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Excavations at Saintbridge, Gloucester, 1981

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With contributions by C. Pinder, M.J. Watkins, and F. Wild

Summary

Excavations in advance of the construction of a balancing pond revealed slight evidence of neolithic – early bronze age occupation, a pit and loosely associated assemblage of early – middle iron age pottery, and a series of Roman ditches and gulleys, which formed part of a field system.

Introduction

Excavations were undertaken during August 1981 on the playing field at the western end of Redpoll Way, Saintbridge, Gloucester (SO 852167), in response to the threat posed by the planned construction of a balancing pond. The site (FIG. 1) is situated on westward sloping ground approximately 150 m south of the present course of the River Twyver, at an altitude of about 30 m above sea level. The underlying geology comprises lower lias clay, which is sporadically overlain by spreads of alluvial loam and gravel. At the start of the excavation the site was under grass and was regularly used as a playing-field. Slight traces of ridge-and-furrow cultivation, with a longitudinal axis roughly south-west to north-east, could be seen on the field surface.

Almost all the investigated areas of gravel terrace to the east of Gloucester City are known to be exceptionally rich in archaeological remains of all periods (Heighway 1974). Excavations and watching-briefs during the 1930s in and around Barnwood yielded palaeolithic flints, neolithic and bronze age finds, a beaker burial and settlement, iron age burials and settlement evidence, and a Roman cemetery (Clifford 1930; 1934; 1964). More recently, in 1972, when work commenced on the construction of the Heron Housing Estate at Saintbridge, salvage excavations and watching-briefs established the existence of extensive occupation in this area too (Garrod 1978; Garrod and Heighway 1984; Rawes 1975, 22; Rawes and Rawes 1976). Finds included Roman burials and traces of settlements of similar date. Perhaps of most significance, however, was the evidence of ?late neolithic and iron age settlement in the form of artefact scatters and a few associated features (Garrod and Heighway 1984, 24), which came to light in Redpoll Way.

The excavations were directed by T.C. Darvill for Gloucester City Excavation Unit, with the kind permission of Gloucester District Council who own the playing-field. The finds and the detailed excavation archive have been deposited with the City Museum and Art Gallery, Gloucester, under the accession/site code 26/1981.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Three trenches were opened on the playing-field (FIG. 1). The largest trench, Area I, was located as near to the known area of prehistoric settlement as possible; Areas II and III were

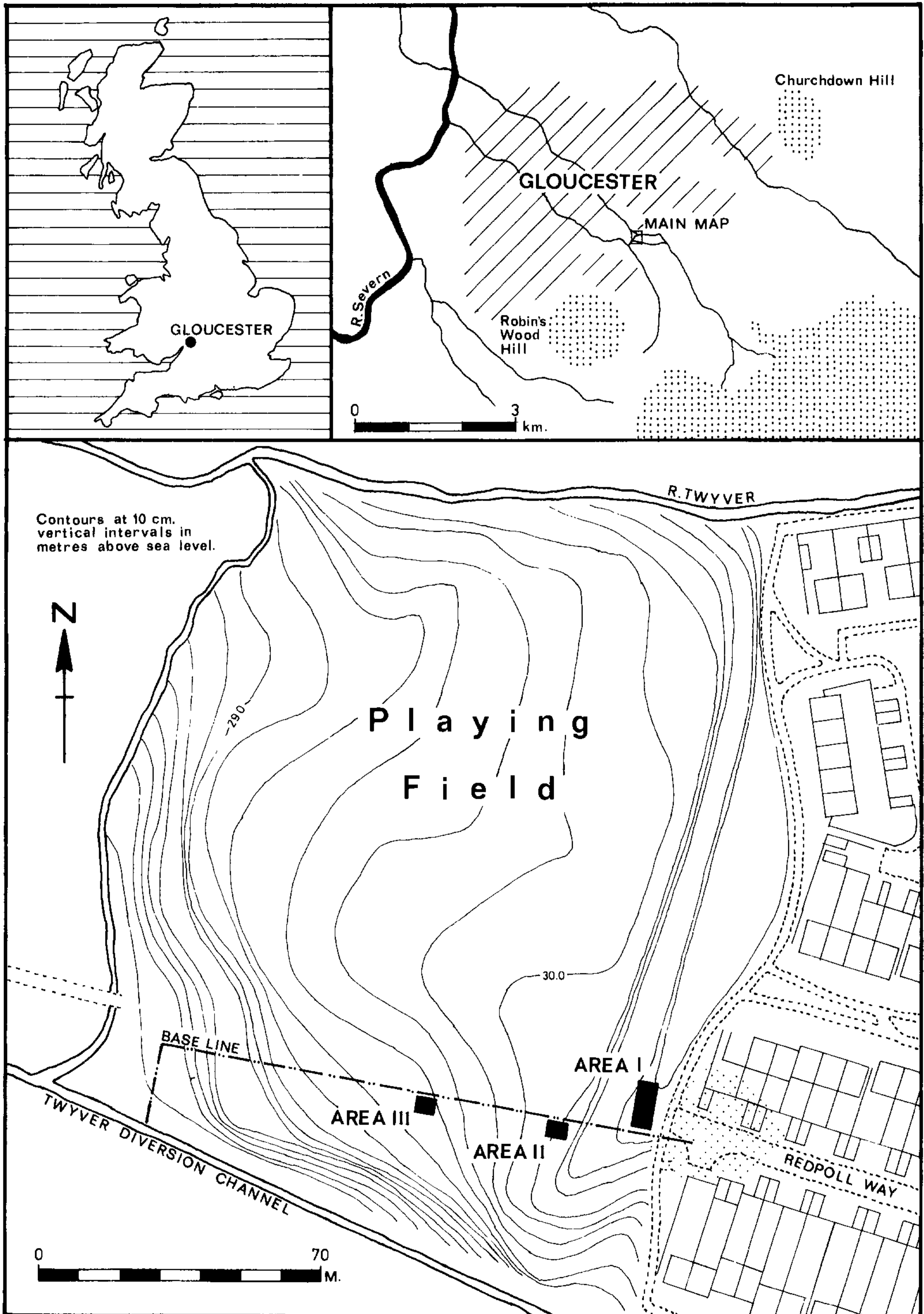


FIG. 1 Location of the site and the excavated areas. (Area of earlier finds indicated on main plan by stippling.)

randomly placed to the west given the constraints imposed by the continued use of the site as a playing-field. The total area investigated was 90 sq. m.

Features of relatively recent date were revealed in all three areas. These included a pipe trench, a rectangular pit, and a clinker path. However, medieval cultivation had lowered the level of the bedrock surface and effectively truncated all the pre-medieval cut features. The topsoil in all areas contained many unstratified finds, presumably derived from the disturbed fills of features and the intermixing of any intervening stratigraphy. In the following sections brief details are given of the pre-medieval features encountered in each area examined.

Area I (FIGS. 2 and 3)

The earliest feature in Area I was a shallow pit or ditch terminal (F13) surviving only to a depth of 0.15 m, but clearly distinguishable from the other features noted by virtue of its compact and slightly sticky brown clay fill. Pottery from this small feature allows it to be assigned to iron age occupation in the area.

All the other features in Area I were of Roman date. The square-cut pit F14, of unknown purpose, was probably the earliest. This was followed by the ditch system F6, comprising a 0.6 m deep U-shaped ditch running north-west to south-east and a shallow gulley (F6a) feeding into it from the north. The principal ditch of F6 was later re-dug (F12) as a steep-sided gulley some 0.3 m deep. Both features contained homogeneous fills of dark loamy matrix containing broken pottery, animal bone, tile, and a few small finds. The pottery from F6 and F12 suggests a mid-third-century date for their fills; the small finds support this. The presence of residual prehistoric pottery and flints in the fill of these features, and from their general vicinity, suggests the existence of prehistoric settlement to the east.

Area II (FIGS. 2 and 3)

All the pre-medieval features in this area were of Roman date. Stratigraphically, F4, F5, and F10 predate F8 and F9, but no chronological priority can be determined for individual features within these two groups either by physical relationships or by the date of the finds.

F4 is either a pit or a ditch terminal, about 0.8 m deep and, as revealed, 2.5 m across. The mid-brown, slightly sandy, clay fill contained pottery of mid-third-century date and a single fragment of *tegula*-type roof tile. Of similar date is the north-south ditch F5, of which only the eastern side was located within the excavated area; the full cross-section is unknown but from the evidence available F5 was only a shallow ditch. The third feature, of broadly the same date as F4 and F5, is the curved gulley F10 in the south-east corner of the trench. It may have been a shallow drainage ditch in view of the thin layer of dark silt along the bottom of the cut.

The two later features in Area II both have U-shaped cross-sections, and are both about 0.3 m deep. They may be interpreted as drainage ditches or boundary ditches. Pottery from F8 and F9 suggests a mid-third-century date for their fills, although a considerable amount of residual late first- and early second-century date wares was found in the fill of F9.

Prehistoric flintwork and pottery were found in residual contexts within Area II.

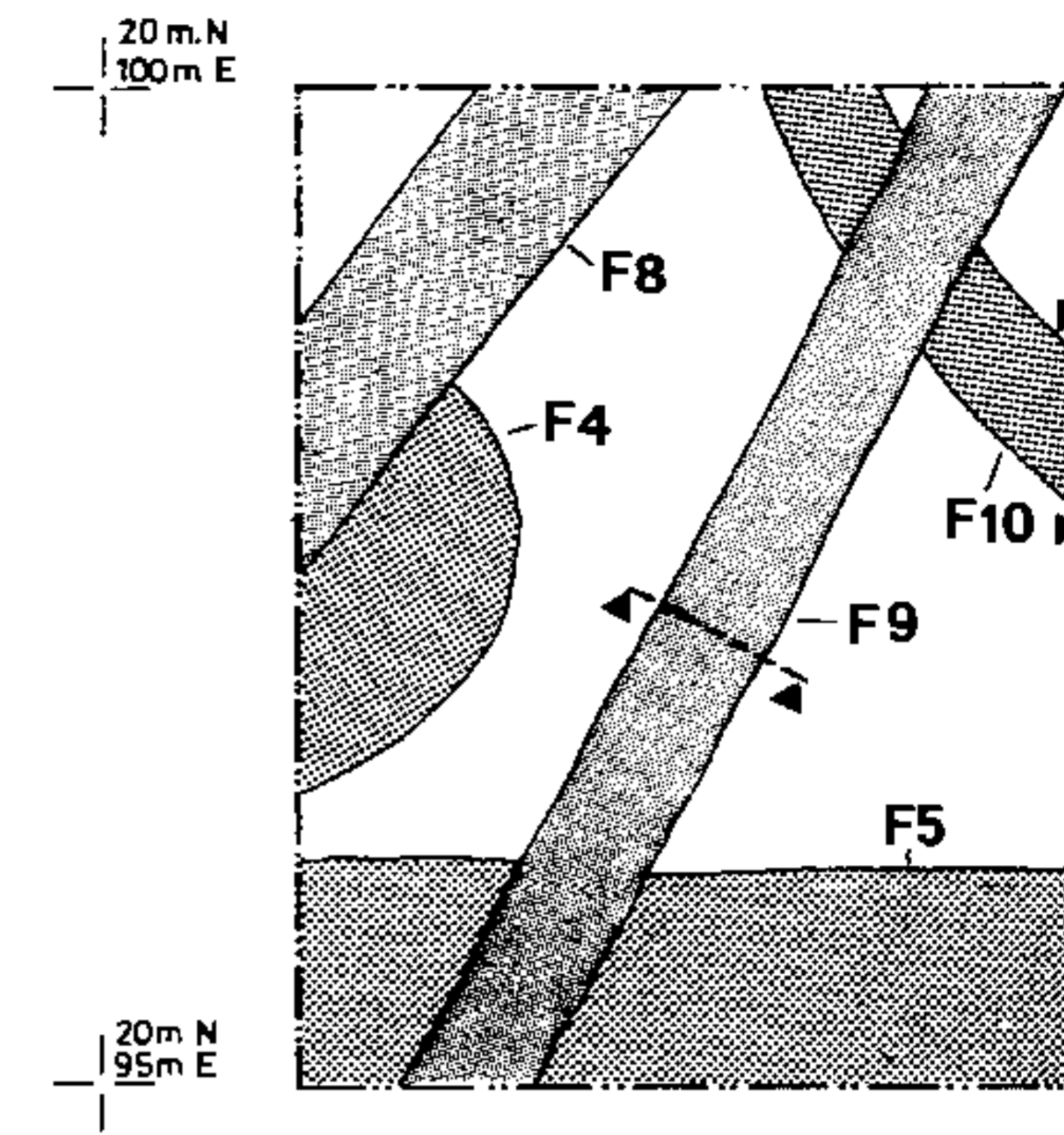
Area III (FIGS. 2 and 3)

Area III contained only one feature, a large ditch, F11, running south-east to north-west. Only slightly more than half of the cross-section was recovered, but this showed that the maximum depth was 1.7 m below the present bedrock surface. The width was about 5 m. Thus the cut

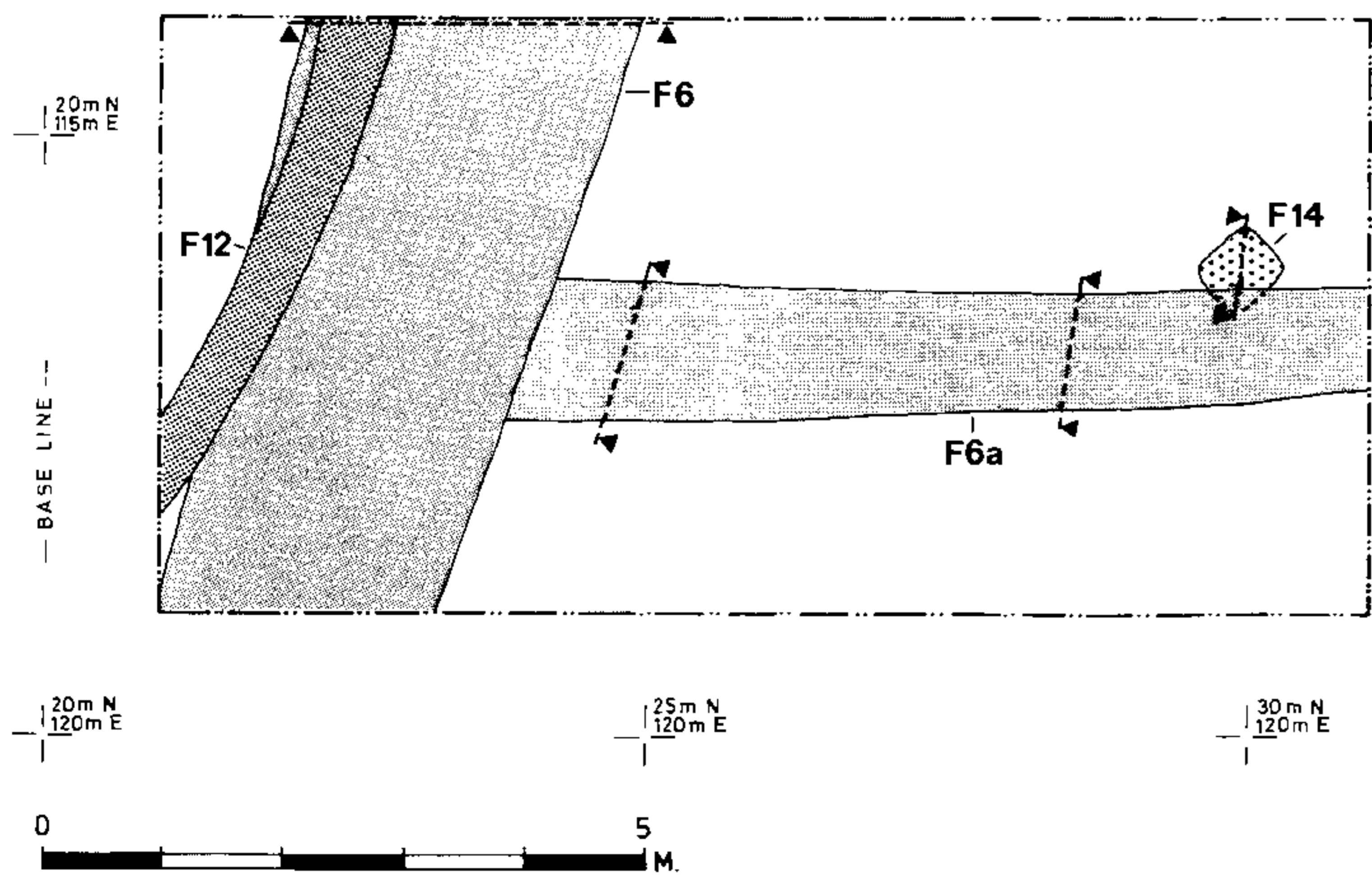
AREA I PREHISTORIC FINDS & FEATURE



AREA II ROMAN FEATURES



AREA I ROMAN FEATURES



AREA III ROMAN FEATURES

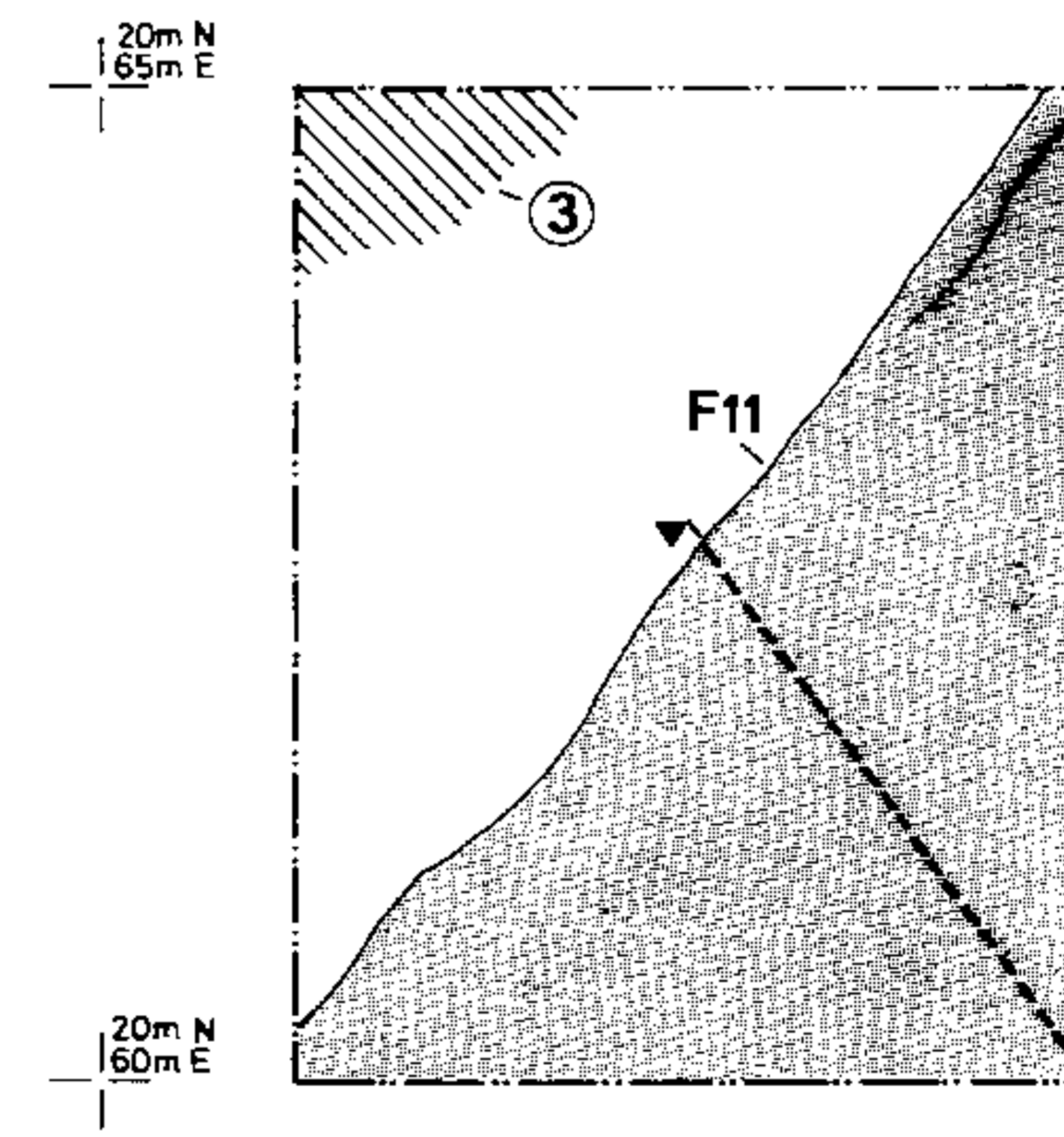


FIG. 2 Excavated features in Areas I, II, and III, and the distribution of prehistoric pottery and flints in Area I.

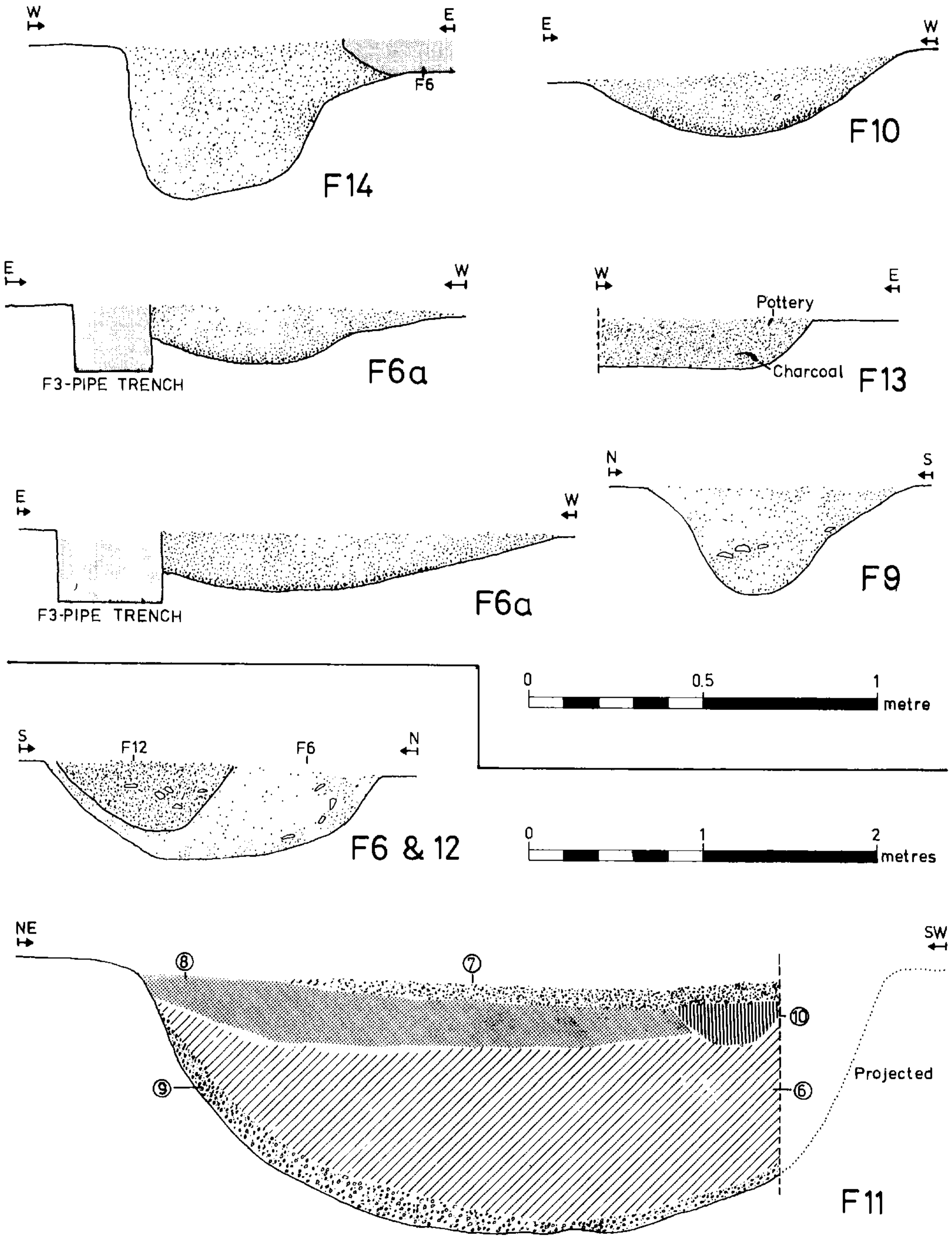


FIG. 3 Sections through excavated features.

pierced the superficial gravel deposits and penetrated about 0.8 m into the underlying lias clay. Five elements in the fill of F11 were recorded. Contexts (9) and (6) represent primary accumulations of loamy gravel and water-washed clay respectively. Context (10) is a gravelly lens representing collapse of the ditch sides, while context (8) is a black humus-rich soil which probably accumulated over a considerable period when the partly filled ditch was merely a linear hollow. The yellow stony clay, context (7), possibly derives from soil movement and soil profile truncation during medieval cultivation. Adjacent to F11, on the north side, was a spread of re-deposited natural gravel, context (3). This may represent the remains of a bank or dump alongside the ditch.

Pottery from context (9) includes late first-century types, although its formation could have been as late as the early second century. The upper fills include later wares extending well into the second century. It should be noted that the orientation of F11 in Area III is roughly the same as F8 and F9 in Area II and F6 and F12 in Area I. F11 stands apart, however, in being much larger than the ditches encountered in the other trenches.

Some prehistoric flintwork and pottery were recovered from the fill of F11.

THE FINDS

The prehistoric pottery by T.C. Darvill

Approximately 121 sherds of prehistoric pottery, weighing a total of 717 grams, were recovered from a variety of contexts in all three trenches. On the basis of typology and fabric two principal subdivisions of the assemblage can be recognized.

Late neolithic-early bronze age wares

Four sherds from Area I and two sherds from Area II stand apart from the other prehistoric pottery in having a soft greasy fabric with little or no tempering. No feature sherds are represented, but the fabrics and general appearance are compatible with late neolithic and early bronze age wares from the area; all the sherds appear to be residual in later contexts. The slight clustering of these sherds in the eastern part of Area I hints that the slightly raised ground to the east of the playing-field was the focus of earlier prehistoric activities in the area.

Iron age wares

The bulk of the prehistoric pottery can be assigned to the iron age. FIG. 4 illustrates the feature sherds present. Four fabrics are represented, although fabric 1, with crushed limestone tempering, was numerically dominant; all the decorated pieces were in fabric 1. Table 1 summarizes the incidence of fabrics by trench. Most notable is the declining amount of fabric 4 with distance west from Area I and the presence of fabric 2 only in Area III.

Typologically the assemblage is dominated by finely made open forms, mostly with everted rims and some with carinations. Decoration is confined to horizontal scoring (FIG. 4, d and i) and filled triangle motifs (FIG. 4, e and k). Several sherds display traces of light burnishing on the outer face. All the vessels present were fired in a wholly or partly reducing atmosphere.

Most of the sherds derive from residual contexts, but the small decorated rim sherd (FIG. 4, d) came from F13 in Area I, possibly a truncated pit.

Parallels for the Saintbridge iron age pottery assemblage are not easy to find in Gloucestershire. The open forms and carinated sherds suggest analogy with the ceramics of the Chastleton-Shenberrow Phase of the sixth to third centuries BC, as defined by Marshall (1978, 9). The absence of finger-tip impressed decoration, large shouldered bowls, and T-shaped rims makes firm ascription to this phase difficult. However, the shouldered bowl forms and incised decoration at Saintbridge can be paralleled at Crickley Hill (Dixon, 1971, Fig. 8) which suggests an early-middle iron age date. The small size of the sample precludes full appraisal of the range of vessels originally present, but a mid-first millennium BC date is most likely on the basis of the fine wares represented. The lug or foot (FIG. 4, q) may well be of later date than the remainder of the assemblage.

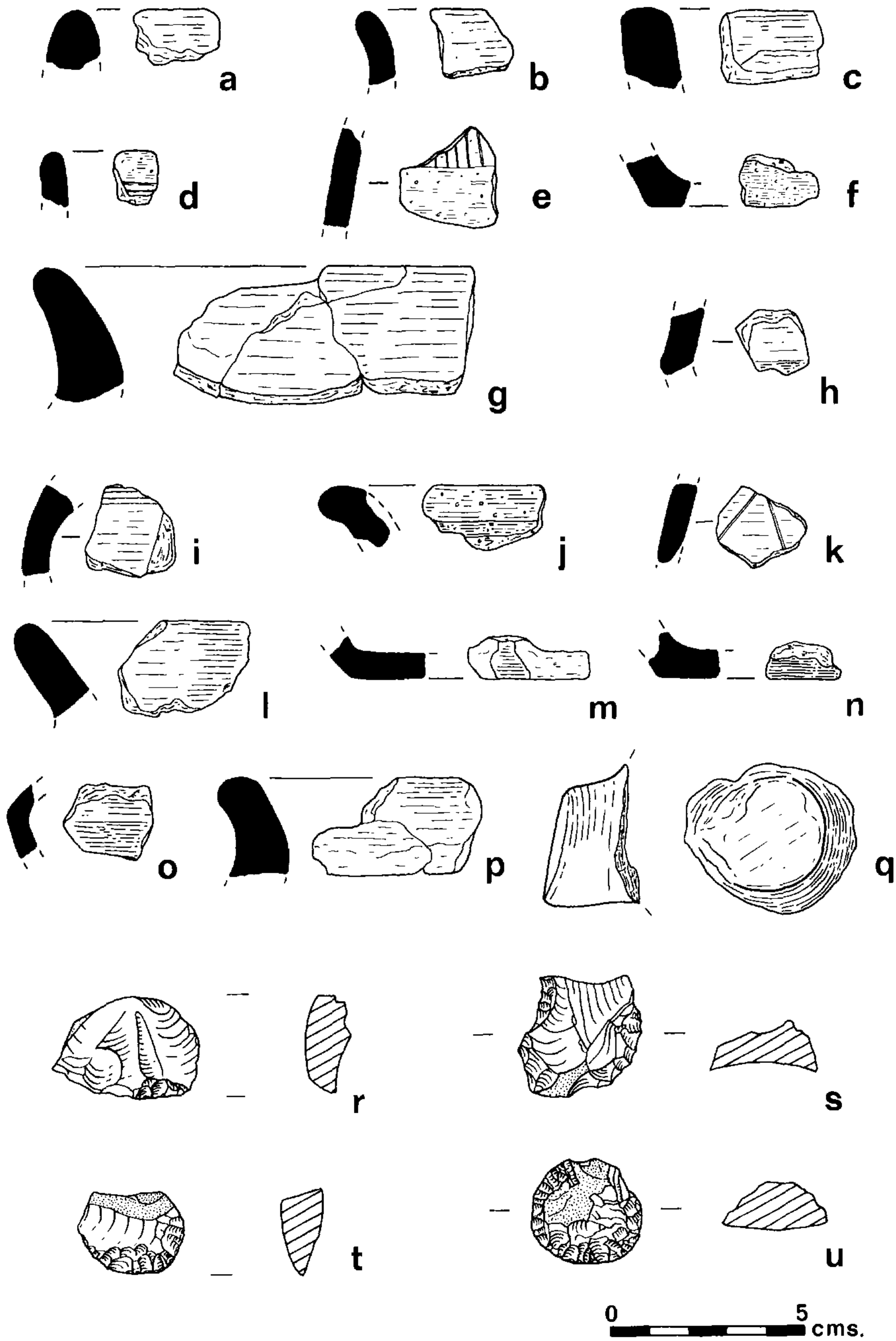


FIG. 4 Prehistoric pottery and flintwork. Scale 1:2.

Table 1 Incidence of iron age pottery by area (in grams)

<i>Area</i>	<i>1</i> <i>Crushed</i> <i>limestone</i>	<i>2</i> <i>Crushed</i> <i>quartz</i>	<i>3</i> <i>Micaceous</i> <i>clay</i>	<i>4</i> <i>Grog and</i> <i>limestone</i>	<i>Totals</i>
I undecorated	90.2	—	—	67.4	157.6
decorated	7.5	—	—	—	7.5
II undecorated	205.0	—	16.5	22.5	244.0
III undecorated	293.3	3.6	2.7	—	299.6
decorated	8.5	—	—	—	8.5
<i>Totals</i>	604.5	3.6	19.2	89.9	717.2

The flints by T.C. Darvill

A total of 28 struck flints weighing approximately 28 grams was recovered. The majority (20) were found in Area I. All were in superficial contexts or residual in Roman contexts. FIG. 2 shows the distribution of flints in Area I.

The raw material represented was all good quality. Some pieces had a milky-white patina. The following identifications were made:

	<i>Area I</i>	<i>Area II</i>	<i>Area III</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Unretouched flakes	12	3	3	18
Unretouched blades	2	—	1	3
Utilized flakes	2	—	—	2
Scrapers	3	—	1	4
Calcined lump	1	—	—	1
<i>Totals</i>	20	3	5	28

The distribution of findspots hints that the settlement focus may have been on the higher ground east of the excavated areas. Such a small assemblage is impossible to date with certainty, but a late neolithic – early bronze age origin is most likely.

Roman pottery by J. Timby

The quantity of Roman pottery recovered was relatively small, totalling some 24.5 kg in weight. It ranged in date from the late first through to the fourth century. With the exception of material from Area III, context (8), the pottery was abraded and fragmentary, emphasizing the disturbed nature of the contexts from which it was derived. The sherds were sorted into fabric types (see Vince and Goudge 1980; Ireland 1984). The material was quantified by weight for the described archaeological contexts (see Tables 2–4).

Area I

The topsoil contained medieval and post-medieval pottery together with some Roman pottery of second- to fourth-century date. The ditch system F6 contained some second-century residual material, but is dated by the presence of Dorset black-burnished wares (TF4) and Severn Valley wares (TF11B) in forms current in the third century, for example Webster type 47 (Webster 1976), flanged bowls, everted rim jars, and plain rimmed dishes. Late Antonine samian ware was also present. F12 contained material datable to the late third century and early fourth century. Very little pottery was recovered from F14, but this would support a second-century date if it is not residual.

Area II

Pottery from F4 broadly dates to the third century. The two linear ditches F5 and F8, together with the gully F10, also contain third-century pottery. F9, despite stratigraphically cutting F5, contains some second-century pottery, presumably residual.

Table 2 Area I Roman pottery: summary of fabric incidence (in grams)

<i>Gloucester type fabric</i>	(3) and (4)	F3	<i>Contexts/features</i>			<i>Totals</i>
			F6	F12	F14	
4 Dorset black burnished	276	1	1511	52	—	1840
5 grey micaceous ware	103	—	83	73	—	259
8 samian	8	—	144	9	—	161
9A Oxfordshire mortaria (white)	27	—	6	7	—	40
9X Oxfordshire mortaria (colour-coated)	39	—	—	—	—	39
10A Dressel 20	86	—	218	—	—	304
11B Severn Valley ware	1952	10	1797	1566	6	5331
11D early Severn Valley ware	342	—	6	—	—	348
12A Oxfordshire colour-coat	8	—	1	4	—	13
12B Nene Valley	—	—	—	7	—	7
12G red colour-coat	—	—	—	40	—	40
12J Rhenish colour-coat	4	—	—	—	—	4
13 Oxfordshire white ware	—	—	13	—	—	13
17 Severn Valley ware variant	—	—	73	—	—	73
18 Malvernian 'native'	—	—	8	—	7	15
23 coarse Severn Valley ware	45	—	109	30	—	184
213 grey sandy ware	3	—	—	—	—	3
Unclassified	—	—	33	7	5	45
<i>Totals</i>	2893	11	4002	1795	18	8719

Table 3 Area II Roman pottery: summary of fabric incidence (in grams)

<i>Gloucester type fabric</i>	(1)	(3)	(4)	F2	<i>Contexts/features</i>					<i>Totals</i>
					F4	F5	F8	F9	F10	
2 grog tempered 'native'	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	78	—	78
4 Dorset black burnished	28	5	18	—	80	14	10	13	—	168
5 grey micaceous ware	8	5	14	—	—	—	2	—	—	29
8 samian	—	—	—	—	15	—	—	—	—	15
9A Oxfordshire mortaria	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	28	33
10A Dressel 20	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
11B Severn Valley ware	128	115	102	10	395	106	25	110	6	997
12A Oxfordshire colour-coat	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	3
12J Rhenish colour-coat	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
13 Oxfordshire white ware	—	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	—	8
23 coarse Severn Valley ware	—	32	—	—	—	—	—	135	—	167
?200 sandy ware	—	3	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
201 black-burnished ware	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
Unclassified	—	—	—	—	14	13	—	—	—	27
<i>Totals</i>	173	166	139	10	515	133	37	336	34	1543

Table 4 Area III Roman pottery: summary of fabric incidence (in grams)

	Contexts/features							Totals
	(1)	(2)	F11				(9)	
<i>Gloucester type fabric</i>	(1)	(2)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	
2 grog-tempered 'native'	—	170	—	75	—	202	20	467
4 Dorset black burnished	11	874	507	235	20	824	16	2487
8 samian	3	46	17	17	—	175	—	258
9A Oxfordshire mortaria	—	—	17	—	—	—	—	17
10A Dressel 20	—	174	23	—	—	—	—	197
11B Severn Valley ware	141	937	315	—	16	230	—	1639
11D early Severn Valley ware	125	2041	780	666	30	1490	1183	6315
12A Oxfordshire colour-coat	—	20	—	—	—	—	—	20
12J Rhenish colour-coat	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
12K Central Gaulish colour coat	—	2	—	—	—	5	3	10
13 Oxfordshire white ware	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	5
18 Malvernian 'native'	—	—	10	—	—	—	1	11
19B Malvernian coarseware	—	58	—	—	8	—	—	66
23 coarse Severn Valley ware	—	293	215	—	—	90	29	627
?25 local sandy	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	4
33 limestone 'native' ware	—	10	—	—	—	95	—	105
34 calcitic 'native' ware	—	—	—	—	—	—	14	14
200 sandy ware	—	163	—	—	—	9	10	182
201 black-burnished ware	—	—	—	20	—	—	—	20
Unclassified	—	16	—	—	—	—	—	16
<i>Totals</i>	280	4814	1884	1013	74	3120	1276	12461

Area III

Superficial deposits in this area contained a higher percentage of early Roman wares than either Area I or Area II. The main feature within Area III, F11, contained middle to late second-century wares in the upper fills, with late first-century to early second-century wares in the lower fills. The samian stamp reported below was found in this feature. Black-burnished ware (TF4) from F11 included Gillam types 54/58 and 57 (Gillam 1976), whilst the Severn Valley wares included tankards (Webster 1976, type 3), jars (Webster types 7, 15, 20), and shallow dishes (Webster types 70, 73).

Samian stamp by F.C. Wild

A single samian stamp reading OFLIC. SEV E was recovered from context (8) in F11. It can be classified as a form 18, of south Gaulish origin, with die la of Lic-Severus. It is uncertain whether the stamp represents a partnership between two potters, or whether this is an abbreviation of the potter's *nomen*. The stamp may belong to Severus, but is unlikely to be connected with Licinus, who was too early. The stamp is probably that illustrated by Hermet from La Graufesenque (Hermet 1934, pl. 111, 52). It has been recorded at Domitianic foundations such as Butzhach and the Saalburg, but also occurs at Camulodunum, where it might possibly be pre-Flavian. An example from a different die, from Verulamium, could be Neronian. His date range is probably *c.* AD 60–90, with the range for this die *c.* AD 70–90.

Table 5 Incidence (in grams) of Roman ceramic tile type by context

Feature	Type				Totals
	<i>Pila</i>	<i>Tegula</i>	<i>Imbrex</i>	?	
Area I F6	—	—	68	402	470
F12	—	—	—	285	285
F14	77	—	—	—	77
Area II F4	—	457	—	—	457
F5	—	—	—	125	125
F8	—	—	—	30	30
F9	—	—	114	29	143
Area III F11	274	672	—	2669	3615
<i>Totals</i>	351	1129	182	3540	5202

Roman ceramic tiles by **T.C. Darvill**

Approximately 144 fragments of Roman ceramic tile, weighing a total of 5.2 kg, were recovered from sealed contexts. Most pieces were small but the presence of *pila*, *tegula* and *imbrex* tiles suggests the existence of buildings in the vicinity. No stamped tiles were present, and the assemblage was too small to make fabric studies practical. Table 5 summarizes the incidence of tile types by context.

The small finds

Approximately 180 small finds of Roman and later date were recovered, including a pair of bronze tweezers, bronze pins, bone pins, glass, furnace slag, bone objects, and iron nails. Most were in poor condition. A full list accompanies the site archive.

The coins by **Malcolm J. Watkins**

- 1 Undecipherable Ae. 15mm diameter. Late 3rd or 4th centuries. Find no. 16.
- 2 Barbarous radiate minim, apparently copying the CONCORDIA AVG type of Aurelian (269–275), having the reverse of a female figure with cornucopiae standing left and sacrificing at an altar. Boon (1974), 115–124, pl. 56 shows a copy with an almost identical reverse bearing the blundered legend COVSECRATIO but with obverse of Tetricus. The present example is unfortunately illegible but the obverse is a fair portrait of Aurelian with little facial hair unlike that of Tetricus who is normally bearded and has a notably snub nose. Barbarous copies of Aurelian are, however, not common, coming towards the end of this period of epidemic counterfeiting. A small casting sprue and rather blurred image suggest that this was cast rather than struck. Wt. 1.303 g; diam. 14 mm. Find no. 22.
- 3 4th-century minim. Probably a copy of FEL TEMP REPARATIO (Falling horseman) type of c. 360. cf. Boon, (1974), 130–3. Wt. 0.53 g; diam. 12 mm (max). Find no. 30.
- 4 George III halfpenny. 1st issue 1770–1775. Obv. GEORGIUS (.III.REX.) apparently bust 2, 1774–5. Find no. 62.
- 5 Edward IV (2nd reign) penny (1471–83). Obv. (–) G and rose by bust. Rev. (–) EBO (–) quatrefoil in centre. York, issued under Archbishop George Neville. York had extensive landholdings around Gloucester in the later 15th century. Much reduced by clipping and wear. Wt. 0.655 g; diam. 15 mm; cf. North (1960) 72, no. 1649. Find no. 84.

The animal bones by **C. Pinder**

An assemblage of 925 animal bones was recovered, mostly from Roman features. A full quantification and analysis accompanies the site archive. It may be noted, however, that of the bones identified to species from secure Roman contexts 51 per cent were sheep/goat, 38 per cent were cow, and 11 per cent were pig. The minimum number of animals represented follows broadly the same pattern with 21 sheep/goat, 12 cattle, and 8 pig. This picture contrasts with the species spectra from the Eastgate site in Gloucester (Maltby 1984, 233), and may reflect an economic or dietary difference between adjacent rural and urban settlements.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the trial excavations at Saintbridge emphasize the fact that well-drained land in the Severn Valley has continually attracted attention for settlement and agriculture. Although few in number the early prehistoric finds provide positive evidence for activity in the vicinity, and as such serve to expand existing knowledge of the disposition of second and third millennium BC settlement. The finds relating to the mid-first millennium BC are important as they represent the first such items to be identified from the lower Severn Valley (cf. Saville 1984, 150). Sadly, details of the intensity and the nature of the prehistoric settlement at Saintbridge cannot be established from the evidence so far recovered.

For the Roman period the picture is rather more clear. Boundary and drainage ditches were present in all three investigated areas, and were also recorded to the east of the site during the construction of the Heron Estate (Garrod and Heighway 1984, 25). Their presence suggests controlled land allotment, and by implication intensive land-use. Such a pattern is much as might

be expected in view of the proximity of the site to the *colonia* of Glevum, even though full details of the field system lay-out are elusive. No evidence to confirm or refute the suggestions of centuriation of land apportionment (Rawes 1979) was recorded.

Ridge-and-furrow cultivation attests intensive land-use on the site during the medieval period.

Acknowledgements

Excavations at Saintbridge were carried out with the kind permission and generous co-operation of Gloucester City Council. John Rhodes, Malcolm J. Watkins, and Anthony P. Garrod expedited arrangements for the work; Paul Gosling acted as a link with the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Department of the Environment. Thanks are also extended to the site assistants, Martin Oake and Mark Maltby, and to the volunteer labour force, Tony Bergonzi, Terry Flowers, Kate Ibbertson, Eileen Nelmes, Brian Read, Yvette Staelens, Pam Stratford, Mick Sutton, and David Timby. John Smith and Richard Hingley kindly provided comments on the small finds and iron age pottery respectively. Felicity Wild would like to thank Brenda Dickinson for comments on the samian stamp.

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