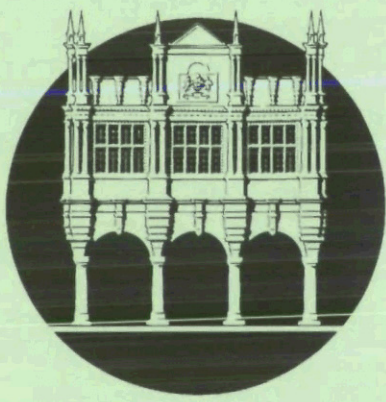


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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
EXETER ROAD, TOPSHAM, 1999**

by

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Exeter Archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken at Exeter Road Topsham by Exeter Archaeology (EA) between 10-14 May 1999. The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Lacey Hickie Caley and carried out as part of a programme of archaeological assessment to assist in the determination of a planning application submitted by the University of Exeter to Exeter City Council (Ref: 98/0614/03).

1.1 The site (SX96008920)

This site occupies an area of around 9.3ha, bounded on the south-west by Exeter Road, on the north-west by the M5 Motorway, on the north-east by a field at the rear of Newcourt Road, and on the south-east by Broom Park and an adjoining field. The underlying rock consists of Dawlish Sandstone, also laid down in Permian times, overlain by deposits of the third river terrace, giving rise to a Brown Earth soil ascribed to the Rudway Series, and suitable for intensive production. In the Exeter Local Plan the area is identified as a green wedge, intended to prevent Topsham and Countess Wear from merging, and enabling them to retain their separate identities.

1.2 Project brief

The archaeological evaluation was carried out in accordance with the terms of a brief provided by the Exeter City Council Archaeology Officer (EVALBF/99/0129/03, 23 April 1999), prepared in the light of a previous archaeological assessment and geophysical survey (Collings *et al.* 1999; Oxford Archaeotechnics 1999). The primary aim of the evaluation was to assess the character of suspected archaeological features, particularly those identified in the geophysical survey, in order that a reasonable assessment of the impact of the proposed scheme can be made. The two areas of maximum potential identified by the geophysical survey were the in the south-west corner of the site (probable enclosure) and the centre of the southern field (field boundaries).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (Collings *et al.* 1999, 2-3)

2.1 Archaeological background

The river terraces were highly regarded as areas of settlement in prehistoric times and are known to have been well-populated during the Bronze and Iron Ages. The road from Topsham to Exeter was used to transport goods in the medieval period and probably lies on the approximate course of the earlier Roman road linking Exeter with the port. In the south-western corner of the site itself, dark linear marks identified from an aerial photograph indicate the former presence of an enclosure or field boundaries.

A substantial amount of Romano-British and also prehistoric activity has been identified in the vicinity of this site, including flint scatters comprising hundreds of flakes and implements of mainly Late Neolithic date.

Within 100m to the south-west, on the opposite side of Exeter Road at SX957890, the excavation of a gravel terrace in 1974 revealed the nucleus of a Romano-British farmstead, dating from the first century AD. A probable 2nd-century boundary and a late 3rd/4th-century cremation also indicated use of the site later in the Roman period. Late Neolithic settlement on the same site was indicated by a flint scatter, a number of pits and a quantity of pottery,

and a small number of microliths suggested even earlier Mesolithic occupation (Jarvis & Maxfield 1975).

Within 350m to the south-east of the site a variety of Roman finds were retrieved in the 1930s during the construction of a sewer trench about fifty feet from Exeter Road. Trial excavations revealed the presence of pottery of the Roman military period at SX96078873, and nearby (at SX95958870) a large group of pottery of similar date was found in a pit during the construction of a pipe-trench in Riverside Road in 1973/4, in addition to two sandstone block footings of a building located near the junction with Hamilton Road. Other Roman pottery and building materials were found during a trial excavation at SX96088860 in 1949, and there have been further sporadic finds in this general area. A small excavation in 1938, on the opposite side of the road at SX96238875, revealed a Romano-British building interpreted as a combined hand-operated corn mill and bakehouse.

2.2 Historical background

The field pattern in the area to the north-west of Topsham is a very regular one, with a number of long narrow plots aligned at right-angles to Exeter Road, particularly on the north-west side. These are likely to be of medieval origin having formed strips of cultivated land within a large unenclosed open field. The strips were gradually amalgamated and enclosed with hedges to produce the landscape which was mapped in the mid 19th century.

The site has probably always been used for agricultural purposes. At the time of the tithe survey (1842-3) it consisted of six fields. By 1890 this had been reduced to four, and the site was crossed by a footpath linking Exeter Road with Newcourt Road (Fig. 5). Aerial photographs taken after the last war show large greenhouses at the northern end of the site, which remained until at least the 1980s, and further rationalisation since has reduced the number of fields to two.

3. THE EVALUATION

3.1 Method

Thirteen trenches were excavated in order to investigate the features indicated by the geophysical survey and to obtain a representative sample of the entire site (Fig. 2). All trenches were excavated by a wheeled-digger using a toothless grading bucket to a width of c. 1.5m (except trench K). The depth of overlying topsoil on the site was generally 0.30m (as a minimum). Below this in most places, was a lower soil horizon varying in depth from 0.15m to 0.25m. This consisted of a reddish-brown silty material and overlay the natural gravel or silty clay subsoil. All archaeological features were cut into the subsoil and, where it was present, they were sealed by the lower soil horizon (536). Archaeological features were generally at a depth of around 0.45m below the present ground surface, with a minimum depth of 0.35m.

The site boundaries, trench locations and archaeological features were surveyed using a Sokkia total station, and the exposed features were drawn in plan and section at scales of 1:20 and 1:50 as appropriate. A written record was compiled using standard EA context sheets, and a photographic record, consisting of colour transparencies and black-and-white prints, was also made.

3.2 Results

Trench A (30m long) (Figs 3-4)

S x 98 NC | 134

This trench was excavated in the south-west corner of the site, parallel with Exeter Road, to examine the potential enclosure identified during the geophysical survey.

Three linear features aligned NE/SW were located within the trench. The enclosure ditch (506), corresponding to the anomaly recorded on the geophysical survey, was 1.30m wide, 1.10m deep and 0.25m wide at its base. The sides of the ditch were fairly steep, particularly towards the base. The lower fill (507) contained a high proportion of small stones derived from the natural gravel. The level of silting suggests that the ditch was open for a long period and at least half-filled by natural erosion and silting. This fill contained no dating evidence. The upper fill (503) contained less gravel and appeared to have been infilled over a shorter period. One sherd of Roman tile was recovered from this context.

A second linear feature (505) was encountered 1.40m to the north-west of, and parallel to, ditch 506. This was much smaller in size, being 0.80m wide with a maximum depth of 0.35m. The sides were fairly steep, but the base appeared to have been disturbed by animal activity. It was filled with a reddish-brown sandy silt (502) but contained no dating evidence.

The another parallel feature (504) was located 1.60m to the north-west of 505. This gully was fairly small with a width of 0.45m and a depth of 0.35m. It was steep-sided with a flat base. It contained a similar fill to ditch 505 (501) but, again, no dating evidence.

Trench B (20m long) (Figs 3-4)

Trench B was excavated in the south-west part of the site, parallel with the western site boundary, to locate the continuation of the ditch (506) recorded in trench A. The trench was dug to a maximum depth of 0.50m to the level of natural gravels. The enclosure ditch here (523) was more substantial than that in Trench A, being 1.70m wide and 1.0m deep. Its sides were fairly steep but irregular. The base fill (535) consisted mainly of silt with small rounded stones derived from the natural gravel subsoil. This fill did not contain any dating evidence. The upper fill (524) comprised a mid-brown silty loam, similar to the overlying topsoil, and contained 19 sherds of Roman pottery representing ten vessels. There was no evidence for a bank to the south of the ditch.

About 5.25m to the south of ditch (523), and running parallel to it, a second linear feature (525) was found. This ditch was very shallow and also cut from the level of natural gravel. It was 0.70m wide and 0.15m deep, with fairly steep sides and a flat base. It was filled with a light reddish-brown silt (526) and contained one sherd of a Roman amphora.

To the south of ditch (523) were two small post-holes. One (527) had a diameter of 0.25m and a depth of 0.28m. It was filled with a mid-brown silty loam (528) containing no finds. Another post-hole (529), to the south of 527, had a diameter of 0.70m and a depth of 0.50m. It was filled with a mid reddish-brown silt (530) and contained one piece of Roman tile.

Immediately to the south of this post-hole a ditch (531) was aligned NW/SE. This was 0.70m wide and 0.30m deep. It was filled with mid-brown sandy silt (532) but contained no finds. Running parallel to this ditch was a gully (533), 0.20m wide and 0.10m deep. This was filled with similar material (534) and contained one sherd of Roman pottery.

Trench C (20m long)

This trench was located at the southern edge of the site in the area of the proposed depot, aligned SW/NE at right angles to Exeter Road. The natural subsoil in the north-west of the trench consisted of reddish-brown sandy clay and in the south-east it was gravel. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench D (20m long)

Trench D was located in the south-east corner of the site parallel with Exeter Road and perpendicular to the eastern site boundary. It was positioned in order to investigate a possible ring-form suggested by the geophysical survey. The trench was dug to a depth of 0.50m. No gravel was encountered, the natural subsoil consisting of a reddish-brown clay silt which was progressively less mixed with depth. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench E (30m long)

Trench E was excavated at the western side of the site parallel with the site boundary in the area where a flint scatter had been located. The trench was dug to a maximum depth of 0.55m, exposing the natural gravels, but no archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench F (15m)

Trench F was positioned to locate a possible pit or hollow indicated by the geophysical survey towards the south end of the site. This trench was aligned NW/SE, parallel with Exeter Road, and was excavated to depth of 0.45m where natural gravel was exposed. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench G (10m long)

This north/south trench was positioned to the east of trench E to investigate a possible trackway suggested by the geophysical survey. The natural subsoil consisted of reddish clay silt containing frequent medium-sized rounded stones. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench H (20m long)

This trench was positioned at right-angles to the eastern site boundary at the location of the proposed pavilion. The trench was aligned NW/SE. Natural gravel and clay were located at a depth of 0.50m. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench J (10m)

Trench J, aligned NW/SE, was excavated to the north-east of trench G to investigate a weak linear feature on the geophysical plot. Natural gravel was encountered at a depth of 0.55m. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench K

This trench was located to the north-east of trench J and was excavated as a 15m box with a maximum width of 7.5m. This was designed to locate the junction of three boundary features and the continuation of the weak linear feature mentioned above. These were all detected on the geophysical survey. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.73m where the natural gravel was exposed. It was only at this depth that the archaeological features could be detected as soilmarks.

The latest feature, ditch (517), formed the north-east angle of a field boundary as a continuous feature. The fill of this ditch consisted of mid-brown sandy silt and contained post-medieval pottery. This ditch was fairly shallow but had been truncated by the machine-excavated trench. The section showed the ditch to have a depth of 0.40m.

A second post-medieval boundary ditch (521), aligned east/west, appeared to abut ditch 517 and was linked to it by a shallow gully. Ditch 521 also contained post-medieval pottery. The north edge of this ditch was very irregular. The base was almost flat and fairly even. Examination of the section showed that this ditch had been dug from just above the level of natural gravel to a depth of 0.60m.

A third ditch (519) (the weak linear) was located to the north; this was cut by both ditches (517/521). Only the very base of the ditch survived where it cut into the natural gravel. It had a width of 0.48m and a depth of 0.10m. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

Trench L (30m long)

Trench L was positioned at right-angles to the M5 motorway in the northern part of the lower field. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.50m. No gravel was located; the natural subsoil consisted of a reddish-brown sandy clay becoming increasingly less mixed with depth. No archaeological features or finds were found.

Trench M (20m long)

This trench was located in the northern part of the site in the upper field. It was aligned NW/SE and at right-angles to the M5 motorway. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.30m where natural gravels were exposed. The gravels had been subjected to modern disturbance in isolated areas, probably as a result of former nursery activity. No archaeological features or finds were located.

Trench N (30m long)

Trench N was located in the upper field to the north-east of trench K. The trench was aligned NW to SE and was excavated to a depth of 0.45m. Natural gravels were not encountered; the natural subsoil consisted of reddish-brown sandy clay, becoming less mixed with increased depth. No archaeological features or finds were found.

Trial pits

The excavation of a series of trial pits on the site by WSP Environmental was also observed by Exeter Archaeology in May 1999. However, the trial pits revealed no significant archaeological information.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Roman enclosure

The large ditches (506 and 523) in the east of trench A and the north of trench B appear to represent the eastern angle of Roman enclosure situated in the south-west corner of the site close to the existing access.

There was no clear evidence for any banks associated with the enclosure. The geophysical survey indicates that ditches 506/523 formed a continuous boundary, although the ditch in trench B (523) was found to be more substantial. The pottery from the upper fill of this ditch

dates from the mid 2nd to the mid 3rd century AD, i.e. from the Roman civil period. No dating evidence was retrieved from the lower ditch fills, but the level of silting in the base of 506 (trench A) suggests that it was open for a long period of time. This fact, together with the recovery of a sherd of pottery (534) dating from between AD 49 and the late 2nd century, from the gully in trench B (533), allows for the possibility of the enclosure having been in use in the earlier Roman period. It may be contemporary and possibly associated with the nearby settlement located 100m to the south-west at SX957890. This latter site was excavated in 1974 (see 2.1) and found to date predominantly from the 1st century AD, but also containing elements of later Roman activity (2nd to 4th centuries). A linear feature found in an outlying excavation trench in 1974, now lying beneath the M5 adjacent to the present site, was roughly parallel to ditch 506. This feature was assigned to the first century AD (Jarvis & Maxfield 1975, Trench A on Fig. 2; 225).

Unfortunately, the sherd of Roman amphora (526) in the second shallow ditch (525), and the piece of Roman tile (530) in the larger post-hole (529), both excavated in trench B, could not be closely dated. However, the presence of these and other features within the enclosure area suggests that there is preservation of internal structures, probably representing more than one phase of activity.

All the features associated with the enclosure were located at a minimum depth of 0.35m below the present surface.

4.2 Field boundaries

The ditches located within trench K represent the remains of a post-medieval field system. However, the small ditch (519) is on a different alignment and is likely to date to an earlier period. The field pattern is displayed on Topsham Tithe Map c. 1843 and the 1890 1st edition OS map (Fig. 5).

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The remainder of the site showed no evidence of archaeological remains. Other putative features suggested by the geophysical survey were probably caused by variations in the natural subsoil and geology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Lacey Hickie Caley on behalf of the University of Exeter and administered by P. Lacey and P.J. Weddell (EA). The project brief was supplied by A.R. Pye (Archaeology Officer, ECC). The fieldwork was undertaken by A.J. Sage assisted by J.P. Freeman, A. Ellis and R. Conabeer. The illustrations were prepared by A.J. Sage.

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APPENDIX: FINDS CATALOGUE by G. Langman

The following is an alphabetical finds listing for Exeter Road, Topsham 1999. All weights given are in grams (to the nearest 2 grams) and qty denotes quantity. The following site code was used to mark artefacts: TER 99.

Context Dating

<i>context</i>	<i>date/period</i>	<i>stnw</i>	<i>stoneware</i>
503	roman	SW	South-Western
518	17th/18th century	w	ware
522	1650-1750	Wstr	Westerwald
524	roman (mid 2nd to mid 3rd century)		
526	roman		
530	roman		
534	roman (conquest to late 2nd century)		

Clay pipe

<i>context</i>	<i>bowls</i>	<i>stems</i>	<i>dates/comments</i>
518	-	3	after 1600

Glass

<i>context</i>	<i>qty</i>	<i>comments</i>
522	1	green bottle glass fragment: 1650-1750

Ironwork

<i>context</i>	<i>qty</i>	<i>comments</i>
503	2	?nail (2 fragments of same object)

Lithics

<i>context</i>	<i>qty</i>	<i>comments</i>
518	2	flint: 2 utilised flakes
unstrat	2	flint: 2 struck flakes

Pottery & Dating Evidence*Abbreviations Listing*

BB1	black-burnished ware category 1
bs	base
C	Century
CSJ	counter sunk jar
cw	coarseware
dec	decorated
Del	Delft
E	early
Exe	Exeter
gty	gritty
gy	grey
jg	jug
L	late
M	mid
PRD	plain rim dish
Rom	Roman
SD	South Devon
sdv	sandy
sgf	sgraffito
sh	sherd
SS	South Somerset

Roman

<i>context</i>	<i>contents/dating evidence</i>	<i>sherds</i>	<i>vessels</i>
503	Rom tile: Rom		
524	Rom (M2C-M3C) total sherds: 19 total vessels: 10 amphora Exe gty gy w (E2C-L3C) Exe sdy gy w (1C-L2C) SW BB1 (1 CSJ M1C-M3C, 1 PRD M2C-M3C) SD w	2 1 1 10 5	1 1 1 4 3
526	Rom total sherds: 1 total vessels: 1 amphora	1	1
530	Rom tile: Rom		
534	Rom (1C-L2C) total sherds: 1 total vessels: 1 Exe sdy gy w (1C-L2C)	1	1
unstrat trench N	total sherds: 2 total vessels: 1 amphora tile: Rom	2	1

Statistics-Roman

total number of sherds: 23
minimum number of vessels: 13

Post-Medieval

<i>context</i>	<i>contents/dating evidence</i>	<i>sherds</i>	<i>vessels</i>	Slag <i>context</i>	<i>qty</i>	<i>weight</i>	<i>comments</i>	
				534	1	14	not tap slag	
518	17C/18C total sherds: 1 total vessels: 1 SS sgf (17C/E18C, worn sh) clay pipe: aft 1600	1	1	Tile <i>context</i>	<i>qty</i>		<i>comments</i>	
				503	1		roman tile fragment	
				524	1		roman tile fragment	
				530	1		roman tile fragment	
				unstrat trench N	1		roman tile fragment	
522	1650-1750 total sherds: 2 total vessels: 1 SS cw (17C/18C, cup bs) glass: 1650-1750	2	1	Roman tile data <i>context</i>	<i>fabric</i>	<i>type</i>	<i>qty</i>	<i>weight</i>
				503	2	imb	1	16
				524	2	teg	1	212
				530	2	imb	1	24
				unstrat trench N	1	teg	1	18
unstrat	total sherds: 7 total vessels: 3 Del dec (?L17C/18C) Wstr stnw (L17C/E18C, 2 jg)	1 6	1 2	imb = imbrex teg = tegula				

Statistics: Post-Medieval

total number of sherds: 10

minimum number of vessels: 5



Fig. 1 Site location. Based on the 1997 OS 1:25000 Explorer map sheet 114, with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright AL 52533A 0001.

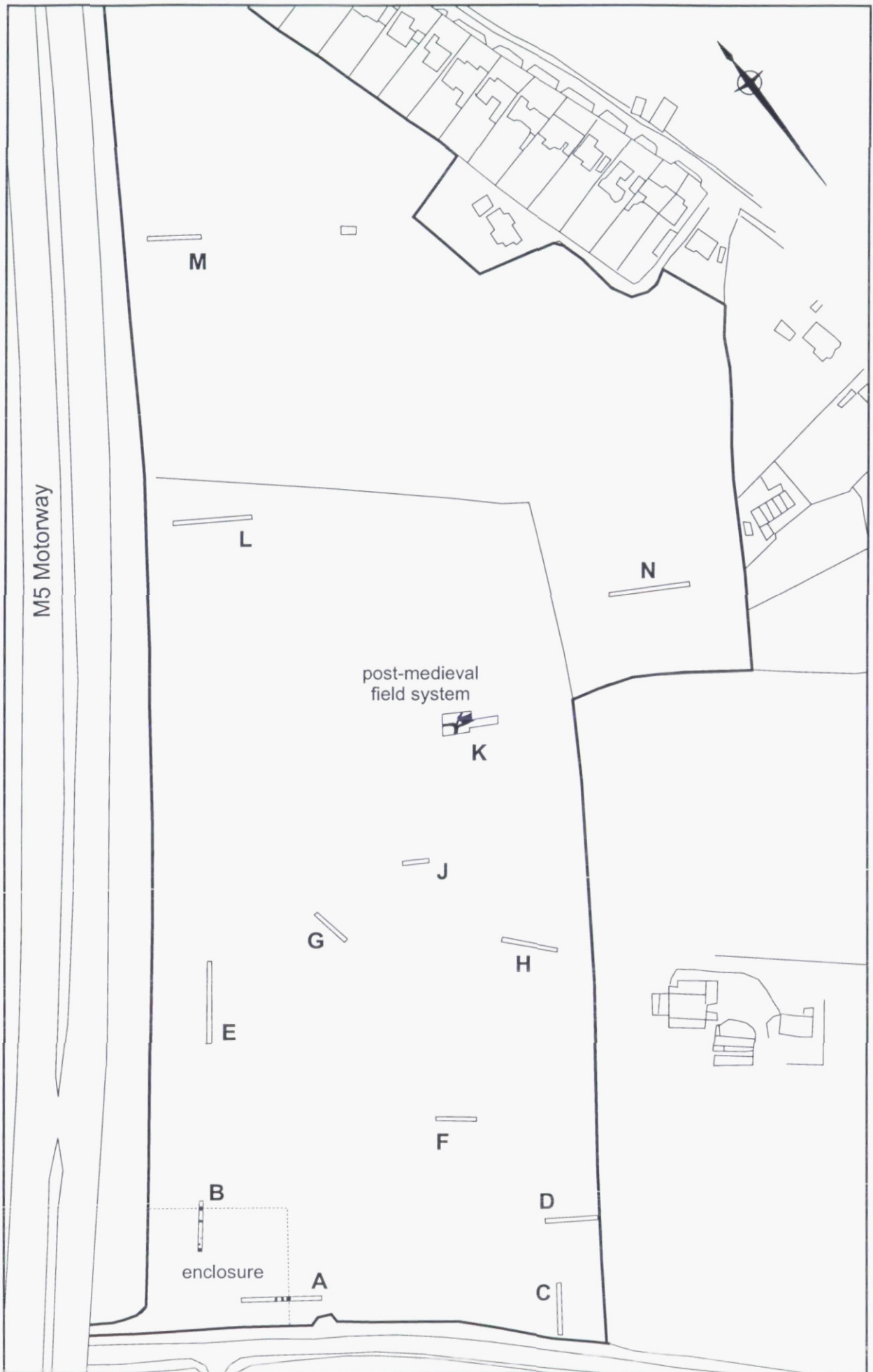


Fig. 2 Location of trenches with features shown in black. Scale 1:2000.

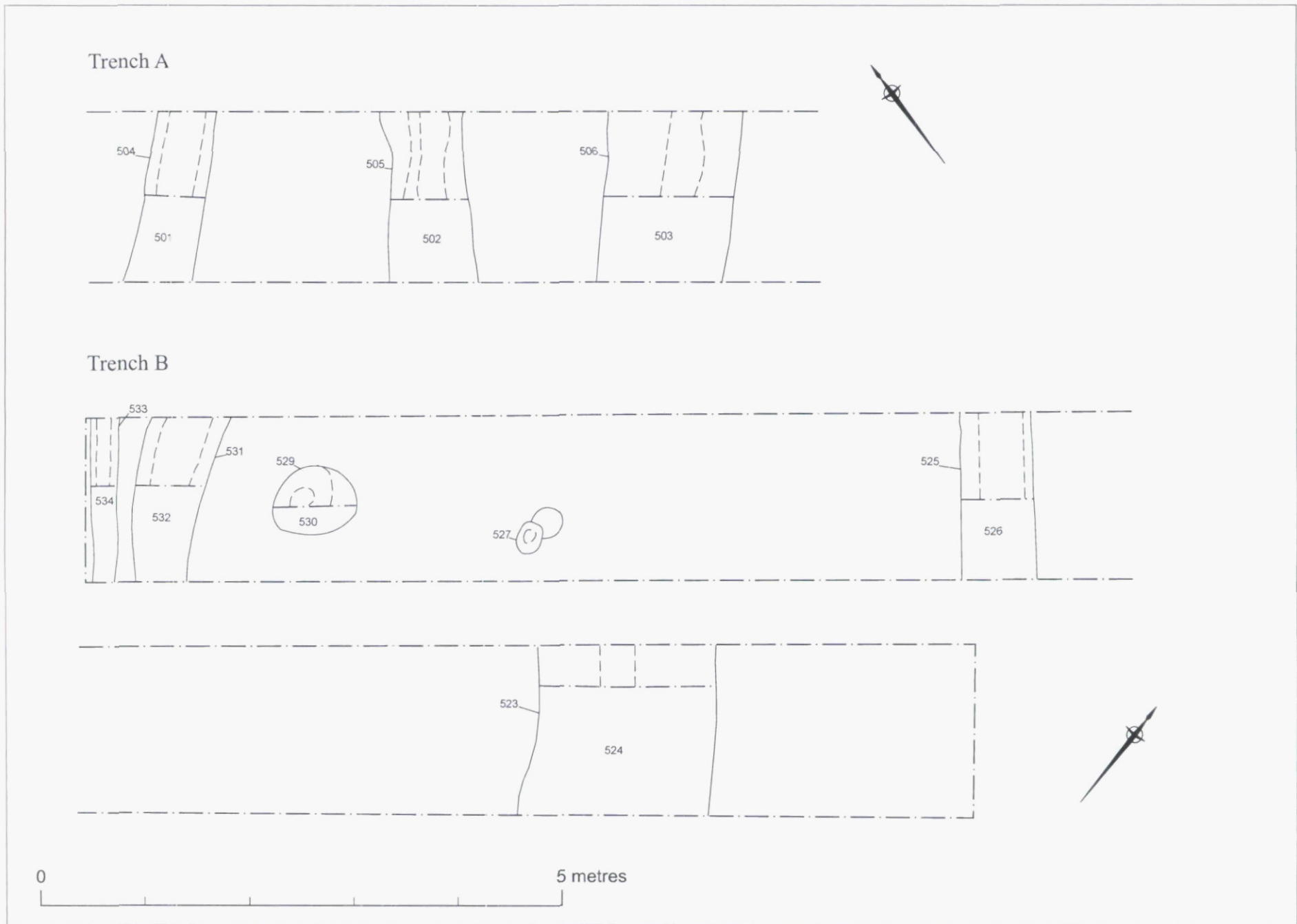


Fig. 3 Plans of trenches A and B. Scale 1:50

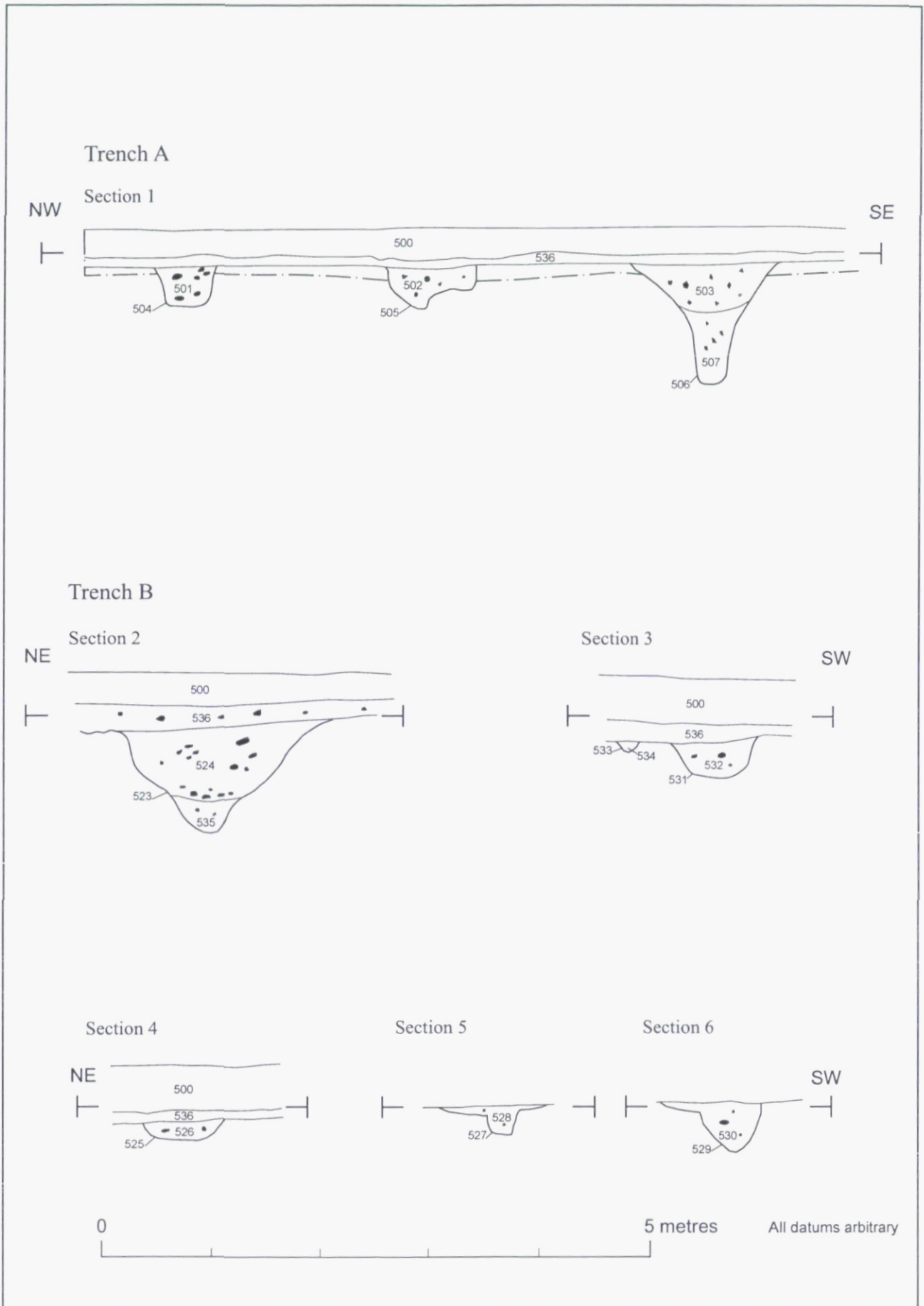


Fig. 4 Trenches A and B: sections. Scale 1:50.

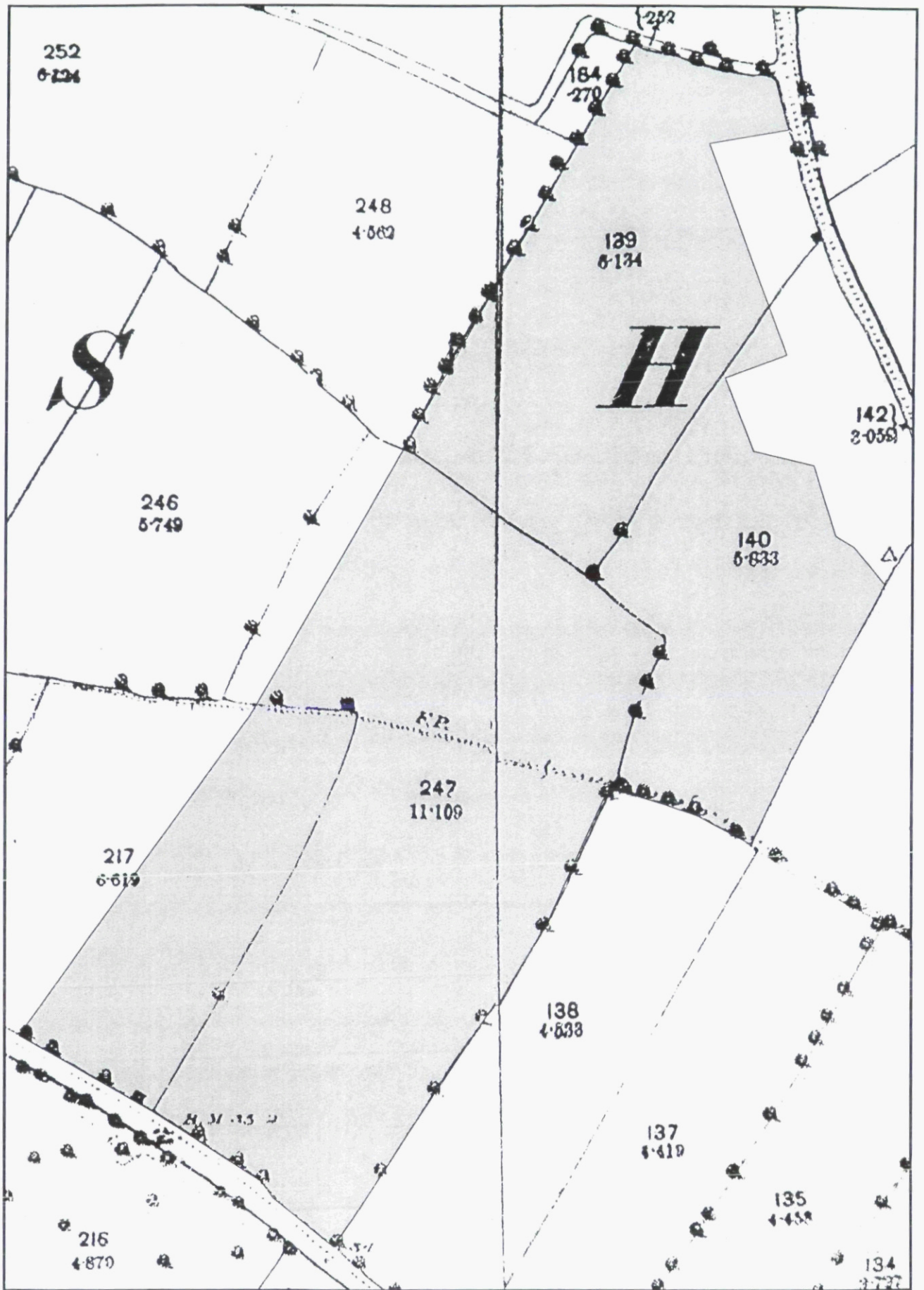


Fig. 5 The site area in 1890 (OS 1st edition 1:2500 map sheets Devon LXXX.15 & 16).