

*An Archaeological Assessment  
on the route of the Humberside  
to Buncefield Pipeline.*

*King's Walden, Hertfordshire*



H-B 41-02



PETROFINA (UK) LTD.

HUMBERSIDE TO BUNCEFIELD PIPELINE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

ASSESSMENT REPORT

WINCH HILL, KING'S WALDEN, HERTFORDSHIRE

by

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERING AND LEISURE

FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY SECTION

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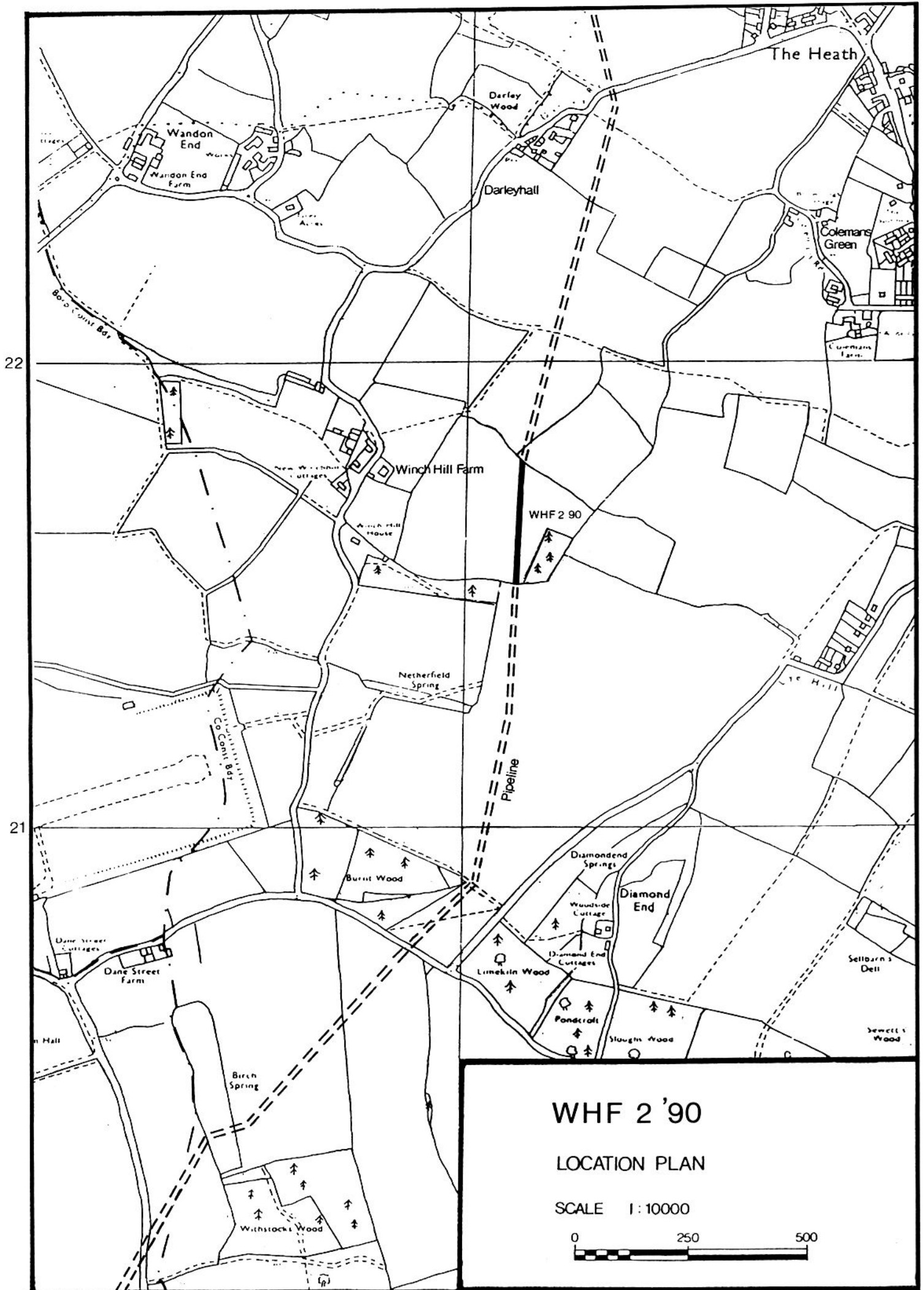
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NB. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and they take full responsibility for them. They are not necessarily the views of the North Hertfordshire District Council.



14  
Fig 1

TL 12 SW

**WINCH HILL FARM, KINGS WALDEN, HERTFORDSHIRE**

**Petrofina Site ref: HB-41-02**

**NHDC (Letchworth Museum) Site ref: WHF-2-90**

**1. Archaeological Background and Introduction**

In January 1990 initial archaeological survey work was undertaken along the proposed route of the Petrofina pipeline across arable fields south of Darleyhall, and to the east of Winch Hill Farm, Hertfordshire. This area was considered worthy of archaeological investigation, since in 1912 the burial of an Anglo-Saxon woman (dated to the sixth century AD) was discovered by workmen in the vicinity of Darleyhall (HCC SMR: No. 1248). The precise location of the burial was not noted at the time, and the possibility of an associated settlement or cemetery remained.

A magnetometer survey conducted by Geophysical Surveys Ltd. (Bradford) failed to indicate the presence of such a site near Darleyhall; however considerable anomalies were recorded near Winch Hill Farm, in field 0070 (see fig. 1).

Accordingly, the NHDC Museum Service Field Archaeology team excavated several trial pits in this area (based on the geophysical survey readout) whilst examining this section of the pipeline route. The results indicated the presence, not of Anglo-Saxon activity, but of a previously unknown Romano-British site, tentatively dated to the first and second centuries AD.

It was recommended in the investigation report (WHF-1-90) that further work would be required in advance of pipeline construction to ascertain the date, character and extent of the site.

**2. Methodology**

In June 1990, the ploughsoil was mechanically stripped from the route of the pipeline across Winch Hill Common, to allow a twenty metre wide access for construction vehicles. During this operation, Ms. J. Lawson (for Wessex Archaeological Trust) observed the area, and reported that several potential features were visible in the centre of field 0070, although the surface was uneven, and still obscured by patches of ploughsoil.

On the 18th June, six members of the NHDC Field Archaeology Section returned to the site and began four weeks of fieldwork, assisted in the first week by four members of the St. Albans' Field Team.

After systematic examination, a relatively dense area of plough-scattered artifacts was located, some fifty five metres from the southern boundary of field 0070.

Consequently this area (21 x 12 metres) was carefully recleaned, first by machine then by hand and the underlying features manually excavated (Area B).

To the north of Area B, a single pit was excavated (Area A, fig. 2). Near the northern field boundary, two amorphous areas of dark soil were recorded and sampled for dating evidence, however the pressure of time did not allow for excavation.

The stripped areas to the north and south of field 0070 were examined, but revealed no further archaeological features, except a comparatively modern drainage sump in the middle of field 2681.

The pipe trench was dug across the area of investigation on the 10th July 1990. It was suspected that some features (rendered invisible on the uneven, plough-damaged surface within the pipeline easement) might be revealed in the walls of the trench. Several archaeological features were distinguished amidst numerous glacial fissures in the chalk, and subsequently recorded and investigated for dateable material.

All features were accurately located, the details given context numbers and described using pro-forma record cards. Field drawings were made, and levels calculated from the Fina spot height marker 134.02 mOD. A photographic record was maintained. The finds and records were then checked and analysed, and illustrations drawn to accompany this interim report.

### 3. Summary of Results

Numerous features were investigated in the main area of excavation (Area B). See fig. 3.

A series of three pits (69, 68 and 27), contained sherds of coarse-ware vessels and fragments of animal bone; and were dateable in a sequence from the late pre-Roman Iron Age (50 BC - AD50) to the second century AD. The final, circular, pit (27) contained a lining of flints as the primary fill and this layer produced a toiletry set of bronze tweezers, a spatula and a pick, which may have been originally linked together by a cord or thong.

Features 34, 91 and 86 were interpreted as post holes, only one of which (91) contained pottery sherds, which were dateable to the late pre-Roman Iron Age. A contemporary pit (37) was dug into an area of natural gravel (24) and was truncated in the second century by a smaller pit (35). Both pits were shallow and irregular shapes, neither displayed an obvious purpose.

Pit 49 and pit 75 were both roughly ovoid well constructed features, cut into the natural chalk. Both features were interpreted as shallow storage pits, and each contained homogenous, backfilled deposits incorporating abraded late first century or early second century AD coarse ware sherds.

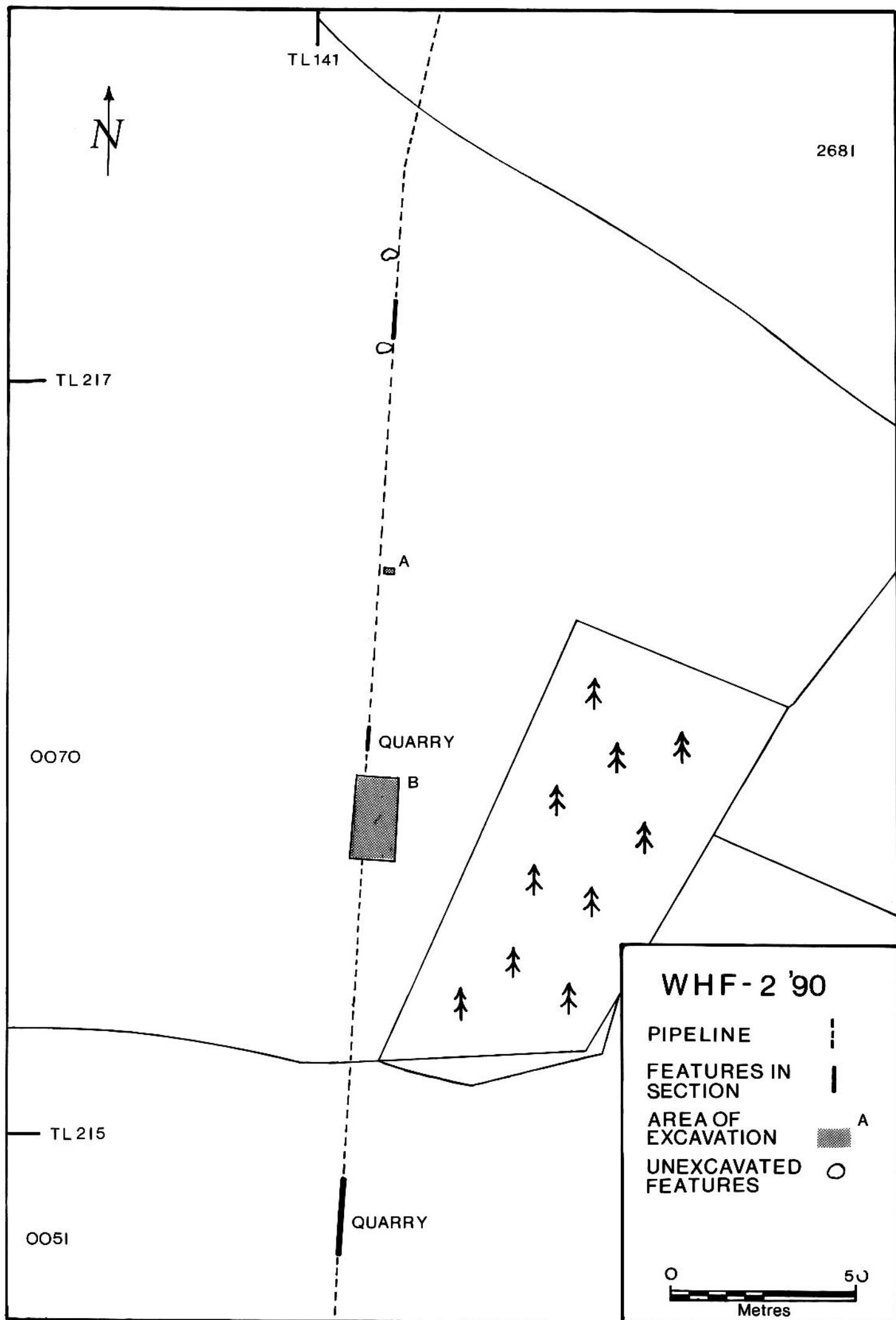


Fig 2



Feature 66 was undoubtedly a large storage pit, roughly circular (an average diameter of 1.8 metres by 1.1 metres deep) with undercut chalk sides leading to a rounded base. Like pits 49 and 75, pit 66 appears to have been recleaned several times, and certainly prior to disuse, after which time it was deliberately backfilled. In addition to numerous pottery sherds and fragments of animal bone, the fills contained broken floor tiles and large segments of burnt and semi-fired daub, some of which retained the impressions of the wicker panels to which it had been attached. Patches of the clay fill had been scorched (and partially fired) in situ, indicating that burning, or extremely hot material had been deposited in the pit. The broken fragments of a large, almost complete, grog-tempered grain jar (Baldock Fabric 2B) were found in association with this scorched layer. An earlier deposit contained another almost complete grog-tempered vessel of a finer fabric (Baldock Fabric 2A) broken in situ. Both vessels date from the early to mid first century AD, indicating a single, if prolonged, phase of deposition within the pit.

At a later stage (possibly the early second century AD) the surface of pit 66 was sealed by a layer of flint cobbles (22), which has survived modern plough damage due to the further subsidence of the underlying fills. A layer of silt above the cobbles contained an iron 'latch-lifter' key. Vestiges of a second century occupation surface were also recorded covering the area of pit 75, and an isolated patch (19) may have survived slightly further to the north. The remains of an extremely plough-damaged, possibly in-urned second century cremation (2B) were excavated by the northern edge of pit 37.

A surface of closely packed flints (4.5 x 2 metres) was partially uncovered against the eastern edge of Area B(51). The surface overlay a shallow depression in the natural clay, and was interpreted as a floor or yard surface, perhaps constructed over a well-trodden area of the settlement. The surface was cut by two stakeholes (83 and 84), and contained sherds of late pre-Roman Iron Age, coarse ware pottery. A series of patchy deposits of scorched, carbon-flecked clayish silt containing fragments of burnt daub and pottery overlay the cobbles. This material may represent a nearby (possibly related) structure, which was destroyed by fire in about the middle of the first century AD. It is tempting to suggest that this event may have also produced the burnt material and building debris deposited in the abandoned storage pit 66.

To the north of Area B, a single pit was excavated in half section (Area A, fig.3). The roughly oval pit (32) appeared to be an isolated feature, however there was insufficient time available to re-clean the surrounding area thoroughly. The base of the cut was covered in a layer of flint (similar to pit 27) incorporating pottery



sherds dating from the mid first century AD. An iron chisel blade was also discovered in this layer. Quantities of animal bone were deposited in the remaining fills. The purpose of pits 32 and 27 is uncertain, perhaps they were storage pits or watering hollows for animals, the flint lining intended to prevent animals from slipping or clouding the water?

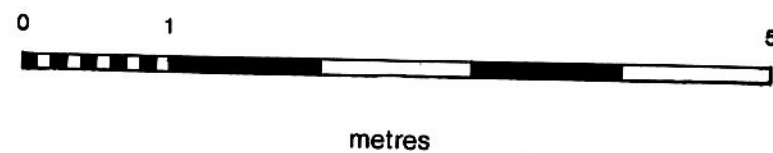
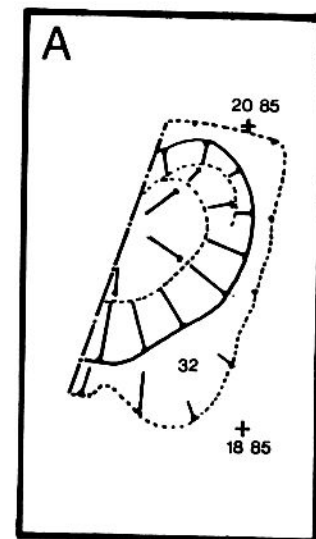
Fragments of grey-ware vessels (common throughout the Romano-British period) were recovered from the two unexcavated features near the northern boundary of field 0070 (see fig. 2). These features were possibly related to a large negative feature which was truncated by the pipe trench, and contained second century pottery sherds and a large fragment of Mediterranean amphora. Unfortunately the trench at this point was extremely ragged and only rudimentary recording of the section is now possible, however a longitudinally truncated ditch is suspected.

The trench also revealed two backfilled quarry pits (dating probably to the nineteenth century), to the south of field 0070 and to the north of area B (see fig. 2). The latter feature had largely truncated a N-W orientated late Iron Age ditch, the base of which remained, just visible, below the level of quarrying.

#### 4. Initial Conclusions

The results of this preliminary assessment of work carried out at Winch Hill Common indicate a substantial settlement ranging in date from the late Iron Age, perhaps the second half of the first century BC, to the Romano-British period of the second century. A fourth century coin discovered in the upper fill of pit 27, may be intrusive since no other finds from the site support this date. The settlement appears to develop, migrating over its original position, indicated by occupation layers covering earlier features - perhaps following a destruction phase in the mid first century AD.

The pipeline route provides information concerning the extent of the settlement along a north-south axis across field 0070, where an area approximately two hundred metres long located in the middle of the field appears to contain all the known features. The extent of the settlement to the east and west of this line remains unknown. The geography of the site might suggest that the settlement does extend in these directions following the spur of the hill, overlooking the fertile valley to the north. The cobbled surface 51 indicated the presence of features (possibly structures) beyond the eastern limits of excavation; indeed it is probable that the foci of the settlement have not been exposed during this investigation. The settlement appears unenclosed, however the features located in the pipe trench near the northern field boundary, and in the central quarry, may suggest otherwise.



WHF 2 90  
Excavated Areas

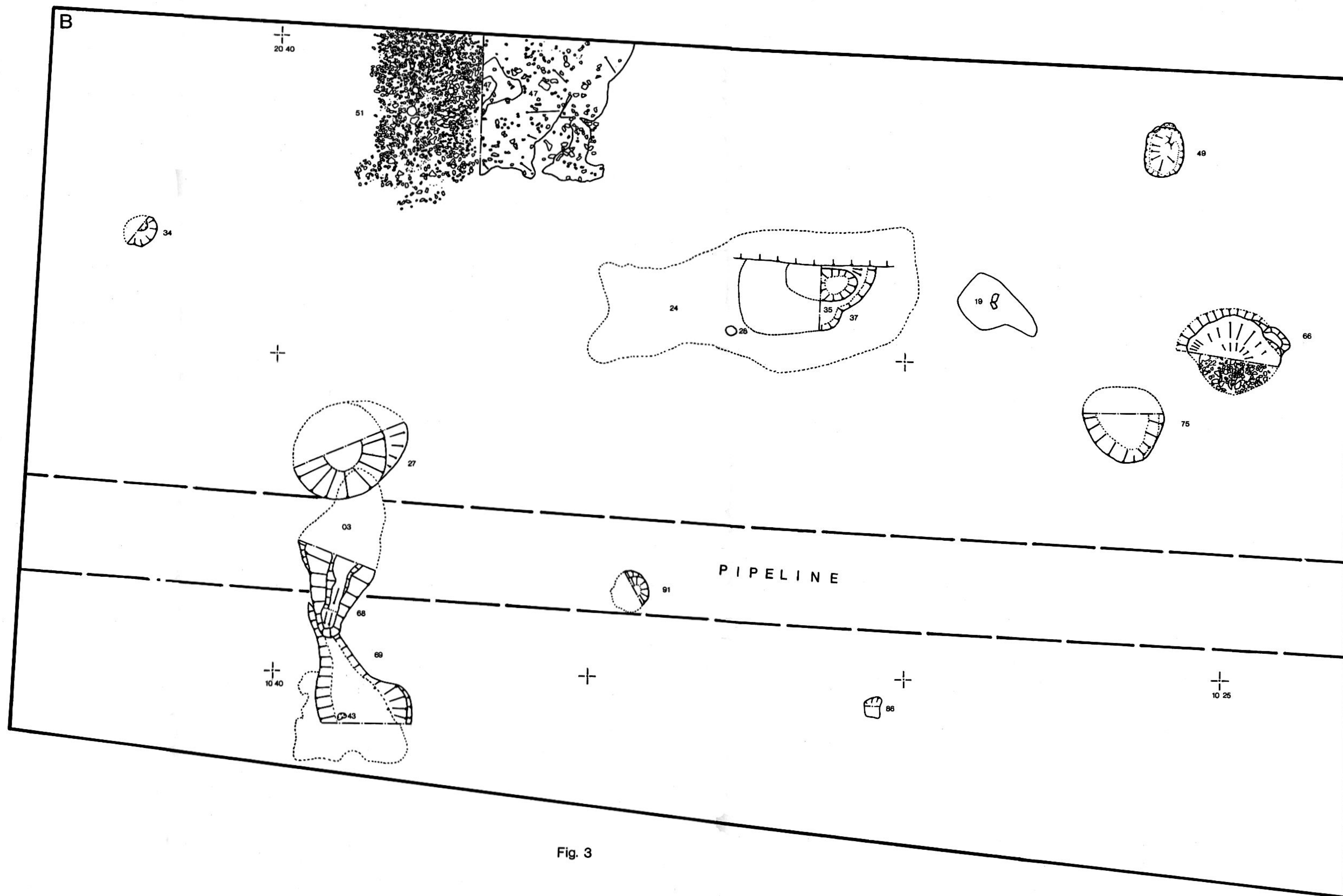


Fig. 3

5. The site at Winch Hill Farm represents a previously unknown Romano-British settlement, perhaps an extensive farmstead or hamlet, in an area where few such settlements have as yet been recorded.

Its archaeological significance within the County is certainly sufficient to justify a fuller report than this interim account being prepared for publication, probably in the County journal.

- a. Specialist reports will be required on the pottery, tile and brick, and animal bone. There are a number of smallfinds requiring conservation.
- b. Further illustration will be required such as individual feature plans, sections and finds, e.g. pottery. Perhaps 4-6 weeks work for an illustrator.
- c. The production of a final publishable Report will require input from the site director, an illustrator, a finds officer, a number of specialists, and probably a post-excavation assistant. Once the specialist reports were available, it should be possible to produce the final Report over a period of about 2 months.

## Appendix

### Finds (by weight) from WHF-2-90

Pottery	15,970g
Daub/fired clay	524g
Tile and brick	11,453g
Animal bone	3,521g
Worked flint	1g
Iron fragments	180g

### WHF'90 & WHF 2'90 FINDS COMBINED TOTALS

16,036g
524g
11,581
3,521g
1g
190g

### Special Finds

ITEM	CATALOGUE No.	DETAILS
Iron key	A6019	
Iron chisel	A6020	
Iron chisel	A6024	
Iron hinge-nail	A6026	
Iron hinge-nail	A6027	
Iron object (?)	A6046	
Copper alloy object	A6021	
Copper alloy coin	A6022	Comodus. 181-184AD
Copper alloy coin	A6023	Constantine I/II. 335-340AD
Copper alloy tweezers, spatula and pick	A6025	
Copper alloy tweezers	A6030	
Glass frag.	A6028	
Quern frag.	A6029	

Two hemispherical, alluvial conglomerate quernstones, in the possession of the farmer, Mr. Sharp, were identified as originating in the southern area of Field 0070. These were recorded and photographed, but remain in the garden of the tied farm cottages.