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A Report on the Surveys conducted at Taplow Court

April 1987

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This work on Taplow was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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Taplow Survey

The objective of the survey work undertaken at Taplow between the 6th to 11th of April 1987 was to provide a site context for the 1883 excavation of the burial mound. The site context was defined as an area containing the burial mound and churchyard with Berry Fields to the south and the scarp down to the River Thames on the west. (Appendix 1). These areas were subjected to various surveys (Fig. 1)

Within the churchyard a site grid was laid out with pegs driven into the ground at 30m intervals. All the surveys conducted within the churchyard were referred to this grid. The grid itself was located against the brick walls of Taplow Court House. This enabled the exact position of the site grid to be established in relation to the house.

The grid peg in the SW corner was given the arbitrary reference of 800E/800N and a temporary bench mark (TBM) was established in the centre of the churchyard and given an arbitrary height of 100m. Before the work was completed the true height of our TBM was established by levelling from the benchmark at NGR 90800/82200 (Appendix 2). (Consequently all contour readings were altered to read Above Ordnance Datum - AOD).

CONTOUR SURVEY

A contour survey of the burial mound and churchyard was conducted using two sets of equipment. The burial mound itself was surveyed using a Nikon NT2A Theodolite with a preprogrammed Psion Organiser II hand held computer. The Psion gave XYZ co-ordinates according to the site grid. These were stored and dumped regularly onto floppy disc (Appendix 3). The burial mound was surveyed at metre intervals. The relatively flat churchyard was surveyed using an EDM mounted on a Nikon NT2A Theodolite. Readings were taken at a wider spacing of every two metres. All the measurements from the EDM were recorded on paper and converted by hand into XYZ co-ordinates and typed onto floppy disc. Where necessary temporary survey stations were established within the grid (Appendix 4)to enable complete coverage over the ground.
The contour survey of the burial mound and churchyard was produced using a programme written by R Young (BUFAU) from the Genosurf Graphics Routines. The contour survey was drawn up at intervals of 0.20m and clearly shows the prominence of the burial mound within the relatively flat churchyard (fig.2)

Two features of note are the curved footpath which runs up the north side of the mound and the flat summit. These features are almost certainly the result of landscaping after the 1883 excavation.

The prominent position of the burial mound is indicated by the two profiles N-S and E-W (Fig.3). The data recorded for the E-W profile comprise a series of heights taken across the landscaped garden. Due to the totally inacessible nature of the environment further west the remaining readings were taken off the Ordnance Survey 1:1250 (Plan SU9082). The N-S readings were taken as a profile right through Berry Fields.

GRAVESTONE SURVEY

All the memorial/gravestones in the churchyard were located by tacheometry using a Nikon NT2A Theodolite in relation to the site grid. Up to four readings were taken for each gravestone, one at each corner (Appendix 5). Altogether a hundred and one gravestones were located (Fig.4). Each gravestone was allocated a feature number and photographed (Appendix 6). Except for the memorial stone commemorating the excavation of the burial mound all the stones are located in the churchyard outside the edge of the burial mound. The graves appear to fall into two groups. The larger stone memorials, some containing subsurface crypts are concentrated on the western side of the churchyard and are less likely to have been landscaped. However, east of the burial mound many of the gravestones appear concentrated in groups which may indicate landscaping of the churchyard when the burial mound was reconstructed, when the church was demolished, or when the House gardens were landscaped (Fig.5).

RESISTIVITY SURVEY

The eastern side of the churchyard was surveyed with a Bradphys Resistivity meter, using the Wenner configuration. The objective was to pick up any subsurface anomalies such as a quarry ditch around the mound, or the foundations of the church. The western side of the churchyard was not surveyed because of the density of grave-stones. The gravestones have also caused gaps on the coverage of the eastern side but without seriously affecting the validity of the results. Readings were taken at metre intervals along transects aligned with the site grid. The results were recorded by hand before being transferred onto the University of York VAX cluster computer network for plotting (Appendix 7).

The results of the resistivity survey indicates there is no quarry ditch outside the present edge of the burial mound (Fig.6) and further suggests the 19th century landscaping was achieved with material dug from the mound rather than freshly quarried.

The most significant anomaly picked up by the resistivity survey is an almost uniform feature in the NE corner of the churchyard. According to the survey it measures 18m E-W, 22m N-S. The shape of the feature indicates this is the demolished church. Further confirmation of this anomaly was gained when an employee of Plessey plc. produced a series of colour prints showing a grass stain cruciform feature in the same position in the churchyard as the resistivity survey. Using the plotted gravestones as a base line the feature was located onto the site plan of the gravestones (see Fig.4). A further anomaly picked up by the resistivity survey is a diagonal pathway which runs from the SE corner of the churchyard up to the circular memorial cross. Although the present public entrance to the churchyard is also at the SE corner, the impression from the mapping of this feature and the grass stain is that it once served as the pathway into the larger cruciform building - the church.

To the south of the churchyard lies Berry Fields. Within the present field a number of earthworks were recorded by the Ordnance Survey and the object of the present survey was to locate these earthworks as surface features and to

use the resistivity meter to locate any associated ditches. The earthworks were difficult to locate as topographical features because of the irregular height of the land which was being used at the time of the survey as pasture and the shallow nature of the earthworks. However using the Nikon Theodolite with EDM attachment a series of transects were laid out to provide profiles down the slope south and west from the site grid which had been extended along the northern edge of the field. From these profiles it was possible to map the line of the rather ephemeral banks (Fig.7).

The Resistivity meter took readings every metre along transects laid out south from the site grid. Each transect was 60m long and the results were plotted using the same computer programme as the readings from the churchyard. Although the transects of the resistivity survey did not reach the lower earthwork opposite the pond anomalies were picked up along the northern edge of the field in both transects (Fig.8). The results from the southern end of the transects are equitable with a rather uniform pattern of readings. Without knowledge of the impact of agricultural practices within the subsoil of the field it is difficult to explain the anomalous readings. However it may not be coincidence that the edge of the gardens occurs imediately north of the anomalies giving the impression that the landscaping impinged upon the edge of Berry Fields.

ASSESSMENT

The burial mound at Taplow is situated in a prominent position in the landscape looking over the Thames Valley to the south and west. The results of detailed survey work around the burial mound give some indication of the history of the site.

The mound appears to have been constructed from material scraped up from the surrounding area. There is no evidence for a quarry ditch around the mound or even the small scoops which must have been the source for the mound makeup.

After the excavation of 1883 the burial mound was landscaped with a convenient footpath up to the summit. The flat topped summit of the burial mound must have provided a convenient vantage point looking out over the Thames Valley.

At some stage a church or cruciform building was constructed in the NE corner of the site. Later demolition left no clear trace of this building until it appeared as a grass mark stain during a dry summer. This building is believed to be identical with the feature picked out by the resistivity survey.

Further landscaping of the churchyard is witnessed by the position of many of the gravestones. A few are on top of the building walls and must post date the demolition of the building.

In retrospect the geophysical survey of Berry Fields should have been extended by 20m south to pick up the larger bank. No ditches were found in the field but if necessary the earthwork survey should act as the foundation to a more detailed geophysical sampling programme. Given the ephemeral nature of the banks it was extrememly difficult to match the geophysical survey without the results of the earthwork survey.

Benchmark at NGR 90800/82200 at 63.26m AOD
Levelling from Benchmark to TBM

B.S.		1.703
	F.S.	1.731
B.S.		2.588
	F.S.	0.627
B.S.		1.705
	F.S.	1.077

B.S. - F.S. = 5.996 - 3.435
= 2.561

Site TBM at 63.260 + 2.561 = 65.821m

(Thus 34.179m taken off all Z co-ordinates of contour readings to establish the true height A.O.D.)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Altogether nine films were processed, four negative films N176, N177, N180, N181 and five slide films S152, S154, S155, S156, S157. The films were allocated numbers within the Sutton Hoo recording system. All the abbreviations used on the forms are explained below. Occasional photographs were entered as part of a completed film.

One of the films N180 was donated to the project by Mr Roger Williams (Raven Cottage, Rochford Way, Taplow, Maidenhead) of Plessey (Taplow) plc.

Some of these were copied onto negative film, N181 by N. Macbeth.

The slides were originally split for safety into two sets apd stored in separate places. They were split according to exposure number into an 'even' and 'odd' set. Although each film is complete the slides are still in their folders, either all even or all odd numbers.

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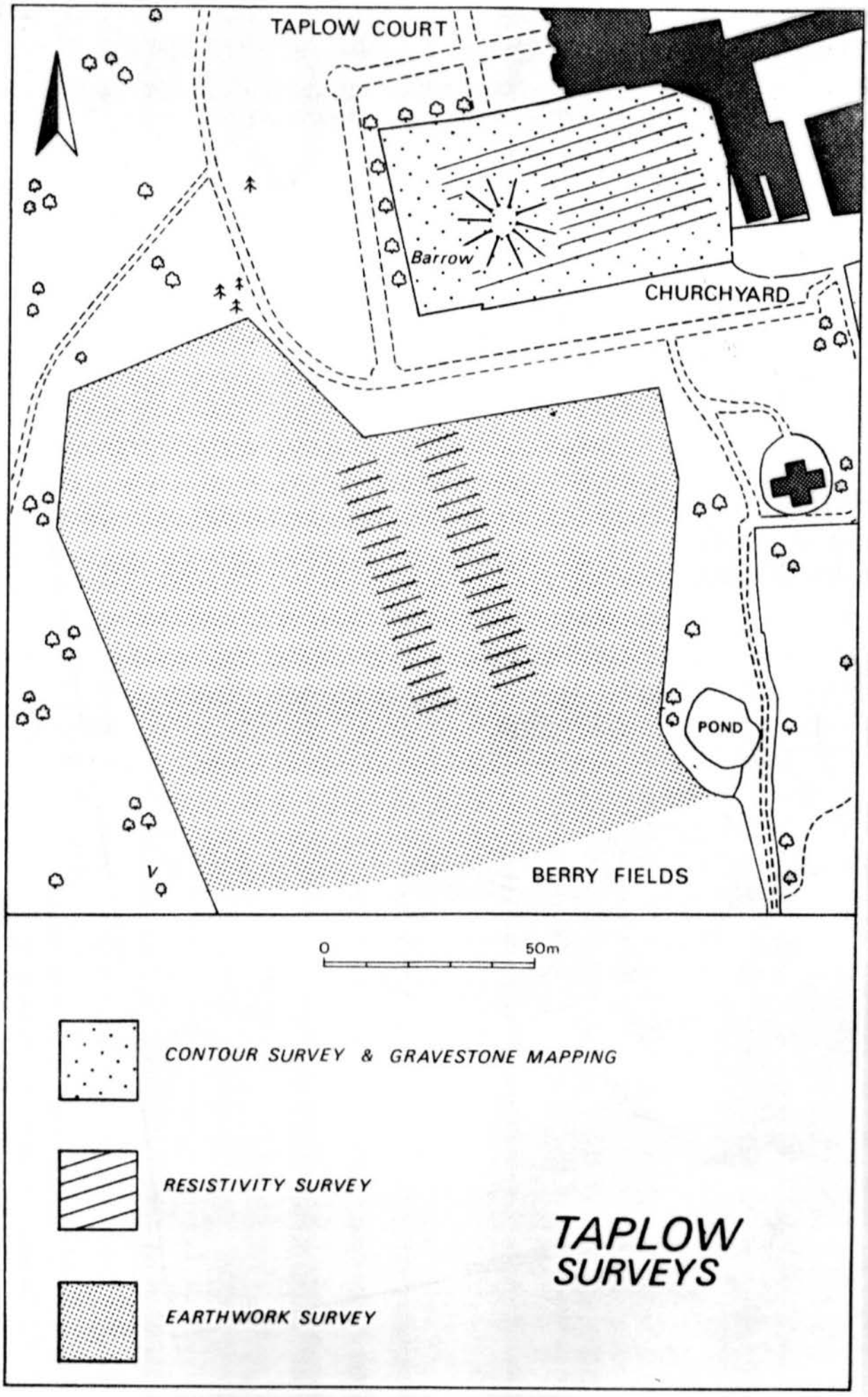
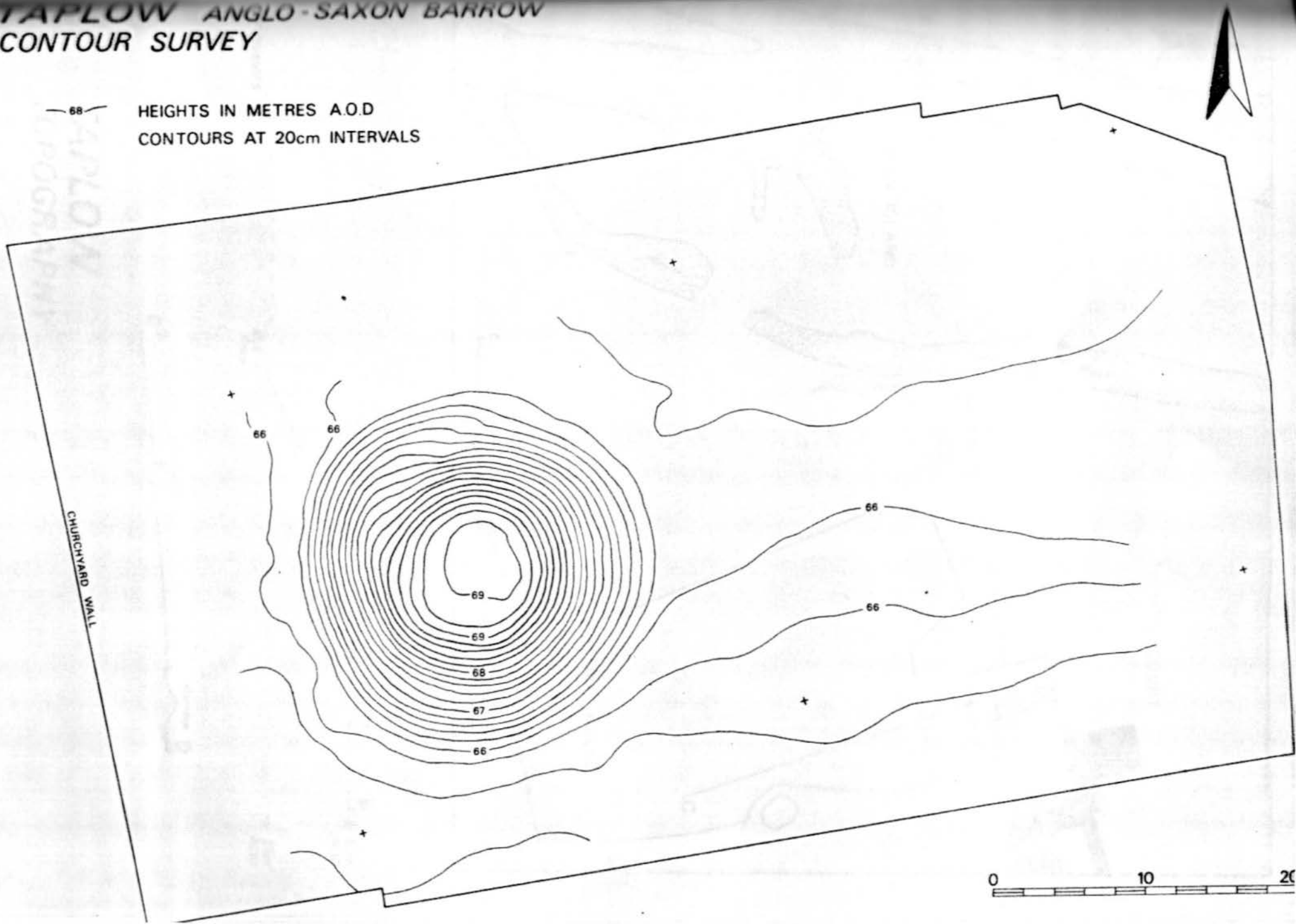
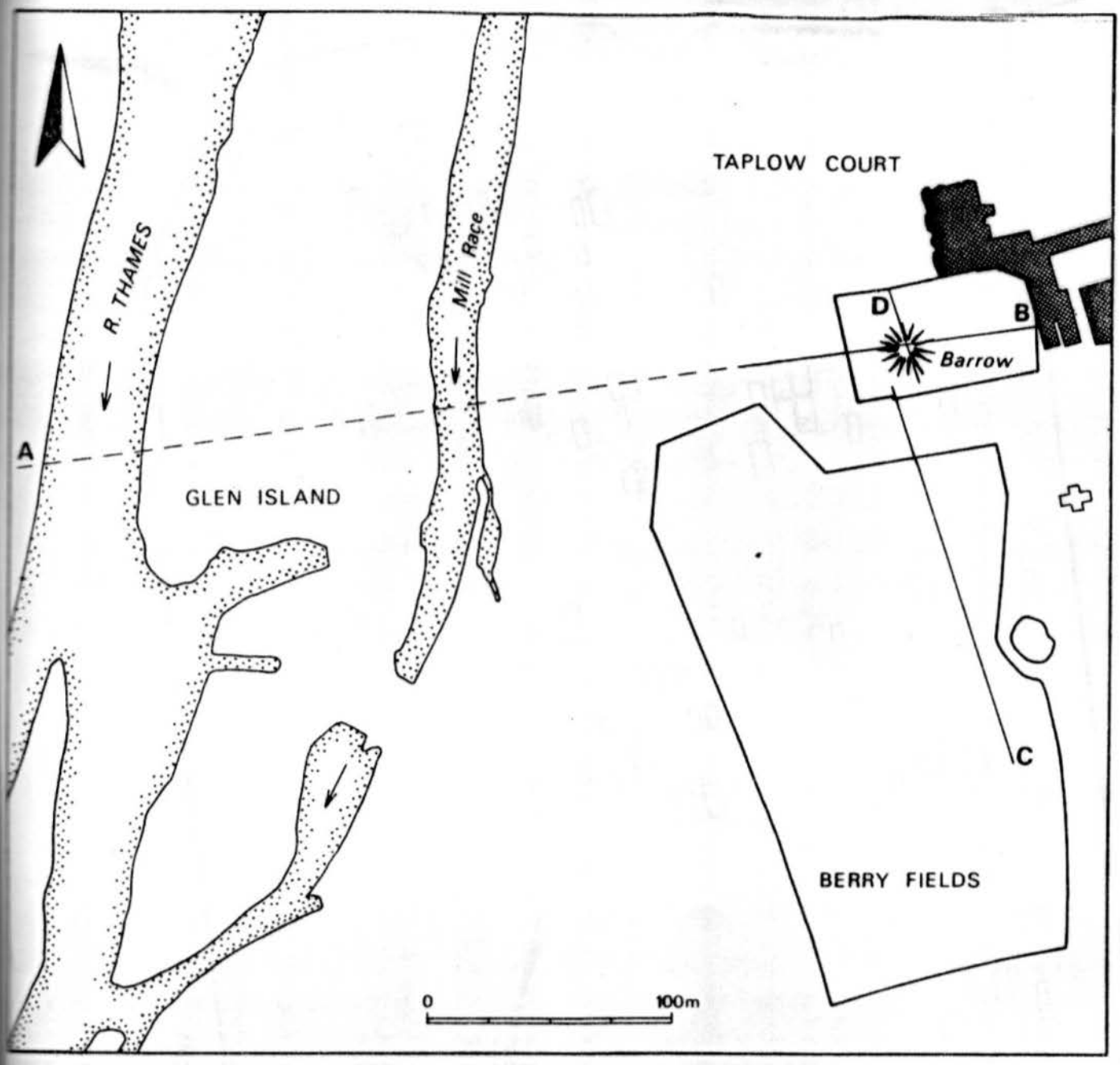
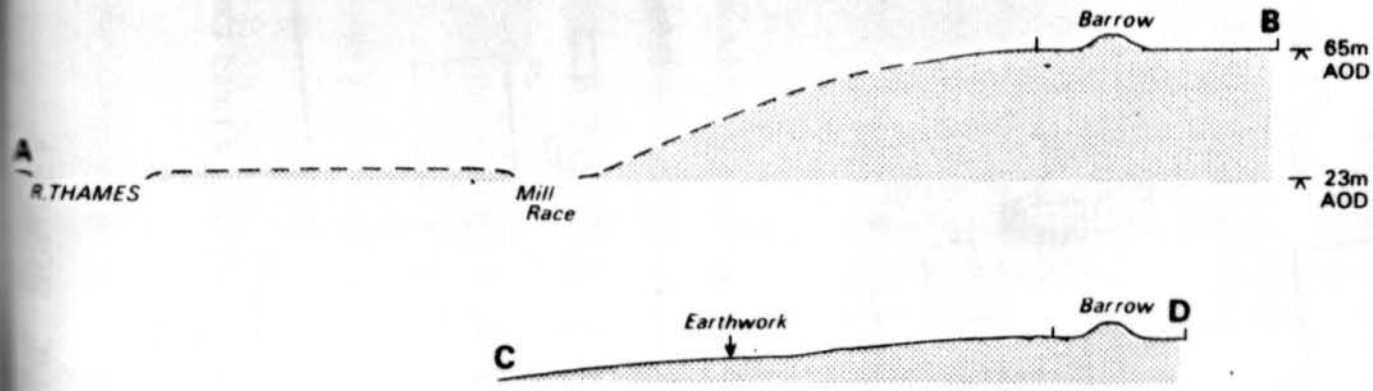

TAPLOW COURT
Barrow
CHURCHYARD
POND
BERRY FIELDS
0
50m
CONTOUR SURVEY & GRAVESTONE MAPPING
RESISTIVITY SURVEY
EARTHWORK SURVEY
TAPLOW
SURVEYS

TAPLOW ANGLO-SAXON BARROW
CONTOUR SURVEY







TAPLOW
TOPOGRAPHY

GRAVESTONE SURVEY

RESISTIVITY SURVEY

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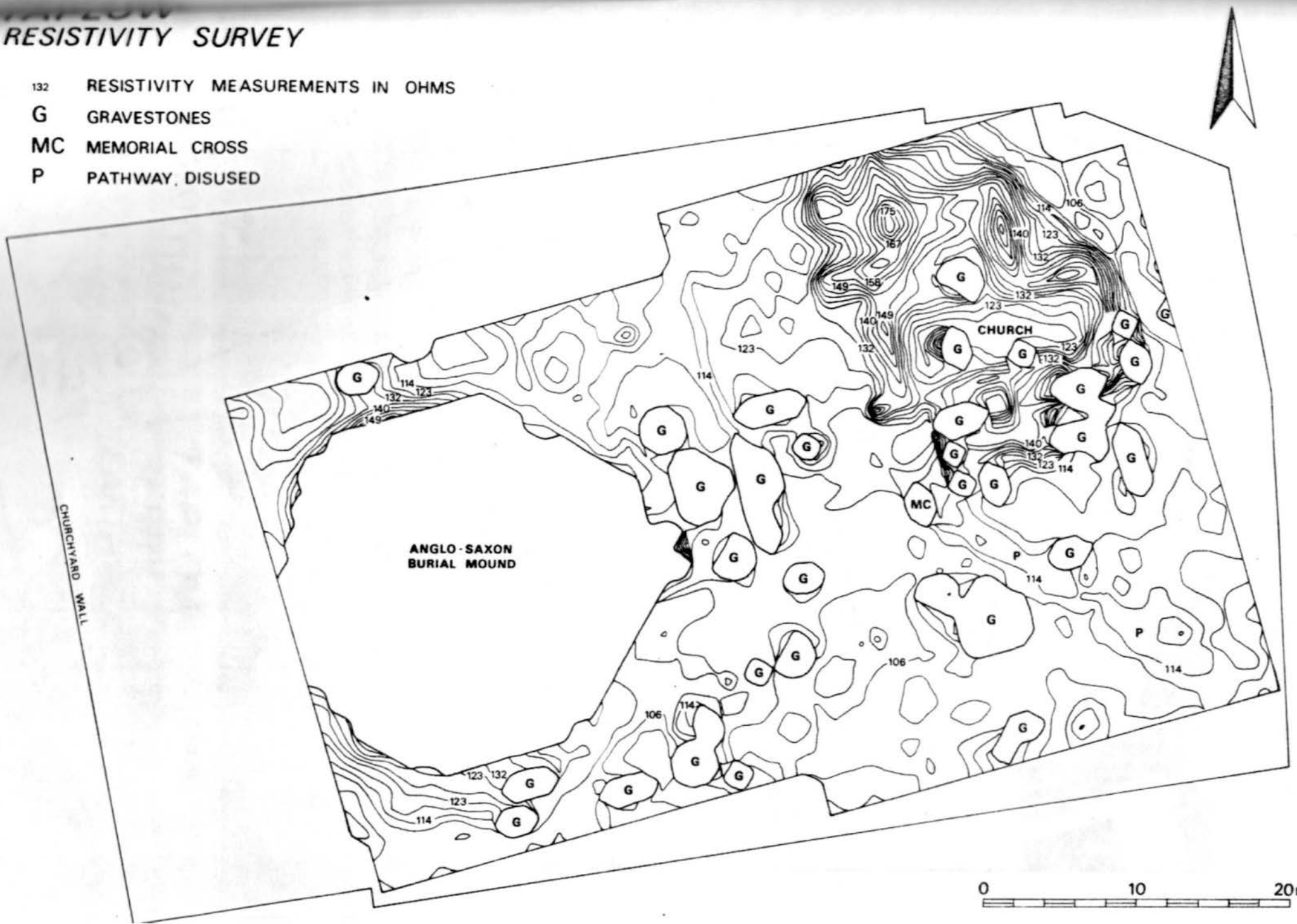
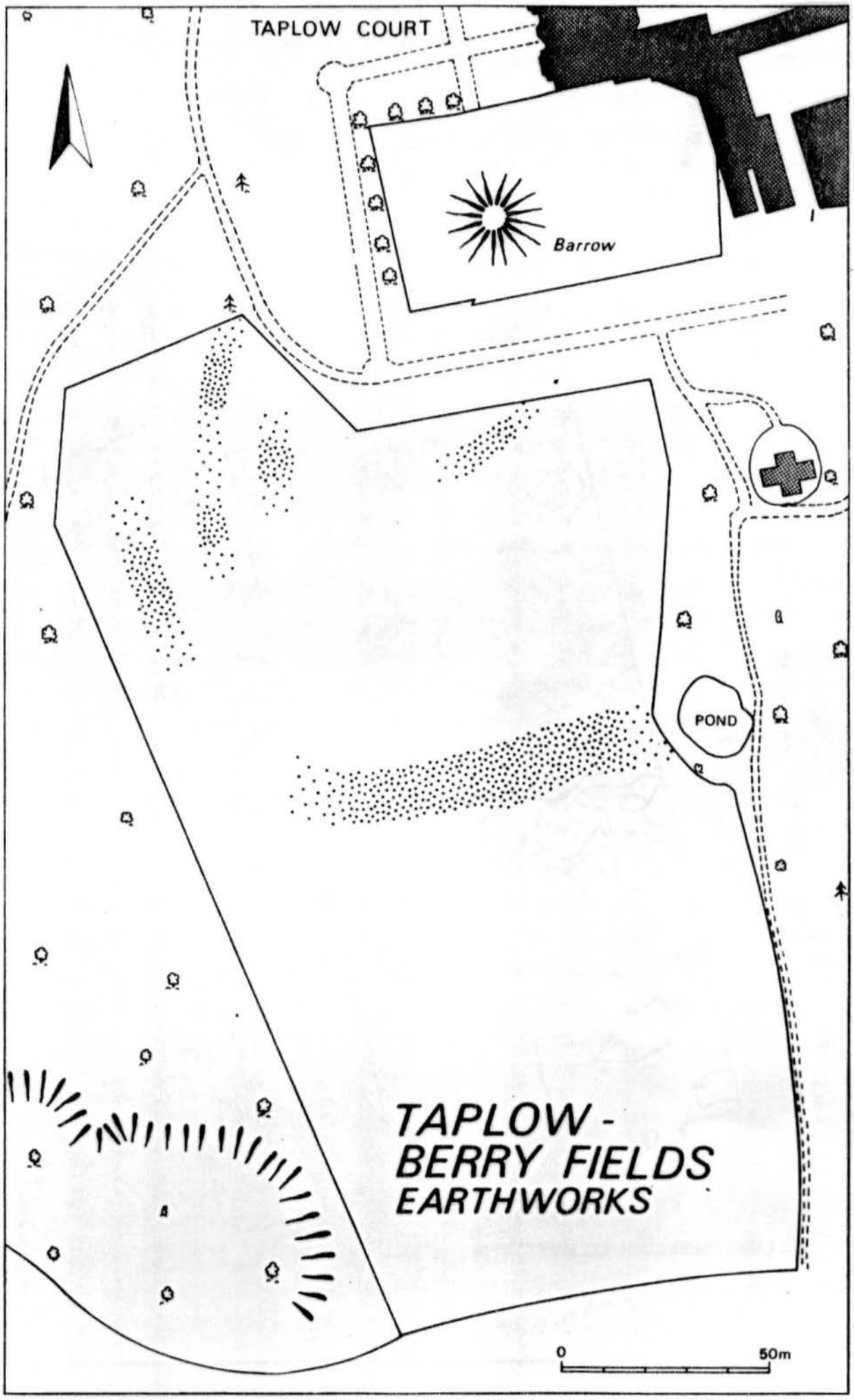
G GRAVESTONES

MC MEMORIAL CROSS

P PATHWAY, DISUSED




TAPLOW COURT
Barrow
POND
TAPLOW -
BERRY FIELDS
EARTHWORKS
0
50m

TAPLOW ~ BERRY FIELDS
RESISTIVITY SURVEY

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