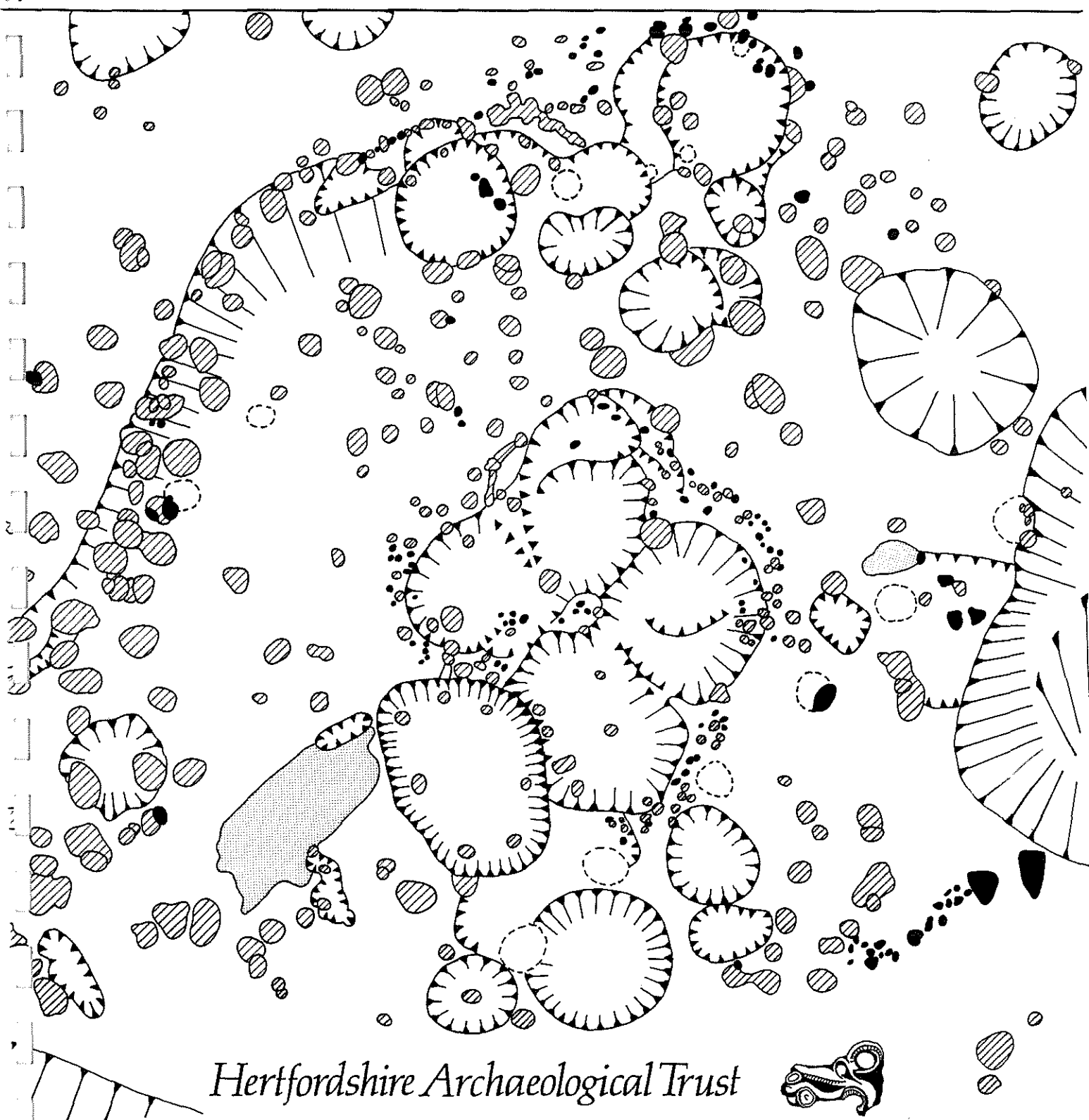


# VALERIAN WAY, CHELLS STEVENAGE

## AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION



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THE HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

VALERIAN WAY, CHELLS, STEVENAGE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

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## VALERIAN WAY, CHELLS, STEVENAGE

### AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

#### INTRODUCTION

At the end of November to early December, 1993, the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological excavation at Chells, Stevenage. The work was commissioned by Wilcon Homes and was carried out in advance of their development of the land to the west of Gresley Way, Chells (NGR TL265260)(Fig 1).

#### BACKGROUND

Between 1988 and 1989 the area of development had been the subject of a major excavation by the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust. The excavation revealed an extensive system of ditched enclosures which contained, amongst other things, a well and malting kiln dating from the Roman period (Fig.2) Subsequent to the excavation, a watching brief was held on the site and during the winter of 1989, as a result of topsoil stripping, for a road (Valerian Way) a group of cremation burials were discovered. The alignment of the cremations suggested they might continue to the west of Valerian Way.

#### METHOD OF WORK AND OBJECTIVES

Using a mechanical excavator the topsoil was stripped from an area measuring 30 m x 15 m in order to determine the presence or otherwise of cremation burials. Any burials were to be excavated by hand and removed.

#### RESULTS (Fig.3)

The topsoil was on average 0.3 m deep and when removed revealed the natural subsoil, an orange clay containing patches of gravel. After hand cleaning, several archaeological features were visible cutting into the clay, the ones most likely to represent burials were then investigated further:-

##### Feature 103

F103 was a circular feature 0.35 m in diameter and 0.8 m deep. The sides were lined with a reddish brown material (L102) that was either severely degraded pottery or burnt clay. L102 was not present in the base of F103 suggesting that if F103 was a cremation it was inverted. The upper fill of F103 (L104) was a mid grey brown, clay silt with a c.5% charcoal content. The lower fill (L105) was similar in colour and texture but with a much higher concentration of charcoal, c.40%. Neither L104 nor L105 produced any visible evidence of burnt bone.

#### Feature 107

F107 was an oval-shaped feature which measured 0.68 m x 0.28 m and was 0.12 m deep. Some of the cremations excavated in 1989 had been deposited in pits and it was thought that F107 may be of this type. However on excavation no evidence of a burial was found i.e. there was no charcoal or burnt material in its fill.

#### Feature 110

This feature was similar in size and shape to F107, and it measured 0.70 m x 0.30 m and was 0.12 m deep. It had a single fill (L101) a reddish brown clay loam which contained a small percentage of charcoal (c.5%). As with F107 there was no indication that F110 represented a burial.

#### Feature 112

This was the largest of the three oval features investigated, it measured 1 m x 0.80 m and was 0.18 m deep. It was filled with a reddish brown clay silt (L111) which contained pebbles (15%) and large cobbles (5%). Excavation of F112 produced no evidence of a burial.

In addition to these features two ditches were exposed:-

#### Feature 113

This feature was 13 m long and 1.6 m wide. It contained a single mid brown silty, clay fill (L108) which contained Roman pottery. It was excavated to a depth of 0.60 m but was not bottomed. 113 ran south east to north west across the site, it did not follow a straight line as half way along its length it curved and ran directly north for 2 m before curving again to resume its original course.

#### Feature 114

Ditch 114 was 11 m long, 1.05 m wide and 0.55 m deep. From the eastern edge of the excavation F114 ran north west for 5.50 m, then curved through 90°, and ran 5.50 m north east back to the eastern section (Fig. 3). It contained two fills: L109 a mid brown silty clay 0.20 m deep which produced several sherds of Roman pottery, and L115 a yellow brown silty clay 0.35 m deep. Both L109 and L115 represent natural silting into Ditch 114.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Features 107, 110 and 112 were possibly shallow pits. They were all similar in shape and size, all three had clearly defined edges, and the fills of F107 and F110 contained Roman pottery.

Feature 103 was the only candidate for a cremation although the lack of burnt bone, and the distance of F103 from the cremations excavated in 1989, suggests that the charcoal found in F103 was not the result of a cremation burial.

The two ditches seemed to be boundary ditches relating to two separate enclosures. The 'kink' in Ditch 113 means that it is not aligned with a ditch slightly to the west located during trial trenching (Fig. 2). The resulting gap between the two ditches may have served as an entrance for the large enclosure which was located to the south of the excavation.

Ditch 114 seemed to form the corner of a second enclosure which likely contained the cremations found in 1989. This idea seems to be supported by the fact that two separate ditch sections (marked F114? on Fig. 3) were visible in a modern ditch, on the east side of Valerian Way. The ditch sections possibly represent continuation of F114. If F114 was the boundary ditch of a cremation cemetery it would explain the lack of cremations within the excavation as only a small part of the enclosure was exposed.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trust is grateful to Wilcon Homes for their cooperation and funding of the excavation.

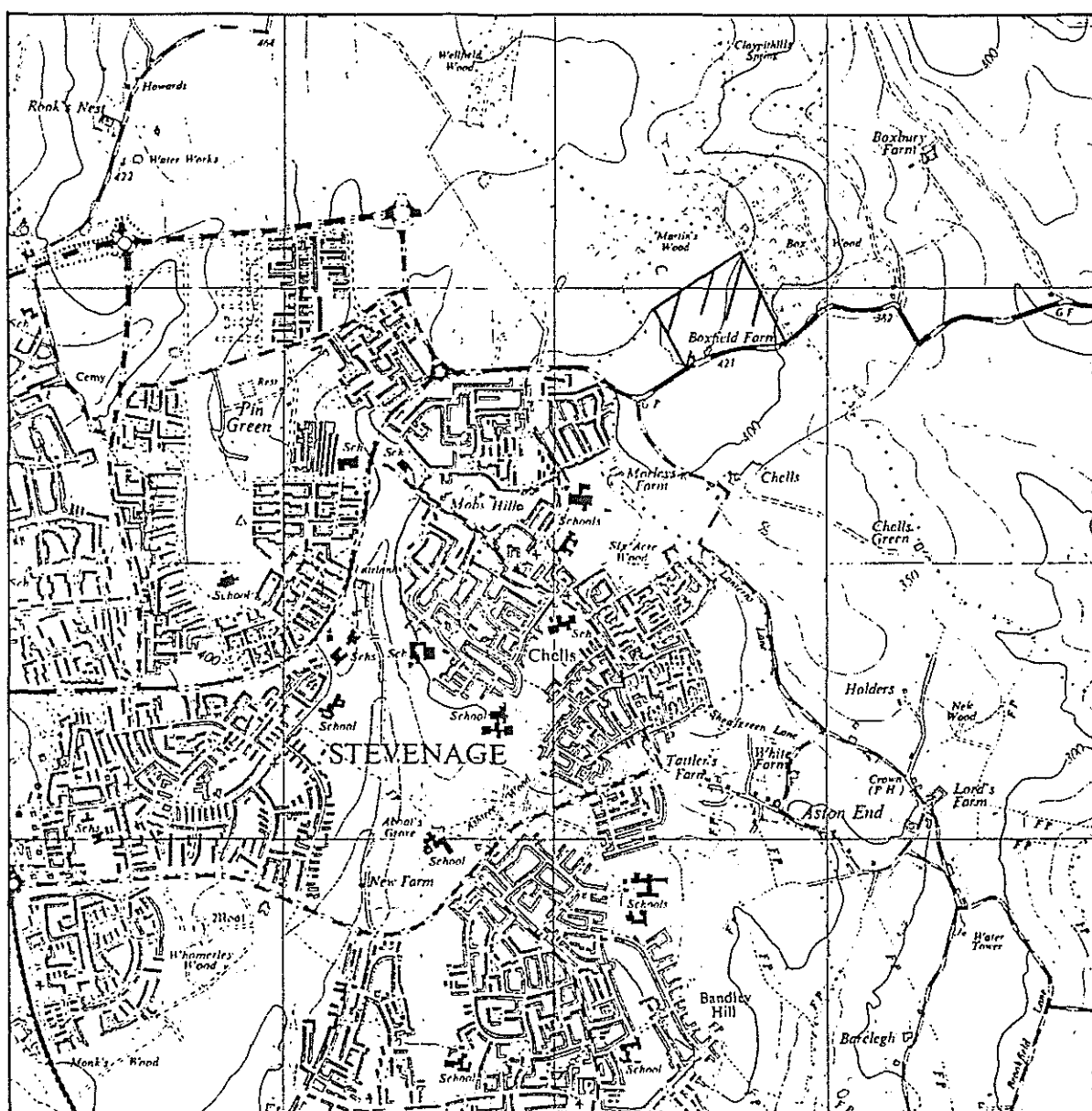
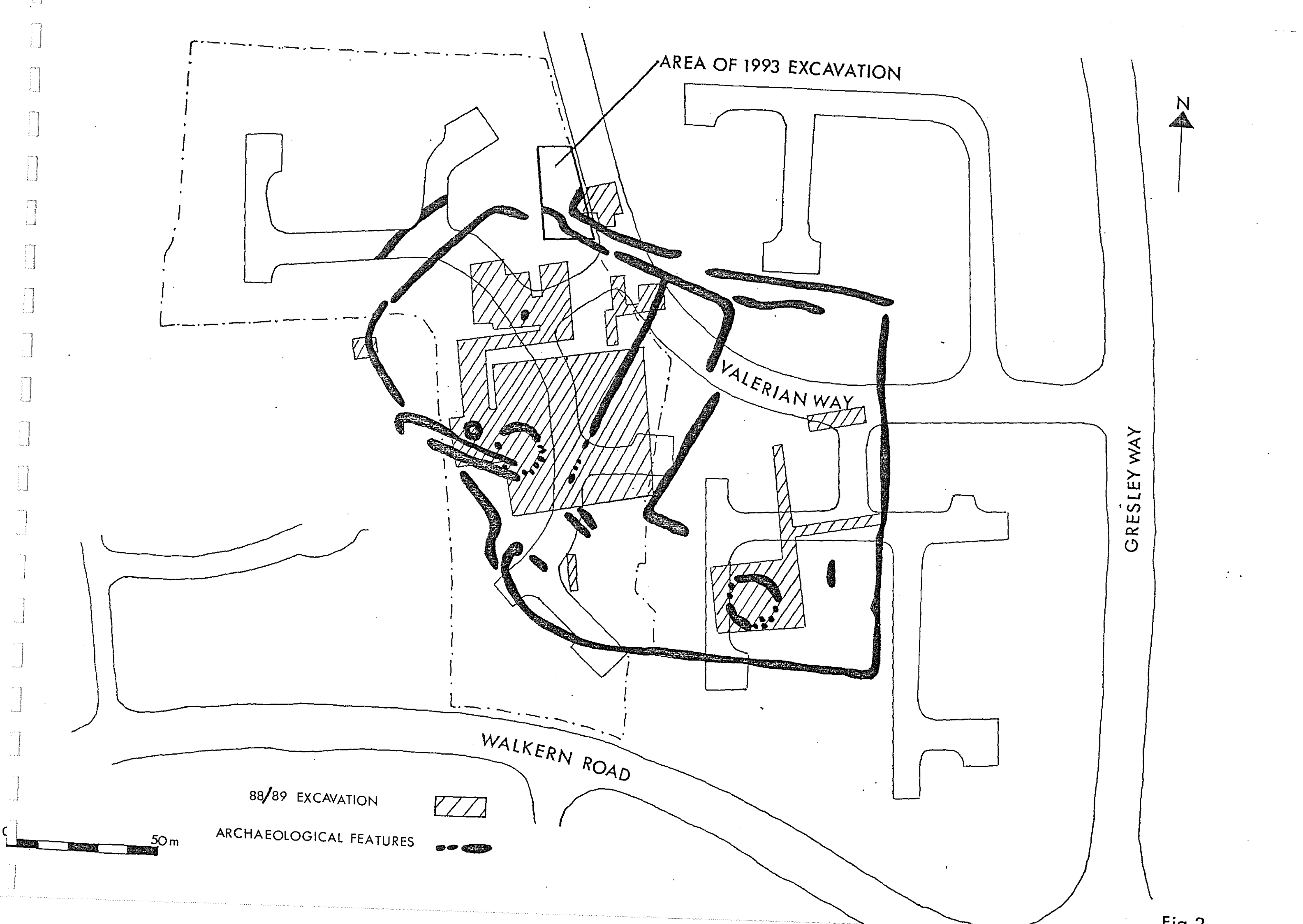
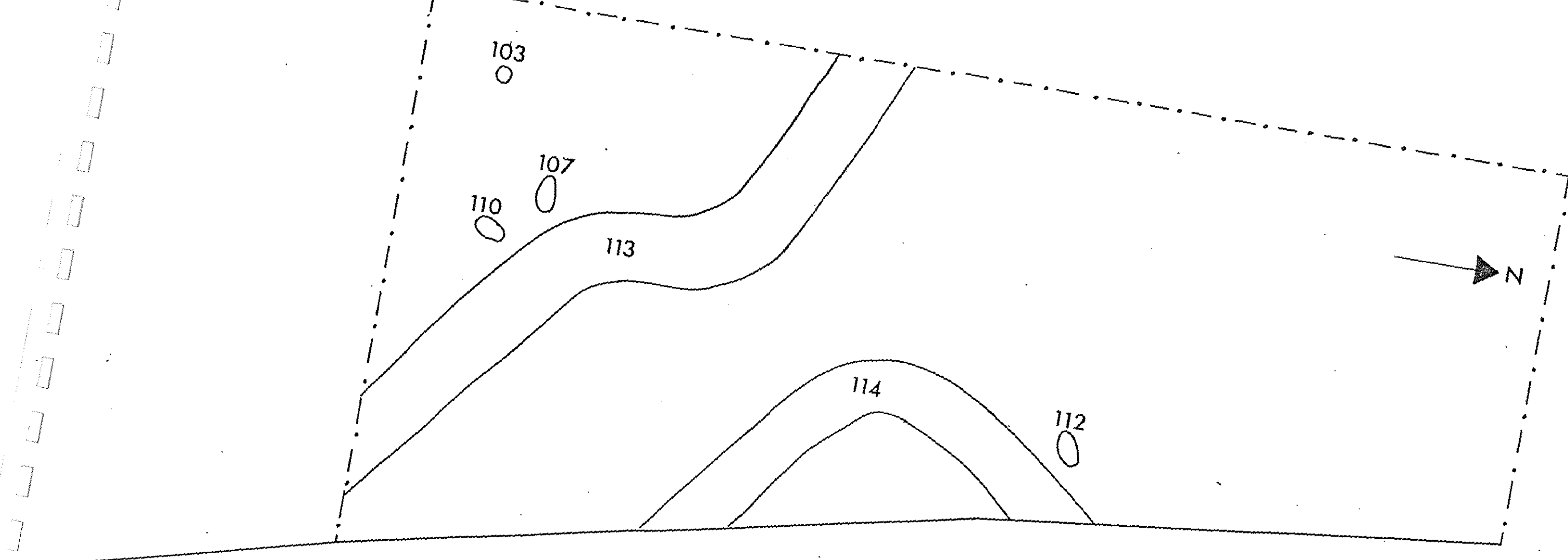


Fig.1 Valarian Way, Chells, Stevenage Site Location Plan





Pavement

Valerian Way

CREMATIONS

/114 ? /

Modern ditch

114 ?

