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HIGH AVENUE, LETCHWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE.

An Archaeological Evaluation

SITE CODE: LETCH-3, 99
NGR: TL 2113 3168

Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust

HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST
Report No.560

HIGH AVENUE, LETCHWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE

An Archaeological Evaluation

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October 1999

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HIGH AVENUE, LETCHWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Thirteen trenches were excavated on the site of the land adjacent to High Avenue, Letchworth.

Eight of the excavated trenches contained archaeological remains, predominantly of a Romano-British date, and concentrated in the south western part of the site. The remainder of the site revealed no archaeological features. Trenches 12 and 13 provided particularly clear evidence that the site lies on the extremities of a Romano-British settlement thought to exist south west of the site, and known from previous finds in the vicinity. The site occupies a crested location some 1km to the south east of the Iron Age hillfort at Wilbury Hill.

The metal detecting survey revealed two Roman coins to be present in the central and western parts of the site, along with more recent items of metalwork.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 During August, 1999 Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on the land adjacent to High Avenue, Letchworth, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 2113 3168; Figs.1-2). The works were commissioned by Matthew Homes Ltd in advance of proposed residential development of the site (Planning Application 95/1416/1). They were executed as part of a planning condition applied by the local planning authority (based on advice from North Hertfordshire District Council Field Archaeology Section (NHDC FAS)). This was followed by a metal detector survey of the site by Mr Andrew Phillips and other members of the local metal detector society during the weekend of 25th/26th September 1999.

1.2 The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with a brief prepared by NHDC FAS (dated June 1998), and a specification compiled by HAT (dated 2/7/99). It complied with Hertfordshire County Council County Archaeology Office, *Methods Statement No. 1: Standards and Practices for the Archaeological Excavation of Exploratory Trial Trenches* and the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations*. The evaluation followed an archaeological desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and topographic survey. The brief also required the survey of the site by metal detector, which was carried out after the conclusion of the evaluation.

1.3 The principal aims of the evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains which were liable to be disturbed during the proposed development, with particular reference to a

known late Iron Age and early Roman site located to the immediate west (SMR 137, 1276 & 4201).

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

2.1 The site comprises an approximately square area of land, to the rear of High Avenue, Letchworth. It lies c.1km south-west of Letchworth town centre and c. 3km north-east of Hitchin. The area is generally flat and lies at a height of c. 97-98 m AOD. The site comprises rough grassland with small trees and shrubs. A sub-linear mound of spoil occupied part of the eastern area of the site. The northern side is bounded by a hedge, with a school playing field to the north. The remaining boundaries comprise mature trees with residential housing to the rear. Dense vegetation was cleared to allow the metal detector survey to take place.

2.2 The area lies in the drainage basin of the River Great Ouse. Drainage in the region is dominated by the River Hiz and its tributaries, the River Oughton and River Purwell. The River Hiz is located 2km west of the site and drains south to north, into the River Ivel and into the River Great Ouse at Tempsford.

2.3 The underlying geology is chalk, the site lying on the northern side of the Chiltern Hills. The soils covering the site and surrounding area have not been mapped, but are likely to comprise the Hanslope Association, typically permeable calcareous clayey soils, developed over the chalk (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983, 7). Deposit of chalky and clayey drift clay commonly overlie the chalk in this area. The topsoil covering the site is likely to have been disturbed during the construction of the recreation ground and surrounding houses.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The archaeological background to the site is presented in detail in the Desk-Based Assessment (HAT Report No.527, 1999). In summary:

- The site lies in an area of archaeological interest. Finds from the Neolithic period have been made locally, for instance at High Avenue (300m to the north) and Briar Patch (300m to the SW). A group of Bronze Age burial mounds are located 6-800 m west of the site. The site is also situated some 1km to the south of the major prehistoric routeway of the Icknield Way (which extended from East Anglia, through the Chilterns, to Wiltshire).
- A late Iron Age/early Roman site is located immediately south west of the present site (SMR 137 and 1276). It was located and recorded in foundation trenches during housing construction on Highfield/Sollershott West in 1955, and comprised a late Iron Age occupation site, with a variety of pits and linear ditches, continuing in use during the Roman period. Finds from the site included what was recorded as Belgic wares, Castor and Samian wares, Mortaria and gritted ware, suggesting a late Iron Age to 1st/2nd century date. Other finds included many fragments of animal bone and items such as quernstone fragments. An unpublished manuscript report recording the features and locations is held by NHDC FAS. Features mainly included pits and ditches (where visible). A Romano-British rubbish pit was also revealed in the rear garden of 2, Sollershott West in 1990. In addition, later Iron Age and Roman pottery sherds, also indicative of occupation, have been found some 500m to the north at Campers Piece (SMR 1285), and a late Iron Age coin was found 300m to the south of the site (SMR

140). The Chiltern Hills were an area of considerable importance during the Iron Age. A hillfort of this era, Wilbury Hill, was located 1km north-west of the site, and also in use during the Bronze Age and early Roman periods, and other hillforts are known along the northern slopes of the Chilterns, both to the east and west of the site within 12km. An Iron Age cemetery was situated close to the west of Wilbury Hill (SMR 135 & 139).

- The region continued to be important during the Roman period, with the Icknield Way continuing in use and the small Roman town of Baldock situated some 4 km to the west of the application area. The Roman road from Baldock to Verulamium passed 3km to the SE of the site. There is widespread evidence of Roman activity close to the site. The known Iron Age site on the western periphery was also in use during the Roman period (SMR 4201), and Roman coins have been found within 200m to the south and east of the site (SMR 1263-5, 1269). Any eastern limit of the Roman activity is not known, but the finds of coins continue to the east towards Hitchin Road, some 600m distant (SMR 1273 and 4887). A Roman villa was situated at Nine Springs, 2km to the south of the site, and Iron Age site at Blackhorse Road on the north eastern side of the town was also occupied in the Roman period, and further Roman evidence has been found to the north at Norton Road. A Romano-British occupation site is also known from Hawthorn Hill, Letchworth, in the northern part of the town (SMR 1286).

- No evidence for Saxon occupation of the study area has been found, though a possible 9th-century book clasp was found 700m to the SE of the site at Letchworth Lane (SMR 1260), and the village of Letchworth close by probably developed from a Saxon settlement, mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. A Saxon cemetery, dating from the 7th century AD, was recorded at Blackhorse Road, some 3km to the north-east of the application area. There is no other evidence for Saxon occupation of the immediate vicinity.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

4.1 Thirteen trial trenches were excavated in locations agreed with NHDC FAS (Fig.2). The trenches were 2.1 m wide and between 15-40 metres in length.

4.2 The trenches were opened with a 180° mechanical excavator (JCB) and the evaluation was executed in accordance with the project brief and specification.

4.3 The site was visited by an environmentalist, Dr R Scaife, to examine the potential for preservation of environmental material that may provide data relating to the past land use, environment and economy of the site (as required in the brief).

4.4 The metal detector survey was carried out by Mr Andrew Phillips and other members of the local metal detector society during the weekend of 25th/26th September 1999. A total of 20 man hours was spent on the survey, which encompassed the whole site. The site was metal detected in accordance with the brief (Section 3.52), and specification (Section 6.5). Dense vegetation was stripped by the client prior to the metal detector survey taking place.

4.5 The metal detector survey utilised the site grid established during the geophysical survey (Fig.5). The site was divided into thirty five 20 m units, and each unit was individually numbered. The transects were walked and also a general site survey was undertaken .

4.6 The distribution of the finds was plotted (Figs.5-6) and the material quantified (Appendix 1).

5 DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

Individual descriptions of the trial trenches are presented below (Figs.2 - 4):

5.1.1 Trench 1 Figs.2-3

Sample section (0.00 = 97.95 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.34m	L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.34 - 0.54m	L1003. Subsoil. Mid-dark greyish brown clayey subsoil.
0.54m +	L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description A well-developed subsoil (L1003) was observed in the south-west portion of the trench and in the first 2.5 m of the north-westerly spur. L1036 possibly represents a very shallow buried soil (0.03 m thick), observed running in a 5m wide band across the SW portion of the trench. No archaeological features or finds were identified.

5.1.2 Trench 2 Fig.2

Sample section (0.00 = 98.00 AOD):

0.00 - 0.24m	L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.24 - 0.35 m	L1003. Subsoil. Mid-dark greyish brown clayey subsoil.
0.35m +	L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description A patchy layer of subsoil (L1003) was observed throughout the trench. No archaeological features or finds were identified.

5.1.3 Trench 3 Fig.2

Sample section (0.00 = 97.75 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.28m	L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.28m +	L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description A mole drain was recorded running in a E -W orientation through the southern section of the trench. No archaeological features or finds were observed.

5.1.4 Trench 4 Fig.2

Sample section (0.00 = 97.45 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.25m	L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.25m +	L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description A dump deposit of modern building materials was recorded within the northern portion of the trench. No archaeological features or finds were identified.

5.1.5 Trench 5 Fig.2

Sample section (0.00 = 97.50 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.29m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.29m + L1002. Natural drift. Mid greyish orange silty clay.

Description No archaeological features or finds were identified.

5.1.6 Trench 6 Fig.2

Sample section (0.00 = 97.50 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.26m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.26m + L1002. Natural mid greyish orange silty clay

Description No archaeological features or finds were identified.

5.1.7 Trench 7 Figs.2-3

Sample section (0.00 = 97.75 AOD):

0.00 - 0.29m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.29 - 0.43 m L1003. Subsoil. Mid-dark greyish brown clayey subsoil.
0.43m + L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description The western arm of the trench contained a diffuse spread of flint pebbles within L1001. A number of archaeological features were recorded. F1055 was small shallow, sub-circular pit (c.0.6m in diameter). It was 0.12 m deep, with moderately steep sides and a slightly irregular base. It was filled with a mid brown sandy clay (L1056) with occasional flint pebbles and sparse charcoal flecks. It contained a struck flint (2g). To the west of this feature, the partial remains of a very shallow gully were recorded (F1057), running in a NW-SE orientation, 0.3 m wide. It was filled with a mid orange brown sandy clay (L1058), slightly different from the surrounding natural drift, containing sparse charcoal flecks and no finds. A mole drain was observed running in an E-W orientation.

Feature F1037 was a ditch to the SW, orientated NW-SE, and measuring 0.5m wide x 0.33m deep. It exhibited regular sides and a slightly eroded, V-shaped base. It was filled with an orange brown silty clay (L1038), and contained fragments of animal bone (7; 65g). F1037 possibly relates to Ditch F1039 in Trench 8 (see below).

5.1.8 Trench 8 Figs.2-3

Sample section (0.00 = 97.87 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.30m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.30m + L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description A single ditch (F1039) was observed in the SW portion of Trench 8, orientated NW-SE, and up to 1.48 m wide and 0.34 m deep. It exhibited gently sloping sides and a concave base. It was filled with a mid orange brown silty clay (L1040). It contained 4 abraded sherds of Roman pottery (14g); and fragments of tile (1; 26g) and animal bone (35; 262g). It possibly represents a continuation of Ditch F1037 in Trench 7.

5.1.9 Trench 9 Fig.2

Sample section (0.00 = 97.75 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.29m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.29m + L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description No archaeological features or finds were identified.

5.1.10 Trench 10 Figs.2-3

Sample section (0.00 = 97.80 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.29m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.29m + L1001. Natural drift. Mid orange/brown sandy clay.

Description Feature F1034 was a sub-circular pit, measuring c.1.15m x 1.5m, partially revealed within the trench. It exhibited a shallow, regular profile, and was 0.25 m deep with a flattish base. It was filled with a mid brownish orange silty clay (L1035) and contained 25 sherds of pottery (EIA - c.AD70; 132g), fragments of animal bone (40; 846g), and a struck flint (2g). The majority of the pottery sherds belong to a single, local grog-tempered Belgic vessel. Remnants of a possible buried soil layer (F1058 L1059) were recorded to the east of F1034. This was in the form of a thin patchy layer (c.0.07m) of orange/brown silty clay soil overlaying L1001. The latter contained 4 sherds of Roman pottery (18g).

5.1.11 Trench 11 Figs.2-3

Sample section (0.00 = 97.81 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.30m L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.30m + L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description Two archaeological features were recorded in the trench. Feature F1032 was a ditch, slightly curvilinear in plan, aligned broadly E-W. It was 1.15 m wide and 0.25 m deep, with gently sloping sides and a concave base. It was filled with a mid brownish orange silty clay (L1033) with occasional flint pebbles. It contained 2 very abraded sherds of LBA/EIA pottery and 6 sherds of Roman pottery, and fragments of daub (4; 24g) and animal bone (2;

22g). An area of disturbance was recorded mid way along the trench, possibly the result of tree-root activity, and not thought to be of archaeological origin because of its irregularity. A drainage pipe trench was also observed to cut this area.

A shallow, sub-circular pit cut (F1022) was recorded within the SE end of Trench 11, partially revealed within the trench. It was very shallow (0.08 m) with a flattish, slightly irregular base. Its fill comprised a light orange/brown silty clay (F1023). It contained 2 sherds of Roman pottery (3g), and a struck flint (20g).

5.1.12 Trench 12 Figs.2 & 4

Sample section (0.00 = 97.70 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.30m	L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.30 - 0.40m	L1003. Subsoil. Mid-dark greyish brown clayey subsoil.
0.30m +	L1001. Natural drift. Mid brownish orange sandy clay.

Description A number of archaeological features were identified within the trench.

At the eastern end of the trench a substantial ditch (F1010) was aligned NW-SE, and terminated within the trench. It exhibited a blunted round terminal, and was 1 m wide and 0.45 m deep, with very steep sides and a rounded concave base. It was filled with a dark orange/brown clay (L1011) with occasional flint pebble inclusions. It contained pottery sherds (28; 140g) and animal bone (11; 86g). The pottery exhibits a broad date range from the 1st century until as late as the 5th century AD. Other finds include fragments of daub (3; 14g), an iron nail (10g), and three lumps of slag (14g).

A subcircular pit (F1051), measuring c.1.5m x 1.1m x 0.35m deep, cut the Ditch F1010 approximately midway along its length. F1051 exhibited a regular, concave profile, and was filled with an orange/brown silty clay with occasional flint pebbles (L1052). It contained 2nd-4th century pottery (19; 178g), and fragments of animal bone (3; 46g) including a burnt fragment (1; 30g). A large, undressed nodule of flint was recorded centrally at the base of the pit.

The edge of another feature (F1049), possibly representing a ditch, was recorded in the SE corner of Trench 12, though heavily truncated by Ditch F1011. Orientated NE-SW, the visible edge broke sharply at the surface, with a steeply sloping side and an irregular base, sloping to the SE at a depth of c. 0.17m. It was filled with a cohesive, orange/brown clay with occasional flint pebbles (L1050), and contained 9 small, abraded pottery sherds (43g) which date between the late 1st century to the 4th century.

A further large ditch (F1016), measuring c. 0.7m wide and 0.59m deep was recorded to the NW of F1010, orientated NE-SW. It had moderately steep sides tapering to a narrow, slightly V-shaped base. Its fill (L1017) was a compact dark greyish brown silty clay, becoming more compact and more clayey with depth. Occasional flint pebble inclusions, recorded predominantly along the SE edge of the ditch may indicate the former presence of a corresponding bank on this side, though the evidence was slight. L1017 contained pottery sherds (59; 318g) and fragments of animal bone (14; 136g). The pottery dates from the late

Iron Age to the 2nd century. A worked bone object (SF2) and part of an iron nail fragment (4g) were also retrieved from the fill.

Ditch F1016 appeared to cut a shallow meandering gully (F1012) which was orientated roughly E-W and measured 0.45m wide by 0.17 m deep. It continued beyond the confines of the trench to the east, and F1012 runs for c.10 m before ending in a sub-rounded north-western terminal. It exhibited slightly irregular, gently sloping sides, and an uneven, broadly concave base. The fill (F1013) was a mid greyish brown silty clay. It contained late Iron Age - 2nd century pottery (41; 177g), fragments of animal bone (4; 4g), daub (3; 18g) and shell (8g), and a lump of slag (28g).

A slightly tapering linear feature, F1014, was recorded to the NW of F1012, aligned N-S, with moderately steep sides and a flattish base. It was filled with a mid orange/brown silty clay (L1015). It was cut by a small pit, F1018 (c.1 m in diameter and 0.32 m deep), which exhibited steep sides and a flattish base. The pit was filled with a mid orange/brown silty clay (L1019), similar to L1015. It contained pottery sherds (23; 104g), the majority being 1st-2nd century, though with some later (4th century) material.

Another linear feature (F1008) was recorded in the trench, aligned NW-SE, continuing beyond the trench to the west and terminating within the trench at its eastern end. It exhibited steep sides and a flattish base. It was filled with a compact dark greyish brown silty clay (L1009) with pockets of more sandy material. F1009 contained Roman pottery (45; 354g) including 1 sherd with a lead plug (SF1), and fragments of daub (5; 14g), tile (1; 46g), animal bone (7; 39g), charcoal (2; 1g); iron sheet (1; 4g), iron nail (1; 4g) and shell (2; 1g). A rise in the natural drift L1001 over this section of the trench was recorded. Two drainage pipes cut F1008.

A further linear feature (F1004) was observed on a NW-SE alignment, continuing from the NW end of the trench and extending within the trench to the east before merging with F1006. F1004 and F1006 are probably the same. F1006 forming the sub-circular terminus to F1004. The fill of F1004 (F1005) consists of a dark greyish brown silty clay, fairly compact. It contained Roman pottery (14; 70g), and fragments of animal bone (15; 92g), charcoal (1; <1g); iron nail (1; 14g) and burnt stone (1; 152g).

5.1.13 Trench 13 Figs. 2 & 4

Sample section (0.00 = 97.70 m AOD):

0.00 - 0.39m	L1000. Topsoil. Dark greyish brown slightly clayey loam.
0.39m +	L1024. Yellowish brown silty clay layer.

Description Trench 13 revealed layers which appeared to relate to a large feature/s, extending beyond the confines of the trench (possibly evidence of chalk quarrying or other extractive activities). L1025 was a dark greyish brown silty clay layer which appeared to encompass the majority of the trench. It contained late 1st-mid 2nd C pottery (12; 135g), and fragments of ?burnt daub (12g) and animal bone (1; 84g). L1024 was a layer of lighter yellowish brown silty clay which occurred in the NW portion of the trench, continuing SE in a 0.9m wide strip along the SE facing edge of Trench 13. It overlay L1025. L1048, a dark

greyish brown layer, probably the same as L1025, was present in the SE section of the trench and contained 5 sherds of Roman pottery (69g).

F1029 was a shallow sub-circular pit, possibly the base of a hearth. The sides broke gradually at the top, descending gently before merging into an uneven base. The fill (F1030) consisted of an mixed deposit of clayey silt and burnt clay with occasional flecks of charcoal. The layer yielded a small quantity of Roman pottery (7 sherds; 27g), but no coherent hearth/flue structure was identified. A lump of burnt flint (6g) was also recovered.

A box section through L1024/5 in the north-western end of the trench revealed a steeply cut edge of a large feature which extended beyond the confines of the trench. A sequence of deposits below L1025 were recorded. Layer L1026 was sealed by L1025, consisting of very compact, mid orange/brown silty clay with occasional flint pebbles and charcoal flecks. Directly below this was L1027, a compact, coarse orange/brown silty clay with c.10% flint pebbles. No finds were retrieved from this deposit. The primary fill of the feature (L1028) was a very thin compact deposit of dark orange/brown slightly clayey sand with moderate flint and chalk inclusions, containing no finds.

A c.5m wide box section was hand excavated through homogenous layers L1025 and L1048 within the SE part of the trench. Two underlying layers were revealed, at a depth of c. 0.13 m. L1044 was a compact mid orange/yellow sandy clay layer, whilst L1045 was a compact and cohesive brownish orange layer (not shown on Fig.4). L1044 contained 10 fragments of animal bone (194g). The relationship between the two layers was unclear. Both layers slope away to the SW. A 'linear' band of tightly-packed cobbles (L1043), orientated N-S, overlay L1044 and L1045 at this point. The cobbles are of small-mid sized undressed and unmortared flint nodules and may represent the remains of a path, trackway or bank, its survival perhaps being determined by the slope of the underlying layers. Two fragments of animal bone were recorded from L1043 (102g).

Another layer, L1047, was identified adjacent to L1043 on the south-eastern side, consisting of a mid orange/brown sandy clay. It contained 112 Roman pottery sherds (907g) of a 1st-4th century date, the majority of which date to between the late 2nd-4th centuries. Other finds comprise fragments of daub (3; 40g); tile (3; 246g); charcoal (1; <1g); fired clay (?loomweight; 4; 1370g); iron nails (3; 28g) and shell (1; <1g). An underlying layer (L1046), a mid brownish grey silty clay, was sealed by cobbles L1043. Two additional sections were excavated, traversing the cobbled surface (L1043), revealing the surface to overly/seal L1046 along the SW margin, whilst L1046 overlies L1044, which continued to slope downwards to the SW.

To the NW of L1043, two shallow features were observed, both cutting L1045. Feature F1041 was a shallow, irregular pit. The fill (L1042) was a compact, mid yellowish grey silty clay and contained 5 animal bone fragments (563g) and a Roman sherd (4g). F1053, a shallow gully, located to the south-east and aligned NE-SW. It was 0.31m wide and only 0.09m deep, with moderately steep sides and a concave base. It was filled with a mid greyish orange silty clay (L1054). No finds were retrieved from the feature.

5.1.14 Metal Detecting Figs. 5 & 6

The metal detecting survey revealed frequent modern finds. Two Roman coins were found in Squares 19 and 33 (a 4th-century copper alloy coin and a barbarous radiate, respectively). In addition, three items of unknown date (a lead weight, a fragment of copper alloy waste and a possible lead repair for a ceramic vessel) were found.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 The evaluation revealed the continuation of Iron Age/Romano-British features, previously known from observations adjacent to the site. The site was anticipated given the vicinity of previously-known archaeological features to the south west. The features reveal evidence of occupation of the site in the form of pits, post holes and ditches (the latter relating to enclosures/field boundaries). It is difficult to assess the nature of these enclosures from the evidence in the evaluation trenches, but it would appear that at least two groups of alignments are represented.

6.2 The survival of possible metalling of a trackway in Trench 13 is important, though it may be associated with the evidence of ?bank material recorded in F1016, Trench 12.

6.3 The trial trenches located in the eastern half of the site revealed no archaeological features, suggesting that the features in the western end of Trenches 7 and 8 represent the eastern extent of the site.

6.4 The large, deep feature which encompassed a large part of Trench 13 may be derived from quarrying of the site, though its precise nature is difficult to characterise within the evaluation trench.

6.5 The date range of the pottery retrieved from the site suggests that it was occupied during the period from the late Iron Age to perhaps as late as the 4th century. The pottery assemblage is dominated by coarse wares, particularly jars, with occasional bowls, dishes, beakers, flagons and mortaria, all suggestive of rural domestic occupation with few high status vessels. Precise dating of occupation of the site is difficult at this stage, given the broad date range of the pottery.

6.6 The metal detecting survey encompassed the whole site. Two Roman coins were located, along with items of uncertain date (a lead weight, copper alloy waste and a lead repair item). Modern material was present in large numbers. The barbarous radiate (Square 33) overlay the area of the trial trenches which contained archaeological features, in particular Trench 12, and the 4th-century coin find was close by Trench 7 which also contained features.

6.7 The evaluation illuminates the importance of this area of high ground on the north-eastern fringe of the Chiltern Hills during the Iron Age, and the proximity to the other known Iron Age sites suggests that this was an occupation site that continued in use during the Roman period, covering a large area now occupied by the Highfield housing developments of the 1950s/1960s. Examination of the local topography shows the site to occupy the rough centre of a promontory/ridge of high ground that looks across to the Wilbury hillfort to the north

north west and overlooks the valley towards Hitchin to the west, situated on a favourable crested location for occupation of this period.

6.8 The environmentalist's comments are appended below. It would appear that the potential for botanical remains on the site may be restricted to those charred cereals that may be present within the fills of features such as hearths and pits. Pollen may also be present but the potential for waterlogged plant remains appears small. Faunal remains, such as molluscan remains and larger bones, are not well preserved, but animal bone was recovered from the fills of the features.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Trust is grateful to Mr Andrew Phillips and the local metal detector society for undertaking the metal detector survey.

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Letchworth (LETC-3,99): Environmental Sampling

All of the 13 evaluation trenches were examined for potential preservation of environmental material which might provide data relating to the past local environment, land use and economy of the site. Consideration was given to faunal and botanical remains and soil/sedimentological analysis. The former, that is molluscan remains and larger bones, appear not to have been preserved due to the gravel and clay substrate of the site. Botanical remains have a far greater potential although this may be restricted to charred plant remains (seeds, including grain and wood charcoal) and possibly pollen.

Plant Macrofossils: The most obvious potential is for the preservation and recovery of charred plant material that is, essentially seeds and wood charcoal. Clusters/spreads of charred material observed in a number of pits and ditch contexts have already been sampled for any future assessment or full analysis. This was especially pertinent to a small number of possible prehistoric pits which might not be available at a future date. Information relating to pre-Iron Age agriculture in this region is particularly scant and any possibility for recovery of early crops (charred grain etc.) should be regarded as important. The vast majority of the features relate present to the Romano-British occupation of the site and sampling of the principal dated and sealed contexts should be undertaken for recovery of charred macrobotanical evidence. Typically, this might produce evidence of cultigens and processing debris of those crops which were being grown and/or processed and utilised on-site. Where possible, contexts of different dates might be sampled for examination of temporal trends in agriculture through the tenure of the site and samples obtained spatially across the site may produce information on trends in activity. It is suggested therefore, that bulk samples of c 10 litres (where possible without contamination) should be taken from the main contexts and from those which show obvious charcoal evidence during excavation. Trenches 12 and 13 appear to have particular potential being deeper ditches with multiple fills containing charcoal. Smaller, ditch/pit fills were also in evidence during evaluation and it is likely that more such features will be found. These similarly offer good potential especially where these can be closely artifact dated. Where dating of any of the features is not possible from contained artifacts, charcoal recovered may be used for radiocarbon although the resulting chronology will be less tight. Bulk samples for these remains would require flotation on-site or at the HAT facility. These would then be assessed for content, preservation and potential for reconstructing the local agriculture and environment.

The potential for waterlogged plant remains appears small. However, given the clayey nature of the area which has an apparently greater number of features (trenches 12 and 13) it is just possible that any deeper features may have some more organic sediments at their base. This may apply to the areas of trench 12 and 13 where cut 1016 and cut 1031 (trenches 12 and 13 resp.) and the unexcavated but possibly deep feature of trench 13 (a possible watering hole?) are present. Such damper or even waterlogged contexts seem unlikely at this site, but if found, would obviously repay sampling for waterlogged seeds and pollen (see below).

Pollen: The depth of soil to underlying gravels in the majority of the excavated area/trenches is shallow (<50cm). There is clearly intense faunal (earthworm) mixing and as such, possibilities for pollen analysis and thus reconstruction of the wider vegetation environment

appear few. This applies to a possible buried soil/old land surface noted in trench 1 where worm activity would seriously inhibit the integrity of any analysis even if pollen was found to be preserved. The basal sediments of the ditches of trench 12 (cut 1016) and trench 13 (cut 1031) being deeper and multi layered and in the area of clayey soils (rather than sand) are the only contexts so far excavated which may produce pollen evidence. It is suggested, therefore, that the bottoms of these features and any specifically sealed contexts above should be sampled for pollen using monolith tins. Once obtained these could be initially assessed for pollen presence or absence and if proven to be of value a fuller analysis could be undertaken subsequently. The taphonomy and thus interpretation of pollen assemblages obtained from ditch and pit contexts is frequently questioned. Valuable information can, however, be gained on the local agricultural character of adjacent fields and of the broader regional vegetation.

General sample sizes: Suggestions only.

Charred plant remains	10 litres
Waterlogged, if present	5 litres.
Pollen	Monolith column samples.

NB. . Sample size not at the expense of contamination from different contexts.
Larger samples if charred seeds obviously present but not in large numbers.
Monoliths of 5-20cm square x 50cm long are adequate. Overlapping.

Soils and Sediments: There are distinct changes in the basement lithologies from Quaternary sand/gravel substrate to a clay capping which has resulted in variations in the soil developed on the site. A soil scientist should be contracted to visit the site and properly describe these soils and ascertain the level of any subsequent analysis, for example soil micromorphology. The latter may be especially pertinent to any buried soils which may be found.

Dr Robert G Scaife
21st August 1999

The Pottery

A. R. Fawcett BA, MA

Introduction

This report provides a broad date range for each context which contained pottery at High Avenue, Letchworth. Dating is based upon the identification of both form and fabric where possible. The report also contains a brief summary of the results of analysis.

Methodology

Quantification is by sherd count and weight per fabric. A summary of the results is presented below. The assemblage from each context was given a brief macroscopic examination. No detailed fabric description of any of the material and no detailed comparison with other material has been attempted. The spot date for each context is based upon the most recent sherd, however, where appropriate, comments have been made as to the condition and the majority of material. A fabric and form key is set out below.

Fabric Key

LGF SA	La Graufesenque Samian (South Gaul)
LMV SA	Les Martres-de-Veyre Samian (Central Gaul)
BAT AM 2	Baetican (Late) Amphorae 2
BSW	Black Surfaced or Romanising Grey Wares
COLC CC2	Colchester (Late) Colour-Coated Ware 2
FLH RE	Fulmer/Hedgerley Reduced Ware
GLARE	Post-Medieval Glazed Red Earthenware
HAD OX	Hadham Oxidised Ware
HAD RE 1	Hadham Reduced Ware 1
HAD WS	Hadham White Slipped Ware
HAR SH	Harrold Shelly Ware
HGW RE C	Highgate Wood C Reduced Ware
LNVC	Lower Nene Valley (White or Oxidised) Colour-Coated Ware
LOC GT	Local 'Belgic' Grog Tempered Wares
OXF RS	Oxfordshire Red Slipped Ware
OXF WH	Oxfordshire White Ware
OVW WH	Overwey White Ware
SAX-Q & L	Saxon Quartz & Lime Tempered Ware
STOR	Storage Jar Fabrics
UNS BU	Unspecified Buff Wares
UNS CC	Unspecified Colour Coats
UNS OX	Unspecified Oxidised Wares
UNS RE	Unspecified Reduced Wares
UNS WS	Unspecified White Slipped Oxidised Wares
VER RE	Verulamium Reduced Ware
VER WH	Verulamium White Ware

B = Dish, C = Bowl, D = Mortaria, G = Jar, H = Beaker, J = Flagon.

CONTEX I	CERAMIC DATA	DATE RANGE	COMMENTS
Trench 8			
F1039: L1040	1x LNV CC (6g) 3x UNS RE (8g)	No close date within the Roman period	All sherds are small and abraded.
Trench 10			
L1000	3x Modern earthenware fabric (17g)	Modern	
F1034: L1035	24x LOC GT [G] (126g) 1x UNS RE [G] (6g)	LIA - c AD70	The UNS RE sherd is abraded. Remaining sherds are from the same vessel.
L1003	2x OXF RS (3g) 1x VER WH (3g) 1x UNS RE (12g)	No close date within the Roman period	All sherds are small and abraded.
Trench 11			
L1000	1x BSW (1g) 1x Modern earthenware (9g) 1x OXF RS (8g) 10x UNS RE [C, G & H] (69g)	No close date within the Roman period	
F1022: L1023	2x BSW (3g)	No close date within the Roman period	Both sherds are small and not diagnostic.
F1032: L1033	2x BSW [G] (12g) 1x HAR SH (10g) 3x LOC GT [G] (26g) 2x PRE FL (17g)	LBA - Roman	The prehistoric sherds are LBA- EIA. They are very abraded.
Trench 12			
L1000	2x BSW [G] (9g) 2x STOR [G] (40g) 1x UNS RE [G] (13g)	No close date within the Roman period	
F1004: L1005	1x BSW (7g) 3x FLH RE (6g) 3x HAR SH [G] (22g) 1x OXF RS (4g) 6x UNS RE [G] (31g)	1st - 4th C	
F1006: L1007	2x HAD OX (6g) 2x UNS RE (8g)	No close date within the Roman period	All sherds are small.
F1008: L1009	5x BSW (32g) 1x GLARE (3g) 8x HAR SH [G] (109g) 3x LNV CC (8g)	1st - 4th C Majority 3rd - 4th C	The OXF WH is much burnt. The HAR SH is in good condition with

	2x <i>OXF WH</i> [D] (66g) 3x UNS BB (6g) 1x UNS CC (2g) 21x UNS RE [G] (117g) 1x UNS RE (no weight) 1x VER RE [G] (11g)		many of the sherds displaying characteristic rilling. The UNS RE sherd has a lead plug
F1010: L1011	4x BSW (18g) 7x HAR SH [G] (35g) 1x OVW WH (1g) 1x UNS OX (5g) 13x UNS RE [G] (70g) 1x <i>VER WH</i> (1g) 1x <i>SAX Q&L</i> (10g)	1st - 5th C	A small amount of material from Overwey has been found previously - within a post 400AD assemblage from Verulamium.
F1012: L1013	2x LGF SA (2g) 4x BSW (14g) 23x FLH RE [G] (89g) 2x LOC GT [G] (19g) 10x UNS RE [G] (53g)	LIA - 2nd C	The LOC GT & BSW are small and abraded.
F1016: L1017	8x BSW [G] (37g) 15x HAR SH [G] (71g) 19x LOC GT [G] (78g) 2x STOR [G] (89g) 1x UNS BU (6g) 9x UNS RE [H] (26g) 5x VER WH (11g)	LIA - 2nd C	Only two truly diagnostic sherds are present, both are everted rims in LOC GT & BSW. The styles are typical of those found e.g. Prae Wood, Herts.
F1018: L1019	11x BSW (39g) 4x LOC GT (19g) 1x HAR SH (5g) 1x STOR (9g) 3x UNS RE (9g) 2x UNS WS (7g) 1x VER RE (16g)	Pre-Flavian - 4th C Majority 1st - 2nd C	No diagnostic sherds are present, and all sherds are small and abraded.
F1020: L1021	1x GLARE (11g)	Post-Med	
F1049: L1050	2x LMV SA (2g) 1x HAD RE 1 (6g) 1x HAR SH (10g) 1x HGW C (4g) 4x UNS RE (21g)	c AD70 - 4th C. Both LMV SA & HGW C conclude in the 2nd C. Site had easy access to HAR SH & HAD RE, therefore a 2nd C end date is possible.	All sherds are small and abraded.
F1051: L1052	2x COLC CC2 [H] (5g) 3x BSW [H] (15g)	2nd - 4th C	The BSW, GROG & COLC CC2 are

	2x LOC GT (4g) 2x HAD RE 1 (31g) 1x HAD WS [J] (19g) 5x HAR SH (74g) 3x STOR [G] (28g) 1x UNS RE (2g)		more abraded than the other fabrics.
Trench 13			
L1000	2x UNS RE [G] (30g)	No close date within the Roman period	
F1029: L1030	2x STOR (18g) 5x UNS RE (9g)	No close date within the Roman period	
F1031: L1025	10x BSW [C & G] (57g) 1x STOR (59g) 1x UNS RE (19g)	The reed rim bowl form in BSW suggests a date from the late 1st to mid 2nd C	
F1041: L1042	1x BSW (4g)	No close date within the Roman period	
L1048	1x OXF RS (5g) 4x UNS RE (64g)	1st - 4th C Presence of OXF RS indicates a 3rd - 4th C date.	
L1047	1x LGF SAM (<1g) 1x BAT AM 2 [Dr20] (152g) 5x BSW (32g) 31x HAD RE 1 [B, C, G, ?J] (256g) 6x HAR SH (99g) 1x LNV CC [H] (2g) 7x OXF RS [C, H] (37g) 1x VER WH (1g) 59x UNS RE [B, C, G] (328g)	1st - 4th C Majority L 2nd-4th C. Earlier material is small and abraded.	Dressel 20 sherd is of a later date, c. mid 2nd - AD260. The context is dominated by high fired greywares which gradually replaced BSW during the 2nd C. The absence of LOC GT concurs.

Summary

A total of 446 sherds weighing 2975g were recovered from High Avenue, Letchworth. The results of quantification are set out below.

FABRIC	SHERD No	% OF SHERD No	WEIGHT	% OF WEIGHT
LGF SA	3	1%	3g	Present
LMV SA	2	Present	2g	Present
BAT AM 2	1	Present	152g	-

BSW	59	14%	280g	12%
COLC CC 2	2	Present	5g	Present
FLH RE	26	6%	95g	4%
GLARE/MOD	6	1%	40g	1%
HAD OX	2	Present	6g	Present
HAD RE 1	34	9%	288g	11%
HAD WS	1	Present	19g	1%
HAR SH	47	10%	435g	17%
HGW RE C	1	Present	4g	Present
LNVC CC	5	1%	16g	1%
LOC GT	54	13%	272g	11%
OXF RS	12	3%	57g	2%
OXF WH	2	Present	66g	2%
OVW WH	1	Present	1g	Present
PRE FL	2	Present	17g	1%
SAX Q&L	1	Present	10g	Present
STOR	11	3%	243g	-
UNS BB	3	1%	6g	Present
UNS BU	1	Present	6g	Present
UNS CC	1	Present	2g	Present
UNS OX	1	Present	5g	Present
UNS RE	156	36%	895g	35%
UNS WS	2	Present	7g	Present
VER RE	2	Present	27g	1%
VER WH	8	2%	16g	1%

Continental imports are represented by five small sherds of Samian from Southern and Central Gaul. One Dr20 olive oil amphora body sherd, from the Gaudalquivir Valley in southern Spain, is also present. Similarly there are few Romano-British fine wares. Those present are from the industries at Colchester, the Lower Nene Valley and Oxfordshire. The latter accounts for the largest number of fine wares.

The assemblage is dominated by coarse wares and in particular jars, with occasional bowls, dishes, and very occasional beakers, flagons and mortaria. In general the pottery sherds are small and abraded. Diagnostic sherds (rims and bases) are few with the exception of context 1047, Trench 13. Many of the assemblages which contain coarse wares have a mixture of early and late Roman fabrics, and close dating is not possible. A typical example is the occurrence of 'Harrold' shell-tempered ware from the Bedfordshire/Buckinghamshire region. This fabric is normally associated with late assemblages dating to the early 4th C AD, and this is the principal period of expansion of the industry. However, this fabric was produced throughout the Roman period and indeed occurs in small quantities throughout the Roman occupation at Folly Lane, Verulamium (Lyne. unpub). Its association with Oxfordshire red slip ware (whose production commences c AD240) is usually an indication of a later date, however, this combination occurs only twice at High Avenue. The accessibility of the site near a major Roman cross-roads could account for its presence with earlier material.

The remaining coarse wares are mostly locally-produced 'Belgic' grog-tempered wares, their successor BSW, and thereafter reduced sandy grey wares. The source of the latter appears to be mainly from the Hadham kilns. Production at the Hadham kilns probably commenced in the mid 1st century, however, the earlier fabrics and forms are not clearly understood. The dating sequence is complicated because the site is near the production centre, therefore, the dating obtained from sites outside the county e.g. mid-Essex (3rd-4th AD) cannot be readily applied. It is known that Hadham fabrics occurred at Verulamium from at least c AD180 (Lyne.unpub).

An interesting aspect is that only a small quantity of Verulamium region ware is present. The latter is often found in association with LOC GT and BSW usually in greater quantity, however, this may again be due to the location of the site.

Concordance of Finds

Feature	Context	Trench	Description	Spot Date	Pottery	Building material	Animal Bone	Struck flint	Other
1000	1000	10	Topsoil	Modern	3 sherds (17g)	2 frags tile (28g)			
1000	1000	11	Topsoil	Roman	13 sherds (87g)	2 frags tile (48g)		1 (2g)	
1000	1000	12	Topsoil	Roman	5 sherds (62g)			1 (8g)	
1000	1000	13	Topsoil	Roman	2 sherds (30g)				
1003	1003	10	Subsoil	Roman	4 sherds (18g)				
1004	1005	12	Fill of ditch	1st - 4th C	14 sherds (70g)	1 frag tile (95g)	15 frags (92g)		1 frag charcoal (<1g) 1 Fe nail (14g) 1 frag burnt stone (152g)
1006	1007	12	Fill of pit	Roman	4 sherds (14g)		19 frags (244g)		
1008	1009	12	Fill of ditch	1st - 4th C	45 sherds (354g) 1 sherd with lead plug (SF 1)	5 frags daub (14g) 1 frag tile (46g)	7 frags (39g)		2 frags charcoal (1g) 1 frag Fe sheet (4g) 1 frag Fe nail (4g) 2 frags shell (1g)
1010	1011	12	Fill of ditch	1st - 5th C	28 sherds (140g)	3 frags daub (14g)	11 frags (86g)		1 Fe nail (10g) 3 frags slag (14g)
1012	1013	12	Fill of ditch	LIA - 2nd C	41 sherds (177g)	3 frags daub (18g)	4 frags (4g)		1 frag shell (8g) 1 frag slag (28g)
1016	1017	12	Fill of ?ditch	LIA - 2nd C	59 sherds (318g)		14 frags (136g)		SF 2 Worked bone object (8g) 1 Fe nail frag (4g)
1018	1019	12	Fill of ?ditch	Pre-Flavian - 4th C	23 sherds (104g)				
1020	1021	12	Fill of drainage cut	Post-Med	1 sherd (11g)				
1022	1023	11	Fill of ?pit	Roman	2 sherds (3g)			1 (20g)	
1029	1030	13	Fill of ?hearth	Roman	7 sherds (27g)				1 frag burnt flint (6g)
1031	1025	13	Fill of unknown cut (? water feature)	Late 1st - mid 2nd C	12 sherds (135g)	1 frag ?burnt daub (12g)	1 frag (84g)		
1032	1033	11	Fill of ditch	LBA - Roman	8 sherds (65g)	4 frags daub (24g)	2 frags (22g)		

Feature	Context	Trench	Description	Spot Date	Pottery	Building material	Animal Bone	Struck flint	Other
1034	1035	10	Fill of pit	LIA - c AD 70	25 sherds (132g)		40 frags (846g)	1 (2g)	
1037	1038	7	Fill of ditch				7 frags (65g)		
1039	1040	8	Fill of ditch	Roman	4 sherds (14g)	1 frag tile (26g)	35 frags (262g)		
1041	1042	13	Fill of pit	Roman	1 sherd (4g)		5 frags (563g)		
1043	1043	13	Cobbled surface				2 frags (102g)		
1044	1044	13	Layer				10 frags (194g)		
1047	1047	13	Layer	1st - 4th C	112 sherds (907g)	3 frags daub (40g) 3 frags tile (246g)	21 frags (307g)		1 frag charcoal (<1g) 4 frags fired clay (object / ?loomweight) (1370g) 3 Fe nails (28g) 1 frag shell (<1g)
1048	1048	13	Layer	1st - 4th C	5 sherds (69g)				
1049	1050	12	Fill of ?gully	c AD 70 - 4th C	9 sherds (43g)				
1051	1052	12	Fill of pit	2nd - 4th C	19 sherds (178g)		3 frags (46g) 1 burnt frag (30g)		
1055	1056	7	Fill of pit					1 (2g)	

High Avenue, Letchworth, Hertfordshire

26/09/99

Concordance of modern finds by grid

Grid number	Cu alloy	Lead	Other
10	Brooch plate (4g)		
15		Moulding (40g)	
17	Buckle (3g)	Weight (112g)	
22	Fitting (2g)		
23		Soldier figure, ?toy (12g)	1874 - Silver Sixpence (2g)
29		Weight (74g)	

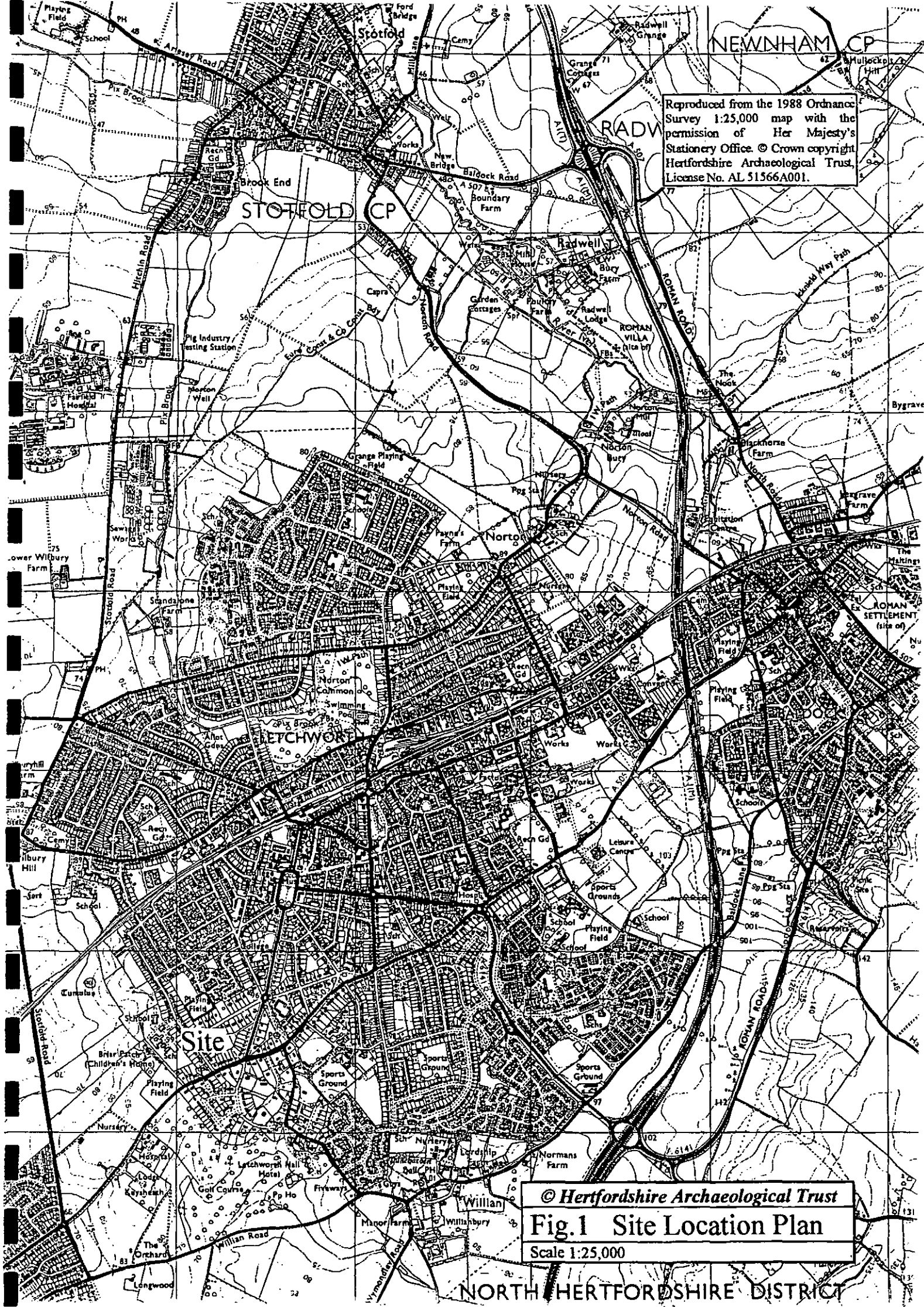
Concordance of other modern finds

Cu alloy
1 x George V One penny (10g)
1 x George VI One penny (10g)
2 x handles (?door) (88g)
1 x hoop fitting with thistle motif (? horse tack)
1 x decorative (?flower) fitting (6g)
4 x rifle bullet cases (38g)
2 x rifle bullets (22g)
1 x hinge (4g)
1 x cog (2g)
1 x object / fitting (78g)
1 pierced strip (6g)
1 frag plate (10g)

[illegible]

Lead
3 frags sheet (70g)
1 frag pierced plate (14g)
3 strips frags (244g)
4 rod frags (102g)
1 frag tube (8g)

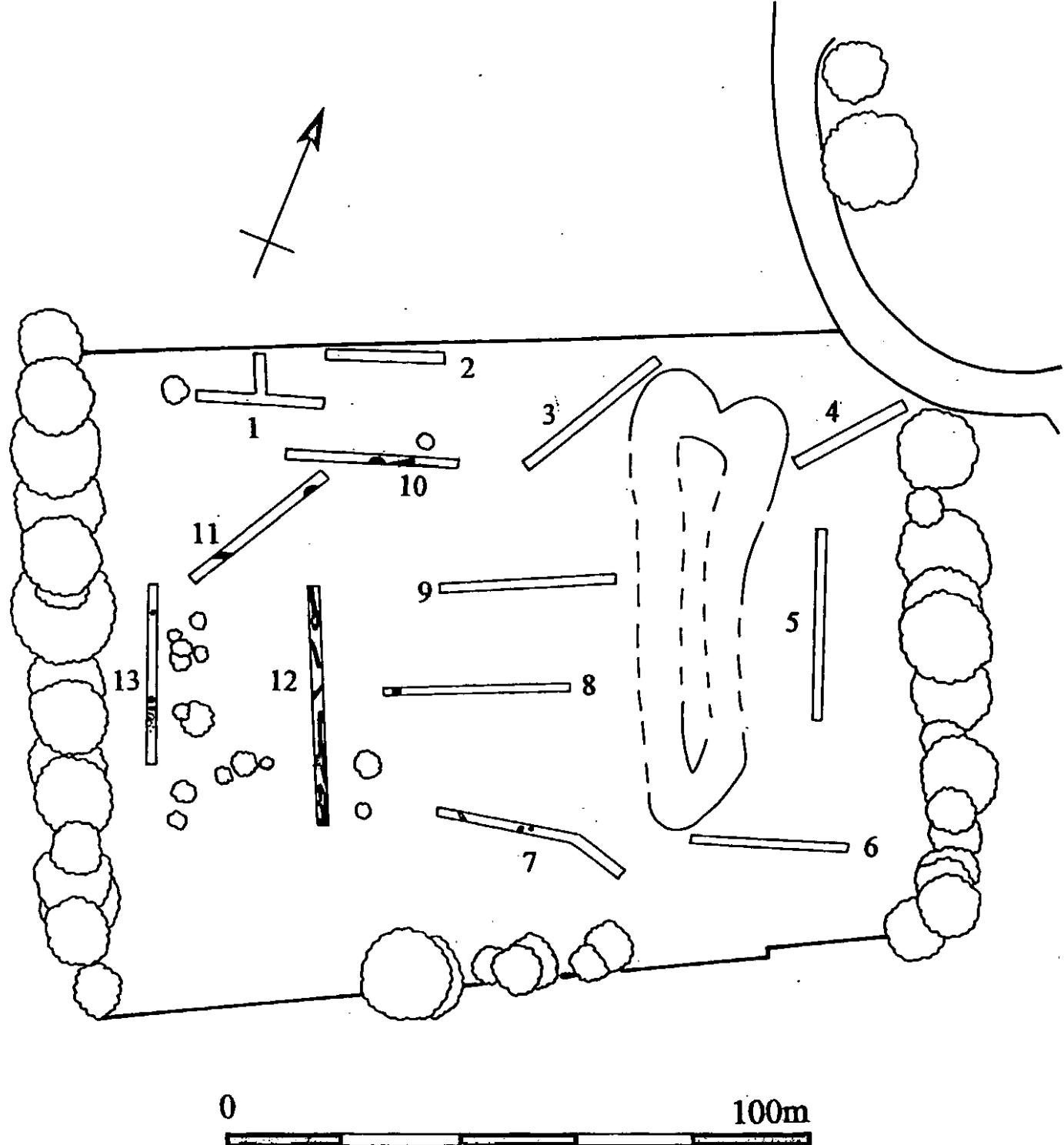
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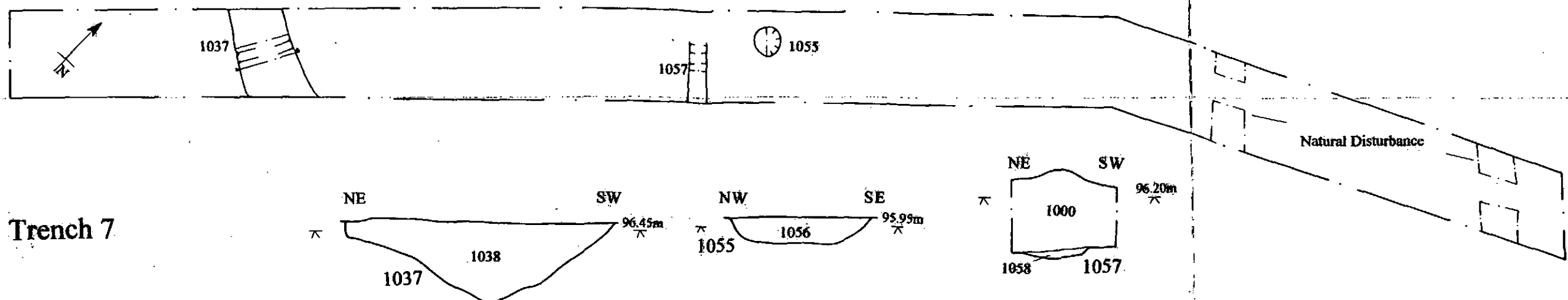
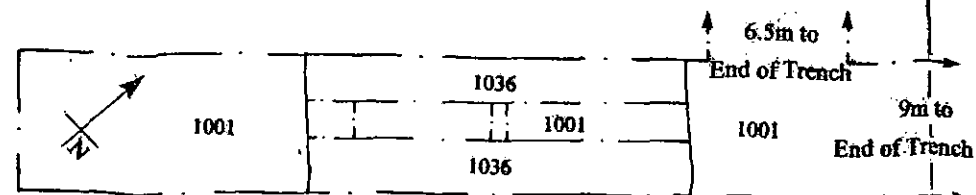
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Fig.1 Site Location Plan
Scale 1:25,000

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT

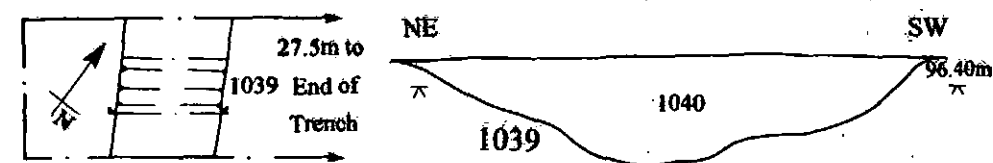


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Fig.2 Trench Location Plan
 Scale 1: 1000

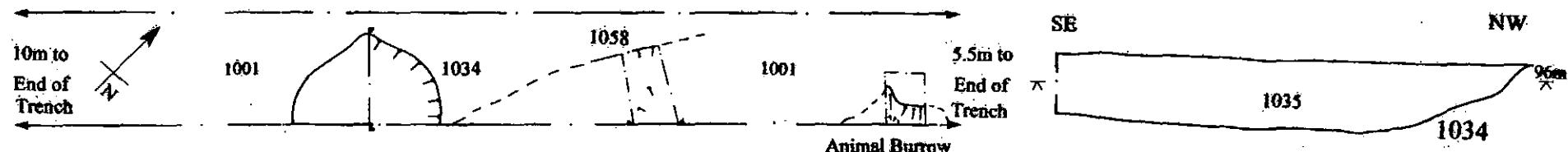
Trench 1



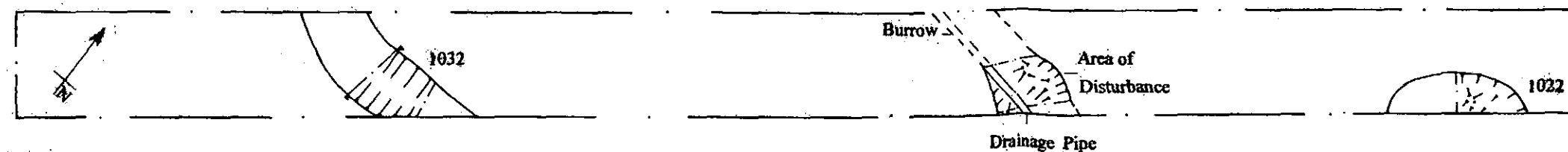
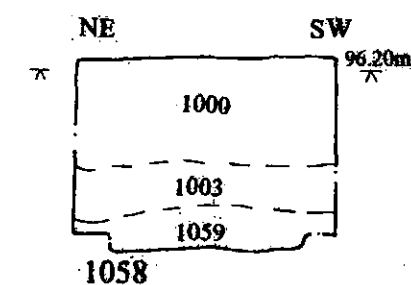
Trench 7



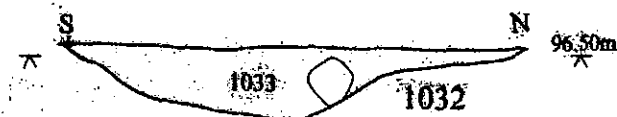
Trench 8

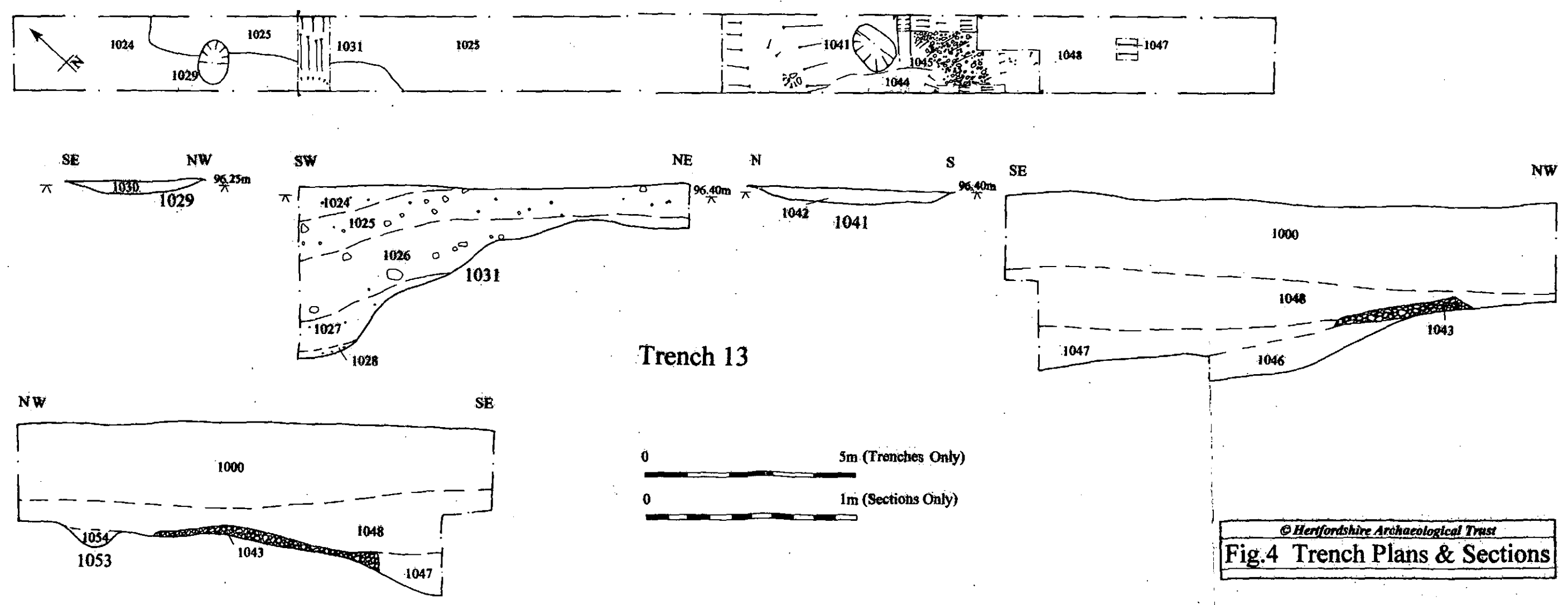
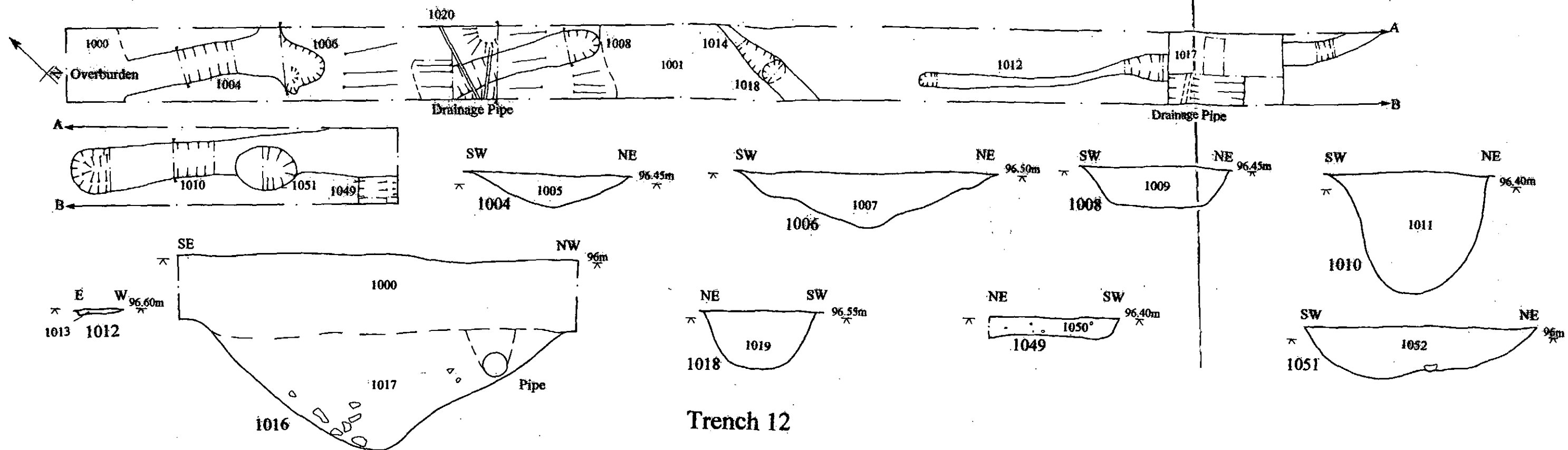


Trench 10

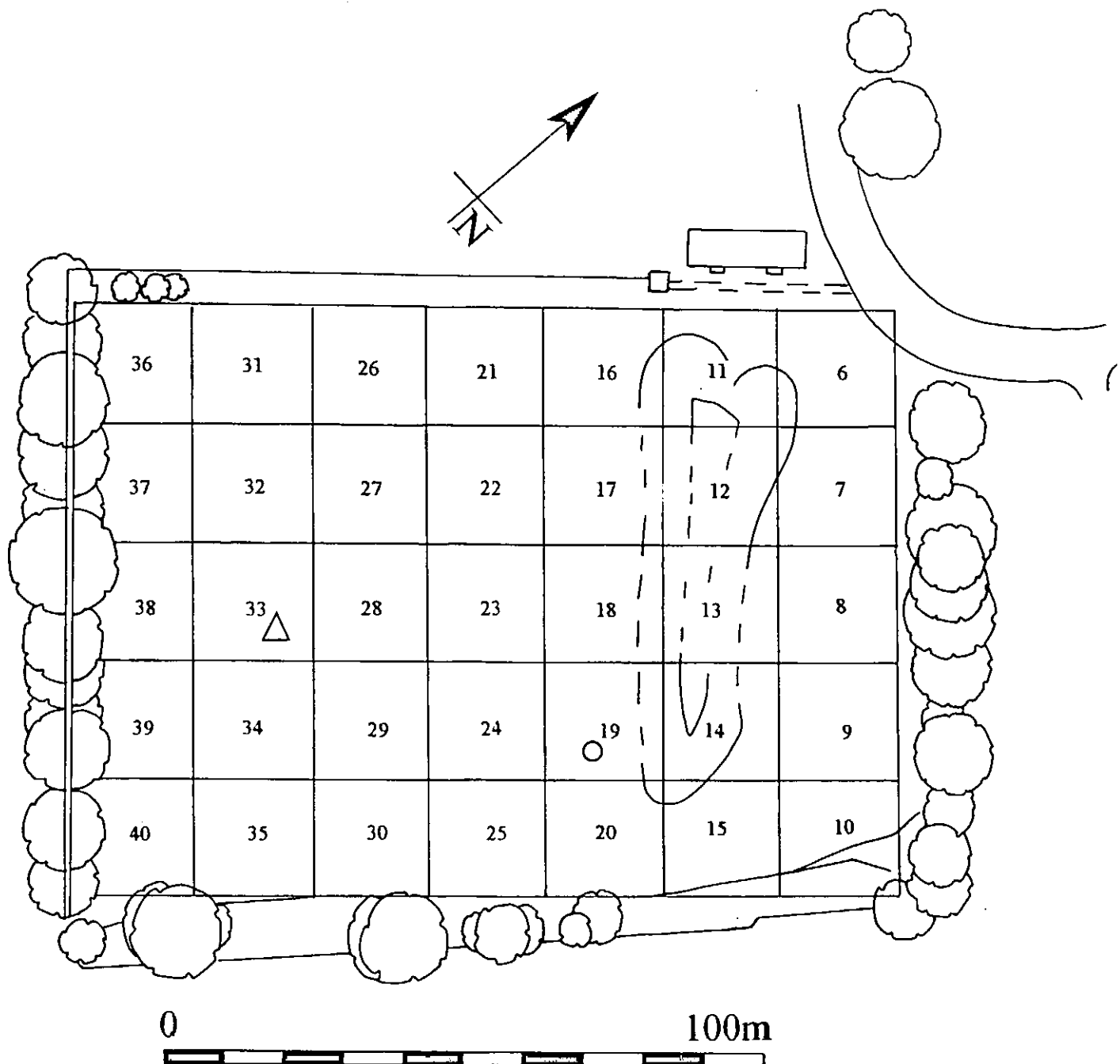


Trench 11





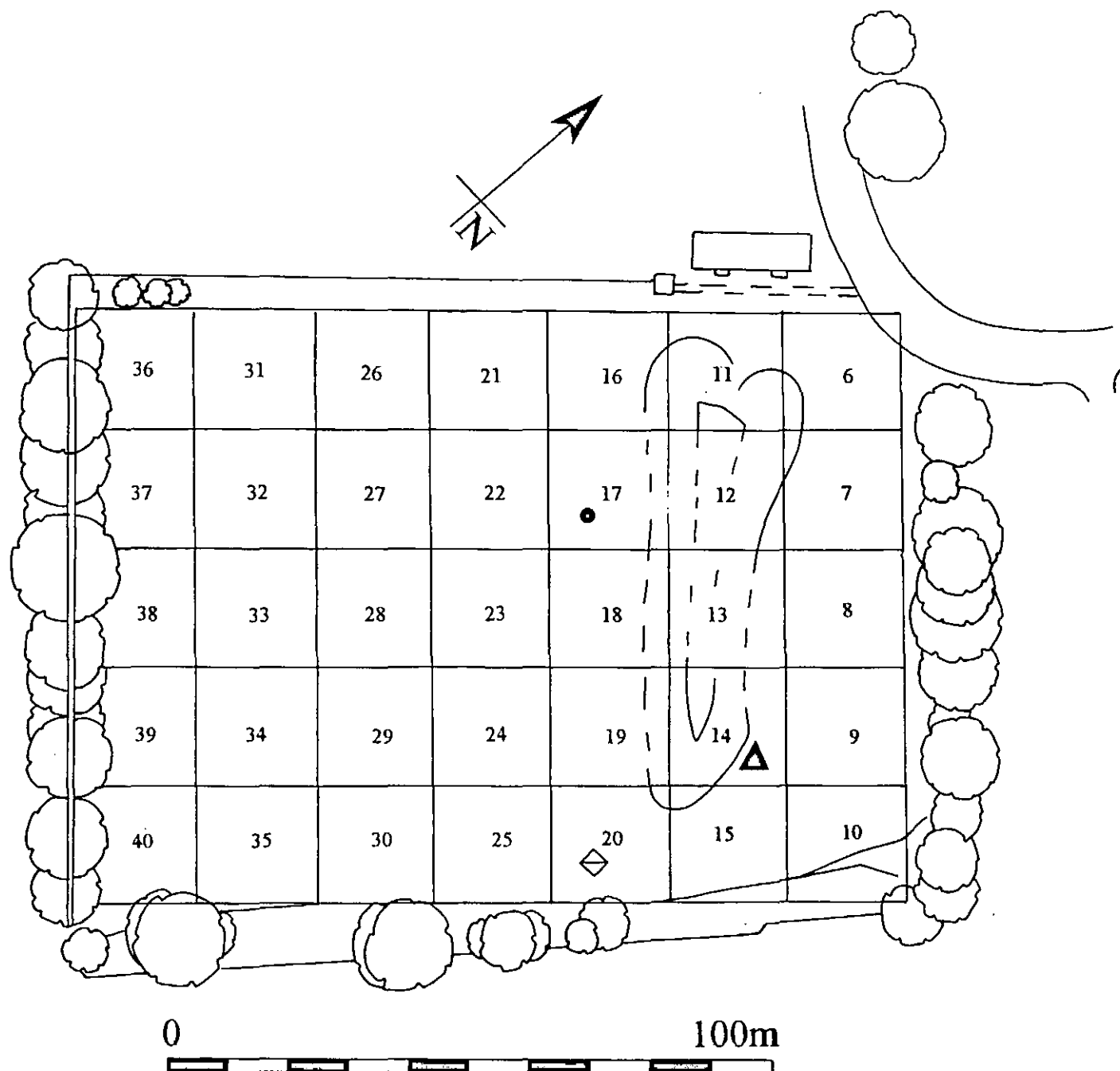
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Fig.4 Trench Plans & Sections



\circ 4th Cu Alloy Coin

\triangle 1 Barbarous Radiate

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Fig. 5 Metal Detecting Survey - Roman Finds
 Scale: 1:1000



△ Lead Weight

• Cu Alloy Waste

◇ ?Lead Repair (for ceramic vessel)

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Fig. 6 Metal Detecting Survey - Other Finds

Scale: 1:1000