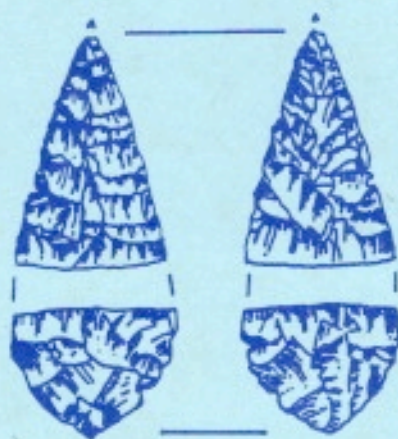


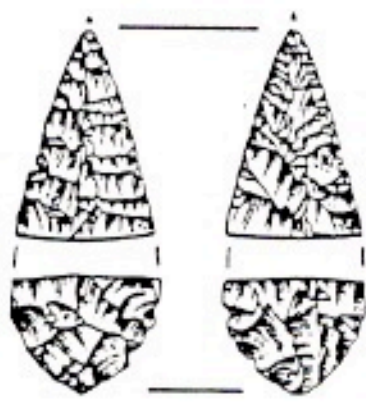
LOFTS FARM PROJECT

Maldon Archaeological Group



LOFTS FARM PROJECT

MALDON ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP



MALDON
Archaeological
Group

MALDON ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

LOFTS FARM PROJECT

INTERIM REPORTS

CONTENTS

INTERIM REPORT FOR WORK 1978-1979

Pages 1/1 - 1/8

(Including introduction and historical background,
Neolithic discoveries and Iron Age ditches and hat circle)

INTERIM REPORT OF 'MOAT' SITE EXCAVATION

Pages 2/1 - 2/3

INTERIM REPORT OF WORK 1979-1980

Pages 3/1 - 3/7

(Including Bronze Age 'Barrow' excavation
and Iron Age/Roman field ditches)

INTERIM REPORT OF WORK 1981-1983

Pages 4/1 - 4/7

(Including Iron Age settlements,
Bronze age and Roman finds and
sword chape hoard)

INTERIM REPORT OF WORK 1984-1985

Pages 5/1-5/6

(Including Late Bronze Age rectangular enclosure,
Early Iron Age well with worked stakes and
Darmsden-Linton pottery
and Early Iron Age 'Barrow' burial)



Cover drawing by H.M. of Essex County Council

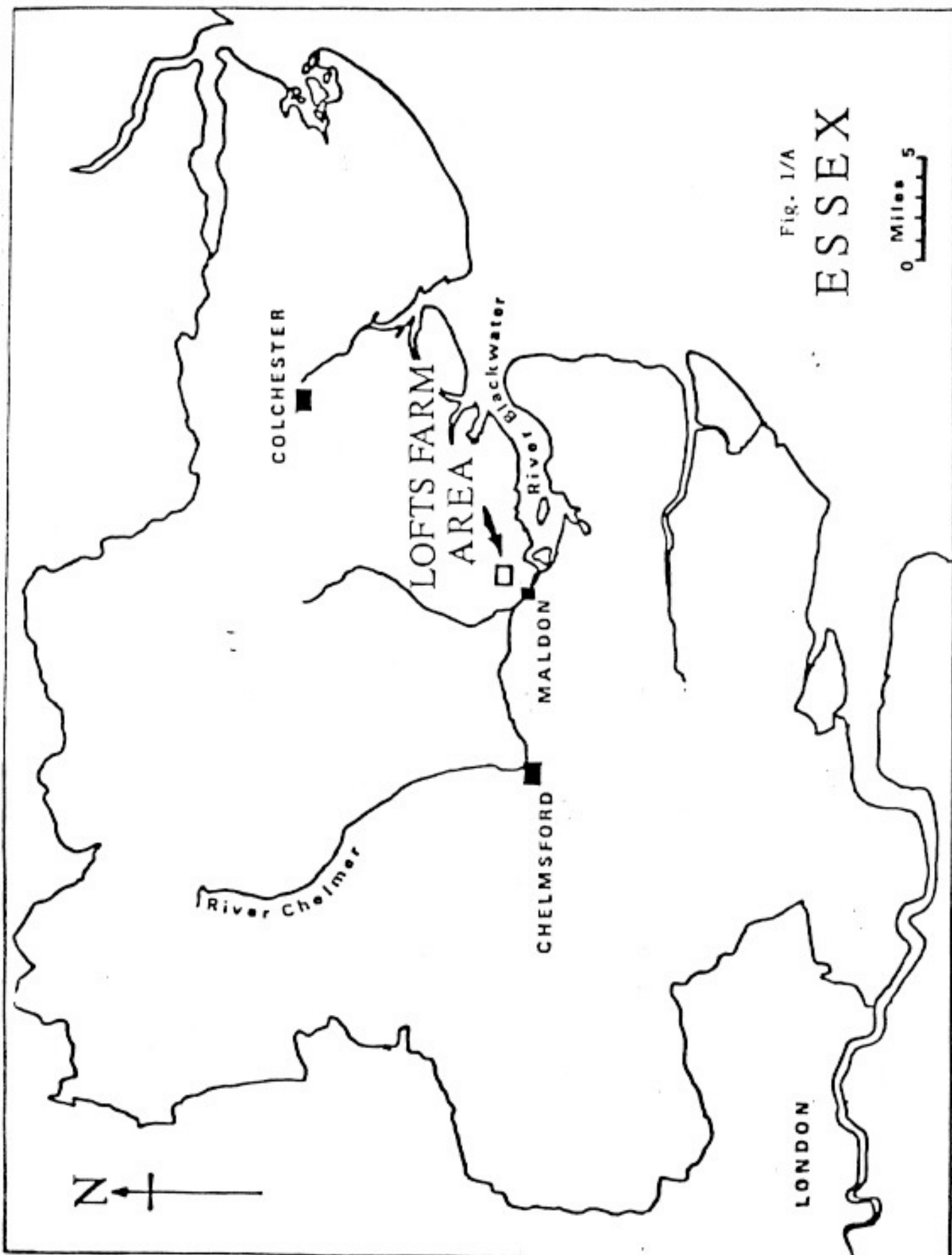


Fig. 1/A

ESSEX

0 Miles 5

LOFTS FARM PROJECT 1978-79 MALDON ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

A ten year gravel extraction programme around Lofts Farm, Great Totham (TL86670906) will destroy a complex of archaeological crop mark features. Contractors Aggregates, the gravel company, have allowed members of Maldon Archaeological Group to observe and work on the site as extraction progresses. At the end of our project's first year this is a suitable point to report on our results.

LOCATION

The gravel terrace now being exploited extends along much of the north side of the Blackwater Estuary. The area which concerns us is approximately 1 km from the nearest sea wall and 2 km from the centre of Maldon. A layer of brickearth, sufficiently thick to prevent crop marks showing, covers the southern part of the site.

Each field has been designated a letter as shown on Fig 1/B.

METHODS

Our first year's work has included historical research, plotting crop marks from air photographs, excavation, field walking as well as the observation and recording after topsoil stripping of ten acres in the SW corner of the quarry.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

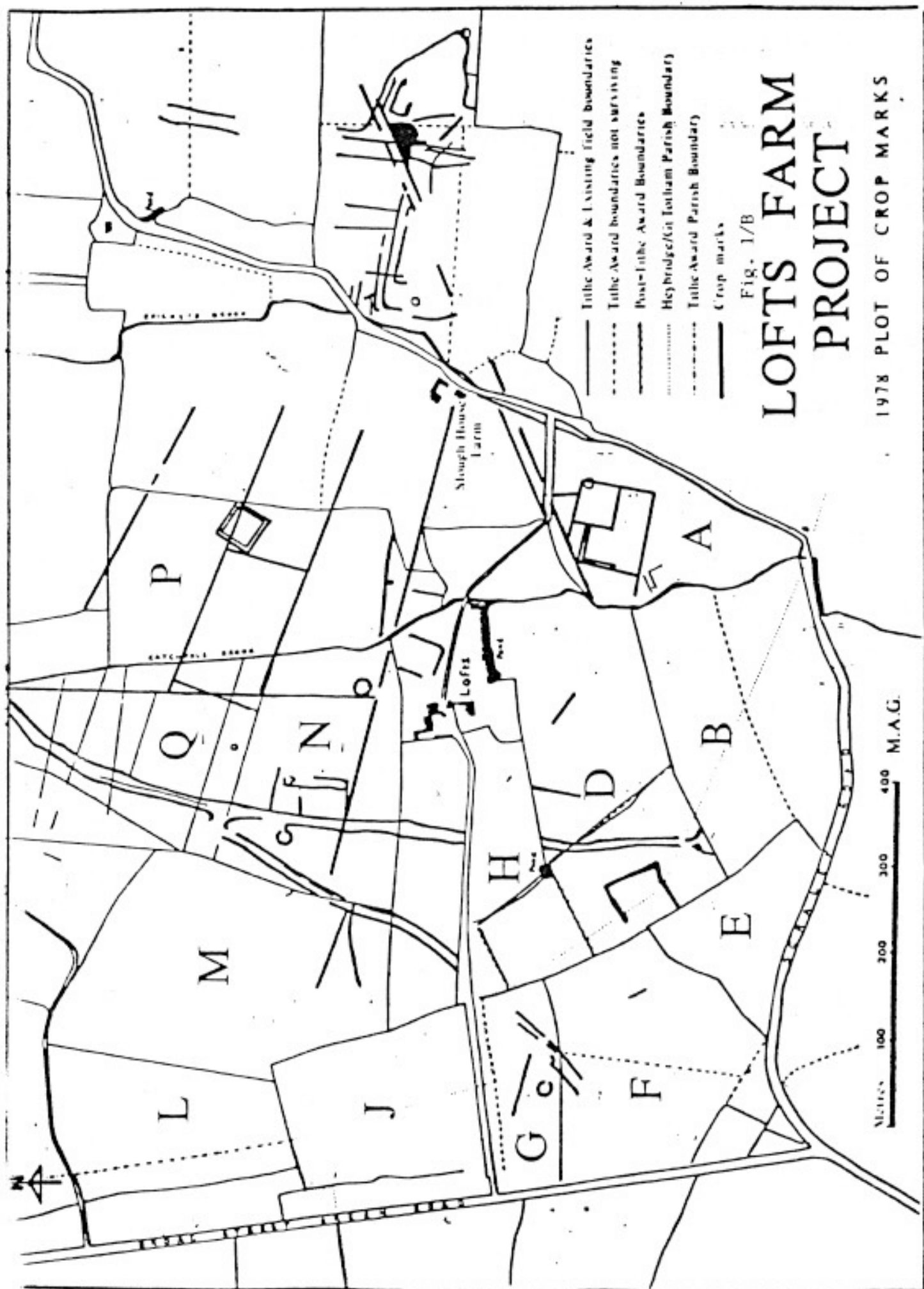
A rental of 1441 refers to Loftes and is our earliest mention of the farm. (Some earlier documents in the Essex Record Office may provide more references but they are at present in a too fragile condition to consult.)

Johnson, in his 1831 History of Great Totham, tells us about the owners and occupiers of the Lofts estate. It belonged to Anne Bourchier in 1570 when it was described as having 40 acres of arable land, 4 acres of meadow, 100 acres of pasture and 10 acres of wood in Great and Little Totham.

John Bullock, who lived and was buried at Wigborough, owned Lofts in 1595. The head of this family was described as being "of Lofts" until 1637 when Edward Bullock bought Faulkbourne. The last Mr Bullock died in 1705 and this may have been when the property was sold to Sir Nathan Wright of Cranham who was the owner in 1712.

An Indenture of 1715 (ERO. D/DSU T72) details conditions of a lease between Nathan Wright and Phillip Good of Heybridge and informs us that the occupier of Lofts at the time was John Warwick. The document also gives a little insight into the nature of the property when it mentions 'a capital messuage or farm called Lofts', two other messuages or farms, a garden, a moat, a Hall, a stable, a coach house, a mead called Lofts Mead and a Hop Garden.

Lofts was eventually bought, along with other land at Langford, by Nicholas Wescombe Esq. of Nottinghamshire.



George Johnson in 1831 writes "The house at the time it was inhabited by the Bullock family, and even until within a few years past, was a mansion of considerable extent; the hall was particularly spacious. It was moated. A modern structure has been lately erected, and is now a good farm house."

From cartographic and field name evidence we know that in 1777 at least 10 acres of woodland existed on the southern part of the area and by 1839 it had disappeared. Perhaps the demand for timber and arable land during the Napoleonic "scare" was responsible for this.

Our research work will continue in the hope of gaining a fuller understanding of the present field layout and the relationship of Lofts Farm to the 'moat' feature in field D.

AIR PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE (Fig 1/B)

The rectilinear enclosure shown in field A was not initially recorded on the County Sites & Monuments Record and had been destroyed before we were aware of the gravel extraction work. It is in this field that Contractors Aggregates have set up their processing plant.

A north-south trackway running at right angles to the river estuary is the site's most prominent feature and in field M can be seen other features directly related to this. These are a rectangular enclosure on the east side, a circular enclosure on the west and a possible junction and fork of another trackway off to the south-west.

Apparently overlying the trackway ditches is a system of possibly regular rectangular fields with which a large well defined ring ditch is associated. Unrelated to the fields is an interesting bivallate enclosure in field P.

The other obvious features can be seen in field D. A 'moat' shaped enclosure adjoins a field boundary and a line crosses the trackway from NW-SE. The latter corresponds to a field boundary shown on the 1839 tithe map.

EXCAVATION

The proposed order of gravel extraction is from the SW corner to the SE and then from the NW corner to the NE. Consequently the first known feature to be destroyed will be the 'moat' enclosure in field D. With this in mind M.A.G. successfully sought permission to carry out trial excavation work in the 'moat' area. An interim report of work is appended to the end of this account.

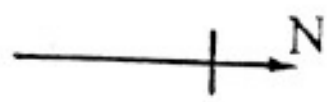
FIELD WALKING

The present intensive use of the arable land and our occupation with observation of top soil stripping has limited our field walking to one part of field D. It is difficult to deduce much from such a small sample, 6000 sq m, but we did find a greater concentration of medieval pottery at the 'moat' end of the field.

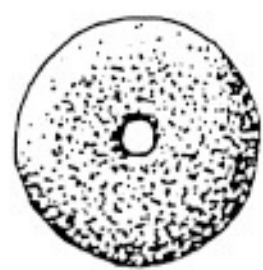
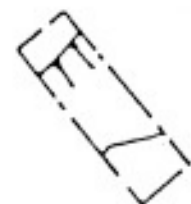
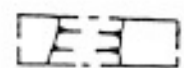
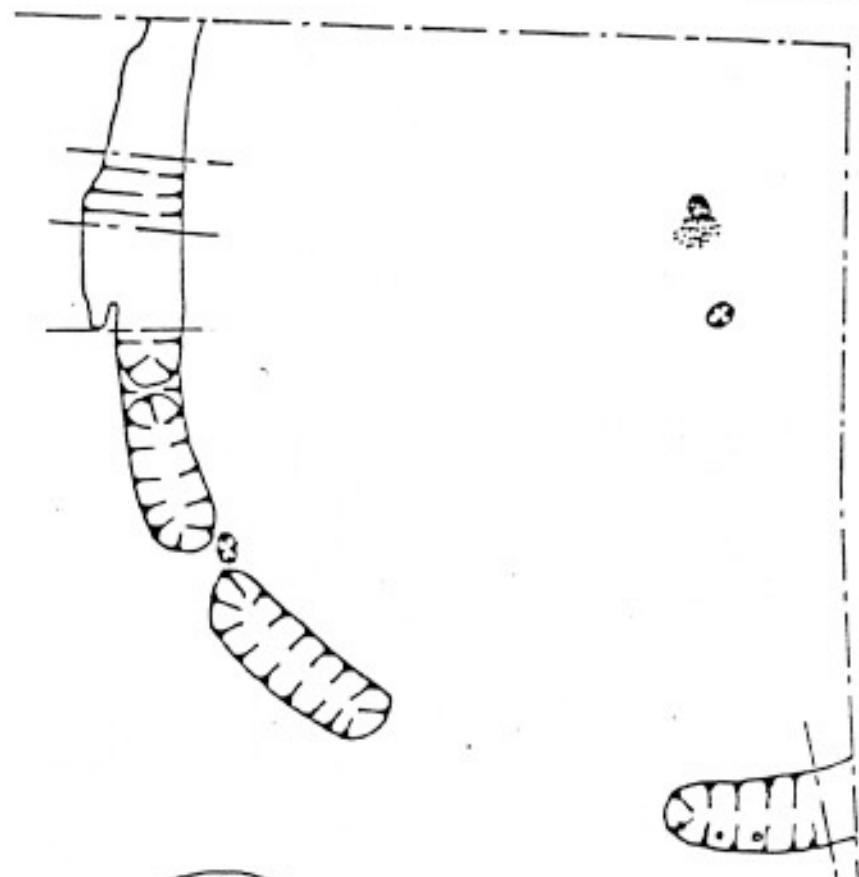
OBSERVATION OF OVERBURDEN STRIPPING

We have been rewarded with some important discoveries in an area which had not previously revealed anything by crop marks. The area cleared includes most of field F and all of field G and represents Stage One in the Gravel Extraction Programme.

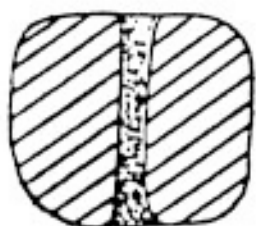
IRON AGE HUT CIRCLE



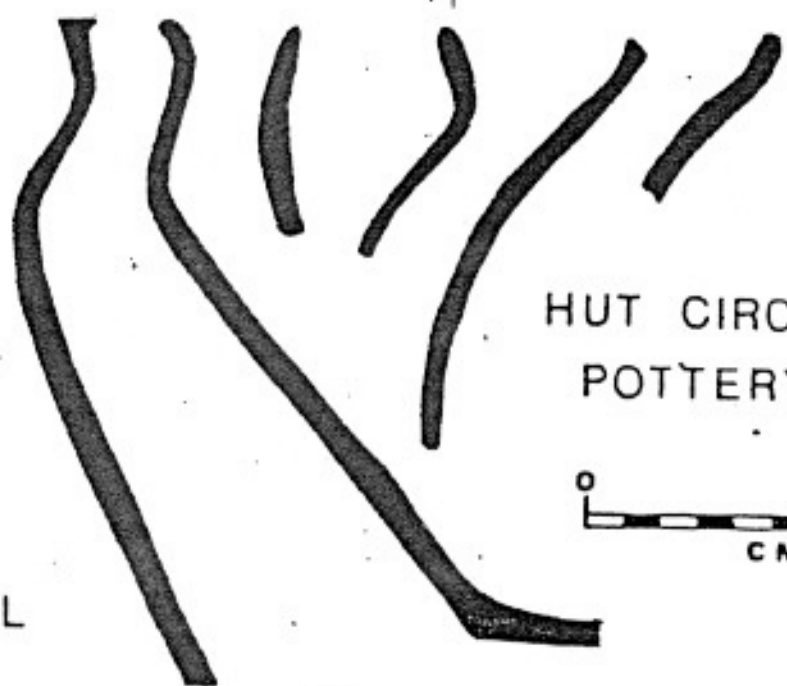
UNEXCAVATED



ACTUAL SIZE



SPINDLE WHORL



HUT CIRCLE
POTTERY



NEOLITHIC

One of the County's largest collections of Middle Neolithic pottery has been rescued from two features, one being a straight thirty metre length of ditch and the other a small pit. Carbon dating and environmental evidence should be forthcoming from samples taken of the pit fill. Both features contained a few flint flake implements similar to those found earlier while excavating on the 'moat' site 100 metres away.

Possibly related to this period were two or three shallow charcoal-rich pits approximately 1 metre in diameter. They were cut about 25 cm into the 'natural' brickearth which had been lightly baked red indicating burning in situ. No flint flakes or pottery were found.

BRONZE AGE

No Beaker sherds or other Early or Middle Bronze Age finds have yet been identified, however, the Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age is represented by a deep clay-lined pit which contained several flinty sherds, some of which were very fragile.

IRON AGE

Four features containing Iron Age pottery were recorded in field G - a hut circle, a straight field ditch and two pits.

HUT CIRCLE

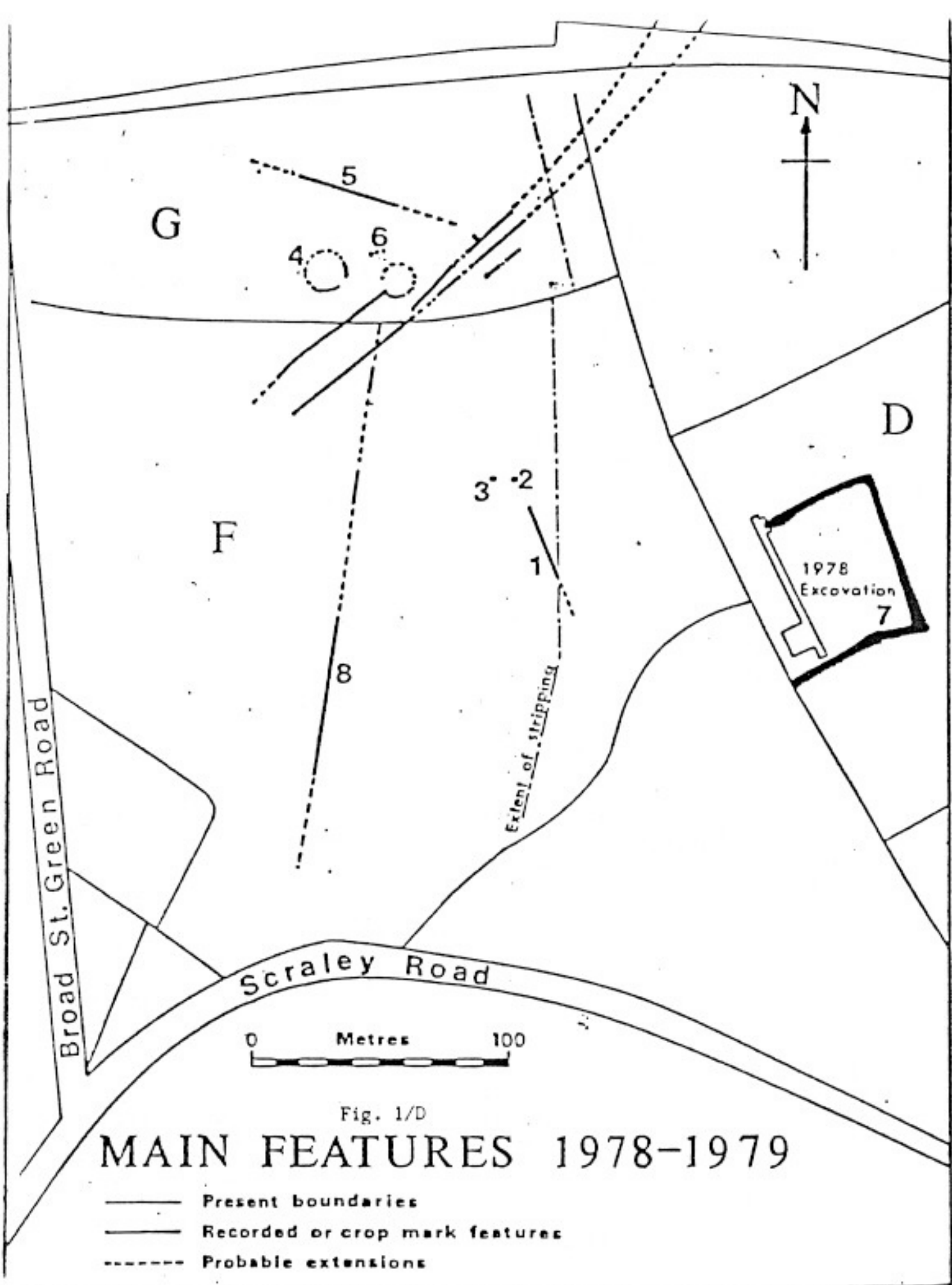
Limited time and resources allowed only a third of the hut circle to be fully examined. (Fig 1/C)

The drip gully ditch was unusual for its rather large diameter (16 metres) and also in the way it was interrupted frequently and neatly along its length.

Near to, and at the centre, were two small post holes which seemed insufficient to have held roof bearing timbers. Also at the centre, and on what must have been the top of the brickearth subsoil, was a concentration of pebbles which could have formed a plinth for a much more substantial post. No other post holes were observed in the section examined nor were any found outside the entrance. Possible evidence of roof timbers was recognised in the form of small holes at approximately 50 cm intervals around the outside edge of the gully in one section excavated.

On the north and south sides of the circle the gully showed signs of disturbance. This could be interpreted as a recut but its shallow depth and patchy nature suggests that it could have been disturbance caused by the collapse of the hut's roof.

Understandably, the butt ends adjacent to the east facing entrance produced the bulk of the finds. This contrasts with a section excavated opposite the entrance which did not produce one sherd. In addition to pottery, fragments of triangular loom weights and a spindle whorl were found. The hand-made pottery is comparable with types from the Little Waltham settlement site where these were dated between 300 BC and 50 BC. Decoration is limited to finger impressions on rims although there are sherds of a black sandy fabric with haphazard thin incised lines.



1:Neolithic ditch 2:Neolithic pit 3:Bronze Age pit 4:Iron Age hut circle

5:Iron Age ditch 6:Iron Age pits 7:Medieval moat 8:Field boundary-Tithe Map

TRACKWAY

The two parallel cropmark ditch lines in field N, forking away from the main N-S trackway, were identified and traced across field G into F.

A tiny fragment of pottery, too small to identify, is the only find from either of these ditches. Part of a ring ditch that appeared to be joined to one of the 'trackway' ditches was uncovered but then unfortunately destroyed between our visits to the site. It had been hoped that the straight Iron Age ditch would help resolve the 'trackway' dating but again we were not quite able to prove the connection.

One ditch passes within 20 metres of the Iron Age hut circle but no pottery was found in the fill. This negative evidence suggests the two features were not contemporary.

Positive dating must await the discovery of more evidence.

CREMATION BURIAL PIT

A small pit containing charcoal and burnt bone fragments was recorded in field F but no indication of its date was recovered. Later study of the contents may produce the answer.

SUMMARY

Our work has shown that this gravel terrace had been used extensively, although not intensively, by man for over 4000 years, taking advantage of the good natural drainage for crops and the nearby salt marsh for grazing. It is likely that the Iron Age inhabitants were involved in the seasonal extraction of salt from the estuary although only one possible piece of briquetage was found in the hut area.

A basic chronological sequence for the crop marks is beginning to emerge although it must remain conjectural until more positive evidence is recovered.

This is the order - the trackway (?Bronze Age) - a system of rectangular fields (Middle Iron Age through into the Roman Period) - abandonment, represented by loss of the rectangular fields (?Saxon) - present field layout (?Early Medieval).

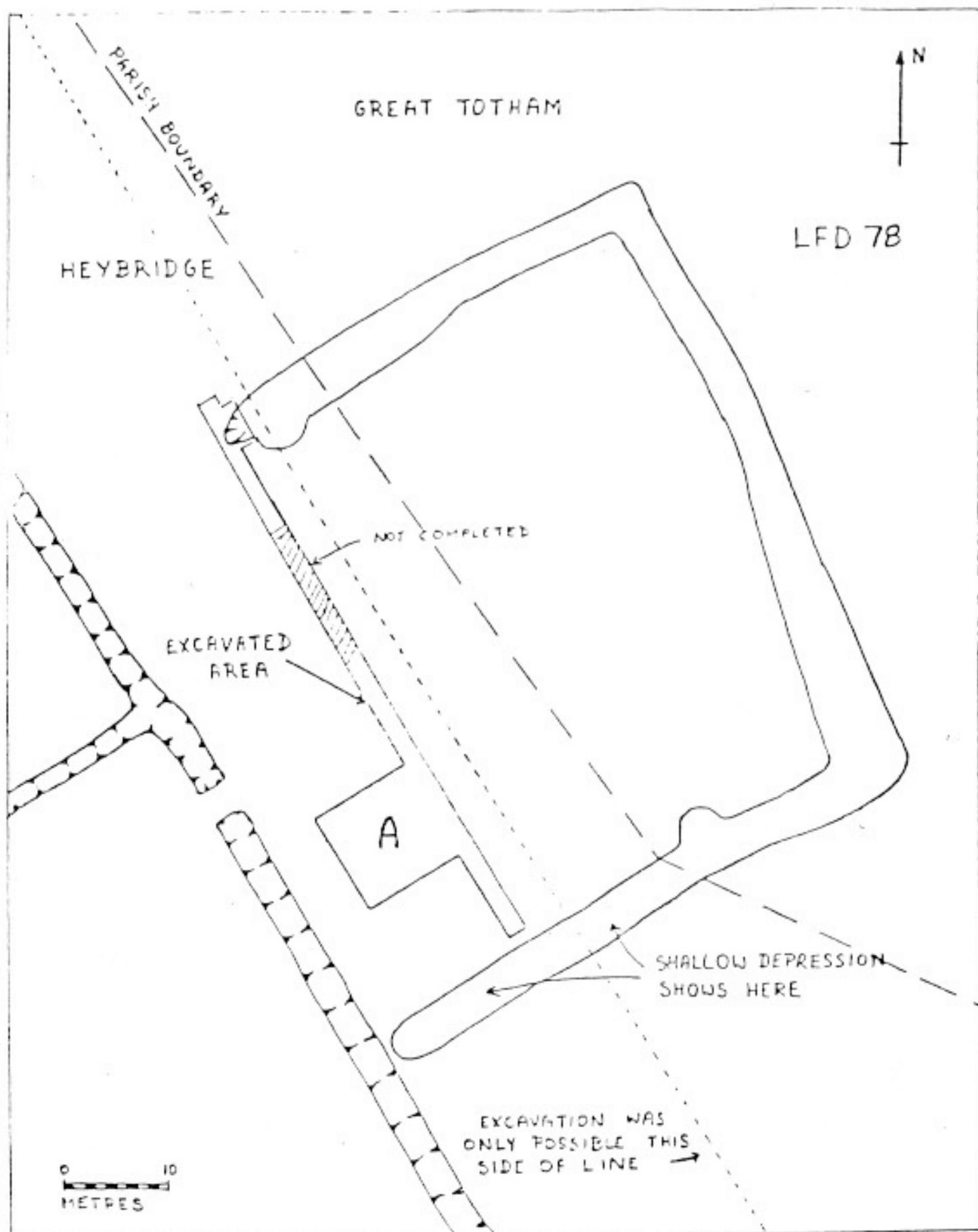
The machine stripping of the topsoil showed that the hut circle was probably isolated as a settlement of this period would have produced a mass of pottery and this was not evident here.

Considering some of the difficulties faced during the year - which included the driest autumn and the worst winter for some time, the results have been encouraging. Mr Rees, farmer of the fields to the north of Lofts, has generously offered to leave an area available to the Group for a whole year. This will enable us to excavate a selected area in detail.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the gravel company, Contractors Aggregates, and the farmers, Mr Hughes and Mr Rees, for their permission to carry out our work on the site.

The Essex County Council archaeological section have provided invaluable help in all aspects of the work. This included finance for machine stripping on the moat excavation, the loan of tools and equipment, and useful advice during the fieldwork and post-excavation work.



SKETCH PLAN, LOFTS FARM 'MOAT' SITE. TRANSPOSED FROM
Fig. 2/A AIR PHOTOGRAPHS M.A.G. 1978

LOFTS FARM PROJECT 1978 A MOAT SITE EXCAVATION

Between the 30th September, 1978 and the 8th October, 1978 Maldon Archaeological Group undertook an excavation at Lofts Farm, Great Totham. Its purpose was to discover basic information about a site which hitherto had been known only as a rectangular shaped crop mark, due for destruction by gravel extraction.

We are indebted to Mr. Hughes, the farmer of Lofts, and Contractors Aggregates, the gravel company, for allowing us to work on the site. For professional advice, loan of most tools and material and finance to pay for machine removal of topsoil we are indebted to Michael Eddy and the Essex County Council, Archaeological Section. Contractors Aggregates kindly back-filled our excavation without charge. During the week thirty different people assisted for at least half a day each. This included invaluable help from Wickford members of the Billericay Archaeological & Historical Society, and Colchester Archaeological Group.

The site is situated on a gravel terrace which stretches along much of the north side of the Blackwater Estuary. On modern maps the Heybridge-Great Totham parish boundary and the 25ft contour are both shown cutting across our enclosure and I now believe they are both related to our site. The former bends at one edge of one side of the 'moat' and the latter probably represents the lowest 'safe' height above the pre-sea wall flood plain.

The only documentary evidence we have discovered so far has been found in the enclosure and tithe awards and their associated maps which date to the early 19th century. Just 250 yds north-west of our 'moat' site lies the present Lofts Farm which was also probably moated, and is shown clearly on the Chapman & Andre map of 1777 in its present position. A rental of 1441 is the earliest reference we have found of La Loftes, as it was called. Later documents indicate that Lofts was an estate of some size (over 100 acres) and had assumed some importance.

The excavation was unhindered by rain and, rather surprisingly for the time of year, we were confronted not by mud but by a concrete hard layer of brickearth under the topsoil. Potatoes growing in the field covered threequarters of the site and this dictated the positioning of our trench.

Due to a very unscientific law, that often seems to work against archaeologists, we were unable to identify any man-made features, other than the moat, until the last hour of the last day. These were shallow pits and a stoney sloping surface and are in the part of the trench shown as incomplete on the sketch plan.

Finds collected during the week do give us that basic information which we were seeking and therefore made the excavation a success.

The activities of Stone Age man are represented by the two or three flint flake implements discovered. This is not enough to indicate a settlement but represents a scatter which one might expect to find in any field if one looked carefully enough.

In the brickearth, immediately below the topsoil, was a concentration of tile and pottery sherds which provided us with the best indication of the site's type and first occupation. This pottery has a rough sandy grey fabric and is dated tentatively to the 14th century by comparison with pottery from other Essex medieval sites. Some, but very little, of the better quality glazed pottery of the same period was found. Later post-Medieval types of pottery were also poorly represented as well as this level. Not one sherd has been identified as being earlier than this rough grey pottery (i.e. no Roman or Saxon).

We were able to extend our trench over the north length of the 'moat' to reveal a butt end and hence the enclosure entrance. It appeared to have been backfilled with gravel and contained a lot of 16th-17th century broken brick. Four sherds, the most recent being late 18th or early 19th century, were also in the fill.

The shape and size of the enclosure, and the finds we have collected, indicate that the site was typical of the small moated homesteads which came into being around 1300. It was a period in which England's population was expanding and the demand for more agricultural land led to the clearance and occupation of land not used before. Chapman & Andre show woodland adjacent to our site in 1777. Most moated homesteads in Essex came into being between about 1250 and 1320 (see *Fieldwork in Local History* by W.G. Hoskins). Moats probably served several functions which could have included defence, drainage control and the control of animals. Current research suggests that moats at this time were considered fashionable and enabled their owners to keep up with the Jones (De Veres).

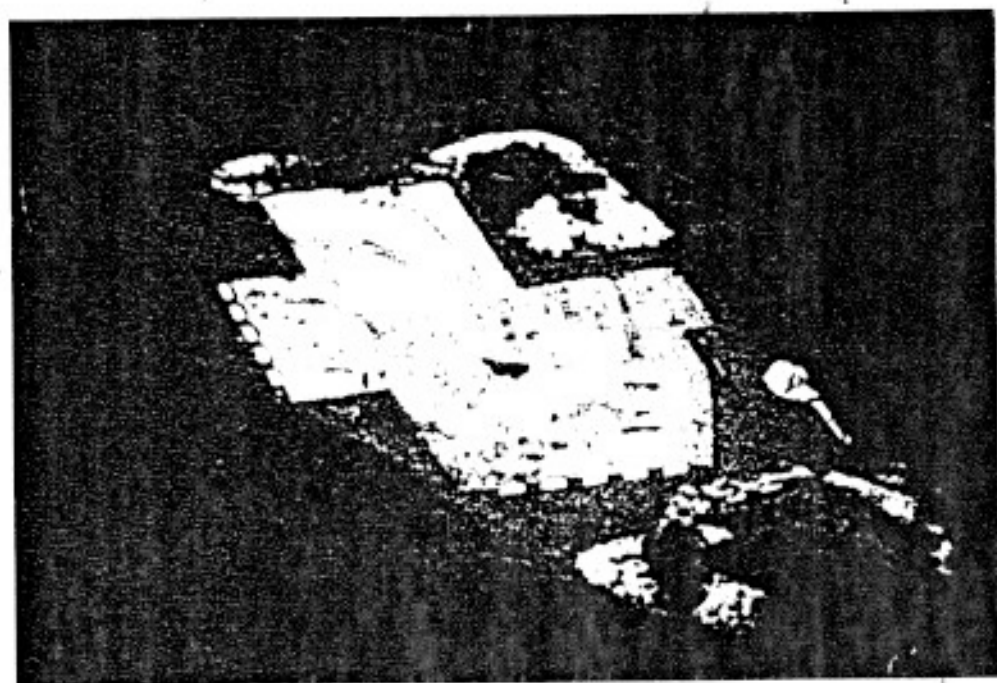
Although our excavation failed to reveal foundations we can expect a building to have existed somewhere within the 'moat' and it may have lasted long enough to have brick additions in the 16th or 17th century. These could easily have been chimneys. The moat, which may well have outlasted any enclosed buildings, was filled in during the late 18th or early 19th century but part of one side was left as a pond. This section, which we did not excavate, still shows today as a dip in the field much more distinctly than any other part of the moat, excluding the ditch and hedge on the west side.

Over the coming year documentary research and field walking will be continued by M.A.G. in the hope of uncovering more clues. Next autumn, after this coming year's wheat crop, the site will be required by the gravel diggers. It is our hope that we will have a chance to recognise any building foundations or any other features when this takes place and that we will have time to plot and examine them. A full report of this excavation will not be put together until the site has been destroyed but processing and drawing are already underway.

A special thanks is due to M.A.G. members who put in more than one day on the site, Dave and Jackie Gustard, Tony Froom, Malcolm and Frances Billinge, Pauline and Geoffrey Clark, Susan Matten, Betty Parker, Brian Semmonds (Wickford) Janet and David Eacersall, Pauline and David Neild, and to John Bailey (Photographs) Richard Hansen (Finds) and Patricia Ryan for the documentary research.

MAGIC5116, MCMLXXVIII

IRON
AGE
HUT
CIRCLE



LFN
EXCAVATION

LFN
'BARROW'



This report describes the preliminary results of work carried out by Maldon Archaeological Group between July 1979 and December 1980 in the vicinity of Loft's Farm, Great Totham (TL 86670906) which will be quarried for gravel within the next few years. Previous work on the site and a historical background are described in a similar account printed by the Group in July 1979. Since this time we have recorded visits to the area on 95 days, expended at least 160 man/days of excavation and observation, and taken over 500 colour transparencies as record photographs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Group wishes to thank Contractors Aggregates for their co-operation and permission to work on the land and also their donation towards the costs of the Project. We are also indebted to Mr Rees of Little Braxted Hall for allowing us to keep the excavation trench open throughout the year and available at weekends. The author would also like to thank Mr and Mrs Hughes of Loft's Farm for allowing easy access for tools and equipment to the excavation.

A grant to pay for topsoil stripping was awarded by Maldon District Council, who also assisted by loaning us surveying equipment.

Through the period Essex County Council Archaeological Section have given invaluable advice and practical help, particularly the assistance of six full-time archaeologists made possible by a County Council grant.

EXCAVATION (Fig 3/A)

A stratigraphically important element in the crop mark complex in field 'N' was kindly left uncultivated by Mr Rees to allow M.A.G. to carry out a detailed excavation.

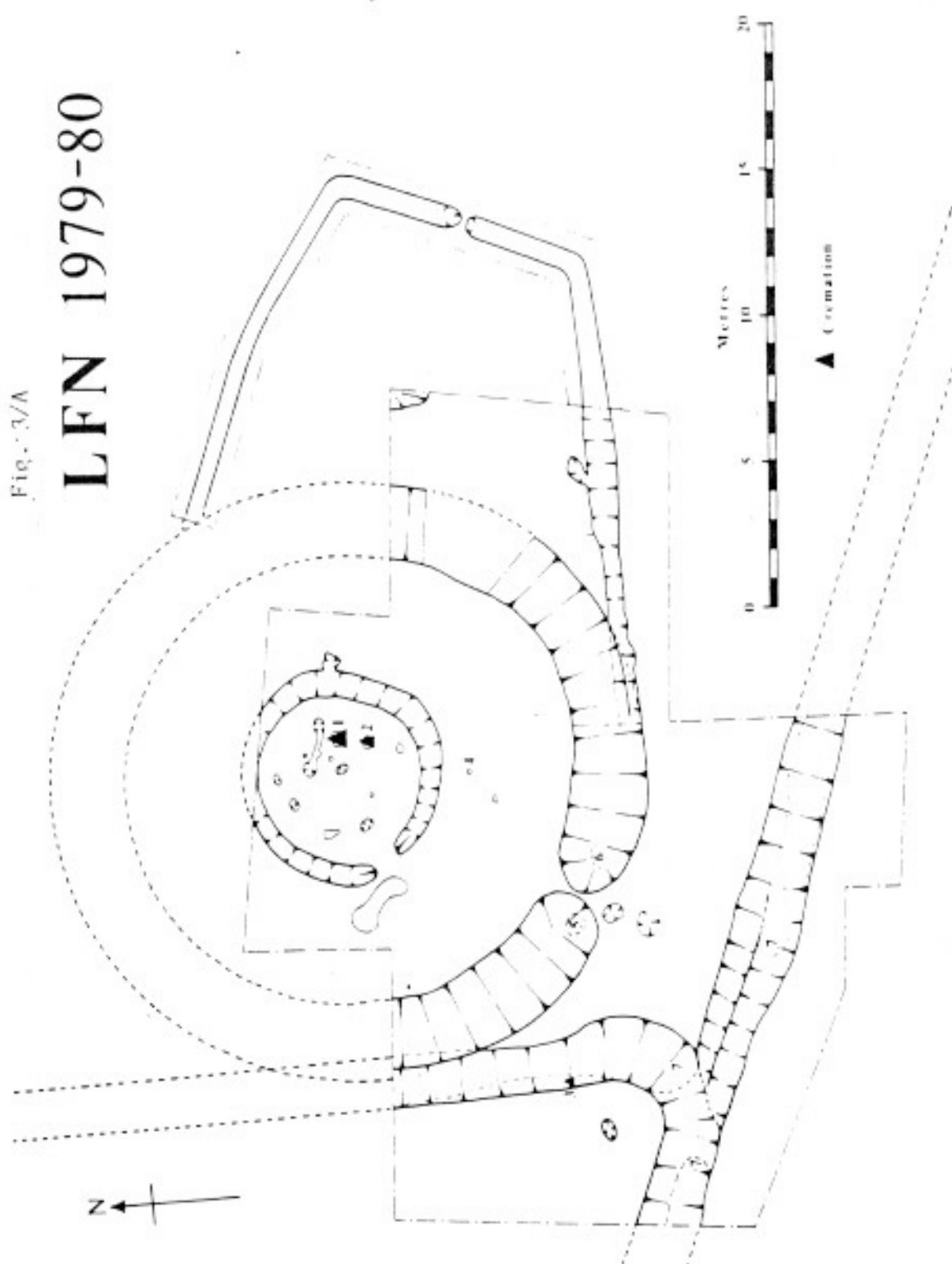
In September 1979 approximately 400 sq. metres of topsoil were removed by machine to uncover parts of three or four crop mark features. Eleven months later this trench was extended to include another crop mark and also more of a newly discovered ring ditch.

The main features were concentric ring ditches with south-east facing "entrances", three cremation burials, an enclosure with a narrow east facing "entrance" and two field ditches. The west field ditch and the east enclosure clearly post-dated the outer ring ditch.

Cremation 1 was the deepest and, unlike the other two, was not associated with an urn. However, some of the charcoal with the burnt bone fragments suggest a wooden vessel may have been involved with the burial. The remains of Cremation 2 were only 30 cm. below the modern surface and are a remarkable survival. It is probable that other cremations have been destroyed by the erosive effect of centuries of ploughing. This interpretation was strengthened by the presence of several urn sherds around the site.

Fig. 3/A

LFN 1979-80



SITE SEQUENCE

Initial study of the finds and results indicate the following Sequence:

PHASE 1 : A barrow, comprising the ring ditches around Cremation 1, was constructed in the early or middle Bronze Age. Two small post holes, one containing a Beaker sherd were found within the centre circle. The possibility of a central structure is hinted at by the size and form of the inner ditch. Although other burials were placed nearby, the deep outer ditch was allowed to silt up and was eventually lost.

PHASE 2 : A field system was laid out in the Iron Age. It would appear that remains of the barrow were still visible since field boundaries were positioned to include the monument in the corner of a field. The east enclosure ditch may have been dug at this time to utilize remnants of the barrow for some agricultural purpose, although it could equally represent the last phase of the site's ritual significance.

PHASE 3 : Three separate cuts of the field ditches were discernable, the last of which was Romano/British and involved the creation of new field entrances by terminating the recuts in butt ends and spreading gravel over the old silted ditches. It seems unlikely that this position for an entrance would have been chosen if any trace of the barrow remained.

PHASE 4 : This field system eventually fell out of use and no trace of it can be recognised in the field layout that we have today.

OBSERVATION OF OVERBURDEN STRIPPING

The quarry pit has now encompassed all the fields south of Lofts Farm, i.e. A, B, D, F, G and H on the plan, although most of F and G have been reinstated as farmland.

Inevitably, archaeological evidence would be destroyed in our absence, but it was hoped that numerous lunchtime visits would be sufficient to record an outline of the early fields which will eventually relate to dated features elsewhere on the site.

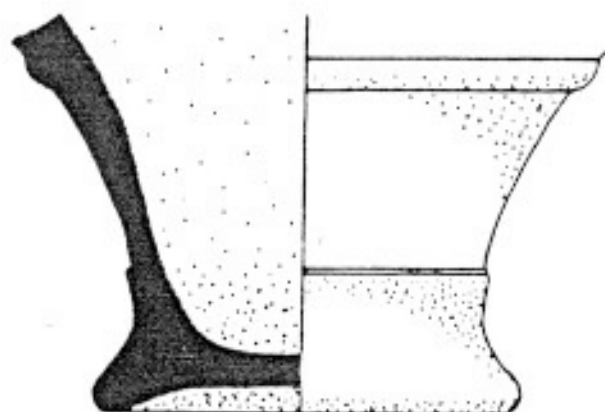
Features recorded included small lengths of field ditches, one straight 28 metre side and two round corners of an 'enclosure' (9 on Fig 3/C), the bottom of the MEDIEVAL 'moat' and a large POST MEDIEVAL pit containing burnt red earth. The precision with which the 'enclosure' was dug and the nature of the fill tempts one to postulate a ROMAN origin, despite the absence of any finds. A small shallow pit was the only prehistoric feature that could be dated by its contents which were NEOLITHIC sherds and struck flint flakes (2 on Plan). The most interesting of the ditches were small parallel lengths of ditch in field 'E' (10 on Fig 3/C) which clearly continue the parallel ditches visible in the crop mark photographs entering the threatened fields from the north-west. Having identified approximately a 1 km. in length, it seems probable that it formed part of a trackway or road to the ancient settlement or port of Heybridge, less than 2 km. to the south-west.



'Beaker' sherd

Bucket urn sherd

The above were in association with the Bronze Age 'barrow'



POTTERY

0 50 100 mm

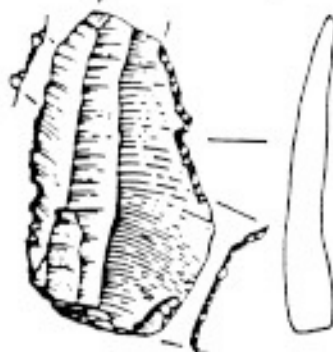
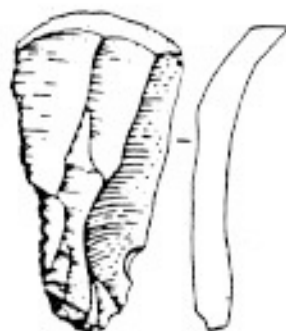
A hand-made late Iron Age ('Belgic') base

FLINT



Only one of these arrowhead pieces was found stratified and came from the outer barrow ring ditch.

Actual size.



It has been noticed that the shape of this flint closely resembles part of the profile of the pot above. If this is not coincidental our discovery is important and has far-reaching implications.

SUMMARY

The latest discoveries may not have the same impact as the earlier Neolithic pottery or Iron Age hut circle, but the results are certainly of equal importance in understanding this historic landscape.

The chronological sequence of the crop marks suggested previously remains unchanged and, in some respects, is further substantiated by recent evidence. The sequence in broad outline is:

The barrows and main trackway (? Bronze Age) - a system of rectangular fields (Iron Age through into the Roman period) - abandonment or complete change of farming technique (? Saxon) - present field layout (? Early Medieval).

Recent changes in the method of topsoil stripping in the gravel pit has made it unlikely that we shall see such clear traces of early features in future. This emphasises the importance of prior excavation in selected areas before they are destroyed by gravel extraction. However, with continued interest and active support we can still look forward to achieving all the principal objectives.

FINDS

The finds will be deposited with Colchester & Essex Museum as the full reports are written, but can be made available now for inspection by prior arrangement with Paul Brown, 152, Farnbridge Road, Maldon, Tel. Maldon (0261) 57315.

This report would not be complete without a special mention of all the volunteers who have helped in the work and especially Brian Chinnery, Elaine Brown, Malcolm and Frances Billinge, Dave Gustard, David and Richard Jennings, Geoff Clark, Nobby Clark, Andrew Jones, Gillea Crossley, Anna Cronin and Tony Froom.

The following businesses have assisted the Group by allowing us special discounts: D N W Orriss - machine stripping, Reeve & Son Ltd - wheelbarrows, H Springett - photographic materials, Tesco Ltd - packaging (paper bags).

Appendix

The cremated bone from the barrow's 'primary' burial has been kindly examined by Dr. Judson Chesterman of Sheffield University. He was unable to identify any human bone in the sample and believed them to have been mostly of pig.

Thanks to a grant from the Lloyds Bank Equipment Fund we have been able to obtain a carbon date from the small quantity of charcoal found with the bone. Harwell Low Level Measurements Laboratory have provided the following results:-

A. Code Number	HAR - 6391		
B. Conventional Radiocarbon Age	(i) YEARS BP	3540±120	
	(ii) BP-1950	1590bc	
C. Stable Isotope Ratio $\delta^{13}C$		-27.9 ‰	

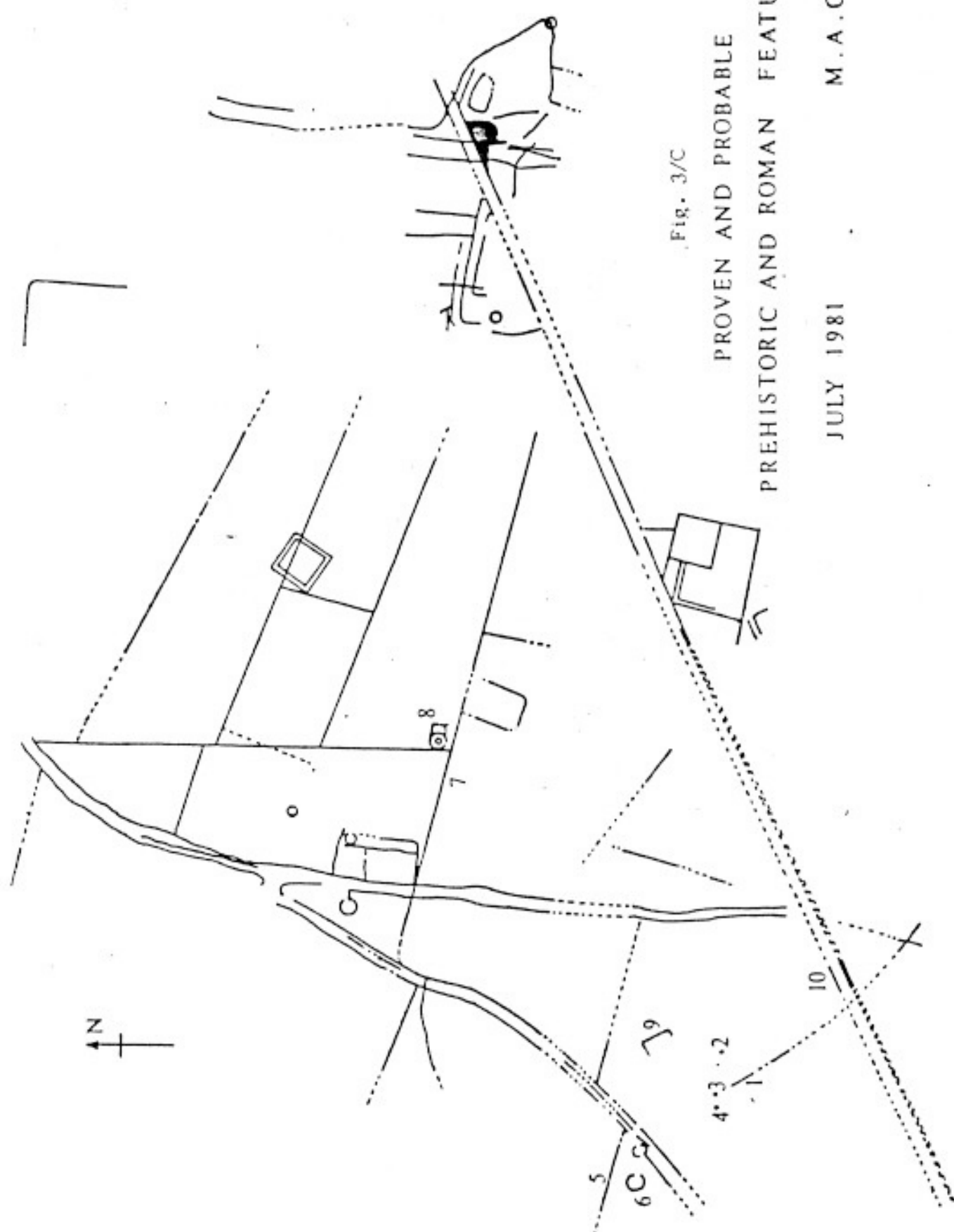


Fig. 3/C

PROVEN AND PROBABLE
PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN FEATURES

JULY 1981

M.A.G.

LOFTS FARM PROJECT

MALDON ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP



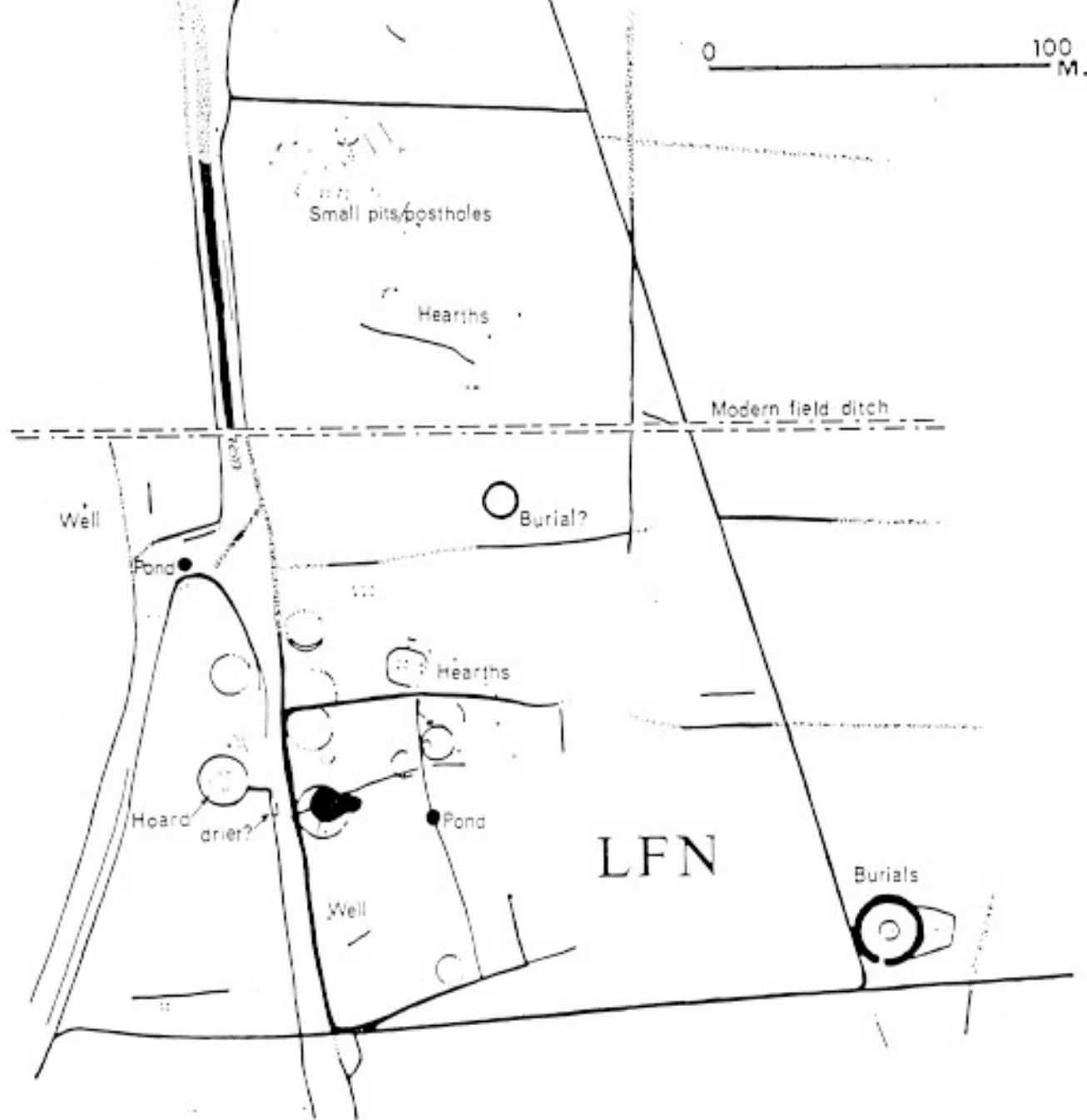
LOFTS FARM PROJECT

LFQ



Fig 4/A

0 100 M.



The Lofts Farm Gravel Pit has now extended another forty acres to the north, and in doing so has probably uncovered the site's most concentrated and prolific archaeological remains. This interim report gives a summary of the work and then discusses certain discoveries in more detail.

Most of the 1981-2 discoveries were the result of a selective excavation at the centre of the field 'N'. The rest came as a result of observation of topsoil stripping. Frequently last year we were unable to investigate in detail all that was revealed and were forced to be selective. We chose to concentrate on obvious structures, e.g. ring ditches and post structures. Consequently many small, less obvious pits have been lost, unrecorded.

BRONZE AGE. (2,000 BC - 500 BC).

Three independent features were noted, a small well, a bucket urn burial and an eleven metre ring ditch. Although not proven by finds this was probably the last remnant of a barrow burial. More features may be attributed to the Bronze Age when all the pottery has been thoroughly examined.

IRON AGE. (500 BC - 43 AD).

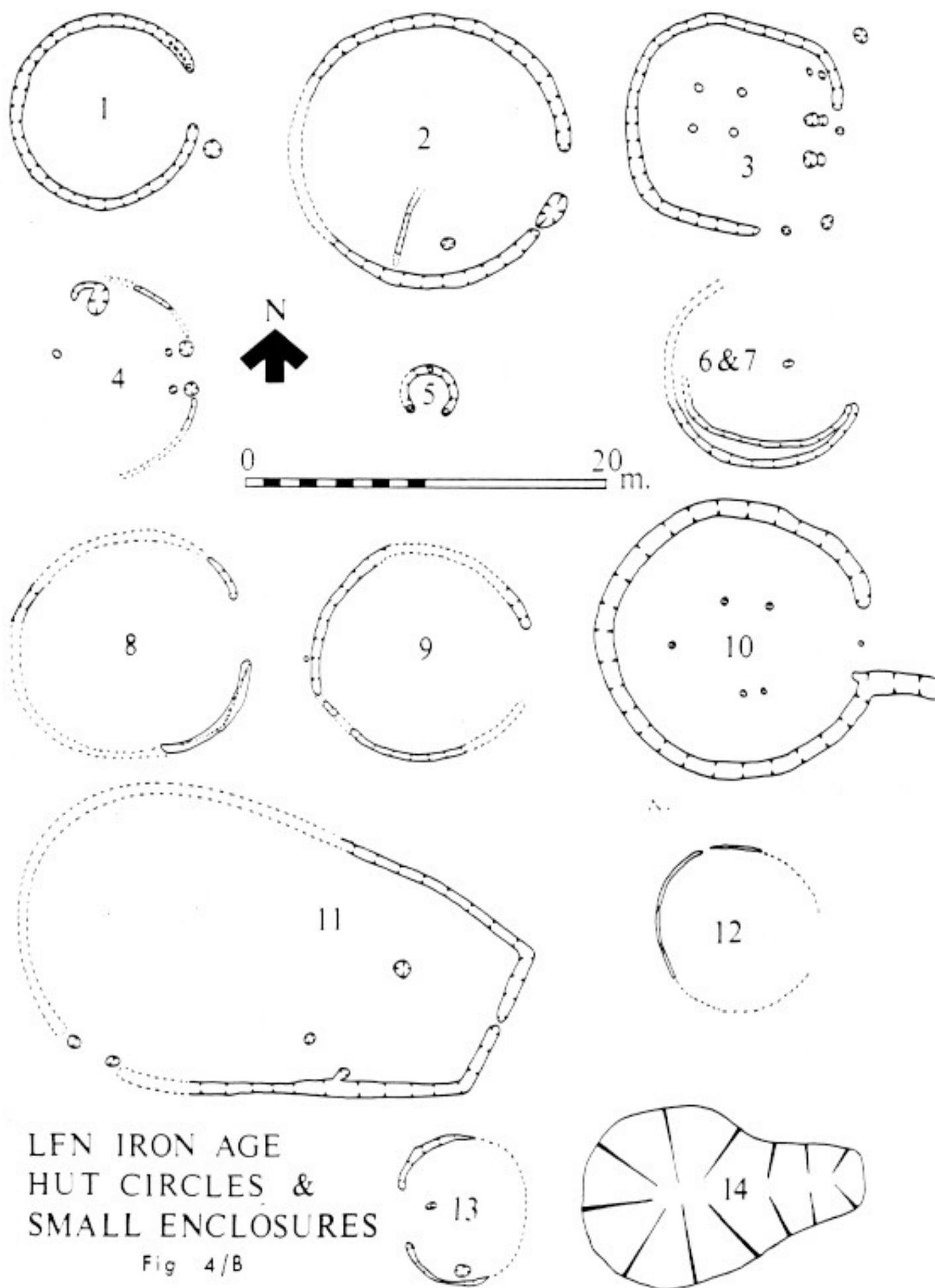
The Iron Age occupation is probably two settlements. The northern one, which is the slightly higher and earlier of the two, is characterised by small groups of pits and hearths. Traces of only one 7m. diameter ring ditch were found in this area. Nearby a rectangular posthole structure, measuring approx. 5m x 8m was planned but did not produce finds. Also in this vicinity were several small oval pits which were not excavated. Four post structures were also found in this settlement. The pottery was coarse, fragile and devoid of decoration. From such fragmentary remains it is difficult to understand the extent, or nature of the settlement represented.

The habitation to the south, with its fourteen ring ditches and distinctive pottery styles, is much easier to understand. This was a farming settlement spanning the last two or three centuries before the Claudian Invasion. Probably only one or two of the hut features existed at any one time. They varied in diameter from 2.5m to 15m and most had an east-facing entrance. One of the later (Belgic) structures is represented by a large pear shaped depression rather than a ring ditch.

An enclosure approx. 90m x 50m is aligned onto part of the trackway and envelopes some of the huts. It was extended and sub-divided in its later use. Apparently access was from the east, not from the trackway.

Other features of note were a 5 metre diameter pond, a small well and four post structures. An elongated pit was found adjacent to an area of burning in the top of a silted trackway ditch. There was some evidence to suggest these may have been linked by a small tunnel and used together as a drier of some kind. No other similar areas of burning of pits were identified elsewhere. In two places at the bottom of the late enclosure ditches, we recovered broken 'Belgic' pots with traces of burnt bone fragments, reminiscent of cremation burials. The only other burial evidence from this southern area was an isolated (unstratified) patch of charcoal and specks of cremated bone.

Inside the circumference of a 'pre-Belgic' hut drainage gully we excavated 'en bloc' a small hoard of bronze pieces. We suspect that this hoard was deposited by a smith at a much later date than the hut, at around the end of our settlement's life, i.e. early 1st Century AD.



ROMAN. (43 AD - 410 AD)

All the Roman evidence to the date has been related to the trackway, and the field ditches aligned on it. A 5m diameter pond, situated inside the trackway junction, produced Roman sherds. Two coins, one of Antoninus Pius (138 - 161 AD) and the other a Barabourus Radiate (Circa 300 AD), were discovered by the use of a metal detector over and near to the trackway.

THE TRACKWAY

This most prominent feature ran north/south, right across the site. For much of its length it consists of at least three ditches. Two of these were less than three metres apart, resulting in a profile similar to the straight trackway to the south of Lofts Farm and to a Roman road recorded in Colchester - (A.F. Hall. JBAA 3S Vol. VII 1942 53 -70). Despite the lack of stratigraphic evidence, I am confident that this configuration is not accidental. It is interesting to consider possible causes. Does this smaller inner ditch mark off a footway? Is it derived from a Roman scheme to reduce or standardise tracking widths?

Several other phases were visible including a series of protrusions on the east side. These appeared to line up with field ditches. The trackway probably existed before the first early Iron Age Settlements and may well have survived until the 18th century AD. There is evidence for a link between the vestiges of this ancient trackway, and an existing farm track which is used at present, and extends northwards from our site. If this is so, and the ancient and modern farm tracks originally formed part of a continuous route, then the existing modern track may very well have been in use continuously for 2,500 years.

HUT CIRCLES

It is probable that most circles, if not all, represented a hut of some kind. The pottery has not yet been carefully examined but it is already possible to tentatively arrange them chronologically as in FIGURE 4/8. Circle '1' was a foundation trench for upright timbers. It had a hearth just outside the entrance. The ditch of Hut '2' was probably a drainage gully around the outside. The hut had an internal hearth and partition wall trench. The four post structure in ENCLOSURE '3' is probably not contemporary. HUT '8' had the charcoal remains of a ground timber plate. This beam slot design probably applies to huts '6', '7' and '9', but not to '10' which was an outside drainage gully. The ditches of '4', '12' and '13' were very narrow and most likely housed a wall of 'stake' like timbers.

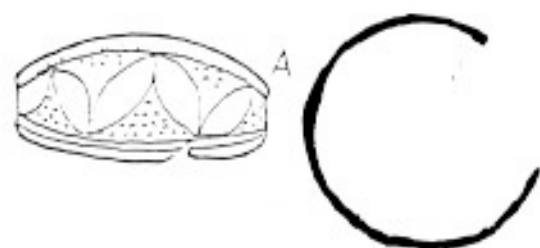
Much of '11' is conjectural and probably does not represent one building. Finds in the excavated sections were few and far between. It is possible that we did not notice this late re-cut when excavating the top of the comparatively deep 'barrow' ditch. This suggested plan would explain why post holes were recorded cutting through the top fills of the 'barrow' ditch, each side of the causeway entrance.

Only one ('10') of these circles were clearly visible in the best cropmark photographs.

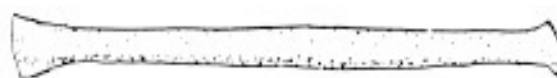
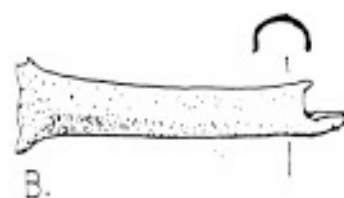
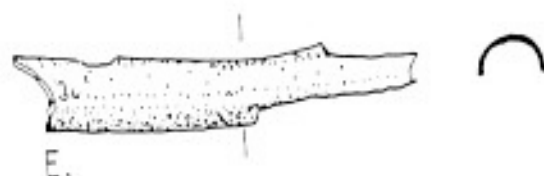
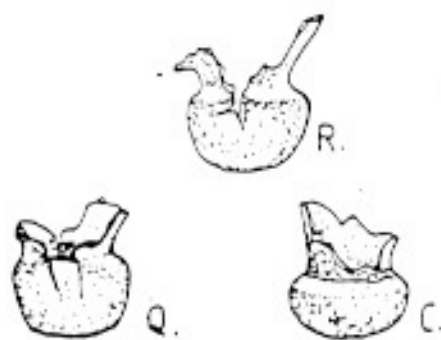
BRONZE OBJECTS FROM HOARD

COLCHESTER & ESSEX MUSEUM

Laboratory Record



Drawings by A.M.Bojko & P.N.B.



SCALE 1:1 approx

HOARD

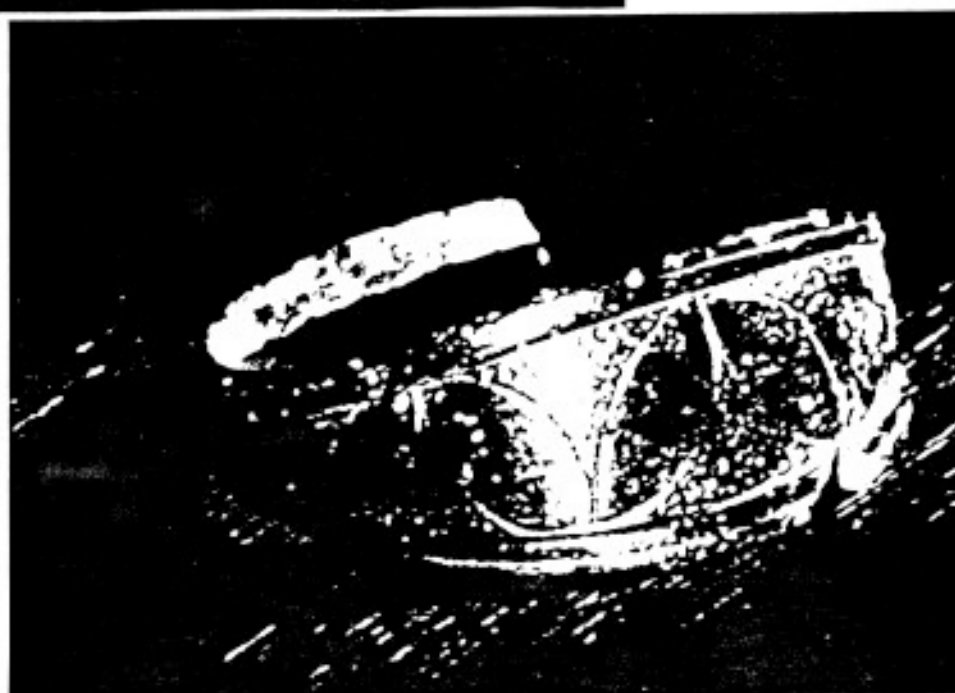
The hoard was entirely within 4 cm of the top-soil and may well have been dug away by our own hired JCB had we not been alerted to its presence by the use of a metal detector by a Group member before machine stripping began. We excavated the delicate pieces in a "block" which could then be examined in laboratory conditions at Colchester Castle Museum. This was achieved by digging all round the hoard, making a wooden box to size, filling the edges with plaster of paris and then undercutting. Before its 17 mile trip to Colchester we were able to obtain an excellent X-ray picture of the hoard from our local hospital. Several full-size prints from this X-ray were provided at a nominal charge by Maldon's main photographic business. These have been of great assistance in later examination and research work.

The hoard consisted mainly of 'Bredon' type IVa scabbard chapes and U-section scabbard bindings. Also included was a small bronze ring. Part of the flat surface of this had been widened to take punched decoration in the form of interlocking arcs in La Tene style. A ball of grey substance, found with the metal objects, has yet to be identified.



X-RAY

RING



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Again we are indebted to Mr. Rees who allowed us to excavated at the centre of a cultivated field prior to the gravel extraction, and also to Contractors Aggregates who have provided assistance to us wherever possible.

The increase in discoveries has meant a greater need for expert assistance and advice. This has been freely provided by The Essex County Council Archaeological Section, Colchester & Essex Museum, and Stephen Greep of Verulamium Museum.

We are grateful for the financial help given to us, during this period, by the following:-

Maldon District Council, Essex County Council and Lloyds Bank plc.

None of these discoveries would have been made had it not been for the hours or toil put in by many members and friends of the Group. These include:-

David & Richard Jennings, Gilles Crossley, Elaine Brown, Stephen Nunn, Brian Chinnery, Geof and Pauline Clark, W.J.R. Clark, Anna Cronin, Betty Watts, Philip Brown, Lesley Bermingham, Pat Ryan, Betty Andrews, Mark Harvey, Allen Wyatt, Len Sargent, Colin Langmead, Bob Adams, Kelvin Adkins, Rowland Flook. David Hurd, Mike Stitchbury, Mark Billage, Dave Gustard, Brian Milton, Tony Doe.

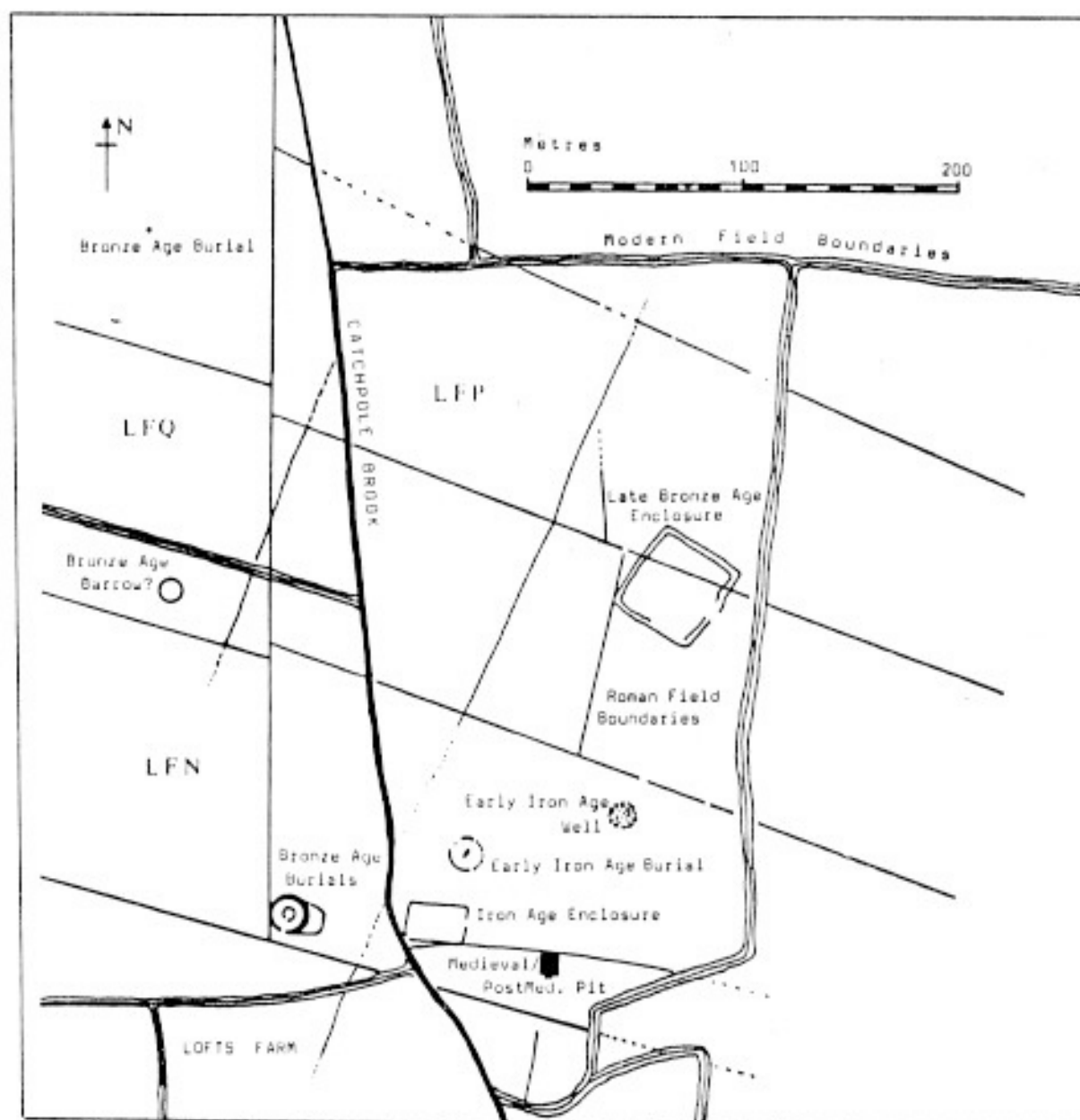
Doug Renton, worked full time on the site for several weeks. He is responsible for the clarification of important features which would otherwise have been lost.

The metal detecting, site observation, recording and excavation carried out by Pat Adkins also made a significant contribution to our knowledge.

Those who have played important parts in the post excavation work include:- Garth Groombridge, Tony Froom, Mike Crellin, Martin O'Connor, Eric Doherty.

Paul N. Brown
Chairman
Maldon Archaeological Group

The Project's original objective, to approximately date all the cropmark elements, was realised in October 1984, when excavation work started on the faint outline of a double-ditched enclosure in field 'LFP'. Pottery indicated a Late Bronze Age date and fortunately, as with many other features recorded over the years, much more than basic dating evidence has been rescued. New discoveries have again come to light during close observation of topsoil stripping and gravel quarrying. Most of these were made in field LFP to the south of the Late Bronze Age settlement and include an Early Iron Age Well, an Early Iron Age 'Barrow Burial', a sub-rectangular Iron Age enclosure and a Medieval or Post-Medieval pit.



THE LATE BRONZE AGE ENCLOSURE

Recognising the potential of the site, Maldon Archaeological Group sought assistance from the Essex County Council Archaeology Section. With the aid of a grant from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission and with co-operation of Contractors Aggregates, the ECC Section continued the excavation through harsh winter months in conjunction with MAG.

The enclosure was double-ditched with a single, east facing entrance. The ditches were irregular and very slight, often only 30 or 40 cm (1ft or 1ft 4in) deep and less than 1m (3ft 3in) wide. Only on the north side were they more substantial, being over 50cm (1ft 7in) deep and up to 1.5m (4ft 11in) wide. Near the south-east corner there was no trace of the inner ditch for a length of approximately 12m (39ft). However, numerous post holes in the area may represent a fence-line or simple structures blocking the gap. If the narrow gap between the ditches had been occupied by spoil and capped by a hedge or fence, an effective barrier would have been provided, preventing animals from getting in or out of the enclosure. The ditches may also have been for drainage.

Situated just to the west of the centre of the enclosure were the postholes of a single sub-circular building, about 10m (33ft) in diameter, with traces of a porch to the south-east. This building contained a number of internal pits and post holes and was surrounded, particularly on its south and west sides, by a scatter of similar pits and post holes. Some may have been storage pits and it is possible to discern at least two four-post structures, probably also for storage. There seem to be traces of a fence-line separating the central building from the northern part of the enclosure. This fence may have continued a line of post holes which divided the 8m (26ft 3in) wide enclosure entrance, and may have been designed to channel livestock into the northern part of the enclosure, an area with relatively few features.

Finds consisted mainly of pottery with smaller amounts of flintwork and fired clay objects, including a spindle-whorl and a number of fragments of perforated clay slabs. These distinctive slabs are characteristic of Late Bronze Age sites in the Thames valley and are known from sites in the Chelmer valley and Blackwater estuary. A single fragment of bronze, probably part of a socketed axe, was recovered with the aid of a metal detector. A tiny fragment of amber came to light during the analysis of a ditch soil sample.

The Lofts Farm enclosure has provided a considerable addition to the growing body of data relating to the Late Bronze Age in the central Essex river system. The site is a marked contrast to the impressive circular enclosure currently being excavated at Springfield Lyons near Chelmsford. The deep ditch, impressive gate structure and large quantities of bronze casting moulds discovered at the Springfield site clearly indicate its high status. The pottery group from Lofts Farm, together with the environmental data, should be directly comparable with the Springfield evidence, thus providing an opportunity to contrast two different types of contemporary settlement within the same river system.

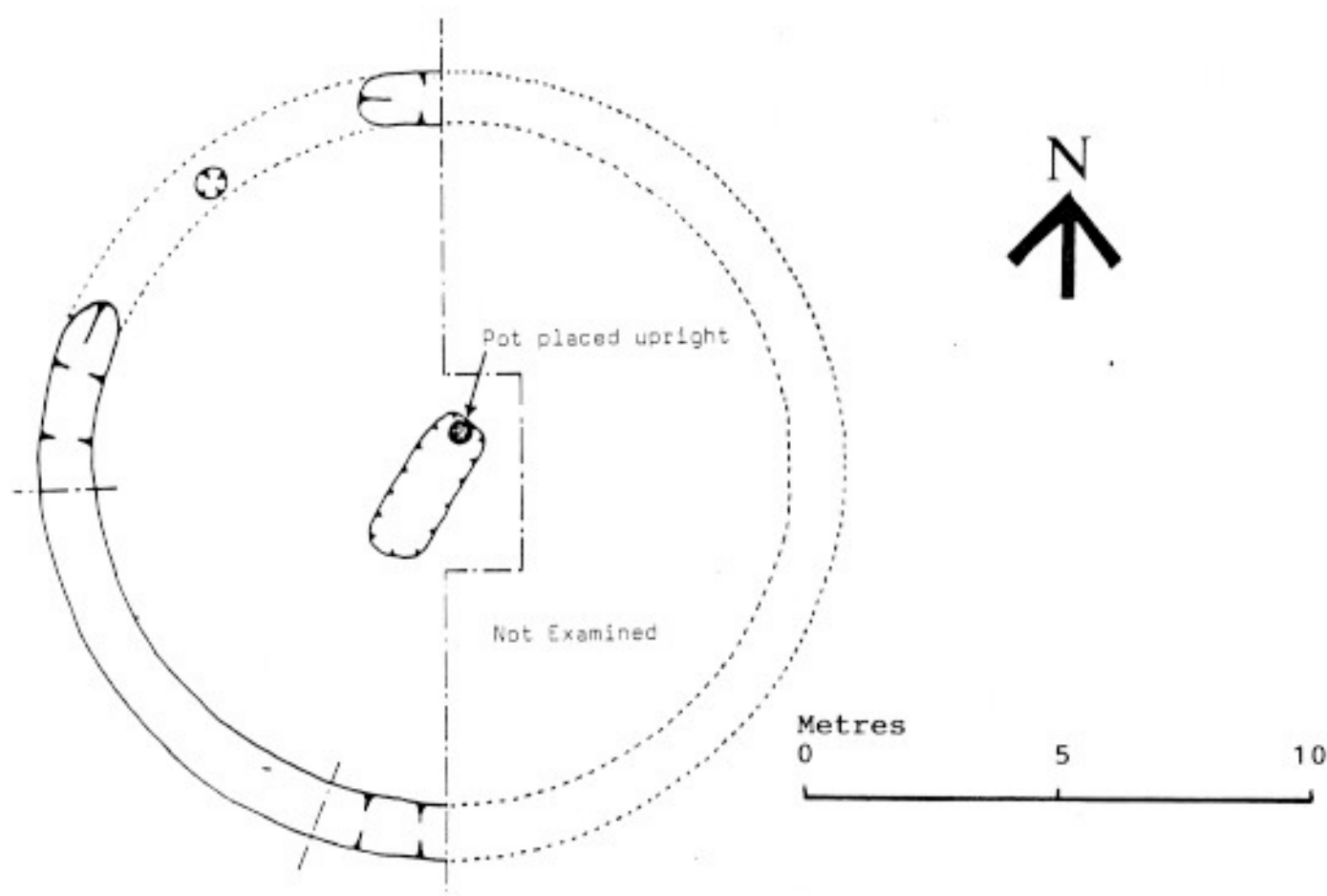
LOFTS FARM 1985

Late Bronze Age Enclosure



Springfield Lyons and two similar enclosures at Mucking in the south of the county have produced considerable evidence for high status Late Bronze Age settlements. Little is known of lower order settlements in Essex, although an extensive Late Bronze Age field system and dispersed settlement was recorded by Southend Museum prior to brickearth extraction at North Shoebury. The recognition and excavation of the Lofts Farm enclosure is therefore of considerable importance. There are no other clear examples of Late Bronze Age rectangular enclosures in Essex, although some of the cropmark sites may be of that date. Further afield, rectangular Late Bronze Age enclosures are suspected in Norfolk, and a general comparison may be drawn with Billingborough, Lincolnshire, although the form of that site appears rather different.

EARLY IRON AGE 'BARROW' BURIAL



EARLY IRON AGE 'BARROW' BURIAL

The 'Barrow' feature consisted of a shallow, flat bottomed, rectangular pit surrounded by a 15m (49ft) diameter ring ditch which was also fairly shallow and flat bottomed. To the north west was a 6.5m (21ft 4in) interruption in the ringditch which must have represented an entrance of some kind. At the mid-point of this 'entrance' was a post hole.

The central pit measured 3.2m (10ft 6in) by 1.1m (3ft 8in) by 30cm (1ft) deep and was aligned 23deg. east of north. At its northern end a large, undecorated, black fabric pot had been placed in an upright position. Unfortunately this pot fell apart when lifted and has yet to be reassembled although it would appear to have been deposited minus its flat base. No other finds came from the pit's fill, which was a clean silty mixture indicating that the pit had never been back filled but rather left open. No actual burial remains came to light although the bottom of the grave pit displayed feint staining. Traces of an earlier phase to the ringditch was just discernable. This may have been a much earlier Bronze Age continuous ringditch 'barrow'. The site is only about ninety metres from the 'barrow' excavated earlier by Maldon Archaeological Group in field LFN.

EARLY IRON AGE WELL

Whilst excavation of the Lofts Farm enclosure was in progress MAG member Pat Atkins recorded features revealed in the topsoil stripping and gravel extraction. Approximately 80m (262ft) south of the Late Bronze Age enclosure, he noticed a large feature containing distinctive Early Iron Age Darmsden-Linton style pottery. This feature was half sectioned and proved to be a well over 2m (6ft 6in) deep. The lower water-logged levels produced numerous fragments of wood including large worked stakes, apparently part of the well's lining and possibly part of a wooden ladder arrangement. The upper levels yielded large quantities of Early Iron Age pottery. This well was closely similar in form and finds to one recorded by Mr Adkins on nearby Chigborough Farm. The water-logged deposits will yield valuable environmental data and the large quantity of Darmsden Linton style pottery will provide an opportunity to study a recently excavated group of this distinctive ceramic style associated with radiocarbon dating evidence.

IRON AGE ENCLOSURE

Very little time could be devoted to the sub rectangular enclosure which was approx. 18m by 20m. Investigation of the interior was not possible and only scant dating evidence came from a couple of small sections of the enclosure ditch.

MEDIEVAL OR POST MEDIEVAL PIT

The Med./PostMed pit is recorded in the hope that an interpretation may be forthcoming. The pit was very regular and measured approximately 11m by 6m. At the centre of its shorter south side was a rectangular protrusion of approx. 1.5m. The fill was a brown clay, providing a few pieces of peg tile and a few iron nails. A narrow trench was extended through the clay and a flat bottom of natural gravel encountered at approx. 300mm. It is possible that our trench missed a deeper section and also that a cropmarked ditch immediately to the north is related to the pit although the only finds from the ditch were Iron Age. It is difficult to envisage the purpose of such a feature in such a position.

CONCLUSION

The Project's rescue fieldwork is now completed although it is likely that nearby farmland will also be quarried for gravel in the future. Despite the considerable increase in recorded evidence the overall interpretation of the Lofts Farm area remains substantially the same as that described in 1979 and shown on page 1/8 of this compilation. The full significance of the Lofts Farm sites must await completion of the detailed post-excavation work and a study of the surrounding landscape including evidence from the growing number of new sites up and down the river valley. The results will undoubtedly add greatly to the understanding of prehistoric peoples in Essex.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The involvement of Essex County Council in the Project is a very welcome advantage and I am indebted to director Nigel Brown for providing the basis of this Intrim Report. Thanks are again due to Contractors Aggregates whose continued co-operation has been vital to our success.

Members and friends who have assisted on site during the past two years include:- Pat and Kelvin Adkins, Elaine Brown, Garth Groombridge, Len Sargent, Tony Doe, Alen Wyatt, Lyn Everett, Stephen Nunn, W.J.R.Clark, Doug Renton, David Philpot, David Jennings, Anna Cronin, Phil Gollin, Pamela Ryan, Ted Meriden, Rachel and Lois Dawson, Mel Kingsley, Brian Chinnery, Helen Blackshaw, Benoit Touffu and Geoff Clark.

It is with much sadness that I record the death, on site, of dear friend and MAG member, Doug Renton. Doug took his interest seriously and put himself out to become a better archaeologist by both study and practical experience alongside the professionals. He will long be missed as a friend and helper and his dedication and example will always be remembered by those who knew him.

PAUL N BROWN

April 1986

