

Site Distribution

By M. A. ASTON

THE 15 important new sites located by the work of the M.40 Research Group represent a great increase in the archaeological knowledge of this part of Oxfordshire. The sites reveal the same phenomenon as that recently shown by the work of the M.4 and M.5 Committees on motorways in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. There, intensive fieldwork similar to that employed by the M.40 Group revealed far more sites in any particular area than had hitherto been thought to exist.¹ Before work began on the M.40 there were few sites known or recorded in the records at the Oxford City and County Museum Field Department² and none of those was directly on the line of the future motorway. As was shown in 1970, the overall density of sites over this area was less than one site per square kilometre.³ Now this density has been increased to at least two or three sites per square kilometre for the area adjacent to the motorway. As with the work of the M.5 in Gloucestershire, any distribution map of sites of any period likely to be composed in the future will tend to show sites, in some cases a line of sites, where a motorway has been built. The work of the M.40 Group therefore demonstrates that, firstly, there are far more sites in any particular area than may have been suspected, secondly, intensive work in every sphere can locate many of these buried sites, using such techniques as fieldwork, aerial reconnaissance and scientific survey methods, and thirdly, any development likely to disturb the topsoil over a large area will almost certainly reveal previously unsuspected or unrecorded sites. The need for more fieldwork over the whole county is demonstrated beyond all doubt.

Although most of the line of the future M.40 motorway from Waterstock crossroads to Banbury and northwards is as yet unannounced (May 1973), the public has been informed of a corridor between two and four miles wide (three to six kilometres) in which the future extension of the motorway will be built. Figure 2, on p. 3, shows this corridor in relation to the existing M.40 under construction, and with the 125 or so known sites of all periods plotted. No doubt with future intensive fieldwork when the definite line of the motorway is announced far more sites than are shown here will come to light. The opportunities available for an increase in knowledge of the archaeology and history of South Northamptonshire and North Oxfordshire could well be as spectacular as for the South Oxfordshire area.

¹ P. J. Fowler and C. V. Walthew (eds.), 'Archaeology and the M5 Motorway', *Trans. Bristol and Gloucs. Arch. Soc.*, 90 (1971), 22.

² D. Benson, 'A Sites and Monuments Record for the Oxfordshire Region', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1972), 226-37.

³ D. Benson, 'A Museum—Oxfordshire' in E. Fowler (ed.), *Field Survey in British Archaeology*, C.B.A., 1972, 16.