LINEAR DITCHES IN THE VICINITY OF ANDOVER

By MICK RAWLINGS

Abstract

Archaeological evaluation of land to the west of Floral Way, Andover resulted in the discovery of three previously unknown linear ditches. Although investigation of these features did not produce any datable artefacts, it is argued, by analogy, that the ditches are likely to belong to the later prehistoric period and are probably part of a network of similar features previously examined to the north of this area.

Introduction

In 1996 Wessex Archaeology carried out a staged programme of archaeological evaluation of a plot of land to the west of Floral Way, Andover (centred on NGR SU 3445 4515). The work had been requested by the Local Planning Authority prior to the determination of an application for residential development.

The proposed development area comprises an irregular-shaped plot of land measuring *c.* 19 ha (Fig. 2) on the south-west edge of Andover. A shallow dry valley is aligned north-east/south-west through the central part of the area, with gentle slopes upwards on either side. Absolute heights across the area vary from *c.* 72 m aOD to *c.* 82 m aOD. At the time of the evaluation, most of the area was arable farmland, the exceptions being a small triangular piece of disused scrubland in the north-west corner and a narrow strip of grass-covered road verge extending to the south-east.

A more detailed account of the evaluation can be found in the client report (Wessex Archaeology 1996).

Evaluation Methods

The work was carried out in three separate stages between May and October 1996. An initial geophysical survey comprised eight transects of detailed magnetometer survey, sufficient to cover 30% of the proposed development area.

Following analysis of the results of this systematic geophysical sampling, a programme of trial trenching was undertaken. This programme was devised to investigate areas of features of high archaeological potential identified by the geophysical survey. Areas of low archaeological potential were also examined in order to check the validity of the geophysical survey results.

A final stage of evaluation comprised systematic surface artefact collection; this was aimed at the identification of scatters and concentrations of archaeological material within the ploughsoil.

Results

Ditch F1

Several potential archaeological features were located by the geophysical survey. Predominant amongst these was a very distinct linear feature (ditch) generally aligned north-north-east/south-south-west across the western part of the evaluation area (Fig. 2, F1). This was recorded in all of the transects which crossed this area and was allocated a 90% confidence rating by the team carrying out the survey.

Three trenches were located along the line of this feature in order to confirm its presence and alignment (Fig. 2, T2, T3, T5). In each trench the ditch was recorded in the anticipated position and a section was excavated manually across the feature in Trench 2. The ditch was 2 m wide at the surface and 0.9 m deep, with a steep-sided, U-shaped profile (Fig. 3). There were four distinct layers within the ditch fill sequence: a primary fill of degraded chalk rubble along the lower part of the eastern side of the ditch (*206*); a secondary fill of yellowish-brown silty loam with some fragments of flint and chalk (*205*); a similar tertiary fill containing some large flint nodules (*202*); and a more clayey upper fill (*201*). Although it is assumed that there was originally a corresponding bank on at least one side of the ditch, there was nothing in the nature of the fill sequence to indi-

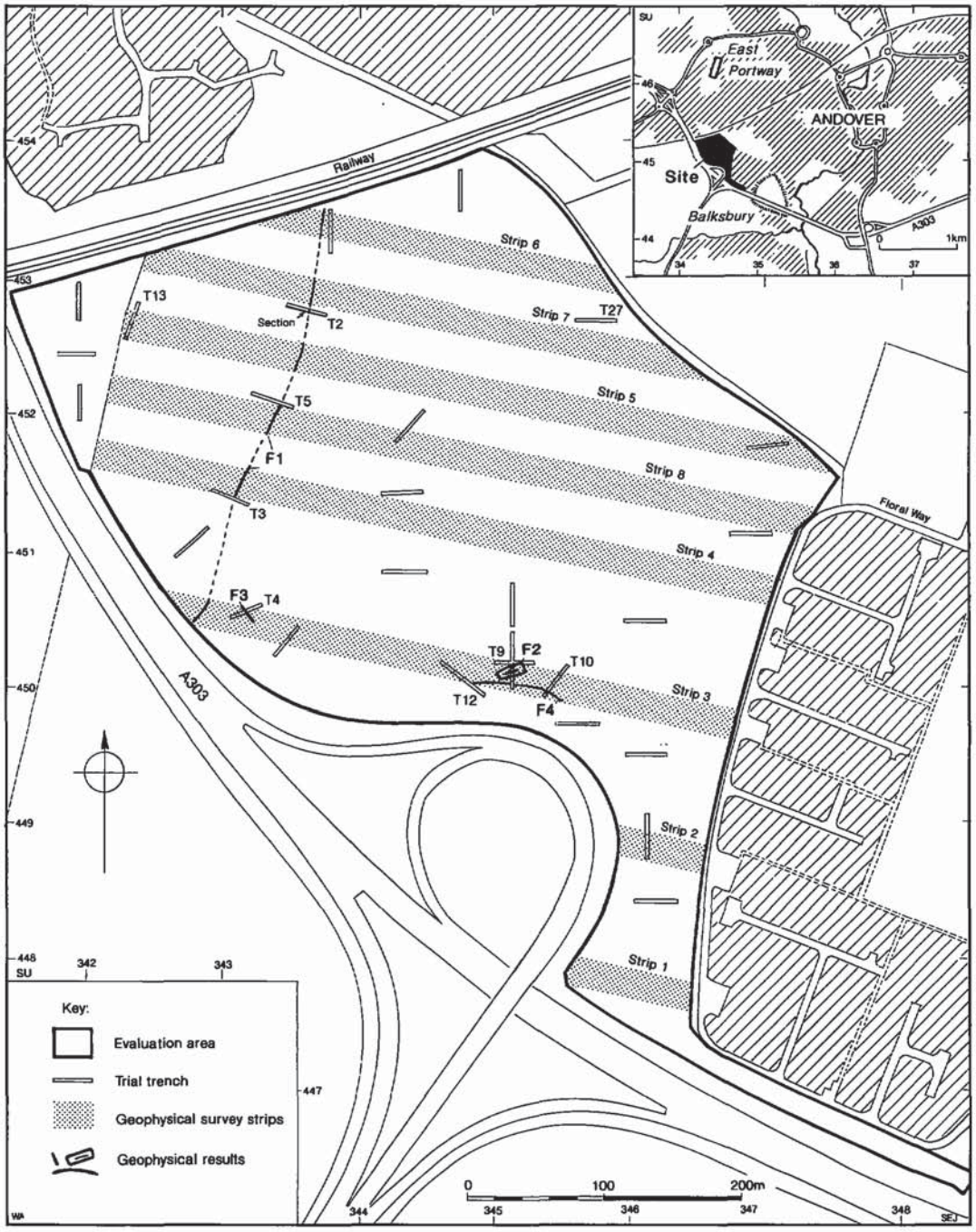

Fig. 2 Andover: location of evaluation trenches to the west of Floral Way

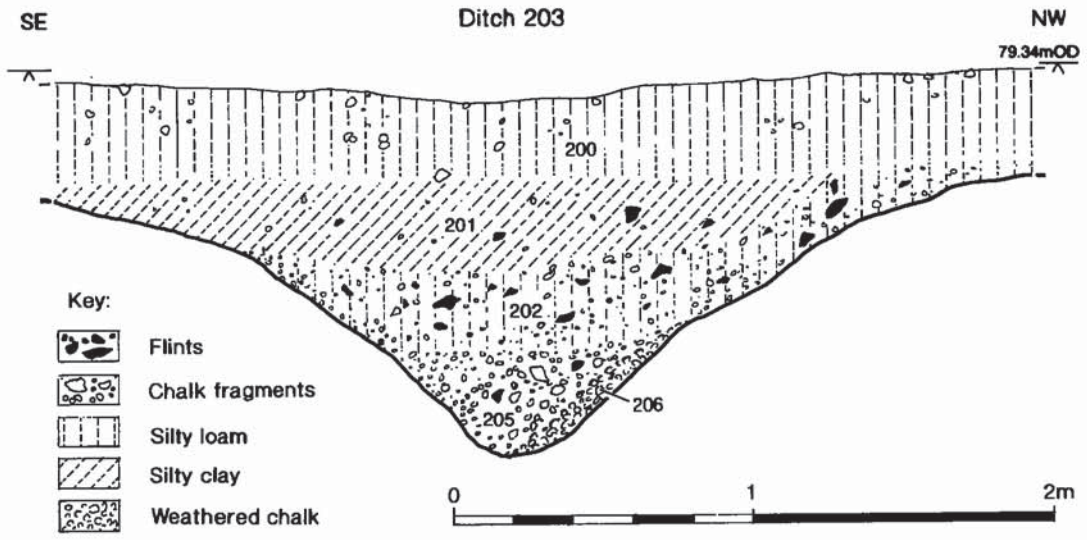

Fig. 3 Andover: linear ditch section in Trench 2

cate its likely position. No artefacts were recovered from the ditch.

Other features

Close to the southern end of Ditch F1, a narrow and short linear feature had been identified during the geophysical survey (Fig. 2, F3). Although this was allocated a 75% confidence rating on the strength of the magnetometer response, a trial trench (Fig. 2, T4) located directly on the position of this feature failed to locate anything except a few stripes of clay, probably the result of periglacial weathering of the chalk.

A further small group of potential archaeological features was also identified in the southern part of the evaluation area during the geophysical survey (Fig. 2, F2 and F4), although the elements of this group were allocated confidence ratings of only 15% – 40%. The trial trenches positioned to examine these potential features found further evidence of periglacial weathering of the surface of the chalk but no trace of any anthropogenic activity.

A small ditch was located in trial trench T13; it was aligned north-east/south-west and the rounded western terminal of the feature was within the trench area. The ditch was 0.5 m wide at the surface and 0.15 m deep, and had steep sides and a flat base. A few pieces of unworked flint were found in the ditch fill.

Another small ditch was located in trial trench T27. This feature was 0.45 m wide at the surface and 0.22 m deep with steep sides and a flat base. Again a few pieces of unworked flint were found in the ditch fill.

The programme of surface artefact collection resulted in the recovery of 600 pieces of worked flint and eleven sherds of pottery. No concentrations of artefact material were identified. The assemblage of worked flint was analysed and was seen to represent a flake industry without specialised blade or core tool production. Eleven tools were identified, including thumbnail scrapers, a piercer and a tranchet flake tool. The overall nature of the assemblage suggests activity of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date.

The pottery assemblage included eight sherds of probable Romano-British date, one of which was a colour-coated fineware of Oxfordshire origin which is likely to be of 3rd–4th century AD date. The other three sherds are medieval in date; one rim sherd was from a jar or bowl of 12th–13th century date.

Discussion

The paucity of archaeological features identified within the proposed development area by the

evaluation programme was rather surprising, as several important archaeological sites are located within the immediate vicinity. These include the Late Bronze Age enclosure and subsequent settlement at Balksbury Camp *c.* 400 m to the south-east (Wainwright & Davies 1995), the Iron Age hillfort of Bury Hill *c.* 1.2 km to the south (Hawkes 1940), and a group of Bronze Age round barrows and an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Portway East *c.* 1 km to the north (Cook & Dacre 1985). The Roman road known as the Portway passes within 600 m of the north-western edge of the evaluation area.

Due to the lack of datable artefacts and the relative isolation of the features, discussion regarding the ditches recorded within the evaluation area, including the more substantial F2, is limited in nature and value. However, attention should be drawn to the presence within the west Andover area of a number of other ditches of which slightly more is known.

Investigations carried out during improvement works along the A303 road recorded several isolated ditches at various intervals between Andover and Thruxton (Bellamy 1992). These included an undated example aligned north/south at the Monxton interchange *c.* 800 m north-west of ditch F2. This was thought to be a potential component of a ditch system which converges on an Iron Age enclosure at Portway West (Department of the Environment 1975).

More relevant to the current site, however, is a meandering ditch (generally aligned north/south) which forms a boundary between the Iron Age enclosure at Portway West and the contemporary site of Blendon Drive to the east. This is known as the East Portway Ditch and has been the subject of more intensive investigation (Cook & Dacre 1985, 10–16; but see Palmer 1984, Map 1, for a clear indication of the relationship between these sites).

The East Portway Ditch clearly post-dates a group of Middle Bronze Age round barrows and is itself likely to be of Iron Age date, contemporary with the two ditched settlements which it separates. Its survival into the historic period is attested by the presence of a series of inhumation burials of 6th century AD date cut into the upper fills of the ditch. The southern extent of the East Portway Ditch is not known and it is separated from ditch F2 by *c.* 800 m of residential development, but it is plausible to suggest that these features are part of a network of later prehistoric land division in the west Andover area.

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned via Savills International Property Consultants and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Mr P Kentish for his assistance during the course of the work. Thanks are also due to the Burnfield family for funding the work and enabling access during the right gaps in the farming calendar. The collaborative role of Mr D Hopkins, Principal Archaeologist at Hampshire County Council, is duly acknowledged.

The trial trenching was carried out under the direction of Mike Heaton and the surface artefact collection was supervised by Neil J Adam. The geophysical survey was undertaken by GeoQuest Associates. The artefacts were examined by Phil Harding and L N Mepham, and the figures were prepared by S E James.

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