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An Earthwork Survey
at
Marton-in-the-Forest, North Yorkshire.

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Introduction

This report covers the survey of the earthworks present in the area to be affected by the conversion of a listed barn to residential use, with the associated erection of a stable block and excavation of drains and septic tank, at Marton-in-the-Forest

The site lies in a pasture field in the parish of Marton-cum-Moxby, North Yorkshire, SE 6025 6821 (Fig 1). The site is on a low, east-west aligned ridge of glacial origin, facing southwards towards the River Foss. The altitude is c55m AOD

The fields immediately to the west (OS parcel 1912) and the north (OS parcel 3118) (Fig 2) of the site are scheduled as part of the shrunken medieval village of Marton (SAM NY 729). The implication from this scheduling is that the field in which the stables are to be built (OS parcel 3400) was not considered at the time to be of the same archaeological significance as the scheduled areas

An aerial photograph (CUC AQQ81) elucidates the earthworks in the vicinity of the site. The field to the north of the site (OS parcel 3118) shows an east-west hollow-way with ?house/building platforms to the north of the hollow-way and possibly to the south of it. The field to the west of the site (OS parcels 1912 and 1216) shows a series of linear features, perhaps the boundaries of a series of enclosures. The north west corner of OS parcel 3400, in which the survey was conducted, appears to bear a number of east to west linear features, adjacent to the modern road, to the south, ridge and furrow representing medieval cultivation runs on a north to south alignment

It is clear from the close proximity of the scheduled areas, and from aerial photographic information, that the site had archaeological potential, and so a scheme of archaeological works was called for by the Archaeology Section, NYCC. Given that earthworks existed on the area to be affected by the erection of the stables and excavation of drainage trenches, an earthwork survey was proposed as a method of precisely locating any features of potential archaeological significance, and to assess their importance

Accordingly, an earthwork survey was carried out on 27th July 1992, by the writer with the assistance of K Grieveson. The work was funded by the client, Mr R S Riley

Survey Methods

The site was assessed by careful visual examination in the field in order to identify and isolate the earthwork features

Baselines were established in each of the areas to be surveyed, and a grid surveyed from them using a theodolite. The limits of the earthworks were measured from the grid by off-setting using tapes, and the results were directly plotted at 1:100. The area surveyed exceeded that to be affected by the proposed stables and drainage works, in order to make clear, as much as was feasible, the form and arrangement of the earthworks.

Survey Results

The earthworks were generally very low (<0.5m), and hence not all were well-defined. Two recently disturbed areas were noted; the northern example probably representing erosion around a cattle-feeder, the southern would appear to be a pipe trench. In addition, a tree was situated on a low mound.

In OS parcel 1912, Feature A, a platform-like feature was located (Figs 4 and 5). 'A' had dimensions of 10m north to south and 5m east to west. The height was 0.5m. The form of this feature is accentuated on the west side by a cobbled trackway leading from the gate to the east of the barn. To the east of 'A', a broad, deep ditch ('B'), also emphasises the feature.

The possibility exists that 'A' represents the remains of a building platform, mutilated by the aforesaid trackway and ditch. Another interpretation is that 'A' represents a rick or stack base for the storage of harvested crops prior to thrashing and storage in the barn alongside.

Feature B (Figs 4 and 5) exists as a linear feature on a north to south alignment. The ditch has a width of 6m, a length of 23m and a depth of 0.5m. The existing hedge is situated in the base of this feature. 'B' would apparently represent a boundary feature, in effect a precursor to the modern hedge.

The remainder of the surveyed features were located in OS parcel 3400 to the east.

Associated with ditch 'B', and on its eastern side, was a 0.2m high bank, Feature C (Fig 4). The bank has a length of 18m and a height on the east side of 0.15m. 'C' would appear to be a bank directly related to ditch 'B', perhaps an original hedge bank, or caused by the upcast of material from 'B' during its excavation or cleaning.

Adjacent to the modern road, an apparent platform, Feature D (Fig 4), is separated from bank 'C' by a shallow linear feature, Feature E (presumably a recent drainage feature). 'D' is 8m east to west in size, 4m north to south and c0.25m high. 'D' is accentuated by ditch 'B' on the west side, and is separated from platform-like feature 'G' by a shallow linear feature, Feature F (5m long, 5m wide and 0.50m deep).

The apparent platform, Feature G (Figs 4 and 5), is in excess of 7m wide north to south, and 20m long east to west. The height of this feature is c0.20m.

A shallow linear feature, Feature H (Figs 4 and 5), runs parallel to the southern edge of 'G' for a distance of c12m. The height of this feature is approximately 0.1m, with a breadth of 3m.

Another linear feature, Feature I (Figs 4 and 5), exists as a low bank running parallel with 'H' for a distance of 23m east to west, as far as bank 'C'. The maximum height of this feature, 0.25m, is along the northern edge, but it is much lower, at 0.05m, on the southern side.

Feature J (Figs 4 and 5) runs on an east to west alignment at the southern margin of the surveyed area, roughly parallel to T 'J' exists as a terraced feature with a height of 0.35m 'J' runs towards the present field gate, but is separated from it by hollow 'K' The probability is that 'J' represents a former trackway leading to the forerunner of the present field gate

Feature K (Fig 4) is a linear hollow, c14m long south-west to north-east, and 5m wide north-west to south-east The depth is 0.20m 'K' was almost certainly formed by erosion at the present field gate, probably caused by the massing of stock at this point

Discussion

It can be seen that, with the exception of ditch/bank 'B' and 'C' and trackways 'J' and 'K', the earthwork features on the site do not conform to any readily interpretable form; this in itself might reflect a degree of disturbance to the site. Caution must be applied here as to the interpretation of features which are fairly insubstantial, and in the case of 'A' and 'D', somewhat altered by later processes.

The 'platform' features 'A', 'D' and 'G' might possibly represent house/building areas, in which case 'A' and 'D' might represent part of the same whole, albeit in mutilated form. However, the major focus for the occupation of the shmnken village of Marton lies in the scheduled OS parcel 3118 to the north, adjacent to a hollow-way in that field. For that reason, it is probable 'A', 'D' and 'G' are not related to medieval buildings, but perhaps to the rear of crofts associated with such buildings.

The linear features 'H' and 'T' are apparently earlier than the bank and ditch 'B' and 'C', and have the general appearance of ridge and furrow. However, the ridge and furrow shown in the aerial photograph discussed above, clearly runs at 90 degrees to 'H' and 'T', on a north to south alignment, calling for an alternative interpretation. It could be that 'H' and 'T' represent a headland at the limit of medieval ploughing.

The terraced feature, 'J' is interpretable as a former track leading from Marton Priory Farm to the existing gateway. It is also possible that this feature, rather than 'H' or 'T', functioned as the headland at the limit of the north to south ridge and furrow, and also as a trackway.

Recommendations

From the above discussion it can be seen that none of the earthworks on site can be ascribed to medieval activity with any degree of certainty. In any case, the fact that the area was not included in the scheduled monument, calls into question the significance of the site as a whole.

The overlay (Fig 3) to the earthwork plan (Fig 4) indicates the position of the proposed stables, drainage trenches and septic tank. The stable block does not directly affect the potentially most significant features, 'platforms' 'A', 'D' and 'G'. In any case it is understood that the structure will be founded on a concrete raft, minimising any disturbance to below-ground deposits.

The proposed mini sewage treatment plant and associated drainage trench will cut through 'platforms' 'A', 'D' and 'G'. The drainage trench will be in the order of 0.6m wide, and if it is kept as close to the hedge as possible, 1m north of the indicated line, 'platform' 'A' would not be subjected to a great degree of disturbance. Potentially more destructive is the excavation of the pit for the mini sewage plant in the position indicated (Fig 3). It is proposed that by moving the plant to a point c2m east of the indicated position, to the centre of ditch 'B' (a course of action already mooted by Mr Riley), any disturbance to features 'A' and 'D' will be minimised.

In conclusion, the following factors are observed:

- (a) The raft construction of the stable block should ensure that ground disturbance is kept to a minimum, and will avoid 'platforms' 'A', 'D' and 'G'
- (b) The course of the drainage trench should be kept as close to the east-west hedge bordering the present road as possible, so as to avoid 'platform' 'A'
- (c) The proposed mini sewage treatment plant should be located centrally to ditch 'B', again causing a minimum disturbance to 'A' and also 'D'. (It is understood that an unconditional Planning Consent for a mini sewage treatment plant in this area was passed by Hambleton District Council on 2nd February 1990, and is current to 1st February 1995)

It is accordingly put forward that any ground disturbance associated with the erection of the stables, and the excavation of the drainage trenches and pit for the mini sewage treatment plant should proceed with provision for an archaeological Watching Brief. It is understood that a similar provision has been put forward to observe the limited ground disturbances in the scheduled area.

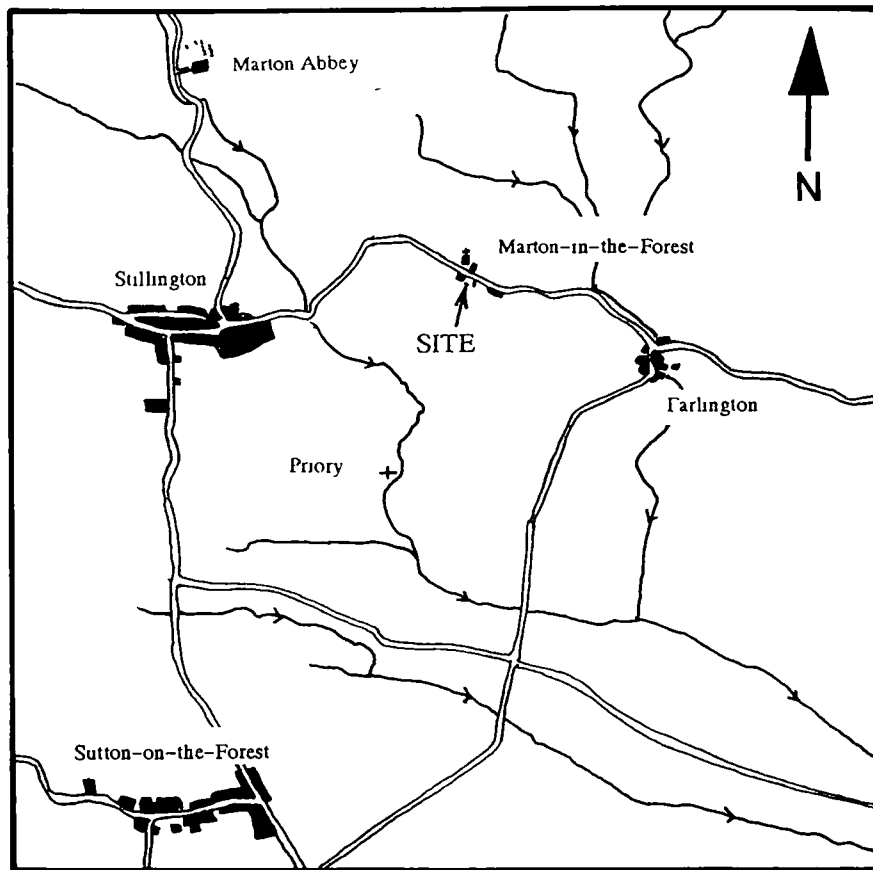


Figure 1 – Site Location Map Scale 1:50000

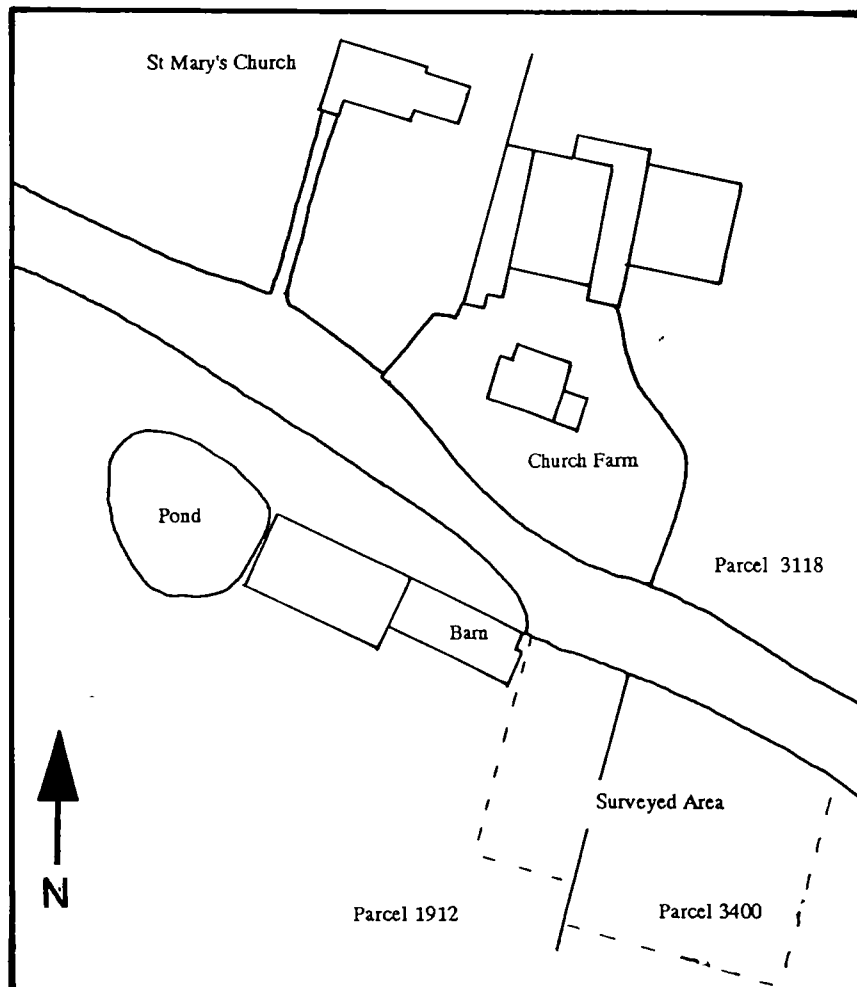


Figure 2 – Site Environs Scale 1:1000

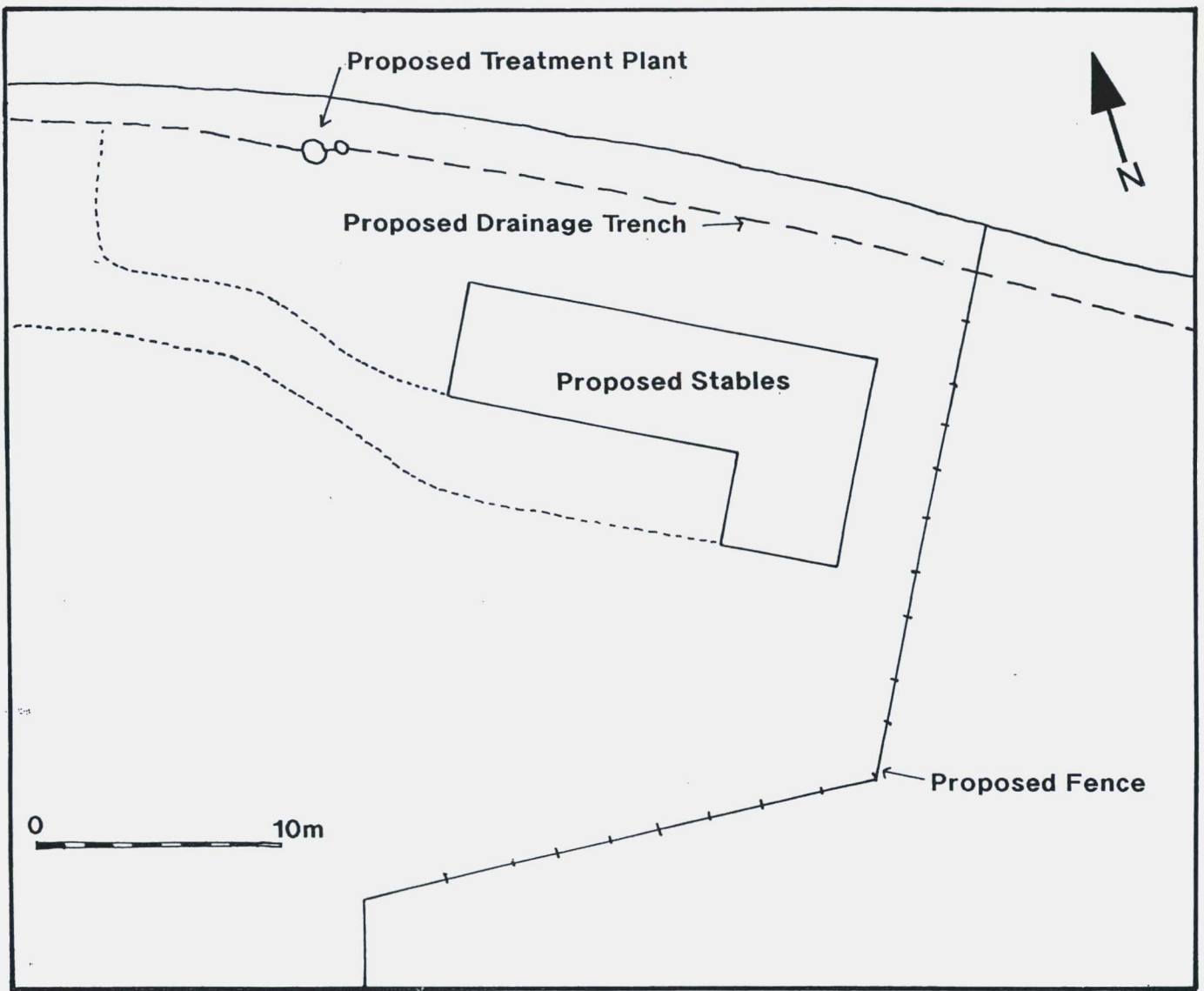


Figure 3 – Proposed Development.

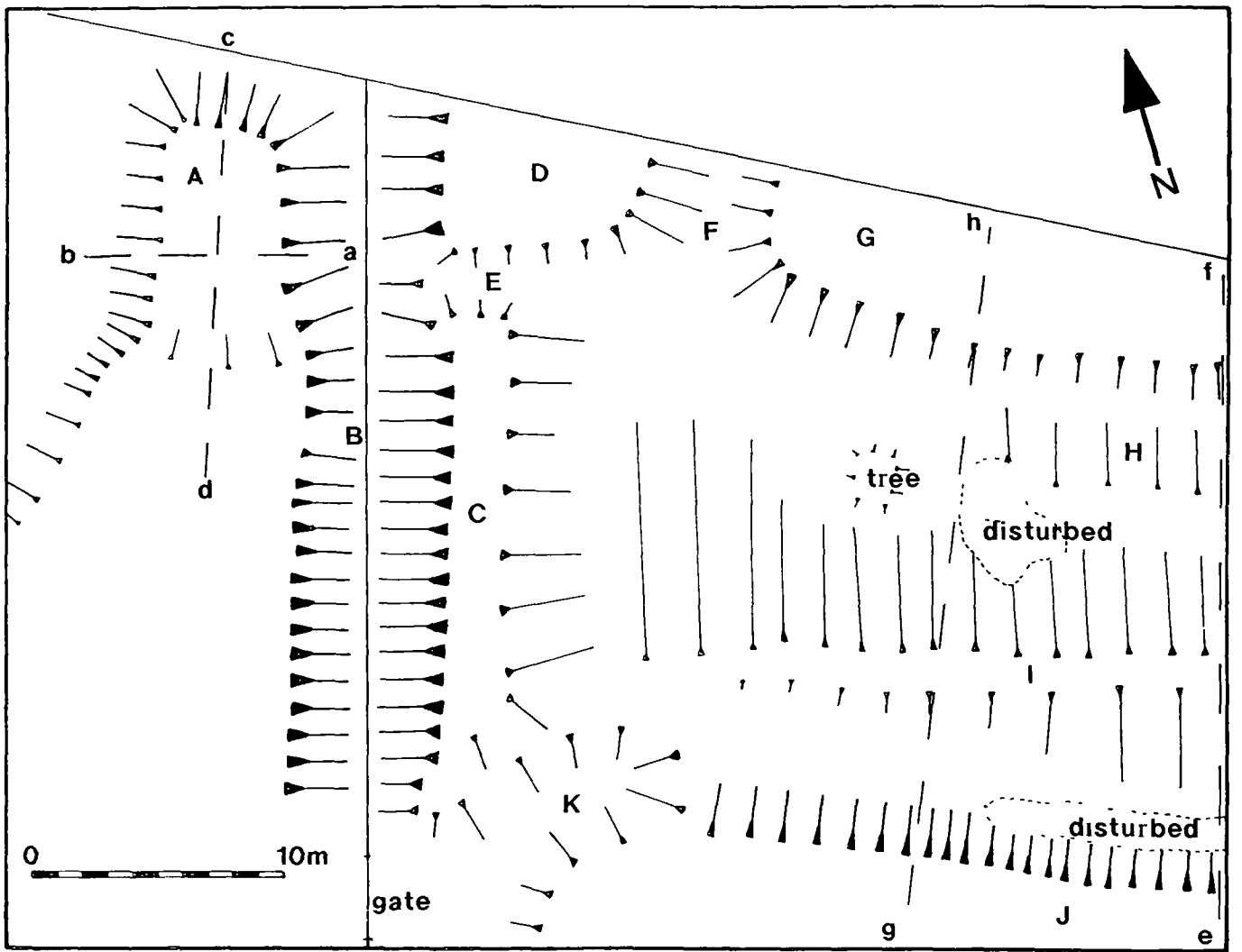


Figure 4 - Plan of Earthworks

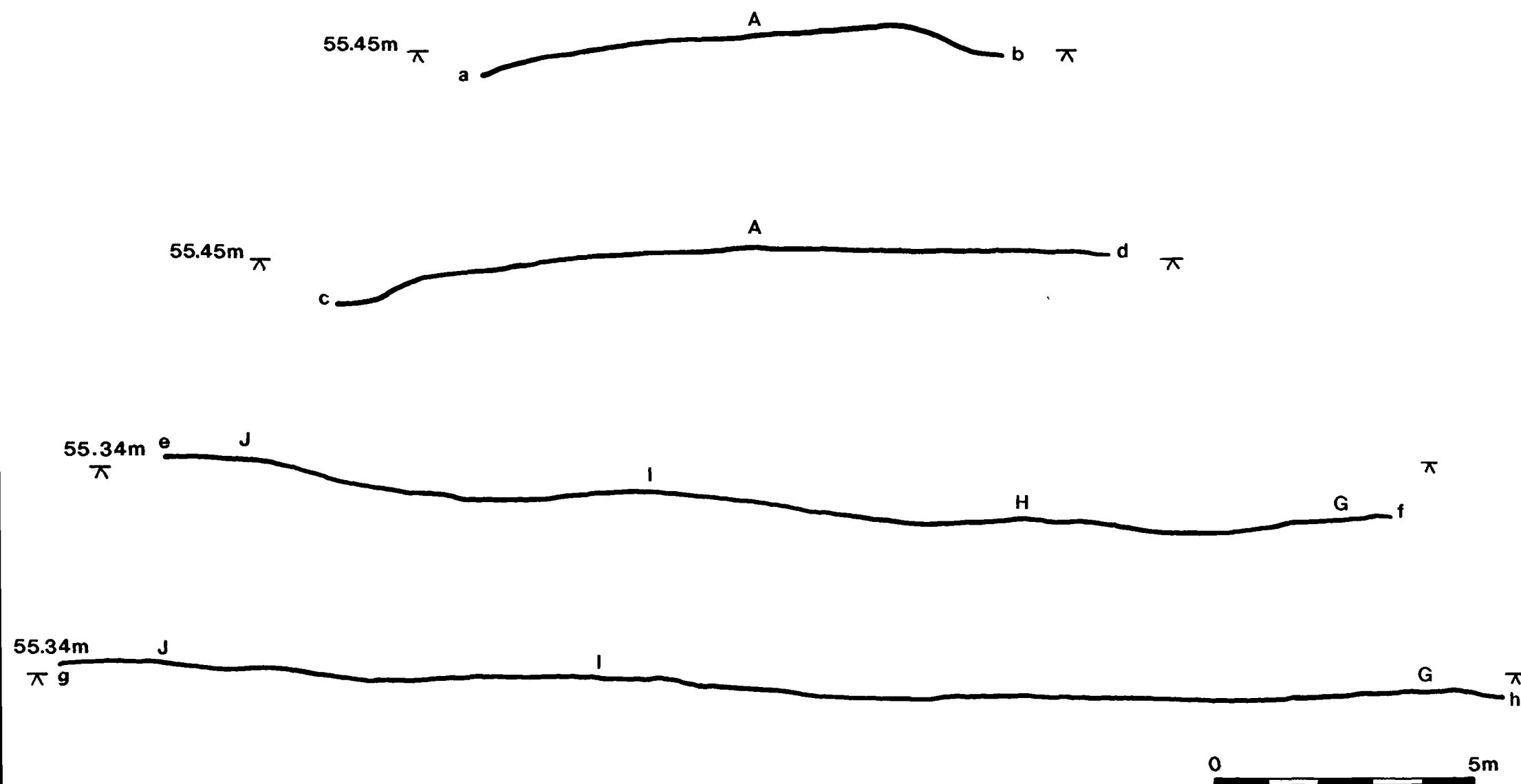


Figure 5 - Profiles through Earthworks