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**An Archaeological Evaluation of the Former Gasworks at Stockbridge Road,
Chichester**

P-96-003

**Stockbridge Road,
Chichester,
West Sussex**

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Introduction

Prior to proposed development of a parcel of land (centred NGR SU85940426) on the east side of Stockbridge Road, Chichester, Southern Archaeology were invited by McCarthy and Stone Ltd to carry out an assessment, through trial trenching, of the potential impact of the proposals on any underlying archaeological deposits. The excavations, which took place in the week 15-18/1/96, were undertaken by two temporary field workers directed John Wildman, a temporary field officer. Post-excavation processing and identification of finds, compilation of records, and background research continued into the following week under the direction of James Kenny, a member of the company's core staff. This report was compiled by JW and JK.

Topography, Archaeological and Historical Background

The site lies c.300m south-west of the site of the south gate of Roman and medieval Chichester. It is bounded by Stockbridge Road to the west, by buildings fronting onto Basin Road to the east, by a main railway line to the north and by a post office sorting office to the south. Roman cremation and inhumation burials, presumably part of a roadside cemetery, were discovered during the construction of the canal basin in 1819 (Salzman, 1953, 13) and an Iron Age/early Roman ditch, discovered during nearby excavations in 1975-6 (Down, 1981, 59-75), heads towards the site. In the Middle Ages the land belonged to the Vicars Choral and was leased out as garden plots (Morgan, 1992, 181). The gasworks was built in 1868.

Method

The field methodology followed, as closely as was possible, the requirements of a Brief for Field Evaluation (Ref. JRM GASWORKS 5.9.95) provided by SA as consultants to Chichester District Council. Four trenches (see Fig. 1) with a combined total length of 93m were positioned within the proposed building footprint. Strict adherence to the positions suggested in the brief was impossible due to the presence of an office building at the south-east corner, a diesel facility at the centre, three gasholder bases covering most of the rest of the southern half of the site and a variety of deep footings and service-pipes throughout. Because of the latter, trenches 1 and 3 were machine excavated using a 1m wide bucket and in all cases initial work had to be done with a toothed bucket. Where archaeological deposits were encountered, they were cleaned manually and a sample were excavated as specified in the Brief. Scale drawings were made of all such features, both in plan and section.

Results

Trench 1 (10m long and 1m wide)

Taken down to 1.2m in places, through tarmac and gravel make-up and the demolished remains of a benzene plant. Two modern service pipes and a large (15cm diameter) cast-iron pipe prevented deeper excavation.

Trench 2 (38m long and 1.5m wide)

Taken down to 1.2m through tarmac and gravel make-up to clean gravel. At its north end the trench exposed the remains of the walls and cellars of houses, the latter back-filled with gasworks waste containing modern polythene bags. The southern half exposed the very deep brick and concrete foundations of a gasholder and large areas of waste materials including coal and a tar-like substance. Beneath this the natural gravel was stained black through contamination.

Trench 3 (19m long and 1m wide)

This was positioned in an attempt to intercept the line of a ditch discovered in 1975-6. The only possible location was between two gasholder bases and a live gas main. Taken down to 1m through tarmac and gravel make-up to the brickearth subsoil. A very large feature (5) at the south end of the trench contained layers of dark yellowish-brown brickearth and light brownish grey flinty clay. Although the presence of a gas main, an old service pipe and a large modern pit made excavation and interpretation difficult, the feature seems to be part of a U-shaped ditch c.1.95m deep and in excess of 4m wide. The finds (see Appendix 1, context 5, below) indicate an AD second to third century date for the fill of the ditch. Its line (see Fig. 1) does not parallel that of the 1975-6 ditch, so it is either a separate feature or the same one on a different alignment.

Trench 4 (25m long and 1.5m wide)

Positioned to allow examination of what seemed from the results of trenches 1-3 to be the least disturbed area of the site. Taken down through tarmac and gravel make-up and a c.1m thick layer of disturbed topsoil to the surface of the brickearth subsoil at a depth of c.0.6m. Within a complex of modern test pits, footings and other disturbances several archaeological features were identified and a sample excavated (see Fig. 2 for a plan and sections). Excavated features comprised: a Roman ditch (8), five postholes of uncertain date (10, 12, 14, 16 & 18), three Medieval or late-Medieval pits (22, 30 & 32) two Medieval gullies (26 & 37), a Medieval or post-Medieval ditch (28) and a post-Medieval pit (24).

Discussion

It is clear from the features noted in trenches 3 and 4 that, despite severe disturbance to most of the site as a result of gas production, significant Roman and Medieval to post-Medieval deposits still survive, albeit probably only in a relatively small area in the vicinity of trench 4. The features probably represent Roman land divisions and occupation paralleling the road from the south gate to Dell Quay and later Medieval ribbon development.

References

- Down, A. (1981) *Chichester Excavations 5*
- Morgan, R. (1992) *Chichester, a Documentary History*
- Salzman, L.F. (1953) *The Victoria History of the County of Sussex*, Vol. 3.

Appendix 1: the Finds

5 (large ?ditch, trench 3)

11 small fragments of firecracked flint (c.250g), many large fragments of animal bone (c.1450g), 1 small fragment of vitrified pot, 14 sherds of Roman coarse greyware, including a Rowlands Castle everted rimsherd (AD 2nd-3rd).

8 (ditch, trench 4)

1 medium fragment of hard greensand stone, 2 small fragments of ?iron slag, 6 small fragment of animal bone, 25 sherds of Roman greyware, 1 sherd, of Roman ?samian ware, 1 sherd of Roman rusticated grey fineware (mid. AD 1st?).

14 (posthole, trench 4)

1 sherd of ?Roman fineware.

16 (posthole, trench 4)

1 small fragment of post-Medieval brick.

22 (pit, trench 4)

2 small fragments of Medieval or post-Medieval brick or tile, 13 sherds of Medieval or late-Medieval coarse earthenware.

24 (pit, trench 4)

1 small animal bone, 1 small fragment of coal, 1 small fragment of grey-blue slate, 1 oyster shell, 4 small fragments of post-Medieval brick or tile.

26 (gully, trench 4)

1 small animal bone, 2 sherds of ?Roman coarseware, 1 sherd of Medieval coarse earthenware (cooking pot).

28 (ditch, trench 4)

3 small animal bones, 1 small fragment of Medieval or post-Medieval peg-tile, 3 very small fragments of brick or tile, including 1 possibly Roman and 1 probably post-Medieval, 12 sherds of late Medieval coarse earthenware.

30 (pit, trench 4)

1 very small fragment of firecracked flint, 8 small fragments of animal bone, 1 oyster shell, 1 winkle shell, 7 small fragments of Medieval or post-Medieval brick or tile, 23 sherds of Medieval or late-Medieval coarse earthenware.

32 (pit, trench 4)

1 small fragment of ?Sussex Marble (very shelly limestone), 1 small fragment of vitrified material, 1 oyster shell, 3 small animal bones, 10 sherds of ?Medieval or late-Medieval coarse earthenware, 1 sherd of Roman coarse greyware.

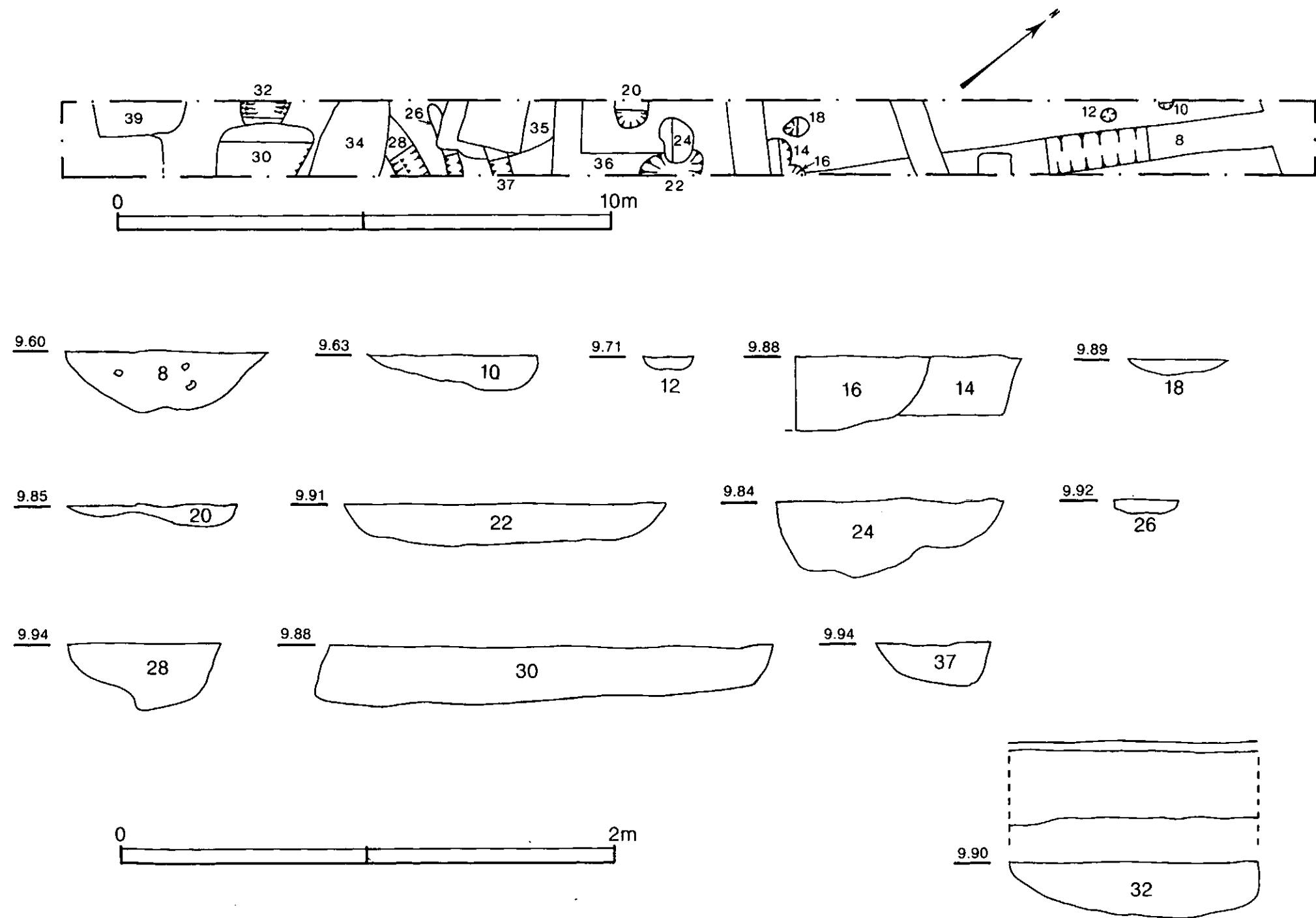
37 (gully, trench 4)

1 medium fragment of firecracked flint, 1 small fragment of ?cremated bone, 2 small fragments of animal bone, 2 small fragments of fired daub, 1 sherd of ?Roman or Medieval coarse greyware, 1 sherd of Medieval coarse earthenware.

In addition, pits 34, 35 & 39 and ?gully 36, though not excavated, appeared to contain Medieval pottery.

James Kenny
31/01/96

Fig. 2: trench 4, plan and sections



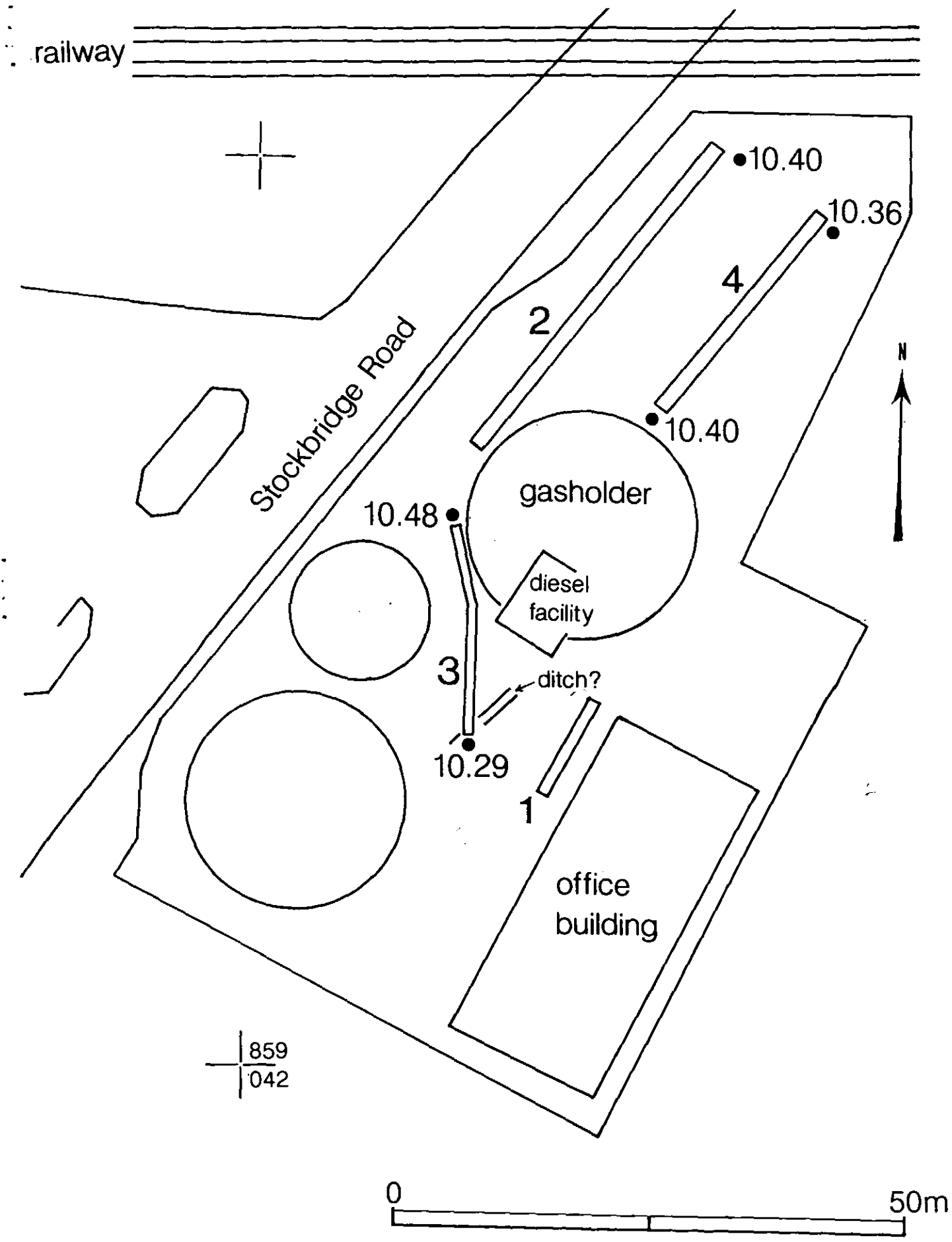


Fig. 1: site plan