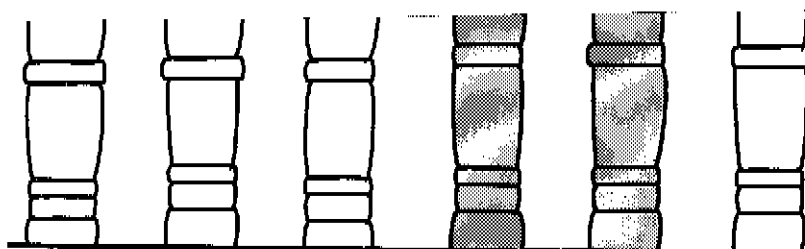


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COPY OF THE TRIAL TRENCH
REPORT FOR YOU.

Mike Hall

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NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

A6 RUSHDEN - HIGHAM FERRERS BYPASS

SITE 3

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL EXCAVATION

OCTOBER 2001

*NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 2001*

*A6 RUSHDEN - HIGHAM FERRERS BYPASS
SITE 3
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL EXCAVATION
OCTOBER 2001*

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A6 RUSHDEN – HIGHAM FERRERS BYPASS, SITE 3
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL EXCAVATION
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Abstract

Six trial trenches were excavated on land off Newton Lane, Higham Ferrers, as archaeological mitigation works in connection with the proposed A6 bypass. The site had been identified as part of a probable Roman settlement through previous surface collection and geophysical surveys. The excavation confirmed the presence of Roman remains in the form of substantial ditches and suggested that the site limits were correctly defined by the geophysical survey. No structural features were discovered although quantities of finds suggest that there was occupation nearby, probably with a focus west of the proposed road corridor.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a trial excavation in October 2001 at Site 3 near Newton Lane, as part of ongoing works prior to the development of the A6 Rushden - Higham Ferrers bypass. The work was carried out in accordance with the Archaeology Brief set by White, Young and Green Consulting Engineers in September 2001.

The purpose of this trial excavation was to establish the extent of Site 3 and the nature of the archaeology present so that recommendations for mitigation works could be made.

2 BACKGROUND

Prior to this phase of work Northamptonshire Archaeology produced three reports detailing archaeological remains that would be affected by the bypass.

- ◆ A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass Detailed Archaeological Desktop Study
October 1996
- ◆ A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass Archaeological Evaluation: Stage 2
Fieldwalking and Geophysical Surveys February 1997
- ◆ Additional Geophysical Survey at Site 3, A6 Rushden - Higham Ferrers Bypass July
2001

These previous phases of work identified the site as a Romano-British settlement and field

system, with possible hearths or kilns.

3 GEOLOGY

The site lies upon an area of Great Oolite Limestone and Great Oolite Clays. When the trenches were opened they revealed a medium brown mixed clay natural substrate, with sandy patches and white flecking.

4 METHODOLOGY

Six trenches were opened totalling c. 188 square metres using a JCB 3CX equipped with a 1.5m-wide toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were located in accordance with the Brief so as to sample features identified in the geophysical survey and examine apparently blank areas.

The archaeological features present were planned at a scale of 1:50. Features were sampled by hand excavation and recorded in accordance with Northamptonshire Archaeology's standard single context recording system. Sections were recorded at a scale of 1:20 and spot heights reduced to levels above Ordnance Datum.

5 FIELDWORK

Topsoil varied in depth across the site from 0.25m to 0.40m and consisted of brown loamy clay, under this lay brown clay subsoil with mixed pebble inclusions. In Trenches 4 and 5 deep plough marks were visible in the mixed clay natural.

5.1 TRENCH 1

(20 m x 1.5 m)

This trench was positioned to examine an enclosure ditch and an area to the west. Towards the east end of the trench were two small gullies running on slightly different alignments (Fig 3, 104 and 106). They were both filled with brown clay that contained mixed pebble inclusions and charcoal flecking. Gully 104 was c. 1.05m wide and 0.25m deep, it cut 106 which lay slightly to the west. Gully 106 was c. 0.40m deep, c. 1.20m wide and contained a few sherds of Roman pottery (Fill 107).

5.2 TRENCH 2

(15 m x 3.0 m)

This trench was positioned to examine anomalies interpreted as a possible hearth or kiln.

Running north-east to south-west through this trench were two ditches (206) and (208). They were similar to those in Trench 3 (313 and 311) being of similar shape and orientation. Ditch 206 (Fill 207) yielded two coarse sherds of Roman and Iron Age pottery as well as animal bone. Ditch 208 (Fill 209) contained some animal bone. The relationship between the two was obscured by a modern drain (Fig 4, Section 1), but the observations from Trench 3 indicate that the deeper ditch (206) cut the shallower one (208).

5.3 *TRENCH 3*

(15 m x 3.0 m)

This trench was positioned to examine an area of chaotic geophysical readings in the corner of the field. Two large sets of ditches ran through this trench. The earlier two ditches (313 and 311) ran roughly north-east to south-west and were cut by two gullies (309 and 307) and a ditch (304) running north-west to south-east (Figs 3 & 4, Sections 2 & 3). Numerous land drains cut both the features and a redundant water pipe ran along the length of the trench.

Ditch 313 (Fill 314) yielded a small assemblage of Roman pottery and there were also a few sherds from Gully 307 (Fill 306). The largest assemblage from the excavations came from Ditch 304 (Fill 305), which also yielded a fragment of saddle quern and some animal bone. There were two probable Iron Age sherds from Gully 309 and a probable medieval sherd, the latter of which may well be intrusive from a field drain.

5.4 *TRENCH 4*

(10 m x 1.5 m)

This trench was positioned to examine the northern limit of the enclosures, but contained no archaeological features. The subsoil was quite deep and the trench might have been cut along the length of a furrow.

5.5 *TRENCH 5*

(20 m x 1.5 m)

This trench was positioned to examine a scatter of small anomalies that may have represented pits. Root disturbance was present at the eastern side of this trench, but it was void of archaeological features.

5.6 *TRENCH 6*

(20 m x 1.5 m)

This trench was positioned to examine the southern limits of the enclosures. Two shallow furrows, forming part of medieval field system, ran north-east to south-west through this

trench. They were c.3m wide and no more than 0.25m deep.

6 FINDS

The evaluation produced a small group of finds dating from the Iron Age and Roman periods. The assemblage comprised, pottery sherds, animal bone, fired clay, tile and one stone quern. Most of the material was retrieved from Trench 3.

6.1 THE POTTERY

In total there were 32 sherds of pottery weighing c. 453 g. There were very few diagnostic sherds, the majority being abraded body sherds displaying few features and making identification difficult. All were coarse wares.

Chronologically, the earliest fabric type is four sherds of hand-made shell/flinted gritted ware from Trenches 2 and 3. One was a diagnostic sherd (Context 305), which dates to the early to middle Iron Age (pers. com. D Jackson) and is furnished with a flat-topped rim and thumbed impressions. It is possible that some of the other sherds may be Iron Age but extensive abrasion makes accurate identification difficult.

Fragments of Roman pottery were retrieved from all the trenches. The largest assemblage came from Ditch 304 in Trench 3. The presence of grog-tempered wares in both hard- and soft-fired fabrics, together with shell-gritted wares and greywares suggests a first to second century date for the assemblage. There is a notable absence of colour-coated wares and fabrics which post-date the mid second century.

FABRIC	CONTEXT NUMBER																		
	107		207		305		306		310		314		402		602		607		
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
Iron Age			1	8	1	20			2	30									
Roman																			
Grog tempered	1	12			1	18					1	37							
Shell-gritted	1	6	1	22	8	106	1	5			1	8						1	15
Greyware					2	8	1	5			1	42	1	18	2	50	1	17	
Oxidised ware	1	2			1	4					1	8							
Medieval									1	6									
Indet.							1	3							1	3			
TOTAL	3	20	2	30	13	156	3	13	3	36	4	95	1	18	3	53	2	32	

6.2 THE OTHER FINDS

The other finds include fired-clay (9g), ceramic roof tile (154g) and a large piece of stone saddle quern from Ditch 304.

6.3

ANIMAL BONE

Eighteen fragments (355g) of animal bone from seven contexts (207, 209, 305, 306, and 607) were examined to determine species present, state of preservation and potential for further analysis.

Fragmentation was moderate and surface abrasion was low. Evidence for butchery was noted on two pieces and canid gnawing on a further two pieces. No evidence of burning was noted.

The species present were *Ovicaprid* (7 fragments), *Bos* (7 fragments), *Equus* (2 fragments) and *Sus* (1 fragment). A single indeterminate fragment was also recorded.

The small size of the assemblage limits any potential to a brief description of the species present. They are all common to Iron Age/Romano-British farmsteads.

7

CONCLUSIONS

The absence of archaeological features in Trenches 4, 5 and 6 shows that the geophysical survey plot reliably defines the limits of the Romano-British enclosures. The chaotic anomalies in Trenches 2 and 3, thought to be kilns or hearths, appear to be caused by dumps of material in the ditch fills. There was a reasonably large quantity of domestic refuse, including a quernstone in the ditches in Trenches 2 and 3.

There was evidence of intercutting ditches, with at least two phases of ditches on different alignments in Trench 3. The pottery recovered indicates that occupation began in the Iron Age and continued into the early Roman period, although this chronology was not reflected in the stratigraphic phasing where the earlier gullies yielded exclusively Roman pottery. It is therefore possible that the Iron Age occupation lies outside the area investigated.

The quantity of domestic refuse indicates settlement nearby, but not necessarily within the enclosures lying in the road corridor. The main focus of occupation would seem to lie to the west. However, there may be groups of small features such as pits and post-holes not found in the trenches and not identifiable from the geophysical survey.

The lack of archaeological features in the northern field (Trenches 4 and 5) may be due to

deeper ploughing than normal, evident in the plough marks on the geophysical survey and visible in the trenches. These would have the potential to remove the shallower gullies. The furrows in Trench 6 confirm the presence of medieval agriculture in this field also.

8 **STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL**

The evaluation provided a modest assemblage of artefacts of Iron Age and Roman date. The limited investigations of the site do not provide a sufficient overview of activity here to make further analysis of the material collected worthwhile at this stage. However, the material should be added to any further archaeological finds made in later stages of mitigation, and the potential of the group as a whole assessed when these further stages of mitigation are completed.

9 **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATION**

Further mitigation of this site should take the form of,

- an area excavation between Trenches 1 and 3 across the full width of the road corridor (c. 90 m x 60 m in extent).
- two additional trenches (each c. 30 m x 2 m) positioned to examine the linear geophysical anomalies in the southern area outside the proposed area of excavation.

The excavation area and trenches should be stripped using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, working under archaeological control, to expose the uppermost archaeological levels.

The exposed archaeological deposits should be cleaned by hand as necessary to define their extents and planned.

Features across the whole of the excavation should be sample excavated so as to define all significant relationships, and at the following minimum levels:

Linear ditches: 5%, targeted at intersections, terminals and evenly spaced segments along their length.

Ring/curvilinear ditches: 25% targeted at terminals and in evenly spaced segments.

Timber structures represented by post-holes, beam slots etc: 50% of each feature.

Pits: 50% of each feature.

Burials and other special deposits: full excavation

The excavation should include an appropriate environmental sampling strategy. Bulk samples of at least 30 litres should be taken from appropriate contexts for charred plant remains. Appropriate samples should also be taken for waterlogged remains, if encountered. Strategies for phosphate sampling should also be considered.

There should be a financial contingency for the scientific dating of appropriate samples.

Following completion of fieldwork, a post-excavation assessment report and updated project design should be prepared in accordance with standard Northamptonshire and English Heritage (MAP2) procedures. The results of the previous evaluation and any other work on the site should be incorporated in the assessment.

The updated research design should include a programme for undertaking appropriate analytical research, publishing the results, and depositing the archive in suitable museum/repository.

The above recommendations exclude any requirements of the Highways Agency regarding the publication and other dissemination/display of the results of the excavation, which should be regarded as additional requirements.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

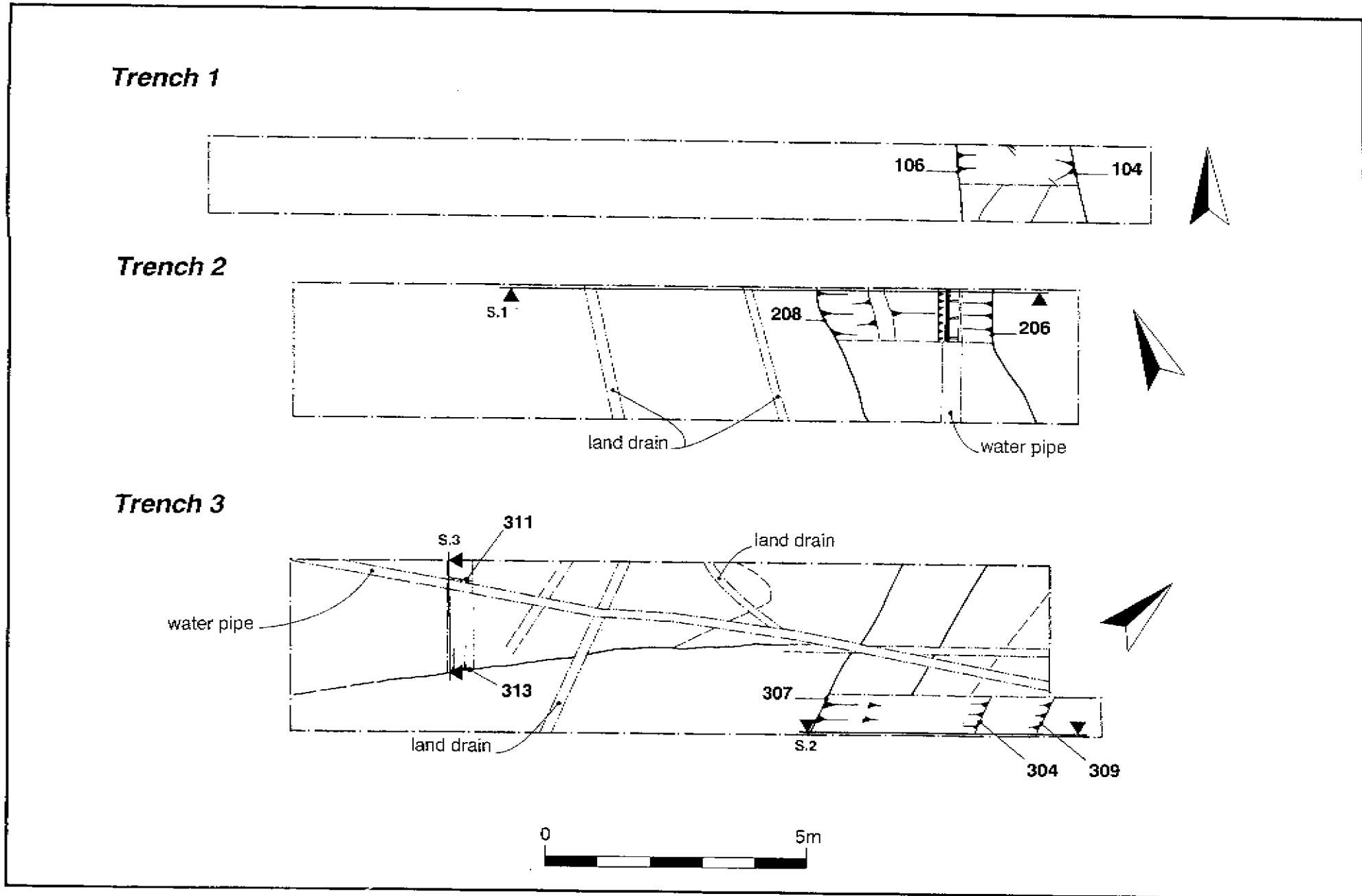


Fig. 3

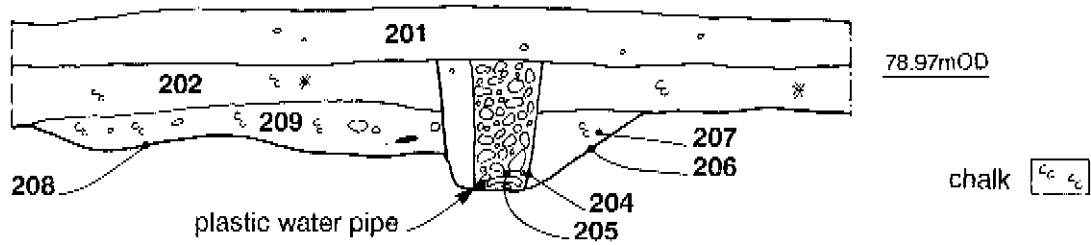
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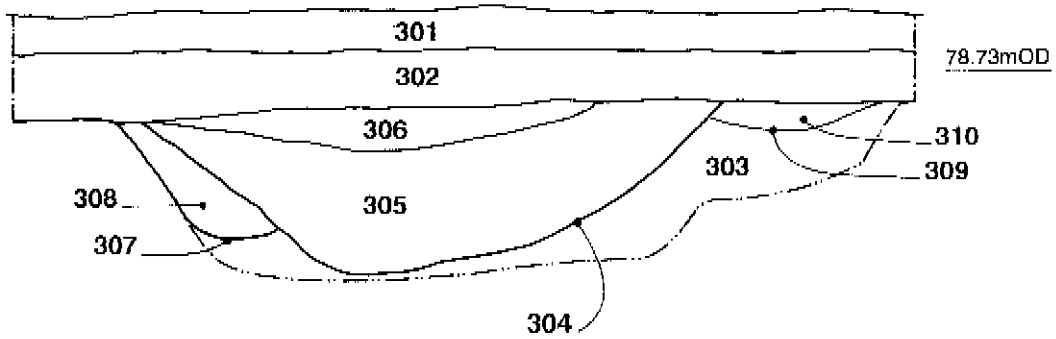
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Section 2
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Section 3

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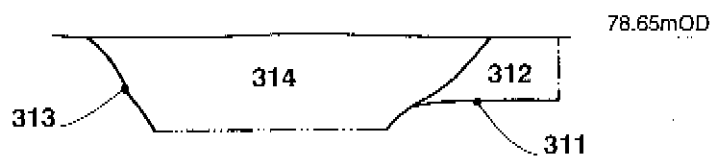
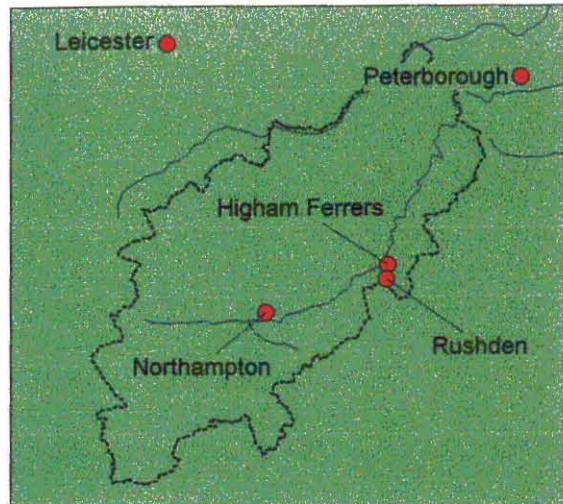
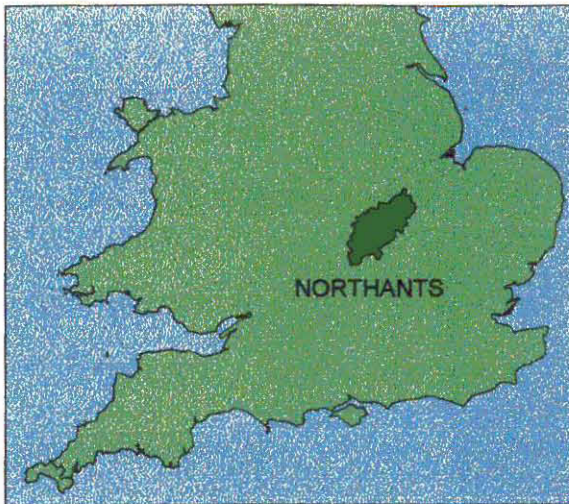
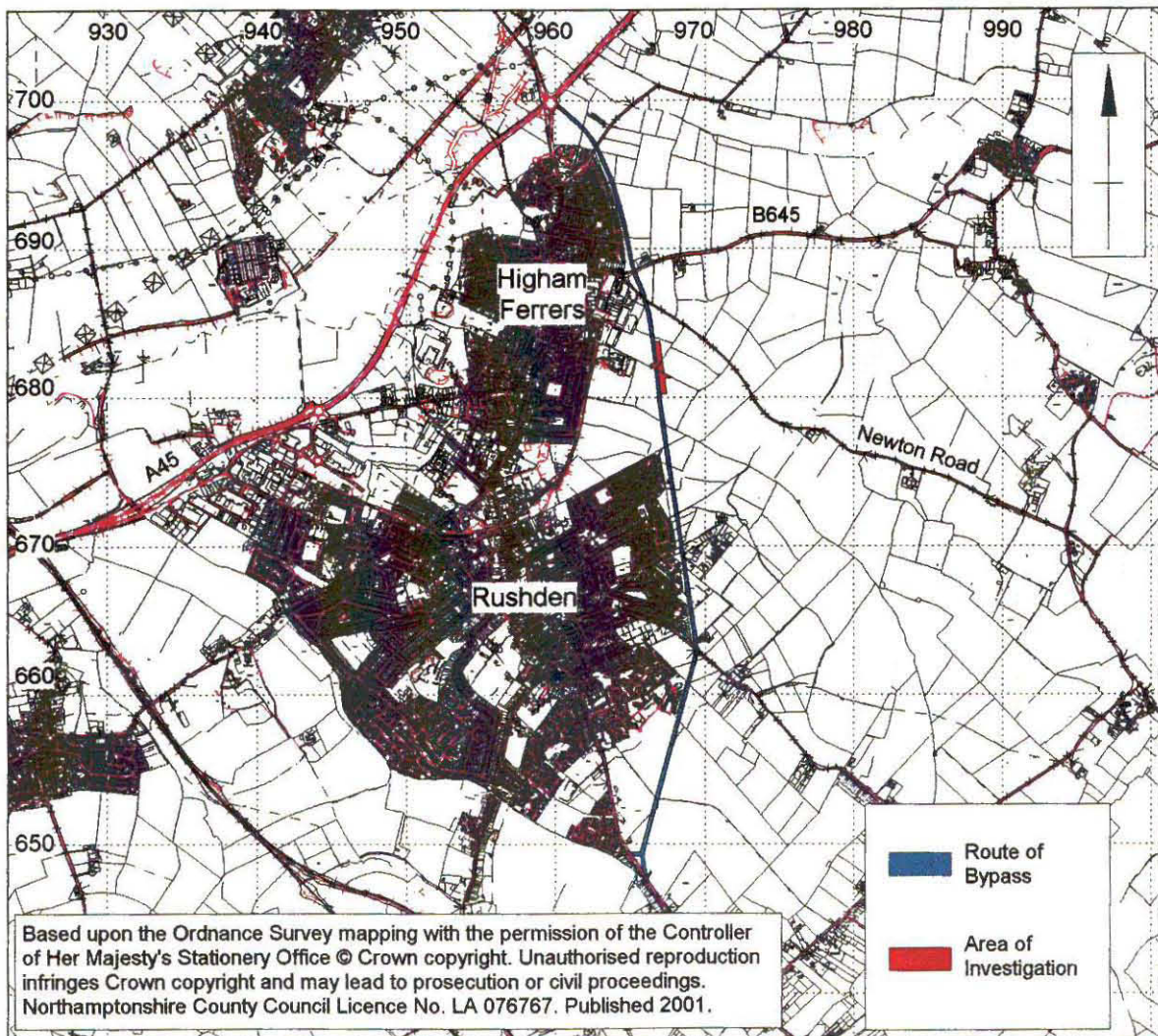


Fig. 4



Scale 1:5000



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Fig 1

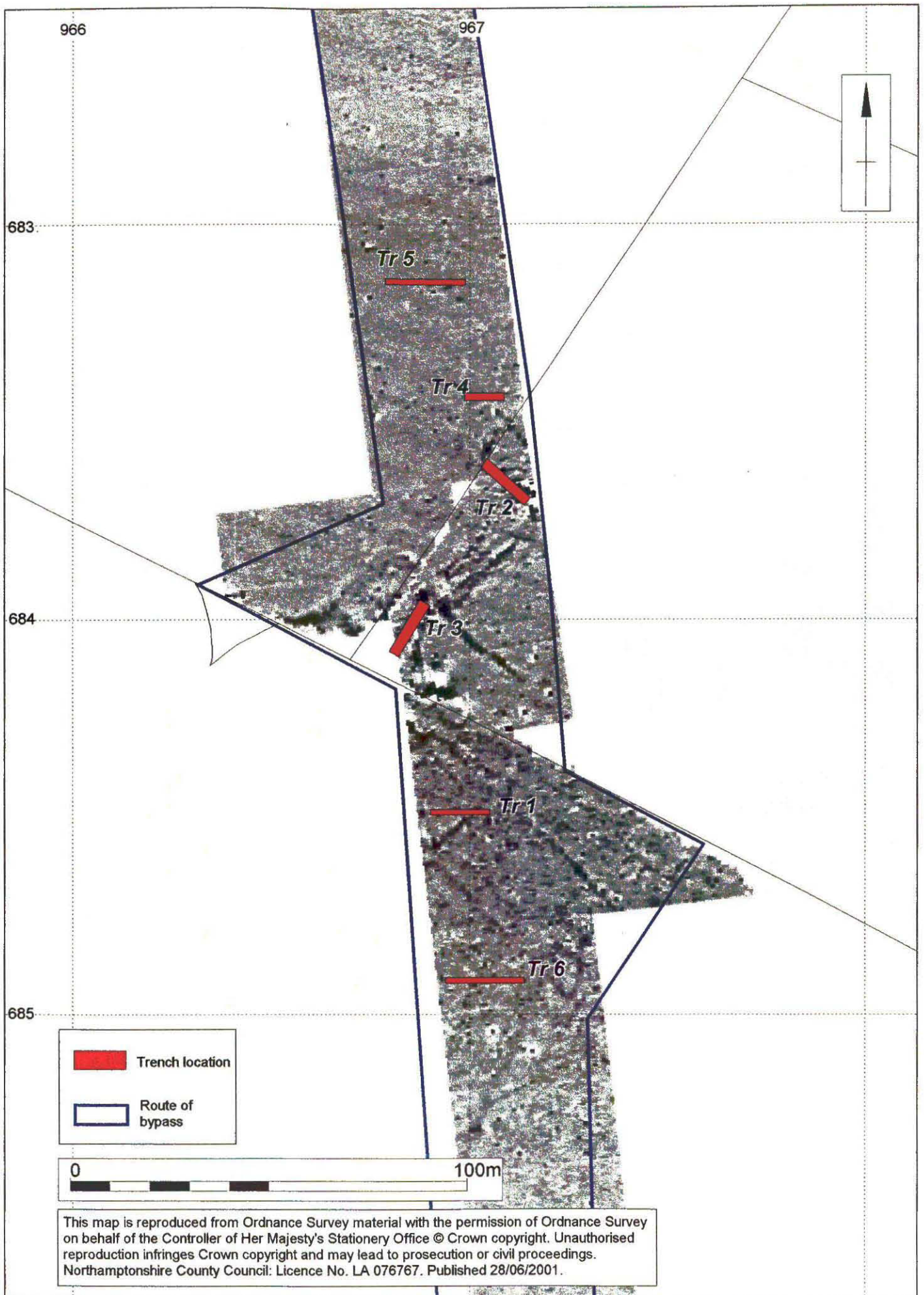


Fig. 2