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AN IRON AGE SITE AT MADDISON STREET, SOUTHAMPTON

By STEPHEN SMITH

With a gazetteer of Iron Age sites within Southampton City District compiled by M A Brisbane and N Cooper

ABSTRACT

Excavations within the bailey of Southampton Castle revealed a group of Iron Age features below late Saxon and medieval layers. No complete structures were identified, but gulleys, post-holes and a hollow were discovered, which seemed to have been utilised at two different periods, both within the third-first centuries BC. The pottery was mostly of the St Catherine's Hill/Worthy Down type series (Cunliffe 1974).

INTRODUCTION

Excavations took place in the castle bailey in advance of redevelopment (Fig 1). The site had been an open garden from the time of the castle's destruction in 1822 until the late nineteenth century when terraced houses were built on the site. Following their demolition in 1969, the area became a car park. Financial support for excavation and post-excavation was provided in the first instance by the City of Southampton. Supplementary grants were received from Hampshire County Council and the Department of the Environment through the Wessex Archaeological Committee.

The intention of the excavation was to study the use of the medieval castle bailey. The discovery of Iron Age levels, although suggested by earlier excavations, was purely fortuitous. Considering their significance to Southampton, but not to the castle publication (Oxley forthcoming), it seemed appropriate to publish them here separately. The medieval site will be fully published in the Southampton City Museums Archaeological Report series.

The site stands on a localised deposit of fine sandy silt ('brickearth'), an extension to the deposit that runs down the Southampton peninsula and is also encountered in the area of the Middle-Saxon town (Shackley, in Holdsworth 1980) 0·8 km to the east. This 'brickearth' appears at 9·5m OD, is 1·5m thick, and overlies plateau gravels. To the west the site would have been edged by a 5m high cliff (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 18), which constitutes a natural defence for the west of the peninsula.

There is little known of the prehistoric settlement of this area of the South Hampshire Basin. Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork has been found on a number of sites in the town. Bronze Age barrows occur in the area (Ashbee 1974) and a local hoard of palstaves and socketed axes is known from the east bank of the River Itchen near Cobden Bridge. Pottery of this period is attested from medieval sites including Maddison Street. Of the Iron Age itself, there is little detailed evidence of local occupation sites. However, previous excavations within the castle enceinte, particularly beneath the motte (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 136) have located Iron Age pottery in buried soil surfaces (SOU 134, see gazeteer no 22 and Fig 6.22 in the Appendix). The Appendix which follows this report gives a full gazetteer of Iron Age sites within the area of Southampton's city boundaries.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Methodology

The examination of Iron Age features concentrated on two specific areas. South of features 1075 and 1072 (Fig 2), features were dealt with in the course of the general excavation of the medieval site. To the north, a block of the site was seen to be protected by the remnant base of the medieval bailey rampart (Fig 4.1 – 302). A test hole illustrated the survival of buried layers

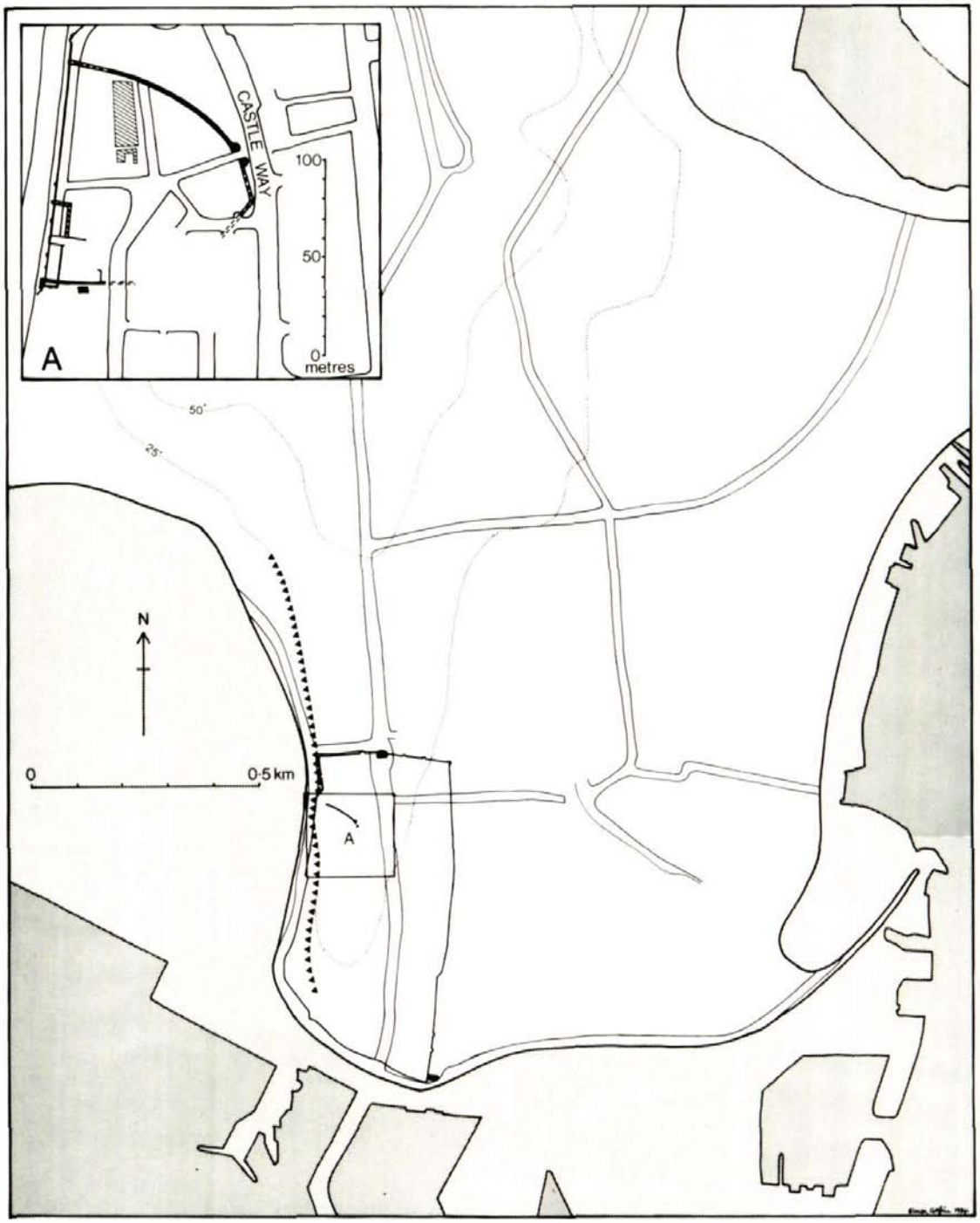

Fig 1. Maddison Street, Southampton. Location Plan.

beneath this rampart and the area was accordingly tackled as a separate exercise. Attribution of a possible Iron Age date for features has been made on the basis of discovery of type artefacts or by the presence of a very specific mid yellow grey silt loam, as in feature 494 (Fig 2.2 and Fig 4.21), which only existed below 481 as 641 (Fig 4.19), and in layer 1024 (Fig 4.1). Other features may also be Iron Age but, lacking direct chronological or stratigraphical evidence, have been excluded from this report. The sections chosen for publication are those which show characteristic feature types and general site relationships.

Although there is no continuous stratigraphic relationship between the Iron Age features on the site due to later medieval disturbance, sufficient similarity of fills and artefacts permit parallels to be drawn between the respective Iron Age features. Excavated features occur in three groups, again probably due to medieval disturbance and not reflecting any Iron Age preference. The northernmost of these groups, that centred around 1082 (Fig 3.1) seems to represent a coherent group of features; the remaining groups, in site centre and site south are incidental groups of gulleys and post-holes.

All layers on the site were sampled, at least 4 litres of soil being taken. Only those layers sealed beneath the putative medieval rampart (Fig 4.1 – 302) were so undisturbed as to provide viable samples. The material retrieved from these levels was itself so clayey that sample separation with hydrogen peroxide was rendered almost impossible due to excessive flocculation.

The site and finds were recorded using the computer orientated SMART recording system of Southampton City Museums. Readers wishing to make further study of the site records and finds should consult the archive housed at God's House Tower Museum, Southampton. The finds are also deposited with the City Museums Service. Excavations began in July 1980 and were completed by February 1981. The site code is SOU 29.

THE SITE

Three sub-phases are recognisable on the basis of their relationship to layers 641/893 (Fig 4.17, 19) and 888/9 (Fig 4.1, 3.5).

Phase IA

This period of activity is defined as those features containing primary silting layers 607, 976, 881 (Fig 3.4), 1024 (Fig 4.1) and being sealed by 641 (Fig 4.19) and 893 (Fig 4.17). The primary layer, a yellow-grey silt, links gulleys 301, 494, 639, 1074 and hollow 1082. At the time of the development of the northern hollow, 1082, features 875 and the post-holes around 1082 seem also to have been cut. It seems likely that these post-holes relate to a structure erected over this hollow. The larger post-holes, 860, 1031, 1034, 1043, 1047, 1072 and 1075, would have contained timbers 20cm in diameter, set up to 1m in the subsoil. The section of 1047 (Fig 3.2) is characteristic of all these post-holes except for 1031 and 1034 (Fig 3.3) which were set in post-pits. The fill of the post-pit packing is again of the yellow-grey silt recognised as characteristic of this phase of site use. Water rounded pebbles also occur in the fill. A shallow hollow, 1070, is filled with a dirty yellow-grey silt, 5cm deep. To the south of this, a group of slight post-holes, 439, 550, 552, 554, 556, 558, 712 and 727, may have supported a structure. They all have a similar fill, a mixed yellow-grey silt, and are very shallow (Fig 4.6, 8 and 9). Their upper surface may have been removed by medieval disturbance. Other post-holes spread over the site share the same type of fill. Only amongst those collected around gulley 494 is there any indication of structure, with the right-angled position at 679 and a possible post-pit, 699. It is uncertain whether the gulleys, 301, 1074, and 494, are the bedding trenches for buildings or were constructed for drainage and land division. They are slight, being 1m wide and less than 50cm deep (Fig 4.12, 13 and 21) and contain a yellow-grey silt with water worn pebbles. It is uncertain whether 875 (Fig. 3.4) is a gulley or a pit. If a gulley, the primary yellow-grey silt fill 881, is similar to the fill 776 in 301 and 1074. 301 and 1074 seem to be contemporary

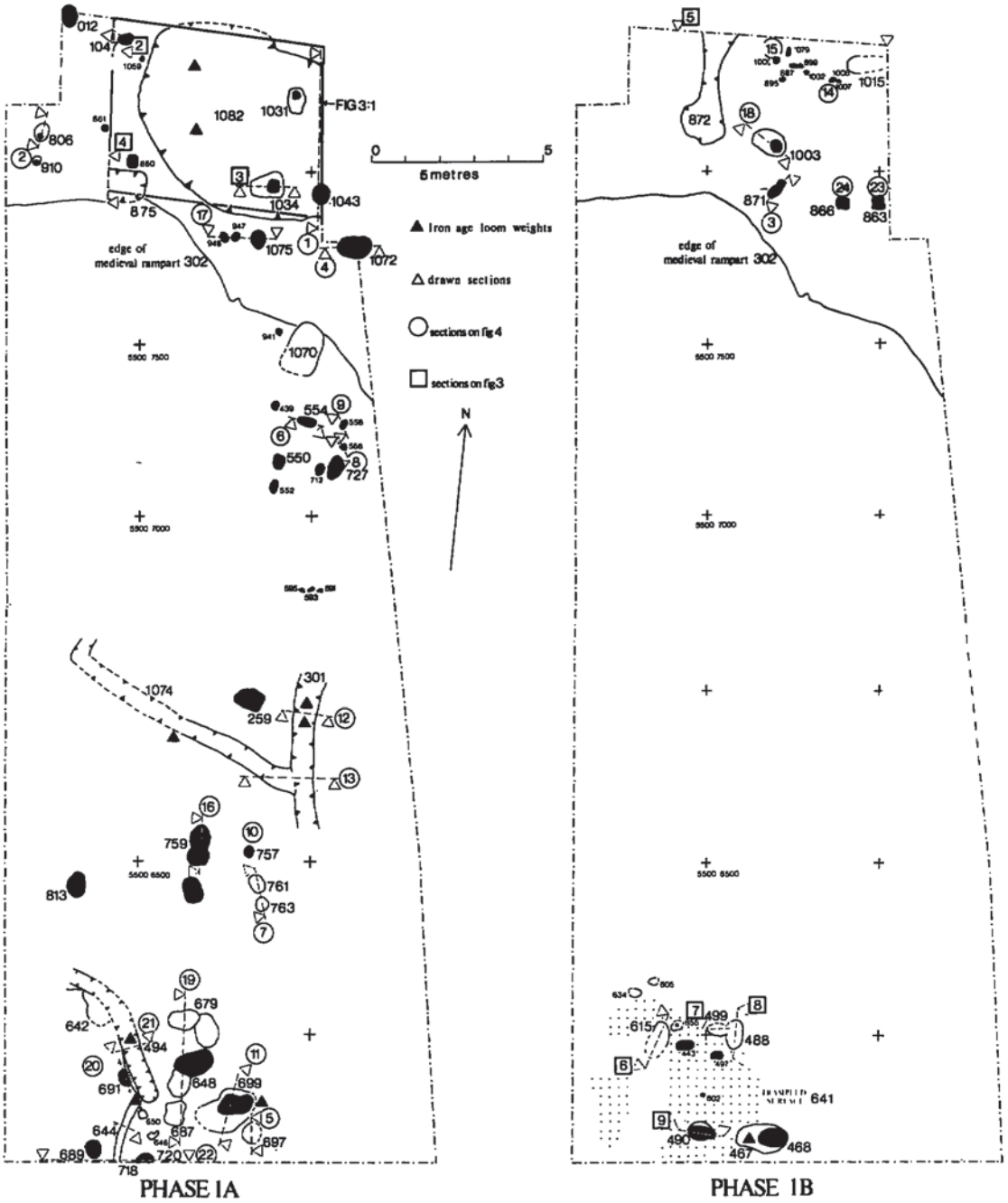

Fig 2. Maddison Street. Phases 1A and B. Post-holes drawn filled, hollows open.

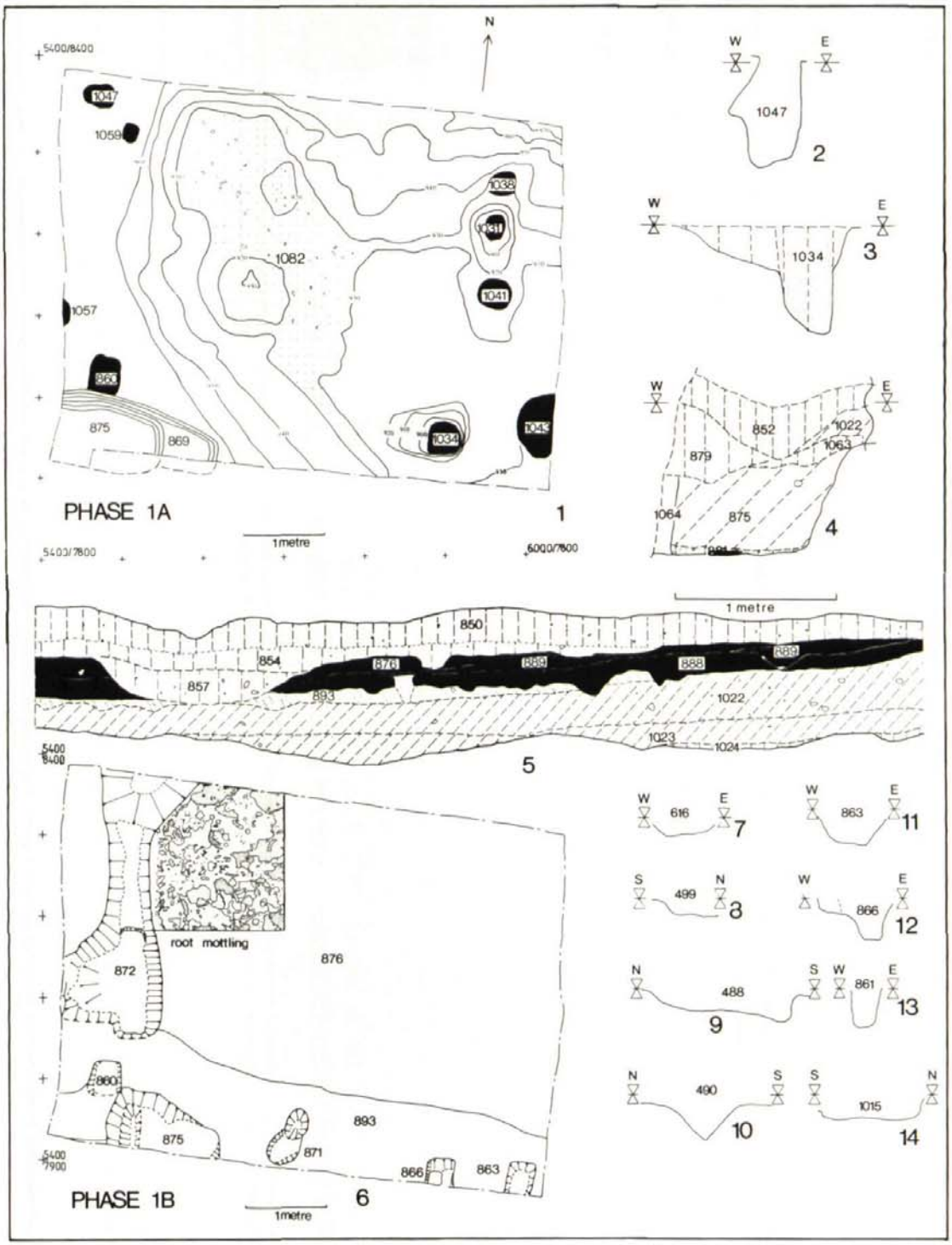

Fig 3. Maddison Street. Plans of northern hollow and various sections referred to in text.

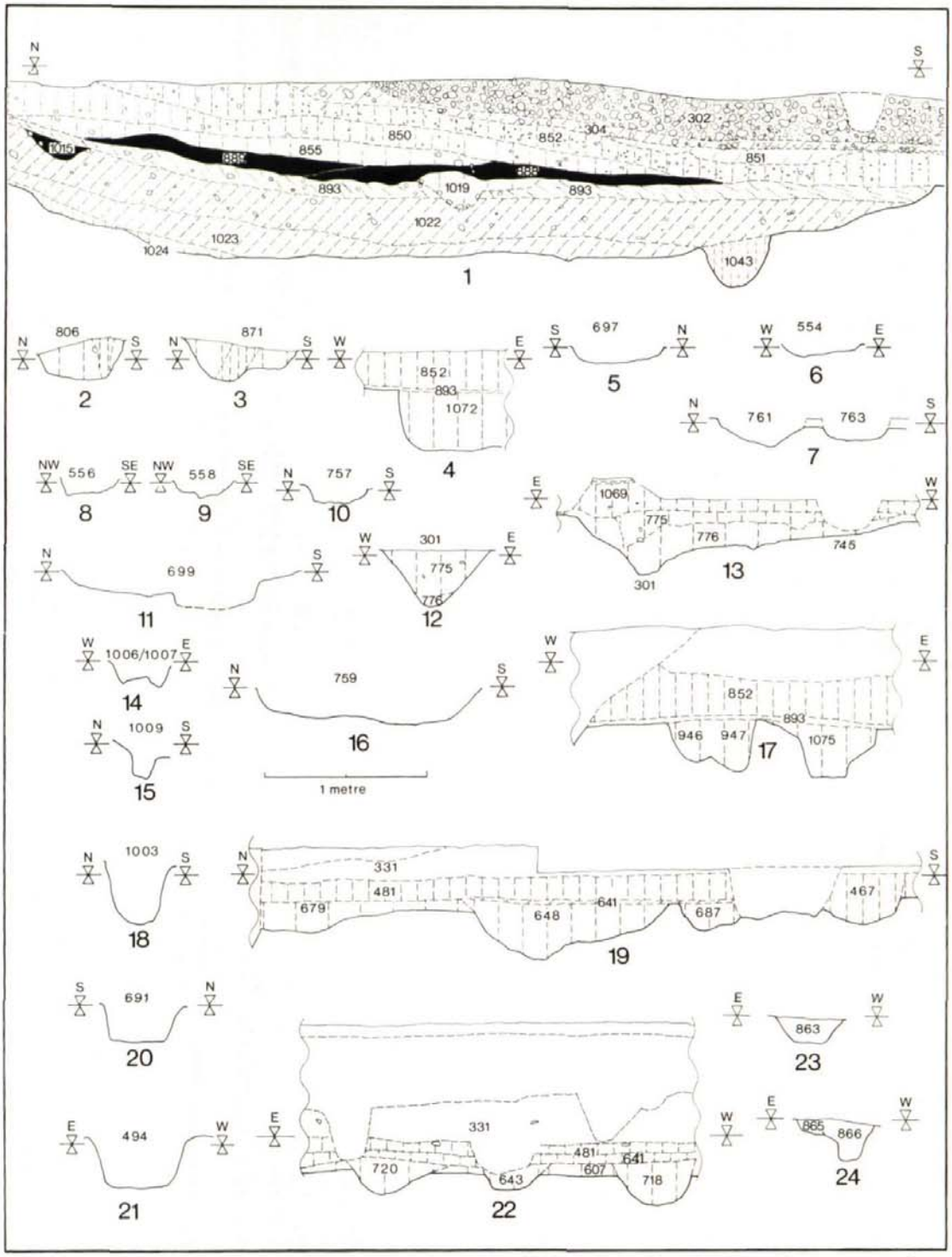

Fig 4. Maddison Street. Northern hollow; west facing N-S section. Key sections, all to same scale.

and have 'V'-shaped profiles. 494 and 875 have 'U'-shaped profiles.

Layer 1067 in the bottom of 1082 was a mixed grey loam containing much charcoal, *in situ* burnt clay, fire-cracked flints, middle Iron Age pottery and fragments of triangular loom weights. This may represent domestic occupation of this hollow. 494 had two nearly complete loom weights in its lowest fill, and was sealed by a deposit of dumped fired clay. 301, 1074 and 699 also contained triangular loom weight fragments. This is the only evidence for domestic occupation on the site. Unfortunately, the loom weights do not provide any diagnostic dating closer than that given by the pottery from the Iron Age features (Champion 1975).

Phase IB

The separation of this phase from Phase IA is on stratigraphic grounds based on the recognition of layer 641, a crisp dirty yellow-grey silty loam of up to 5cm thick (Fig 4.19, 22). It was so compacted as to suggest that it was the result of trampling. Post-pipes penetrate this surface which may have been associated with a structure supported in these post-holes. Similarly, the right angled feature 488/499, which cuts this layer, may be associated with such a structure.

To the north layer 1067 is sealed by 1024, a layer similar to 641. 1023, an orange-brown silty clay, and 1022, a brown silty clay comparable to 481 at site south, build up and a new series of slighter post-holes (Fig 2.1B) are cut. Only 1003 has a post-pit.

Fragments of triangular loom weights and middle Iron Age pottery, all unabraded, were deposited during this phase of occupation.

Phase IC

This period of very restricted activity on the site was only recognised in the area protected by the medieval rampart, 302–4. After the build up of layer 1022, pit 1015 was cut. This was 1m in diameter and 20cm deep, filled with burnt oak fragments. Above this developed layer 893 (Fig 4.1) a grey silty-loam with much root mottling. This was cut by at least one post-hole, 1019. The root mottling is certainly contemporary with layer 893, as no root disturbance was recognised in layer 855 above. The post-hole was sealed by layers 888 and 889, a mid-grey silty clay loam totally root mottled and containing up to 40% charcoal (Fig 3.6). This appears to have been an old land surface, cut by gulley 872 (Fig 3.5). The root mottling is certainly not modern, as again, no root activity was encountered in layers 852 and 855. It is, unfortunately, impossible to say whether these mottled layers were of Iron Age date. One of them, 889, contained at least 3 kilos of iron slag which is quite undatable, and 893 produced a small sherd which could be either Iron Age or Saxon in date. Fig 4.1 does show that 888 and 889 were directly sealed by 855 and 852, which both contain sherds attributed to the Late Saxon period. To the south 855 and 852 continue as 331 (Fig 4.19, 22) a layer which seals a Saxo-Norman building. 855 and 852 present great problems of interpretation, as their exact position in the Iron Age/early medieval sequence is unclear. Furthermore, they appear to rise fairly sharply to the north and directly seal a landsurface – 888 and 889. They would seem to be earlier than the medieval (thirteenth century) rampart, 302–4. This sequence of layers is discussed more fully in the forthcoming Southampton City Museums Archaeological Reports, where Phases II–IV (Late Saxon to later Medieval) of the site will be examined in detail.

Discussion

Although the site shows a density of features comparable with the interior of chalk-land occupation sites, the lack of pits and the general paucity of finds makes identification of the nature and longevity of the site impossible. The hollow 1082 and its associated post-holes provide the only suggestion of a structure in any recognisable form. The presence of loom weights in the lower fill of the gulleys could be packing around post positions, the gulleys being bedding trenches, but no such post-holes were recognised. Alternatively, the gulleys may have served simply for drainage. The individual post-holes found on the site would only have held slight timbers and give little information as to the structures they may have supported.

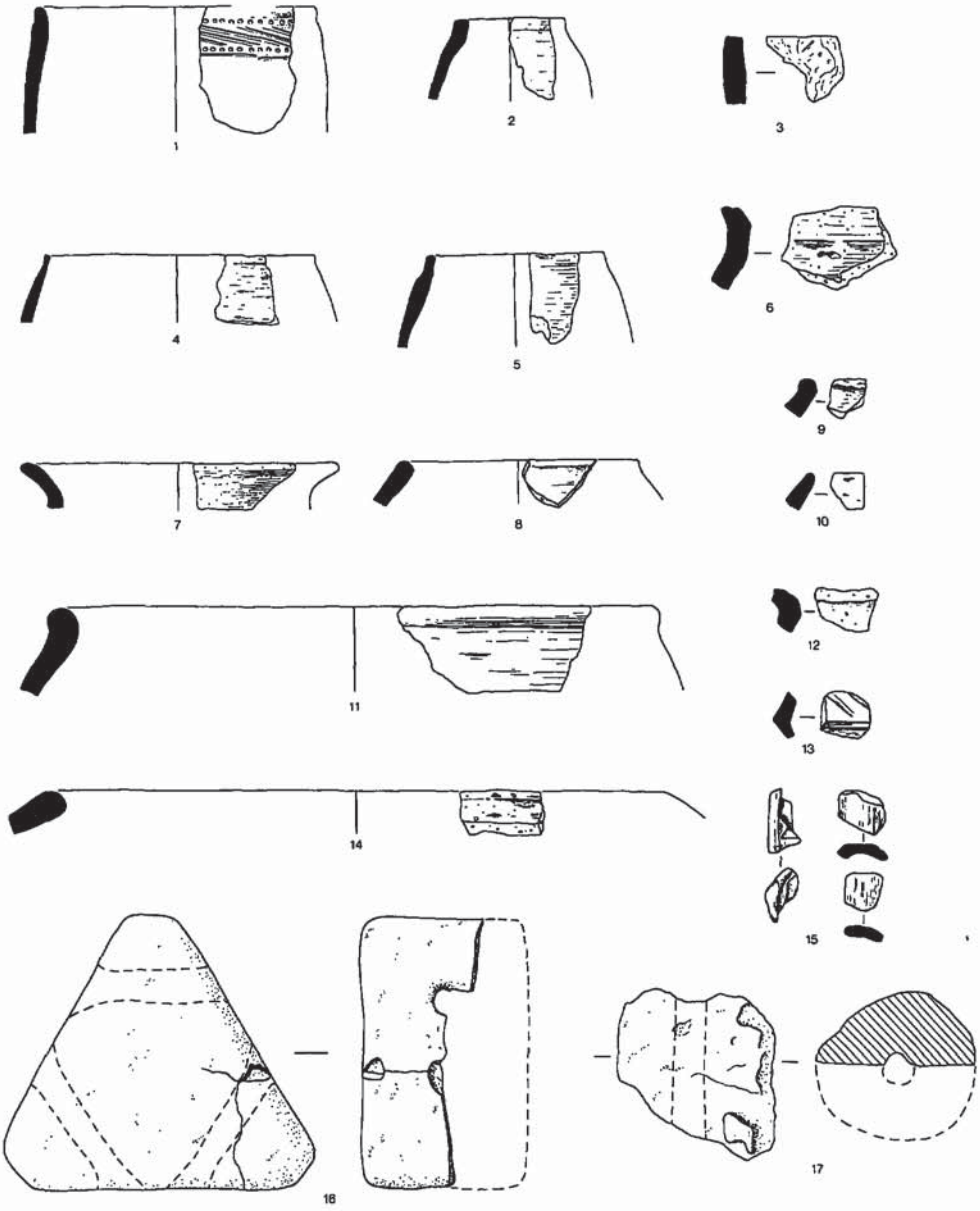

Fig 5. Maddison Street. Pottery and associated fired clay objects. All to same scale, 1:4.

It is only the loom weights and the contents of layer 1067 in hollow 1082 with its evidence for *in situ* burning and firecracked flints, possibly used as pot-boilers or as a roasting hearth, that suggest any level of domestic occupation. No bone or metalwork was recovered from the Iron Age deposits, although they were present in quantity in the medieval levels. The iron slag from 889 might just be of Iron Age date.

During the course of building construction on the site in March 1984, an opportunity arose to re-examine the previously unexcavated northern half of post-hole 1072. This was found to contain a small amount of *in situ* burning, which was sampled for dating purposes by thermoluminescence and thermo-remnant magnetism. Results from these analyses are expected shortly from the DoE Ancient Monuments Laboratory. Those wishing to be informed of the results should contact Southampton City Museums Archaeology Section.

THE FINDS

The material recovered comes from a series of post-holes and gulleys of Middle Iron Age date. A hollow, 1082, to the north of the site, is the only significantly stratified part of the site. The Iron Age features on the site were much mutilated by later features associated with the medieval castle.

The Pottery

Several bodysherds recovered from the site (unillustrated) were probably of Bronze Age date. One rim (Fig 5.3) which had been cut flat was of note, being a wide mouthed jar. No features contained only Bronze Age sherds. The remainder of the prehistoric material recovered would seem to be of Iron Age date. Material from the medieval site may also contain Iron Age sherds but, being bodysherds fabricated from the local brickearth, could be given no date and would in any case be residual. Figs 5.6 and 5.13 may be slightly earlier than the Middle Iron Age date attributed to the remainder of the material. The Iron Age pottery in general would seem to fall into the St Catherine's Hill/Worthy Down type, although the Southampton material would seem to be of local manufacture, having no chalk inclusions.

Loomweights

It was the presence of nearly complete pierced triangular loom weights which first brought the Iron Age activity to the excavator's attention. Several different features produced the objects which all seem to be made in the same fabric and under similar firing circumstances. The weights were all of the same dimensions in as much as three complete outlines could be made out from 29 fragments. No loom positions were recognised. Champion (1975) has discussed their British distribution. Several are known from Winchester and Southampton Museum possesses one from Romsey. Contexts 295, 301, 494, 604, 775, 1022, 1056 and 1067 produced loom weight fragments. It is difficult to decide whether the deposition of the loomweight fragments in these positions was accidental or deliberate.

Fig 5.17 is a possible cylindrical loomweight. Its top is lopsided, but otherwise it fits the characteristics of known cylindrical loom weights. Its association with triangular loom weights in context 301 is chronologically difficult, as they more normally occur in late Bronze Age contexts. The fabric is identical to that of the triangular loom weights.

Fired clay

Fig 5.15 shows three fragments of very fine, shaped clay which are well fired and may represent fragments of a mould.

FIG 5

1. 2 rimsherds of saucepan pot. Orange fabric with grog and flint inclusions. Surface self slipped. Grooved & punched decoration. Context 1051. 3rd – 1st BC.
2. Rimsherd of small jar. Dark grey fabric with flint and grog inclusions. Burnished interior and exterior. Context 1040. 3rd – 1st BC.
3. Rim sherd of a Bronze Age jar. Very soft, pink fabric with grog, flint and organic inclusions. Context 1051. 1700–1000 B C ?
4. Rim sherd of small jar. Dark grey brown sandy fabric. Surface self slipped. Marked with organic traces. Context 601. 3rd – 1st B C.

5. Rim sherd of small jar. Dark grey, sandy fabric, burnished exterior. Context 610. 3rd – 1st B C.
6. Fragment of neck of a jar. Dark grey, sandy fabric, numerous flint inclusions. Outer surface smoothed. Context 554. 3rd – 1st B C.
7. Rim and body sherd from a small jar. Very dark grey fabric with flint inclusions. Context 854. 3rd – 1st B C.
8. Rim and 10 body sherds from a small jar. Grey fabric with flint inclusions. Interior and exterior burnished. Context 1051. 3rd – 1st B C.
9. Rim of small proto bead rim jar. Dark grey, sand and flint gritted fabric. Context 265. 3rd – 1st B C.
10. Fragment of rim. Mid brown, very sandy fabric. Context 876.
11. Rim of a large jar. Light grey fabric, heavily flint gritted. Burnished on the interior and exterior. Context 1022. 3rd – 1st B C.
12. Rim and neck of a small jar. Very dark grey, heavily flint gritted fabric. Context 463.
13. Shoulder of carinated bowl. Dark grey, very sandy fabric. Grooved decoration over burnished surface. Context 876. 5th – 3rd B C.
14. Rim from a large jar. Grey fabric with heavy flint inclusions, burnished interior. Context 1022. 3rd – 1st B C.
15. Fragments of fired clay. Very fine clay, perhaps from a mould.
16. Triangular loom weight. Orange oxidised surface, dark grey brown reduced interior. Sparse flint inclusions.
17. Fired clay object. Fabric identical to triangular loom weights. Possibly part of a cylindrical loom weight.

Conclusions

It is difficult to say more about the Maddison Street site than that it was used during the Middle to Late Iron Age. The paucity of ceramic finds and the absence of metal work and faunal evidence precludes any discussion of economic considerations. The loom weights themselves suggest weaving and thus the possible association of sheep rearing with the site. If indeed we do have a sizeable cliff top settlement, excavation may only have revealed a peripheral element. On this basis, further discussion must await future investigation, particularly to the north in Albion Place. However, it is significant that information regarding the Iron Age use of the South Hampshire Basin is, at last, coming to light.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer would like to record his indebtedness to Rob Mason, assistant supervisor, who, with Maggie Holland, worked on the publication plans and sections and the site archive. Simon Griffin drew Figs 1 and 6, and re-drew Fig 5. The DoE Ancient Monuments Laboratory, Wessex Archaeological Committee, Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and the City Museums provided invaluable support and assistance. Machola Ltd, at great personal expense, provided free machining of the site. Graham Scobie, Rod Fitzgerald and Tim Robey carried out most of the excavation of the site and onsite recording work, and Miss Deborah Spaulding maintained the finds system. The Committee of SARC who initiated the excavation, maintained a constant commitment to its completion especially through the offices of its former chairman, the late Cllr John Barr, whose enthusiasm and support will be sadly missed. The archiving of the site has been completed by Southampton City Museums Archaeology Section under its Archaeological Officer, M A Brisbane, who edited this report.

APPENDIX

GAZETTEER OF IRON AGE SITES AND FIND SPOTS WITHIN THE CITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

By M A Brisbane and N Cooper

The following gazeteer was compiled in January 1984 and lists all known Iron Age sites and find spots within the modern boundary of the City of Southampton. A small number of sites which occur just outside the City boundary are also included, although this list is not exhaustive.

Ref No on Fig 6	Description and Date	Locality and Museum Site No where relevant	O S Grid Ref	Source
1	Bronze, 'leech-shaped' brooch; Early Iron Age.	Bitterne Manor	SU436 133	Waterman, DM 1944–6
2	Post-holes, gulleys, pottery and loomweights. One Early sherd; the rest Middle-Late.	Maddison Street (SOU 29)	SU4187 1149	This report
3	Pit with almost complete saucepan pot. Low density scatter of unfeatured sherds; Middle-Late.	Melbourne Street (SOU 20)	SU4283 1196	Museum Site Archives
4	Toothill Camp. Fort of single bank and ditch. Scheduled. Presumed to be Late Iron Age.	Rownhams	SU3815 1865	Williams-Freeman, JP 1915.
5	Chilworth Ring. Fort of single bank and ditch. Scheduled. Presumed Late.	Chilworth	SU4135 1700	Williams-Freeman, JP 1915.
6	Fort of single bank and ditch, mutilated by gravel digging. Scheduled. Presumed Late.	West End	SU4747 1378	NMR: SU41 SE6.
7	Castle Hill. Sub-circular stock enclosure of single bank and ditch. Scheduled. Presumed Late.	Chilworth	SU4057 1688	Crawford, OGS 1948.
8	Sub-circular stock enclosure of single bank and ditch; presumed Late.	Aldermoor Road	SU3925 1584	Crawford, OGS 1941–3.
9	Remains of a Field System, extent uncertain; presumed Late.	Rownhams	SU3795 1810	NMR:SU 31 NE 15.
10	Three ditches, bead-rim pottery and fire-cracked flints. Low density scatter of unfeatured pottery; Late.	Six Dials (SOU 169)	SU4243 1221	Museum Site Archives
11	Possible salt working site. Post-holes, gulleys, briquettage, and pottery; Late.	East Park Terrace (SOU 3)	SU4230 1228	Museum Site Archives. NMR: SU 41 SW 70.
12	Gold Stater of Cunobelinus; Late.	Southampton	SU4213	Allen, DF 1961.
13	Gold ¼ Stater; Late.	Southampton	SU4213	Allen, DF 1961.
14	Bronze stater of the Durotriges; Mack 318; Late.	Bitterne	SU4413	Allen, DF 1961.
15	Bead-rim and other 'Belgic' pottery; mainly wheel turned; Late.	Bitterne Manor (SOU 215)	SU4333 1335	Waterman, DM 1947.
16	Bead-rim jar found *c* 1900; Late.	Quayside Road	SU4358 1317	Dale, W 1898–1903.
17	*c* 15 sherds; Late.	Melbourne Street (SOU 4)	SU4281 1175	Museum Site Archives.

Ref No on Fig 6	Description and Date	Locality and Museum Site No where relevant	O S Grid Ref	Source
18	?Linear feature with pottery; Late.	Gasworks (SOU 8)	SU4285 1164	Museum Site Archives.
19	Post-holes, possible gulley and pottery; date uncertain, probably Late.	Rowlands Car Park (SOU 97)	SU4232 1238	Museum Site Archives.
20	Ditch, pottery and fire-cracked flints; date uncertain.	Albion Place (SOU 132)	SU4190 1154	Museum Site Archive. NMR: SU 41 SW 6.
21	Bronze coin; date uncertain.	Bitterne	SU4413	Allen, DF 1961.
22	Two sherds and fire-cracked flints; date uncertain.	Zion Chapel (SOU 134)	SU4193 1139	Maitland-Muller, MR in Platt, C and Coleman-Smith, 1975.

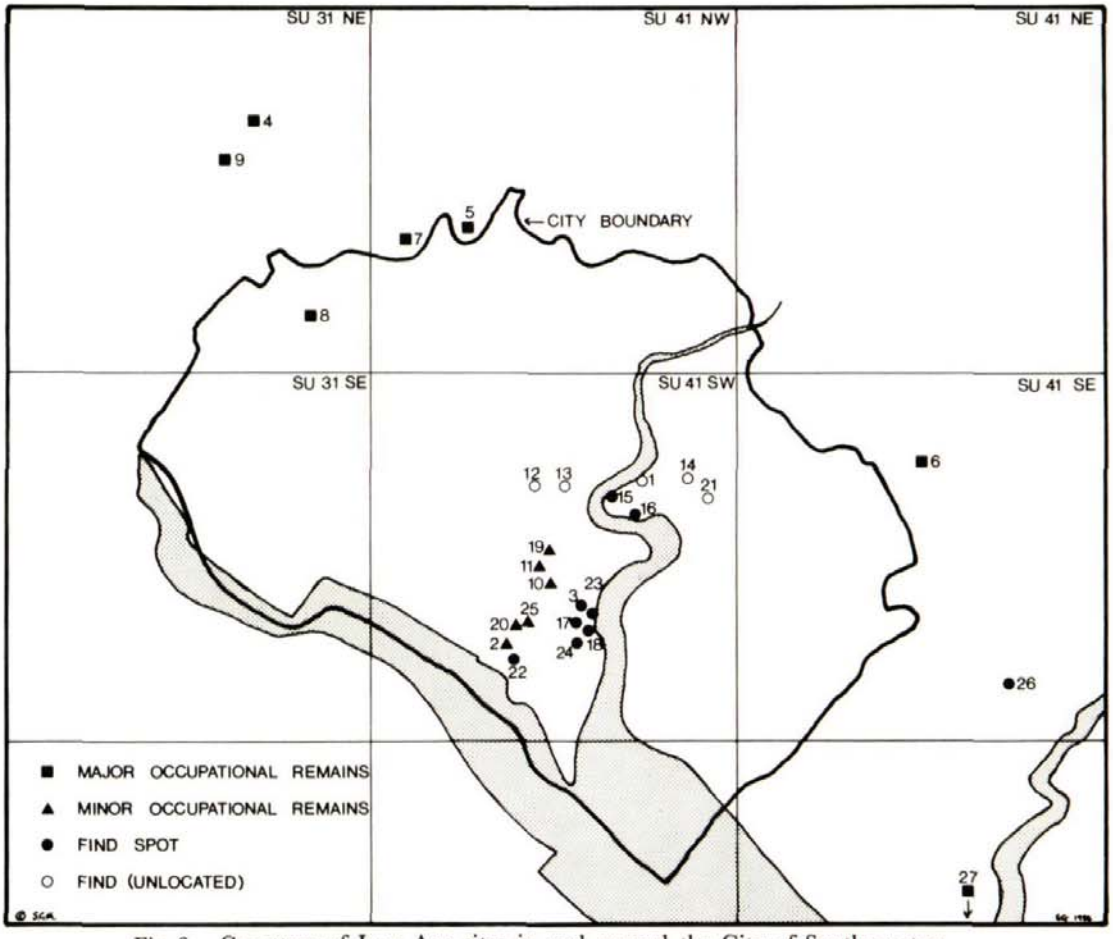

Fig 6. Gazetteer of Iron Age sites in and around the City of Southampton.

Ref No on Fig 6	Description and Date	Locality and Museum Site No where relevant	O S Grid Ref	Source
23	Scatter of unfeatured pottery; date uncertain.	Marine Parade (SOU 13)	SU4293 1171	Museum Site Archives.
24	Slight scatter of unfeatured pottery; date uncertain.	Chapel Road (SOU 11)	SU4285 1161	Museum Site Archives.
25	3 body sherds of undiagnostic pottery from Late Saxon contexts; date uncertain.	York Buildings, Trench 1 (SOU 175)	SU4205 1160	Museum Site Archives.
26	Two sherds; date uncertain.	Bursledon	SU487 106	Hughes, M 1972.
27	'Promontory' fort; a single ditch and bank isolating low lying marsh; presumed to be Late Iron Age	Hamble	SU4821 0603	Williams-Freeman, JP 1926–30.

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