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Interim Report on Trial Excavations at Castle Howard Road Malton
and
Recommendations for Further Work

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Interim Report on Trial Excavations at Castle Howard Road, Malton and Recommendations for Further Work

Introduction

Six weeks of trial excavations were undertaken on selected areas at the above site (Figs. 1-3), following recommendations submitted by MAP in August 1991 for the archaeological sampling of anomalies revealed by a Magnetometry Survey.

A full report of the Trial Excavations is in preparation. However, it was felt that a resume of the results of the excavation and recommendations for future work should be submitted to all parties as soon as possible, due to the pending detailed planning application for the site.

Excavation Results

Area 1 (Fig. 3)

This area consisted of a 10m square and was excavated to examine the assumed junction between anomalies J and K. Anomaly J showed on the Geophysical Survey as an east-west linear feature. Anomaly K consisted of a strong north-south magnetic anomaly.

The excavation showed that Anomaly K had been created by three parallel linear features of no great dimension, having maximum depths of 20cm and a similar maximum width. The fills of these parallel features contained recent pottery, coal, Fe objects and brick and tile fragments, which obviously registered strongly on the Magnetometry survey to the extent of suggesting rather more significant remains than were actually present.

Anomaly J was not present in the area examined, raising the possibility that the depth of the feature is variable across the site, perhaps having been removed by erosion or ploughing in certain areas.

Area 2 (Fig. 3)

This area, 3m wide and 11m long, was stripped in order to reveal Anomaly J. Excavation showed this feature to exist as a linear ditch with a flat-based V profile, measuring c.1.2m at the top and surviving to a depth of 0.5m. No traces of a bank remained on either side of the ditch. No dateable material was recovered.

Area 3 (Fig. 3)

A trench 4m wide and 16m in length was excavated over this Anomaly D, which was originally interpreted as representing a trackway bounded by ditches on either side. Excavation revealed two linear features, on a parallel east-west alignment, separated by a 'spine' of limestone bedrock c.3m wide.

The northernmost ditch had a width at the top of 3.5m and a depth of c.1m. The profile was a broad, flat-based V and the fills were stony.

The southern feature had markedly less stony fills. The width at the top was 4m and the depth 0.8m. The convex base showed two parallel incised lines at either edge. It is certain that a harsh erosive process would be necessary to produce these features in the limestone bedrock, which would seem to represent ruts created by wheeled traffic.

Finds were limited to a number of calcite-gritted (Romano-British) from the upper fills, which suggest an Iron Age or Romano-British date for the ditch/hollow-way.

The implication is that the northern ditch was the earlier feature, perhaps representing a land boundary with a bank, no longer in existence, which silted into the ditch giving rise to the stony fills. The southern feature would appear to represent a hollow-way that became established parallel to the ditch.

Area 4 (Fig. 3)

The purpose of Area 4 was to examine a number of amorphous geophysical anomalies (Anomalies F, G, H and I). Excavation showed the anomalies to represent the distinction between solid limestone bedrock and loamy material occupying the top of a large hollow, which obscured a phase of archaeological activity below. Therefore, the form of the geophysical anomalies does not relate to the archaeological features.

The origin of the hollow is as yet unknown. However, it is clear that there is considerable Romano-British activity in the vicinity; several hundred Romano-British sherds were found in two segments of a large feature (ditch or quarry?) towards the south of the area. This large feature also contained a human cremation burial in an urn, possibly Romano-British in date, although vessel and bone have yet to be assessed.

The hollow was crossed at a later date by two parallel north-east – south-west linear features, which would seem to represent furrows from a Rigg and Furrow field system. Finds from the furrows confirm a medieval date.

Proposals for Future Work

It can be seen from the results of the Trial Excavations outlined above, that further archaeological excavation is called for in those areas to be affected by the proposed development. The following programme is proposed:

- (i) The archaeological examination of the ditch/hollow-way, Anomaly D, where intercepted by plots 78, 79, 101, 102 and the roadbed (Fig. 4). A c.50m length of these features should be revealed and sufficient of the fills excavated to give more information on the 'ruts' and provide extra dating evidence. In addition, environmental analysis of the fills should supply important information concerning the environmental history of the area.
- (ii) The further examination of the vicinity of the large hollow in area 4, Anomaly F, with a view to establishing the extent and origin of the large ditch/quarry. Also to determine the extent of the cremation cemetery implied by the occurrence of the cremation located in the Trial Excavation. It is noted that this area will form a turning circle under the available development plan (Fig. 4) and destruction of archaeological deposits is to be anticipated by the associated sewers and other service trenches.
- (iii) The excavation of a length of the east-west linear ditch revealed in Area 2, Anomaly J, where the ditch is to be intercepted by the road bed and plot 95 (Fig. 4). Of priority would be the recovery of dating evidence for this feature.
- (iv) It is further proposed that a Watching Brief be conducted on the installation of the roads and sewers in the southern sector of the development area, which had not been subject to geophysical survey, in order to establish the possible presence of archaeological features. The Watching Brief may in turn lead to further excavation in this area. From an archaeological point of view, the most satisfactory method would be to strip the topsoil from the area of the road beds with a machine with a rear-acter and toothless blade, to the surface of the bedrock, or to the point where archaeological deposits occur. The area could thus be examined in advance of the development work, and it is noted that this strategy had the affect of rapidly advancing the necessary archaeological work on the Watching Brief at West Lodge Gardens.
- (v) A full programme of environmental sampling, including land snail analysis, should be carried out on excavated deposits.

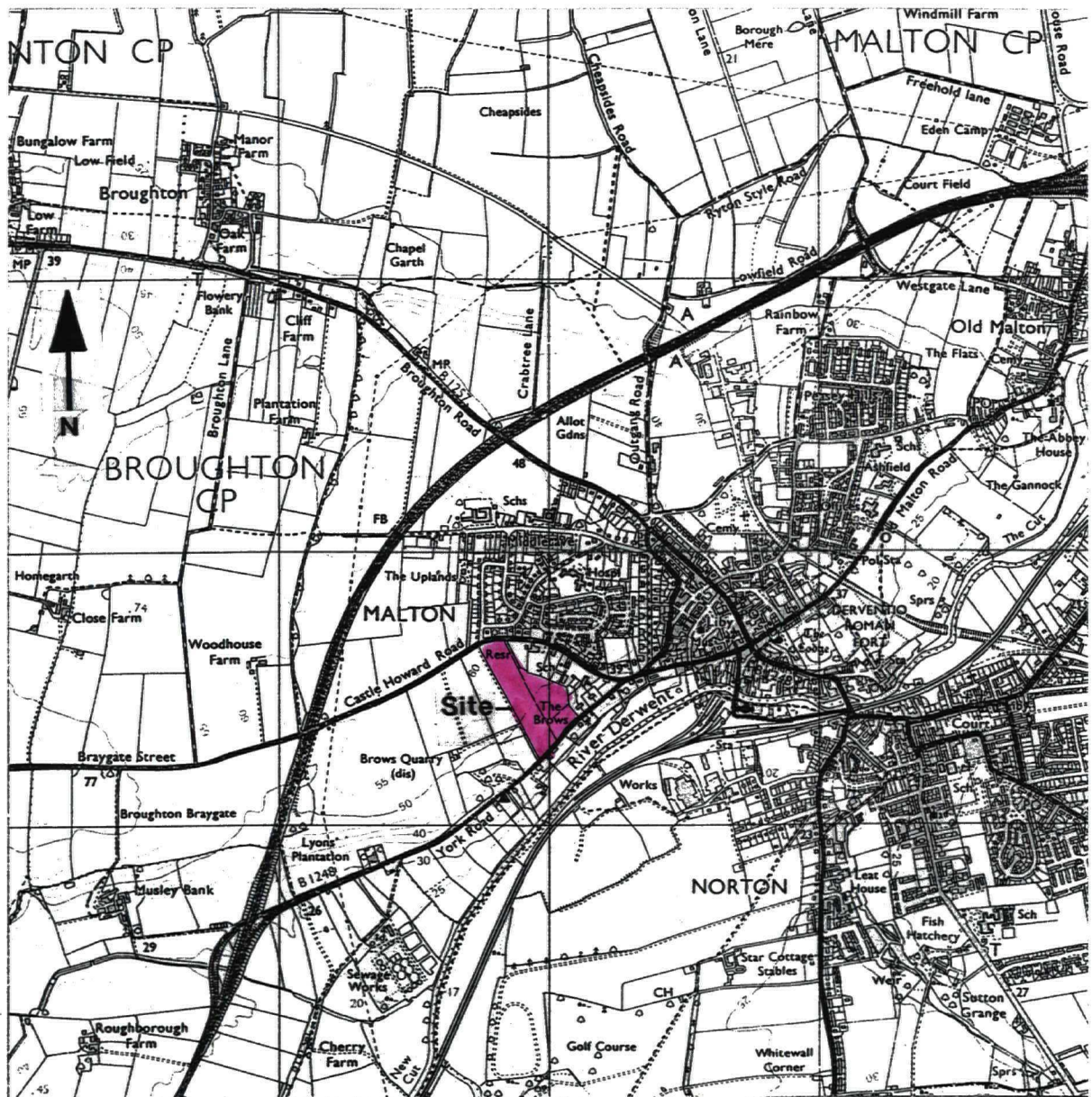


Fig. 1 Site Location

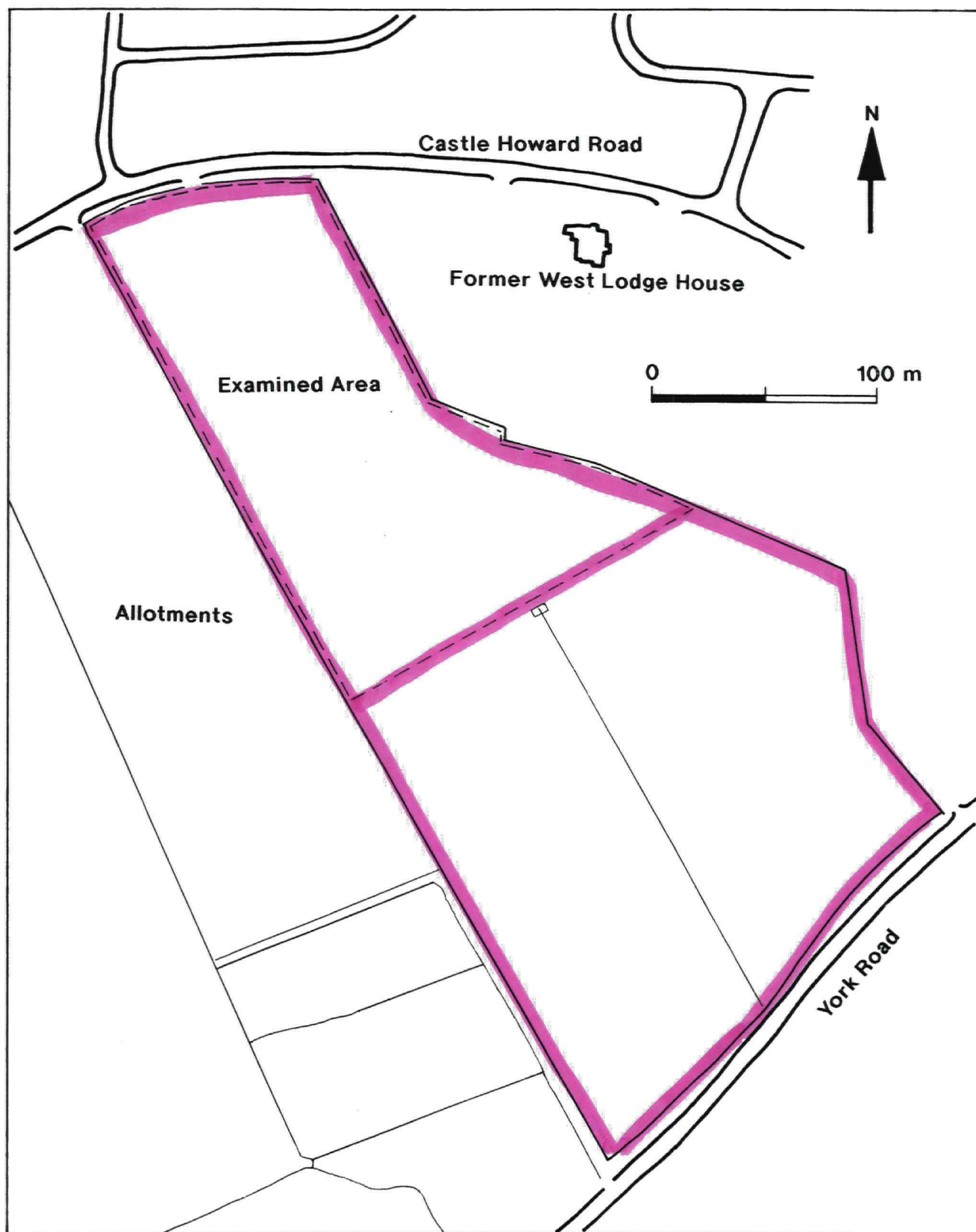
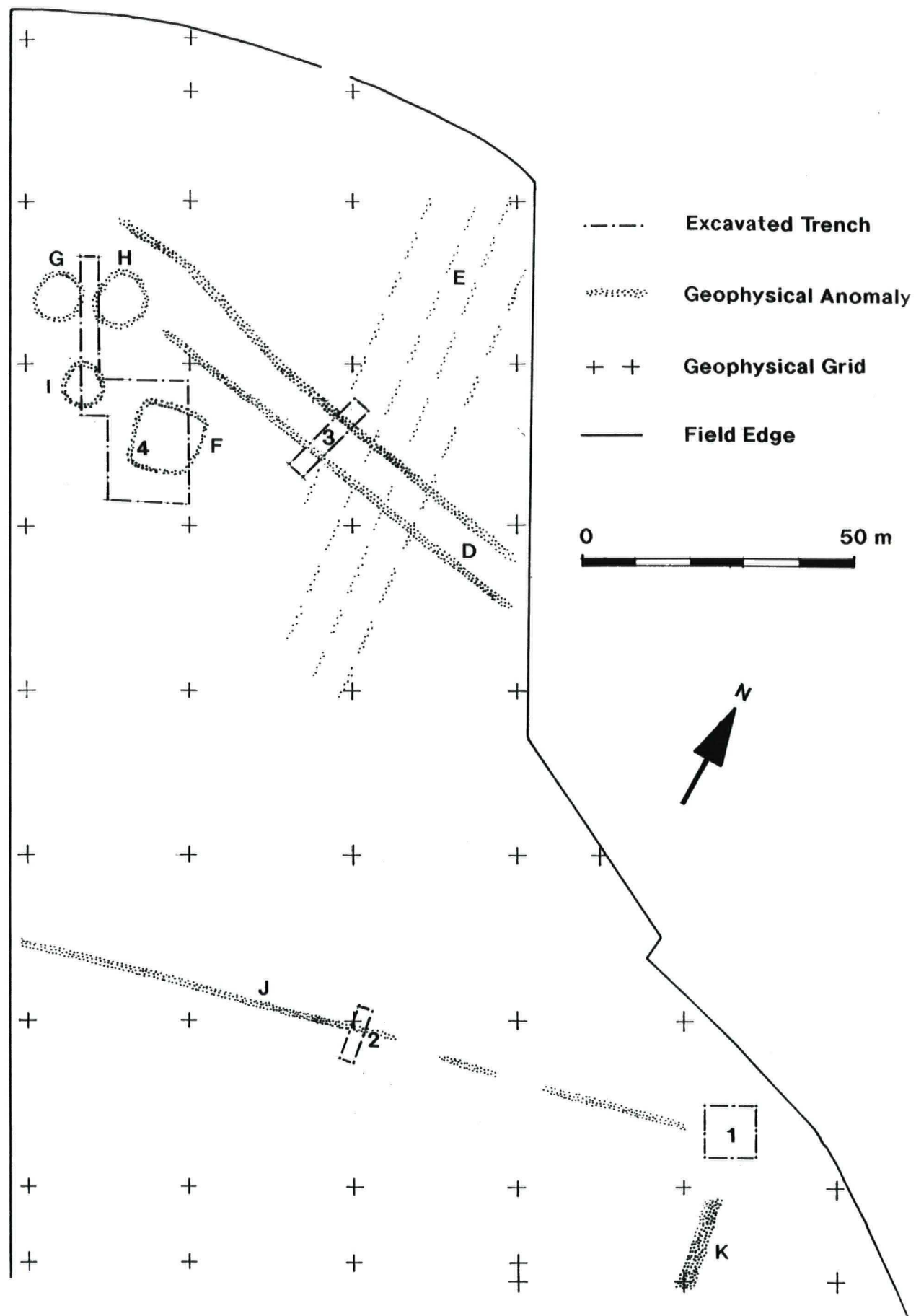


Fig 2. Location of Examined Area

Fig. 3 Location of Trenches and Geophysical Anomalies



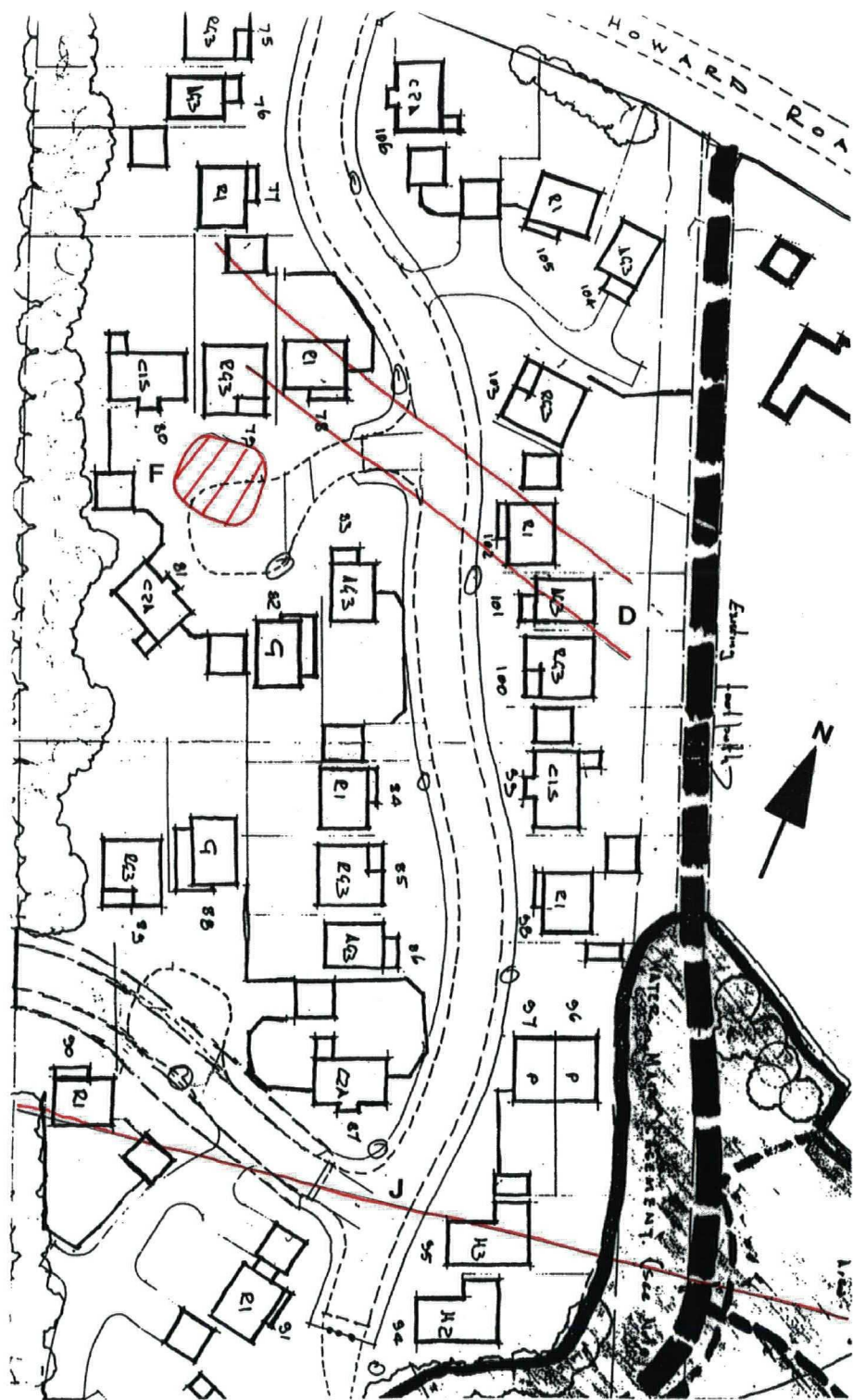


Fig. 4 Proposed Development and Geophysical/Archaeological Anomalies

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