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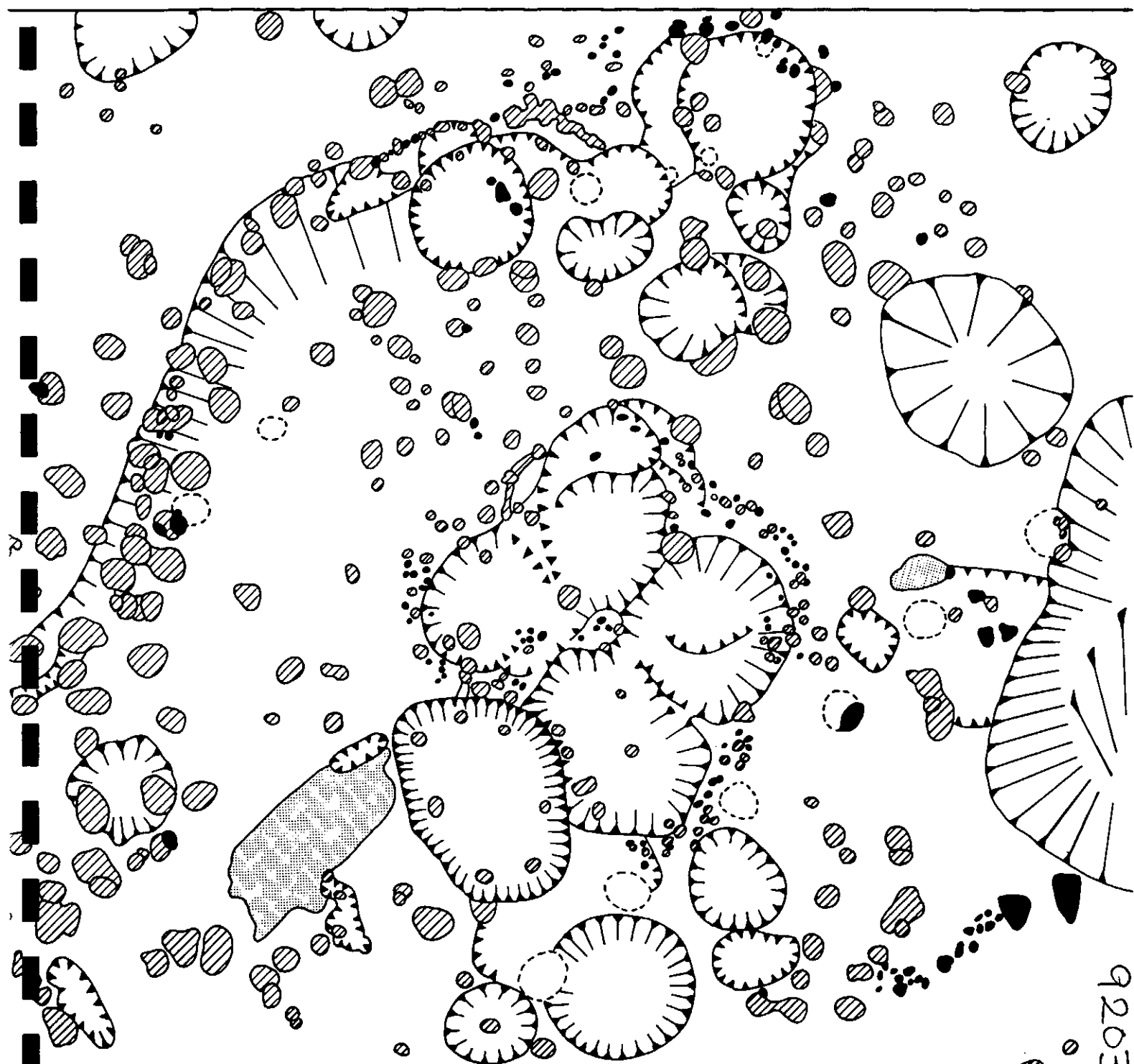
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Buncefield Lane, Hemel Hempstead  
An Archaeological Evaluation



Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust



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THE HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

**BUNCEFIELD LANE, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD:  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

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# **BUNCEFIELD LANE, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

## **INTRODUCTION** Fig. 1

During December 1994, the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological evaluation on land to the west of Buncefield Lane in Hemel Hempstead (NGR TL 082 080). The work was commissioned in response to a proposal for the development of a distribution centre.

## **BACKGROUND AND SITE TOPOGRAPHY**

The site is situated on an area of high ground, approximately 3.5 km to the NW of the river Bulbourne, and is currently in use as pasture. A well-developed soil horizon, typical of long-term pasture, overlay a subsoil comprising boulder clay and clay with flints.

Less than 300 m to the south of the site, part of a Romano-Celtic temple was discovered when Roman building remains were found during the excavation of a sewer pipe trench in 1966. Further excavations by David Neal in 1982 and 1983 revealed a religious complex, dating from the 1st and 2nd century AD (Herts County Council Sites and Monuments Record Number 0094). Roman pottery and building remains have also been discovered less than a kilometre to the east (HCC SMR No. 6823).

Two supposed Roman roads are thought to have passed close to the site, one running 1.5 km to the west (HCC SMR No. 4566), and one less than a kilometre to the north-east (HCC SMR No. 4598). The hedgerow which bisects the site in an east/west direction is also thought to represent the line of a Roman road.

In addition to evidence of Romano-British activity, several prehistoric finds have also been recorded locally. A Bronze Age knife (HCC SMR No. 0584) and a flint arrowhead (HCC SMR No. 0585) were found within a kilometre to the north-west, and a Bronze Age round barrow is known to exist close by (HCC SMR No. 0054).

## METHOD OF WORK AND OBJECTIVES Fig. 2

The objective of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of the surviving archaeological remains that may be threatened by the proposed development. The work was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by the County Archaeological Officer, Hertfordshire County Council.

Evaluation commenced with a geophysical survey of the site, undertaken by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford, commissioned by the Trust. This took the form of a rapid gradiometric scan of the entire site, followed by detailed examination of anomalies revealed by the scan. No anomalies of archaeological interest were recorded by the survey.

Trial-trenching was employed for the second phase of the evaluation. Twenty trenches (length 25-33 m; width 2 m) were cut using a mechanical excavator, and the exposed archaeological features were then excavated by hand. In most cases the features were dug in half-section and fully recorded, using scaled plans and section drawings, written descriptions and photographs (black and white and colour).

All the features recorded appear to truncate the natural mid brownish-orange clay subsoil, and are sealed by topsoil, or colluvium and other modern overburden.

Trenches 1-5 were located in the northern field, and served to test the validity of the geophysical survey which produced negative results in the area.

Trenches 6-7 were located across the substantial east/west field boundary in an attempt to prove whether a the line of a supposed Roman road is marked by the present hedgerow.

Trenches 8-15 examined the south-west area of the site, with the objective of detecting the north-east side of a trapezoidal enclosure recorded by David Neal during his excavations of 1982-3.

Trenches 16-20 were sited in an area to the south-east which is known to contain medieval ridge-and-furrow earthworks. The objective of these trenches was to try to reveal any buried soil horizons which may survive below the ridges or headlands.

## **DESCRIPTION OF WORKS** Fig. 2

### **Trench 1** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

Between 0.25 and 0.3 m of dark brown clayey-loam topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil.

No archaeological remains were identified.

### **Trench 2** (length 30 m; width 2m)

An average of 0.28 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 138.32 m OD).

One feature of archaeological interest was revealed.

F152 is a small subcircular pit, less than one metre in diameter, continuing beyond the eastern section of the trench. It has been backfilled with mid brownish-grey clayey loam (L153), from which a small abraded brick fragment and one piece of burnt flint were recovered (top of feature: 138.05 m OD).

### **Trench 3** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.25 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil.

No archaeological remains were identified.

### **Trench 4** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.32 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 138.71 m OD).

Three features of archaeological interest were revealed, although only one was excavated owing to severe flooding.

F150 is an oval pit, 2 m in length and 0.3 m deep. The fill comprises orange-brown clayey loam (L151); no finds were recovered (top of feature: 138.39 m OD).

The two unexcavated features comprise small circular pits, approximately 0.5 m in diameter, filled by orange-brown clayey loam. Both compare favourably with other excavated features recorded across the rest of the site (top of features: 138.39 m OD).

**Trench 5** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.35 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil. Six modern field drains traversed the trench.

No archaeological remains were identified.

**Trench 6** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

Between 0.3 m and 0.4 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil. The trench was slightly deeper (with considerable root disturbance) in the centre where it traversed the present field boundary.

No archaeological remains were identified.

**Trench 7** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

Between 0.25 m and 0.4 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil. The trench was deeper (with considerable root disturbance) in the centre where it traversed the present field boundary.

No archaeological remains were identified.

**Trench 8** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.3 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil.

No archaeological remains were identified.

**Trench 9** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.3 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil.

No archaeological remains were identified.

**Trench 10** (length 30 m; width 2m)

An average of 0.35 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 137.98 m OD).

One feature of archaeological interest was revealed.

F148 is a NNW/SSE aligned linear slot which may represent the terminal of a ditch that continues beyond the northern limits of the trench. It is over 2 m long, and contains a fill of mid orange-grey clayey silt (L149), probably the product of natural weathering after the feature fell into disuse. No finds were recovered. (top of feature: 137.63 m OD).

### **Trench 11** (length 33 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.4 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 137.62 m OD).

Five features of archaeological interest were revealed, four of which were excavated.

F132 is a subcircular pit, approximately one metre in diameter and 0.23 m deep. The fill comprises a grey-brown clay-loam backfill (L133) with occasional charcoal flecks. No finds were present (top of feature: 137.07 m OD).

F134 is a shallow irregular linear pit, over 2.8 m in length, aligned NE/SW. The fill comprises a mid orange-brown silty clay (L135), probably the product of natural silting. No finds were recovered (top of feature: 137.15 m OD).

F136 is a shallow subcircular posthole, which may once have supported a timber post or stake. It is 0.5 m in diameter, and appears to have been backfilled deliberately after use with brown-grey silty clay (L137). Some large flint nodules revealed during excavation could be the remains of packing material. A second feature of comparable size immediately to the east was not excavated. (top of feature: 137.23 m OD).

F138 comprises a shallow subvoid pit or slot, 1.1 m long and aligned east-west. The fill consists of mid orange-brown clayey loam (L139). No finds were recovered (top of feature: 136.99 m OD).

### **Trench 12** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average depth of 0.32 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to reveal the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 136.71 m OD).

Two features of archaeological interest were identified.

F144 is the northern terminal of a ditch aligned NE/SW, continuing beyond the southern limits of the trench. It is 0.18 m deep and 0.6 m wide, filled with orange-brown silty clay backfill. No finds were recovered (top of feature: 136.33 m OD).

F146 comprises a subvoid pit, approximately a metre in diameter and 0.28 m deep, that has been backfilled with orange-brown silty clay. No finds were recovered (top of feature: 136.40 m OD).

### **Trench 13** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

In the southern half of the trench, 0.25-0.3 m of topsoil overlay 0.3 m of mixed modern overburden, giving a maximum depth of 0.6 m. Towards the north end, 0.3 m of topsoil directly overlay the natural clay subsoil. All the overburden was removed by mechanical excavator (top of trench 136.69 m OD).

One feature of archaeological interest was revealed, but this was slightly obscured by modern disturbance.

F130 is an irregular subovoid pit, 1.5 m long and less than 0.12 m deep. It seems to have been backfilled with yellow-brown silty clay (L131). One small piece of worked flint and a tiny abraded pottery sherd were recovered from the fill during excavation (top of feature: 136.03 m OD).

### **Trench 14** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

In the southern half of the trench, 0.25 m of topsoil overlay a maximum of 0.35 m of mixed modern overburden, giving an overall depth of 0.6 m. At the north end, 0.3 m of topsoil directly overlay the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 136.25 m).

The overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator, and a large modern feature was exposed in the southern end of the trench. Three features of archaeological interest were also revealed.

F124 is part of a large circular pit which continues beyond the western section of the trench. It is more than 3 m in diameter and over 0.25 m deep, backfilled with dark brown clayey loam (L125). Occasional charcoal and pottery flecks were present, but the only retrievable finds were two very small abraded tile fragments (top of feature: 135.64 m OD).

F126 is a substantial ditch with a sharp 'V'-shaped profile, aligned east-west. It is one metre wide and 0.5 m deep, extending beyond the boundaries of the trench to the east and west. The fill comprises a yellow-brown clayey loam (L127), and a tiny abraded flint flake was recovered during excavation (top of feature: 135.87 m OD).

F128 is a subcircular pit or possibly a posthole, immediately to the north of Ditch 126. It appears to have been deliberately backfilled with mid-brown clayey loam (L129); no finds were recovered (top of feature: 135.84 m OD).

### **Trench 15** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average depth of 0.3 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 135.92 m OD).

Two features of archaeological interest were revealed.



F140 is a ditch aligned NNE/SSW, probably terminating towards the northern section of the trench, and continuing beyond the southern section. It is a substantial feature, approximately one metre wide and 0.33 m deep, with a clear steep-sided profile. Its fill is a grey-orange silty clay (L141), and no finds were recovered during excavation (top of feature: 135.59 m OD).

F142 is a shallow subcircular pit, 0.7 m wide and 0.1 m deep. It appears to have silted up naturally after use, and the fill is an orange-brown clayey loam with an indistinct eroded boundary (L143). A number of large flint nodules present are probably derived from the local natural subsoil, which contains a high proportion of coarse inclusions in this area (top of trench: 135.47 m OD).

### **Trench 16** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.2 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil.

No archaeological remains were present, although two small very abraded sherds of pottery which probably date from the Roman period were recovered from the topsoil.

### **Trench 17** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.3 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 136.47 m OD).

Two features of archaeological interest were revealed.

F120 is a small posthole, 0.3 m in diameter and 0.12 m in depth, with a pointed base which probably contained a pointed wooden stake. The fill comprises a backfilled deposit of dark brown silty clay with occasional flecks of charcoal (L121). No finds were retrieved (top of feature: 136.13 m OD).

F122 represents a shallow but substantial curvilinear ditch, aligned approximately NW/SE. It is one metre wide, with a concave profile. The fill comprises an orange-brown clay-loam backfill (L123), and although some flecks of pottery and charcoal were identified in low densities, no finds were recovered (top of feature 136.15 m OD).

### **Trench 18** (length 25 m; width 2 m).

An average depth of 0.2 m of topsoil overlay 0.35 m of 'colluvium' or hillwash. Both layers were removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil, giving a total depth of 0.55 m (top of trench: 136.82 m OD).

The colluvium sealed five features of archaeological interest .

F100 is a wide shallow ditch, measuring 3.2 m and continuing beyond the northern and southern sections of the trench. The fill comprises light orange-brown clayey silt (L101), and no finds were recovered (top of feature: 136.02 m OD).

F102 is also a ditch, 0.85 m wide, aligned NW/SE. It has a rounded terminal to the south, and is up to 0.2 m deep with a clear sharp profile. The fill consists of greyish-brown clayey silt (L103) containing small quantities of charcoal. A few crumbs of prehistoric pottery were recovered during excavation (top of feature: 136.08 m OD).

F104 represents the remains of a small subvoid pit, 0.6 m in diameter, backfilled with orange-grey silty clay (L105). No finds were recovered (top of feature: 136.08 m OD)

F106 is probably a subcircular pit, continuing beyond the southern limits of the trench. The shallow eroded profile is filled by light brownish-orange clayey silt (L107), which probably resulted from natural weathering once the feature fell into disuse. No finds were recovered (top of feature: 136.11 m OD)

F108 is a very shallow irregular pit which may represent the truncated bases of two postholes. This feature also seems to have been infilled by natural processes, and contained a deposit of light orange-grey clayey silt (L109). A few flecks of charcoal and small crumbs of pottery were the only finds (top of feature: 136.13 m OD).

### **Trench 19** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

An average of 0.45 m of topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator to expose the natural clay subsoil (top of trench: 135.78 m OD).

Two features of archaeological interest were revealed, and a large worked flint flake was recovered during a search of the overlying topsoil.

F116 comprises a small but substantial slot aligned NW/SE, continuing beyond the northern section of the trench. The feature is 0.25 m wide and 0.25 m deep, filled with brown clayey silt (L117). Frequent large flint and chalk lumps may represent packing material, suggesting the feature had a structural function. A small abraded brick or tile fragment and a piece of struck flint were recovered during excavation (top of feature: 135.42 m OD).

F118 is a subvoid pit, 0.6 m in diameter and 0.2 m deep. It appears to have been backfilled with grey-brown silty clay (L119). Occasional charcoal flecks were identified, but no finds were recovered (top of feature: 135.53 m OD).

## **Trench 20** (length 30 m; width 2 m)

The trench was excavated by machine to a depth of 0.5 m. An average of 0.2 m of topsoil overlay 0.3 m of colluvium, which sealed the archaeological features cutting into the natural clay subsoil below (top of trench: 135.85 m OD).

Three features of archaeological interest were revealed.

F110 is ditch aligned NW/SE, 0.8 m wide and 0.25 m deep, truncating an earlier pit (F114). An abraded brick or tile fragment and a small sherd of pottery were retrieved from the ditch fill, a grey-brown clayey silt (L111) with occasional charcoal flecks (top of feature: 135.25 m OD).

F112 is also a substantial ditch, aligned on a north-south axis, measuring 0.75 m in width and 0.3 m in depth. Part of a rounded terminal was identified to the north. The fill comprises grey-brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecks (L113). No finds were recovered (top of feature: 135.25 m OD).

F114 has been heavily truncated by Ditch 110, but probably represents a shallow pit over one metre wide. It has been backfilled after use with brown-orange clayey loam (L115). One piece of struck flint was recovered during excavation (top of feature: 135.29 m OD).

## CONCLUSIONS

Trenches 1-5 were cut with the general purpose of examining the northern field for archaeological remains, while Trenches 6-20 were sited so as to address specific questions, which were as follows:

Trenches 6-7 truncated the substantial field boundary which traverses the development from east to west. It has been suggested that the field boundary marked the course of a Roman road, but no remains of a road were evident in either trench.

Trenches 8-14 were located in the south-western corner of the site, closest to the area of known archaeological importance. It was considered likely that the ditch which defined the north-eastern side of the trapezoidal enclosure located in that area may be present in the extreme south-west of the development site. However, no features contemporary with the known archaeology were found in those trenches, and no ditch was evident.

Trenches 16-20 were sited so as to examine the buried soils which may have survived beneath any plough ridges or headlands. However, no buried soils were preserved.

No archaeological features were identified in Trenches 1, 3, 5-9 and 16. Within the remaining trenches archaeological features were present below the topsoil, which is between 0.2 m and 0.35 m deep, and they cut the natural clay subsoil.

These features are interpreted as being archaeological (man-made) as opposed to natural (the result of geological processes, root or animal disturbance). In number they average between 2-5 per trench. The feature types are closely comparable across the site, comprising mainly ovoid or subcircular pits, linear ditches with well-defined profiles, and occasional small postholes and slots reflecting structural remains.

The fills of the features are the result either of deliberate backfilling or of natural weathering and silting once the features had fallen into disuse. Most of the deposits recorded have a high clay content, and were probably derived from the local natural subsoil. Distinct signs of 'gleying' or water action were identified within the soil profiles, and many of the deposits contain manganese staining, showing chemical changes have taken place due to weathering. The result of this is that many of the deposits appear very leached and sterile. A minority of the fills contain charcoal in very low densities, which is mostly unsuitable for dating purposes and other environmental study.

The features contain very few finds. Those recovered are of a general nature (struck flint, brick or tile), and cannot be assigned to a specific period. The number of finds per feature is insufficient for dating purposes. The finds are abraded; *i.e.* they are not contained within their primary (or original) context, and have been exposed to the processes of erosion prior to being buried. Some of the finds are small (a chip or a crumb) and may have been incorporated by root or worm action. A large number of features contain no finds.

Because of the lack of finds, interpretation of the archaeological evidence is problematic. Though the features located are archaeological, they cannot be attributed to specific archaeological periods. Additionally, the archaeology is apparently not particularly well preserved. The features are shallow, and no buried soil horizons or layers were present. Few features contained carbonised remains, and bone is unlikely to be preserved.

The trenches were laid out in order to answer specific questions. The dimensions of the trenches and their configuration do not allow the spatial arrangement of the archaeological features to be considered; for example, do the postholes represent the remains of a recognisable building plan?

## **SUMMARY**

The specific questions set out in the brief were addressed and were proven to be negative.

Although archaeological features were found, the lack of finds diminishes the value of the archaeological features which have been recognised.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Trust is grateful to The Commission for New Towns for funding the evaluation, in particular Mr Roger Pidgeon for his support and co-operation.

The Trust would also like to thank Dr R Scaife for his comments on the environmental evidence.



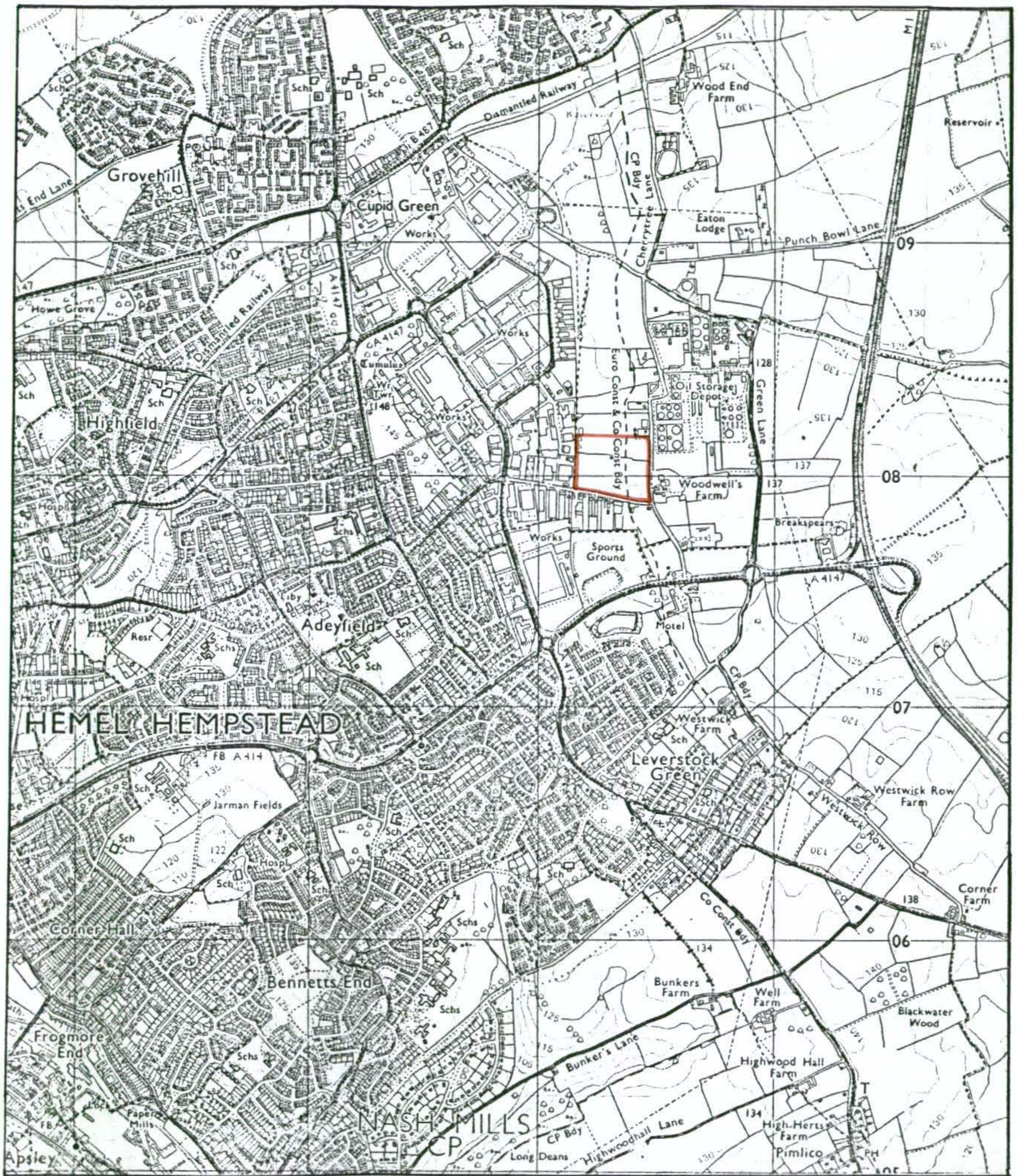


Fig.1 Site Location Plan



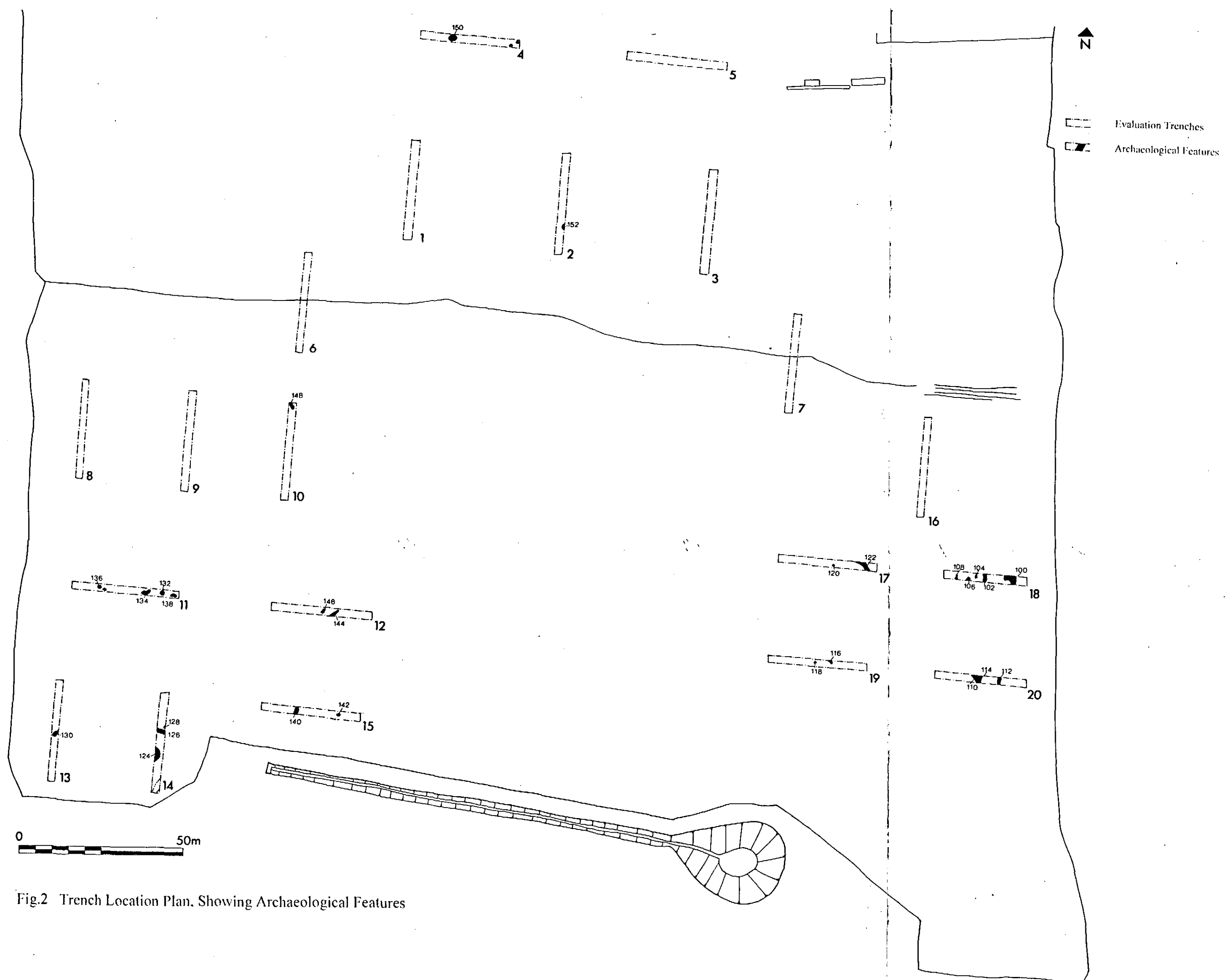


Fig.2 Trench Location Plan, Showing Archaeological Features