

**An Archaeological Evaluation
on land at Home Farm, Great Casterton,
Rutland (TF 0008 0887)**

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and

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An Archaeological Evaluation at land at Home Farmyard, Great Casterton, Rutland (TF 0008 0887).

Summary

In October 1998 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Home Farm, Great Casterton (TF 0008 0887), in advance of proposed residential development. Six trenches were excavated by machine, and cleaned by hand. A burial, possibly of Roman date was uncovered. The remains of two walls, a hearth, post holes and a surface were recorded, some of which may date from the medieval period. The archive will be held by Rutland County Museum under the Accession Number A11.1998.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document comprises the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken upon land at Home Farmyard, Great Casterton, Rutland (TF 0008 0887), in advance of the proposed residential development (Planning Application No: 97/0663/9).
- 1.2 The site lies approximately 14km east of Oakham in the County of Rutland. It consists of an area of *c.* 0.3ha. within which it is proposed to convert four buildings and build seven new houses.
- 1.3 The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 157 indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of Northampton Sand Ironstone and alluvium adjacent to the River Gwash in the west. The site lies at a height of *c.* 40m O.D. on gently west sloping land.
- 1.4 An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for the proposed residential dwellings, produced by ULAS, concluded that the archaeological potential of the site was high due to the proximity of known Roman and medieval activity (Marsden 1998, ULAS Report No: 98/36).
- 1.5 The work was carried out between 12th and 16th October 1998.
- 1.6 All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations*.

2. Archaeological and Historical Background

Details from Desk-Based Assessment (Marsden 1998).

- 2.1 The Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record reveals that the site lies within the vicinity of seventeen relevant sites (listed in Appendix 3).

- 2.2 The site is situated either partly or entirely within the Roman town of Great Casterton (00NWA) and is on the frontage of the Ermine Street Roman road. Extensive excavation was carried out in Great Casterton in the 1950s by the University of Nottingham Summer School led by Philip Corder but very little was done on the actual Ermine Street frontage (Liddle 1995, 87). A bath house was recorded as lying beneath the churchyard (Corder 1961, 18), to the south of Home Farm. A trench excavated north of the churchyard in 1958 revealed a large stone built kiln (about 1.8m by 1.3m). It was decided that although its solidity suggested a Roman feature, it was in fact more likely to be a medieval malt kiln similar to one found at Barrow, Rutland (ibid. 55).
- 2.3 It is extremely close to the Roman and medieval occupation layers, including structures, that were uncovered by an archaeological excavation at Strawsons Yard in 1992 (Beamish 1992).
- 2.4. The medieval church of St Peter and St Paul is situated nearby to the south. Evidence of Saxon (00NWD) and medieval activity has been found in Great Casterton, a settlement which is listed in the Domesday Book.

3. Aims

- 3.1 The primary aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence, nature, character and extent of any archaeological deposits within the area of proposed development.
- 3.2 To establish a date range for any archaeological deposits located.
- 3.3 To ascertain the state of preservation of these deposits.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 Six trenches were excavated to provide a 5% sample of the proposed development area. In order to target areas likely to suffer the most disturbance, the trenches were located where it proposed to build the new buildings (in the footprint for the houses). It was necessary to adjust the position of trench 6, due to the presence of thick vegetation and a partly demolished shed.
- 4.2 Topsoil and interface layers were removed using a JCB with a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket. This was carried out under full archaeological supervision.
- 4.3 Trenches were numerically labelled, 1-6, from the south to the north of the site. The dimensions and orientations of the trenches are tabulated below.

Trench	Width (m)	Length (m)	Maximum depth (m)	Approx. Orientation
1	1.5	8.5	1.25	N-S
2	1.5	10	1.3	E-W
3	1.5	8.5	1.3	E-W
4	1.5	9.2	1.25	N-S
5	1.5	9.5	0.85	E-W
6	1.5	9.2	0.85	N-S

4.4 Natural subsoil was reached in trenches 5 and 6. In trenches 1-4, it was necessary to stop digging for safety reasons after the natural subsoil was still not reached at 1.2m below ground level.

4.5 All potential archaeological deposits and their levels above Ordnance Datum were recorded.

4.6 The trenches were backfilled at the end of the excavation.

5. Results

5.1. Trench 1 (*figures 3 and 5*)

Number of features: 2
Context numbers: (13), 15, (17), 16.

Topsoil was 0.2m deep, sealing a number of rubble layers, apparently used to build up the land. Natural subsoil was only reached at the north end of the trench, at a depth of 37.57 O.D. (1.3m below ground level). At the north end, a wall (13) was uncovered, running east-west across the trench. It was 0.76m wide and of drystone construction, comprising large stones packed in by smaller flat stones. One and a half metres to the south of this feature, the natural subsoil began to slope abruptly downwards (16). This was filled by a wet, blue grey clay with ironstone inclusions (17). Due to the depth of the trench the other side of this feature was not located.

5.2 Trench 2 (*figure 4*)

Number of features: 1
Context numbers: (18), (19)

Trench 2 was excavated to a depth of between 1.05m (38.28 O.D.) at the east end and 1.2m (37.93 O.D.) at the west end. The top 0.75m consisted of overburden, a series of "make up" layers of stones in a sandy matrix with pieces of brick. Below these was a sticky organic dark brown silty clay, possibly a buried topsoil (19). At the east end of the trench a layer was uncovered, consisting of small limestone fragments densely packed in a brown clayish matrix (18). This layer was found at a depth of 38.28 O.D. but was not fully excavated as it sloped downwards beneath layer (19), to a level of 37.94 O.D. Due

to the depth of the trench it was not uncovered any further. However, digging into it revealed that it was above a rubble layer of large stones and pieces of ironstone (20) from which two pieces of Roman tile were recovered. This may represent as a yard surface. No other features were located in this trench.

5.3 Trench 3 (*figure 4*)

Number of features: 5

Context numbers: (4), (5), 6, (7), (8), (9), 10, (11), 12, (14)

Trench 3 was excavated to a depth of 1.2m but the natural subsoil was still not entirely exposed in this trench. Rubble layers, consisting of stones in a sandy matrix with modern brick, slate and tile inclusions were one metre deep. Below this was a very sticky dark brown silty clay, probably the same buried topsoil observed in trenches 1 and 2. Five archaeological features were located in the eastern half of the trench.

A shallow oval feature (11) was located 2m from the east end of the trench. It consisted of greyish brown clay with frequent pieces of ironstone and slag and measured 0.95m in length and 0.45m wide. A sherd of medieval pottery and nine pieces of slag were recovered from the fill. A shallow circular feature with a vivid purplish brown silty clay fill (9) was cut into (11).

Half a metre to the west of these features was a semi-circular scorched area, featuring 2 large flat burnt stones (7). It measured 0.85m in diameter but was partly hidden by the north baulk so that only a semi-circle was visible. It seems likely that this was a hearth. This feature is adjacent to and, possibly cut by, a slightly raised area of orangish brown clay with frequent ironstone pieces (14). This layer abuts a structure (4), probably a wall. It is possible that this is the remains of a floor surface. The structure (4) was constructed of large ironstone blocks and smaller pieces of stone in a shallow trench. The ironstone blocks appear to form an end halfway across the trench. The stones were one course deep and set 0.1m above the bottom of the cut (6). There are a few loose stones but they may be interpreted as tumble. The soil surrounding the wall (5) was composed of silty clay with frequent small stones, pieces of burnt stone and occasional slag. To the west of the wall only the buried topsoil (8) was exposed.

5.4 Trench 4 (*figure 3*)

Number of features: 1

Context numbers: (1), (2), 3.

Trench 4 was excavated to a depth of 1.2m below the ground surface (38.50 O.D.), at which depth the natural subsoil was just visible. This comprised a yellowish brown clay with frequent limestone. About 7.5m from the north end of the trench, human remains were discovered (1), aligned north-south and partially hidden under the baulk. Although they was not complete, an articulated burial was represented by skull fragments, a left ulna, ribs and left tibia and fibula, at a level of 38.40m O.D. Two sherds of Roman

pottery were recovered from earth around the bones (2). A possible grave cut was identified, (3), but it was very shallow and unclear in places. No other archaeological features were identified.

5.5 Trench 5 (*not illustrated*)

Number of features: 0

Natural subsoil was revealed at 0.8m below ground level (c.38.60 O.D.). This consisted of a yellowish white sandy limestone and was quite different to the type of subsoil found in the other trenches. There was 0.8m of rubble and ash above the subsoil, with frequent large sherds of post medieval pottery and glass as though the area had been a bottle dump. No archaeological features were identified.

5.6 Trench 6 (*not illustrated*)

Number of features: 0

It was originally planned to place this trench several metres to the north. However, thick vegetation and the presence of an old shed meant that the trench location had to be moved southwards. No archaeological features were identified in this trench. The natural subsoil, an orange clay with ironstone, was reached at a depth of 0.2m below topsoil (39.93 O.D.) at the north end of the trench and 40.23 O.D. at the south end of the trench. There was a lot of root disturbance in this trench due to the proximity of a number of bushes and trees.

6. Discussion

- 6.1 An evaluation at the adjacent site of Strawsons Yard, Great Casterton revealed that archaeological deposits were to be found at the relatively shallow depth of 0.25m (Beamish 1992). For this reason the depth of the deposits at Home Farm was quite unexpected. All the surviving archaeology was located 1.2m below present ground levels under a thick layer of made up land.
- 6.2 There appears to be a concentration of features towards the south side of the site, particularly in trench 3. It is possible that excavation right down to natural subsoil may have revealed further features.
- 6.3 Few dateable finds were recovered and the most common find was slag. One piece of furnace lining was recovered from the fill of the wall trench in trench 3 (5). The rest of the slag recovered from the site was tap slag, associated with smelting. Slag was found in contexts (2), the grave fill; (8), buried topsoil in trench 3; and (11) post hole fill in trench 3. Three sherds of pottery were identified as Roman, as was the tile found in context (18). Two of the Roman sherds were associated with the burial in trench 4, while the third was found associated with wall (4) in trench 3. This was

probably residual, as a medieval sherd was also recovered from this feature. The post holes in trench 3 are also likely to be medieval.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Evaluation by trial trenching has confirmed the presence of archaeological deposits and structures in the development area. These seem to be concentrated towards the south of the area. Preservation of these remains was generally quite good.
- 7.2 Although the finds are few, both Roman and Medieval finds are represented in small quantities. It has been possible to assign a tentative date to some of the features but given the paucity of the finds this is not conclusive.
- 7.3 The presence of tap slag suggests smelting activity in the area. Evidence for small scale Roman smelting at Great Casterton has been previously suggested by a bowl furnace found during the excavations in the 1950's, while it is thought that slag from the upper fills of town defences is likely to be medieval (Condron 1997, 6).
- 7.4 Two walls, a hearth and post holes were located in the south of the area; features which are associated with occupation. The hearth and wall in trench 3 are linked by the surface (14), and their preservation suggests that there may be a surviving complex of features in this area, possibly of medieval date.
- 7.5 The discovery of articulated human remains, aligned north-south suggest a burial with pagan rites, perhaps contemporary with Roman settlement. Since graves are rarely singular, it is likely that more human remains may exist within the development area. This may indicate that at some stage this part of the site was outside of the Roman town as Romans did not bury their dead within town boundaries. The only known Roman cemetery in Great Casterton of Roman date is outside the north gate, between the Ryhall and Pickworth Roads.

8. Publication

A version of the summary (above) will appear in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course.

9. Archive

The archive consists of one box of finds, colour slides and black and white prints, site notes and plans and will be held by Rutland County Museum under the Accession number A11.1998.

10. Bibliography

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11. Illustrations

- Figure 1:* Location Map.
- Figure 2:* Plan showing house plots and location of trenches.
- Figure 3:* Plan of trench 1 and trench 4.
- Figure 4:* Plan of trench 2 and trench 3.
- Figure 5:* Section through wall (13).
- Figure 6:* Plan showing principal features in trenches 1-6.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 3.

Sites and Monument s Records

1. Roman

00NWP (NGR TF 001 089) Roman and Medieval occupation at Strawson's Farmyard, Great Casterton.

An archaeological evaluation was carried out in 1992 (Beamish 1993 and unpublished). Archaeological levels were identified at a depth of just over 0.25m. This produced Roman and Medieval finds and features including make-up levels, pits and post holes. A stone foundation to a medieval wall and a Roman foundation for a timber building were also uncovered.

00NWA (NGR TF 001089) Great Casterton Roman town.

The town had been noted by Camden, Horsley and Stukeley. In 1874 a Roman coin hoard was found. The 1950s and 60s saw excavation of the settlement, including the defences and various archaeological deposits of a Roman date. This included ramparts, ditches, walls, several buildings, including a bath-house, and various other features of a Roman date. In 1991 a Leicestershire Archaeological Unit evaluation excavation was undertaken in the northeast quarter of the Roman town. This revealed a wall and construction trench, and a circular feature, all probably of a Roman date. Recent watching briefs in the Ryhall Road area have uncovered evidence of ramparts, pitting and a possible Roman wall.

Excavations in the Roman town have also revealed evidence of Saxon-medieval activity, including quarrying, a stone building and iron-smelting.

00NEAL (NGR TF 999 090 and 999 091) Roman coin hoard and structural remains found at Plough Inn, Great Casterton.

00NWD (NGR TF 000 092) Roman and Anglo-Saxon cemetery and Roman pottery kiln north of the Roman town of Great Casterton.

During the late 1950s finds were made in the area. A pottery kiln associated with Nene Valley type pottery of a late second century date was noted. In 1959 numerous graves were seen during the building of the new Primary School and one was excavated.

Excavations in Ryhall road in 1966 uncovered 79 burials and a late Roman pottery kiln. The burials consisted of 29 late Roman inhumations, 35 Anglo-Saxon cremations and 15 Anglo-Saxon inhumations. There was a stone Roman coffin. The pottery kiln antedates the fourth century defences of the town and is of a lower Nene Valley type. Finds from the area include metal, bone, and glass artefacts. An Anglo-Saxon cruciform brooch was also included. Associated with the Anglo-Saxon burials were objects including wrist-clasps, toilet sets, a spearhead, iron

knives, glass vessels, bone combs and counters, beads, a purse ring and 18 complete pottery vessels.

00NWB (NGR TF 002093) Early Roman fort northeast of Great Casterton.

A ditch of the fort was sectioned in 1954. In 1959 aerial photographs revealed cropmarks relating to the fort. During the 1960s small excavations were undertaken investigating the defences, the gates and several of the interior buildings, including the barracks. The fort was believed to have been built around 43-45 AD, reduced in c.70 AD, and deserted around 80 AD. Various finds from these excavations include pottery, coins, brooches and numerous metal finds.

00NWC (NGR TF 007097) Roman villa, west of Glebe Barn.

Excavations in the 1940s and 50s revealed a large part of a villa complex. This includes houses, barns, corn driers, a bath house and mosaic pavements. Finds include slag, rope, a bone plaque, many coins, a skeleton from the fill of the cold bath, wall plaster, tiles, slates, the base of a stone column, two Saxon coins and part of a Saxon glass drinking horn. The excavator proposes that occupation at the site probably continued into the fifth century AD.

00NWAC (NGR TF 004 094) Roman coins found southwest of Glebe Barn.

2. Prehistoric

00NWE (NGR TF 000090) Middle Bronze Age spearhead found in Sharpe's field.

00NWX Neolithic flint axe and prehistoric arrowhead found at Great Casterton, in museum.

00NWZ Two late Bronze Age socketed axes from Great Casterton are in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

90NEE (NGR SK996086) ?Bronze Age ?Ring ditch cropmarks, south of Ingthorpe, Tinwell parish

00NWAF (NGR TF 010090) ?Iron Age ?sub-rectangular enclosure and prehistoric ditch, north of Quarry Farm, Little Casterton parish.

A possible sub-rectangular enclosure and a length of ditch were identified from aerial photography in 1989. Also seen at the same time was a possible ring-ditch and another possible rectangular enclosure in this field.

3. *Medieval*

00NWT (NGR TF 001087) Church of St Peter and St Paul, Great Casterton.

The building has Saxo-Norman origins, with the font also dating to this period. The church is mainly thirteenth century. The chancel is Early English with possible Norman elements. The tower is fourteenth century. There is a thirteenth century wall painting in the northeast corner of the north aisle (Pevsner, 472-473)

00NWU Medieval religious house/hospital, Great Casterton.

This hospital for lepers was founded in 1311 when Bishop Dalderly granted as indulgence to those who wished to help its inmates. In 1328 a two year licence to beg was granted to the proctors of the infirm bretheren. nothing further is known of its history.

00NWAD Saxo-Norman watermill, Great Casterton.

A mill is mentioned in the both entries for Great Casterton in the Domesday Book. Its current day position is not known.

90NEF (SK 995088) Medieval village, ? chapel and Anglo-Saxon cross at Ingthorpe, Tinwell parish

90NEG (SK990095) Medieval village earthworks, south east of the church, Tickencote

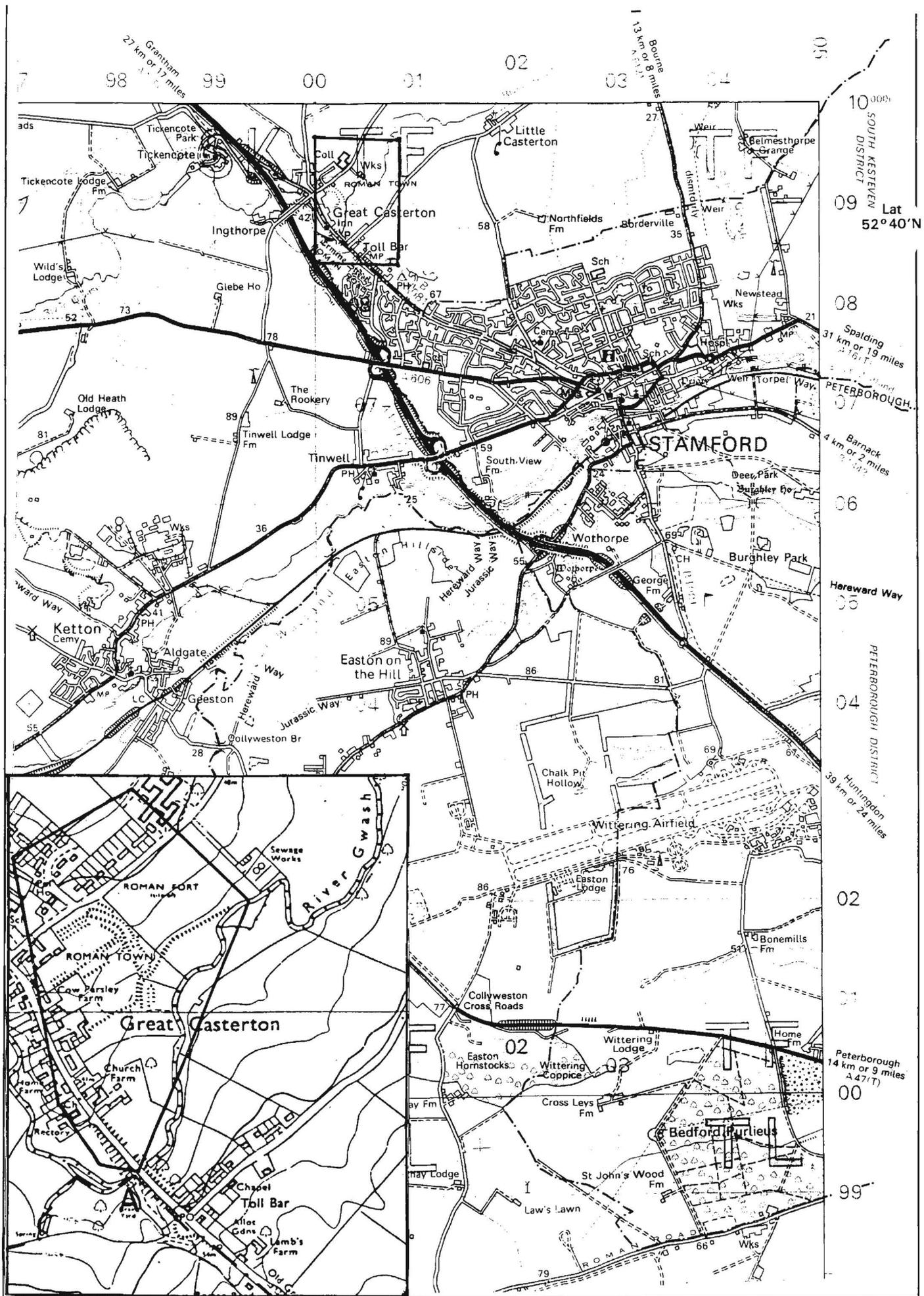


Figure 1: Location Map. Scale 1:50 000. Reproduced from the 1996 Ordnance Survey map, sheet 141 with the permission of the Controller of HMSO © Crown Copyright. ULAS licence no. AL51800A0001

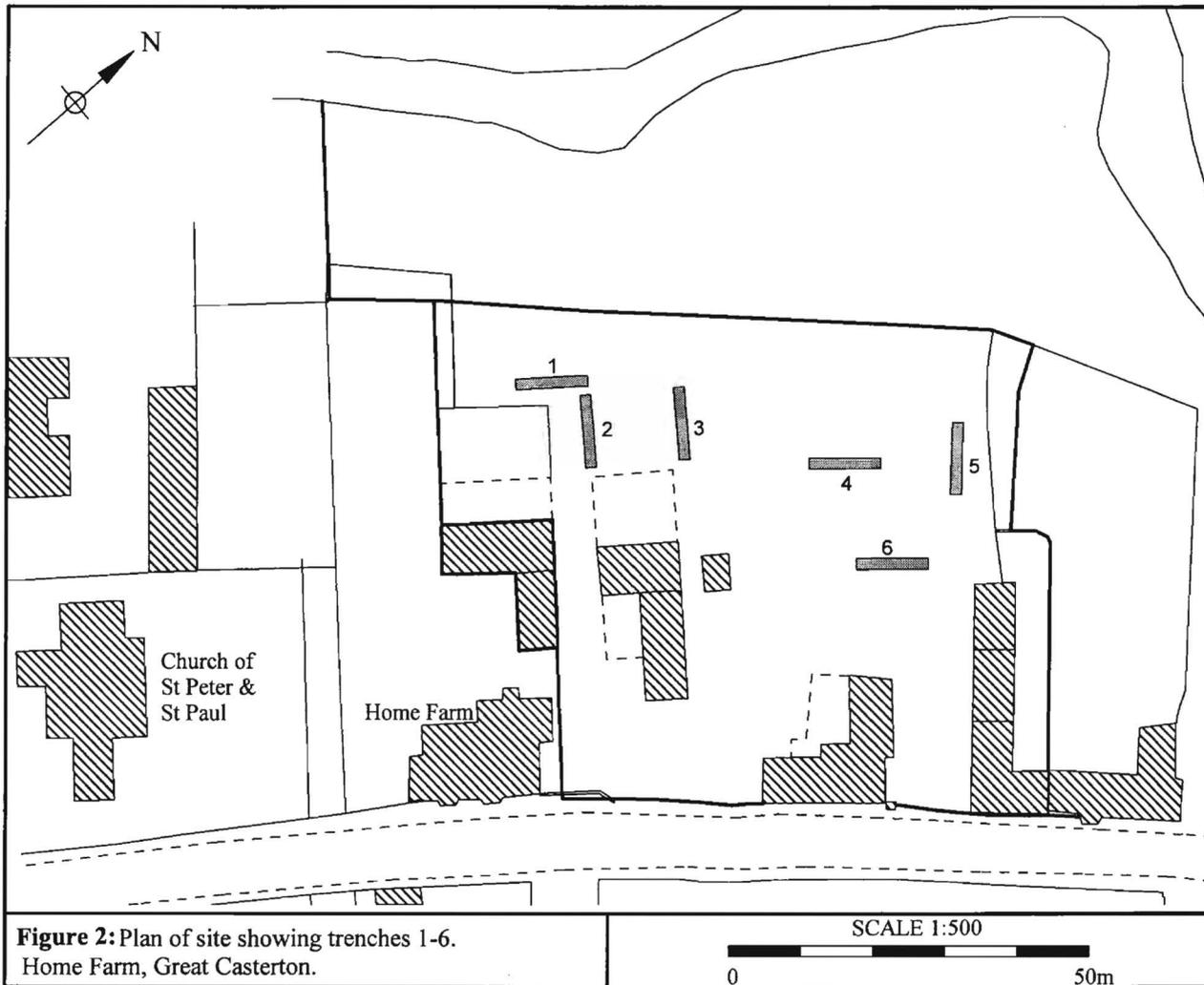


Figure 2: Plan of site showing trenches 1-6.
Home Farm, Great Casterton.

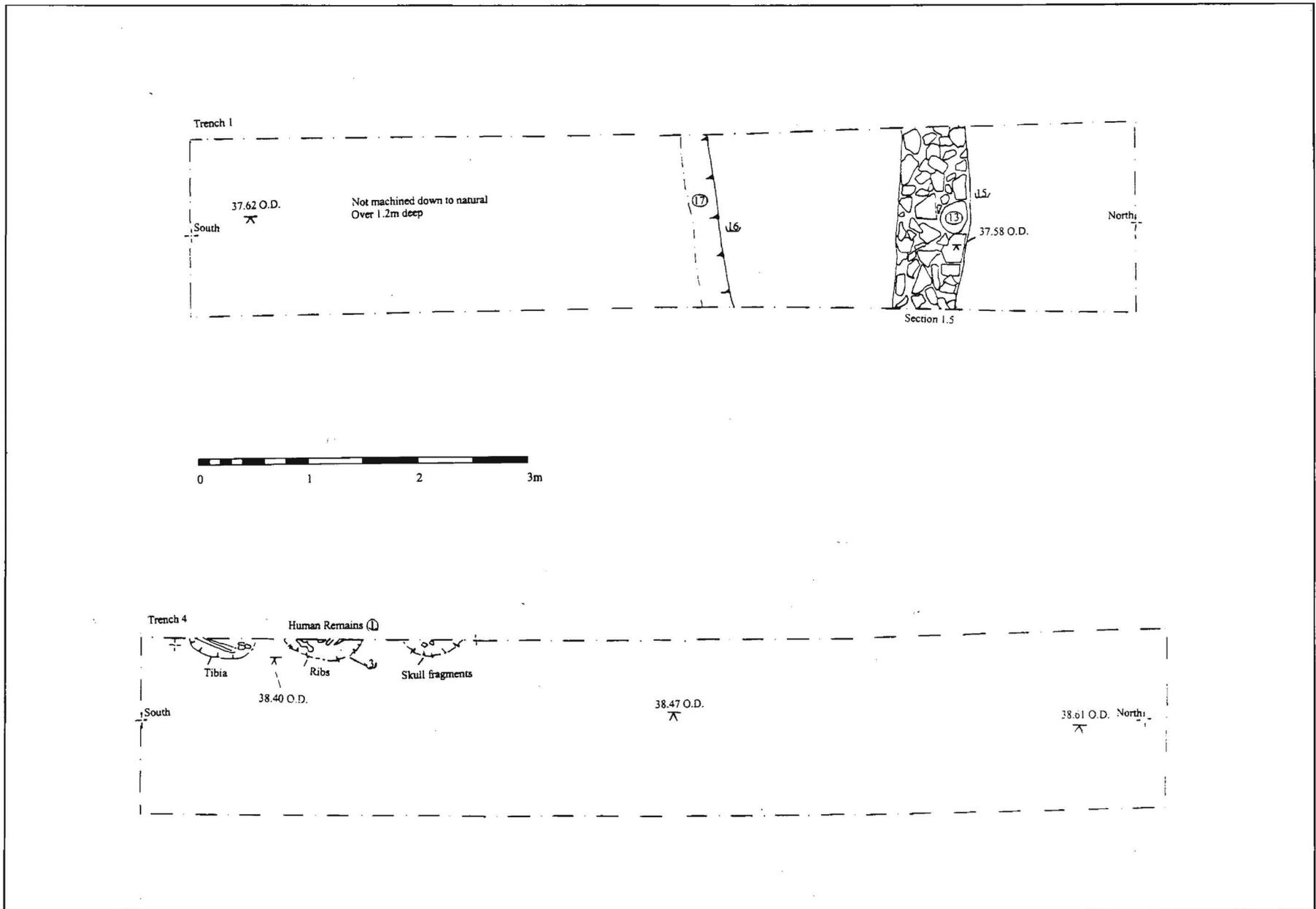


Figure 3: Plan of North -South aligned trenches. Trench 1 and Trench 4. Scale 1:50.

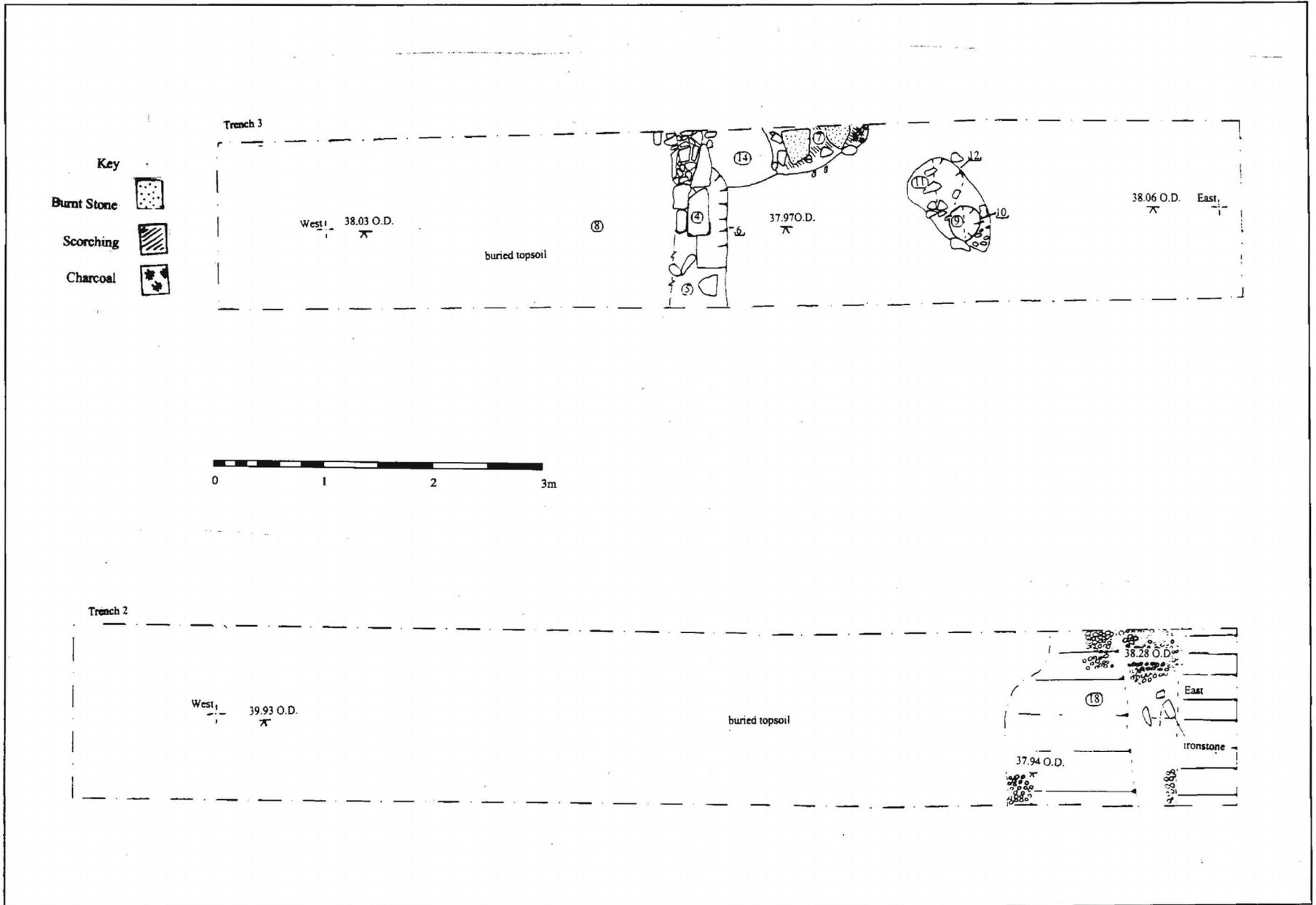


Figure 4: Plan of East-West aligned trenches. Trench 2 and Trench 3. Scale 1:50.

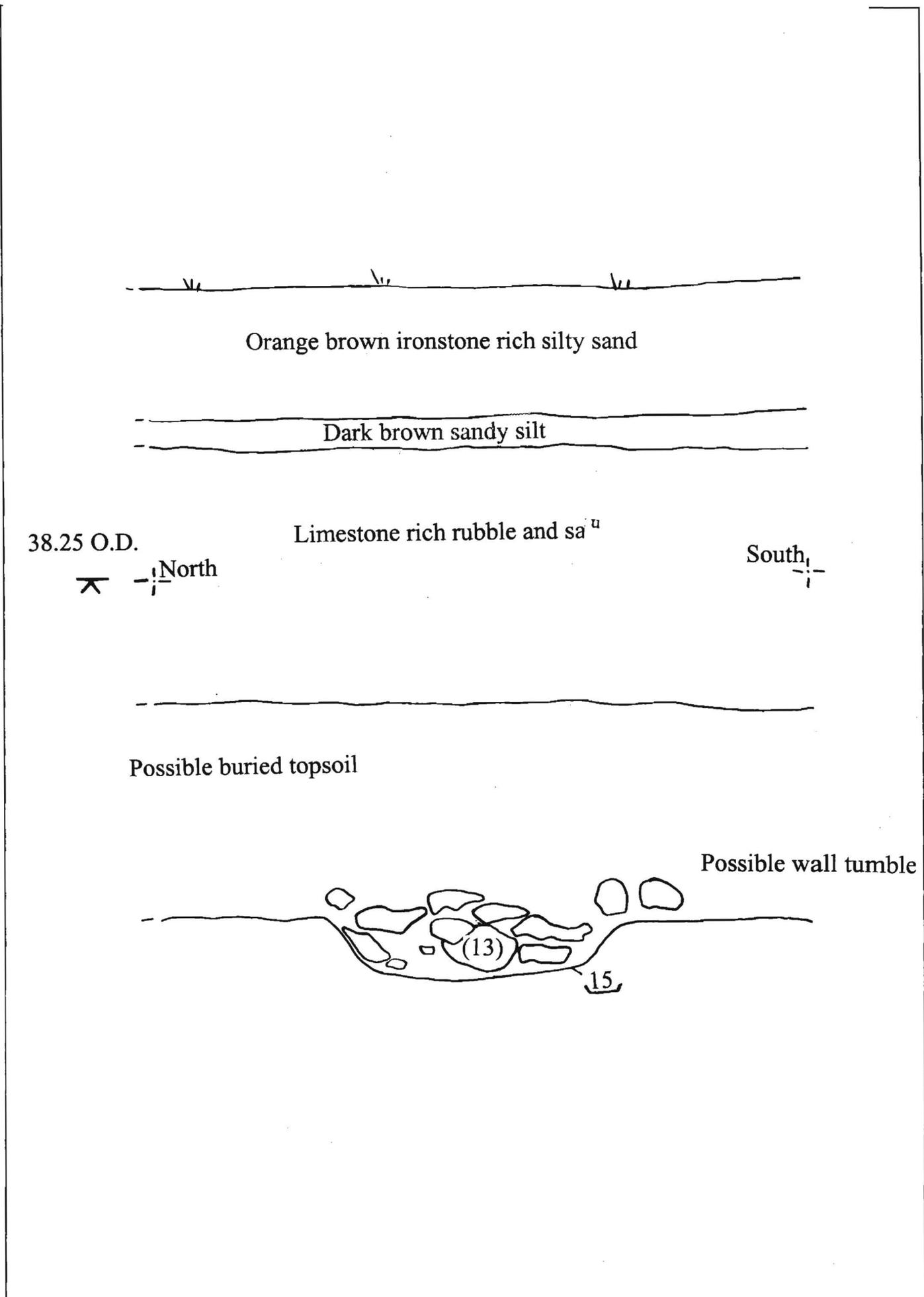


Figure 5: Section through wall (13) in trench 1, showing depth of overburden. Scale 1:10.

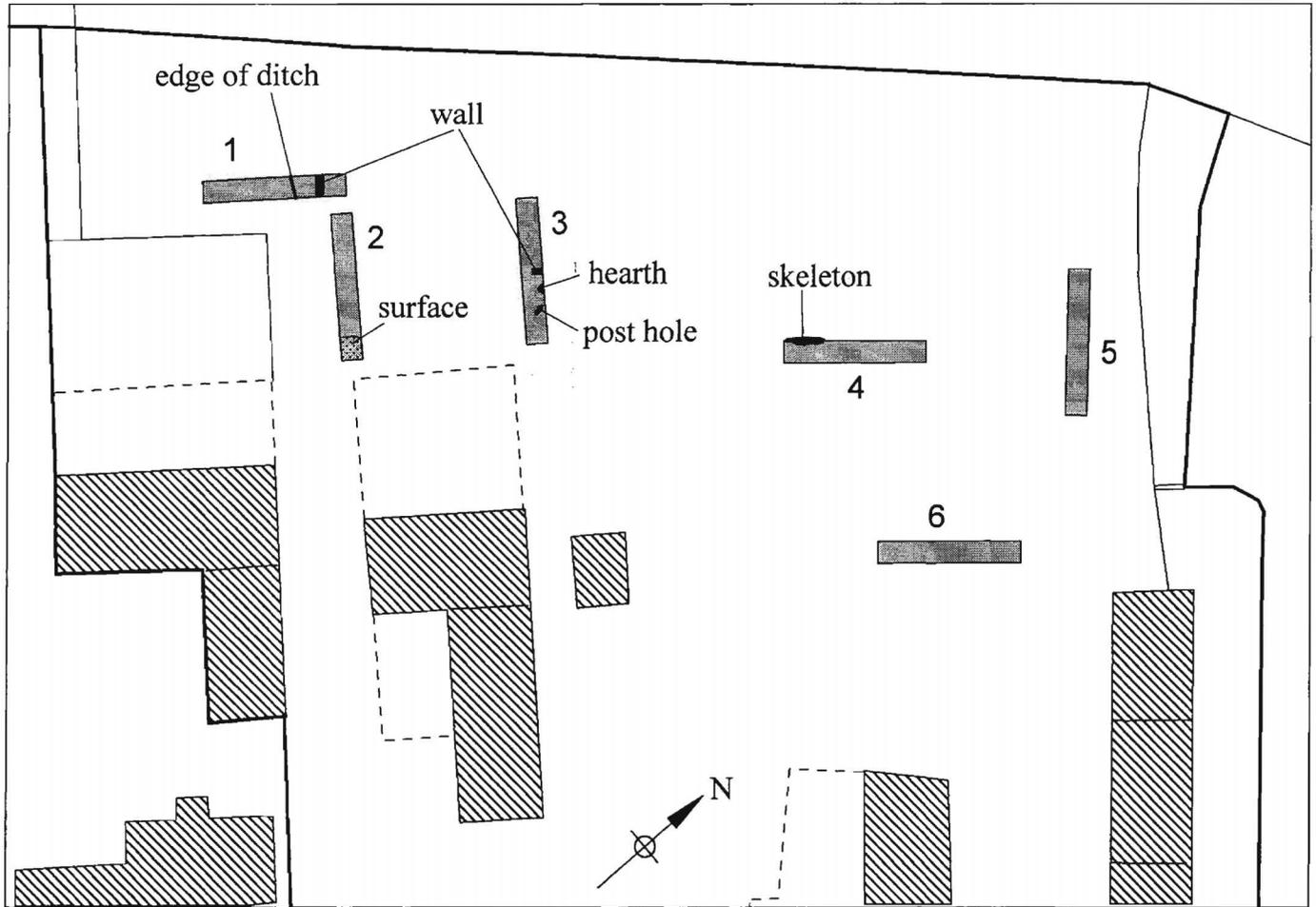


Figure 6: Plan of trenches, showing principal features
Home Farm, Great Casterton.

Scale 1:500

