# ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT SITE OF NEW WAREHOUSE FOR VITAL DOG SUPPLIES THE BARTON, NORTH TAWTON, DEVON

by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of archaeological recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) at The Barton, North Tawton, Devon (SS 6606 0062) in April and May 2003. The work was commissioned by K.W. & J. Dunn & Sons, at the request of English Heritage South West Region, to investigate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the construction of a new warehouse, service runs, and an associated access road.

## 2. THE SITE (SS 6606 0062)

The site of the new warehouse and access road (to the east and north of the building) is located on a gentle westward slope at a height of between 125m and 130m AOD (Fig. 1). It occupies *c.* 6200m$^2$ of an arable field at the southern edge of the northern part of an area defined as a Scheduled Monument (SM), Devon 10384 (Fig. 2). The current Vital Dog Supplies storage and distribution warehouses lie adjacent to the south. At 100m to the west the land drops sharply towards the River Taw.

The underlying geology consists of Permian Bow Conglomerates overlain by river terrace deposits (BGS).

## 3. BACKGROUND

### 3.1 General archaeological background

#### 3.1.1 *Roman and prehistoric remains*

The area around The Barton contains a large number of archaeological sites of the later prehistoric period and also one of the most extensive Roman military sites in Devon. These sites are protected as a Scheduled Monument (SM) Devon 10384, the boundary of which encircles, but does not include, The Barton itself. It has been identified as one of the possible sites of the Roman military post or station of *Nemetostatio* mentioned in the Ravenna Cosmography, although Bury Barton, Lapford is another contender (see Griffith 1984, 20–25).

***SM10384: prehistoric ring-ditches***

A collection of ring-ditches is included within the Scheduled Monument. These features are usually indicative of Bronze Age barrows, although Late Neolithic or Roman dates are also possible. Three such features are located close to the present development area:

- SMR SS60SE/**33** (SS66120072) ***Double ring-ditch*** (lies within Scheduled area). This is *c.* 20m in diameter and cut by the Roman marching camp perimeter.
- SMR SS60SE/**51** (SS66120081) Scheduled Monument 10384/1 ***Small enclosure or large single ring-ditch***. This lies immediately north of the Roman camp and close to other ring-ditches.
- SMR SS60SE/**34** (SS66350076) Scheduled Monument 10384/2 ***Double ring-ditch***. This feature, nearly 38m in diameter, is bisected by a grubbed-out field boundary.

***SM 10384: Roman military complex***

Cropmark and earthwork evidence in the immediate vicinity of the development site has demonstrated the presence of Roman remains comprising two marching camps (SMR

SS60SE/26, SM10384/3), two forts (SX69NE/3, SM10384; SS60SE/64, SM10384/4), a Roman road (SX69NE/22) and numerous associated features.

3.1.2 ***Medieval***

The village of North Tawton originated as a Saxon and Domesday settlement (Thorn & Thorn 1985, 1.3) and contains a number of medieval sites, including the parish church, a 12th-century motte, and an enclosed medieval strip field system.

Formerly called Cottles Barton, The Barton is a Grade II* Listed Building, with associated agricultural outbuildings, situated to the south of the development site. It was built as a small manor house in 1567 and restored in 1866 (Hoskins 1972, 490). It is possible, however, that the site has Saxon origins, being identified by several sources (e.g. Reichel 1901, 607) with the Domesday estate of *Tawetone*.

3.2 **Previous archaeological investigations**

In 2002 a geophysical survey and subsequent evaluation were undertaken on the site of the proposed new warehouse. The geophysical (resistivity) survey revealed a number of possible features (GSB Prospection 2002). Trenches were sited to investigate these geophysical anomalies and to evaluate the entire site (Reed 2002). The features revealed during these investigations included a pit of probable Neolithic date, a possible prehistoric or Roman ditch, and another ditch of likely medieval origin.

In October 2003 an evaluation of a proposed lorry park and storm water storage pond, associated with the new warehouse, was undertaken (Whiteaway 2003). This exposed a shallow ditch of probable post-medieval date, and a series of ceramic and stone-lined land drains. Seven struck flint artefacts were recovered from the topsoil. A reinterpretation of the cropmarks within the Scheduled area (B–D on Fig. 6) reinforced the view (Welfare & Swan 1995, 54, 56) that cropmark B was not part of a Roman military marching camp as previously thought.

During the winter of 2002, emergency recording and a subsequent watching brief were undertaken during the realignment of a gas main in two areas to the south of Bathe Cross and Newland Mill (centred at SX 6656 0044 and SX 6602 0036 respectively). To the south of Newland Mill, features and deposits were exposed that had been sealed and protected by up to 0.75m of cultivation soil. They included a possible Romano-British trackway, a ditch that had been infilled during the Roman period, and a series of late prehistoric and early Roman buried soils. Pollen from the earliest buried soil (*c.* 1500–500BC) indicated an open undisturbed local environment with some probable cereal cultivation in the vicinity (Passmore 2003).

4. METHOD

The project was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by English Heritage (EA September 2002; revised April 2003).

Groundworks involved the stripping of topsoil from the footprint of the new warehouse and its access road. The natural slope was also levelled by the reduction of the existing ground in the eastern third of the site, with the resultant spoil being dumped and spread across the lower two-thirds of the site.

Topsoil stripping to the surface of the *in situ* natural subsoil was carried out under archaeological supervision and undertaken using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. The earlier evaluation (Reed 2002) had shown that the site had been subjected to agricultural truncation, with the surviving archaeological resource consisting of features cut into the subsoil.

Any exposed features were fully excavated, with a minimum of 20% of linear features sampled. A written record was produced on standard EA single context sheets, a drawn record was compiled at 1:20 and 1:100, and a photographic record was made consisting of colour transparencies and black-and-white prints. Deposits were assessed on site for their potential for yielding environmental material (charred plant remains, pollen etc.) and sampled as appropriate. The stockpiled topsoil was also examined for the recovery of artefacts.

## 5. RESULTS (Figs 3–5; Pl. 1)

The exposed subsoil varied across the site and consisted of red, stony, gritty silt on the eastern side, becoming more gravelly to the west, with angular and rounded gravel in a yellowish-brown clay matrix. This clay matrix contained pockets of natural reddish-brown silts and gravels. The topsoil consisted of dark red sandy silt, up to 0.50m thick; this is described by the Soil Survey (1983) as typical brown earths of the Crediton association.

### 5.1 **Ditches**

***Ditch 699*** (Pl. 2)
This ditch, the same as ditch 507 in the earlier evaluation, was exposed for a distance of 7.05m. It had been severely truncated by agricultural activity. It was aligned NNE to SSW, had an open V-shaped profile of between 1.1m and 1.4m wide, and was cut into the natural subsoil to a depth of 0.28m. The maximum recorded depth was 0.34m. The fill of the ditch (697) was a dark yellowish-brown, slightly sandy friable silt, containing occasional flecks and fragments of charcoal. A single struck flake was recovered (in addition to the sherd of medieval pottery retrieved during the evaluation).

***Ditch 700*** (Pl. 3)
This ditch was exposed over the full north-south width of the warehouse footprint and was the same as feature 504 recorded during the earlier evaluation. It had a V-shaped profile but with a rounded base; it was 1.2m wide and 0.50m deep. The ditch was filled with a reddish-brown to yellowish-red, loose clayey silt (679) containing occasional angular stones. A struck flint flake was recovered from one section (in addition to the single flint found during the evaluation).

***Ditch 701***
This ditch was exposed for a length of 17.80m on a north to south alignment in the centre of the warehouse site. Its profile was U-shaped, with near vertical sides and a flat base. It was up to 0.44m wide and cut into the subsoil to a maximum depth of 0.32m. It was filled with a friable, reddish-brown silt (611) containing fragments of charcoal and coke at its base, and must be regarded as being of post-medieval date.

***Ditch 702 and associated features***
This ditch, aligned NNW to SSE, was exposed for a length of 41.5m; it was recorded as 503 during the earlier evaluation. Its profile was a broad U-shape with gently sloping sides, up to

1.50m wide and 0.30m deep. The ditch was filled with red silty clay (620) with occasional gravel and charcoal fragments and contained four struck flakes and a piece of burnt flint. Towards the middle of the site this feature cut an earlier, undated pit (690). This pit was ovoid with gently sloping sides and a flat base. It measured 0.90m by 0.84m and was cut 0.16m into the subsoil. It was filled with firm, red silty clay containing a few charcoal fragments.

Aligned along the eastern edge of the ditch was a shallow intermittent gully (629). This feature was up to 0.16m wide and 0.05m deep and contained the same fill as the adjacent ditch. On the western side of the ditch were a number of post-holes (640, 642, 644, 646, 678, 682, 686, and 694). These were up to 0.40m in diameter and 0.20m deep, and were filled with reddish-brown silty clays. Post-hole 646 contained a struck flint.

5.2 **Pits at the east end of the site** (Fig. 4; Pl. 4) SS66150069 PRN 71119

A discrete group of five shallow pits was exposed in the south-east corner of the site. The pits were small (see table below for dimensions) and, with the exception of 662, contained a primary fill of red sandy clay, probably representing natural silting, sealed by thin secondary fills of dark reddish-brown clayey silt containing up to 90% charcoal.

| Context No. | Length (m) | Width (m) | Depth (m) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 652 | 1.10 | 0.70 | 0.10 |
| 655 | 0.90 | 0.69 | 0.10 |
| 658 | 0.90 | 0.70 | 0.08 |
| 662 | 0.90 | 0.50 | 0.20 |
| 668 | 1.00 | 0.80 | 0.18 |

5.3 **Other features**

Of the other features recorded, the following were of note (all undated):

The north-eastern edge of a ditch (520) was exposed for a distance of 1.85m in the south-western corner of the site. It had steep sides and was excavated to a depth of 0.75m, but its base was not reached. It contained four fills (521–4), but no finds.

Fourteen metres to the east of ditch 520 was an ovoid pit (625). This had rounded sides and a flat base; it measured between 0.80m and 0.60m in diameter and was 0.24m deep. It was filled with brownish-red silty clay (624), which contained 10% charcoal inclusions. This fill was sampled for environmental analysis and potential radiocarbon dating. In the top of the pit was a small scoop (623) measuring 0.25m in diameter and 0.11m deep. This may represent the base of a post-hole.

Pit 674 was exposed in the centre of the site. This measured between 0.90m and 0.64m in diameter and was 0.05m deep. At the base of this feature was a stake-hole (672).

To the north of 674, two short segments of a truncated gully (684) were exposed over a distance of 9m. The gully was 0.38m wide, 0.06m deep, and was filled with a compact, reddish-brown silty clay (683).

At the northern edge of the site was a pit (696). This had an open U-shaped profile, was between 0.88m and 0.96m wide, and 0.32m deep. It was filled with charcoal-flecked, red silty sand (695).

Just to the west of ditch 702, pit 638 measured 1.68m north-south, 0.62m east-west, and cut 0.22m into the natural subsoil. It was filled with reddish-brown, slightly sandy clay silt (637) and contained 47 fragments of animal (sheep/goat) bone, a fragment of 19th- or 20th-century window glass, and a residual struck flint.

Other undated features were post-hole 604, and pits 606, 608, 615, 619, and 627.

### 5.4 **Removal of stone dump**

A substantial stone dump to the south-west (west of The Barton) was removed as part of the project. A base layer of stones was retained as a surface for car parking and no excavation took place in this area. Consequently no archaeological deposits were seen to be disturbed.

## 6. THE FINDS (Appendix 1)

Twenty-two pieces of struck flint were recovered and two burnt pieces (14 of these flints were recovered from the topsoil). No Roman finds were retrieved, despite the proximity of known Roman deposits. Modern finds were recovered from pit 638 along with animal bones. Surprisingly no ceramic finds were observed within the topsoil.

## 7. RADIOCARBON DATING (Appendices 2 and 3)

Fills from a number of the pits containing charcoal were sampled to enable assessment of their potential to provide environmental data and their suitability for radiocarbon dating. These are listed in the table below, in addition to sample 4432300 from the evaluation, which was also processed.

| Cut | Fill | Sample |
|---|---|---|
| 502 | 501 | 4432300 |
| 652 | 651 | 4633302 |
| 655 | 654 | 4633303 |
| 658 | 656 | 4633304 |
| 668 | 667 | 4633305 |
| 696 | 695 | 4633306 |
| 625 | 624 | 4633307 |

After initial processing by EA, the samples were analysed by Rowena Gale to identify species and suitable material for conventional radiocarbon dating (Appendix 2). Most of the samples contained a mixed assemblage of gorse, elder, blackthorn, hazel, willow ash, birch, and oak, with the latter generally being the most predominant species.

Four samples (4432300, 4633305, 4633306 and 4633307) were selected for radiocarbon dating. Sample 4432300 (from evaluation pit 502) had been provisionally dated to the Neolithic period from the lithic assemblage. Samples 4633306 and 4633307 were taken from discrete pits, whilst 4633305 was taken from one of the group of five pits located in the south-east corner of the site. Radiocarbon dating was undertaken by The University of Waikato, New Zealand (Appendix 3) and results ranging from 3340BC to AD130 were obtained.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The agricultural truncation noted across the site during the evaluation was confirmed during the excavation. This was evidenced by the relatively shallow depth of features, e.g. at the eastern end of the site where only the bases survived. The area to the south of The Barton has not been subjected to the same level of disturbance (Passmore 2003).

The earliest feature on the site was pit 502, recorded during the evaluation. This was radiocarbon dated to 3340–2910BC, the middle to late Neolithic period. A second prehistoric feature, pit 625, was radiocarbon dated to 2210–1910BC (Early Bronze Age). This is the only feature within the area of The Barton that has been securely dated to the Bronze Age, although the ring-ditches to the north of the site (within the SM) may also be of this date. Two further unprotected and ploughed-out barrows are located on the west side of the River Taw at SS 658 005 (Gent 1996, 3).

The pits at the eastern end of the site contained distinctive charcoal-rich upper fills and were of similar size. Although these features contained no finds, radiocarbon dates of 50BC–AD130 (95.4% probability) from pit 668 and 100BC–AD90 (91.8% probability) from pit 696 suggest that they may represent a contemporary group. Given the nature of the surrounding cropmark sites, it is possible that they are of early Roman (military) date.

Ditch 700 appears to represent the western side of the cropmark site interpreted as a Roman military marching camp (A on Fig. 6). The ditch extends southward from the curving north-west angle of the camp. The Roman military interpretation is strengthened by its distinctive, though heavily truncated, V-shaped profile, which is common to ditches of this period.

Ditch 699 had been more heavily truncated than the other linear features. It was suggested during the evaluation that this ditch might be associated with the medieval origin of The Barton, and this interpretation remains valid, although it is possible that the ditch could be earlier. It contained a sherd of medieval pottery (evaluation) and a single flint (excavation). A plot of the cropmarks published by Welfare & Swan (fig. 46) shows a cropmark on the alignment of this ditch, although the feature is not discussed in the accompanying text.

Boundary 702 was recorded during the evaluation as two parallel ditches (503 and 505) and interpreted as a ploughed-out hedgebank. During the excavation only one ditch (702, the same as 503) could be traced, but was observed to have been replaced by a fence line represented by a series of post-holes (640, 642, 644, 646, 678, 682, 686, and 694). This boundary line (shown on Fig. 6) was probably removed in the 20th century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was administered by N. Dunn and S.J. Reed (EA). Thanks are due to N. Dunn and the staff of Dunn Plant Hire for their assistance during the excavation, also to I. Morrison and D. Coe (EH) for their advice during preparation of the written scheme of investigation. The fieldwork was undertaken by the author assisted by J. Bell, J. Hall, P. Harvey, B. Powell, A.J. Sage, C. Wakeham, N. Wassell, and R.K.W. Woodgate. The illustrations were prepared by T. Ives, A.J. Passmore and G. Young.

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# APPENDIX 1: FINDS LISTING

**Bone-faunal**

| *context* | *qty* | *comments* |
|---|---|---|
| 637 | 47 | all bone discarded, insufficient dating evidence, found with 19th/20th century glass & 1 lithic |

**Coins/Tokens**

| *context* | *SF* | *qty* | *comments* |
|---|---|---|---|
| unstrat | - | 1 | very worn, ?penny, ?George III |

**Copper Alloy**

| *context* | *SF* | *qty* | *comments* |
|---|---|---|---|
| unstrat | - | 1 | coin |

**Glass**

| *context* | *qty* | *comments* |
|---|---|---|
| 637 | 1 | window fragment: 19th/20th century |

**Lithics**

| *context* | *qty* | *comments* |
|---|---|---|
| 620 | 5 | flint: 4 struck flakes, 1 ?burnt |
| 622 | 1 | flint: struck flake (?utilised) |
| 637 | 1 | flint: struck |
| 645 | 1 | flint: struck flake |
| 679 | 1 | flint: struck flake |
| 697 | 1 | flint: struck flake (?utilised) |
| unstrat | 14 | flint: 1 end scraper, 1 struck (?utilised), 11 struck flakes, 1 ?burnt |

**Pottery & Dating Evidence**

*Abbreviations Listing*

| | |
|---|---|
| C | Century |
| Pre | prehistoric |

| *context* | *contents/dating evidence* |
|---|---|
| 620 | ?Pre<br>lithics: Pre |
| 622 | Pre<br>lithic: Pre |
| 637 | 19C/20C<br>glass: 19C/20C<br>lithic: Pre |
| 645 | ?Pre<br>lithic: Pre |
| 679 | ?Pre<br>lithic: Pre |
| 697 | ?Pre<br>lithic: Pre |

## APPENDIX 2: CHARCOAL IDENTIFICATION *by* R. Gale

### Introduction

Seven samples of charcoal from pits were examined to identify suitable material for conventional radiocarbon dating.

### Method

Although the samples were mostly quite large, a high proportion of the material was too fragmented to examine. Standard methods were used to prepare the samples (Gale & Cutler 2000). The anatomical structures were examined using a Nikon Labophot-2 microscope at magnifications up to x400 and matched to reference slides of modern wood. The maturity of the wood was noted where appropriate. Material selected for dating was weighed.

### Results

*4432300 [501]*: gorse (*Ulex* sp.) or broom (*Cytisus* sp.), 1g
elder (*Sambucus* sp.), <1g
blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), 3g
hazel (*Corylus avellana*), 1g
hazel nutshells, 3g
willow (*Salix* sp.) or poplar (*Populus* sp.), <1g
oak (*Quercus* sp.) sapwood, 5g
[a high proportion of the sample consisted of oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood]

*4633307 [624]*: hazel (*Corylus avellana*), <1g
[mostly oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood]

*4633306 [651]:* ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) roundwood, 3g
hazel (*Corylus avellana*), roundwood, 4g
willow (*Salix* sp.) or poplar (*Populus* sp.), <1g
birch (*Betula* sp.), <1g
oak (*Quercus* sp.) sapwood, 1g
[the sample included a high proportion of oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood]

*4633303 [654]:* oak (*Quercus* sp.) sapwood, <1gm
ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), 1g
[predominantly oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood]

*4633304 [657]*: blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), <1g
hazel (*Corylus avellana*), <1g
ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), <1g
oak (*Quercus* sp.) sapwood, <1g
*cf. ivy (Hedera helix)*, <1g
[mostly oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood]

*4633305 [667]*: ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), 2g
blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), 2g
hazel (*Corylus avellana*), 3g
oak (*Quercus* sp.) sapwood/ roundwood, 5g
birch (*Betula* sp.), <1g
willow (*Salix* sp.) or poplar (*Populus* sp.), <1g
[oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood]

*4633306 [695]*: [oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood only]

## APPENDIX 3: THE RADIOCARBON DATES

Four samples were submitted to the University of Waikato, New Zealand, for Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) dating.

| Radiocarbon Lab Sample No. | Context | Context and Sample Description | Radiocarbon Age years BP (before present) | Calibrated date (95.4% probability) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wk-13756 | 502 | Fill of pit 501<br>Mostly oak charcoal | 4435±55 | 3340BC (37.4%) 3150BC<br>3140BC (58.0%) 2910BC |
| Wk-13757 | 667 | Fill of pit 668<br>Short-lived wood species charcoal | 1959±40 | 50BC–AD130 |
| Wk-13758 | 695 | Fill of pit 696<br>Oak charcoal | 1991±42 | 100BC (91.8%) AD90<br>AD100 (3.6%) AD130 |
| Wk-13759 | 624 | Fill of pit 625<br>Oak charcoal | 3680±52 | 2210BC–1910BC |


Fig. 1 Location map. Reproduced from the OS 1:50000 Landranger 191 (Okehampton and North Dartmoor area) map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 1991. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100016685.

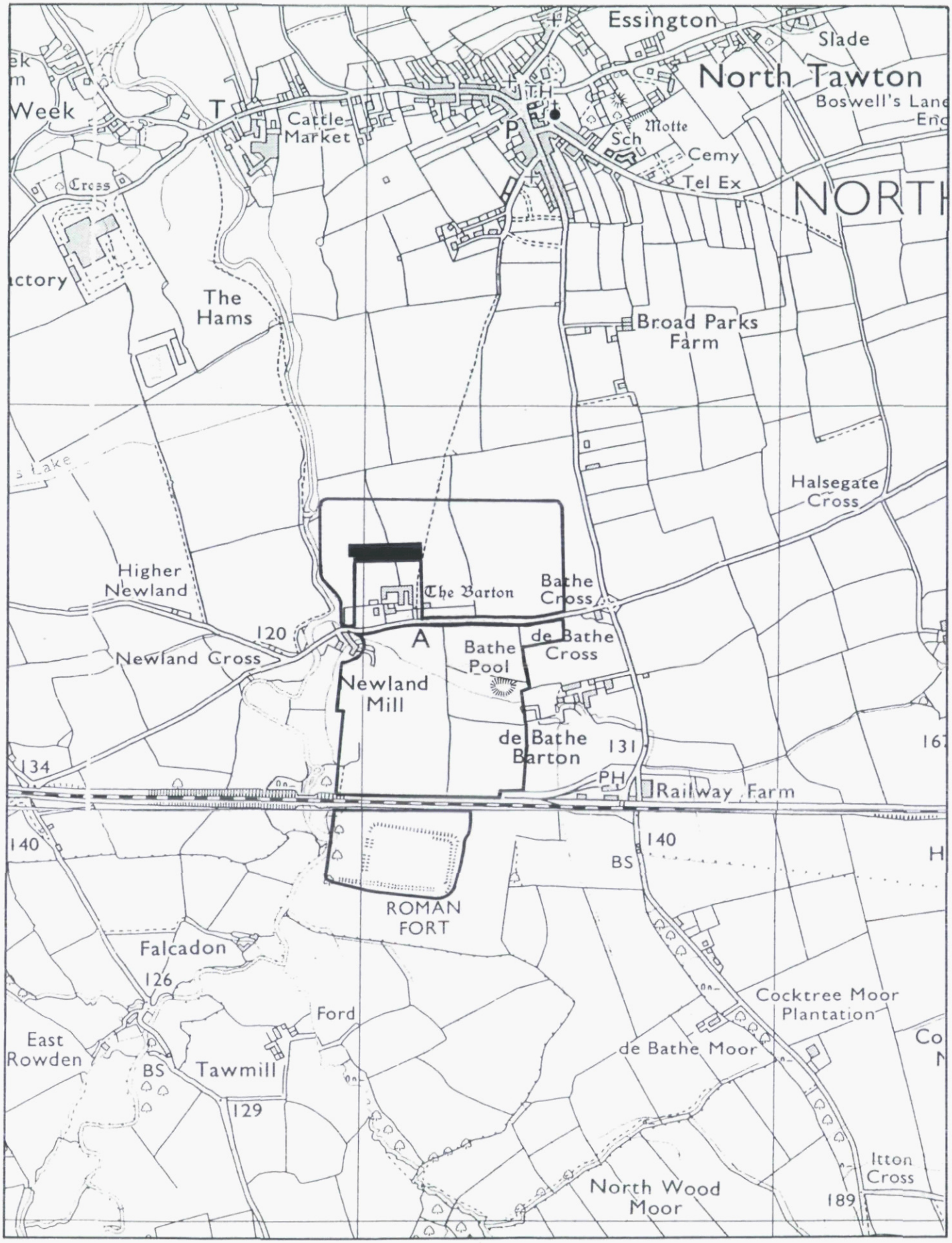



Fig. 2 Location of archaeological recording showing extent of Scheduled area. Reproduced from the 1:25000 Pathfinder maps SS60/70 and SX69/79 (enlarged to 1:12500) by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 1976 and 1980 respectively. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100016685.

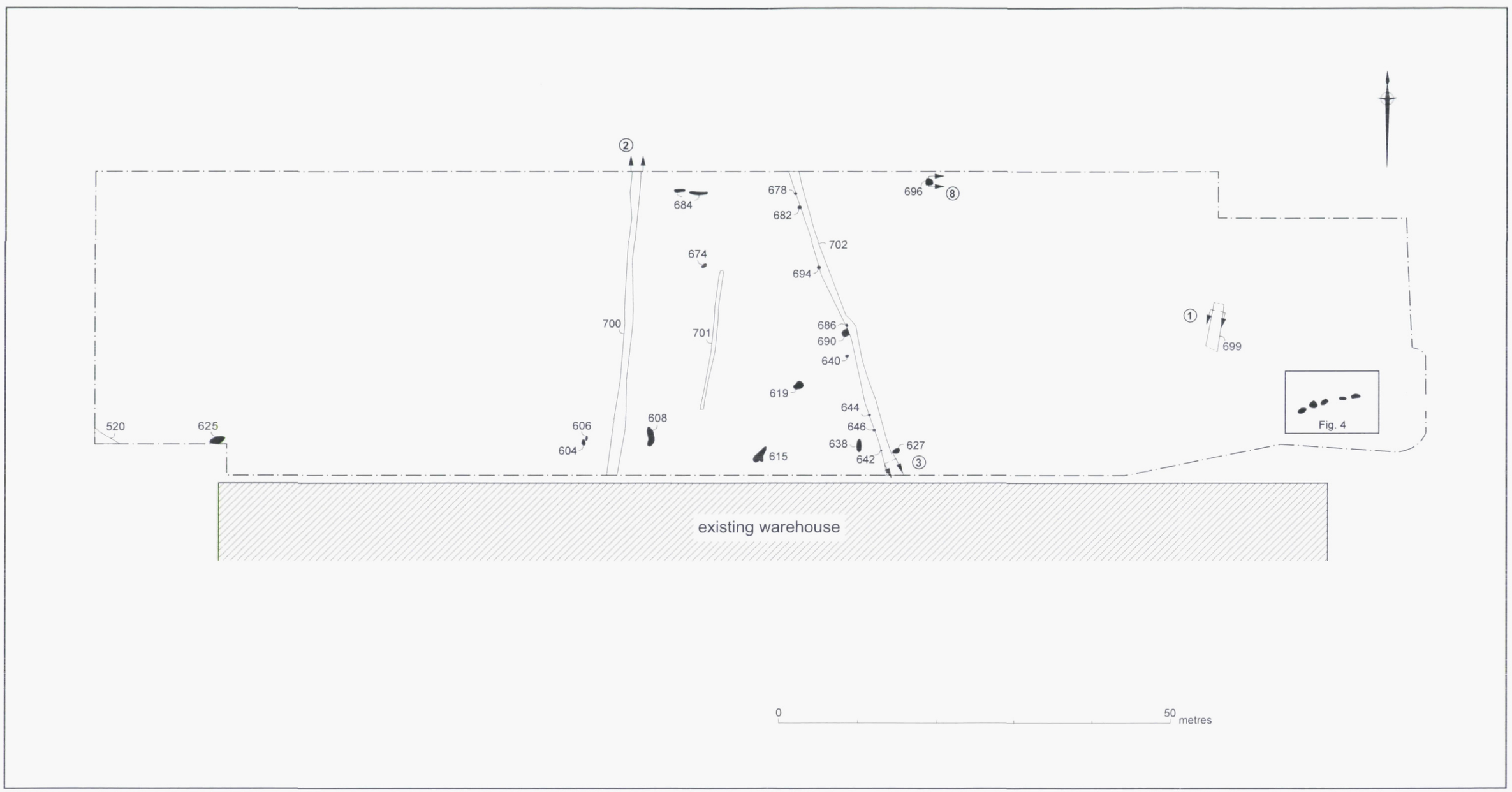



Fig. 3 Site plan showing excavated features. Inset shows location of Fig. 4.

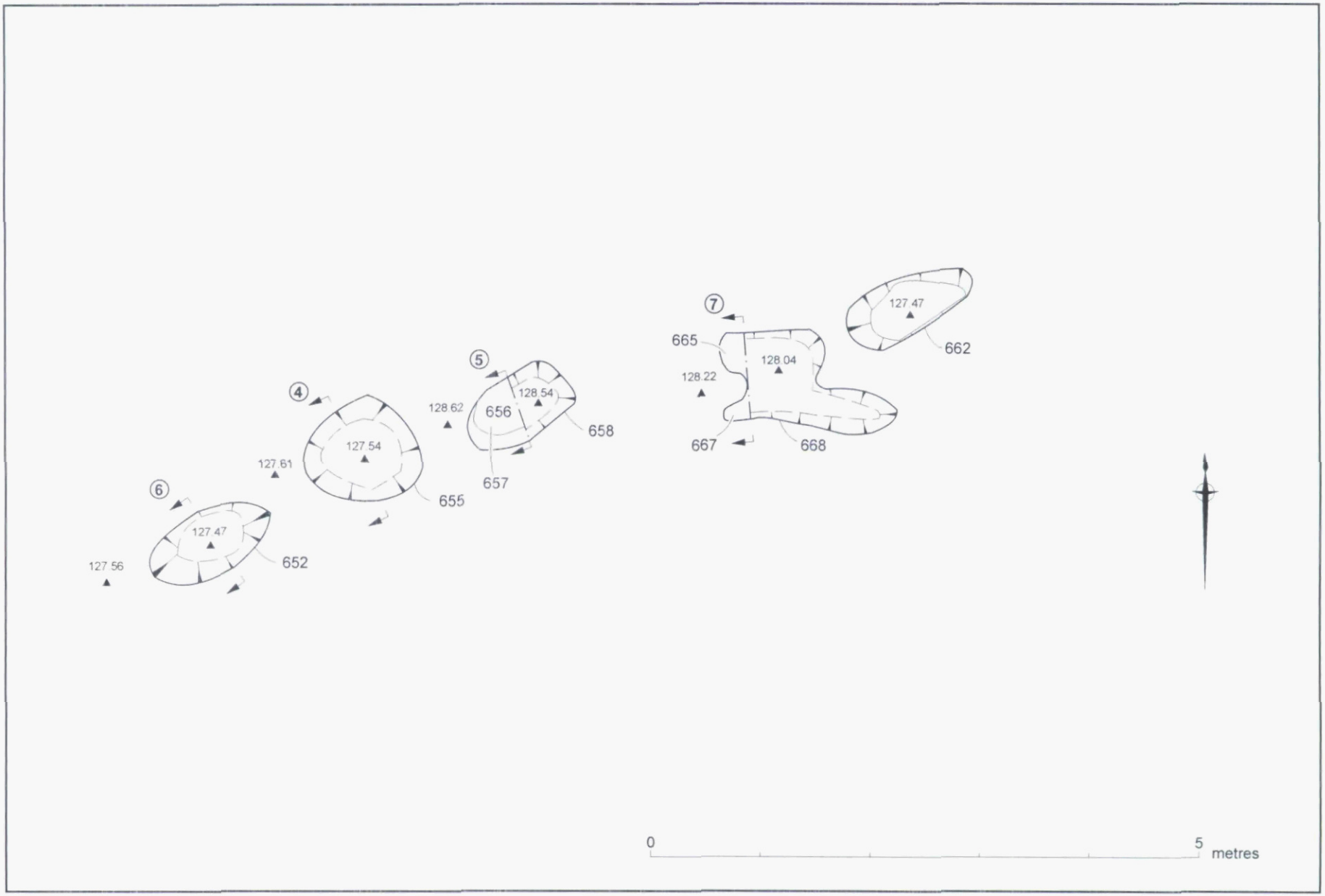



Fig. 4 Plan of pits at eastern end of site (see inset on Fig. 3).

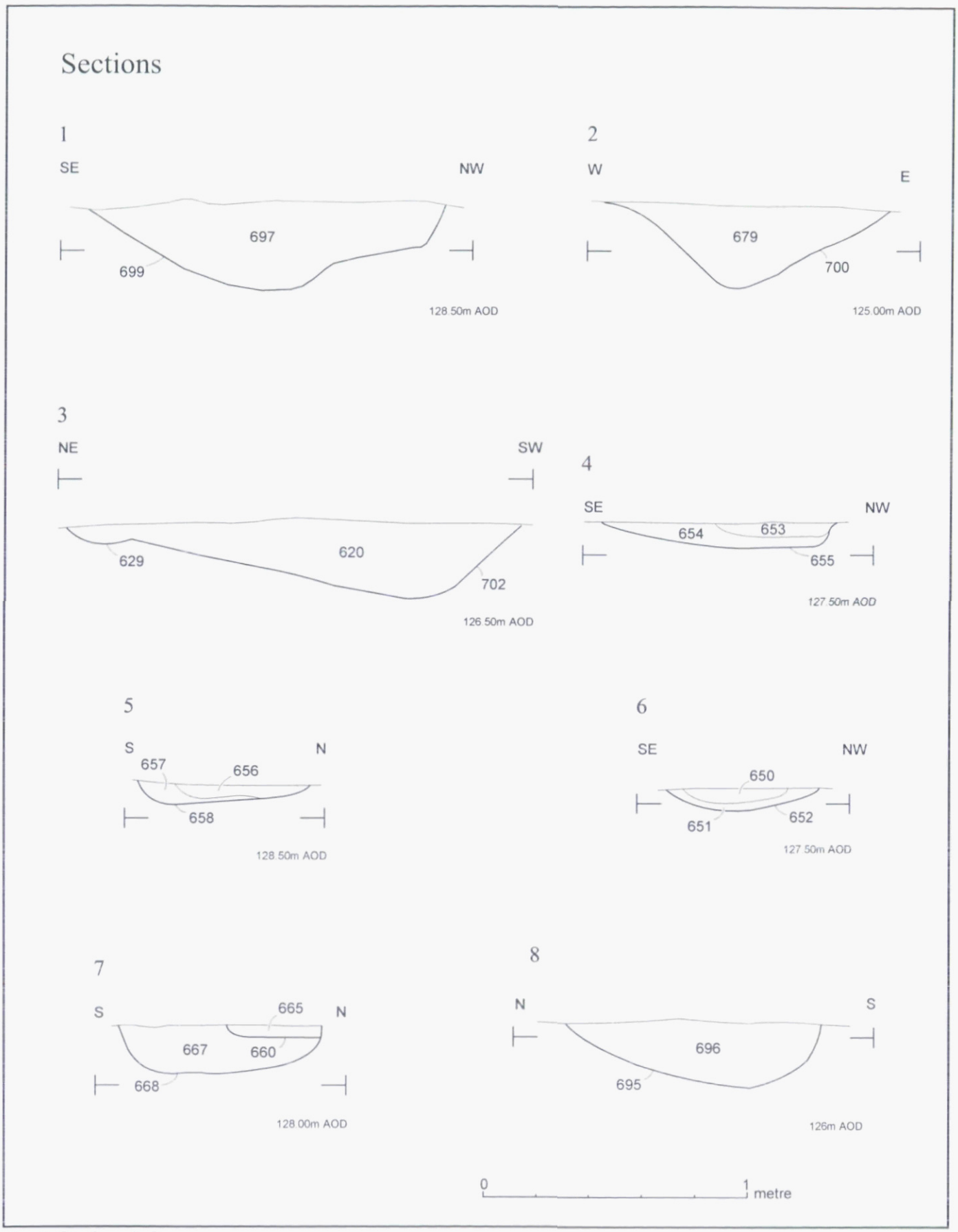
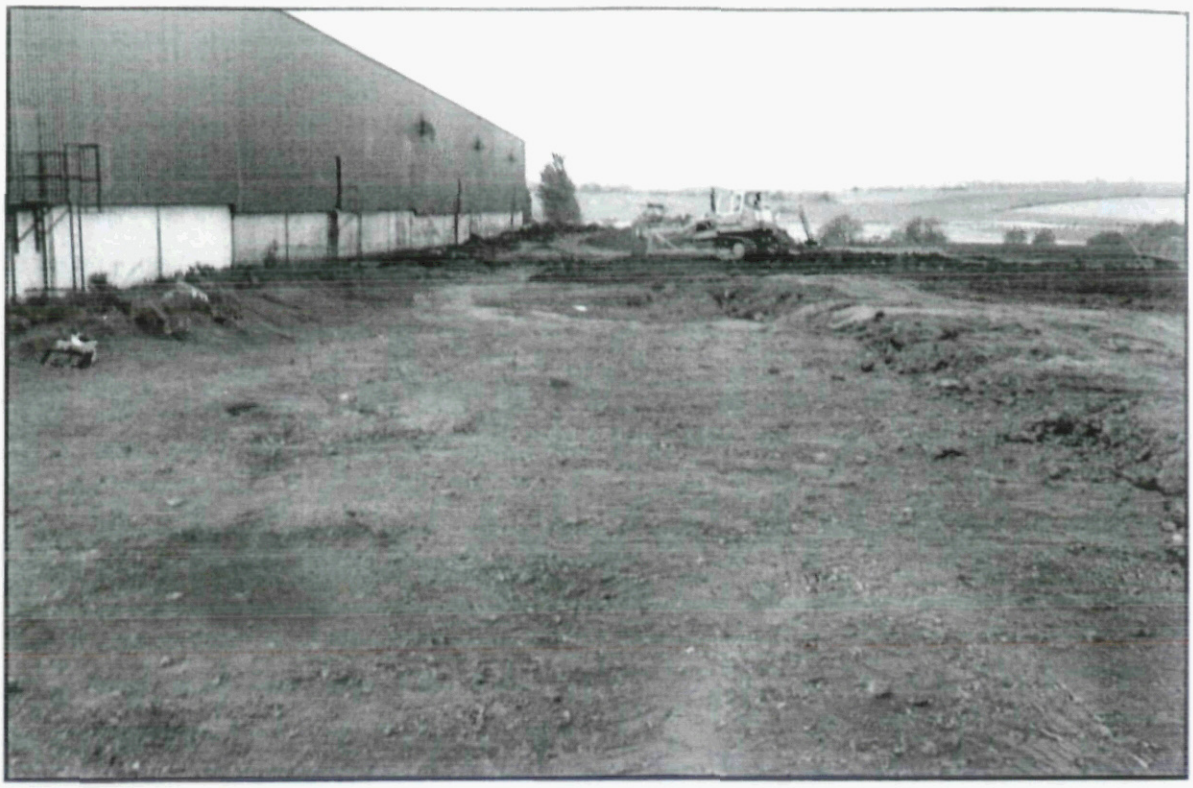
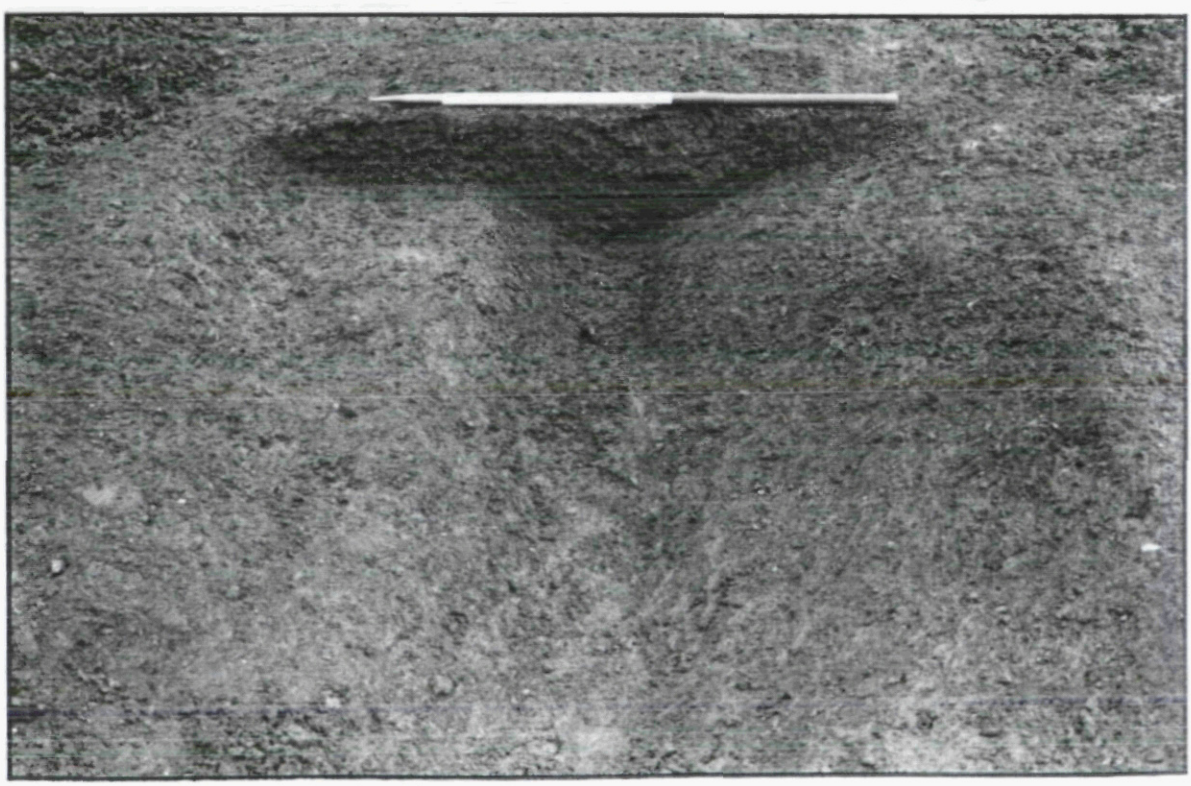



Fig. 5 Sections 1–8.

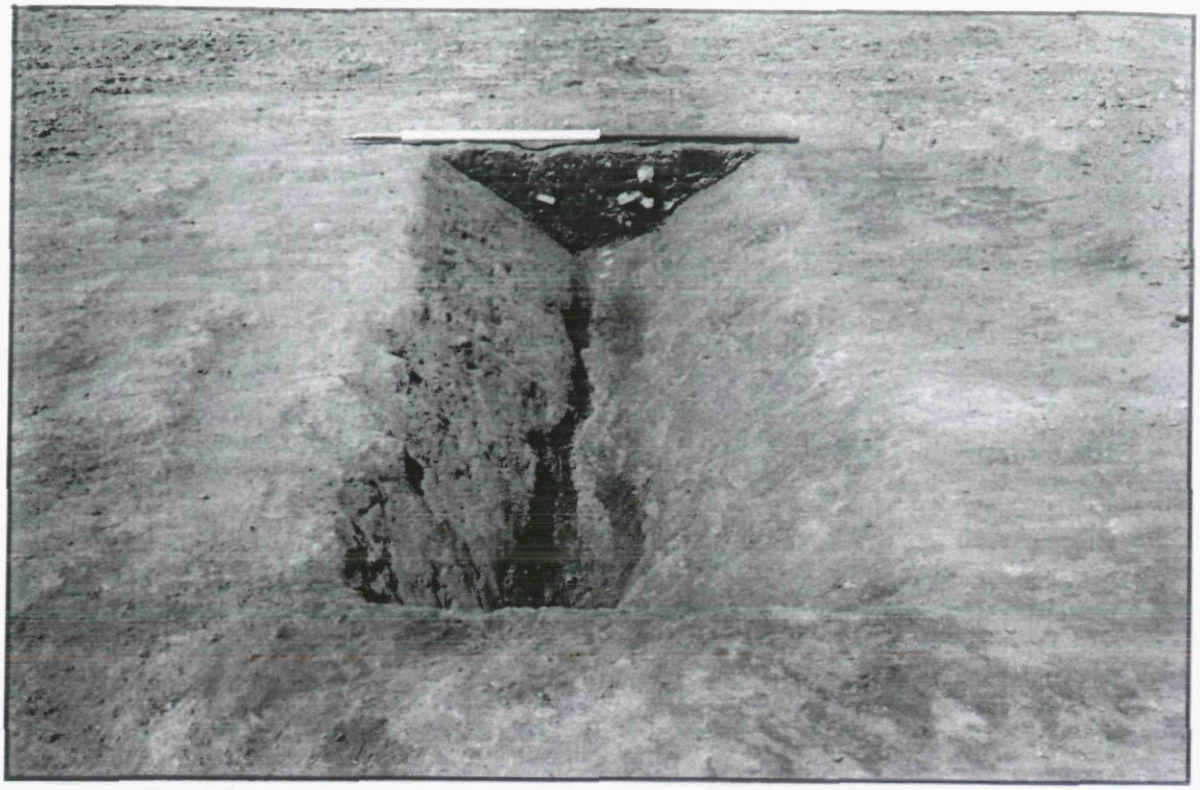

Fig. 6 Location of recording showing excavated features, cropmarks, and 19th-century field boundaries (based on Griffith 1984, fig. 4).



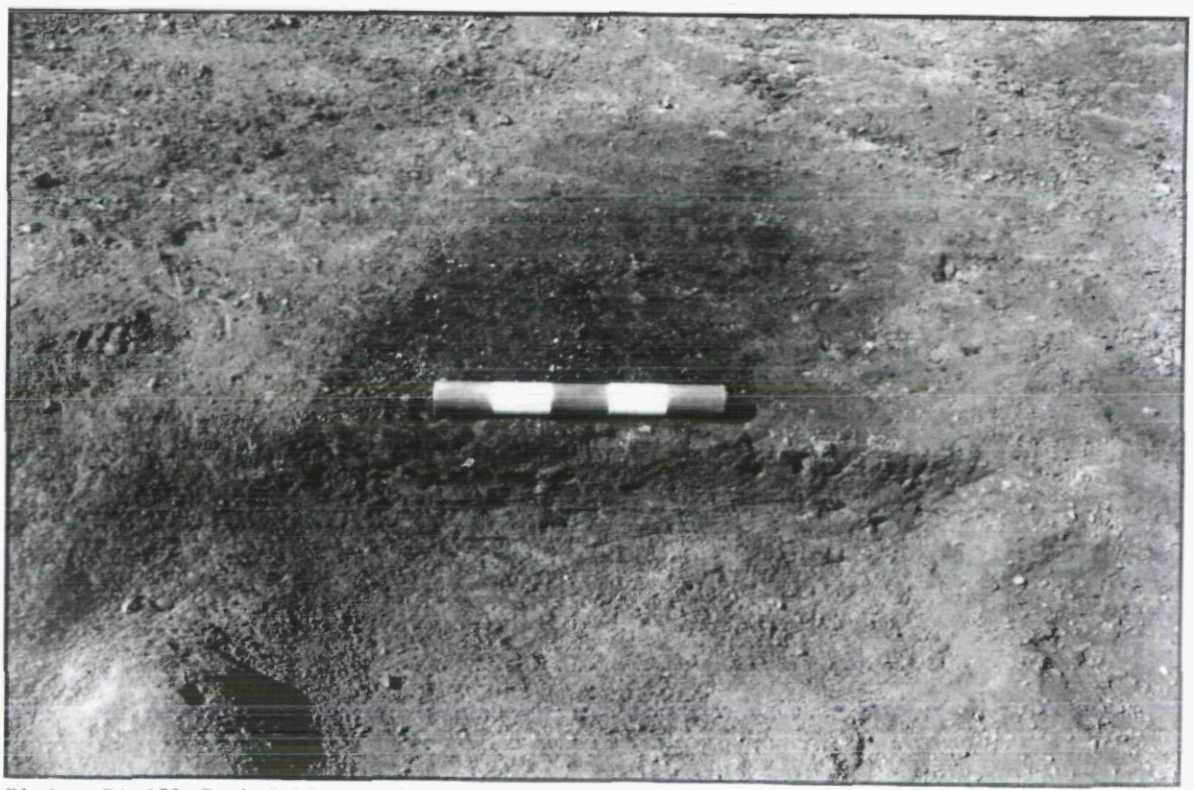
Pl. 1 View west across site.



Pl. 2 Ditch 699. Scale 1m. Looking north.



Pl. 3 Ditch 700, Roman marching camp ditch. Scale 1m. Looking north.



Pl. 4 Pit 652. Scale 0.25m. Looking west.