

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

Project No. 390

February 1996

**LAND NORTHWEST OF 36 BRIDGE STREET,  
CHATTERIS, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.**

**An Archaeological Evaluation 1996**

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# **LAND NORTHWEST OF 36 BRIDGE STREET, CHATTERIS, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.**

## **An Archaeological Evaluation 1996**

### **1.0: SUMMARY**

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation, employing trial-trenching, carried out in advance of an application for a proposed housing development at land northwest of Bridge Street, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire, (centered on N.G.R. TL38958690: hereinafter referred to as the study area).

Activity dating to the Iron Age was recorded (Trench 4). Evidence of medieval or post-medieval cultivation was recorded (Trench 5). No evidence of structures relating to the medieval hithe thought to have boarded the site at Slade Lode was encountered. The remaining features and deposits relate to the post-medieval period (Trenches 1, 2 and 3).

### **2.0: INTRODUCTION**

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation of approximately 0.8 ha. of scrubland located to the northwest of 36 Bridge Street, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Neale Associates on behalf of The First National Commercial Bank P.L.C., and was undertaken in January 1996 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

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 Cambridgeshire County Council in advance of a proposed housing development. The methodology of this evaluation conforms to an evaluation design brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office (Austin 1995) and a specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Jones 1995).

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, significance and quality of any archaeological remains which may be affected by the proposed development and to provide a basis for a series of recommendations to mitigate the impact of the development. This report provides a detailed description of the results of trial-trenching, and an outline of proposals for further mitigation fieldwork.

### **3.0: THE STUDY AREA AND ITS SETTING**

The study area lies on the northern edge of the modern town of Chatteris (Fig. 1). The underlying bedrock is Amphill clay. Most of the drift geology is terrace gravels, the upper 0.5m of which is mixed with clay. Most of the drainage is via the River Ouse to the west and a wider watercourse coming out of Bensons Fen to the southwest of the town.

Most of the land within the study area is scrubland, containing the brick footings of demolished structures within the southern half of the study area. Land to the northeast has recently been developed for housing, with older properties bordering the south and southwestern boundaries of the site. A linear feature, formerly water

filled (Fig. 2), but now infilled, in the extreme northeastern corner of the study area, can still be seen as a slight depression on the ground. Another recent feature is a large pond in the northwest corner of the site now filled with water. Land within the northwestern section of the study area could not be trenched due to the presence of a construction site spoil heap.

The parish of Chatteris consisted largely of an island of gravel measuring approximately 7km. across, which was slowly encroached by the peat fen from the Neolithic period through to the medieval. The study area however remained on a northwest raised spur of land extending from Chatteris Island for nearly 2km. Finds recovered from this area include Neolithic hand axes, flint tools and Roman pottery (Cambridgeshire S.M.R. Nos. 3675, 3672 and 1513).

Large quantities of Bronze Age metalwork have been recovered from Chatteris Island, probably relating to cemeteries disturbed by agriculture. A dispersed barrow cemetery occupies the eastern half of the island, with most burial sites consistently located near the fen edge. Sites with evidence of Bronze Age occupation are all on the higher ground suggesting different areas for burial and domestic activity, with the barrows often lying on the poorer clay and gravel ground surface (Hall 1992, 84).

Six sites showing evidence of Iron Age occupation are known within Chatteris Island, the largest of these being at Langwood, approximately 3km. southeast of the study area (Hall 1992, 93). Chatteris Island became a focus of settlement during the Iron Age and Roman periods, possibly because of the natural protection afforded by the fens.

The name Chatteris was first recorded in AD 974 and by the medieval period only an area slightly larger than present day Chatteris was not encroached on by the peat. The study area was included within this island (Hall 1992, 92). It seems possible therefore, with the slowly diminishing amount of dry arable land, that the study area may have been used for either occupation or for Midland-type strip cultivation forming ridge and furrow.

Fenton lode, a 13th century waterway, passes to the south of the study area. This would have provided the main connection to March and Ely. At Chatteris there was a medieval landing place or hithe at Wilihethe in 1251, probably located on Chatteris Island at the Slade Lode, located approximately 35m from the southern boundary of the study area.

#### **4.0: TRIAL TRENCHING RESULTS (Figs 2-3)**

A total of five trial trenches was excavated to examine the archaeological potential of the site. This trenching amounted in total to approximately 170 square metres, approximately 2% of the study area. 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. Any archaeological features present were sampled by hand-excavation to provide information concerning the survival and complexity of the fills, and to recover artifactual and ecofactual samples for analysis.

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 (Not illustrated)

### *Objectives and results*

Trench 1 measured 16 metres in length, and was aligned northwest-southeast (Fig. 2). This trench was located in the southern part of the survey area to investigate deposits close to the street frontage with Bridge Street, in the proposed vicinity of the medieval hithe. Machining was stopped when brick footings were recorded in the north of the trench.

The subsoil in Trench 1 was exposed at a depth of 0.45m. This comprised an orange/brown gravel with silt (1003), which was cut by feature F15, a ditch located at the extreme southern end of the trench. Aligned northeast-southwest feature F15 had steeply sloping sides and was excavated to a depth of 0.55m. Filled by a grey-brown silt with clay (1001), feature F15 contained fragments of broken brick and drainage pipe. Approximately 5m from the northern end of Trench 1 was a linear feature (F13), aligned northeast-southwest, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. Measuring approximately 0.2m in depth and 0.8m across, feature F13 was filled by a very dark brown sandy clay with charcoal (1002), containing pottery, glass, brick and fragments of clay pipe. Both features (F13 and F15) were sealed by a dark brown silt (1004) with building rubble, measuring approximately 0.24m in depth, which was sealed in turn by topsoil measuring 0.21m in depth.

### *Interpretation*

It seems likely that the larger of the two linear features in Trench 1 (F15) is a former property boundary and may represent the northern property boundary of a plot fronting onto Bridge Street. Finds from this feature tend to suggest that it was used during the later 19th century. Feature F13 appears to represent the remains of recent building activity.

## Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

### *Objectives and results*

Trench 2 was aligned northeast-southwest, perpendicular to Trench 1 and measured 21m in length. At the southwestern end of Trench 2 a sondage was machined to a depth of 1.2m to test the nature of the natural subsoil (2013).

The subsoil in Trench 2 (2013), exposed at a depth of 0.53m, was sealed by a layer of grey-brown clay silt (2001) measuring 0.05m in depth. At the southwestern end of Trench 2, was a ditch (F14, Fig. 3), aligned east-west, with steep sides and a rounded base. Measuring approximately 0.66m in width and 0.50m in depth, feature F14 was filled with a grey silty clay (2011) containing fragments of natural flint, which was overlain by a black silty clay with fragments of red brick (2012). The edge of feature F14 was cut to the north by a small irregularly shaped post-hole (F9, Fig. 3), approximately 0.35m in width and 0.10m in depth. With vertical sides and a flat base feature F9 was filled with a grey silty clay (2003), which contained no datable finds. To the northeast were seven features similar in size to feature F9, each filled by a dark grey gritty silt with clay (2004-2010). Two of these features were excavated (F10 and F11), and were found to have steep sides with a rounded base, each approximately 0.05m in depth. No datable finds were recovered from either feature F10 or feature F11.

At the northeastern end of Trench 2, a small linear feature F7 (Fig. 3) was aligned northwest-southeast, with steep sides and a flat base and approximately 0.6m wide and 0.21m deep. Filled by a dark grey-black gritty clay with silt and shell (2002),

feature F7 contained fragments of late-18th/early-19th century brown glazed pottery, with one clay pipe stem and four animal bones. Layer 2001 and features F7, F9, F10, F11 and F14 were sealed by approximately 0.48m of dark brown silt with rubble (2000).

### *Interpretation*

Finds recovered from the two field or property boundaries F7 and F14 suggest a date in the late-18th/early-19th century, with the post-hole F9 post-dating these. An extension of F7 is evident in Trench 3. The lack of finds from features F10 and F11 makes them difficult to date, although their probable association with feature F9 and the similarity of their fills (2003, 2004 and 2005) suggest they may be contemporary.

### Trench 3 (Not illustrated)

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 3 measured approximately 20m in length and was aligned north-south.

The subsoil in Trench 3 (3005), exposed at a depth of 0.43m, was a silty orange gravel (3005). This was sealed in turn by approximately 0.10m of orange-brown silt clay alluvium (3001). At the northern end of the trench was a ditch (F7) which continued the alignment of ditch F7 (2003, Fig.3) recorded in Trench 2 to the south. With steep sides and a flat base feature F7 here measured 0.4m in width and 0.2m in depth, and was filled with a grey clay silt (3002). At the southern end of the trench, cutting alluvial layer 3001, was a small ovoid feature (F8) which measured approximately 1.15m across and 0.21m in depth. The full extent of this feature lay beyond the eastern baulk of Trench 3. This feature was filled with a dark brown silty clay containing brick fragments, modern glass and one sherd of 19th century cream-ware pottery.

### *Interpretation*

Feature F7 seems likely to be a property of field boundary associated with properties fronting onto Bridge Street, and perpendicular to the boundary ditch F15. Finds evidence suggests a date of the late-18th/early-19th century for all deposits encountered in Trench 3.

### Trench 4 (Fig. 3)

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 4 measured approximately 19m in length and was aligned approximately northeast-southwest. It was positioned in an area where the ground surface was noticeably higher than in the vicinity of Trenches 1, 2 and 3.

The subsoil in Trench 4, exposed at a depth of approximately 0.95m, was an orange/yellow silty gravel (4007). This sloped downwards from west to east where at approximately 14m from the western end of Trench 4 it became a dark yellow gravel with clay (4008). No features were apparent within the layer 4008.

Approximately 10m from the southwest end of Trench 4 was a shallow circular feature (F3), measuring 1.47m in diameter and 0.18m in depth. The northern extent of feature F3 lay beyond the northwestern baulk of Trench 4. With gradually

sloping sides and a flat base feature F3 was filled by a black charcoal rich silt (4004), which contained three abraded fragments of Iron Age pottery.

To the northeast of feature F3 was a small circular feature (F5), possibly a post-hole cut into the natural gravel (4007), measuring 0.35m in diameter and 0.10m in depth. With gradually sloping sides and a flat base, feature F5 was filled by a mid-brown clay with silt and charcoal (4005). The fill (4005) of feature F5 was similar in character to that of a small circular unexcavated deposit (4006) to the north of F5.

A sondage measuring 1.2m in length, 0.5m in width and 0.3m in depth was hand dug approximately 8m from the southwestern end of Trench 4. This was in order to establish the relationship of an apparent curvilinear deposit (4009, Fig. 3), to Feature F3. The curvilinear deposit (4009) was found to be natural in origin. These features were in turn sealed by a layer of brown silty clay (4002), which contained fragments of natural flint.

At the western end of Trench 4 was a shallow ditch feature F4, aligned northwest-south east, cutting layer 4002. Feature F4 measured approximately 1.6m wide and 0.18m deep and was cut with gradually sloping sides and a flat base. Filled with a brown silty clay with charcoal (4003), very similar to layer 4002, F4 contained one retouched flake, possibly a scraper of dark grey pebble flint and possibly one other flake. Other finds included two sherds of 18th/19th century, brown glazed pottery, and an iron nail.

Feature F4 and layer 4002 were sealed by a layer of very dark brown silt with clay (4001) and occasional fragments of brick. The topsoil in Trench 4 was a dark brown silt with coarse sand and clay (4000).

### *Interpretation*

The large shallow feature F3, containing three sherds of Iron Age pottery, suggests some form of Iron Age activity in the study area. Features F5 and F6 may be associated with this activity. However, no dating evidence was produced from these latter features. The curvilinear deposit (4009) appears to be natural in origin and may be the result of periglacial cracking.

The subsoil in Trench 4 was sealed by approximately 0.95m of overburden (compared to Trenches 1, 2 and 3, which were shown to have an overburden of approximately 0.45m). This may have afforded some degree of protection to archaeological deposits from more recent disturbance.

### Trench 5 (Not illustrated)

#### *Objectives and results*

Trench 5, located inside the northern boundary of the study area (Fig. 2), measured 20m in length and was orientated northwest-southeast. The position of this trench was re-aligned from its original location due to the presence of a large pit filled with water in the northwestern corner of the site.

The subsoil in Trench 5, exposed at a depth of approximately 0.28m, was an orange-brown gravel with sand and silt (5001). Towards the centre of Trench 5 was a linear feature (F1) orientated northwest-southeast. With gradually sloping sides and a gently rounded base, feature F1 measured approximately 1.9m in width. Feature F1 was filled by a brown silty clay with charcoal (5002) which was truncated to the north by a linear feature F2. Feature F2 was aligned north-south

and contained building rubble which was evident in its upper fill (5003). The trench was sealed by 0.28m of brown silt overburden (5000).

### *Interpretation*

The profile of Feature F1 is comparable to a plough furrow, and may represent possible ridge and furrow.

### **5.0: THE FINDS** *by Lynne Bevan and Ann Woodward*

Feature F1 (Trench 5) contained three water rolled flint flakes (possibly struck, although lacking in diagnostic features).

Feature F3 (Trench 4) produced three abraded fragments of Iron Age pottery. Two are predominantly shell tempered, one is quartz tempered.

Feature F4 (Trench 4) produced one retouched flint flake, possibly a scraper of dark grey pebble flint, and one other flake. This feature also contained two sherds of brown glazed 18th/19th century pottery and an iron nail.

Feature F7 contained one clay pipe stem, one sherd of brown glazed 18th/19th century pottery and four animal bones.

Feature F8 contained brick fragments, modern glass and one sherd of 19th century cream-ware.

### **6.0: THE ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE** *by Lisa Moffett*

Twenty litre soil samples from features F3 (4004, Trench 4) and F7 (3002, Trench 3) and a 10 litre sample from F5 (4005, Trench 4) were rapidly floated through a 700 micron sieve to recover a sample of any charred plant remains present. The flot was briefly scanned under magnification.

Feature F3 yielded no seeds but contained a large amount of wood charcoal.

Feature F7 contained many snails, a lot of organic material (probably modernish weedy flora), and no charred remains.

The flot from feature F5 was small, consisting mostly roots with no seeds evident.

### **7.0: DISCUSSION**

The southernmost feature encountered in Trench 1 (F15, a wide ditch aligned northeast-southwest) seems likely to be a former property boundary and may represent the extent of properties fronting onto Bridge Street to the south. Although no medieval finds were recovered from this feature, it was not possible to excavate the full width of this deposit. Features F7, F8, F9, F10, F11 and F14, in Trenches 2 and 3, would appear to represent 18th or 19th century activity predominantly within the southern half of the study area.

Feature F3 in Trench 4 (a large shallow pit), suggests Iron Age activity within the study area, and yielded three sherds of quartz tempered and shell tempered Iron Age pottery. Features F5 and F6 may be post-holes associated with this activity. No other features produced datable Iron Age pottery, nor was any residual Iron Age pottery recovered from any other trenches. This negative information could suggest



that Iron Age activity was concentrated in the vicinity of Trench 4. However, given that only one feature (F3) in Trench 4 produced Iron Age pottery, the exact nature or context of such activity cannot be ascertained from the present evidence. The density of undated features in Trench 4 could be interpreted as suggesting that this activity was not intense or long-lived.

Trench 4 showed little evidence of 18th and 19th century disturbance, with the exception of feature F4, a ditch or possible field boundary in the south western end of the trench.

Feature F1 (Trench 5) produced three possible struck flint-flakes. It seems likely however, that this linear feature is the result of strip cultivation forming ridge and furrow. This suggests that the three flint flakes may be residual. The remainder of the northern section of the study area around Trench 5 would appear to be of little archaeological interest due to disturbance by recent activity to the east and the west of the trench (Fig. 2).

No evidence of a medieval hithe associated with Slade Lode was encountered within the study area, or any archaeological deposits relating to the medieval settlement of Chatteris, apart from the possible ridge and furrow in Trench 5.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS**

### **Implications**

Trial-trenching has identified a number of features which are of archaeological interest, despite problems in feature identification and excavation caused by the high water-table and persistent rain during the fieldwork. Of particular interest was the identification of a potential small focus of Iron Age activity within Trench 4, although only one datable feature could be found. A second area of archaeological interest was located in the south of the study area (Trenches 1 and 2), which provided evidence of ditched plot boundaries of post-medieval date.

### **Proposals (Fig. 4)**

The current development plan suggests that construction would have an effect upon identified archaeological deposits within two areas:

#### *ZONE A: Iron Age activity*

##### (1) Terrace of houses adjoining Trench 4.

It is proposed that the overburden within an area measuring 17m by 12m (approximately the footprint of this terrace) should be removed under archaeological control (Trench A). The subsoil surface so revealed should be manually cleaned, to enable archaeological features to be recorded in plan. A sample of the features present would then be hand excavated, to provide information concerning the fill sequences, and to recover datable artifacts and samples for environmental analysis. The objective of this trench is to determine the possible continuation of the Iron Age focus into this area. However, it should be noted that no archaeological features were recorded within the footprint of the building in Trench 4.

##### Terrace of houses to west of Trench 4.

A trench measuring 3m by 8m (Trench B) should be excavated along the eastern side of the terrace of proposed buildings, to the west of Trench 4. This trench would be excavated to the level of the subsoil, under archaeological control, with

sample excavation of any features present. The objective of this trench is to determine the possible continuation of the Iron Age focus of activity into this area.

#### *ZONE B: Terrace of houses in area of Trench 1-2*

An archaeological watching brief should be maintained during construction groundworks in this area to record further evidence of post-medieval activity.

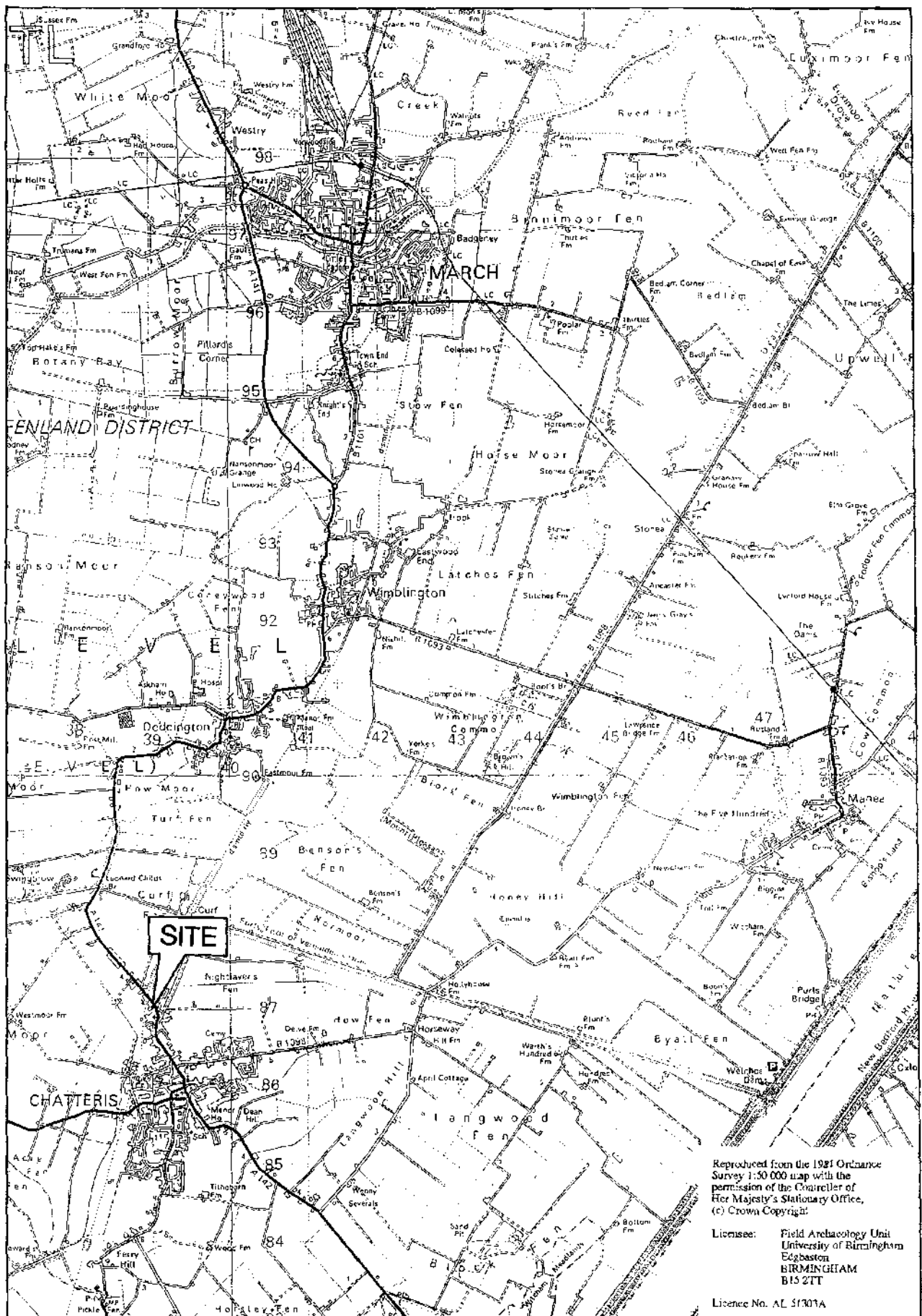
On completion of this further archaeological fieldwork, it may be appropriate to prepare an assessment of the significance of the findings, in accordance with The Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), with a view to further analysis and publication of the results in a local archaeological journal.

### **9.0: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This project was commissioned by Neale Associates on behalf of The First National Commercial Bank P.L.C.. The fieldwork was monitored for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit by Alex Jones and for Cambridgeshire County Council by Louise Austin. The trial-trenching was supervised by Richard Cuttler with the assistance of Bob Burrows and Ed Newton. The environmental assessment was made by Lisa Moffett, with an analysis of the flint finds by Lynne Bevan and the prehistoric pottery by Ann Woodward. The report was edited by Alex Jones and the drawings were prepared by Nigel Dodds and Jon Stenberg.

### **10.0: REFERENCES**

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Fig. 1

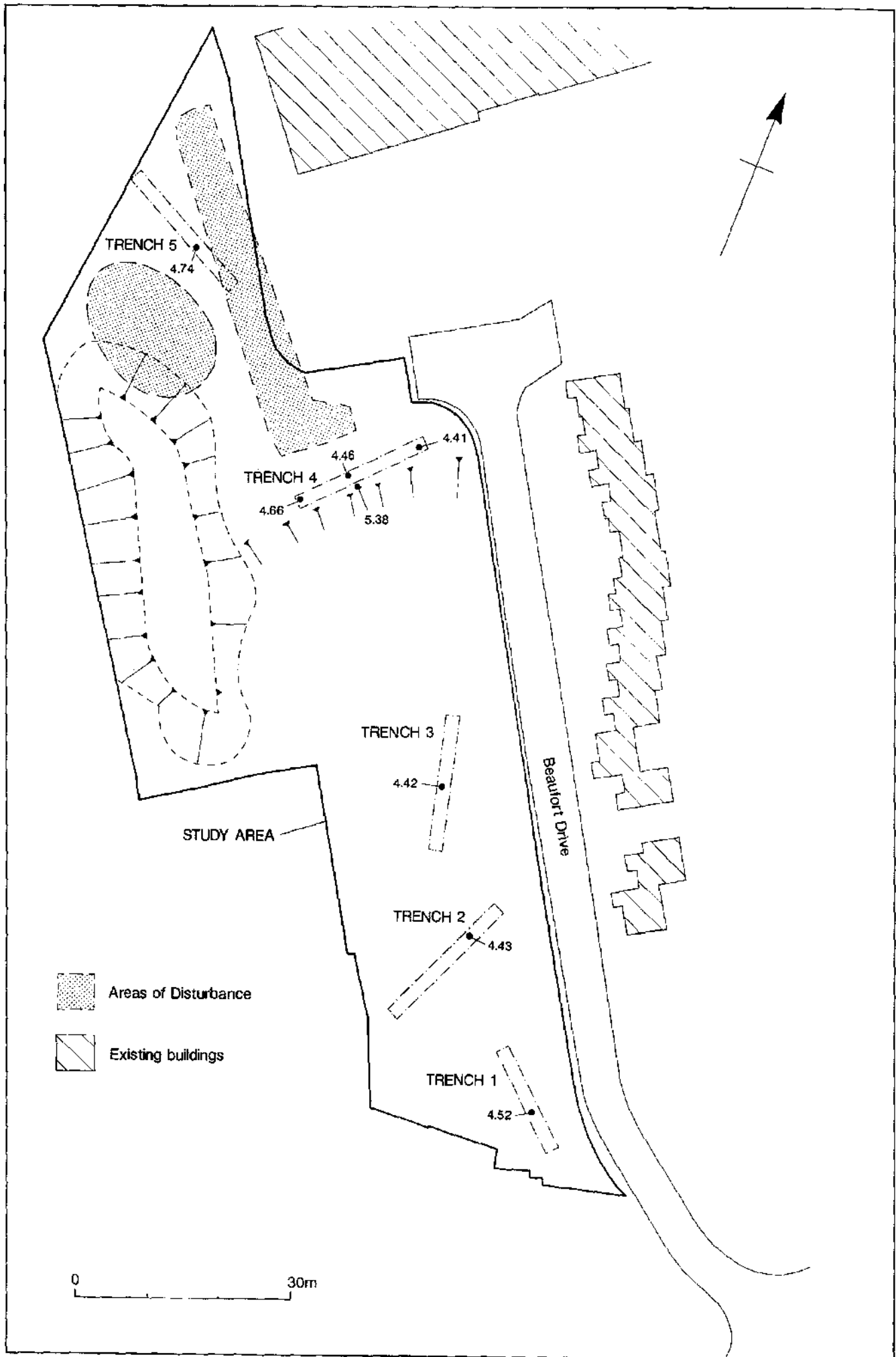


Fig. 2

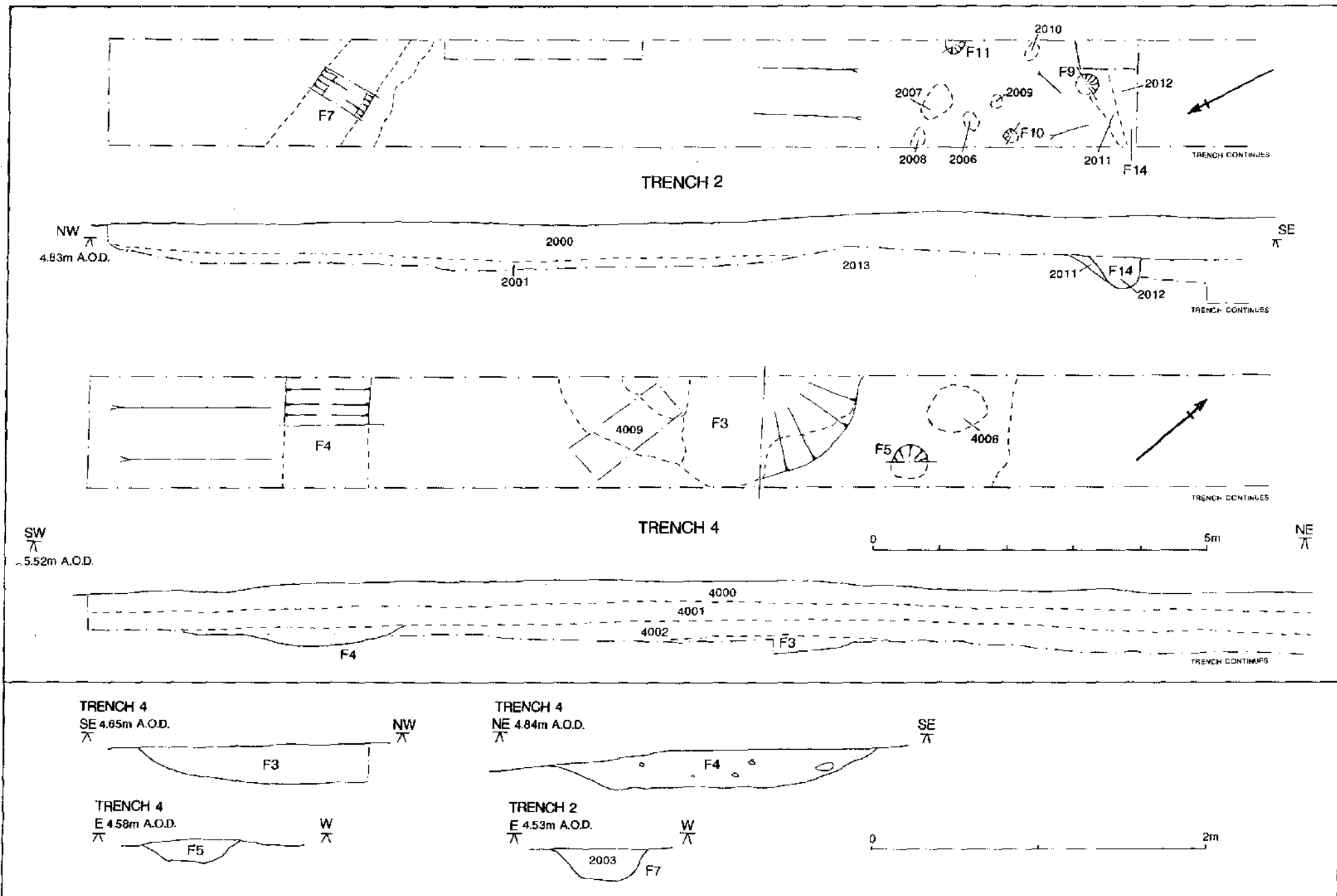


Fig. 3

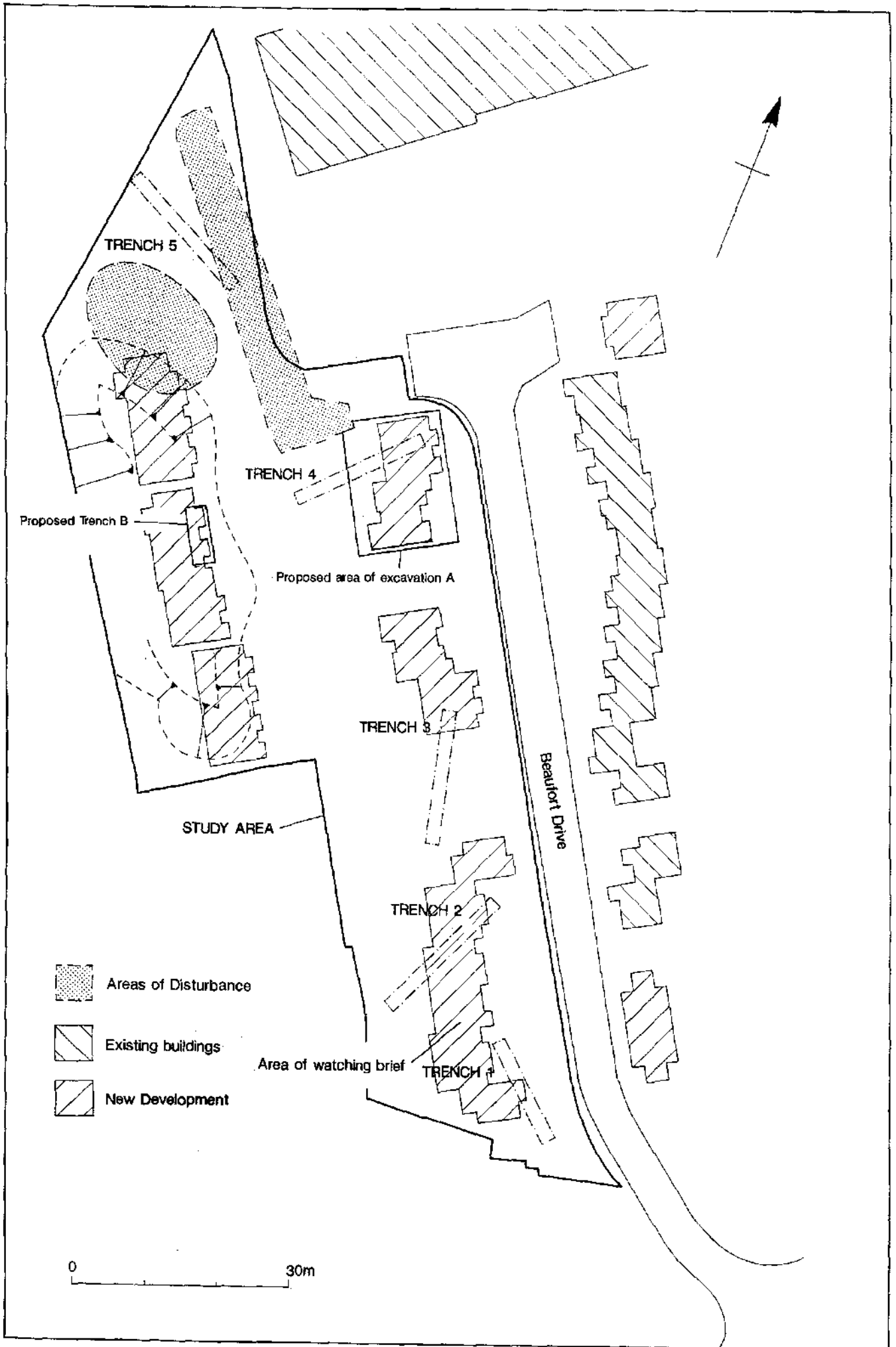


Fig. 4