

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

**Report No. 358**

August 1995

**EYTON LANE, BASCHURCH, SHROPSHIRE**

An Archaeological Evaluation 1995

by Richard Cuttler and Derek Moscrop

with a contribution by Stratascan

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# **EYTON LANE, BASCHURCH, SHROPSHIRE**

An Archaeological evaluation 1995

## **1.0: SUMMARY**

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out in advance of a proposed housing development at Eyton Lane, Baschurch (hereinafter referred to as the study area: Figs. 1 and 2). The evaluation involved a desk-top assessment and geophysical survey, followed by trial trenching, which was targeted to examine the areas of highest archaeological potential.

Although the desk-top assessment and geophysical survey suggested archaeological remains could be present, no features or deposits of archaeological significance were recorded during the trial-trenching. The features uncovered in Trenches 3 and 4 relate to a former, temporary military hospital.

## **2.0: INTRODUCTION**

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation of an area of pasture, located at Eyton Lane, Baschurch in Shropshire (NGR SJ42732200: Fig. 1). The work was undertaken in August 1995 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, on behalf of Galliers Homes Ltd.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for an archaeological evaluation was made by the County Archaeology Office of Shropshire County Council in advance of a proposed housing development. The methodology of this evaluation conforms to an evaluation brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office of Shropshire County Council.

This report provides a detailed description of the results of the desk-top assessment and trial-trenching. The results of the geophysical survey, described in more detail elsewhere (Stratascan 1995), are summarised in Section 6 of this report.

## **3.0: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

The desk-top assessment involved the consultation of primary documentary and cartographic sources held at the Shropshire Records and Research Centre, as well as a re-examination of the aerial photographic archive held at the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Secondary and published sources were also consulted.

Sites of historical significance within one kilometre of the study area were also examined, to set the study area into its local context. Cropmarked features recorded within the study area were plotted at a scale of 1:1000 (Fig 1). A number of cropmarked features in the immediate vicinity, which may have extended into the study area, were also examined.

The purpose of the geophysical survey and trial-trenching was to determine the location, extent, date, character, significance and quality of any archaeological remains which may have been affected by the proposed development, and to provide a basis for a series of recommendations to mitigate the impact of the development.

#### 4.0: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The study area lies on the eastern periphery of the historic medieval town of Baschurch (Fig. 1). The modern settlement appears to have two centres; one in the vicinity of All Saints Church, and the second centred around a crossroads approximately 300m to the northeast. A church at Baschurch is mentioned in the Domesday Book (Thorn and Thorn 1986), although the village is suggested to have had an earlier Saxon origin (Crannage 1908). The focus of the settlement of Baschurch at this time is uncertain, but probably centred on the church of All Saints (Buteux forthcoming).

The settlement known as Newtown (Fig. 1) was founded by the Abbot of Shrewsbury in the 13th century. It seems likely that this corresponds to the area around the crossroads to the northeast of the church (Beresford 1988). In common with other small towns and villages in the Welsh border region, Baschurch is likely to have declined in size during the 14th century. It may have contracted to the area around the church and only expanded again into the Newtown area in the 18th century (Buteux forthcoming).

The study area lies adjacent to the eastern border of medieval Baschurch as defined by the *Central Marches Historic Towns Survey* (Buteux forthcoming). Consequently, there is a possibility of medieval features, associated with activity on the periphery of the settlement, being found within the study area.

According to the current owner of the site, the study area was used for temporary buildings associated with an extension to the orthopaedic hospital, at Baschurch, founded in 1900. These were subsequently used as an auxiliary military hospital during the First World War. The documentary evidence concerning the location of these structures is rather vague, but gives a good account of the type of temporary buildings erected on the site (Hunt n.d.). These included temporary cubicles which were erected on a concrete standing early in 1914. To accommodate large numbers of soldiers returning from France, a mess room and shed, as well as a recreation building were constructed in 1915. Temporary shelters, a linen room, kitchens and bathrooms were also constructed. Five large marquee tents were put up and "filled with soldiers" in August, 1916. According to Hunt, the hospital was understaffed, had an insufficient water supply, and the drainage was inadequate.

##### Cartographic evidence

The Tithe Map for the parish of Baschurch, dated to 1844 (Fig. 3), indicates that the study area encompasses the eastern half of a rectilinear field. Apart from the buildings on the Eyton Lane street frontage, this field has the same boundaries as the field formerly known as "Great Yard" (Fig. 3). The land use of the study area at this time is described as pasture. The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1880 shows that there were no changes to the boundary of this field. The only significant difference which exists between these maps is the presence of a footpath depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map, which runs northwest-southeast across the field. No further changes are evident on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map, dated 1901.

The 1954 Ordnance Survey map depicts two small rectilinear sub-divisions in the northern part of the field to the south of Eyton Lane. These sub-divided plots appear to pre-date the present structures and associated gardens occupying the street frontage of Eyton Lane. No trace of the temporary hospital could be identified on any of the Ordnance Survey maps.

### Aerial photographic evidence (Fig. 1)

All the aerial photographs held by the Shropshire SMR for the study area and its immediate environs was re-examined. No crop-marked sites could be identified within the study area, although this may possibly be attributed to recent use of the study area as pasture. Evidence of crop-marked sites in the immediate vicinity of the study area, however, suggests that human activity dates back to the Neolithic period or the Early Bronze Age. A brief description of these sites is provided below. The likelihood of a crop-marked site extending into the study area is also assessed.

*SA 2394* (NGR SJ42232182) - A group of crop-marked features lying approximately 500m to the east of the study area. According to the SMR they consist of a large rectangular enclosure, two smaller enclosures and field boundaries. They probably represent more than one period of activity as the large enclosure appears to be cut by a linear feature. This in turn may form part of an extensive field system. Further examination of the aerial photographic evidence, suggests that this group of cropmarks might be more complex than they appear on the sketch plot held in the SMR.

*SA 2398* (NGR SJ42322258) - Two circular crop-marked features, which may be interpreted as Bronze Age ring ditches, lying approximately 700m to the northeast of the study area.

*SA 2454* (NGR SJ42902220) - A linear crop-marked feature, approximately 100m to the northeast of the study area, interpreted by the Shropshire SMR as a possible pit alignment. Further inspection of photograph 70/33 tends to suggest that this feature is part of a field system and that it may actually be associated with the possible field boundaries immediately to the east (*SA 4036*). The alignment of this feature, orientated in a south westerly direction, suggests that it may extend into the study area.

*SA 4036* (NGR SJ43002210) - Situated approximately 250m to the northeast of the study area, this series of irregular curvilinear crop-marked features are suggestive of abandoned field boundaries and may be of late prehistoric or Romano-British date. Their close proximity to the study area, and the possibility that they form part of the same field system represented by the crop-marked features immediately to the west (*SA 2454*), may suggest that part of this extensive field system may extend into the study area.

*SA 4037* (NGR SJ43002210) - Situated approximately 150m to the east of the study area, these crop-marked features are described in the SMR as part of a possible field system. However, the aerial photograph suggests that these crop-marked features may represent a possible rectilinear enclosure. There may be associated field boundaries, although some of these are possibly of relatively modern origin (A.P. C.P.A.T. 84 30 26).

*SA 4038* (NGR SJ42332223) - A circular crop-marked feature situated approximately 400m to the northwest of the study area, may be interpreted as a Bronze Age ring ditch.

*SA 4086* (NGR SJ42202240) - A circular crop-marked feature situated approximately 600m to the northwest of the study area, may be interpreted as a Bronze Age ring ditch.

## **5.0: TRIAL-PITTING**

The results of the seven geotechnical trial-pits dug within the study area (Advanced Structures 1994: Fig. 4) indicated that the topsoil was 0.2-0.3m in depth and overlay medium dense red/brown sand and gravel with cobbles. At a depth of 0.5m, the sand and gravel contains larger cobbles and stones. This matrix was observed until ground water entered the trial-holes at a depth of approximately 2.3m causing collapse of the sides.

With the exception of the fine sand, encountered at a depth of 0.2 - 1.3m in Trial Pit 3, ground conditions were similar across the site. The gravel, bricks and builders rubble located in Trial Pit 2 are interpreted by Advanced Structures as an old soak-away (this could be the same feature as the cesspit (M2) referred to below (Mr. Dawson, pers. comm. and Stratascan).

## **6.0: THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY by Stratascan: Figs. 2 and 5)**

The site was surveyed using a gradiometer, to record localised changes in magnetic field, which may indicate the presence of buried archaeology. These localised changes are termed anomalies. The geophysical survey detected several strong responses, most of which are thought to be connected to the use of the study area as a hospital during the First World War. The large anomaly M1 which runs along the eastern edge of the study area is a pipeline, as is M6 which runs across the site. The large anomaly M2 is a manhole and cesspit. Anomaly M3 in the southwestern corner of the site is a pipe, as is anomaly M5, located on the western edge of the survey area. Anomaly M4 is a concrete based cesspit, again thought to be connected with the modern occupation of the site. Anomalies M13 and 14 are probably large buried ferrous objects.

There are, however, several weaker anomalies which may be of interest. Three weak, negative linear anomalies (M7, M8 and M9) can be seen more clearly in Figure 5, where the 'noise' from the stronger anomalies has been filtered out. Anomalies M7 and M9 are at right angles to anomaly M8, and may therefore be associated. However, as they appear to run towards the known manhole cover (M2), and given that anomaly M7 terminates in positive anomaly M17, the more likely interpretation is that these anomalies are drains or pipes.

The weak linear anomaly M10 may possibly be an extension of M11, which runs north-south. Adjacent to anomaly M10 there are three weak, regular anomalies, collectively labelled M12 and a right angled positive anomaly M15. There is a possible sub-circular anomaly M16, in the southern area of the site. However, it is difficult to ascertain the nature of these anomalies, due to the recent history of the site.

Mr. Dawson, the current owner, has identified a sewer running from the main house, which is situated on the crossroads to the north west, to the cesspit (M2). This may account for the weaker anomaly (M8) running north west to south east across the study area. The house is marked on the 1794 map as a malt house and croft and later as Florence House on the Tithe Map of 1844.

## **7.0: TRIAL-TRENCHING RESULTS (Fig. 2)**

A total of six trial-trenches were located to examine areas of archaeological potential, as defined by the desk-top assessment, and the geophysical survey. This trenching amounted in total to almost 120 square metres. In all trenches the overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator to expose the uppermost levels

of the natural subsoil. The machined surface was then hand-cleaned to define any archaeological features present.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma recording sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections, and photographs, which are all held in the archive.

### Trench 1

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 1 measured 10 metres in length, and was aligned east-west, to test two linear anomalies identified during the geophysical survey (M10 and M12). Trench 1 also intersected a slight linear earthwork, visible on the surface as an earthwork bank, measuring approximately 17m across, and aligned north-south.

The uppermost horizon of the subsoil (1001), revealed by hand cleaning of the base of the machined trench, was a light brown sandy silt, with sub-rounded gravel. This was overlain in the western extent of the trench by a layer of light brown sandy silt (1002), which had an average depth of 0.26m. Gradually diminishing towards the eastern half of the trench, this silt layer (1002) was very similar to the natural subsoil (1001), and could only be distinguished by its finer texture and stone content.

A sondage measuring 0.75m by 1.5m was hand-excavated in the western end of the trench, through the layer of silt (1002), to the natural sub-soil (1001). This was dug to test the possibility that the layer of silt (1002) may have been an upper fill of a ditch, associated with, and to the west of, the linear earthwork. The topsoil in Trench 1 (1000) consisted of a medium brown sandy silt, with an average depth of 0.20m.

#### *Interpretation*

It seems likely that the linear earthwork relates to a former field boundary. Since the layer of silt (1002) is natural in origin, there is no evidence to suggest the presence of any anthropogenic features within the trench.

### Trench 2

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 2 measured 10m in length and was orientated approximately north-south (Fig. 2), to intercept two anomalies (M15, M12), identified during the geophysical survey. The natural subsoil in this trench consisted of a light brown, sandy silt with sub-rounded gravel (2001). Cutting the subsoil, was a feature (F200), approximately oval in shape, and with its long axis orientated north-south. Feature F200 had steep sides, an irregular base, and contained a single fill of sandy silt (2002). Measuring approximately 1.10m in diameter and 0.42m deep, the feature (F200) contained no finds. Feature F200 and the natural sub-soil were sealed by a medium brown sandy silt topsoil (2000), which measured an average of 0.18m in depth.

#### *Interpretation*

It seems likely that feature F200 is natural in origin, possibly caused by tree roots. No features of archaeological interest were identified in the trench.



### Trench 3

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 3 measured approximately 10m in length and was aligned east-west. It was positioned to examine a linear anomaly (M11), identified during the geophysical survey.

The uppermost subsoil horizon revealed by hand cleaning the base of the machined trench, was a light brown sandy silt (3001). Cutting the natural subsoil in the eastern end of Trench 3, was a regular linear feature (F300), orientated northwest-southeast. Approximately 0.40m in width, and cut with straight sides, feature F300 corresponds to geophysical anomaly M8, interpreted as a service trench. The topsoil in Trench 3 was a medium brown sandy silt (3000), measuring approximately 0.15m in depth. No finds were recovered from this trench.

#### *Interpretation*

Feature F300 is possibly a service trench for the former military hospital. No features of archaeological interest were identified in Trench 3.

### Trench 4

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 4 measured approximately 7m in length and was aligned approximately north-south. This trench was positioned to intercept the projected line of a pit alignment (SMR No. 2454), recorded to the north of Eyton Lane (Fig 1). After machining Trench 4 for a length of 7m, it became clear that the area had been heavily truncated by two modern features (F400 and F401), so the trench was abandoned, and a further trench (Trench 6) was re-positioned to the northwest.

Approximately one third of a circular feature (F401), was exposed in plan in the southern half of the trench. This feature was of brick-built construction, and two courses in depth. It was constructed using the English bond (one course stretchers and one course headers). The feature survived to a height of 0.45m. The northernmost feature in the trench (F400), was circular in plan, and was constructed using red bricks. This was two courses deep and used stretcher bonding. The feature was capped in concrete, measuring 0.12m in depth, which was supported by a central brick-built pillar. The topsoil (4000) in the trench was a medium brown sandy silt with an average depth of 0.15m. No finds were recovered from this trench.

#### *Interpretation*

Features F400 and F401 probably relate to the former military hospital. No other features of archaeological significance were identified in Trench 4.

### Trench 5

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 5 measured 10m in length and was aligned east-west. It was located to examine a curvilinear anomaly (M16), identified during the geophysical survey.

The compact red-brown silt sand subsoil (5002) was recorded in the base of a sondage. This subsoil was sealed by a layer of light-brown silt (5001), measuring 0.4m in depth. The topsoil (5000) was a medium brown sandy silt, measuring approximately 0.15m in depth.

### *Interpretation*

No features of archaeological interest were identified in Trench 5.

### Trench 6

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 6 measured approximately 17m in length and was aligned northwest-southeast. This trench was positioned to intercept the projected line of the pit alignment (SMR No. 2454), and was dug after the abandonment of Trench 4.

After hand cleaning of the base of Trench 6, a patch of red sand (6002), circular in plan, was evident in the southern half of the trench. Further excavation showed that this layer was overlain by a deposit of light brown silt sand and gravel (6001), which was visible for the remainder of the trench. This was sealed by the medium brown, sandy silt topsoil (6000), to a depth of 0.18cm. Three sherds of late 18th century pottery were recovered from the topsoil (6000).

### *Interpretation*

The red sand (6002), identified in the southern half of Trench 6 is of natural origin. No features of archaeological interest were identified in Trench 6.

## **8.0: DISCUSSION**

The definition and form of the crop-marked features recorded in the vicinity of the study area suggest that settlement and activity in the nearby zone may have begun in the early prehistoric period. The study area is situated adjacent to the eastern border of medieval Baschurch, as defined by Buteux (forthcoming). This suggested that medieval features, associated with activity on the periphery of this settlement, could survive to the west of the study area. The strong magnetic responses recorded by geophysical survey are thought to relate to the occupation of the site as a temporary hospital during the First World War. There is written and oral evidence for the existence of concrete platforms being used to support temporary structures. Remains of the hospital were in evidence in Trenches 3 and 4, surviving below the surface to a depth of 0.6m. Several weaker geophysical responses, however, seem likely to be of geological origin.

No features of archaeological origin were identified by trenching. A number of features of modern, geological and natural origin were noted. The 1844 Tithe Map for the parish of Baschurch describes the study area as pasture. Most of the sub-soil appears relatively undisturbed with little evidence for medieval or post medieval agriculture. The paucity of pottery sherds recovered also tends to suggest that the study area was not intensively 'manured,' and may have been under permanent pasture.

## **9.0: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given that the study area has been extensively investigated through desk-top assessment, geophysical survey, and given the largely negative results produced by trial-trenching, further detailed archaeological investigation within the study area is not considered worthwhile.

Although interest in the study of military features has been heightened by the Council for British Archaeology study 'The Defence of Britain', the results of the

present investigations would indicate the relatively poor survival of below-ground archaeological features and deposits, associated with the military use of the camp. Accordingly, a watching brief is unlikely to provide further information of value.

## **10.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This project was commissioned by Galliers Homes Limited. The fieldwork was monitored by Mike Watson for Shropshire County Council. The geophysical survey was undertaken by a team from Stratascan. The trial-trenching was supervised by Richard Cuttler with the assistance of Martin Campbell and Derek Moscrop. The desk-top assessment was researched by Derek Moscrop. The report was edited by Alex Jones, and the drawings were prepared by Richard Cuttler and Lawrence Jones.

## **11.0: REFERENCES**

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Hunt, A. *n.d.* *The story of Baschurch*, 22-7.

Stratascan. 1995. *A Geophysical Survey at Eyton Lane, Baschurch*.

Thorn, F. and Thorn, C. (eds.). 1986. *Domesday Book: Shropshire*, Chichester.

## **CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES**

Shropshire County Record Office

1794 Map by Richard Payne

1844 Tithe Pap for the Parish of Baschurch.

Ordnance Survey maps:

1880 First Edition

1901 Second Edition

1954 Edition

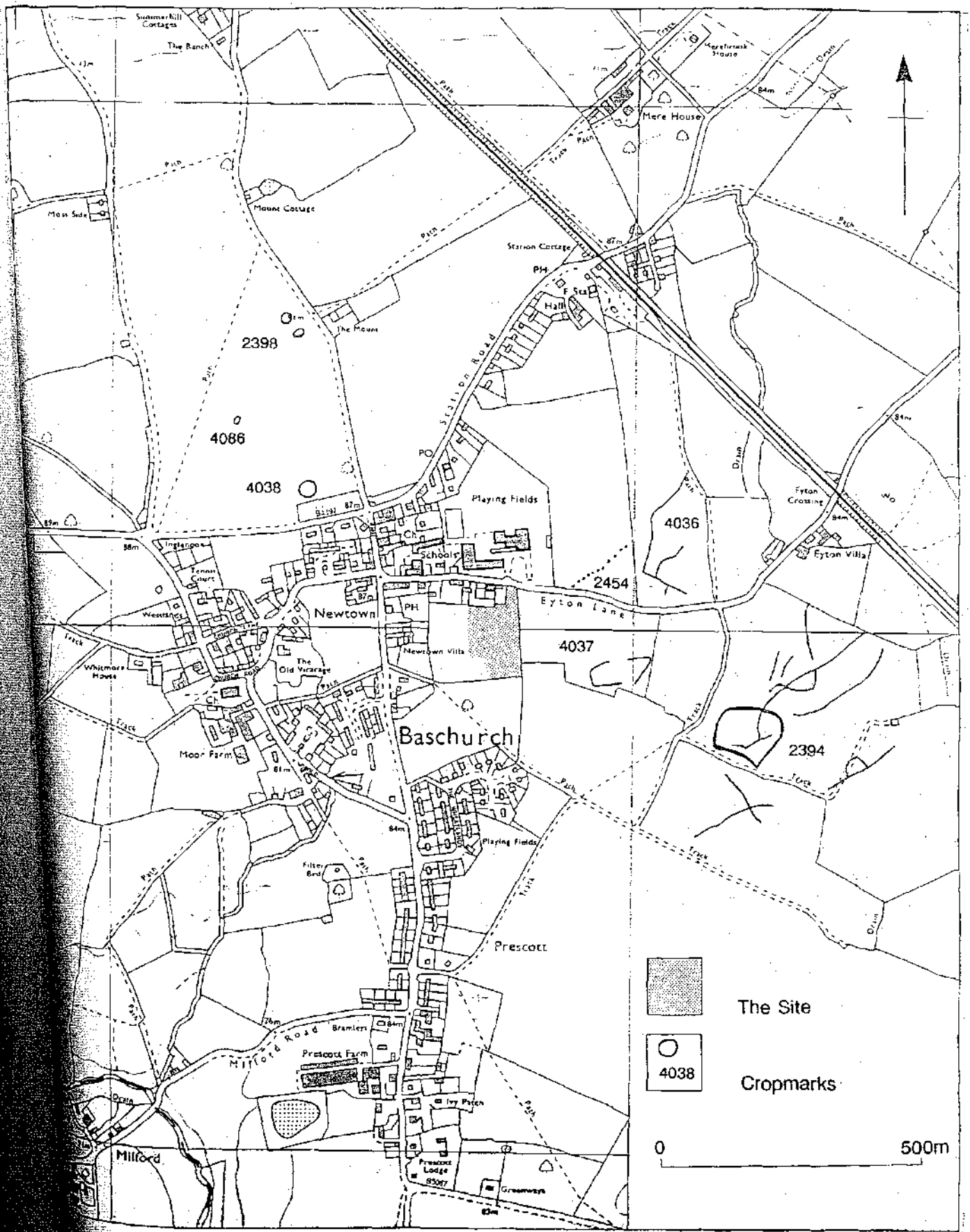


Figure 1

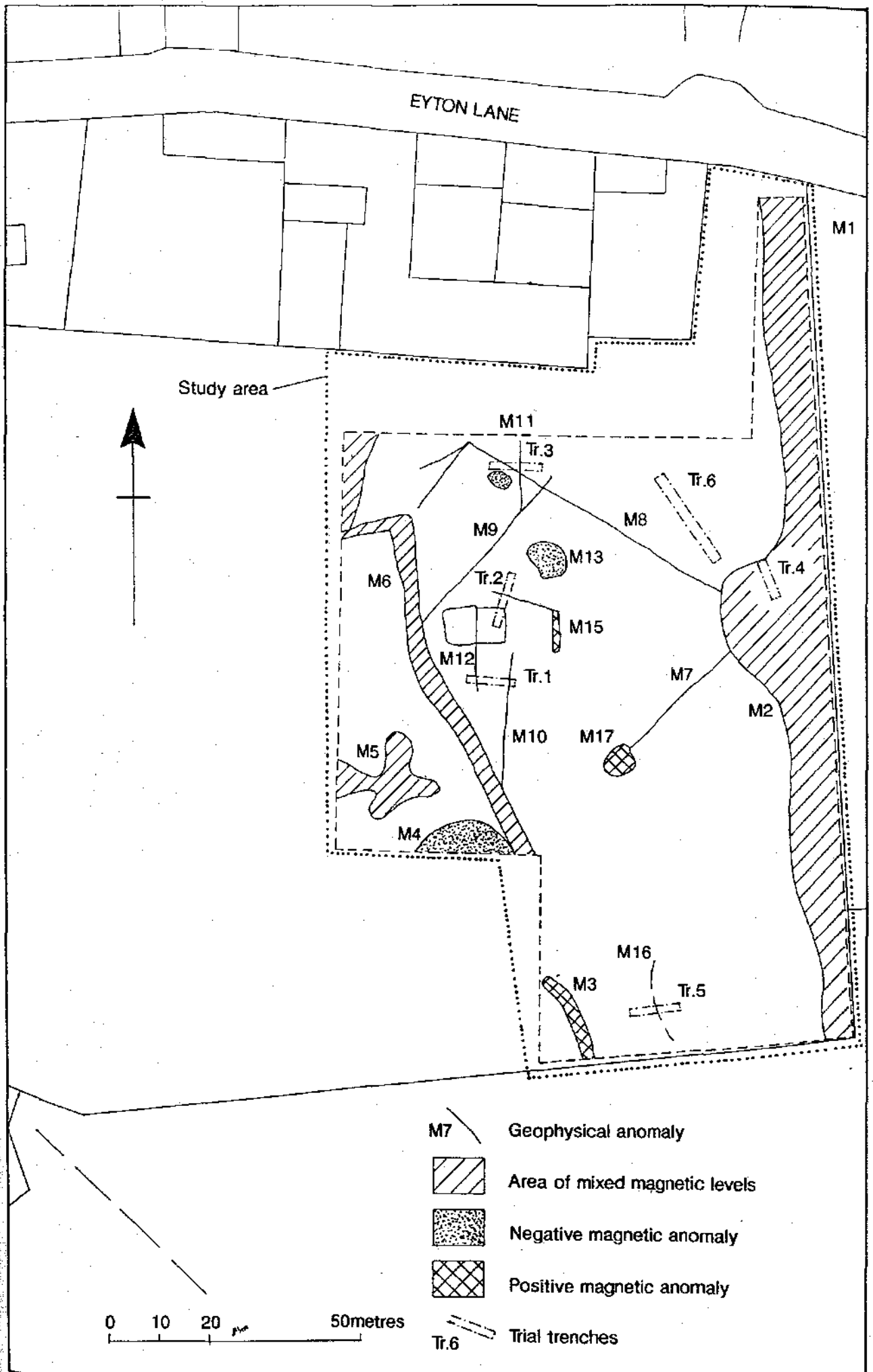


Figure 2

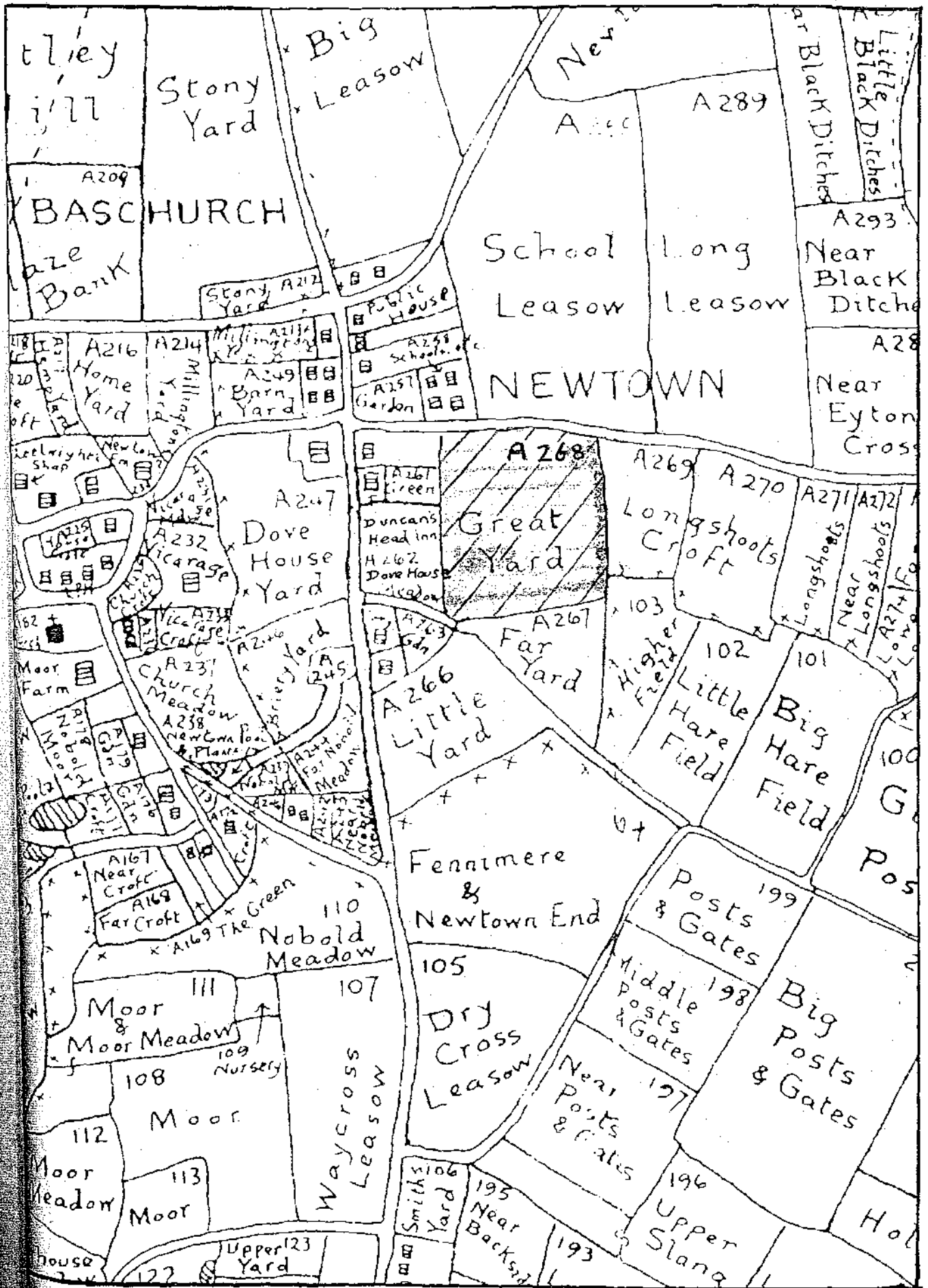


Figure 3

# advanced structures

Position of Trial Holes

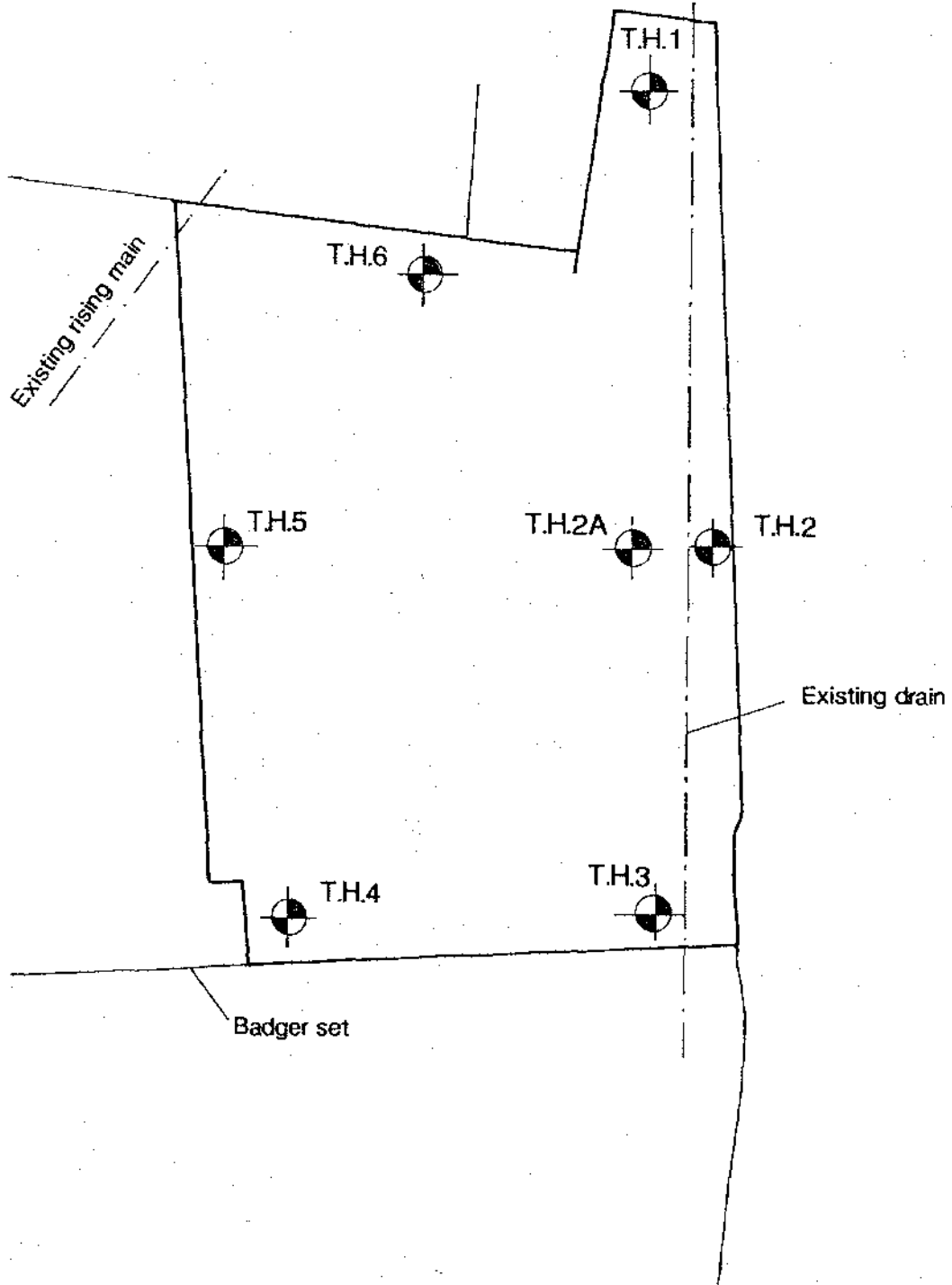


Figure 4

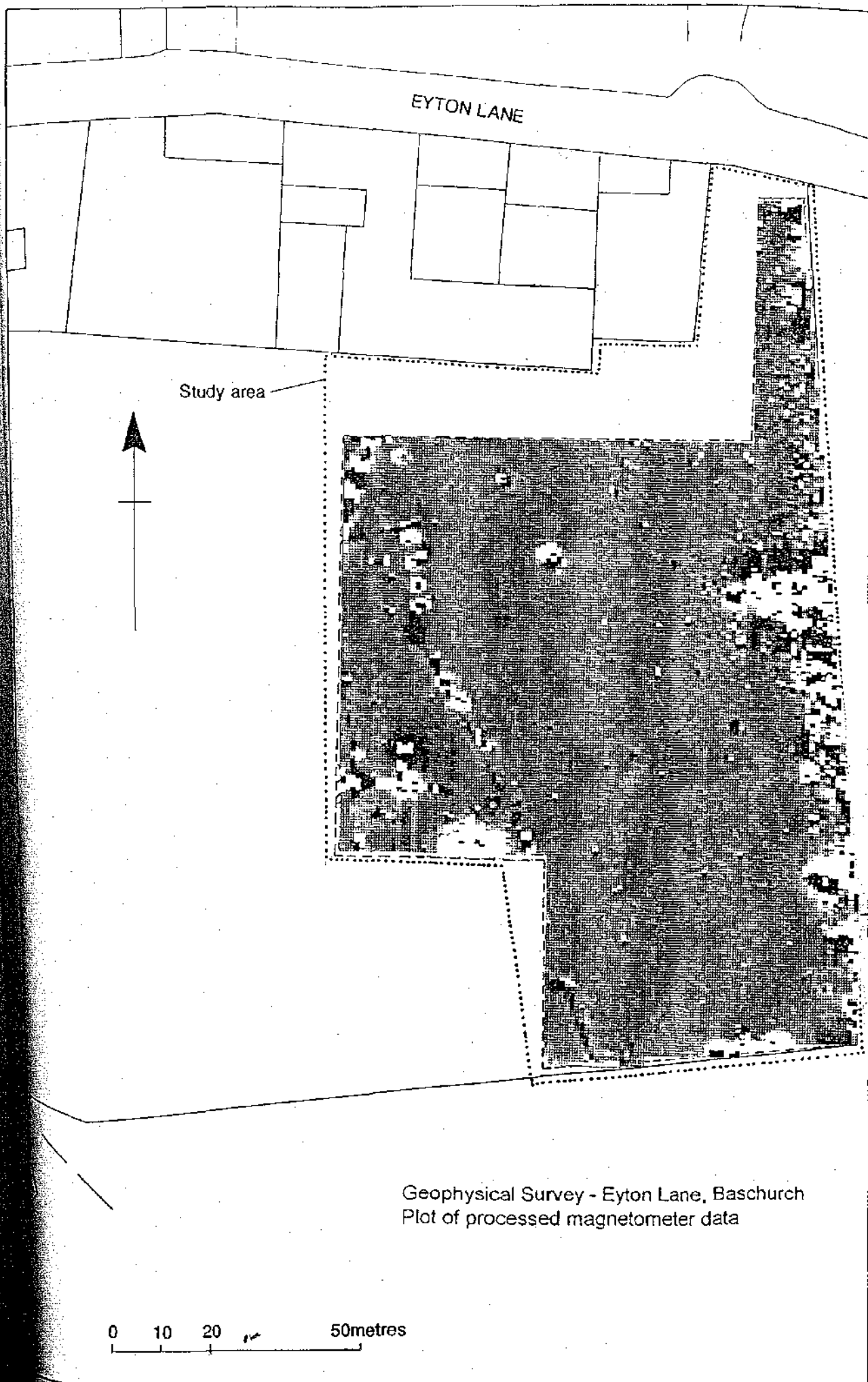


Figure 5