

ESSEX
ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

THE TRANSACTIONS OF
THE ESSEX SOCIETY FOR ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

VOLUME 24 (Third Series)
1993

Published by the Society at the Museum in the Castle 1993

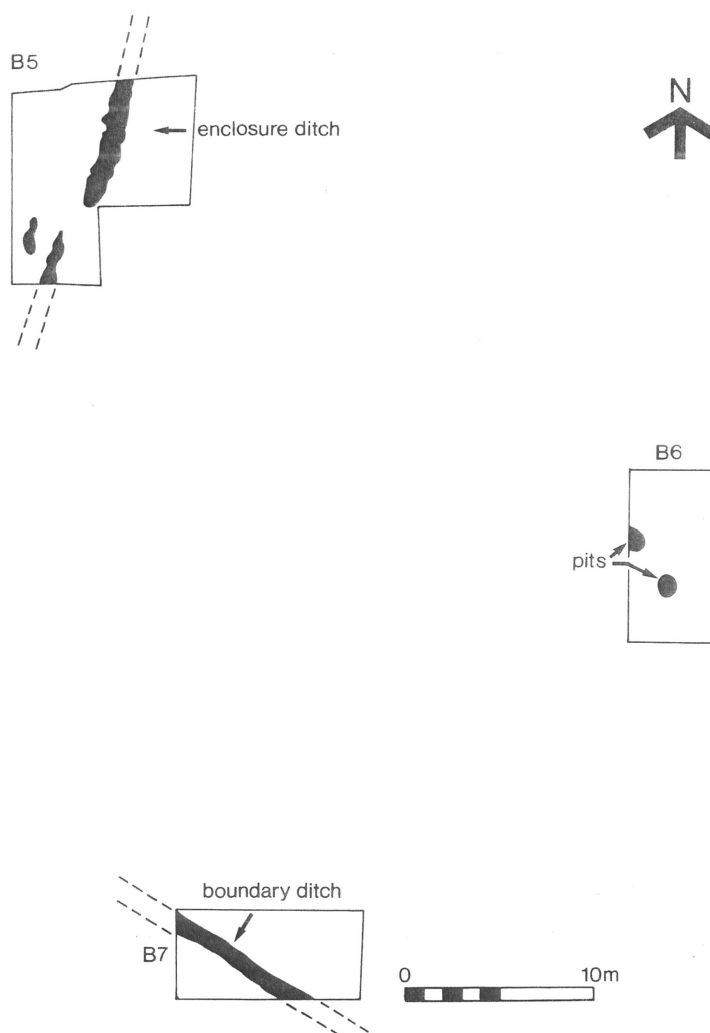


Fig. 3 Overall layout of Late Bronze Age site (Area B).

The investigation of cropmarks at Church Lane, Stanway, Colchester

J. Partridge

(Colchester Archaeological Trust)

In the autumn of 1991, the Colchester Archaeological Trust investigated a series of cropmarks in a field to the north of Church Lane, Stanway (OS grid reference TL 943 240) where ARC Southern Ltd were planning to extend their existing sand and gravel quarry.

Aerial photographs (Pl. 1) revealed a droveway or track in the form of a pair of parallel ditches. One end of the droveway lay within that part of the site where the ditches splayed sharply outwards to form the sides of a large enclosure into which the droveway appeared to lead. The droveway can be traced as a cropmark for at least 320 m westwards. At the western boundary of the site there are some cropmarks which indicate the presence of a sub-rectangular enclosure associated with

the droveway. The cropmark of the enclosure is the clearest in the field adjacent to the site although, even here, its spatial relationship with the droveway is obscure, since it is uncertain how far south the enclosure extended. The eastern and northern sides of the enclosure on the quarry site itself are even more difficult to locate from the cropmarks. Unfortunately excavation provided little useful evidence in this respect.

The droveway

Several trenches were excavated across the line of the droveway with varying results (Fig. 5). Only traces of the ditches were uncovered in Trenches B and F, with the more conclusive information coming from Trenches C and D. In Trench C, the northern ditch (F4) was 1.1 m wide and 0.3 m deep; the southern ditch (F5) was of similar dimensions. The ditches here were 7 m apart, with a layer (L7) of tightly-packed

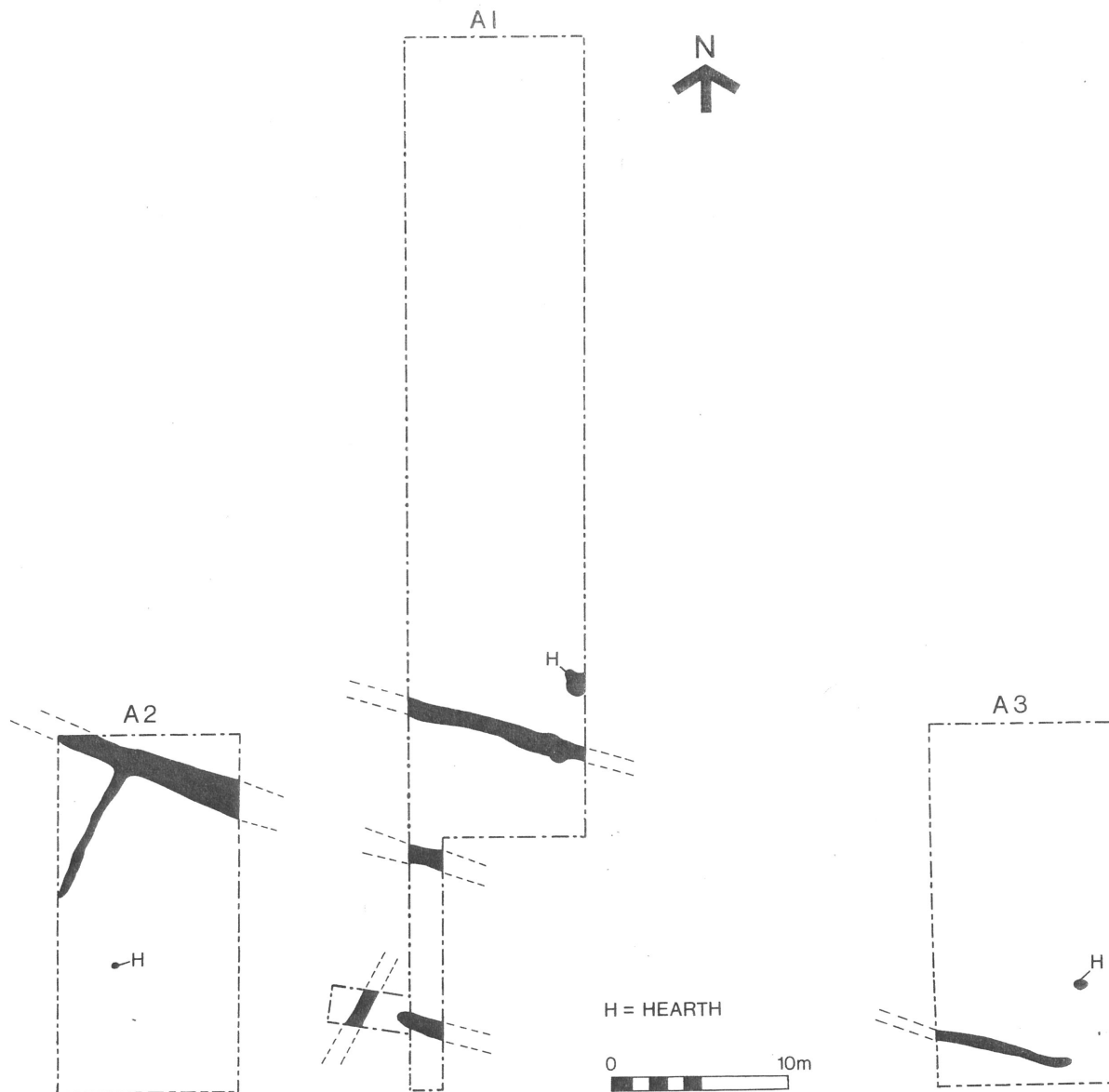


Fig. 4 Overall layout of medieval site (Area A).

small stones in between which was presumably the remains of metalling. The ditch sections showed only a single cut, with a single uniform fill in each case. Trench D was sited where the two ditches diverge sharply outwards. Here the southern ditch (F10) was better-defined than the northern ditch (F15). Only a short section of the latter survived, the predicted turning-point being disturbed by two shallow features (F14 and F18).

Analyses of soil samples from two of the ditch fills (F11 and F13) did not provide any evidence of pollen spores, seeds or vegetable matter. No animal bone survived in prehistoric contexts in the droveway or elsewhere.

The sub-rectangular enclosure

The photographic evidence of the sub-rectangular enclosure is difficult to interpret; it may represent a sub-rectangular enclosure 45 x 90 m in area lying on the north side of the droveway. Alternatively the enclosure could have been roughly square in shape, and had straddled the droveway in such a way that it measured 90 x 90 m.

Trenches were sited to assess the shape and size of the enclosure, but unfortunately little evidence of the enclosure remained to the east of the modern western field boundary. There was some disturbance in the section of Trench G, but this lay just to the north of the projected enclosure ditch and in itself was



Plate I Cropmark photograph. © RCHME Crown Copyright.

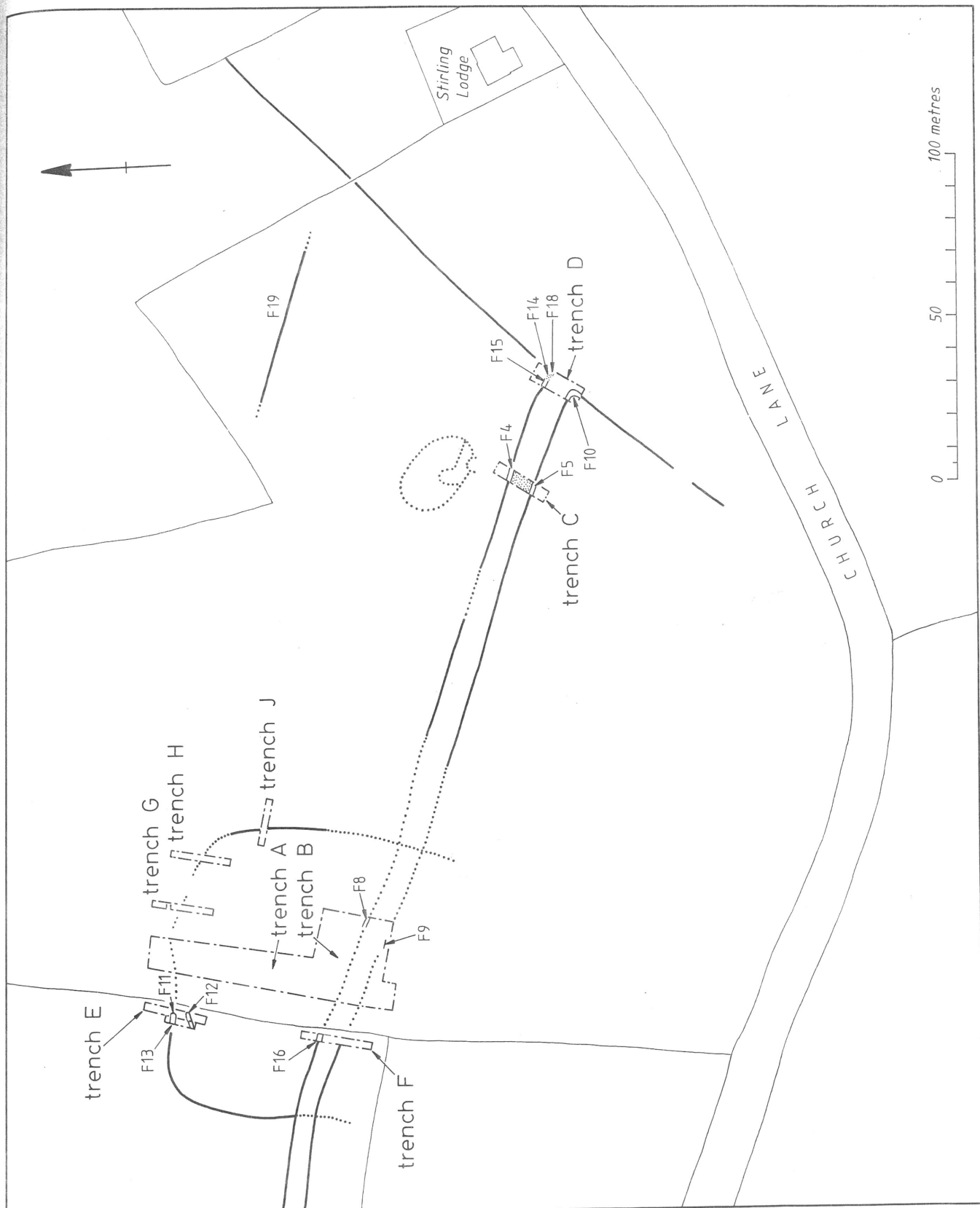


Fig. 5 Site plan.

inconclusive. Trench E, to the west of the field boundary, did provide evidence of the enclosure ditch. In a section cut adjacent to Trench E, the ditch (F13) was found to be 2.7 m wide and 0.7 m deep, but in Trench E itself the ditch (F11) terminated in a butt end. The terminal was 1.8 m wide and 0.6 m deep. Like the ditches of the droveway, the ditch fills of F13 and F11 were simple, suggesting a gradual accumulation of material.

Another possible ditch (F12) was excavated 3 m to the south of ditch F11. Feature 12 was 1.4 m wide and 0.5 m deep. The feature was problematic as only a small part of it was investigated and no finds were recovered. Very few archaeological features were uncovered inside the enclosure within the excavation Trench A, and all were recent. Even the evidence for the parallel ditches of the droveway in Trench B was poor; a series of modern plough-marks visible in the subsoil indicated the extent of modern agricultural activity close to the field boundary and that most of the archaeological features in this area had been destroyed.

Other evidence of activity

The aerial photographs did indicate cropmarks other than those of the enclosure and droveway; the most visible of these were the recently-removed field boundary ditches, and a possibly ancient ditch (F19) parallel to the droveway but 90 m to the north. There were some barely-discernible cropmarks which might indicate other prehistoric activity in the area. None of these cropmarks was examined.

Field-walking failed to provide significant clusters of material. There was a Neolithic waste flake and some medieval sherds and pieces of peg(?) -tile, all of which were widely dispersed. A single Anglo-Saxon grass-tempered sherd was found in the fill of the ditch F10; this sherd was probably not residual as it was not abraded.

Records of previous finds include a Roman coin (Antonia August, minted c. AD 41-64) from the Church Lane area.

Discussion

The most likely explanation for the site is that the parallel ditches represent an enclosed droveway, along which stock was driven. The animals were prevented from straying off the desired course by the ditches. The divergence of the ditches to the south-east represents the northern ditch of a large enclosure which was presumably used for grazing.

The sub-rectangular enclosure was poorly preserved; its shape, size and function remain largely unknown. The ditch terminal (F11) could indicate that the enclosure extended eastwards no further than the present western field boundary, which itself may mark the eastern ditch of the enclosure. Despite the excavation, indications on the aerial photographs that the enclosure may have extended substantially further

eastwards still cannot be discounted. Whether this small enclosure was a settlement site with dwellings, or a corral for rounding-up animals, or even a combination of both, remains unknown.

The ditches of the droveway and enclosure contained very little pottery; much of the pottery which was recovered is characterised by small abraded sherds, mostly without diagnostic features such as rims. The most significant pieces come from F4 (the northern ditch of the droveway), which may be Early Iron Age in date, and F11 (a butt end of the ditch of the sub-enclosure), which are typically Middle Iron Age. This may correctly reflect the temporal relationship between the droveway and enclosure, i.e. that the former predates the latter. A Roman amphora rim and a piece of Roman *tegula* from the ditch on the north side of the droveway (F14 and F5 respectively), and an Anglo-Saxon sherd in the other ditch (F10), suggest that it may have been in use for some considerable time.

The investigation of the land to the north of Church Lane took place before any major stripping of topsoil in preparation for the quarry excavations. The intention is to monitor closely the future removal of topsoil to ensure that all the major archaeological features are suitably recorded.

The finds and site archive are deposited in the Colchester Museums along with the data sheets for the pottery.

Prehistoric pottery

N. Brown

Very little pottery was recovered from the excavation (29 sherds weighing 124 g). It was recorded using a system devised for prehistoric pottery in Essex.

The pottery was of small sherd size and mostly quite abraded. This, together with the general absence of rims or other diagnostic pieces, makes dating difficult. Indeed, the general range of pottery present is not closely datable within the prehistoric period. The small rim and range of fabrics (E, F, and B) recovered from F4 may be of Early Iron Age date, while the sherds of Fabric J from F11 are typically Middle Iron Age. However, even in these cases the condition of the sherds must make them of doubtful value as dating evidence for the feature from which they derive.

Acknowledgements

The archaeological work was commissioned and funded by ARC Southern Ltd. The Trust is indebted to Mr R. Lane of ARC and the landowner Mrs Jansma for their support, and to Mr N. Brown for his pottery report. The soil analysis was kindly undertaken by Anita Jackson of the Department of Biology, Essex University.

Roman pottery from Little Baddow

N.P. Wickenden

In September 1990, the author was called to 'Water Hall', Little Baddow by the owner, Mr D. Attwell, upon the discovery of Roman pottery during the mechanical excavation of foundations for a new barn 20 metres east of the house (TL 7615 0721). The pottery