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**Horncastle, Banovallum Gardens Development:
Archaeological Watching Brief
on
Plots 49-53**

(NGR: 2664 6926)

**Planning Application No. S/086/0647/93)
LCNCC Museum Accession No. 32.93**

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Summary

A watching brief during excavation of footings for four houses produced an unstratified worked flint and medieval plough furrows parallel to an existing field boundary. No sign of the large ditch located nearby during previous work on the site was found but the closest house plot remains to be dug. Sand deposits were thought to represent a relict watercourse, perhaps a precursor of the Thunker Drain.

Introduction and Planning Background

An archaeological condition was placed on planning consent for new houses at Banovallum Gardens, Horncastle by East Lindsey District Council's Planning Committee in 1993 (Fig. 1). The developer, Stamford Homes, commissioned Lindsey Archaeological Services (LAS) to conduct the required archaeological evaluation in July 1993 when 18 machine excavated trenches were examined and recorded (Tann 1993). Two areas of the development site produced a small number of archaeological finds and further work was requested. A geophysical survey by Landscape Research Centre (Yorkshire) in March 1994 concluded that there was probably minimal archaeological activity in two of those areas and further excavation was unlikely to reveal significant remains (Lyll, in Field 1994). A final area, close to Trench 17 of the 1993 evaluation, was designated as of potential interest and a watching brief on the mechanical excavation of house foundation trenches was required. The present report describes the findings when 3 of those building plots were trenched for house footings (Fig. 2; Pl. 1). Further monitoring will take place when Plot 54 is to be built.

Archaeological Background

The archaeological background to this part of Horncastle and the Banovallum Gardens site in particular was described in the report of the evaluation trenching exercise conducted in 1993 (Tann 1993). Amongst other finds from the site, a prehistoric flint flake was found in topsoil removed from Trench 17, and an undated ditch was located at the eastern end of that trench.

Since that evaluation, archaeological fieldwork on two development sites to the SW and south of Banovallum Gardens has provided further information. To the west of the Ambulance Station (at TF 2645 6910) Roman gullies and other features were found, together with late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age worked flints in residual contexts (Field 1994b). To the NE of Tennyson Gardens, north of Mareham Road at TF 2675 6898 (not as stated in report) a rectangular enclosure known from air photographs was investigated and confirmed as a Late Iron Age/Romano-British enclosure (Tipper 1994). The 3.4ha enclosure, bounded by large ditches, was interpreted as a stock

enclosure; no evidence for habitation was found. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age flints were also recovered from the ploughsoil from the site.

Land along the Mareham Road frontage, between the two development areas and immediately south of the Banovallum Gardens development area, was intensively fieldwalked in the 1970s by Boston Archaeology Group members. No Roman finds were found from that exercise, but the authors noted in 1983 that metal detector users were persistently scanning land east of the ambulance station, which might suggest occupation material was becoming apparent (Field and Hurst 1983, 78, and 1981 correspondence in LAS files).

The Watching Brief

Stamford Homes excavated the house footings for semi-detached Plots 49 and 50 on 11th January 1995, using a JCB with two sizes of narrow toothed bucket. The trenches were dug to a base level of 32.95m OD. Observations were made while the soil was being removed and the trench faces and base were inspected after machining had been completed. Access into the trenches was not difficult (Pl. 2).

The footings for the adjacent detached house, Plot 51, were not dug until the following day. The author contacted Ian George by telephone and it was agreed that in view of the findings from the first visit, an intermittent input was acceptable. No monitoring of Plot 51 took place, but the site was visited on 17th January in time to inspect the excavated footings for Plots 52-53 in advance of concrete being laid.

Plots 49 and 50

The footings for this building were excavated into sand, with slight traces of chalk at the base along the western trench (Pl. 3). Coarser sand, and fine gravel, was noted at the southern end of the plot. The subsoil was a dark brown sandy loam, between 0.2m and 0.3m thick. There were no signs of any intrusive features, and no finds were made from the spoil.

Plots 52 and 53

The trenches were excavated to a base at 35.40m OD in order to maintain a uniform ground level around the houses; as a result the excavation was less deep than at Plot 49. The footings revealed an abrupt division between chalk geology below Plot 53 and sand below Plot 52, probably reflecting the southern limit of precursor stream channels to Thunker Drain (Pl. 4).

Four linear features filled with dark brown clay loam were noted cutting the end wall trench of 53 (Pl. 5). A similar number of parallel features were identified in the back wall trench and it has been assumed that they represent a continuation of the others (Fig. 3; Pl. 6). The most easterly cut was about 1.7m wide and 0.7m deep, extending to or just below the base of the trench. The adjacent cut was separated by a peak of soil 0.6m wide. The spacing between the cuts was much less on the back wall; this could be because of the angle at which they were truncated or produced by more than one phase of activity. The most likely interpretation of these features is ridge and furrow

marks from medieval ploughing (some of which were identified elsewhere on the site during the 1993 evaluation). Further furrows may have crossed Plot 52 but could not be distinguished in the disturbed sandier material.

Conclusion

Trench 17 of the archaeological evaluation had encountered one edge of a substantial east-west aligned feature which pre-dated the existing hedge-line that runs between Plots 53 and 54). It was 0.4m deep and had filled with silt before the formation of a subsoil horizon which was found over the evaluated area. A prehistoric worked flint was found in the subsoil layer in this trench. The feature was interpreted as a drainage ditch of unknown antiquity and it was hoped that associated datable material might be found when the site was developed.

The present report relates to building plots on the eastern side of the existing hedge, between about 5m and 45m from the sectioned ditch. No sign of any deep feature was found in the faces of the examined trenches, indicating that the ditch alignment was not bisected by any part of those foundations. No artefacts were found, which means that at present the ditch remains undated.

The ridge and furrow cultivation marks seen in Plot 53 are probably of medieval date. They were aligned approximately parallel to the existing hedge, indicating that the field boundary was probably contemporary or that the present boundary preserves a open field sub-division before formal land enclosure. Horncastle parish was enclosed during the first half of the 19th century (Russell 1985, 94). The cultivation furrows were not apparently associated with the ditch in Trench 17.

The monitored development seems to be positioned at the periphery of several archaeological sites but to exhibit few signs of any activity. This may perhaps be explained by the Thunker Drain which has certainly either become narrower or has moved gradually northwards. Dating the watercourse changes might show that the Banovallum Gardens land had been too wet when the nearby Late Iron Age and Romano-British sites had been in use, and that activity was entirely or mainly restricted to higher land. The thin scatter of earlier worked flints implies that the land had not been under water during the Neolithic/Bronze Age periods, pointing perhaps to changes in natural drainage (possibly prompted by land clearance) but these explanations are conjectural.

Acknowledgements

The co-operation of Mr. Blythe (Production Manager, Stamford Homes), Derek Hinchliffe (Site Agent) and the site personnel was appreciated.

Geoff Tann
Lindsey Archaeological Services
7th February 1995

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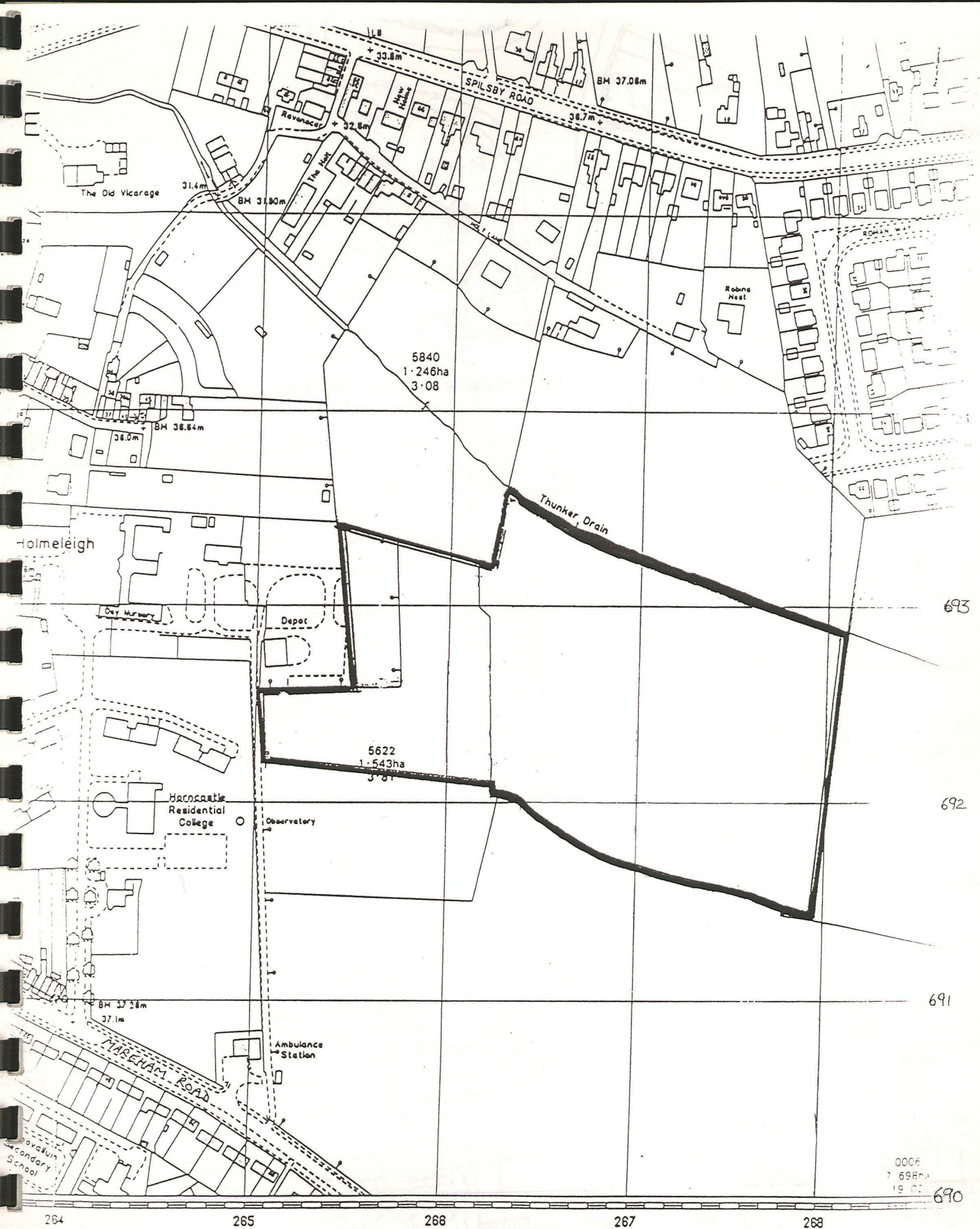


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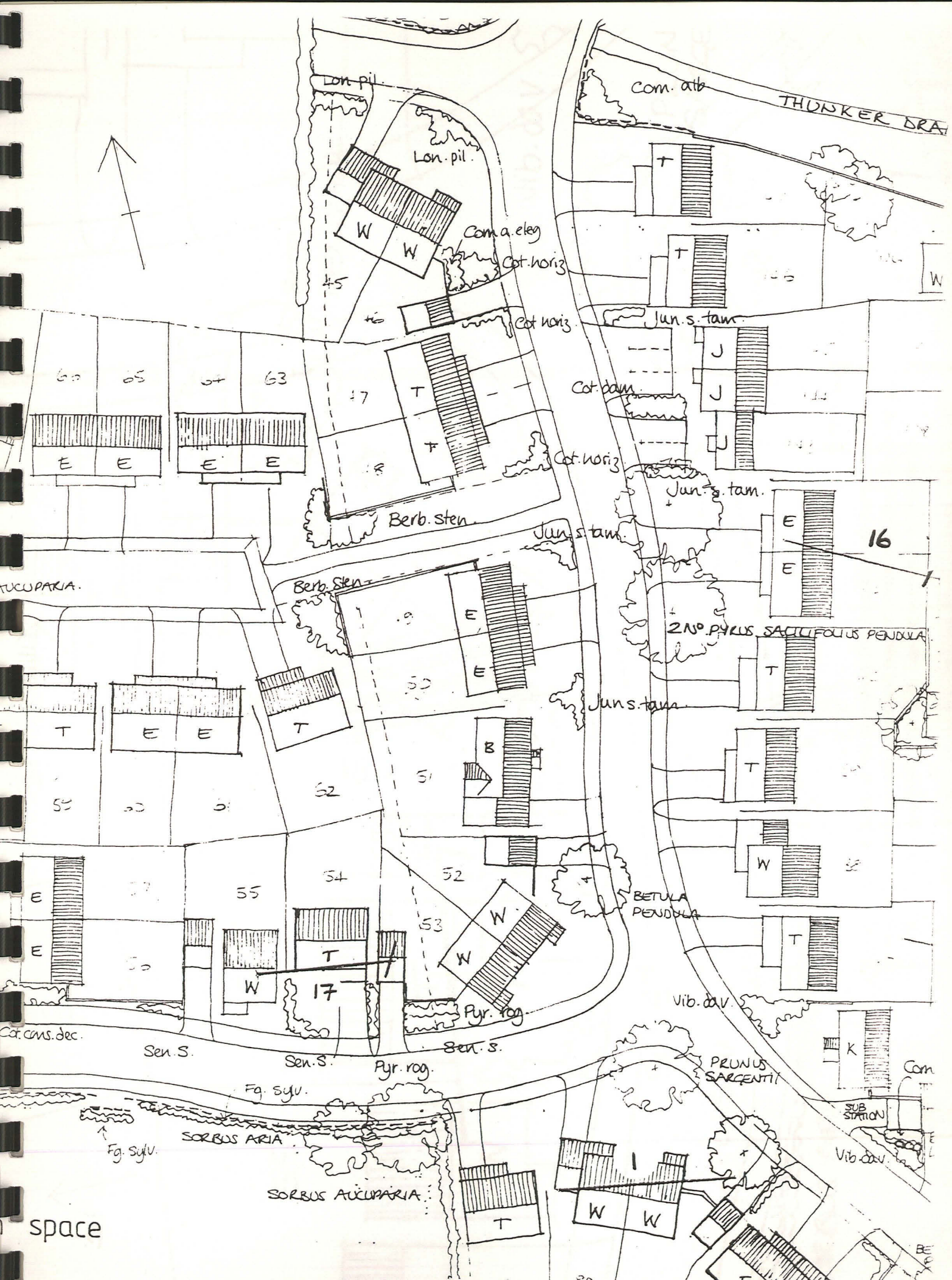


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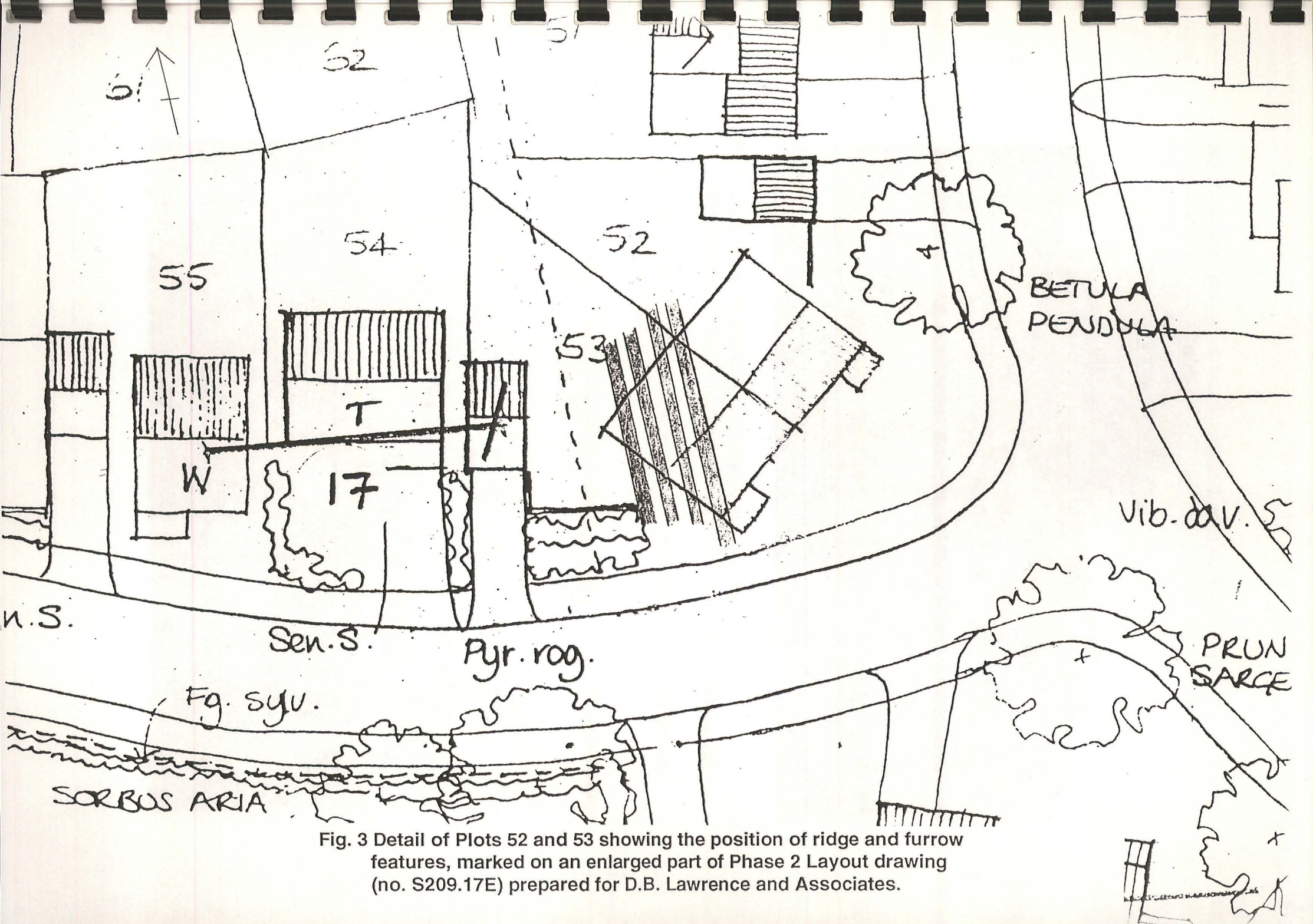


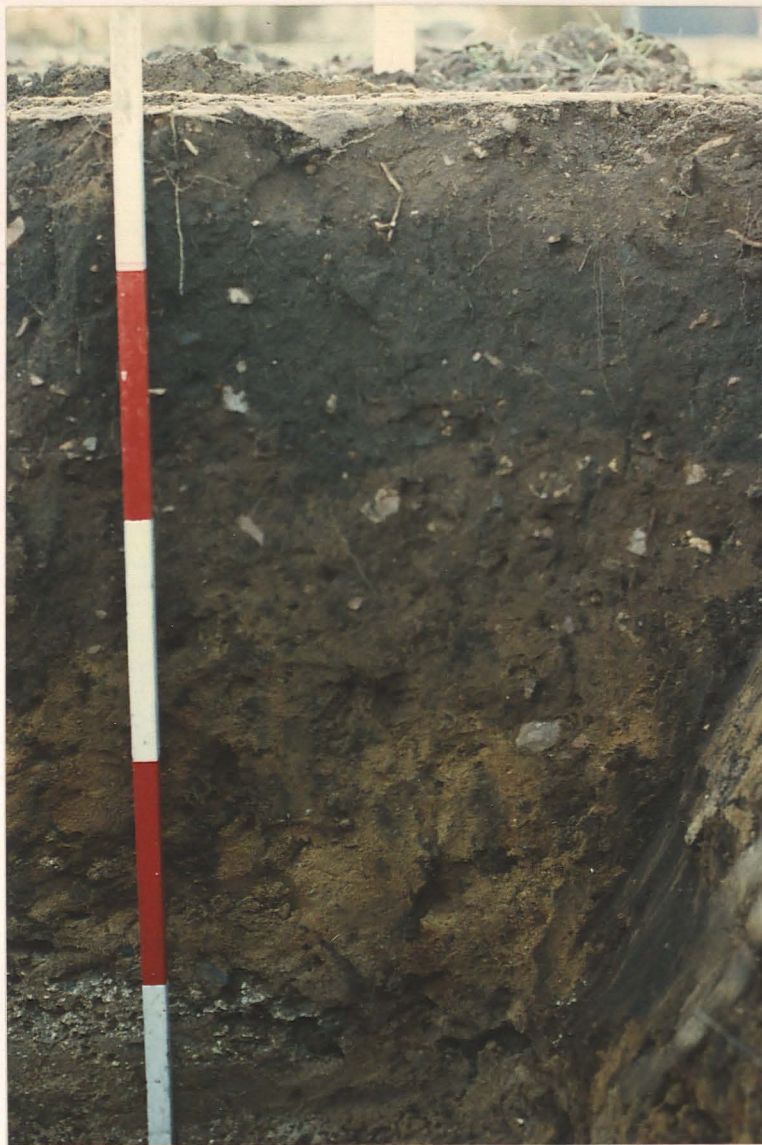
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Pl. 2 Plots 49 and 50 after excavation, with introduced stone on ground surface. (looking east).





Pl. 3 Section through the deposits visible at the southern end of Plot 50.
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