

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Hammondstreet Road, Cheshunt,
Hertfordshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

by
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HAMMONDSTREET ROAD, CHESHUNT, HERTFORDSHIRE

An Archaeological Evaluation

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1.0 SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area proposed for a large housing development adjacent to Hammondstreet Road, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire (hereinafter called the study area) was tested by means of targeted trial trenching in February 1996. The location of the trial trenches was based upon information derived from a desk-top assessment of the study area and the results from monitoring of geotechnical test-pits carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) in 1994 and 1995.

No significant archaeological deposits were identified by the evaluation. The negative results suggest that the study area, which is situated on the poorly-drained clay soils of a ridge running westwards from the fertile Lea Valley, was probably relatively unattractive for settlement, or even agricultural improvement, prior to the blossoming of the regionally important market garden industry here in the later 19th and early 20th century.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This short report describes the results of an archaeological assessment of c.27.5ha of land centred on NGR TL 321047 adjacent to Hammondstreet Road, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire (Fig.1). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned by Beazer Homes (Central) Limited, the developers, to undertake the evaluation, which was carried out in accordance with the methods specified in the Design Brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office of Hertfordshire County Council (Hurley 1996) and a Research Design/Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation (Jones 1996).

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide information concerning the location, extent, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area. This information might then provide a basis for a series of recommendations and suggestions to mitigate the impact of the development upon the archaeological resource, if required.

Archaeological monitoring of geotechnical test-pits carried out by OAU in 1995 identified six relatively undisturbed parts of the overall study area where the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits was considered to be highest (OAU 1995, 6). Three of these areas were targeted for further below-ground investigation as part of the programme of archaeological evaluation (Hurley 1996). For clarity and continuity the area designations originally given in the OAU report are followed here. The areas examined were OAU Areas II, III and IV depicted on Fig.2.

In particular this evaluation was intended to examine the evidence for a putative section of Roman road believed to roughly follow the line of Hammondstreet Road and possibly represented by a slight earthwork and a parchmark seen within Area III to the north of the road. In addition, while no other known archaeological sites were identified during the desk-top assessment the evaluation sought to assess if previously unrecorded remains, possibly adjacent to and associated with the Roman road, were present within Areas II and IV.

3.0 THE STUDY AREA AND ITS SETTING

The study area is situated on a ridge running west from the Lea Valley, approximately 4km northwest of Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. Fieldwork has identified several Roman roads which traverse the broader area within which the study area is situated. The route of the Romans' main North Road, Ermine Street, has been traced up the western side of the Lea Valley passing close to Flamstead End (Margary 1973, 196; NGR TL 345038), part of its line is marked on the 1:50000 Ordnance Survey map at NGR TL 345003 just south of Theobalds Park in Enfield. It has been demonstrated that '*a very detailed and convenient series of roads based upon Ermine Street covered the whole of the region*' (i.e. north of London; Margary 1973, 191), and the alignment thought to follow Hammondstreet Road was part of this system, linking Cheshunt with Dunstable to the northwest. In common with several roads in the vicinity, Hammondstreet Road follows the peak of a ridge of ground, rising from Ermine Street at Flamstead End. These 'ridgeways' were probably favoured by travellers long before the Romans, but fieldwork has shown that Hammondstreet Road, Goffs Lane to the south (B156) and the Cuffley Ridgeway (B157) to the southwest were Roman routeways which retain characteristically Roman features including *agger* (banked sections) and ditches in places.

The surrounding countryside also contains significant evidence of medieval activity, including several moated sites, the Enfield Chase where the royal court used to hunt, and the remains of the Cheshunt Common. In contrast to the Roman road system, surviving evidence of medieval activity appears to be more concentrated within the richer land of the valley floors. The poorly-drained Common in which the study area was located before 19th century enclosure was probably always considered to be marginal agricultural land, possibly managed as scrubland with coppice and animal pannage, until the growth of the market garden industry in the later 19th and earlier 20th century.

Today, only a narrow strip of land to the west of the access road to Tanfield Farm remains within Cheshunt Common, and the nurseries - which were built to provide the Capital City with fresh fruit, flowers and vegetables - are themselves in the process of being developed for housing.

4.0 THE INVESTIGATION

A total of ten trial trenches was opened which provided a 2% sample of the total extent of the study area. The trenches were excavated using a JCB-machine with a toothless ditching bucket to remove the topsoil to reveal the subsoil surface. Definition of this surface was relatively good following machining, and no archaeological features were identified at this stage. Subsequently, each trench was manually cleaned. Trenches were recorded using standard BUFAU pre-printed recording forms, together with level, photograph, and locational details, which are contained within the overall project archive.

4.1 Area II (Fig.3)

Two trenches (Trenches 4 and 5) measuring 50m by 1.6m were opened in an area identified as relatively undisturbed ground by the OAU Geotechnical Report. The trenches were located around the boundary of a rectangular area of scrubland and brambles in the northwest corner of the field within land which had been cleared of former nursery buildings and a bungalow. The objective of digging both trenches was to provide a sample of relatively undisturbed land adjacent to the putative line of the Roman road. In addition, Trench 4 cut the foundations of one of the former nursery buildings which enabled an assessment of the disturbance associated with glasshouse construction to be carried out.

4.2 Area III (Fig.3)

Four 50m long trenches were located in the fields to the east of the former Sylvia Nurseries (Trenches 1,2,3 and 10). The trenches were located in an attempt to identify the line of the Roman road. Trenches 1 and 10 were located as close as was safely possible to the northern boundary of Hammondstreet Road and were designed to test the parchmark (Trench 1) and low bank (Trench 10). Trenches 2 and 3 were excavated to establish if there was any evidence for a road-line further to the north and to prospect for archaeology adjacent to the putative road.

4.3 Area IV (Fig.4)

A total of four trenches was excavated in Area IV. Trenches 6 and 9 measured 50m by 1.6m in length, but Trenches 7 and 8 each measured 25m in length, in order to avoid a field boundary. The objective of digging these trenches was to sample this area downslope of, and to the south of, Hammondstreet Road which had been identified as relatively undisturbed by previous development in the OAU Geotechnical Report.

5.0 RESULTS

No significant archaeological deposits were identified in any of the evaluation trenches. Therefore the results are provided in tabulated form to provide basic data trench by trench, arranged according to OAU Area. No finds were recovered apart from fragments of broken flower pots in Area II.

5.1 Area II

Trench 4

Southwest end of trench:

Ground surface 105.06m; top of subsoil 104.63m AOD.

Northeast end of trench:

Ground Surface 105.49m; top of subsoil 105.11m AOD.

Topsoil directly overlay the natural subsoil which comprised yellow sandy clay with gravel and grey, gleyed ironstone-rich patches. The topsoil was deeper and more humic in Area II probably as a result of the horticultural regime associated with the demolished glasshouses.

The actual below-ground disturbance associated with the construction of these glasshouses is relatively limited, being confined to foundation trenches for the main external walls, regularly spaced concrete piles for steel roof supports which prevented the greenhouse from raking laterally, and shallow electric and water service pipes and cables - although more significant below-ground disturbance may be anticipated in access areas (Rooke 1983, 44).

Trench 5

South end of trench:

Ground surface 105.58m; top of subsoil 105.07m AOD.

North end of trench:

Ground surface 105.12m; top of subsoil 104.68m AOD.

Topsoil overlay natural clay and gravels. There was a shallow mixed-soil horizon between the natural clay and topsoil.

5.2 Area III

Trench 1

South end of trench:

Ground surface 102.89m; top of subsoil 102.57m AOD.

North end of trench:

Ground surface 104.23m; top of subsoil 103.88m AOD.

A shallow mantle of topsoil directly overlay the natural clay subsoil with gravel patches. Drainage was very poor and the ground quickly became waterlogged. A slightly rising undulation in the natural clay corresponded with a very slight earthwork bank in this field, this apparently natural feature may explain the appearance of the parchmark here in dry weather conditions.

Trench 2

Southwest end of trench:

Ground surface 104.13m; top of subsoil 103.88m AOD.

Northeast end of trench::

Ground surface 104.27m; top of subsoil 103.76m AOD.

The natural subsoil contained a higher percentage of gravel approaching the summit of the ridge in this field. Topsoil mantle remained thin.

Trench 3

South end of trench:

Ground surface 104.29m; top of subsoil 103.95m AOD

North end of trench:

Ground surface 104.44m; top of subsoil 104.21m AOD.

Comments as Trench 2.

Trench 10

South end of trench:

Ground surface 103.80m; top of subsoil 103.50m AOD.

North end of trench:

Ground surface 104.67m; top of subsoil 104.35m AOD.

Trench 10 cut the bank running parallel to, but set back c.20m from, the road frontage. Unlike the bank associated with the parchmark cut by Trench 1 to the east, this bank was formed of topsoil. Therefore this feature is probably the remnant of a disused field boundary.

5.3 Area IV

Trench 6

South end of trench:

Ground surface 97.13m; top of subsoil 96.80m AOD.

North end of trench:
Ground surface 99.07m; top of subsoil 98.69m AOD.

In spite of being situated on a south-facing slope away from Hammondstreet Road the land in Area IV was also poorly drained, with a thin mantle of topsoil overlying the natural clay subsoil. Trench 6 was bisected at right angles by a ditch associated with the remains of a field boundary (mapped on Fig.3), which was still discernible in places by patches of bushes and small trees.

Trench 7

South end of trench:
Ground surface 99.56m; top of subsoil 99.12m AOD.

North end of trench:
Ground surface 100.16m; top of subsoil 99.82m AOD.

Poorly drained natural clay subsoil overlain by a thin mantle of topsoil.

Trench 8

South end of trench:
Ground surface 98.12m; top of subsoil 97.67m AOD.

North end of trench:
Ground surface 99.15m; top of subsoil 98.92m AOD.

Comments as Trench 7.

Trench 9

West end of trench:
Ground surface 100.51m; top of subsoil 100.15m AOD.

East end of trench:
Ground surface 98.77m; top of topsoil 98.51m AOD.

Comments as Trench 7.

6.0 DISCUSSION

Given the totally negative results of the archaeological evaluation it is considered that no archaeological constraints upon the proposed development are appropriate in this case. Therefore no recommendations or suggestions for further work have been highlighted.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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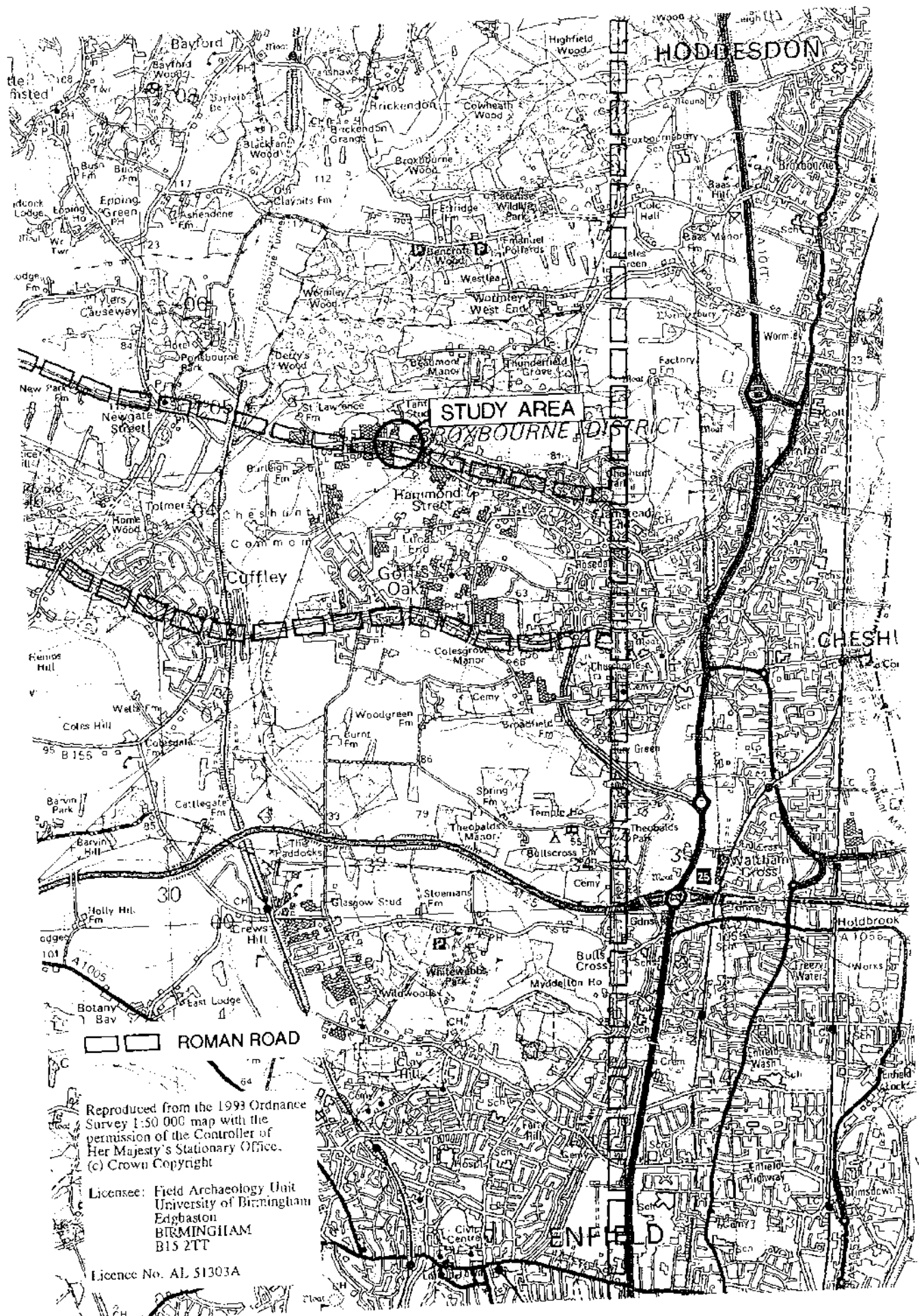


Fig.1

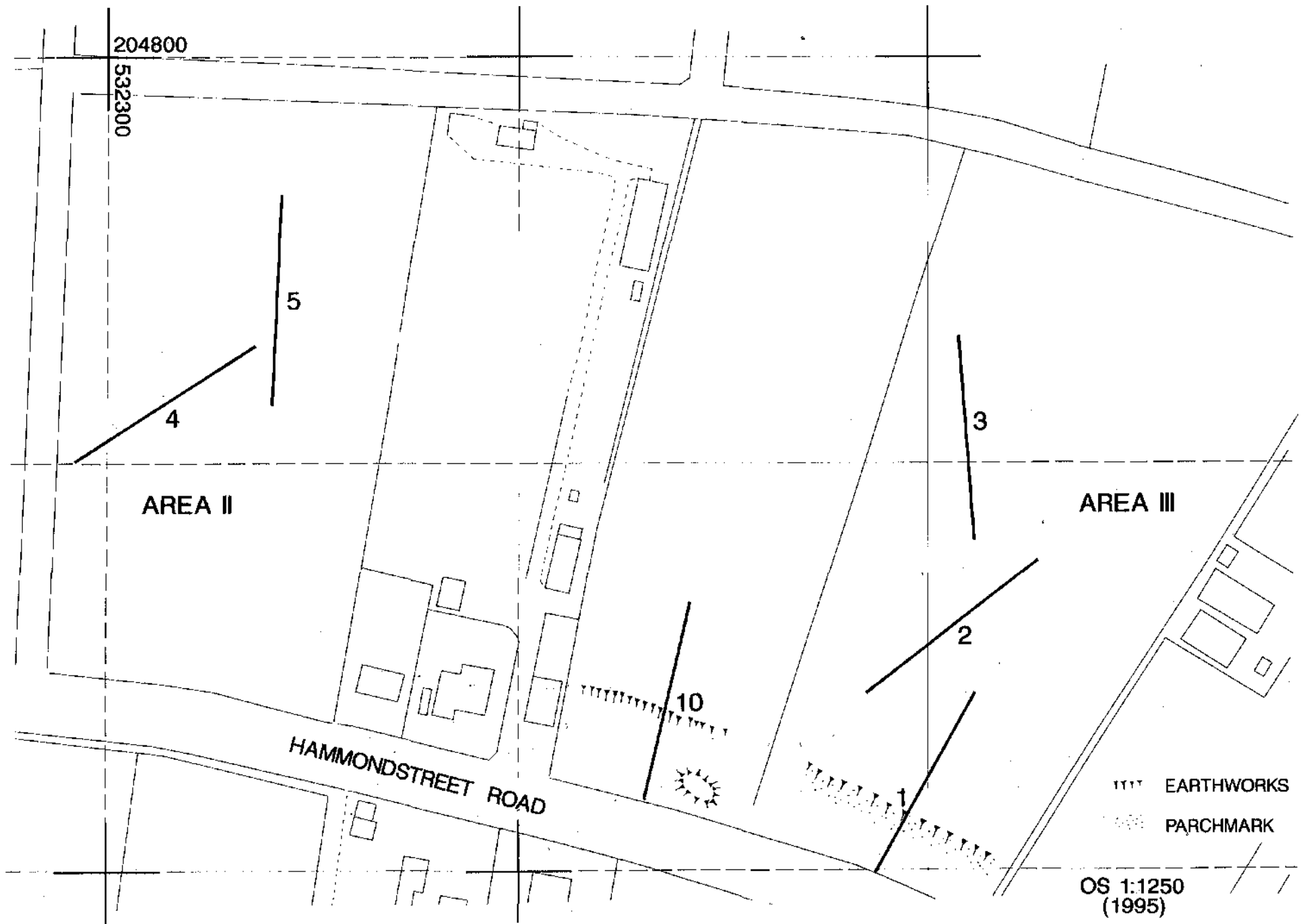
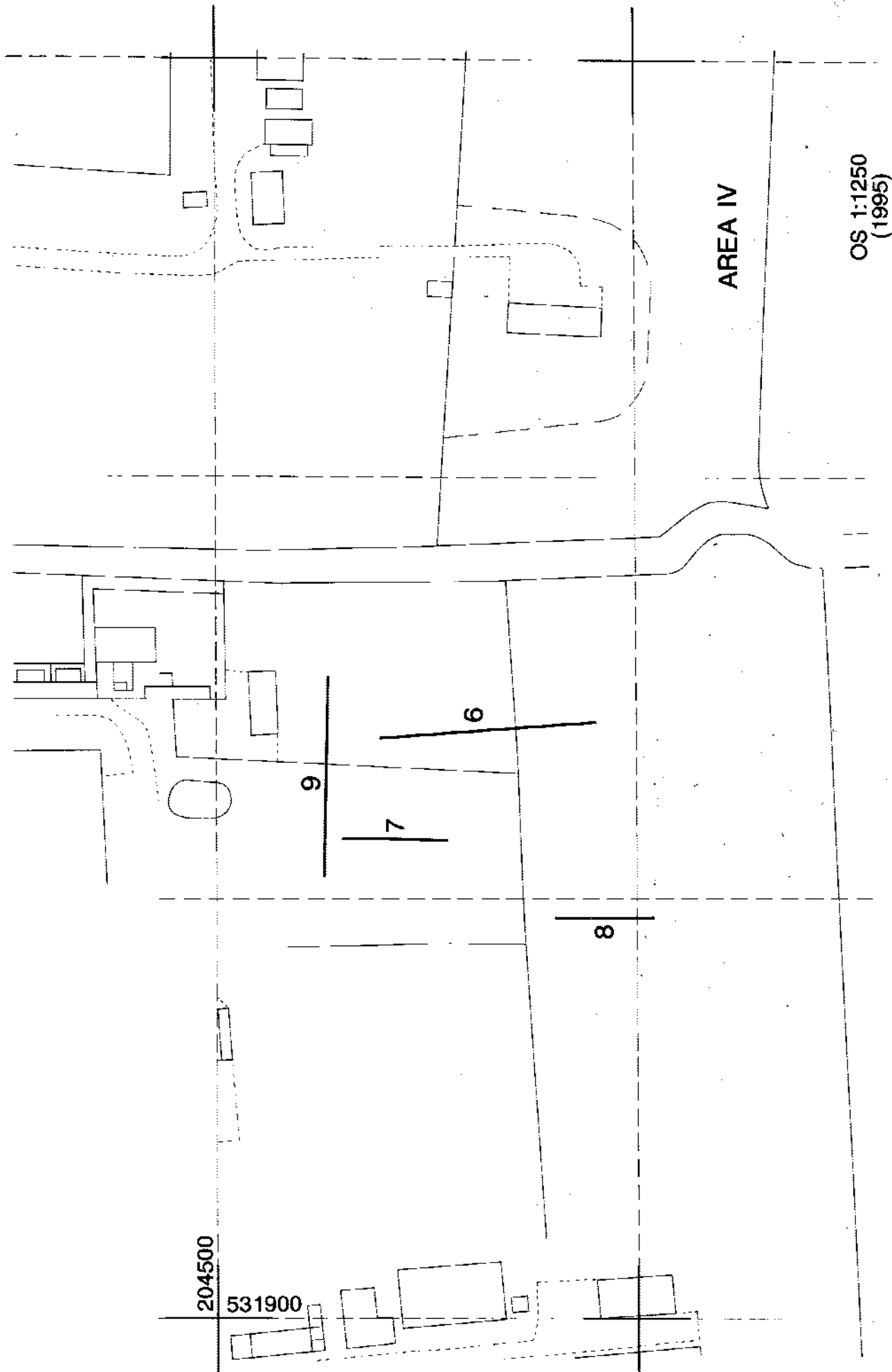


Fig.3



OS 1:1250
(1995)

Fig.4