

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 452

**Interim Report on Archaeological Exploratory Work on
land off London Road, Downham Market**

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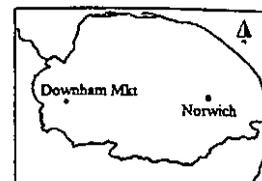
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Local Authority No.076759

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Location: Land off London Road, Downham Market
Grid Ref: TF 610 022
SMR No: 30228
Date of work: September 8th – October 13th 1999



Summary

This report is an interim statement of results obtained so far in an ongoing exploration program designed to evaluate the archaeological potential of land off London Road, Downham Market. This exploratory work is being carried out by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit in advance of a proposed housing development by Bennett Homes plc. Twenty-five trenches, measuring 40m by 1.60m and one trench measuring 10m x 10m, have been investigated to date. A further three trenches await the harvesting of a beet crop before investigation can proceed.

Trenches 1 to 8 in the western part of the proposed development area (Plots A and B) have revealed two loci of archaeological interest. The first, in the vicinity of Trenches 1 and 31, contained a concentration of ditches, pits and post-holes of Iron Age/Romano-British date; the second, around Trenches 7, 8 and 32, contained a ditch and a pit of Middle Saxon date. A number of archaeological features were encountered over the rest of the area. These consisted mainly of diffuse linear features, probably representing post-enclosure field boundaries and drainage ditches.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Scheme of Archaeological Works issued by Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd., supplemented by a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: MS/Expl/99/869).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

This report is an interim statement regarding work by the NAU in September and October 1999. Work continues, and it is therefore possible that not all relevant information was available at this time of writing: for instance some pottery and other finds remain unexamined and not all the evaluation trenches have yet been opened.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums Service, following the policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

A full description of the geological and geomorphological setting of the site is given in the Archaeological Assessment (Griffiths 1997) and will not be repeated here. Briefly, the site is situated on a gentle west-facing slope between 15m and 26m AOD on the edge of the Downham Market ridge. The surface geology is mainly clays and outcrops of carstone with

Fen Valley gravels to the west. The soil cover at the site is deep and consists of argillic brown sands, many of them gleyic.

The original benchmark of 28.63m OD is located on the corner of the house of 94 Downham Road.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

A thorough examination of the present state of archaeological knowledge relating to the proposed development was articulated in the Archaeological Assessment (Griffiths 1997). A short summary of the main background points is outlined below.

The central large field of the proposed development area was formerly the lawn of Crow Hall, a 17th-18th century mansion (SMR Sites 2446 and 2459), now separated from the site by modern housing. Some evidence for earlier cultivation, in the form of east-west ridge and furrow, is visible on aerial photographs of this field. Unsystematic metal-detecting has produced three medieval and post-medieval coins on this land (SMR Sites 30226 and 30228). Along the southern and south-western edge of the site archaeological observation in 1985 during the construction of the Downham Market southern bypass revealed cut features indicative of Middle Saxon activity (SMR Site 21475: although the location of any focal area may lie either south or north of the road), together with unremarkable surface finds of prehistoric, Roman, Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods.

Whilst there are no previously known archaeological sites actually within the proposed development area, it is acknowledged that archaeological potential exists. It is considered that the most significant issue is the potential for Middle Saxon material, considered to have highest priority due to its comparative rarity. Records from archaeological finds in the general vicinity also suggest a background potential in the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval periods.

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this exploratory work was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

A 2% sample (2140m² of the proposed development area of 10.7 hectares) was to be investigated by trial trenching (Fig. 1). Three further trenches (Trenches 31, 32 and 33) were opened as part of the contingency provision in order to ascertain the nature of the archaeological features found in three of the original trenches (Trenches 1, 7 and 8).

Machine excavation was carried out with a tracked and wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the Norfolk Archaeological Unit's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Site conditions were generally good. Only two trenches (Trenches 29 and 30) were flooded due to heavy rain and a rise in the level of ground water; a pump had to be used in order for the trenches to be investigated.

5.0 Results

5.1 Trench 1 and Trench 31

Trench 1 (Figs. 1 & 2) revealed six separate ditches, [38], [39], [90], [95], [97] and [173] (group number for cuts [91], [167], [169] and [171]). Two of these produced readily datable artefacts. Ditch [90] is aligned roughly east-to-west and two of its fills contained pottery. Deposit [41] contained sherds belonging to a white ware flagon form of AD 1st or 2nd-century date. Deposit [80] contained body sherds of a sandy ware with organic voids and combed decoration. Provisional study has suggested it to be Late Iron Age. Ditch [173] is aligned roughly north-to-south, cutting ditch [90]. Within this ditch deposit [40] contained pottery sherds of a large combed storage jar, similar to Horningsea-type material, and also thought to be Late Iron Age in date.

Besides these ditches there were three smaller linear features (henceforth gullies), [88], [93] and [97]. Deposit [87], within gully [88], contained two large fragments of thick-walled sandy ware sherds, again thought to be Iron Age in date.

A pit, [148], and a post-hole, [175], were also uncovered within the confines of Trench 1 but these remain undated.

Trench 31 (Figs. 1 & 3) contained five more ditches and five smaller gullies, besides the roughly east-to-west aligned ditch [90] already discussed in connection with Trench 1. So far only one of these ditches [344] has produced pottery; infilling [320] produced a complete profile of a jar of sandy organic fabric, the form of this vessel suggesting a Late Iron Age date. There were also two Romano-British sherds of indeterminate date.

Infilling [322] within roughly north-to-south aligned gully [321] contained several conjoining sherds of a sandy ware bowl form, again thought to be Iron Age in date.

In addition there were four, as yet undated, pits ([328], [368], [370] and [372]) and two post-holes ([334] and [336]) within the confines of Trench 31.

5.2 Trench 2

Within Trench 2 six ditches ([57], [59], [61], [63], [104] and [133]) and a smaller gully, [115], were investigated (Figs 1 and 2). All were aligned east-to-west except for the gully [115], which was aligned north-east to south-west. With the exception of a ditch [59], which contained what appears (prior to conservation) to be a Colchester-type brooch dating from the 1st century AD, none of the other features within this trench contained readily datable material.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 contained eight linear features of varying sizes, all aligned in the same direction. A number of sherds of pottery were collected from fill [107] within one of these features, [106]; this comprised one sherd of 13th- or 14th-century Grimston-type pottery and a sherd of modern slipware.

5.4 Trench 4

This trench exposed six ditches ([125], [127], [128], [130], [136] and [138]) and a field drain ([200]), all aligned in the same north-east to south-west direction. Only the fill of the field drain, [201], produced pottery: a single sherd of Ipswich-type ware (c.8th–9th century) and one Grimston-type sherd (late 12th–14th century).

5.5 Trench 5

Trench 5 revealed two post-medieval ceramic field drains following a north-to-south alignment.

5.6 Trench 6

Trench 6 exposed a single ditch on an east-to-west alignment. This currently remains undated but is thought to be prehistoric, as the only anthropogenic material it contained was struck flint.

5.7 Trench 7 and Trench 33

Trench 33 (Figs 1 and 3) was excavated in order to further investigate a gully-like feature, [103], first apparent in Trench 7. This 10m x 10m extension revealed that the gullies formed a rough square which was fairly well defined to the south but had been truncated in the north by an amorphous pit, [310]. Also revealed was a line of seven post-holes ([270], [272], [274], [276], [278], [298], [300]); two ditches ([294], [348]); two pits ([284], [316]); and two more isolated post-holes ([302] and [318]). The fill ([325]) of ditch [348] contained an upright rim sherd of Ipswich-type ware and may, on this basis, date to the Middle Saxon period.

5.8 Trench 8 and Trench 32

Trench 8 (Figs 1 and 3) exposed five ditches ([24], [26], [47], [55] and [363]). Ditch [363] was aligned in a generally east-to-west direction; its fill was noticeably darker than those of the other ditches in this trench and contained two large sherds of pottery. This vessel may be a variant of the Ipswich-type or, possibly, Thetford-type tradition and therefore dating from the Middle-Late Saxon period. In addition to the ditches there were a number of undated post-holes ([32], [45], [118]) and pits ([28], [30], [53] and [120]).

Trench 32 was an extension joining Trench 7 to Trench 8 excavated in order to define the density of features between the two trenches. Five additional ditches ([281], [283], [309], [313] and [315]) were discovered all within 15m of Trench 8. Fill [282] within one of these ditches, [283], contained a pottery sherd of Ipswich-type ware.

5.9 Trenches 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30

These trenches exposed several linear features which represent field boundaries and drainage ditches. No dating evidence was retrieved from the features but it is likely that they date from different periods. Most features had been sealed by the thick layer of subsoil that extends across the site, but some ditches were also cut through that subsoil and are therefore of medieval and post-medieval date.

5.10 Trenches 10 and 28

These trenches exposed no features.

6.0 *The Pottery*

This section of the report is the product of a fast initial scan of the pottery collected to date (October 1999), and is not a comprehensive statement on the nature of the entire assemblage. As yet no other artefact categories from the site have been examined fully.

6.1 *Trench 1*

Context [40]: Fragments of large combed storage jar, similar to Horningsea-type material. Big rim sherds with internal lid-seating. The pottery is characteristic of material found to the west of the county on the fenland edge, and is part of a Late Iron Age tradition which continues well into the Roman period.

Context [41]: Several fragments of a white ware flagon, possibly imported. Roman.

Context [80]: Large combed body sherds made from a different fabric to the pottery recovered from context [40]. These are characterised by being sandy but containing frequent organic voids. The sherds, although a subject of some discussion, were thought likely to be of Iron Age date.

Context [87]: Two large thick-walled sandy sherds, probably Iron Age.

6.2 *Trench 3*

Context [107]: 1 Grimston-type ware sherd and 1 fragment 19th-century slipware.

6.3 *Trench 4*

Context [201]: Ipswich ware and 1 Grimston-type ware sherd, L12th-14th century.

6.4 *Trench 5*

Context [171]: Staffordshire white salt-glazed, 18th century.

6.5 *Trench 8*

Context [81]: 2 large bases of an Ipswich/Thetford-type vessel. Middle/Late Saxon.

6.6 *Trench 12*

Context [261]: 1 sherd of Ipswich ware (c. 8th-L9th century).

6.7 *Trench 31*

Context [320]: Complete profile of jar made from a sandy and organic tempered fabric, probably Late Iron Age. In the same context there is an oxidised Roman rim sherd, plus another more reduced one. There are also rim sherds from at least two other vessels.

Context [322]: Several large joining fragments of a sandy bowl with a large rim diameter, crudely made with flattish base. The vessel has a large rim diameter of c.110mm, and is thought to be Iron Age in date.

6.8 *Trench 32*

Context [282]: 1 Ipswich-type ware sherd, Middle Saxon.

6.9 Trench 33

Context [325]: 1 Ipswich-type upright rim sherd, Middle Saxon.

Context [287]: 1 Thetford-type ware and 1 LMU (11th-14th century).

7.0 Conclusions

This report is an interim statement, issued while work continues at the site and before full study of the artefact assemblage has been completed.

Exploratory work to date has revealed a spread of archaeological features, in the form of field boundaries and drainage ditches, over the investigated area. These ditches can be assigned to the medieval period in some instances, but some date to the post-medieval period and the bulk remaining undated. The fact that much of the central part of the proposed development area was part of Crow Hall Park during the 18th and 19th centuries suggests that most of these ditches pre-date the park and are post-medieval in date. Denver parish was not subject to Parliamentary enclosure (Griffiths 1997, 16) and it can therefore be concluded that many of the field boundaries relate to enclosure carried out during or prior to the 18th century.

The work to date has also located two areas of specific archaeological interest which contained features of Iron Age/Roman (Trenches 1 and 31) and Middle Saxon date (Trenches 8 and 32) respectively. In addition a significant density of archaeological features present within Trenches 7 and 33 appear to represent settlement activity. One of the ditches here contained pottery of Middle Saxon date.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by the Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Section.

Acknowledgements

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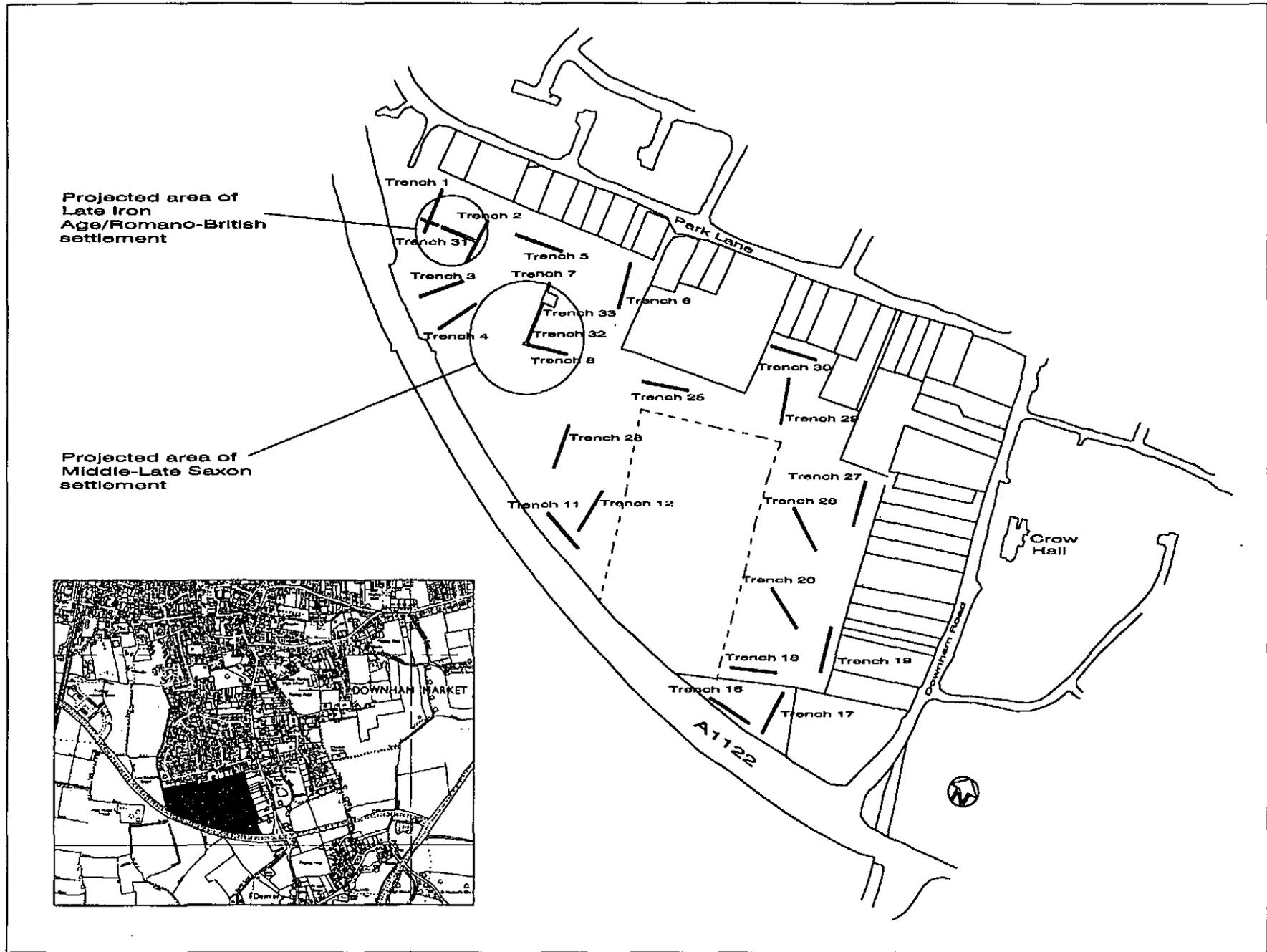


Fig.1 Trench locations.

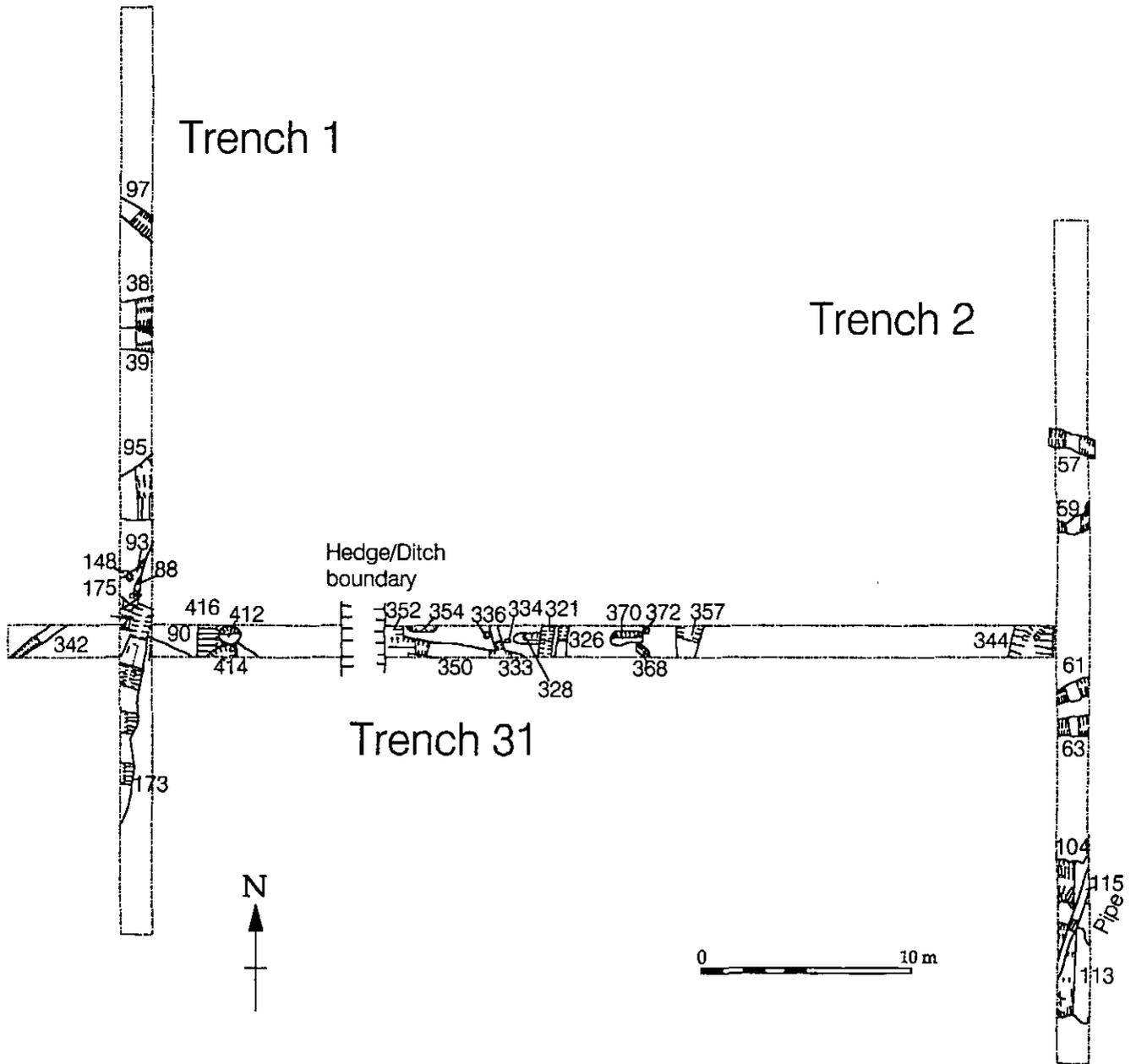


Fig. 2 Late Iron Age/Romano-British area: Trenches 1, 2 and 31

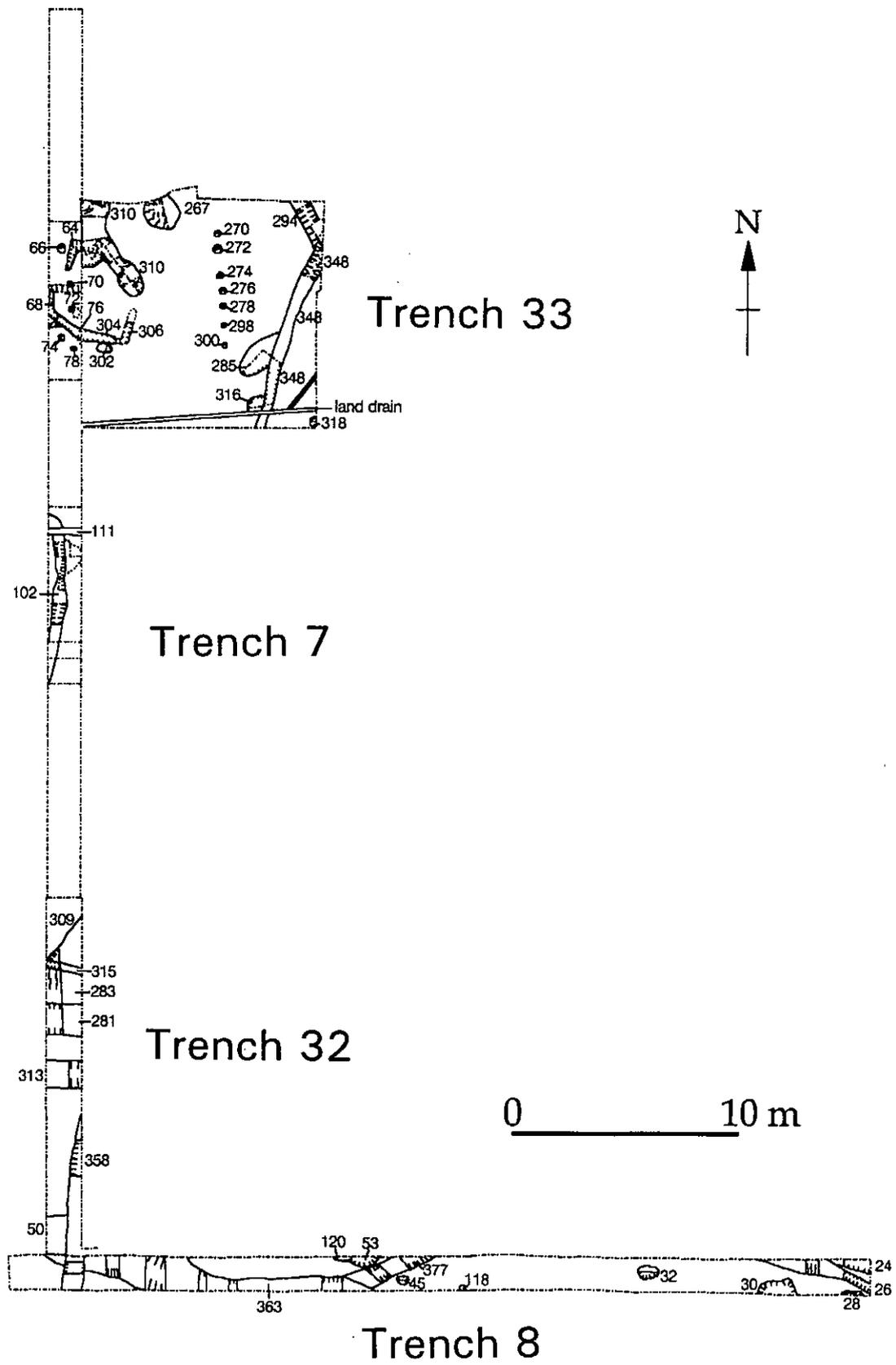


Fig. 3 Middle Saxon area: Trenches 7, 8, 32 and 33