovered from posthole fills (250), (412).

Interpretation

The line of postholes represents a wall of a building that was erected over an old boundary line. Postholes 341, 251, 357, 355, 235 and 236 appear to form a semi- U shaped pattern. On the premise that the posthole line forms the edge of a building, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these postholes mark the position of an external porch and doorway. It is clear that this side of the building is rebuilt at various stages, not all the postholes being contemporary with one another. Further work on the structural detail might shed some light on this aspect. The exact north south extent of the building is unclear, depending upon where the southern end of the structure is interpreted as lying.

On the basis of the southern extent of (153)(319) to the east, it is thought that posthole 285 represents the southwestern corner of the structure. This is perhaps supported by the presence of cut feature 410.

Eastern structural element

Layers (319)/(153)/(131): Postholes 164(163)(309), 333(300), 334(301), 335(302), 350(351); Stakeholes (308),(310),(316); Sandstone patches/pads (327),(311), (320)/(321)

Contexts (153) and (319) were similar layers of compact dark brown to strong brown silty sand that contained patches of red clay, pieces of sandstone and pebbles. The layers were of similar dimensions, c 0.80m wide (maximum width of 1.20m), and c.6m long (although the exact northern extents were unclear, due to truncation). Each context was between 0.15 and 0.20m thick. The layers were on a parallel alignment with, and four metres to the east of the line of postholes described above. In all the top of (153) sloped down c0.40m north to south.

The southern extent of each context was well defined and virtually identical. The contexts were removed in spits and planned and at no stage was a construction cut visible. 13th century pottery was recovered from (153). Three discrete patches of decayed sandstone (321)/(320) 1.1m long x 0.40m wide, (311) 0.5m x 0.30m, and (307) 0.4m x 0.3m, were sealed by (153). Two (320)/(321) and (311) also overlay (319). Both were also elongated to the northeast, and where elongated also overlay (312) of phase 2.3. (307) overlay

(306) of phase 2.3 along with a fourth decayed sandstone pad (303) 0.60m x 0.40m. At the northern end of (153) was what appeared to be a discrete context (131), of yellowish red sandy clay 0.50m wide. Attempted excavation demonstrated that the deposit was undercutting the overlying layer (123) and represented a similar deposit to (153) that had survived to a higher level than that downslope and furthermore was part of an upstanding deposit. However (131) was separated stratigraphically from (153) by posthole 164 0.50m in diameter and 0.30m deep filled by (163) a dark brown silty sand that contained an element of red clay and perhaps 50% cobbles and boulders of 0.40m maximum diameter. Sherds of 12th to 13th century pottery were recovered from (163). Also overlain by (131) was a group of three intercutting features 333 (300), 334 (301), 350 (351) and one discrete 335 (302). The definition of the features was poor; all were filled by similar dark yellowish brown silty sands. Despite the excavation of half sections, it remained unclear whether the three intercutting features were separate or more simply part of the same whole. The features varied between 0.20 and 0.30 in diameter and 0.06 and 0.10m deep.

Interpretation

Layers (319)/(153) are interpreted as part of a cob wall. Perhaps the sandstone pads relate to the internal structure of the wall, acting as pads for strengthening timbers. This would form a 'post and mud' wall (Horsman *et al.* 1988: 77). However the elongation of these otherwise subcircular patches is not understood, and is not easily compatible with such an interpretation. The postholes located presumably relate to a later phase of construction.

Internal features

Hearth 242(246)(239)(240)(241); Postholes 331(332), 237(247)(283), 391(381); Post/Stakeholes (290)(291)(289)(292)(293)(294)(295)(297)(298)(308)(316)

To the east of the posthole line and sealed by a later hearth were two adjacent postholes 331 and 237. 331 was 0.50m diameter and 0.28m deep filled with a dark brown silty sand (332) with sandstone packing. The second posthole of similar diameter but slightly deeper at 0.40m was filled by a brown clay silt sand (247) with red clay patches that surrounded a postpipe filled with a reddish brown sandy silt (238). To the south of these two was an additional posthole 391, 0.25m in diameter and 0.22m deep. The feature is placed within this phase on the basis of its spatial relationship with the other postholes, and its stratigraphic relationship with ditch 64 deposits as recorded in the south facing section of Trench G.

The overlying hearth appears to have been initially formed by a rectangular cut 0.70m square and 0.10m deep lined on the eastern side with a red sand clay (239) which overlay a discontinuous dark brown sand silt clay interface (246). Contained by the clay lining was a stone surface (240), 0.80 long x 0.60m wide, composed predominantly of a now shattered rectangular sandstone slab 0.50 long x 0.30m wide. All the stones were reddened and blackened by burning, and were heat fractured. On the west side the hearth was contained by an arc of cobbles that continued the line of the clay lining in the north, but projected further in the south. Three samples of stone were identified which represented the stone used in the construction of the hearth. Two were specimens of orthoquartzite, one angular and perhaps quarried, and one rounded and waterworn. Although possibly glacial erratics from Scandinavia or

Scotland, they were most probably derived from the Charnian rocks of Charnwood Forest to the east, or the Nuneaton Inlier to the west. An angular and unweathered specimen of crystalline igneous rock was also identified which was most probably a quartz diorite with provenance either in Charnwood or further south in the Enderby, Narborough or Sapcote area (C R Jones pers comm.).

The hearth lining was interrupted by a circular pocket of reddish brown sandy silt clay 0.32m in diameter, with red and black clay patches, and charcoal and sandstone flecking. This overlay the earlier posthole the cut for which 237 was somewhat wider in diameter and overlain by the hearth stones. Presumably the interruption in the hearth lining represented a repair following localised subsidence over the posthole, although this could not be proved in section. Sherds of 12th to 13th Century pottery were recovered from (332) and (338). Other discrete features consisting of possible postholes and stakeholes (290)(291)(289)(292)(293)(294)(295)(297)(298)(308)(316), were recorded in plan only. All of these cut natural bar two which cut (306) and were filled by dark ellowish brown to black sandy silts with elements of charcoal flecking. As the majority of these features had little stratigraphic context other than what they were sealed by and none were excavated, they cannot be phased in any detail. It seems likely that they belong to this general period of activity.

Interpretation

Perhaps the two postholes overlain by the hearth mark the position of a partition or 'cross-passage'. An interpretation of medieval house types based upon some excavated examples, shows the cross-passage as dividing the living quarters of a long-house from the byre (Beresford & Hurst 1971:104). The floor hearth indicates domestic dwelling and thus perhaps a change in use in this part of the building. Being internal to the structure it supports the notion of the porch and doorway to the north. The hearth is positioned adjacent to one of the long walls of the building near the western wall, perhaps toward the southern end of the building. The proximity of the hearth to the wall is paralleled elsewhere e.g. Holworth, Dorset and Wroughton, Wiltshire (Beresford & Hurst 1975:Figs 20-21).

Internal slots

249(393)(394)(248), 373/352(253/353)(368)(366)(252/296), 370(375)(369), 367(299), 372(371)

On the immediate western side and cutting (153)(319) was a series of intercutting linear features. The earliest of these (249) was identified at the southern end of the group of which 0.50m was identified between in the south a temporary baulk, and the north truncation. The feature was not traced beyond the southern temporary baulk. The profile of the feature was V shaped, 0.45m wide and 0.29m deep. The cut was filled primarily by dark yellowish brown sand silts (393) which was truncated by later recutting first on the east side by a similarly shaped but smaller cut filled by (394) a dark brown clay sand silt and on the west side a larger cut filled by a brown sandy silt with charcoal and sandstone flecking (248). Following the deposition of (248), a wider flat bottomed slot was cut 373/352 c.4.8m long, butt ended in the north and the south. 60% of the feature was excavated in two segments. The feature was filled for the most part by a dark yellowish brown to brown silty sand (253/353); in the north the vestiges of a 0.22m wide 0.15m deep flat based slot filled with a brown silty sand (366) were recorded, but no trace was present in the south. (253/353) was capped with (252/296) a dark brown sandy

silt with some charcoal flecking. This was itself cut by 367/372, a U shaped linear feature at least 1.6m in length 0.30m wide and 0.20m deep, with a clear butt end identified in the north, petering out in the south, filled with (299/371) a dark yellowish brown to dark brown silty sand. In the southern section excavated, further truncation was apparent on the west side in the form of 370, a 0.44m wide and 0.30m deep, filled with (369) a dark yellowish brown sand silt and (375) a pale brown sand silt. Finds from these features were very scarce: 12th century pottery was recovered from (248)(252) and (253) along with a small fragment of Roman tile from (248).

Interpretation

Detailed interpretation of these features is again difficult as the exact north-south dimensions of the various slots observed were not determined. However, the features are wholly contained by the putative building. It is thought most probable that the wide flat based slot was structural, and the V shaped features drainage related. However, where such features were draining to, other than simply to the south, is not known. On a more interpretative note, if the building is a long-house, this downslope end is the more likely to have contained livestock, and therefore may have had a rudimentary drainage system (eg. Berseford & Hurst 1971:Fig 19B). The primary cut within the sequence clearly cut the base of (153)(319) cob wall, and therefore postdates the walls construction. This does not preclude contemporaneity with the building.

Phase 3.3

Wall (432); Postholes (253), (254), (255)

Post-dating the ditch filling (338) (Phase 2.2) was a stone built wall in the southeast of the excavation area composed of six angular sandstone blocks varying between 0.15 and 0.28m wide; three of the blocks were clearly squared and two of these were dry stacked. The stones were arranged to form the squared butt end of a wall 0.95m wide which projected on a north-south alignment 0.30m into the excavation area.

In evaluation trench F, within (398) (Phase 2.2) were identified the remains of three subcircular features (254), (255) and (257) between 0.30 and 0.50m long and c.0.30m wide, filled by pale brown, brown and dark brown silty sands, with pieces of sandstone within the fillings. Left unexcavated it is thought that these features represent postholes within the ditch. It is not clear from what level these features were originally cut.

Interpretation

These features are not well dated and insufficient of their character was recorded to facilitate secure interpretation. They post date 12th to 13th century material, and are overlain by 15th to 16th century material at the earliest. They may also be seen to represent a change in the boundary form.

Phase 3.4 (Corresponding to Phases 1-3 of Area W)
Area U Cuts 195(194), 200(198), 199(197)(196)

The earliest features in Area U were two stratigraphically separate parallel cuts. The top of each cut lay at 0.90m below the base of topsoil. 195 was 1.2m wide and up to 0.25m deep filled by (194) a dark brown sandy silt with abundant charcoal flecking. The cut was gradual with 20' sides to a rounded base. The feature was partially truncated in the west; the top of the eastern shoulder was consistent with the level of natural indicating little truncation. 200 was 0.55m wide and 0.30m deep, filled by (198) a dark grey sandy silt with common sandstone inclusions and rare charcoal flecking. 200 was more clearly truncated; the western edge was steep at 75' and the eastern shallower at 45'. The base was narrow but flat. (194) and (198) contained very small quantities of pottery dating from 1200-1450. A sherd of an pre-conquest form was recovered from (194). The third cut 199, 0.40m wide and 0.20m deep was filled with (197) a yellowish brown silty sand and (196) a dark greyish brown silty sand. Again truncated, and only the lower part of the feature surviving, its profile was similarly asymmetric to 200.

Phase 4

15th to 17th Century

Phase 4.1

Ditch 405(419)(418)

Following the disuse of the building sometime in the 13th century, little activity is represented on the site. In the east, the linear boundary is again recut, this time by a 0.95m wide and 0.53m deep ditch, the north-south dimensions of which are unknown. The feature was filled predominantly by (419), a dark yellowish brown silty sand with charcoal and sandstone inclusions, which also contained 13th to early 16th Century pottery. (419) is itself sealed by (418), a similar layer with higher frequency of sandstone inclusions.

Interpretation

This recutting activity demonstrates the maintenance of plot boundaries, despite the change in land-use from domestic dwelling to perhaps more marginal land to settlement.

Phase 4.2

Layers (315)(123)(213)(130)(218/339)(219)

Ditch filling (418) was overlain by (315), a layer of brown clay silt sand with very rare sandstone cobble inclusions to 0.30m. It was generally defined north/south as consequence of the underlying ditch cuts, being 2m wide and traced for 5m north south, running into the baulk in the north and east. The layer was a maximum of 0.10m deep.

Layer (123) partially overlay (315) and was of similar composition but slightly darker and more oriented east to west, 3m wide and 5m in length, between 0.10 and 0.20m deep. The northern boundary of (123) was unclear against a similar but stoneless layer (213) a layer of dark brown clay silt sand 2.4 to 3.0m long and 1.6m wide, and 0.12 to 0.21m deep. (213) shared the alignment of the western edge of (123) which may relate to the making up of levels over subsidence relating from the linear features beneath. 16th to

early 17th Century pottery was recovered from (213); one sherd of Roman Derbyshire ware was also recovered. On the west side of (123) but with an unclear relationship with it was (130) a roughly 1m x 1m patch of dark greyish brown clay silt sand 0.12m deep, with abundant mixed sandstone inclusions. The layer physically overlay (153) and contained 16th century pottery. In the south of the area, layers (218)/(339) and (219) were better defined. (218)/(339) was the earlier, and up to 7m long north-south, tapering in depth from. Composed of a dark greyish brown sand clay silt with common charcoal and stone inclusions, the layers were continuous east west, 7m north-south, and tapered to a maximum depth of 0.35m against the southern baulk, thereby making less acute the prevailing slope. 16th century or later pottery was recovered from (218).

(219) extended for 4.4m northwards from the southern baulk; in the west the layer was overlain and obscured by (229) - a similar layer, and in the east (219) was truncated by Trench F. In all 3.8m of its width was recorded. The layer tapered in depth from 0.05m in the north to 0.15m against the southern baulk. Late medieval pottery was recovered from (219).

Interpretation

With the exception of (130) of unclear origin and function, the other layers described would all seem to represent make-up layers, in an attempt during this period to level up the slope north-south, and also to remove the ditch and evidence of the now disused boundaries.

Phase 4.3 (Corresponding to Phase 4 of Area W)

Area U Cut 160(203)(202); Layers(211)(112)(201)(209)

The fourth cut 160, was 0.65m wide and 0.20m deep, and was undamaged by later activity for the most part. The sides of the feature sloped at 40° to a flat base, with an abrupt break of slope. The primary filling of the feature was (203), a dark greyish to yellowish brown sandy silt which was overlain by (202) a dark greyish brown sandy silt with charcoal, clay and sandstone inclusions, which encroached over the ditch shoulder from the west. It was overlain by (201) a discontinuous 0.14m deep brown silty sand with rare inclusions which also slumped into the ditch from the west. Similar layers continued as traced for 1.6m to the west (211) and 4.6m to the east (112), varying between 0.15 and 0.25m in depth, overlying natural. Layer (209) to the west was of similar composition to (201) and may be part of the same deposit. It was distinctly banked in section to 0.40m in depth. Finds of 12th to 14th century pottery were made from (211) and 11th to 16th from (112).

Given a probable high degree of residuality and an element of intrusion a 14th Century date seems most plausible for this phase. Interpretation These layers probably represent a phase of earthwork construction.

Phase 4.4 (Corresponding to Phase 4 of Area W)

Linear cut 208(207); Discrete cuts 261(260), 154(151)

(209) was truncated by cut feature 261 which was located in the south facing section of the trench and may represent a posthole 0.30m wide and 0.28m deep. Possibly contemporary was the base of a cut feature, 154 0.48m in diameter and 0.16m deep, cutting (201). Excavated in plan the cut was filled by (151), a

dark greyish to reddish brown sandy silt with clay patches from which three sherds of a medieval sandy ware were recovered. The filling of 261, (260) was itself partially truncated by ditch cut 208, which was cut slightly obliquely to the other linear cuts, with relatively steep but slightly irregular profile 0.70m wide and 0.45m deep, filled by a reddish brown sandy silt (207).

Phase 5

16th to 17th Century

Pottery clusters (125)(84)(126)(127)(128); ?Postholes (304)(124)(452)(129) 157(155)(83)

Overlying (123) were a series of semi-discrete clusters of pottery and stone, varying between 0.25 and 0.40m in diameter, and 0.10 to 0.13m deep. The concentrations had no coherent pattern although four of the clusters are aligned and two of these were found to be overlying convincing postholes. The clusters were 3D recorded. The pottery included a noteable residuality, forming an admixture of medieval and early post-medieval forms, with a probable terminus post-quem in the 17th Century.

Within the same area and phase were two further possible postholes 157 and (140). 157 was well defined 0.30m in diameter and 0.13m deep, and had retained the impression of a squared post (155) within its fill (83). (140) was a circular pocket of fill 0.30m in diameter which was not excavated.

Interpretation

The 'hard-core' clusters may be where postholes have been made good. However it is thought equally plausible that they represent structural post-pads when considered along with the clearer postholes, forming the foundations of a timber-framed structure. The inconsistency of such foundations and lack of related building material perhaps points to a lightweight back yard structure that was repaired in a piecemeal fashion.

Phase 5.2 (Corresponding to Phase 5.1 of Area W)

Area U Linear cuts 146(144)(118)(117)(95), 185 (183)(184)(193)(192), 107 (111)(94)(93)(181)(182)(176)(262); Postholes 205 (204), 133 (109), 134 (110), 136 (115), 132 (108), 135 (114), 137 (116); Layers (113)(206)

Ditch 146 survived only on its western side, the eastern sector obliterated by recutting. What remained suggested that the cut was originally at least 2.3m wide and 0.80m deep with western edge steepening gradually from 10 - 60' to a rounded base, broken by an acute basal channel. The channel was filled primarily by a deposit of coal/charcoal (144) centred towards the southern section, sealed by (118), a layer of coal mixed with a small proportion of clay silt. This distinctive deposit increased in its thickness moving up the shoulder of the ditch, and continued for some 4m to the west over the preceding band (209). (118) was itself sealed by (206), a layer of very dark greyish brown loam with a small proportion of coal and sandstone inclusions.

Less extensive later ditch fillings were recorded - (117) a dark grey silty clay, and (95) a similar but more coal rich silty clay. The deposition of (206) made ground levels on the west side up to those at time of excavation. One sherd of a Stamford ware collared jar/spouted pitcher dating from the second half of the 12th century, was recovered from (144), and one medieval

sandy ware sherd from 13th to mid 15 century was recovered from (95). Both appear to be residual.

Recut 185 was 2m wide and 0.80m deep with the base of the cut c.1m further east than precursor 146. In this instance the ditch profile was preserved showing the western shoulder c.0.50m above the eastern, beneath a straight edge with a regularly dished base forming a wide channel 0.70m wide. The ditch was filled primarily by a brown loam (183) which produced 9 sherds of medieval pottery, (184) a dark grey sand silt with red clay patches (184) and coal fleckings, and (193) a very mixed layer of silt, sand, blue clay, red clay, sandstone, grits and coal. The shallow eastern edge of 185 was sealed by (113) a mixture of red and yellow clays with sandstone.

Ditch cut 107 shared the profile and characteristics of 185, was 1.10m wide and 0.80m deep. The western edge was stepped at the same height as the eastern levelled out. Six postholes of similar dimensions (between 0.20 and 0.30m in diameter, and 0.10 to 0.15m deep) were excavated at the base of the ditch where they formed a broad line parallel with the ditch cut; 132 and 136 were adjacent and intercut. The cut was filled by a number of red, blue clean brown clays, and brown silts and sands in various mixtures, with a final loam capping. Finds from these layers included 17th Century pottery from a primary ditch fill (94), and 16th Century cistercian ware from posthole fill (110).

Phase 6

Mid 17th Century onwards

Phase 6.1

Layers (120)(139)(229) Disturbance (228) Topsoils

Layers of loam covered the site, underlying topsoil. The layers were particularly marked against the northern edge of the site, where up to 0.40m of dark greyish brown loam was banked. Finds from these layers date from the mid seventeenth Century onwards.

Interpretation

This would seem to be a period of disuse. The 1842 tithe map shows the site to lie within the current field boundaries. There seems no reason to believe that the area was incorporated as pasture at this stage.

Phase 6.2 (Corresponding to Phase 6.1 of Area W)
Redeposits (262)(176)(263)(264)(175)(173)(174)

All these deposits were layers to the east of the ditches. They consisted predominantly of clean redeposits of sandstone, red clays, and blue clays, all derived from the Triassic substrata. In cumulative depth the layers were at maximum 0.90m deep and extended for at least 20m east to west. These physically overlay the surface of earlier earthwork levels (112) (211) of the 14th to 15th century phase.

Stratigraphically the earliest of the redeposits (262) a pale yellow sandstone overlay ditch fill (111). It is thought unlikely that they predate the 17th century. The latest dump, (174) a red clay was cut by ditch cut 180, which probably dates to the 18th century.

Interpretation

The redeposits clearly stem from nearby coal workings. It is interesting that these slag heaps have been placed over earlier earthworks. This enlarging of previous contours demonstrates an effort to control what might otherwise have been random dumping, and points to large scale organisation.

Phase 6.3

Late 18th Century

Ditch 180 (82)(179)(178)(177); Postholes 187(186), 189(188), 190(191), 117(116)

The last recut of the boundary was regularly V shaped 1.5m wide and 0.70m deep. As a result of the preceding redeposits the cut was from an even level in both east and west. The feature was filled by (82) a primary rubbish deposit which included an element of creamware (1760-1780), and dumps of coal rich clay (178). The last capping fill of the ditch was a 0.25m deep spread of demolition debris including post-medieval brick, tile and stone. Two sherds of a post-medieval pancheon ware were also recovered.

On the western side of the ditch, and identified only in section, were three intercutting postholes. Stratigraphically the features could belong to earlier phases of activity, but the spatial relationship with ditch 180 suggests an association; they perhaps result from fence associated with the boundary. Cut 189 was the earliest 0.35m wide and 0.15m deep, followed by 190 0.30m in diameter and 0.40m deep, followed by three intercutting features to truncate (193) at the top of the western shoulder. Identified in section only, the feature was 0.35m wide and 0.15m deep. 0.75m to the west at the same level was cut feature 205, 0.40m wide and 0.22m deep,, which was also recorded in section only.

Interpretation

The life of the last recut appears short lived prior to backfilling. It seems sensible to suggest that the ditch in its last form predates the events of the early 19th Century, when the road was realigned to the pre 1992 course, as part of the major rebuilding of Coleorton Hall and landscaping of the area. This is historically dated to between 1806 and 1808. The demolition layer sealing the latest activity may well reflect this work.

The Watching Brief

Following the excavation a watching brief was undertaken primarily to delineate the extent of medieval settlement to the east. This revealed medieval and post medieval pottery within 50 m of the eastern extent of the excavation. Further post Medieval activity was recorded to the north and east. A full is in the project archive.

Discussion

The excavations and watching brief at Coleorton indicate occupation and activity in the area between the 12th and 18th centuries. Three broad periods of activity are represented. Phase 1-3 date from the 12th-13th century and includes evidence of medieval timber buildings and associated earthwork construction. From the presence of hearths and domestic material including pottery it can be suggested that the timber buildings were used, at least in

part, as dwellings and that they represent houses in medieval Coleorton (Figs 7-8). The buildings fall into disuse sometime in the 13th century. The reason for this is unclear. As only a relatively small area of village earthworks has survived and a small part of these was excavated this may have only been a very local phenomenon. Movements within settlements were common in the medieval period and areas would be abandoned in favour of new locations. Major population declines did take place in the 14th century due to famines (1315-17) and the Black Death (1348-9) (Liddle 1982, 44). Other Leicestershire villages, for example Aldeby, Alton and Dishley, are known to have disappeared as early as the 12th century (Liddle 1982, 47). The area examined seems to have been little used between the 13th and 15th centuries other than the recutting of a north - south aligned ditch to the east, perhaps demonstrating the maintenance of plot boundaries.

During the 15th-17th centuries the area was levelled up by the deposition of various make-up deposits and the earlier boundary ditches were abandoned (Phase 4). During the 15th-16th century some domestic activity is again indicated albeit in the form of an insubstantial backyard "shed" structure (Phase 5). From the 17th century (Phase 6) onwards the area again seems little used except for the deliberate deposition of material from nearby coal workings, perhaps those apparent as earthworks to the south. Of note is the maintenance of the earthwork forms even when covered by coal working waste, perhaps indicating the maintenance of earlier boundary systems. The excavations have therefore revealed important information on the development of the village of Coleorton and this area of north west Leicestershire, which can now be seen to be of particular significance following the recent discovery of the earliest deep mining in Europe in the area (York and Warburton, 1991). The earliest evidence of occupation may have pre dated this mining but it would have been of increasing importance throughout the successive centuries as indicated by the coal working waste present on the site.

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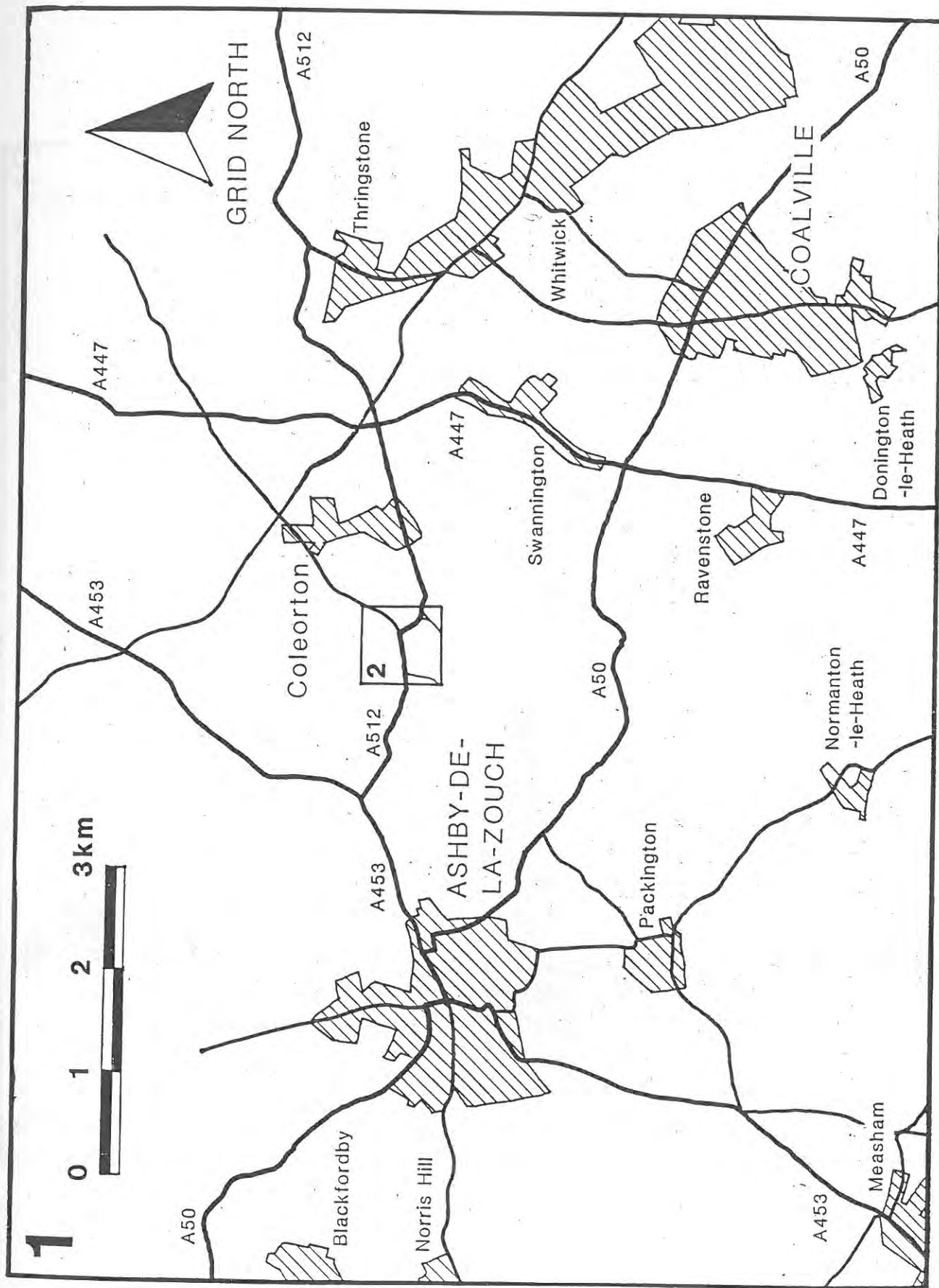


Fig 1 Location Plan 1 Colerorton Area

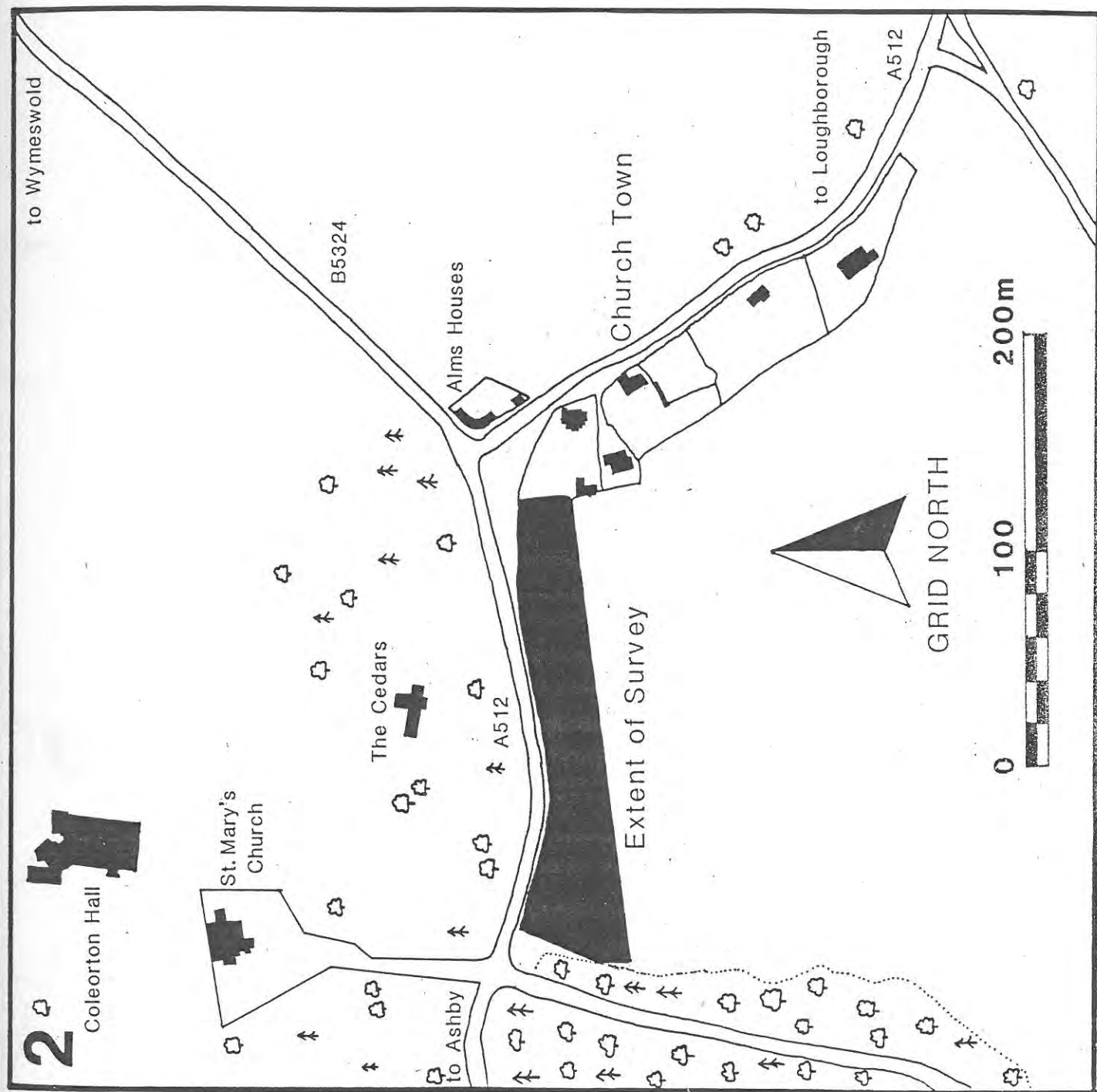


Fig 2 Location Plan 2 Area of survey and excavation

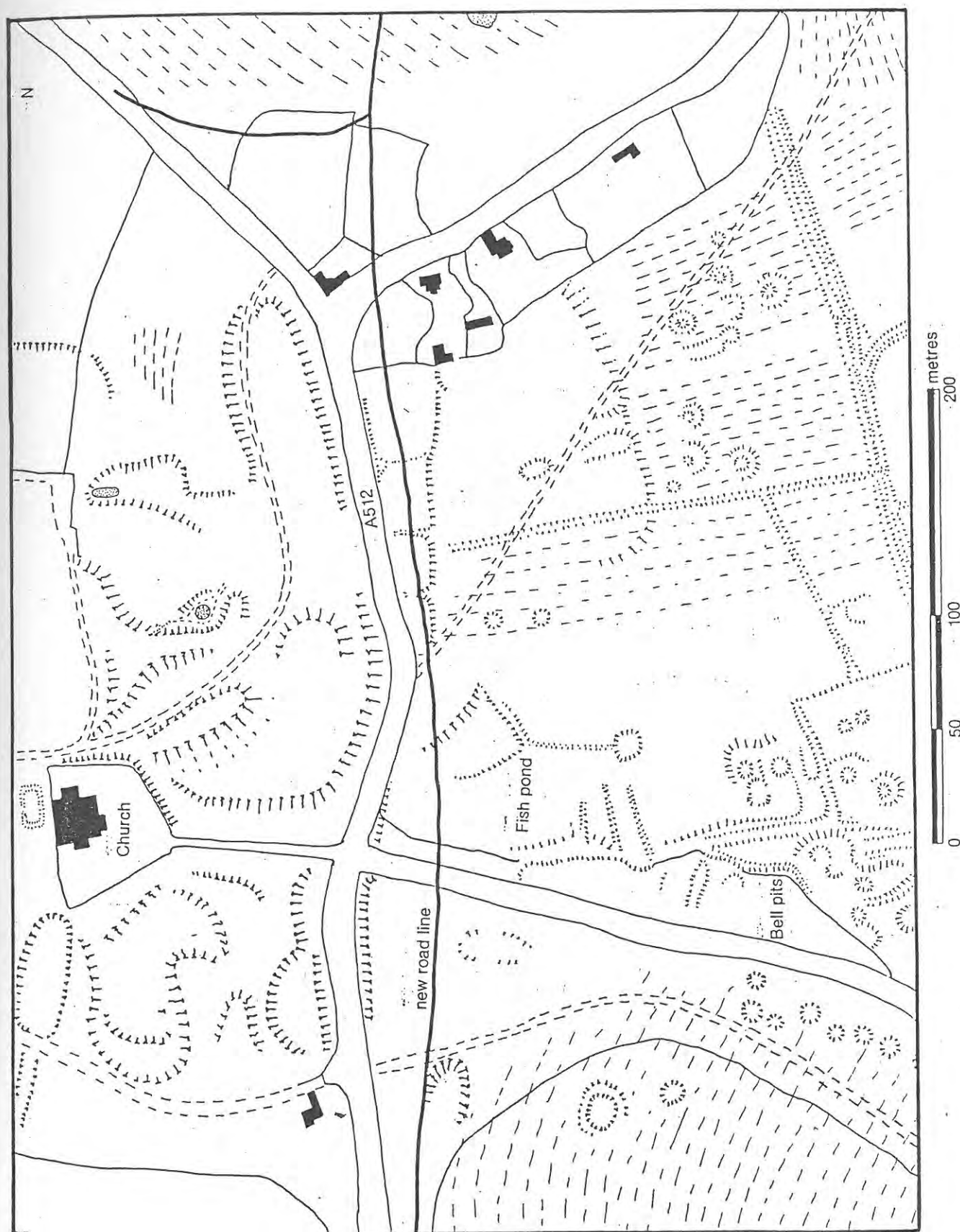


Fig 3 Area of surviving earthworks

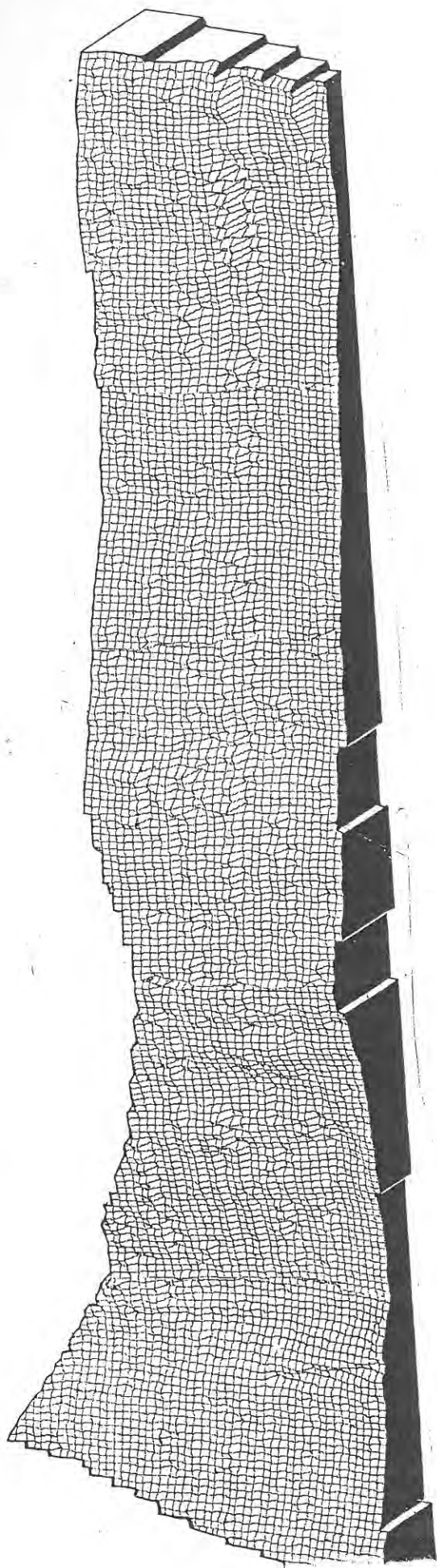
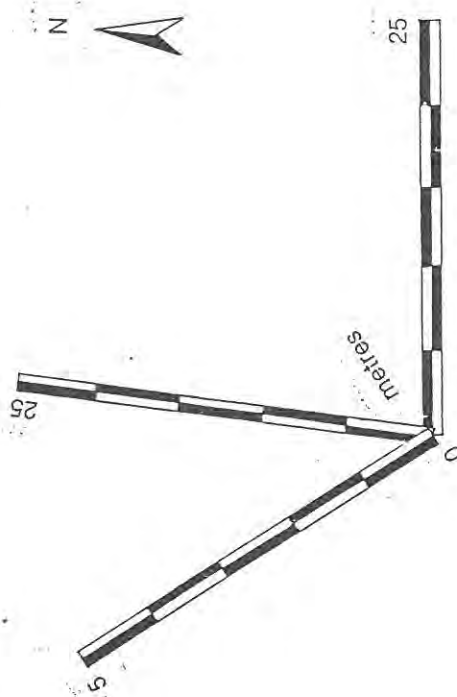


Fig 4 3D plot of earthworks in survey area



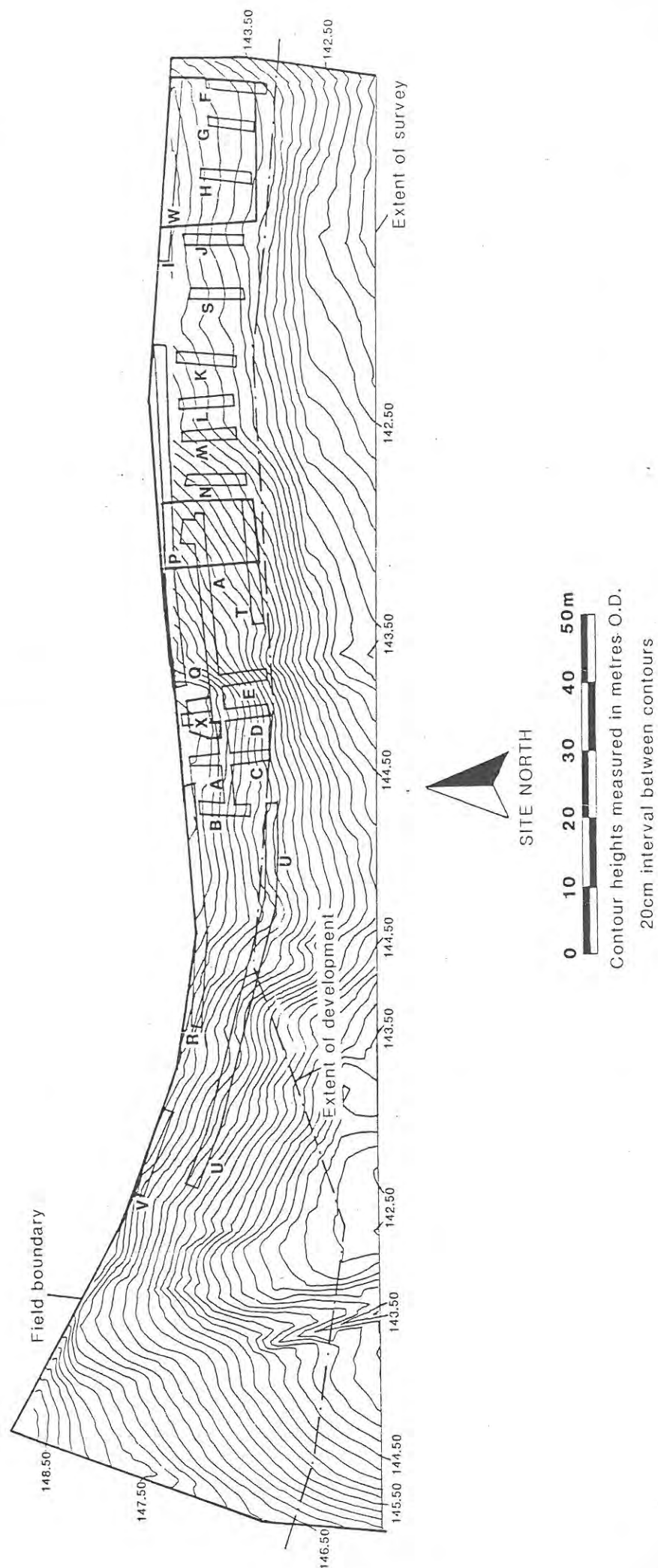


Fig 5 Contour survey of earthworks showing trench locations

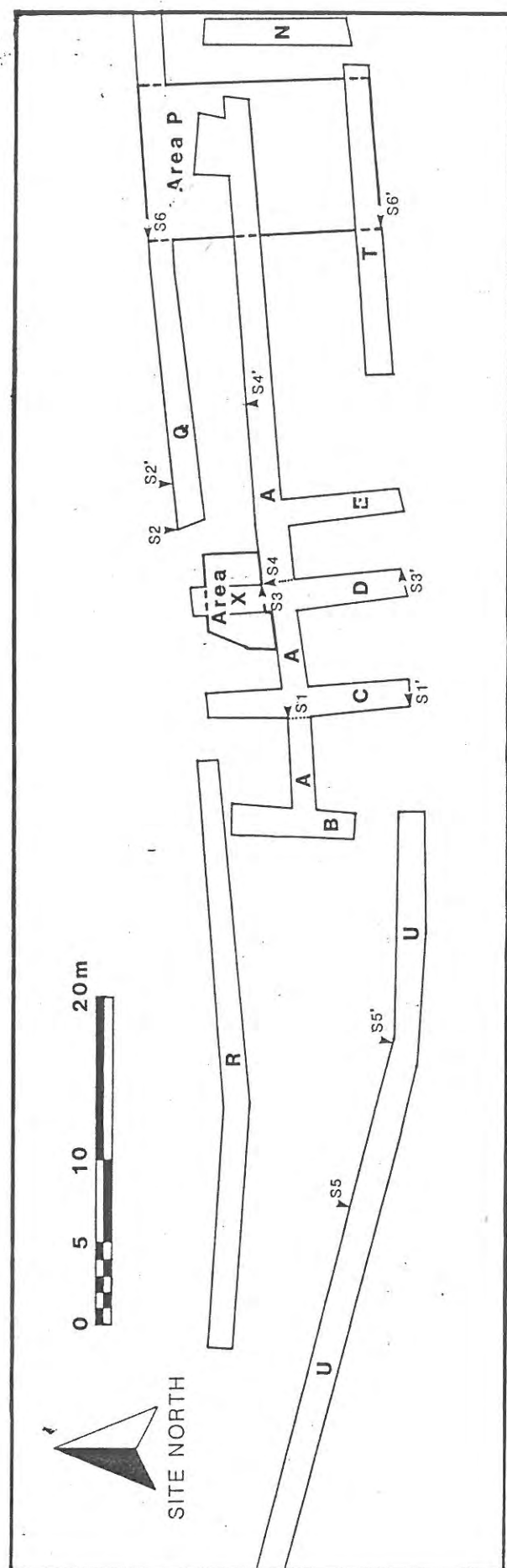


Fig 6 Trench and open area locations in the western half of the site showing position of sections (Figs 9-10)

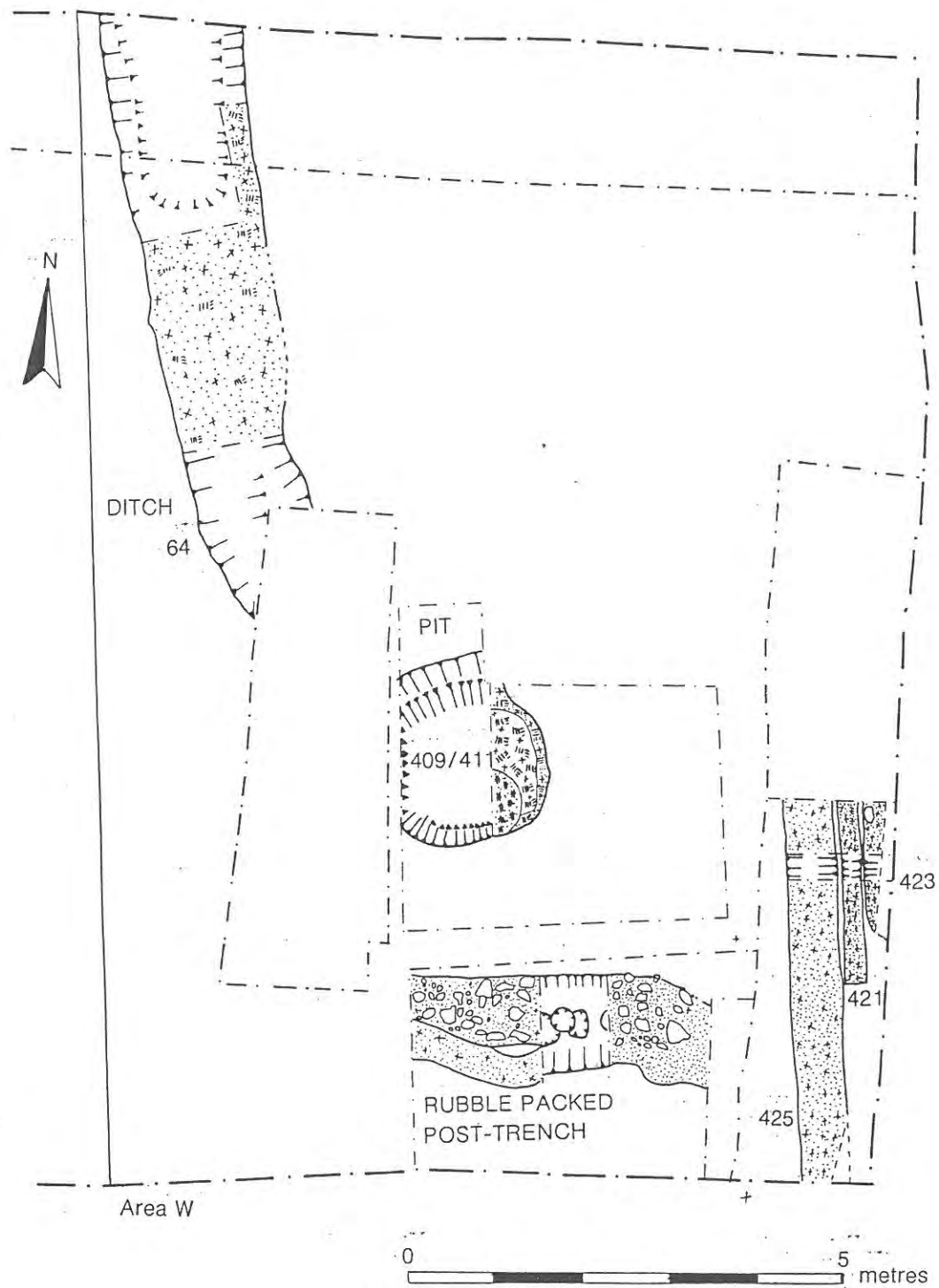


Fig 7 Medieval features at the eastern end of Area W Phases 1-2

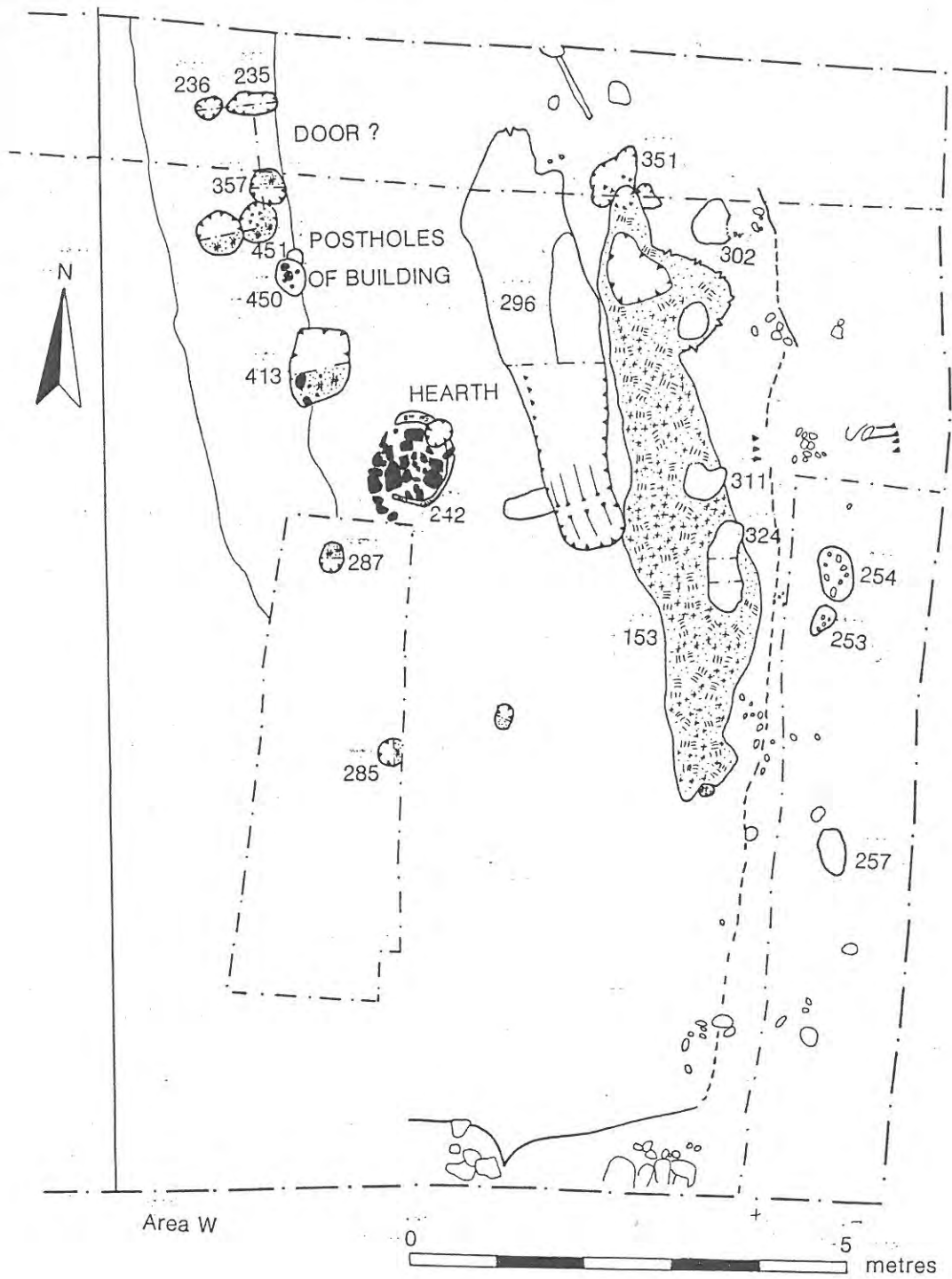


Fig 8 Medieval features at the eastern end of Area W Phase 3

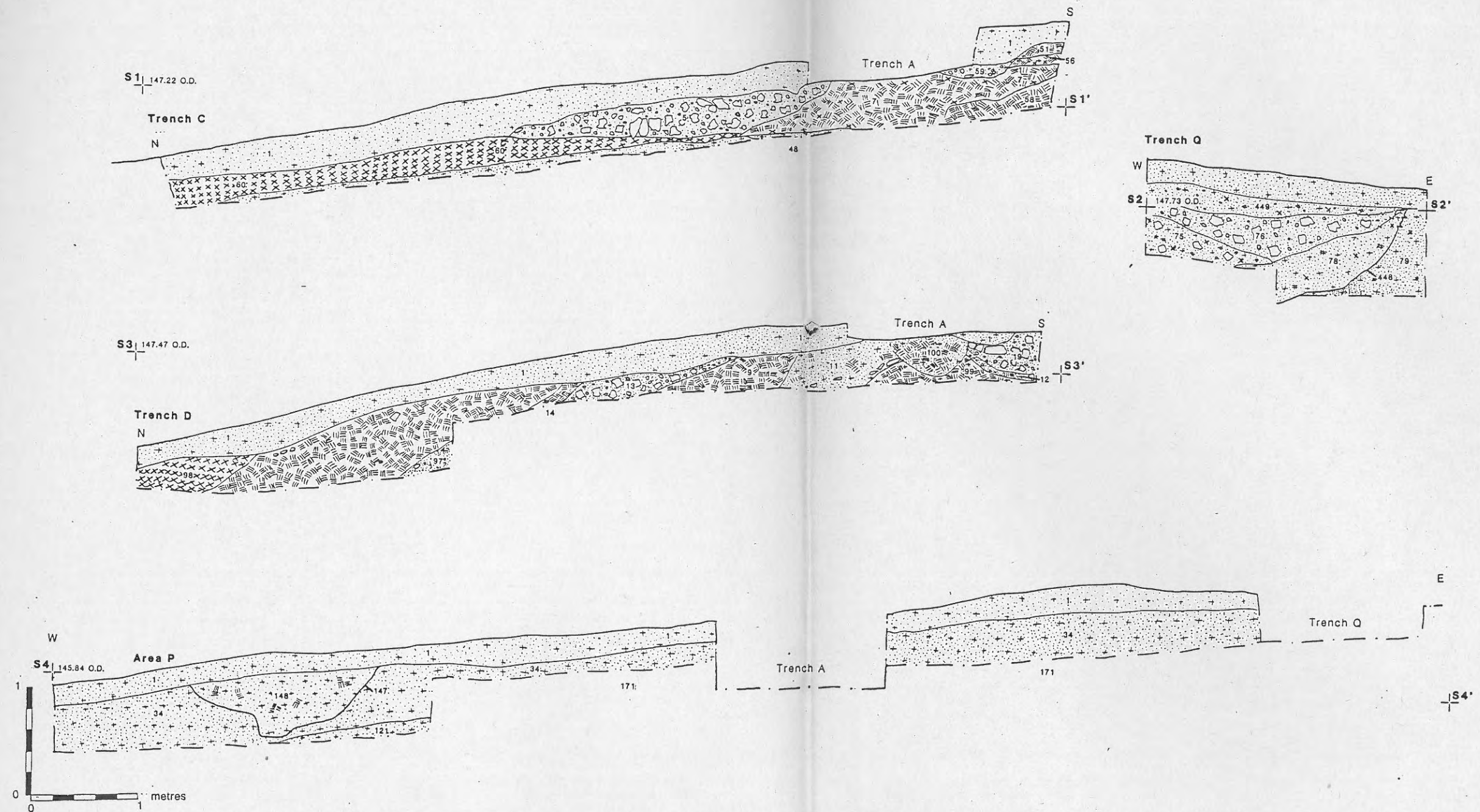


Fig 9 Sections of trenches. S1 Trench C, S2 Trench Q, S3 Trench D, S4 Area P

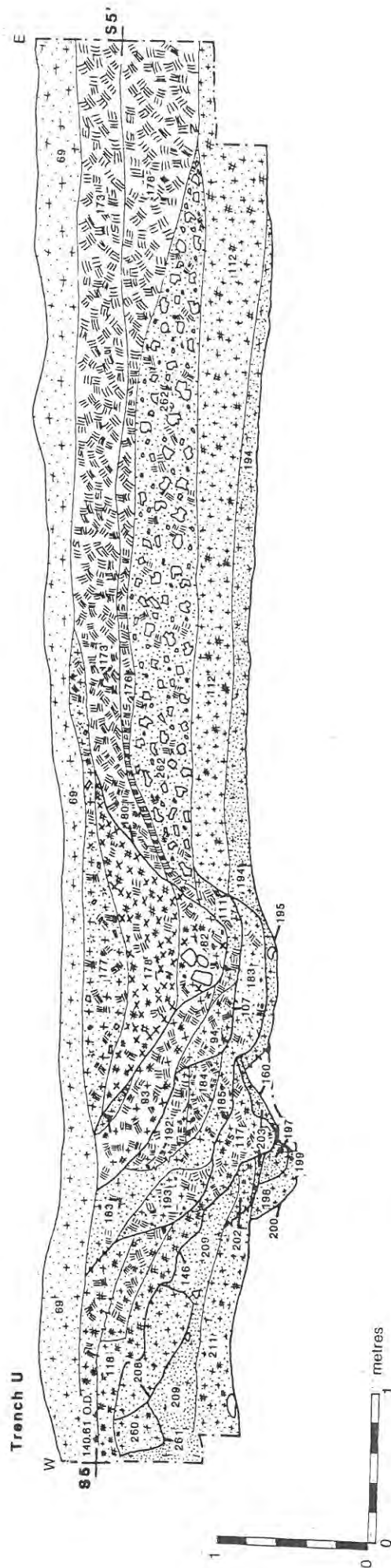


Fig 10 Section of trenches, S5 Trench U