

**DEANS COURT LANE  
WIMBORNE MINSTER  
An archaeological Evaluation  
1990**

by A. E. Jones

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Figure 1A Wimborne and the surrounding area

Figure 1B Wimborne and the site (from Woodward 1984, figure 1)

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### REPORT

#### 1.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation on land to the east and west of Deans Court Lane, Wimborne Minster (Figure 1A), and their archaeological implications. In September 1990 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by the Radley House Partnership to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of a proposed development.

The evaluation site is located to the south of Wimborne town centre, and north of the Deans Court estate (Figure 1B). It includes Number 7 Deans Court Lane to the north-east, the grounds of the North Lodge to the south, and the meadow west of Deans Court Lane (Figure 1C).

The aims of the evaluation were:

- (1) To determine the extent of any archaeological constraint which may affect the design of the proposed development. In particular it was intended to investigate the postulated line of an early medieval defensive circuit (Penn 1980 and Woodward 1984, figure 1), and the possible north-eastward continuation of the medieval suburb of The Leaze, uncovered by archaeological excavation to the south-west of the proposed development site (Field 1973).
- (2) To assess the quality, survival and significance of any archaeological deposits.
- (3) To determine the need for any further archaeological response.

#### 2.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

##### 2.1: Wimborne

The medieval settlement core of the town of Wimborne developed on a gravel terrace, at the confluence of the rivers Allen and Stour, close to the line of known prehistoric trackways and Roman roads which converged on Badbury, 2km north of the town (Figure 1B). A Roman legionary fort has been located at Lake Gates, 1.5km west of Wimborne, but there is little evidence for settled Roman occupation from the area of the town itself (Woodward 1984).

The post-Roman town was located on important routes of communication leading to major urban centres at Poole, Christchurch and Shaftesbury. A double monastery was founded here before 705 AD, and the establishment of a royal residence in the town around 900 AD is attested by references in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Penn 1980, 121-7). The topographical evidence for defensive circuits of late Saxon date has been summarised by Woodward (1984, 59 and figure 1). Rescue excavations in the town centre between 1975-1980 (Woodward 1984) failed to locate major structures or deep occupation deposits dating before 1200 AD. Excavations on the site of the former Grammar School, King Street, just to the west of Deans Court Lane led to the recovery of pottery of 10th- or 11th-century date, and evidence for a pre-medieval timber building (Graham 1985), but no traces of medieval or earlier boundary ditches were located. This information may suggest that the Saxon settlement nucleus was restricted to

the area of the Minster church itself and its present churchyard.

Wimborne may have been a small market town at the time of the Domesday Survey. The medieval town was divided into two manors, held by the Dean and the Lord of Kingston Lacy, each holding separate markets by the early 13th century.

The Dean's market (first mentioned in 1218) may have provided the economic impetus for the development of a planned suburb at The Leaze, south-west of the town (Figure 1B), established around 1200. Excavations at the Leaze identified a main street flanked by alleyways containing dwellings, developing from peasant crofts to larger units incorporating workrooms or shops (Field 1973). The Leaze was probably abandoned in the 14th century, possibly as a result of the Black Death.

## **2.2: The site (Figure 1C)**

The site is bordered to the south by the grounds of Deans Court, to the west of the buildings of the old Queen Elizabeth School, and the west boundary is formed by the river Allen. The modern ground surface slopes gently towards the River to the east, and more imperceptibly towards Deans Court to the south. The line of Deans Court Lane lies slightly to the east of the inner line of the medieval town defences postulated by Penn (Penn 1980).

Eight trenches were opened to enable an extensive examination of the area to be affected by the proposed development. In the north-east of the site three trenches (Trenches II-IV) were excavated in the rear garden of Number 7 Deans Court Lane; to the south three trenches (Trenches V-VII) were opened in overgrown ornamental gardens to the rear of the North Lodge. Two further trenches (Trenches I and VIII) were excavated in a meadow west of Deans Court Lane. Trenches II, III (each measuring 2m by 2m) and IV were wholly excavated by hand, while a mechanical excavator was employed to remove modern overburden from the remaining trenches under archaeological control. In the event some repositioning of the proposed trenches

was necessary to avoid live services and damage to mature trees.

In each trench the priority was the definition of archaeological features from their upper levels, coupled with the agreed limited excavation of features. The information recovered through this approach is considered to be adequate for a basic understanding of the nature of the archaeological deposits. Recording was by means of pro-forma recording sheets, supplemented by plans, sections and photographs which are held in the archive.

## **3.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS (Figure 2)**

### **3.1: The north-east area (Trenches II, III and IV)**

In Trench II the earliest deposit excavated (at 60.2m AOD) was a dark brown silt sand (2003), cut by a roughly circular, steep-sided pit (F200) extending beyond the trench to the east and south, containing alternate tipped layers of soil and flint nodules, broken brick and tile (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005). Up to 0.3m of modern garden soil (2000) sealed the pit F200, and 2003.

The earliest layer located in Trench III (at 59.8m AOD) was a moist, dark brown clay silt (3002), increasing in wetness with depth, sealed by 0.4m of mid-brown clay silt (3001), containing brick and shattered flint nodules, overlain by modern garden soil (3000). No archaeological features could be defined in this trench.

In Trench IV (measuring 1m by 1m), the earliest deposit was a dark brown clay silt (4003), sealed by a lighter silt clay (4002). The latter deposit was cut by a linear gully (F400) 0.3m deep, aligned approximately north-south, and sealed by 0.3m of modern garden soil (4000).

### **3.2: The south-east area (Trenches V, VI and VII)**

In Trench V excavation ceased at the upper horizon of a fine grey-white silt (5004: at 59.4m AOD), cut by a gully (F500), 0.7m wide, filled with a sticky black organic silt (5005). A dark

brown clay-silt (5002/3), 0.8m deep, sealed F500 and 5004. Above was a dump of broken brick and creamy mortar (5001: also seen in Trenches VI and VII) which was overlain by the modern topsoil (5000).

In Trench VI the earliest level investigated (at 59.3m AOD) was a light grey silt sand (6004) into which was pressed a group of sharpened timber stakes (F600), 0.1m in width. Sealing 6004 was an organic clay-silt (6003) capped by mid-brown organic silt (6002). Above was a spread of broken brick and creamy mortar (6001: also seen in Trenches V and VII) sealed by modern topsoil (6000), and cut by a recent sewer pipe (F601).

In Trench VII the earliest deposit located (at 59.7m AOD) was a mixed, dark brown silt clay (7002), containing flint, brick fragments and charcoal, sealed by a mid-brown silt clay (7001) flecked with mortar, and cut by a steep-sided pit (F700: only partly within the trench). The pit was sealed by a spread of mortar and broken brick (7001: also seen in Trenches V and VI) and overlain by modern topsoil (7000).

### 3.3: The west area (Trenches I and VIII)

In Trench I natural gravel was located at 59.86m AOD (0.7m below the modern surface), sealed by a localised lens of orange-brown clay silt (1002). This was overlain by a dark brown silt clay (1001), containing flint nodules and flecked with charcoal and brick, below the modern topsoil (1000). No archaeological features could be defined in this trench.

Trench VIII East measured 10m in length and joined Trench VIII West at an angle of approximately 70 degrees. Natural gravel was exposed for a length of 4m, 0.3m below the modern surface (at 60.7m AOD), at the eastern end of Trench VIII East. The gravel was cut by a heavily-truncated, roughly circular post hole (F802), 0.1m deep and 0.15m across. West of F802 the natural gravel was cut away by a group of indistinguishable, shallow quarry pits, which extended over the remainder of Trench VIII East, and contained a homogeneous fill of dark brown silt clay (8002) flecked with charcoal and mortar.

This quarry pit infill was also exposed for most of the length of Trench VIII West. It was not possible to distinguish the fills of individual pits in this trench, because of their homogeneity, the narrow width of the evaluation trenches, and the limits placed on the excavation of features.

Following the infilling of the quarry pits, an irregular clay outhouse floor (8004) was laid over 8002. This floor extended beyond the trench to the west, and was cut to the south by a vertically-sided service trench (F800) filled with redeposited gravel (8005). A dark brown silt clay (8001) sealed 8004, F800 and 8002, and was cut by a shallow pit (F801) containing demolition debris (8006), below the modern topsoil (8000).

## 4.0: DATING AND DISCUSSION

Natural river gravel was only located in the western site area (Trenches I and VIII). Only one surviving feature, a heavily-truncated post hole (F802), may pre-date the extensive quarrying of natural gravel identified in Trench VIII. The quarrying and infill of the various quarry pits probably took place over a limited time-span, and the fills contained post-medieval pottery with a *terminus* date in the 18th century. Later, a clay-floored outhouse was constructed over the infilled pits.

Natural gravel was not contacted in the north-east area of the site, because of the limits placed on the depth of excavation. No evidence of any structure was found in this area, which is shown as open land behind a cottage (RCHM 1975, 87, number (14)) fronting on Deans Court Lane on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1887. The demolition debris in the pit (F200) may derive from the demolition of this cottage. The upper levels comprise 0.3m of modern garden soil. The earliest deposits contained a few sherds of redeposited medieval pottery, and a quantity of post-medieval pottery with a date in the 18th century.

The earliest deposits excavated in Trenches V and VI were water-lain silts deposited on the western bank of the River Allen, drained by a narrow gully (F500) exposed in Trench V. The dark organic silts deposited by frequent flooding

are sealed by an extensive spread of demolition material, possibly derived from former modifications to the North Lodge.

The evidence from this evaluation may be compared with observations in advance of development at the nearby Grammar School Lane (Hall 1986), to the west of the site. The absence of medieval structural evidence there suggested that the area was behind the contemporary street frontages, and the main activity recorded here was the dumping of 'night soil'.

Any medieval structures within the Deans Court site may have been scoured-out by gravel quarrying, or buried deeply beneath later dumped soils or water-borne silts. The virtual absence of medieval pottery from later contexts may also suggest only limited activity here in the medieval period.

## **5.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS**

### **5.1: Implications**

This evaluation exercise has failed to locate any major surviving structures or important archaeological deposits within 1.2m of the modern surface. Given the limited potential of the proven archaeology, and the limitations placed on the extent and depth of excavation, it is necessary to consider what further archaeological response to the development proposals may be appropriate.

### **5.2: Proposals**

It is proposed that the further archaeological response take the following form:

#### **5.2.1: Watching brief**

If the development proceeds, it is recommended that an archaeological presence in the form of a watching brief be maintained during the groundworks, in liaison with the developer. This will enable the identification and recording of any archaeological features so uncovered, and permit the examination of areas not available for evaluation. In particular, the area immediately adjoining the west bank of the river Allen may merit examination to determine the survival here of any (possibly waterlogged) medieval quayside structures.

#### **5.2.2: The North Lodge**

The interior and exterior elevations of the North Lodge, an important dwelling of early-18th-century origin (RCHM 1975, 87, number (15)), should be recorded by an interpretative photographic survey before the conversion and incorporation of the building into the development.

## **6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

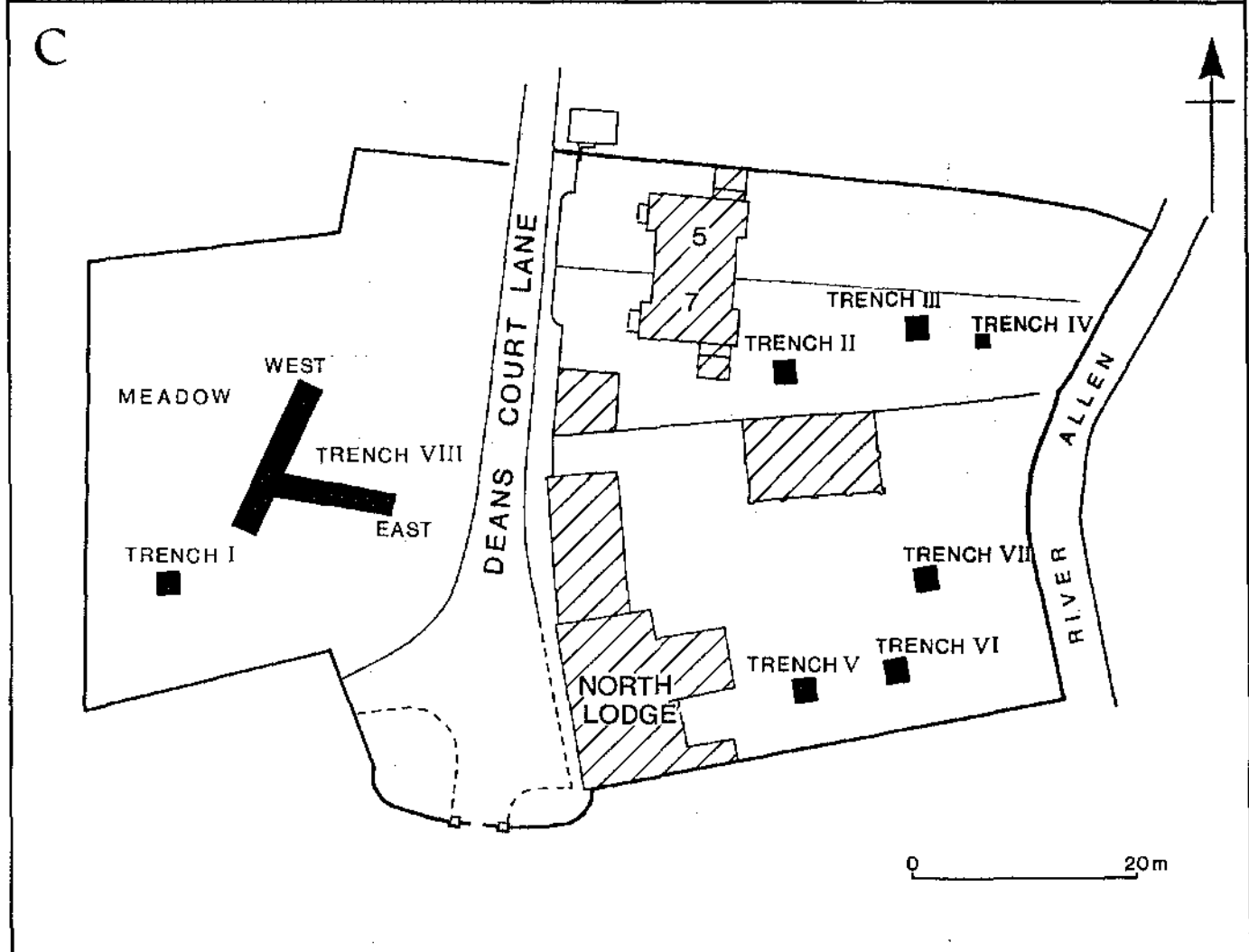
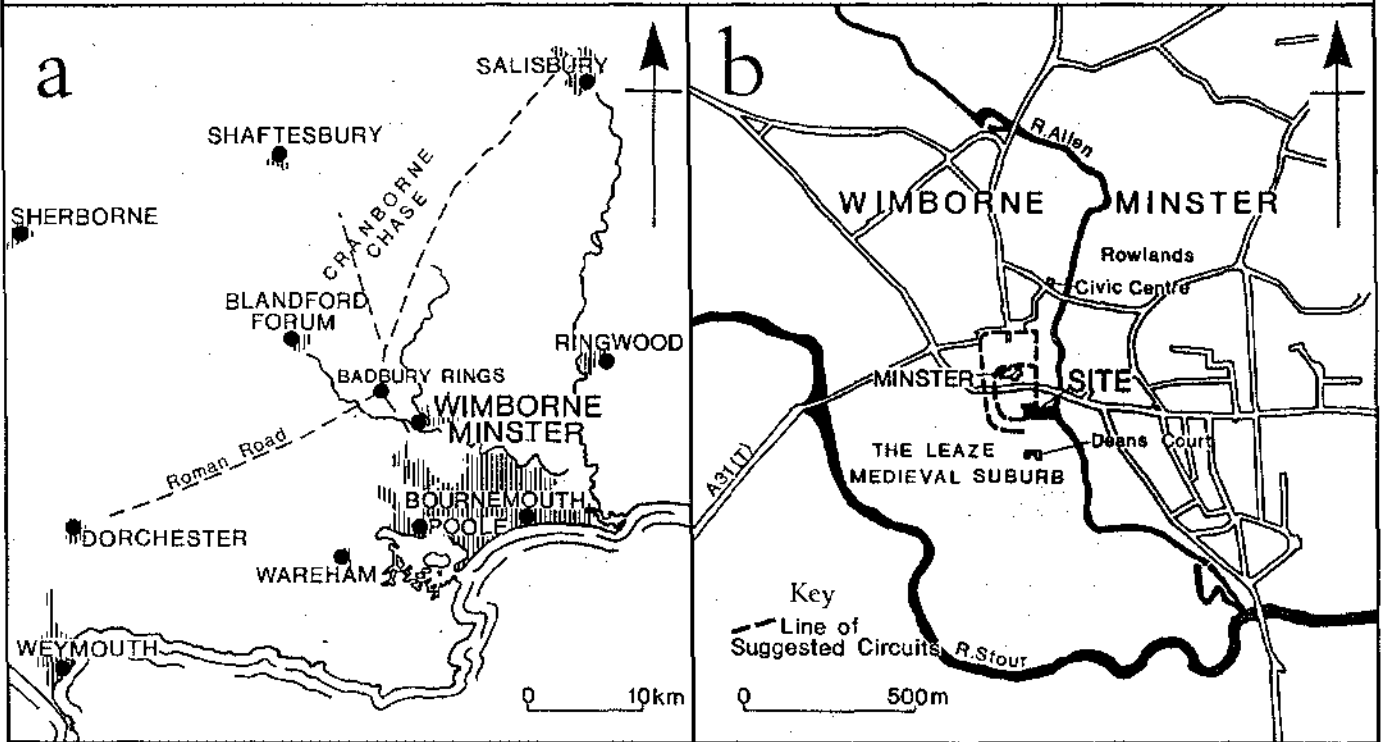
This project was commissioned by the Radley House Partnership. The project was supervised by Alex Jones, assisted by Quentin Hutchinson, and Martin Lightfoot. Dr. Ann Woodward read and commented on an earlier version of this report and advised throughout. The illustrations were prepared by Mark Breedon, the finds processed by Kate Walsh, and the report was produced at BUFAU by Liz Hooper. I am grateful to Sir Michael Hannam and Mr P. Causton of Messrs. Dibbens for their help, and to Mr and Mrs Bird, the tenants of Number 7 Deans Court Lane, for their forbearance during the excavations in their garden.

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# WIMBORNE MINSTER, Archaeological Evaluation 1990





# WIMBORNE 1990 Main Features

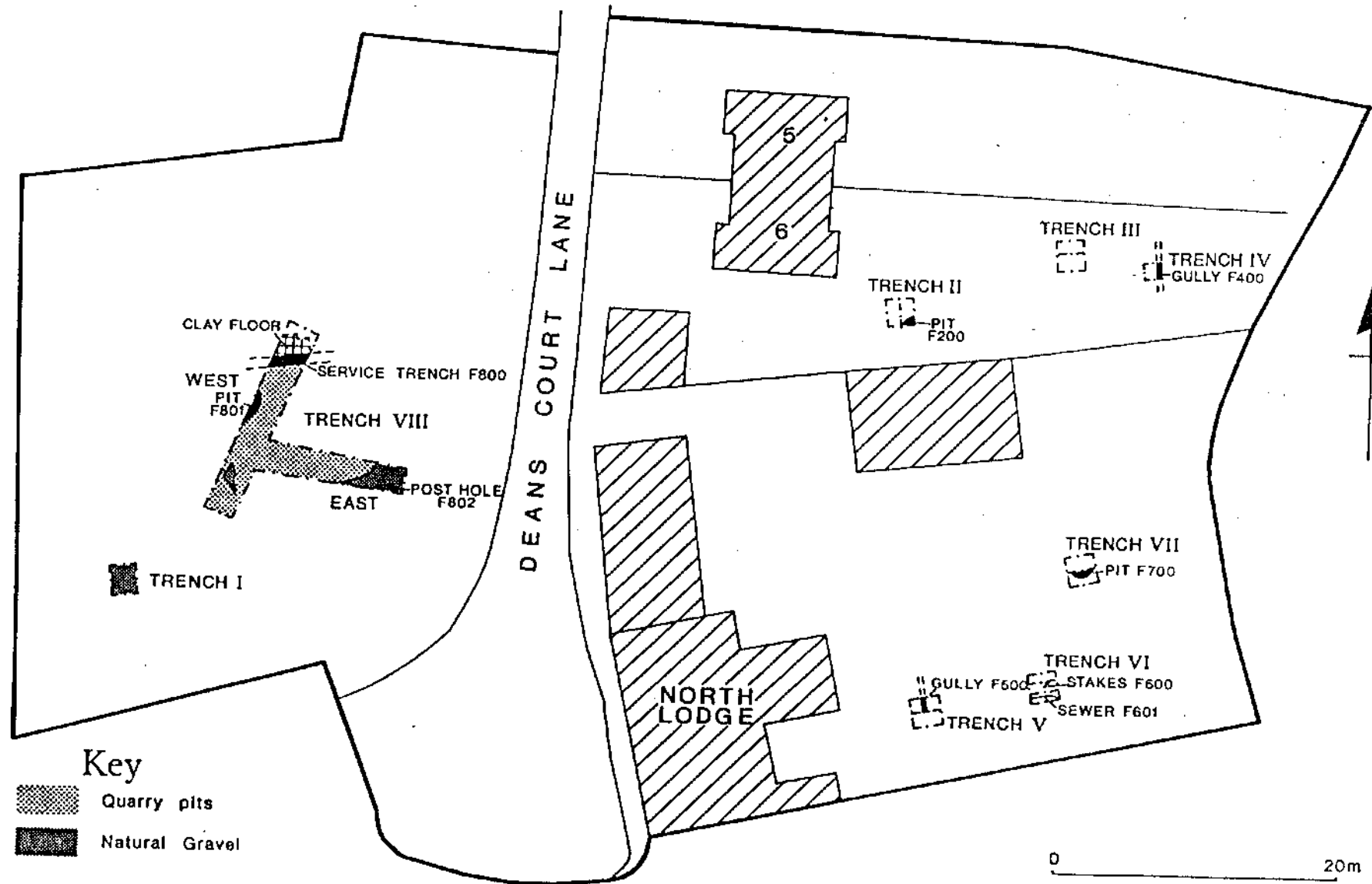


Fig. 2