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Archaeological Excavation on land South of the Cemetery, Station Road, Sutterton, Lincolnshire.

NGR centred on: TF 285 352

Site Code: SRS97

Lincoln City & County Museum Accession N°: 188.97

On behalf of:
Lincolnshire County Council,
Social & Economic Development Office,
Development House,
64 Newland,
Lincoln,
LN1 1YL

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Interim Report

R. Casa, A. J. Hatton & M. Wood

Introduction

From the 1st to the 25th of September 1997, Professional Independent Services for Archaeology Ltd (PISA) carried out an archaeological excavation on land situated due south of the cemetery on the west side of Station Road, half a kilometre to the south-east of Sutterton village in the civil parish of Sutterton, Boston District, Lincolnshire (Fig. 1).

The area under investigation is located in the south-western corner of the 3.7 hectare proposed development area. It comprises *c.* 1.2 hectares of open land (centred on NGR TF 285 352) situated just to the south and west of a newly constructed east-west 'T' shaped access road to the site from Station Road at a height of approximately 3 m AOD (Fig. 2).

The archaeological excavation of the land scheduled for industrial development was funded by a consortium including Boston Borough Council, Lincolnshire County Council and the European Regional Development Fund.

Two soil regimes occur on the development site. On its western side are Pepperthorne/Tanvats Association typical alluvial gley soils. Wisbech Association calcareous alluvial gley soils are present on the east side of the site. Both of these soil types are developed in marine alluvium. The underlying geology comprises glacial drift deposited in a geological basin between the Lincolnshire Wolds and the East Anglian Heights which in turn overlies a solid geology of Jurassic clays.

Previous Work

Since 1994, a number of archaeological investigations have been carried in the proposed development area. These have included a desk-top study, geophysical survey, field-walking, an evaluation and a watching brief which have provided evidence for archaeological activity on the site and in the general area dating from the Romano-British to the post-Medieval periods. The apparent absence of Prehistoric activity is believed to be due to its being buried under alluvium rather than representing a real lack of Prehistoric exploitation; the environmental assessment for the archaeological evaluation suggesting that such remains would underlie the marine and sand/silt deposits at a depth of at least 3m (APS 1996, 15).

The previous archaeological investigations identified sites and finds of Romano-British and Medieval date to the east and north-east of the proposed development area. For the Roman period, artefacts suggest the presence of two settlements (both of unknown extent) in these areas and undated cropmarks exist of a trackway and possible rectangular enclosure in relation to the eastern site. Medieval artefacts have been recovered in the same area to the east of Station Road where ridge and furrow earthworks also occur. Cartographic evidence suggested that this area was part of a large Medieval open field system (APS 1994).

The field-walking survey recovered significant scatters of Romano-British pottery including a concentration in the south-western corner of the site (LAS 1995) where magnetic anomalies were also noted in a Geophysical Survey (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1995). The evaluation carried out in 1995 (APS 1996) tested the nature of the geophysical survey anomalies by trenching and confirmed that most are archaeological in origin (including four ditches [one of which possibly served as a boundary ditch] and a pit) and are Roman in date. Waste material in the form of ash and burnt clay was interpreted as evidence for an industrial process; the existence of 'salt colours' on the burnt clay raised the question of possible salt production (i.e. a saltern).

Significant quantities of well preserved Roman pottery were recovered from the evaluation and the overall assemblage is both suggestive of a site of some status and represents a fairly tightly dated sequence (dating from the later 1st to the mid-late 3rd century AD and possibly the fourth century AD). In comparison with the pottery assemblage, the quality of the bone assemblage ranged from poor to excellent which can probably be accounted for by the difference in soil acidity across the site. It included some 200 bones in all of sheep (predominately), cattle, horse, pig, dog and chicken. Butchery marks were absent though some bones exhibited marks consistent with having being gnawed.

The environmental assessment for the evaluation suggested ribbon activity in Roman times along the bank of a well-drained and relatively dry ancient roddon which was interpreted as having formed on the southern margins of a palaeochannel discovered during the course of the evaluation.

The most recent archaeological investigation of the site took place in 1996 (APS 1996); the watching brief being conducted during the construction of the new 'T' shaped access road in the area of known Roman activity corresponding to the geophysical anomalies along the roddon. The results conformed with the findings of the preceding evaluation. Ditches were identified and quantities of Roman pottery recovered (although the latter dated almost exclusively to the mid/late 3rd century AD). Additionally, two undated ditches were found to

cut into the layer of post-Roman silting below the modern agricultural plough soil (APS 1996, 1, 5). Evidence for industrial or agricultural activity was found in the form of abundant charcoal and burnt clay from ditch fill layers, together with sherds which appeared to be similar to briquetage and which also bore traces of possible salt residues. Little difference was noted in the species character of the small bone assemblage which comprised burnt bones and butchery marks pointing to food preparation and cooking.

Aims and methodology of the 1997 Excavation

The overall objective of the excavation was to determine the presence/absence and character (namely degree of preservation and chronological range) of archaeological remains in the designated excavation area. Thus, the aims centred on recording and retrieving data in the context of the known Romano-British activity on the site.

The excavation consisted of two major separate sites (referred to as Area 1 and Area 2 below) which were excavated down to the first archaeological horizon by means of a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 2.0m wide toothless ditching bucket. A small trench (Area 3) was also excavated in the northern portion of the site to the north of Area 2.

The archaeological features revealed in the excavation were hand excavated with a minimum of 10-20% of each linear feature being sampled in 1m slots and a minimum of 50% of all non-linears (e.g. pits) were half-sectioned. One feature was positively identified as a kiln/hearth and 100% excavated.

In Area 1, a feature which had been sampled within the limitations of the earlier archaeological investigations was re-examined in order to assess the nature of what was previously interpreted as a ditch. This feature proved to be a creek whose fill was 'choked' with layers of carbonised organic material.

All the excavated features were single-context recorded and planned at a scale of 1:20. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and a photographic record made (Colour and Black & White Prints as well as Colour Slides). A base plan of the excavated areas was produced from a plot of digital survey data.

The environmental sampling strategy was feature-based with samples being taken from relevant contexts for potential evidence of economic/industrial/agricultural activities as well as to examine the geological and marine/riverine environment.

Results

Area 1 (Fig. 3)

Area 1 was opened to the south of the 'T' shaped road. At an average depth of 20cms beneath the topsoil an extensive pattern of interconnecting palaeochannels was revealed cutting through a landscape of 'islands'. Although there is no definite evidence for Roman features in this area, three of the (palaeo)channels, when sectioned, produced Roman pottery within their fills. A fourth channel contained no finds. The evidence to date (in advance of the final environmental analyses) would indicate that some of the channels (or creeks) were active before, during and after the period of Roman occupation on the site (see Area 2 below), while others may reflect purely later periods of formation. Finds from the hearth and pit excavated in Area 1 have yet to be securely dated but would seem to relate more to the late Roman or Post-Roman phases of creek-formation.

Area 2 (Fig. 3)

Area 2 was opened to the west of the 'T' shaped road. A number of well-defined zones of activity were revealed as follows:

Northern zone

Excavation revealed a large palaeochannel oriented NE/SW across the area. Sherds of Roman pottery, fragments of animal bone, and fired/burnt clay were recovered from the lower fills of this natural feature suggesting that the channel was active during the period of Roman occupation. To the north of this channel, the apparent lack of archaeological features was taken as negative evidence for occupation which was confirmed by the excavation of the trench (Area 3; see below) further to the north. Immediately to the south of the channel, the only feature present was represented by a large pit of uncertain function.

Eastern and southern zone

In the southern and eastern portion of the area no archaeological features were recorded. The ponds and creeks present in these areas broadly resemble the situation found in Area 1.

Western and central zone

The western and central areas produced by far the highest density of both features, ecofacts and artefacts in context. Three definite pits and one kiln were located on the comparatively higher ground towards the centre of the area. Four and possibly five further pits and a N/S oriented ditch were located close to or extending beyond the western edge of the site.

On stripping the area, it was immediately apparent that all the archaeological features were concentrated on the higher (and therefore better drained; relatively dry) land originally thought

to correspond to the roddon 'identified' during the 1995 evaluation (see above). Preliminary results from the environmental analyses suggest a different interpretation for the sedimentary history of the site and point to land formation in an inter-tidal/riverine zone.

Two of the pits on this higher ground are situated in close proximity to the definite kiln/hearth. Indeed, these pits could also have been kilns/hearths which after their working life were then used for dumping waste (mainly charcoal and fired clay).

As far as the function of the other pits in the area is concerned, some uncertainty rests over their primary use. Dumping of burnt material certainly occurred which suggest that once out of use the features were also used as rubbish pits and allowed to silt up naturally. Analysis of the pit-fills together with what little pottery was recovered in context suggests that most of the pits were contemporary with each other. However, one pit may belong to a later phase of activity as it appears to be cut through a silty layer which partially seals a linear ditch beneath. A similar deposit overlay a pit further to the north. The preliminary interpretation suggests that at some stage, the silt/clay deposits in the upper fills of the creeks overflowed their 'banks' thereby covering the surrounding land surface and burying the landscape beneath a shallow silty sediment which now constitutes part of the modern topsoil. Although partially incorporated into the modern plough-soil, at the time of the excavation this sediment was also visible as a distinct layer respecting the ridge of higher ground in use during the Roman period.

Area 3 (Fig. 3)

Area 3 produced negative evidence for human activity.

Discussion

Broadly speaking, the nature and type of finds from the 1997 excavation correspond with those obtained from the other previous intrusive archaeological works. However, given the question of possible salt production indicated by the previous works, the most striking aspect of the 1997 features and finds is the distinct lack of clear evidence for salt production.

Thus, the previously conjectured function of the site as a saltern has not been corroborated by the evidence revealed in the 1997 excavation. In any event, the interpretation of the site's function must await the final results of the post-excavation analyses. Nevertheless, certain preliminary observations can be made.

The presence of seed grain in samples taken from the pits and creeks is indicative of agricultural activities being carried out either on or (more likely) in close proximity to the

excavated area. In particular, the unusually large quantity of grain (mostly carbonised) in the creek fill in the north-western part of Area 1 is indicative of there having been storage facilities (i.e. a granary) nearby. Although no clear evidence for structures was detected on site, their apparent absence could be accounted for by modern ploughing and weathering whereby shallow features such as post-holes would have been truncated especially on the high ground where the site is located. All that perhaps remains of a potential structure is the spread of burnt material noted in the centre-eastern area of Area 2. In all probability, an ancient fire combined with the destructive forces of ploughing and weathering have served to remove all physical evidence of a possible structure. The recovery of large quantities of unfired clay could be the only tangible evidence for the existence of a structure should the material be positively identified as cob-walling (i.e. a clay facia applied to a wall constructed of organic material).

Evidence for potential industrial activity has emerged. The kiln/hearth in Area 2 could possibly linked with the recovery of lead artefacts and "waste" which were concentrated in the central-eastern portion of the area. It seems that the kiln was not a permanent structure suggesting that metal working (if it is proven to have taken place at all) was not a regular activity and was probably carried out by itinerant craftsmen. Further kilns may have originally existed on the site as the large quantity of fired/burnt clay (possibly part of the kiln lining) and charcoal seems to suggest. Such waste was recovered from the fills of most features and found scattered across the whole of Area 2.

The majority of the finds were unstratified with very little pottery or any other artefact type for that matter being recovered in context. Most artefacts were recovered in the central and eastern portion of Area 2. The general pottery assemblage appears to be homogeneous in character and includes fabrics identical to those already noted in the assemblages from the previous intrusive works. Products from the Nene Valley dating to the later second and third century AD are particularly well represented. The overall assemblage comprises vessels for domestic use (including storage jars, cooking pots and locally produced mortaria [food-grinding bowls]) as well as finer table wares. In addition to the locally produced table wares, several sherds of Samian pottery (imported from Central and Eastern Gaul) were also recovered and by their presence indicate a site of some status.

Only a small quantity of bone was found. All of it is animal bone and is generally in a good state of preservation. The fact that some of the bone is burnt is indicative of food preparation and cooking on site.

The area of 'industrial' occupation presently under investigation appears to be bounded on its northern side by the NE/SW oriented palaeochannel and to the south and east by the network of creeks. Uncertainty rests over the limit of the area to the west, though the N/S linear ditch that extends beyond the edge of the site could have acted as its western boundary.

In conclusion, the site has produced evidence for both agricultural and industrial activity (of an as yet to be precisely defined nature) located in a relatively marginal area which was subjected to tidal or riverine influences and was therefore unsuitable for permanent settlement. That one existed nearby (to the south-west of the 1997 excavation), in an area more suited to settlement would seems to be confirmed by the evidence amassed to date. In particular, the range and quality of the pottery assemblages, the bone assemblages from all the intrusive archaeological works and certain metal artefacts from the 1997 excavation. The nature of this settlement can only be determined by means of further archaeological work.

Scope of the post-excavation analyses

No previous controlled excavation has taken place in this area of the Fens on such an extensive scale with the potential for providing information on the interplay of Roman occupation, industrial and agricultural practices.

The preliminary results of the present excavation contribute to highlight the potential for achieving an understanding of issues such as the site taphonomy, the local environment, agriculture and economy. In particular, the Roman pottery assemblage suggests a site of some status was located nearby. It also has the potential to reveal economic aspects of trade (including coastal trade) and pottery supply in general. The environmental evidence (including carbonised grain and seeds) may offer further clues as to the economic function of the site in relation to agricultural practice. These factors, in conjunction with the stratigraphic sequences identified and the closely dated pottery assemblage provide the opportunity to date the former sequences accurately allowing a picture of the changing local environment to be determined both during and possibly subsequent to the Roman period as well.

Specialists involved in the post-excavation analyses

Dr. James Rackham: Environmental Analyses
Don Mackreth/Mark Wood: Metal Objects
Lorraine Higbee: Animal Bone
Mark Wood/Lindsey Rollo: Roman Pottery
Sarah Hall: Thermoluminescence Dating
Jane Cowgill: Metal Slag & Fired Clay

References

APS	1994 *Desk-top Assessment of the Archaeological Implications of Proposed Development of Land next to the cemetery, Station Road, Sutterton, Lincolnshire.* Unpublished report
"	1996 *Archaeological Evaluation on land south of the cemetery, Station Road, Sutterton, Lincolnshire.* Unpublished report
Geophysical Surveys of Bradford	1995 Report on Geophysical Survey: Sutterton Lincolnshire. Report n° 95/103
LAS	1995 *Land off Spalding Road, Sutterton, Archaeological Evaluation (Field walking Survey).* Unpublished report.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXTS

PRE-ROMAN NATURAL DEPOSITS [1]

Number	Area	Type	Description
[019]	II	Cut	Linear Creek/pond
(020)=(028)	II	Primary fill of [019]	Friable sandy silt. 10YR4/3 dark greyish brown
[049]	II	Cut of pond	Large & shallow circular pond-like feature
(051)	II	Deposit in pond [049]	10 YR3/2 v. dark grey-brown
(054)	II	Deposit (base of pond)	Firm silt/clay. 10YR4/1 dark grey (no cut No)
[055]	II	Cut of natural pond	Pond of complex shape with silt/clay primary fill (no context number)
(060)	I	Deposit (base of pond)	Firm clay silt. ??????? (no cut number)
061 master No.	II	Palaeochannel	NE/SW oriented linear channel. See also (047)

ROMAN NATURAL DEPOSIT[2]

Number	Area	Type	Description
(021)	II	Secondary fill of [019]	Friable sandy silt. 10YR3/3 dark brown
(047)	II	Deposit (base of channel 061)	Firm clay silt;.10YR4/2 dark grey brown
(050)	II	Deposit in pond [049]	'Pear' shaped kiln
(056)	II	Upper deposit in pond [055]	Friable sandy silt. 10YR3/4 dark brown
(057)	II	Mid deposit in pond [055]	Friable silty sand. 10YR4/4 dark yellow-brown
(058)	II	Lower deposit in pond [055]	Firm silt/clay. 10YR4/3 grey-brown
(059)	I	Upper deposit in creek	Firm clay/silt. ??????? (no cut number)

ROMAN FEATURES

Number	Area	Type	Description
(002)	II	Fill of pit [003]	Firm clay silt. 10YR3/3-2 dark to v. dark brown
[003]	II	Cut of pit	Cut of circular pit
(004)	II	Fill of pit [005]	Firm clay silt. 10YR3/3-2 dark to v. dark brown
[005]	II	Cut of pit]	Cut of oval pit
(006)	II	Fill of feature [007]	Firm clay silt. 10YR3/3-2 dark to v. dark brown
[007]	II	Cut of flue-like feature	Cut of narrow flue-like feat between [003]-[005]
(008)	II	Upper fill of pit [011]	Firm sand/silt/clay. 10YR3/2 v dark grey-brown
(009)	II	Lower fill of pit [011]	Firm silt/clay. 10YR3/1 very dark grey
(010)	II	Side fill of pit [011]	Friable clay/sand. 10YR3/3 dark brown
[011]	II	Cut of pit	Small pit extending beyond the W edge of site
(012)	II	Fill ? of ditch [027]	Friable sand/clay. 10YR4/3 dark brown
(013)	II	Fill ? of ditch [027]	Firm sand clay. 10 YR3/3 dark brown
(014)	II	Fill ? of ditch [027]	Firm silt/clay/sand. 10 YR3/2 v dark grey brown
(015)	II	Fill ? of ditch [027]	Friable silt/sand. 10 YR4/2 dark grey-brown
(016)	II	Fill of ditch [027]	Soft silt/clay. 10YR 2/2 v. dark brown
(017)	III	Upper fill of pit [018]	Firm silty clay. 10 YR3/1 v. dark grey
[018]	II	Cut of pit	Rectangular pit extending beyond W edge of site
[022]	II	Cut of pit	Small circular pit
(023)	II	Lower fill of pit [022]	Firm sandy silt. 10YR4/4 brown to dark brown
(024)	II	Upper fill of pit [022]	Firm silty sand. 7.5YR3/2 dark brown
(025)	II	Fill of ditch [027]	Plastic clay silt. 10YR4/1 dark grey
(026)	II	Fill of ditch [027]	Friable silt/sand. 10YR4/2 dark grey-brown
[027]	II	Cut of ditch	NNE/SSW oriented linear ditch
(029)	II	Mid fill of pit [018]	Firm sand/clay/silt. 10YR4/2-3 dark grey-brown
(030)	II	Lower fill of pit [018]	Firm clay silt. 10 YR4/2-3 dark grey-brown
[032]	II	Cut of pit	Large shallow pit
(033)	II	Lower fill of pit [032]	Firm ***. 10YR4/3 brown to dark brown
(034)	II	Fill of kiln [041]	Firm sand/silt/clay. 7.5YR3/4 dark brown

[1] Deposits which appear to have formed before the period of Roman occupation and do not contain Roman finds.

[2] Deposits which appear to have formed during the period of Roman occupation and contain Roman finds.

(035)	II	Fill of pit/kiln [036]	Firm clay silt. 7.5YR3/2 dark brown
[036]	II	Cut of pit/kiln	Shallow circular pit
(037)	II	Fill of kiln [041]	Firm sand/silt/clay. 7.5YR3/4 dark brown
(038)	II	Fill of kiln [041]	Firm sandy clay. 7.5YR4/6 strong brown
(039)	II	Fill of kiln [041]	Firm sand/clay/silt. 10 YR3/3 dark brown
(040)	II	Fill of kiln [041]	Firm silt/sand/clay. 10 YR3/1 v. dark grey
[041]	II	Cut of kiln	'Pear' shaped kiln
(042)	II	Fill of pit/kiln [043]	Firm clay silt. 10YR3/3 dark brown
[043]	II	Cut of pit/kiln	Circular shallow pit
(048)	II	Upper fill of pit [032]	10YR4/2 dark grey brown

POST-ROMAN NATURAL DEPOSITS [3]

Number	Area	Type	Description
031	II	Deposit	Firm silt. 10YR4/4 dark yellow brown below 001. Overflowing of the creeks margin

POST-ROMAN/MEDIEVAL FEATURES

Number	Area	Type	Description
(044)	I	Fill of hearth [046]	Plastic sand/silt/clay. 10YR2/1 black
(045)	I	Fill of hearth [046]	Plastic sand/silt/clay. 10YR3/1 very dark grey
[046]	I	Cut of hearth	Circular pit with central shallow depression
(052)	I	Fill of pit [053]	Plastic sand/silt/clay. 10YR3/1 very dark grey
[053]	I	Cut of pit	Small circular pit

MODERN DEPOSITS:

Number	Area	Type	Description
001	I-II	Topsoil	Grassland. Average depth = 200 mm.

[3] Deposits which appear to have formed after the period of Roman occupation and contain residual Roman finds.

FIGURE 1: Site Location

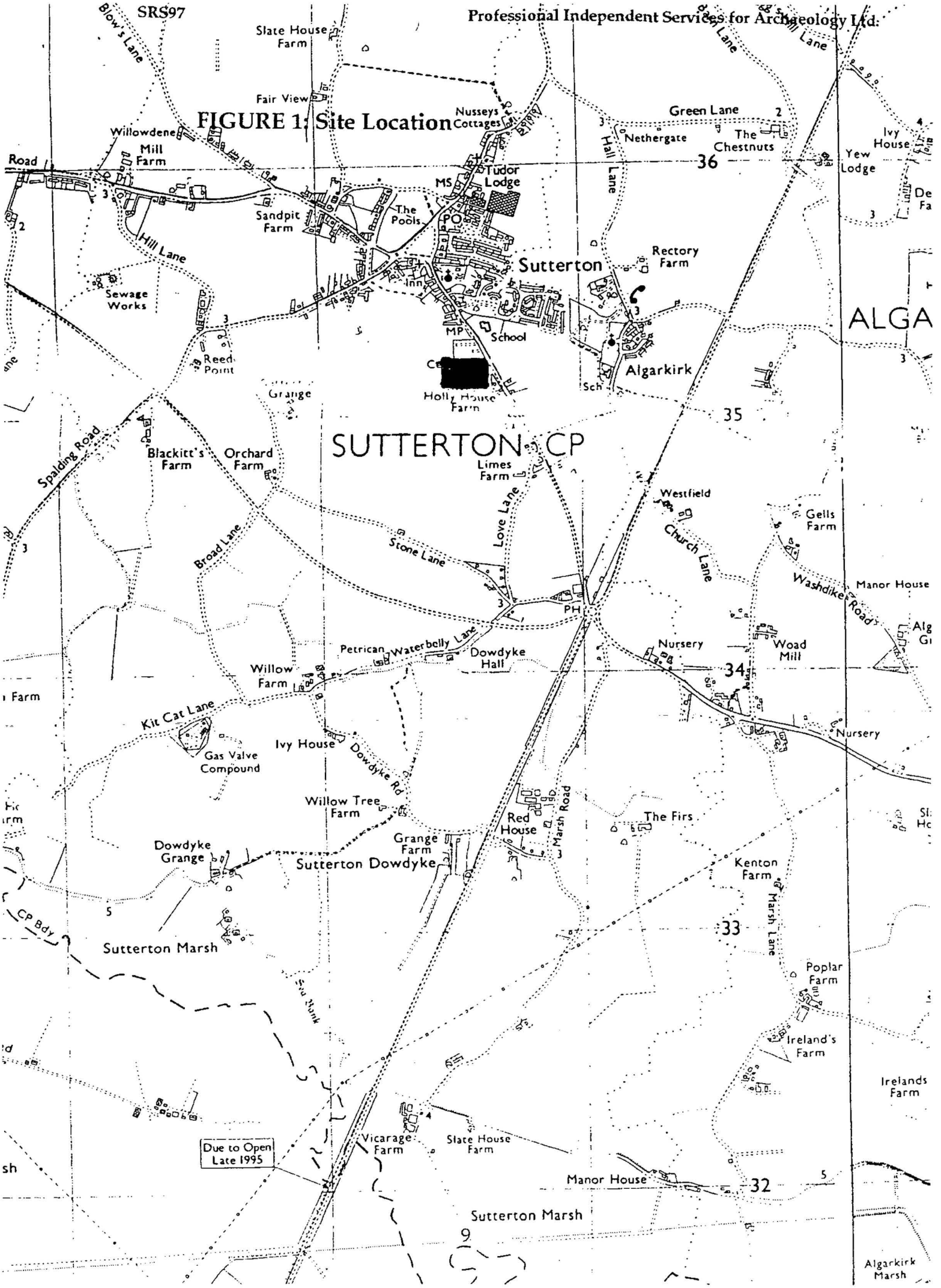
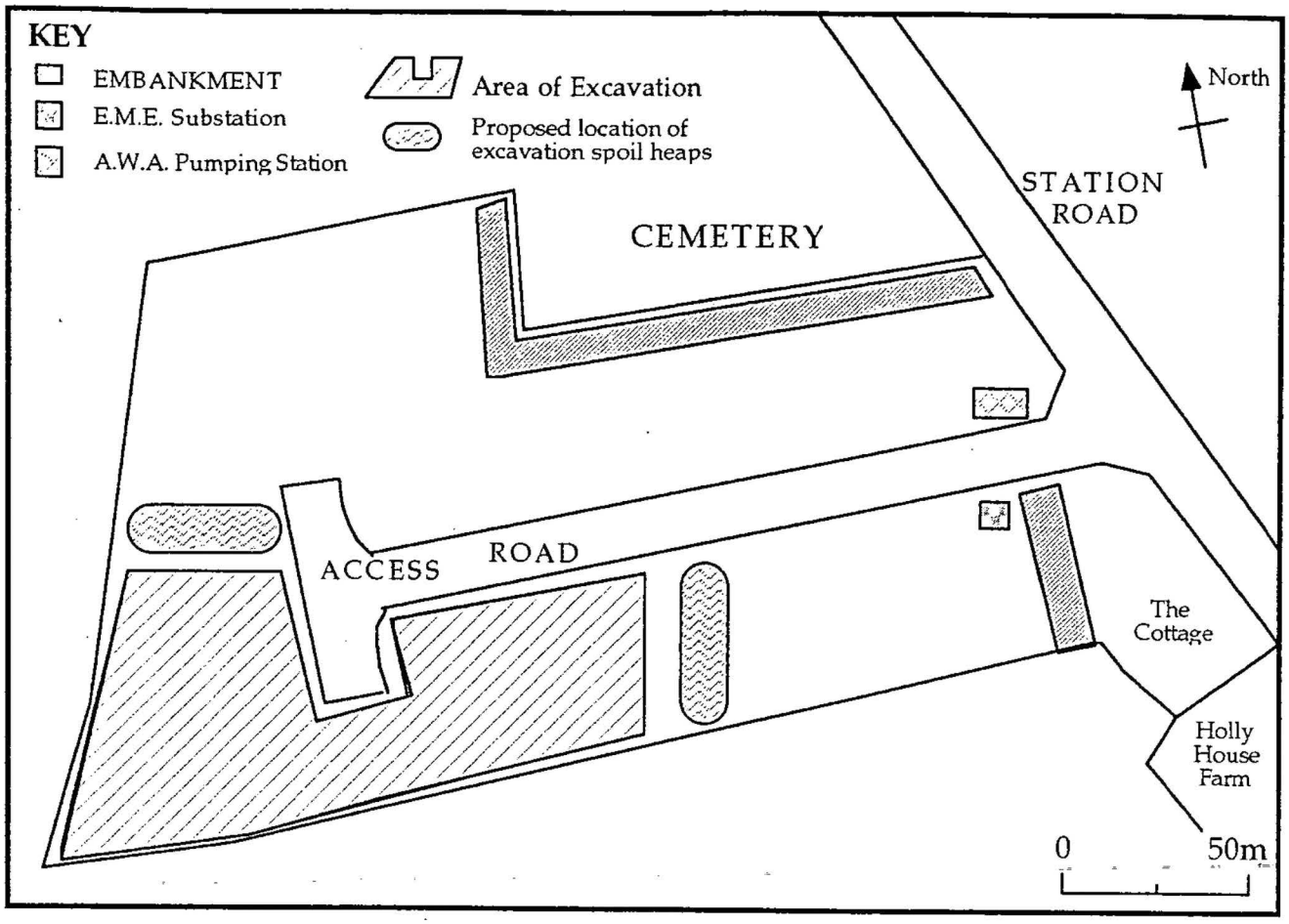


FIGURE 2

Station Road, Sutterton, Lincs.: Sketch plan showing the area of excavation



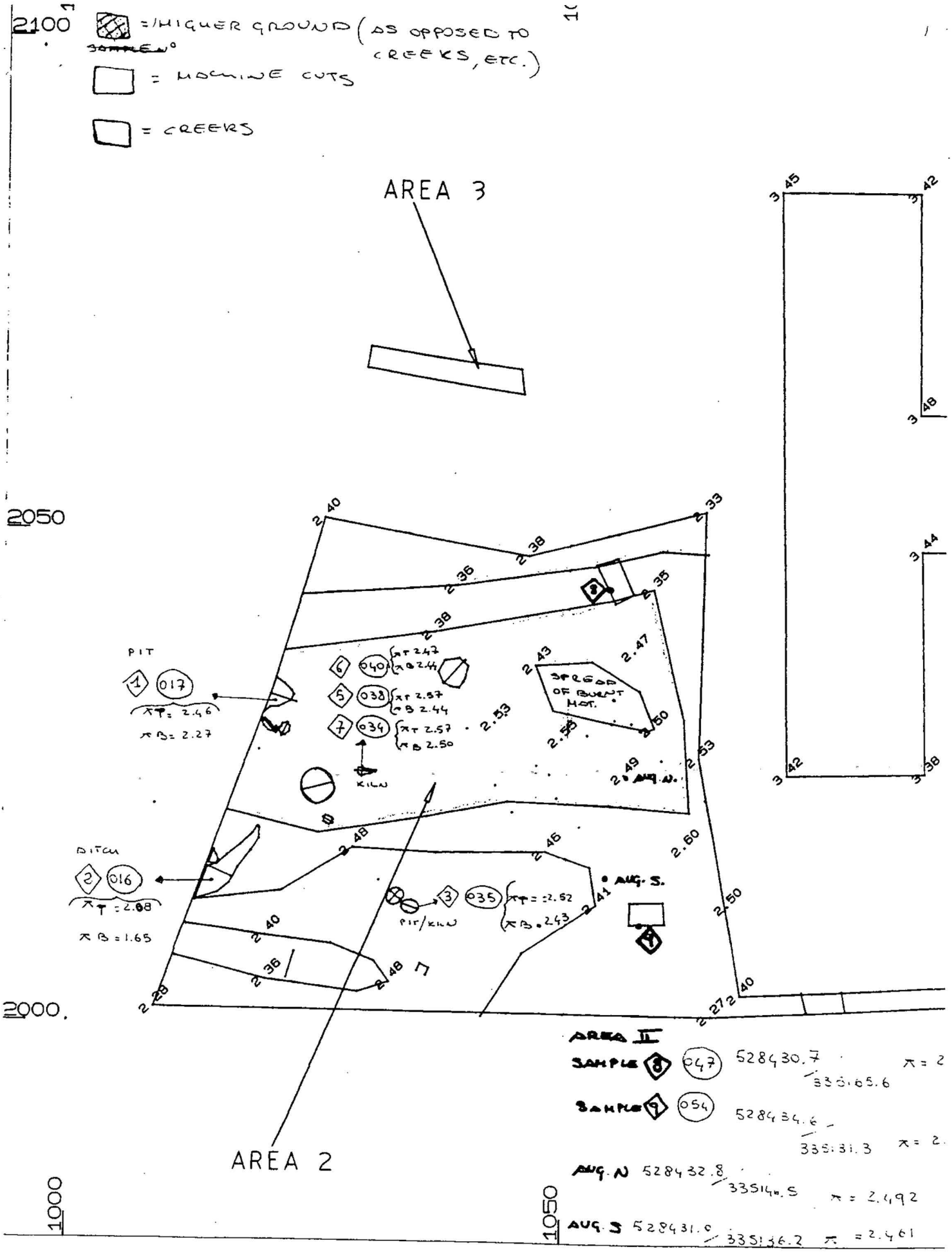


Figure 3 (West)

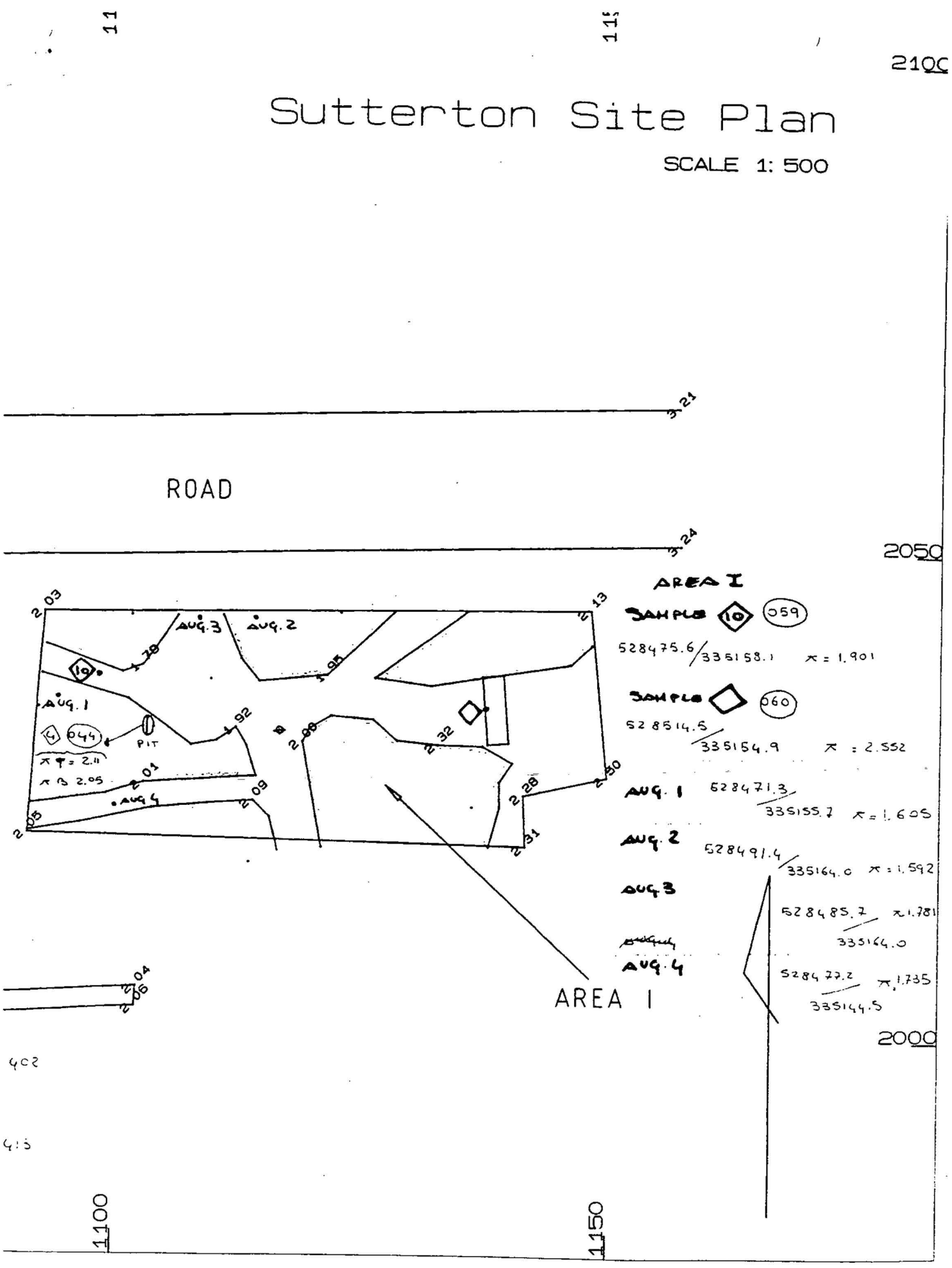


Figure 3 (East)