

**Further Excavations at Albrighton Moat,  
Shropshire 1990**

by  
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with a contribution by  
C. Mould

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of an excavation and geophysical survey at a moated site to the north of the A41 near Albrighton, Shropshire (National Grid Ref. SJ 814 049), (Fig. 1).

The work was commissioned by Mr W. Jukes who wishes to partially re-excavate and re-flood the moat in order to create a fishing amenity for the handicapped.

Three sections were excavated through the moat by BUFAU in 1988 (Cane 1988). In order to assist the landscape architects (S. Walding and Co.) with their planning proposals, seven further transverse sections were required through the moat fills. The objectives were to determine the depth of archaeologically significant deposits and to locate the edges of the ditch cut.

The work was undertaken by BUFAU between November 19th and November 30th, 1990.

## 2.0 THE SITE

Albrighton Moat belongs to a class of medieval monument common throughout Britain. Well over 5000 moated sites have been recorded, including over 100 in Shropshire (Aberg 1978). They vary considerably in shape but are most frequently roughly rectangular, as is the case at Albrighton. They are characterised by a surrounding ditch, in most cases intended to be filled with water. At Albrighton the water appears to have been fed into the northwest corner of the moat by means of a leat from a nearby stream (Fig. 2). At the time of the excavation the moat no longer contained water, partly as a result of field drainage and partly as a result of becoming filled with silt and rubble.

The majority of moated sites were medieval manorial or farmstead complexes. However, a moat might also surround a variety of other structures such as a windmill, chapel or barn. The majority appear to have been dug during the 13th and early 14th centuries although earlier and later examples are also known.

The site at Albrighton currently lies under pasture on a gentle east-facing slope. It seems likely that the fairly level platform surrounded by the moat has been created by raising the eastern side using some of the upcast from the ditch. However, there is no visible evidence for the structure that may have been built on this platform. Its relatively small size (c. 900 sq. m) suggests that any buildings that might have existed were not particularly substantial. The Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record suggests that access to the platform may have been by means of a causeway across the western arm of the moat. Any evidence for this has now been largely obscured by modern debris, although two slight opposing spurs are just visible projecting into the ditch. The southwest corner of the moat has been partly obscured by the A41 Albrighton bypass and the construction of this road might also explain the presence of the modern rubble dumped into the ditch.

The three trenches excavated in 1988 indicated that the latest fills with archaeological potential consisted of partially waterlogged grey silts. The northern and western arms of the moat contained larger amounts of modern debris and consequently the archaeological deposits were contacted at a greater depth.

The objective of the present investigation was to provide additional, more detailed information to ensure that archaeologically significant deposits or structures would not be affected during the establishment of the fishing facility. In addition, it was hoped that a small geophysical survey might provide some evidence for the nature of the structure or structures on the platform.

### 3.0 THE EXCAVATION

#### 3.1 Method

Seven 1m-wide transverse sections (Figs. 2 and 3; Trenches IV-VIII and X-XI) were excavated through the upper fills of the moat. In each case the upper sides of the moat edge were contacted and examined and the upper limit of the archaeologically-significant moat fills was located. The length of the trenches varied from 11.4m (Trench VIII) on the west side of the moat to 8.2m on the east side (Trench V). In addition, a longitudinal section (Fig. 2 and 3; IX) was partially excavated between Trenches VIII and X on the west side of the moat. Only the upper recent rubble fills were removed from this section in an attempt to clarify the existence of the suggested causeway. The trench was 1.0m wide and 10.0m long.

In each case the trenches were excavated by a combination of machine and hand excavation and one each of their sections cleaned and recorded (Fig. 3).

#### 3.2 Results

As with the previous evaluation, the ditch (Feature 1) was found to be cut into the natural sandstone and clay. In the cases where the natural was sandstone, particularly on the east and south sides (Trenches V-VII), the edges were found to be steeper. The sandstone was also occasionally stepped, particularly at the outer edge of the ditch (e.g. Trenches V and VI). It is possible that this has resulted from the natural horizontal bedding of the sandstone although the 1988 excavation provided some evidence that these steps may have been deliberately cut for some form of revetment. On the west and north sides (Trenches IV, VIII, X and XI) the ditch was cut into a red blocky clay (1024) occasionally overlain by a

thin crust of sandstone (Trenches IV and VIII). Within two of the sections (Trenches IV and X) an attempt appears to have been made to consolidate the outer edge of the ditch where it has cut through the natural clay by setting pitched sandstone slabs (1022) into the surface of the clay.

The top of the ditch-cut tended to be widest on the west side (10.4m in Trench VIII and 9.0m in Trench X) and narrowest on the east side (7.8m in Trench V and 7.6m in Trench VI).

A broadly similar sequence of fills was recorded throughout the moat. The primary fills appeared to consist of grey clay silts or silt clays frequently with iron-staining (1025, 1032, and 1040). These were only excavated to any extent in Trench IV and are considered to be archaeologically significant. Waterlogged organic material (mainly tree roots) suggested the potential survival of archaeological organic material within these silts and clays. The top of these deposits was located at a considerably lower depth on the west side and it seems likely that the moat would have been much deeper at this point, although it was not bottomed during the excavation.

The grey silts and clays were overlain by deposits of red-brown clay silts (1021 and 1031) with occasional stones. These varied in thickness from 0.4m (Trench VI) to 0.8m (Trench X).

The upper fills within the western and northern trenches all appeared to be of recent date and consisted of a layer of dark grey-brown silt (1030) overlain by thick dumps of brick rubble, frequently mixed with cobbles (1028) and occasionally associated with layers of ash (1029) or clay (1041). These modern deposits were thickest within the western arm of the moat (e.g. 1.6m in Trench VIII). The rubble was not present in the eastern or southern arms where the most recent deposit consisted of a layer of topsoil between 0.1 and 0.2m thick (1000).

Recent field drains were recorded cutting the red-brown silts (1031) in Trenches V, VI and VIII. These presumably relate to an attempt to remove any remaining standing water from the eastern and southern arms of the moat.

Only the modern brick rubble deposits (1028) were removed from the longitudinal section through the western arm of the moat. These were observed to be clearly banked up over a ridge of the red-brown clay silt (1031) corresponding to the suggested location of the causeway.

### 3.3 Discussion

Where the ditch has been cut into the sandstone bedrock the sides tend to be fairly steep, frequently with a stepped appearance. Where it has been cut into the natural clay the sides tend to have a more gradual slope. Although the excavation did not provide any further evidence for revetments on either side of the ditch it did suggest that in places the edges had been consolidated by setting pitched slabs into the clay sides. Further evidence was provided for the suggested causeway across the western arm of the moat.

The grey silts (1032 and 1040) presumably correspond to a primary silting of the moat, possibly contemporary with the occupation of the platform. The overlying red-brown silts (1021 and 1031) may represent a subsequent post-occupational silting up of the ditch. Very little was recovered from these silts apart from a couple of very small abraded green-glazed pottery fragments of medieval type. Although these are clearly residual they do tend to suggest a 13th-14th century date for the occupation of Albrighton Moat.

The grey-brown silt (1030) appears to have been a relatively recent deposit of water-lain material perhaps the result of a flooding episode. The brick rubble (1028) contained numerous items of modern refuse including discarded glass bottles, horseshoes and other metal objects. This possibly originates from the demolition of nearby buildings and the construction of the A41 Albrighton by-pass.

## 4.0 THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

(by Catharine Mould)

The Geophysical survey was conducted to assess the platform at Albrighton with the aim of locating and defining any structural or occupational traces within this area.

### 4.1 Principles

A Gradiometer provides a non-destructive and rapid method of survey, particularly appropriate for archaeological purposes. The instrument is sensitive to any metal object and to structures and deposits which have acquired a magnetic field. Features which may be detected include ditches and structural foundations which appear as localised variations in the intensity of the site's magnetic field.

A magnetic anomaly is defined as an instrument reading which contrasts with the general background level of the site being investigated. This background level can vary slightly according to the character of the site being investigated (Clark 1989).

A positive anomaly will appear above the general background level, whereas a negative anomaly will appear below the general background level.

### 4.2 Method

An area survey was conducted using a Geoscan FM18 Fluxgate Gradiometer, with a built-in data logger. The platform was surveyed using one 30m grid, with axes aligned N-S and E-W (Fig. 2). Readings were taken at 1m intervals along parallel traverses spaced 1m apart. The Gradiometer was set to a resolution of 1nT.

The recorded data was transferred from the gradiometer to disk, on a Toshiba T1000 portable computer. The data was then processed using the Geoscan Research 'Geoplot' graphics and data-handling program. Data was plotted, in dot-density format, on an Epson RX-100 printer.

### 4.3 Results

The results are presented in the form of dot-density plots, with positive anomalies represented as darker shading (Fig. 4). Figure 4a incorporates all readings within the range -12 to 5 nT. Figure 4b is a plot of only those readings between 0 and 5 nT in order to isolate and emphasise positive anomalies above the general background level. Anomalies which may be interpreted as archaeological features have been annotated A1-A5.

#### 4.4 Discussion

The most significant anomaly appears to be A4, located in the western half of the surveyed area, which yielded values of 0-5 nT. It appeared as a series of linear anomalies forming a rectangular feature c. 25m long and 10m wide, with apparent internal sub-divisions. It is possible that these linear anomalies relate to stone or timber foundations for a rectangular building, either of these would yield values above the general background level. The long axis appears to be on the same orientation as the western arm of the surrounding moat. A similar structure is known at St. Aylaits, Essex where the rectangular building is still standing (Aberg 1978, fig. 12).

A slight anomaly (A5) projecting from the proposed western wall of this building may be interpreted as a porch. The close proximity to the possible causeway across the western arm of the moat (fig. 2) and the corresponding break in the suggested wall tends to support this interpretation. Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire has a similar association between a porch and causeway (Aberg 1978, fig. 11).

It is noticeable that the values for the western half of the surveyed area (between -4 and +5 nT) tend to be higher than for the eastern half (between -2 and -9 nT). It is possible that this contrast reflects the suggested raising of the eastern half of the area to provide a horizontal building platform. It might be expected that the magnetic value within this redeposited material would differ slightly from the less-disturbed western half of the platform. However, it is also possible that the increasingly negative values obtained towards the eastern edge of the platform are the result of instrument drift.

Anomalies A1, A2 and A3 yielded values of 2-8 nT. These may possibly form part of a structure located to the east of A4 and which appears to be on the same alignment as A4.

It is expected that a moated platform should yield some evidence of occupation and it is suggested here that anomaly A4 represents the main building belonging to a small-scale rural farmstead at Albrighton.

#### 5.0 IMPLICATIONS

It is felt that no significant archaeological deposits would be affected by the careful removal of the upper rubble layers (1028, 1029, 1030 and 1041) and the red-brown clay silts (1021 and 1031) in the moat ditches. However, it should be noted that the total depth of these deposits was recorded as considerably greater in the western arm of the moat (up to 2.3m in Trench VIII) than in the eastern arm (less than 0.5m in Trench VI). As was pointed out in the 1988 evaluation, care must also be taken during the removal of the modern fills to prevent damage to the sides of the ditch. Preferably, this should be done under archaeological supervision. It was also observed that sensitive consolidation should be undertaken on the ditch sides and bottom to prevent erosion.

There appears to be substantial evidence to suggest that a causeway existed across the western arm of the ditch at some time during the history of the moat. Care should be taken while removing the brick rubble (1028) at this point and the underlying ridge of silt should be left intact, effectively re-establishing the causeway.

The geophysical survey indicates that it is very likely that traces of archaeological structures have survived on the platform. As these may be very close to the surface, extreme care must be taken not to disturb the platform during the development.

#### 6.0 Acknowledgements

The excavation was carried out by Gwilym Hughes, Steve Litherland and Dave Etheridge with the assistance of Juliet Buckels and Kaye Barrows. Thanks to Mr. W. Jukes for his interest and assistance, to Catharine Mould for conducting the geophysical survey and to John Evenson (Evenson Plant and Equipment) for the loan of a portacabin. The report was edited by Iain Ferris and the illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds, Catharine Mould and Mark Breedon. The report was produced by Liz Hooper.

Gwilym Hughes  
January 1990

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# ALBRIGHTON MOAT 1990 Site Location

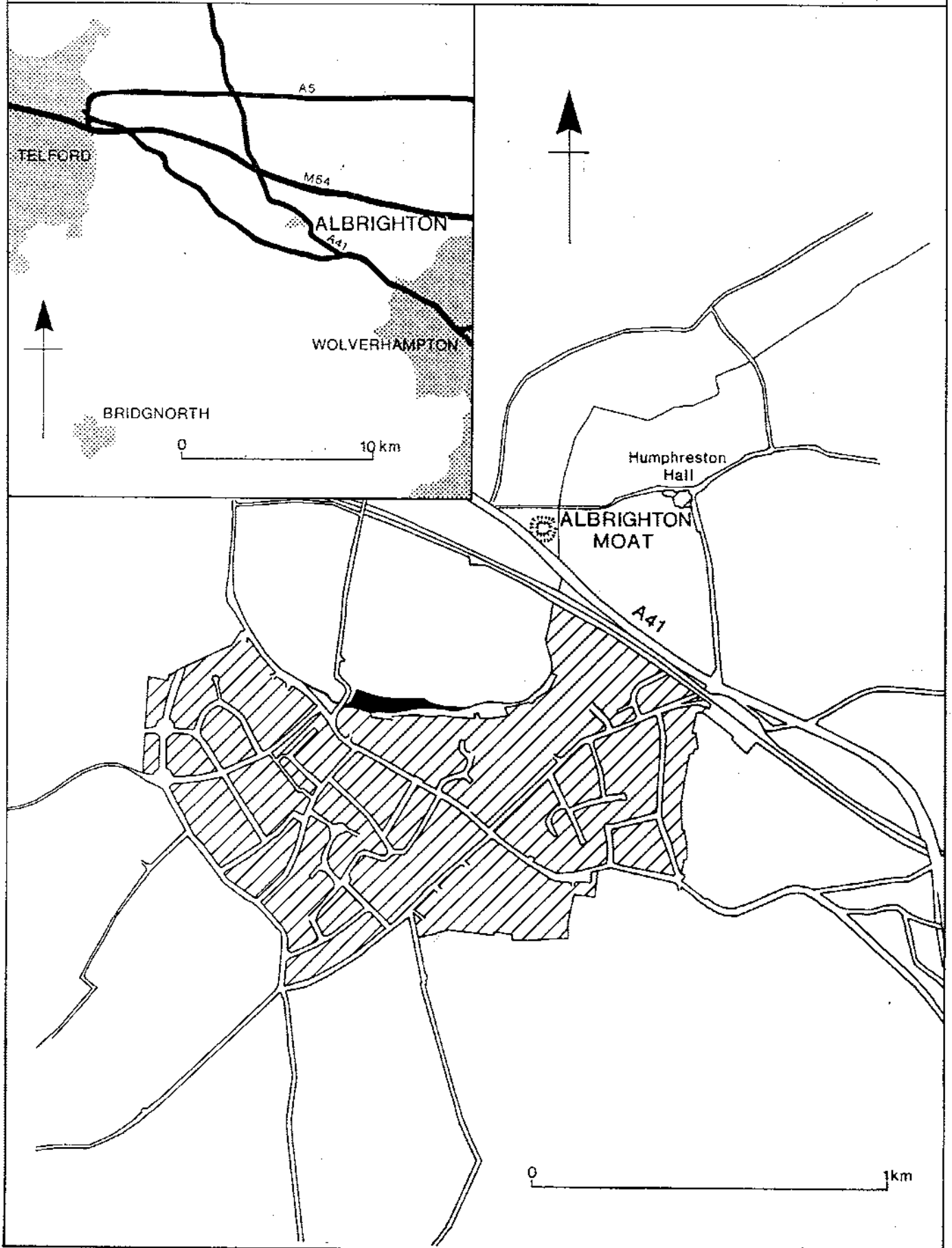


Fig 1



# ALBRIGHTON MOAT 1990 Location of Trenches

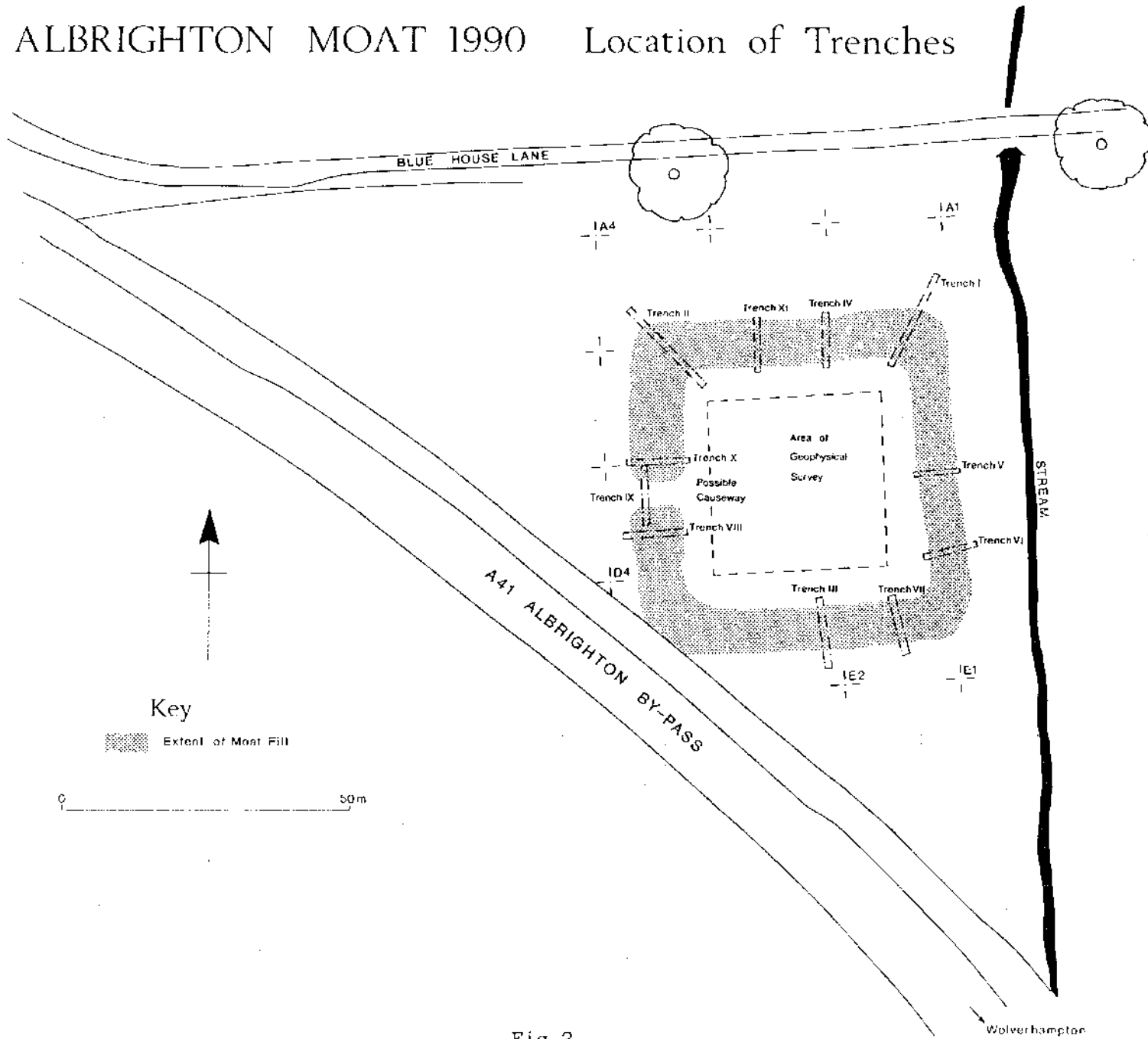
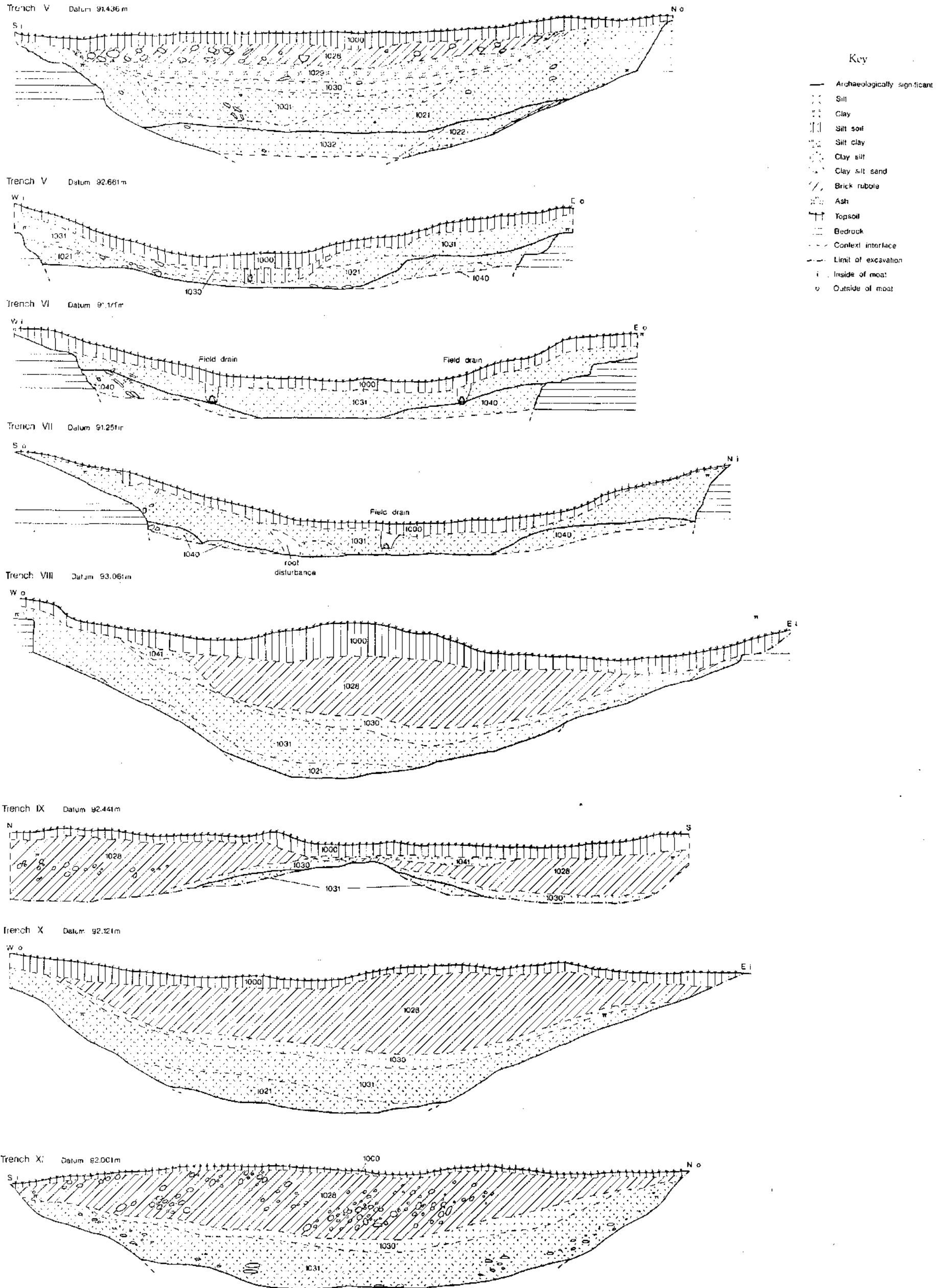


Fig 2

# ALBRIGHTON MOAT 1990 Sections



# ALBRIGHTON MOAT 1990

## Geophysical Survey

0 10m

Fig. 4a

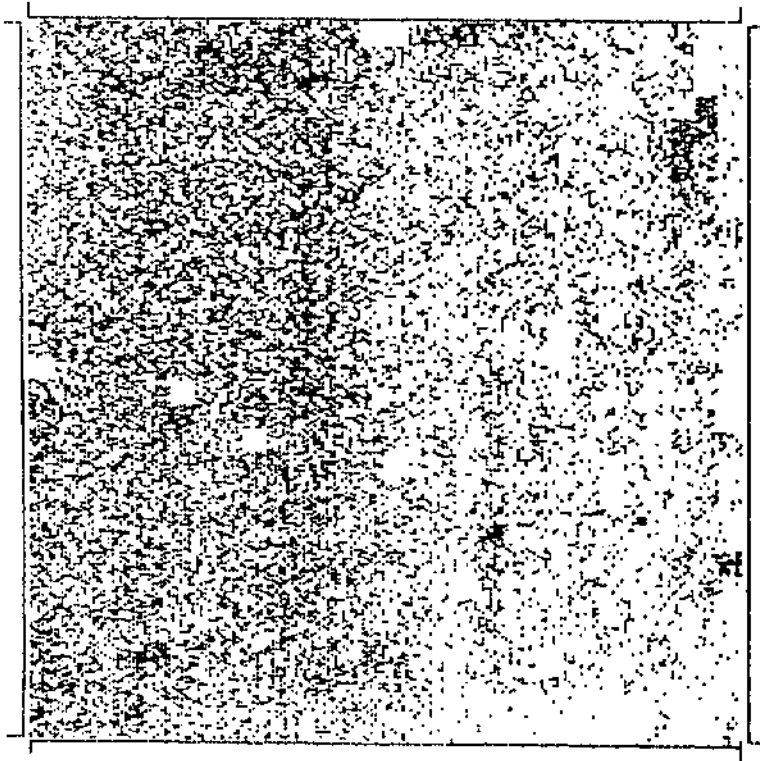


Fig. 4b

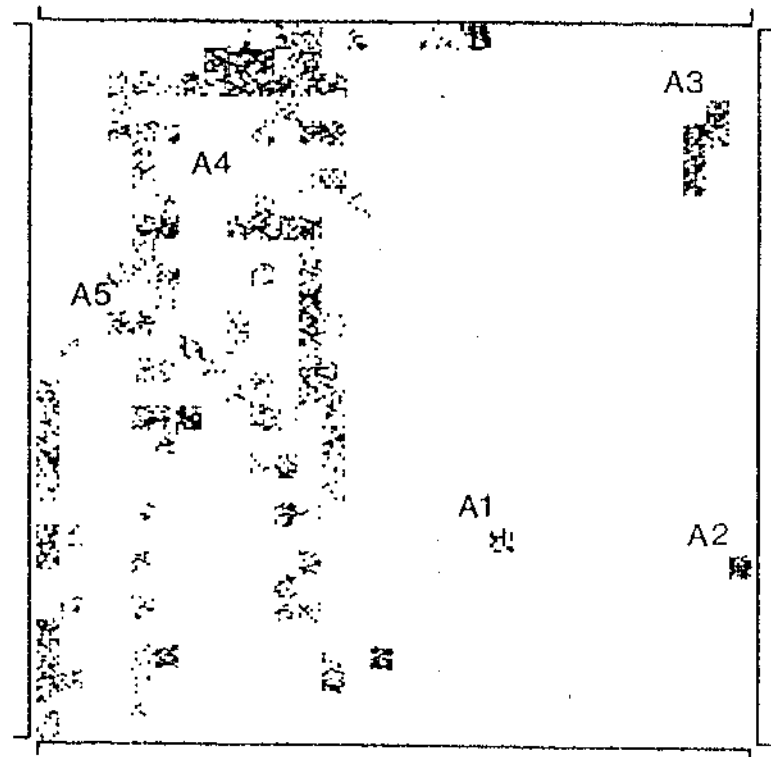


Fig 4