

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Evaluation at  
Condover, Near Shrewsbury, Shropshire**

by

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with Gwilym Hughes**

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In December 1993 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by ARC Central to carry out an archaeological evaluation of land proposed for sand and gravel extraction at Condover, Shropshire (Fig.1) (centred on NGR SJ 497 078). The area for evaluation comprised of approximately 10 hectares of agricultural land 2km to the north of Condover. The evaluation consisted of a desktop assessment, fieldwalking, geophysical survey and trial excavations. Its aims were to locate any archaeological features and deposits likely to be affected, assess their survival, quality, condition and significance and to identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource. These objectives were in accordance with the brief supplied by Shropshire County Council (Watson 1993).

## Desktop Assessment by Gwilym Hughes

### Aerial photographic evidence

An initial examination of all the relevant aerial photographs held at the county Sites and Monuments Record was made. A number of cropmarks have been recorded in the area around the proposed development including three enclosures (SMR 439, 440 and 2205), a ring ditch (SMR 438) and a group of linear features (SMR 2206). However, no cropmarks appear to have been reported in the study area itself.

The closest of these features is that of a rectilinear enclosure immediately to the south-west of the study area (SMR 439). Numerous photographs of this enclosure exist, the clearest of which, in particular those taken by CPAT in 1990 (SMR SJ 4907 - N-Q), suggest a single ditch with a possible small annex on the north-west side. Several of the photographs suggest an internal division of the enclosure. This appears on a 1:2500 plot of the cropmark by Rowan Whimster (1982). Several of the photographs also suggest a number of external linear features, one running northwest-southeast immediately to the southeast of the enclosure and one running northeast-southwest to the west of the enclosure. The latter feature appears to terminate immediately to the south of the field boundary forming the southern boundary of the study area. The most recent CPAT photographs (SMR 4907 N-Q) suggests two linear features in this area, one slightly curving and the other straight.

### Cartographic evidence

The Rocque map of Shropshire of 1751 indicates that the nearby farms of Norton, Bayston and Bomere were all in existence, although no other features relevant to the study area were identified on either this or the Baugh map of 1808.

A map of Condover parish dated 1840 indicates that the study area was formerly divided into several (at least three or four) smaller units. This map also suggests that the curvilinear feature, which appears on some of the aerial photographs immediately to the south of the study area, probably relates to another former field boundary.

The 1882 25" OS map (surveyed in 1881) indicates that at least one of these sub-divisions had been removed. The remaining boundaries appear to have been removed in comparatively recent times. One formerly ran east-west through the study area, along the line of a footpath, and another ran approximately north-south in the eastern part of the study area.

### **Fieldwalking**

Approximately two thirds of the study area (Fig.2) was available for fieldwalking at the time of the evaluation, the south-west part of the study area being under crop or unploughed stubble. All surface artifacts were collected in 20m x 50m rectangles aligned north-south on the national grid. All finds recovered were of post-medieval date apart from one very abraded coarse sherd of medieval pottery, recovered from the northern part of the study area.

### **Geophysical Survey**

The geophysical survey was carried out by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford and has been reported on in detail (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford, Report No.93/143); only a summary is offered here. The area selected for geophysical survey was in the west of the study area closest to the cropmark enclosure (SMR 439). A magnetometer was used to survey an area 120m x 80m. A number of weak linear anomalies were detected, possibly indicating the presence of archaeological features in the form of enclosures or field systems. However, a natural or agricultural origin for these anomalies could not be ruled out.

### **The Trial Trenches**

Three trial trenches were dug, positioned to examine the anomalies detected by geophysical survey (Fig.3). Topsoil in all trenches was removed by machine and the underlying surface was cleaned manually in order to define any archaeological features or deposits.

#### Trench 1

Positioned to examine a single linear geophysical anomaly, this trench was aligned northwest-southeast and was 16m long and 1.5m wide. Topsoil (1000) 0.3m in depth overlay a natural brown sandy clay (1001). The upper 0.01-0.05m of 1001 were contaminated by large flecks of charcoal. This natural sandy clay overlay the natural sand and gravel (1002), contacted in a sondage dug at the southeast end of the trench, 1.2m below the present ground surface. No archaeological features were identifiable in this trench and no finds were recovered.

#### Trench 2

Orientated northwest-southeast, 20m long and 1.5m wide, this trench was positioned to investigate two linear geophysical anomalies. Topsoil (2000) 0.3-0.35m in depth overlay a natural brown sandy clay (2001). The upper 0.01m-0.05m of 2001 were contaminated by large flecks of charcoal. No archaeological features were identified and no finds were recovered from this trench.

### Trench 3

Positioned to examine four linear geophysical anomalies, this trench, 41m long and 1.5m wide, was aligned north-south. Topsoil (3000) 0.3m in depth overlay a natural brown sandy clay (3001), cut at the north end of the trench by a modern land drain orientated northeast-southwest. Abutting 3001, 7m from the north end of the trench was a 9m wide band of natural dark reddish brown clay sand (3002) extending south to 16m from the north end of the trench where it, again, abutted 3001. Abutting 3002 from the north end of the trench was a 1 metre wide band of natural sand and gravel (3003). The upper 0.01-0.03m of these natural subsoils was contaminated with large flecks of charcoal. Cutting 3001 at the north end of the trench, aligned northeast-southwest, was a modern field drain. No archaeological features were detected in this trench. Natural sand and gravel (3003) was contacted in a sondage dug at the southern end of the trench, 1m below the present ground surface, sealed by the natural clay-sand (3002) and a layer of natural sandy clay (3001). No finds were recovered from trench 3.

### **Conclusion**

Fieldwalking failed to locate any artifact concentrations datable to earlier than the post-medieval period, with the exception of a single sherd of medieval pottery. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered in the trial trenches and no finds recovered. The geophysical anomalies tested by trenches 1 and 2 appear to be caused by fairly recent agricultural activity (ie. ploughing back burnt stubble). Geophysical anomalies tested by trench 3 appear to be caused by a modern land drain, bands of natural clay, sand and gravel and recent agricultural activity.

### **Recommendations**

Although no archaeological features or deposits were located during this evaluation, the close proximity of the cropmark enclosure (SMR 439) to the south suggest that archaeological monitoring of any topsoil stripping prior to sand and gravel extraction is advisable.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to Mr. M.D. Watson, Senior Archaeologist, Shropshire County Council Leisure Services Department and Mr. N.J. Barsby, Estates Surveyor, ARC Central. The evaluation was monitored by Simon Buteux and supervised by Laurence Jones with the assistance of Marianne Ridgway.

### **References**

- Report on Geophysical Survey at Condober, Shrewsbury, Geophysical Surveys of Bradford, Report No.93/143
- Watson, M.D. 1993, Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at Condober, Near Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

# CONDOVER 1993-4

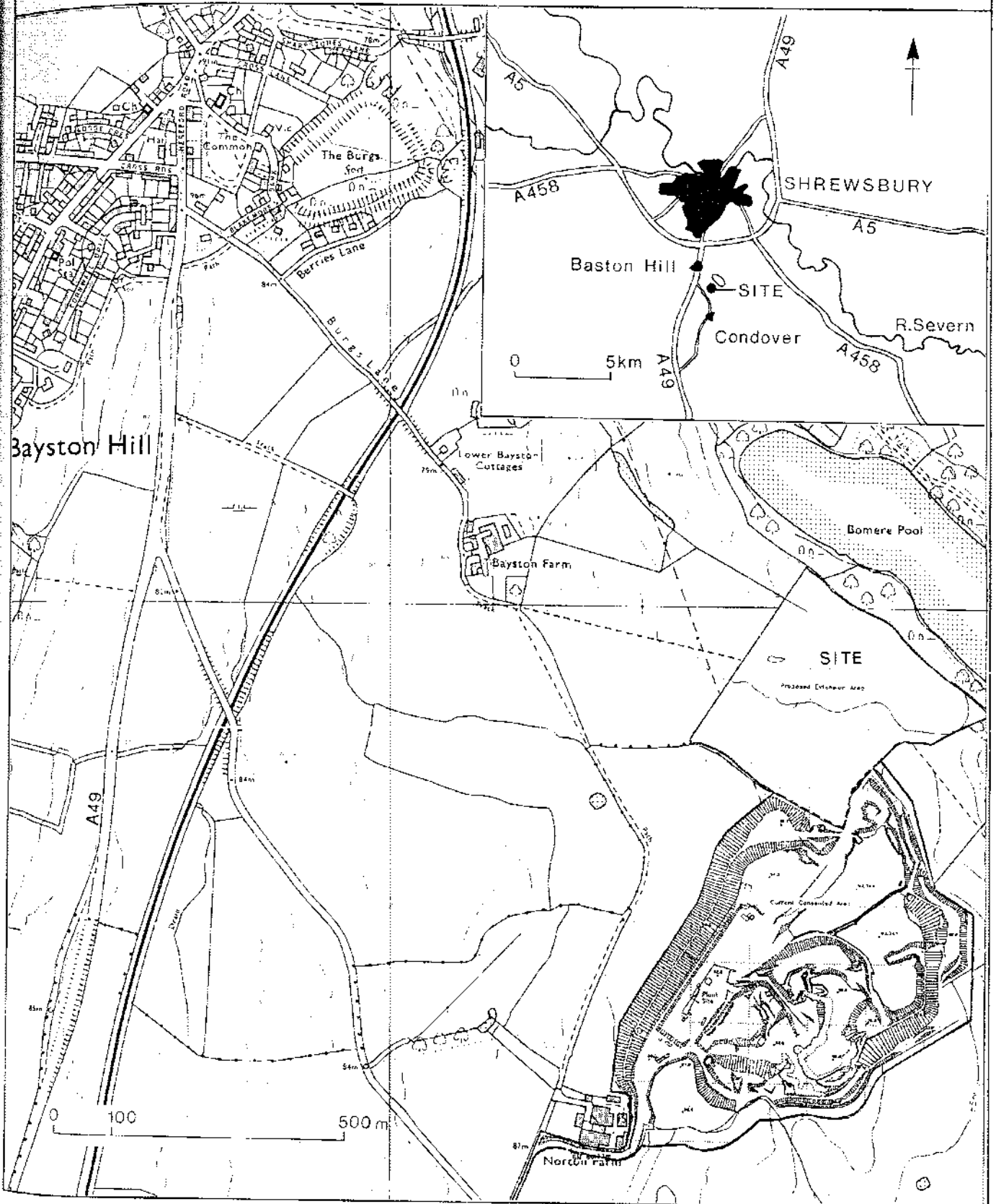


Figure 1: Location plan.

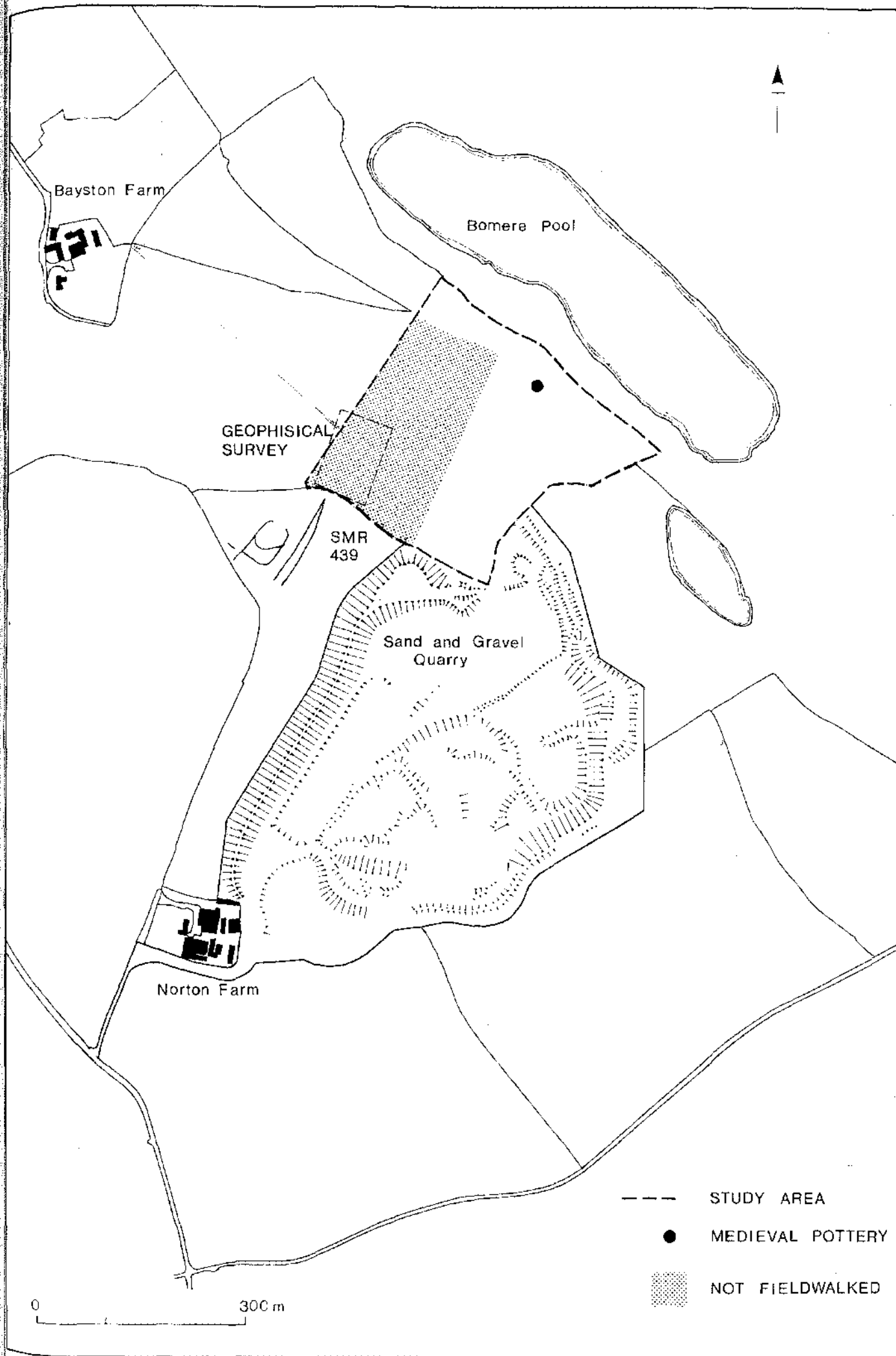


Figure 2: Position of geophysical survey and area fieldwalked.

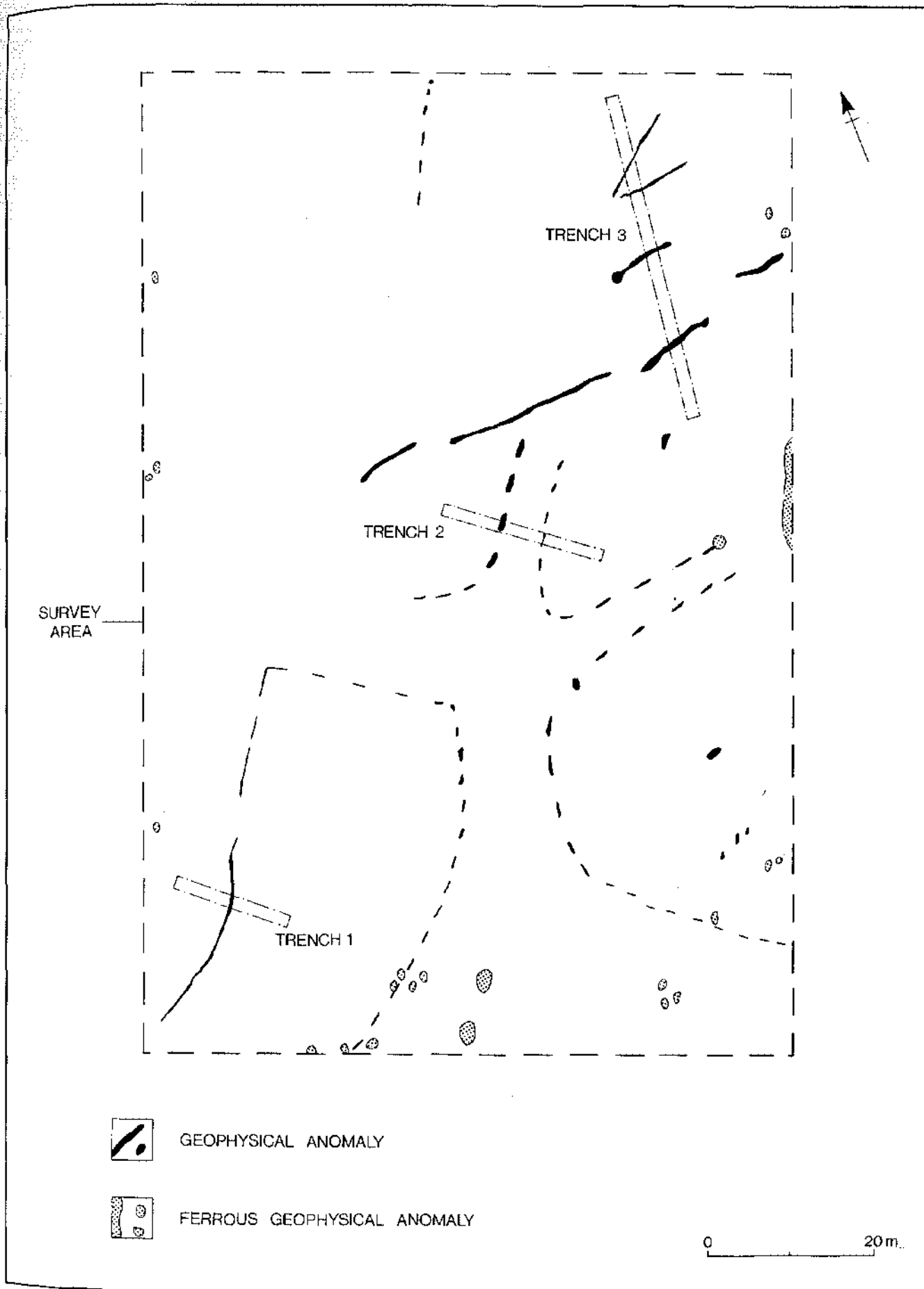


Figure 3: Position of archaeological trenches and geophysical anomalies.

