

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**Church Close, Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire
An Archaeological Evaluation 1997**

B.U.F.A.U.



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Church Close, Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire
An Archaeological Evaluation 1997

by
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**Church Close, Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire.
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1.0:SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area to the north of Church Close, as identified in a Brief for archaeological evaluation (hereafter 'the brief') prepared for the Development Control Office, Archaeology Section, Cambridgeshire County Council, was examined by targeted trial-trenching, undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Lawson-Price Environmental. A number of features of archaeological interest were identified by the trial-trenching, of which a representative sample was tested by hand excavation. The features identified comprised ditches, gulleys and pits. The limited dating evidence recovered suggests a date for this activity mainly in the 13-14th centuries. No evidence was found of the possible moat, occupying part of the site, although only one moat arm could be trenched. The trial-trenching followed a selective geophysical survey, carried out by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford.

2.0: INTRODUCTION (Figs. 1-3)

This report describes the results of the archaeological evaluation of an area to the north of Church Close, Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire (centred at NGR TL 330442, hereafter 'the site'). The site comprises two adjoining fields, both currently under rough pasture, and containing a number of mature trees. The underlying geology consists of Grey Chalk, Chalk Marl and Totternhoe Stone of the Lower chalk beds. The fields are separated by a substantial ditched boundary, overgrown with dense foliage, and together total approximately 1.36 ha. The southern field within the site is located within the probable northern arm of a medieval moat (Cambridgeshire SMR 01238; Fig. 2), associated with the medieval church of St. Peter and St. Paul (SMR 03191). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site by Lawson-Price Environmental, in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, in advance of a proposed housing development. The methodology of this evaluation conforms to a Specification for Archaeological Evaluation (Lawson Price Environmental 1997), and a Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council (Cambridgeshire CC 1994). The project followed the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

The purpose of the evaluation was:

- 1) to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains.
- 2) to assess the presence and survival of artifactual and environmental information.
- 3) in particular, it was intended to locate and identify medieval and possible Saxon settlement/burial evidence and to model the extent of any remains located.

This report provides a summary of the data provided by trial-trenching. The results of the preliminary geophysical survey are also summarised; the full report may be found elsewhere (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1997).

3.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The southern field within the site is believed to be enclosed within the area of a medieval rectilinear moat, associated with the parish church of St. Peter and St. Paul. It is suggested that the moat pre-dates the current church, which is dated to the latter part of the 13th century, and that an earlier church may have occupied a position located more centrally within the moat (VCH 1948, 16). Other possible moated sites are identified in Bassingbourn, including one example located to the east of the site, of suggested 12th century date (*ibid.*, 3).

4.0: METHODOLOGY (Figs. 2-3)

The geophysical survey employed a gradiometer to locate the areas of archaeological potential within the site. Much of the site area was found to be magnetically disturbed, or otherwise unsuitable for geophysical survey. In particular, no survey was possible over the line of the northern moat arm.

Trial trench locations, agreed in consultation with the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council, were positioned to coincide with proposed house footprints and proposed roads. A total of seven trenches, each measuring 20m in length and 1.6m in width were excavated. Additional excavation was subsequently undertaken in Trench 4, to further test the sequence and character of deposits there identified.

In each trench the topsoil was removed by a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, to expose the uppermost archaeological horizon, or the natural subsoil. The machined horizon was hand cleaned to define any archaeological features or deposits present, and a representative sample of these features/deposits were tested by manual excavation. All artifacts found were collected, and samples for environmental analyses were taken from a range of the datable features. Recording was by means of pro-forma printed sheets, supplemented by photography and drawn plans and sections at appropriate scales, which together with the recovered artefacts form the site archive (currently held at BUFAU).

5.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

5.1: Geophysical survey

The anomalies found in Area A (Figs. 2 and 4) comprise small anomalies of ferrous type, and the magnetic 'shadow' of a corrugated iron building in the northeastern corner of the site; no anomalies of possible archaeological interest were found. Although Area B was less disturbed than the other area, the identified anomalies were mainly interpreted to be of modern origin.

5.2: Trial-trenching (Fig. 4)

Trench 1 (Not illustrated in detail)

Trench 1, aligned east-west, was located at the southern limit of the site. At the western end of the trench the lowest deposit recorded was a pale yellow grey clay-silt (1008), located at a depth of 0.80m below the modern surface (at 27.29m AOD). Deposit 1008 measured a minimum of 0.45m in depth, and is interpreted as natural in origin. At the eastern end of the trench, the lowest deposit identified was a white grey chalky clay-silt (1007), recorded at a depth of 0.70m below the modern surface. Deposit 1007 was cut by three features (F100, F101, F102) and also by a modern field drain. Feature F100 was a shallow linear cut, aligned north-south, measuring 1.2m in width and 0.28m in depth, which extended both to the north and south of the trench. Feature F100 was backfilled with a mid-grey clay-silt (1004). Feature F101 was a small linear cut, aligned approximately southwest-northeast, measuring 0.75m in width and up to 0.36m in depth, and backfilled with mid grey clay silt (1005). Feature F102, only partially exposed in the trench, was an irregular cut, measuring a maximum of 2.2m in length, 0.6m in width, and 0.35m in depth, and backfilled with pale grey clay-silt (1006). Above was a layer of brown-grey clay-silt (1003). Layer 1003 was overlain by further deposits containing modern building debris (1002, 1001), in turn sealed by turf and topsoil (1000).

Features F100 and F101 contained pottery dating to the 13-14th century.

Trench 2 (Figs. 5-6)

Trench 2 was located to the north of Trench 1, and was aligned north-south. The earliest deposit recorded was a grey white chalky clay-silt (2005) recorded at a depth of up to 1.11m below the modern surface (at 26.27m AOD). This deposit sloped away towards the southern end of the trench, where it was overlain by a layer of mid grey clay-silt (2014). Deposit 2005 was cut by features F200, F201, F202, and F203, and was sealed by layer 2015, a pale grey clay silt which may represent the fill of another similarly-shaped feature (not excavated). Feature F200 was a vertically sided pit, measuring 1.75m in width and 0.85m in depth, backfilled with grey clay-silts (2003-4). Feature F201 was a fairly steep-sided pit or possible ditch terminal, measuring 2.70m in width, and 0.50m in depth. It was backfilled with pale brown grey clay silts (2006 and 2007). Feature F202 was a small steep sided cut, measuring 1.25m in width, and 0.60m in depth, filled by a sequence of alternating lenses of charcoal, and grey clay-silt (2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012). Adjoining feature F203 was a very shallow, but regular, concave hollow, measuring 2.5m in width, and 0.16m in depth. It was backfilled with a pale grey brown clay silt (2013). Feature F200 was sealed by a layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (2002), and feature F201 was sealed by a layer of similar composition (2008). The latter deposits were in turn sealed by clay-silt (2001), recorded below the turf and topsoil (2000).

Feature F200 contained pottery dating to the 14-15th century; feature F201 contained pottery dating to the 12-14th century.

Trench 3 (Figs. 5-6)

Trench 3, located in the centre of the site was aligned north-south. It was positioned to intercept the line of the northern arm of the possible medieval moat. The lowest deposit was a grey white chalky clay silt (3003), recorded at a depth of 0.45-0.75m below the modern surface (at between 27.15m- 26.72m AOD). Deposit 3003 was cut by linear features F300 and F301, and was also overlain by layers of grey silt 3006 and 3007 (unexcavated)). Feature F300, located in the north of the trench was aligned east-west, and measured 1.90m in width, and 0.30m in depth. It was backfilled with light brown clay silt (3002). Feature F301, located in the centre of the trench was cut parallel with feature F300, to the south, and measured 2.40m in width and 0.53m in depth. It was backfilled with pale grey clay-silt (3004 and 3005). These features were sealed by 0.35-0.60m of mid brown grey clay silt (3001), recorded below the modern turf and topsoil (3000).

No datable pottery was recovered from this trench.

Trench 4 (Not illustrated in detail)

Trench 4 was located to the west of Trench 3, and was aligned east-west; it was later extended to the south. The lowest deposit recorded in the machine-dug extension was a pale yellow white grit (4006), recorded at a depth of up to 1.65m from the modern ground surface (at 27.42m AOD), sealed by a layer of up to 0.25m of white chalky clay-silt (4007). At the western end of the trench, and extending into the extension was a coarse yellow sand (4005). Deposit 4005 was overlain by an irregular layer of white chalky clay silt (4004). Deposits 4004, 4006 and 4007 were sealed by up to 0.55m of pale grey silt clay (4002) containing flecks of white chalky material. Deposit 4002 was overlain by 0.70m of mid brown grey clay silt (4001), below the modern turf and topsoil (4000).

No archaeological features were identified in this trench and no artefacts were recovered.

Trench 5 (Figs. 5-6)

Trench 5 was located at the northern limit of the site, and was aligned east-west. The lowest deposit recorded was a pale yellow brown clay silt (5008), recorded in the base of feature F501 at a depth of 1.20m below the modern surface (at 27.20m AOD). This is interpreted as being natural in origin. Deposit 5008 was overlain by a pale yellow white clay-silt (5007), exposed over part of the base of the trench. Deposit 5007 was cut by features F500, F501 and F502, and was also overlain by deposits 5005 and 5006, both pale brown clay silts, which probably represent the fills of further linear features, but which were not excavated. Feature F502 was a small, steeply-sided, ditch, aligned southwest-northeast, measuring 0.90m in width and 0.23m in depth, which was backfilled with pale brown clay silt (5004). This feature was cut by ditch F501, which was aligned north-south. Feature F501 was cut to a stepped profile, and measured 2.45m in width, and 0.62m in depth. It was backfilled with compact, pale grey brown clay-silt (5003). Feature F500 was a shallow linear feature aligned north-south, located at the western end of the trench, measuring 1.25m in width and 0.25m in depth, and filled by a light grey brown clay silt (5002). The above features and deposits were sealed by 0.45m of mid brown grey clay-silt (5001), which was overlain by turf and topsoil (5000).

Feature F501 contained pottery dating to the 14-15th century.

Trench 6 (Figs. 5-6)

Trench 6 was located in the northeastern corner of the site, and was aligned north-south. The lowest deposit encountered here was a white chalky clay-silt (6009), recorded at a depth of up to 1.10m below the modern surface (at 27.05m AOD). Deposit 6009 was cut by features F600, F601, F602, F603 and was overlain by deposits 6007 and 6008. Feature F600 was a shallow, irregular ditch, aligned north-south, which continued beyond the southern end of the trench. It measured 0.13m in depth, and 1.10m in width, and was backfilled with clay-silt (6005). Feature F601, to the north, was a small steep sided linear ditch or gully, aligned east-west, and measuring 0.60m in width and 0.36m in depth, backfilled with layers of silt (6003-4). Layer 6007 was a dark grey brown clay-silt, recorded in the base of the trench. Layer 6008 comprised a similar material, and may represent the fill of an unexcavated feature. Feature F601 and deposits 6007 and 6008 were cut by a gully F603. This feature measured 0.72m in width, and 0.28m in depth and was backfilled with mid grey-brown clay-silt (6006, 6010). Feature F601, and layers 6007 and 6008, representing possible unexcavated feature fills, were sealed by a layer of dark grey-brown clay-silt (6002), overlain by a layer of clay-silt (6001), recorded below the modern topsoil (6000).

No datable pottery was recovered from this trench.

Trench 7 (Not illustrated)

Trench 7 was located to the northeast of Trench 1 and was aligned east-west. The earliest deposit recorded was a white chalky clay silt (7007), recorded at a depth of 0.70m below the modern surface (at 27.20m AOD). Layer 7007 was cut by two post-holes (F700, F701), and by feature F702, and was overlain by layer 7006. Feature F700 was a post-hole 0.30m in diameter, and 0.15m in depth, backfilled with pale grey clay silt (7002). Feature F701, was also interpreted as a post-hole, measuring 0.38m in diameter and 0.28m in depth, backfilled with pale grey silts (7003 and 7004). Feature F702 was a very shallow sub-circular depression, 1.75m in width and 0.06m in depth, backfilled with a mixed grey brown clay silt (7005). Deposit 7006 was a linear layer, measuring 0.70m in width, 0.09m in depth, aligned north-south, not associated with any discernible feature. The latter features and deposits were overlain by 0.60m of mid grey brown clay silt (7001) and 0.10m of turf and topsoil (7000).

Feature F702 contained pottery of 14-15th century date.

6.0: SPECIALIST REPORTS

6.1: Animal bone by Umberto Albarella

<i>Feature/layer</i>	<i>Identification</i>
Tr. 1	
F100/1004	Cow tooth, sheep metatarsal gnawed by dog.
F101/1005	Dog tooth.
Tr. 3	
F300/3002	2 unidentified fragments.
Tr. 5	
F500/5002	Cow skull fragments.
F501/5003	Pig tooth and fragments
Tr. 6	
F603/6006	Sheep astralagus, partially digested.
Tr. 7	
F702/7005	2 unidentified fragments

This assemblage is too small for any meaningful comments to be made.

6.2: Medieval pottery by Stephanie Ratkai

<i>Feature/layer</i>	<i>Spot-dating</i>
Tr. 1	
F100/1004	13-14th century
F101/1005	13-14th century
Tr. 2	
F200/2003	14-15th century
F201/2006	12-14th century
Tr. 5	
F501/5003	14-15th century
Tr. 7	
F702/7005	14-15th century

The pottery, numbering 21 sherds, is in a generally poor condition. Sherd size is small and many sherds are abraded. It is therefore difficult to be precise about the vessel forms and dating. The absence of St. Neots type ware and Developed St. Neots suggests a date after 1200. Similarly the absence of Cistercian wares or late medieval redwares indicates a date before 1500. However the sample size is small.

Most of the sherds appear to be from cooking pot/jars.

The fabrics seem to belong to local traditions. Sandy calcareous wares predominate. There are in addition, examples of a coarse brown sandy ware (See Hurst 1966 and Coppack 1980) and some calcareous (limestone fragments and oolites) tempered ware. There was a single example of East Midlands grey ware and two joining sherds from a handle in a fine red ware, possibly from a graffito ware vessel.

A very abraded sherd from feature F200 is almost certainly Roman, and residual. Two coarse (joining) sherds from feature F501 are most probably from a ridge tile.

This assemblage is too small, and in too poor condition for meaningful comments to be made concerning the wider significance of its composition.

6.3: Charred plant remains by Angela Monckton

Method

Five samples were processed in a York tank, using a 1mm mesh, and with flotation into a 0.5mm sieve. The flotation fractions were air dried, and sorted using a stereo microscope at x10 magnification; a large flot was divided and had a fraction examined. The remains found were recorded and removed to glass tubes for the less productive samples. The large productive sample was scanned only. The flots were stored dry in polythene bags and the plant remains which were removed were stored in glass tubes with the flots.

Results

One sample (from feature F202, below) contained very abundant cereal grains, with some chaff and weed seeds, and the remains were reasonably well preserved. Four of the samples produced a few very abraded charred plant remains, and also contained abundant well preserved snail shells. The samples were between 6 to 15 litres in volume.

Sample 1, Tr. 3, F300, 3004.

The 8 litre sample produced 30 mls. of flot. Abundant roots and snail shells were present. Uncharred seeds of elder (*Sambucus* sp) and of bedstraw (*Galium* sp) were found together with a very few fragments of charred cereal grain. Over 100 snail shells included *Anisus leucostoma*, *Cochlicopa lubrica*, *Discus rotundus*, *Pupillia muscorum*, *Vallonia* sp, *Trichia* spp and a few *Ceciliodes acicula*.

Sample 2, Tr. 5, F501, 5003.

The 15 litre sample produced 90 mls of flot. Evidence of cereals was found, including seven wheat grains (*Triticum* sp) three of which were tail-grains, and 31 indeterminate cereal grains which were abraded and encrusted with minerals. Other charred remains included four seeds of large grasses (Poaceae), and a fragment of hazel nutshell (*Corylus Avellana*) and a small stem fragment. Snails were most abundant in this sample, over 200 were present and included the same snails mentioned above.

Sample 3, Tr. 6, F501, 6003.

An 11 litre sample produced 25mls of flot, including roots and abundant snails. Few indeterminate cereal grains and a straw fragment were the only charred remains found, and a few charred seeds were present. Over 150 snails included those already noted, together with *Lymnaea truncatula*; abundant juvenile shells were seen.

Sample 4, Tr. 6, layer 6007.

The 9 litre sample produced 20mls of flot, including roots. One grain of wheat and 11 abraded cereal grains together with an uncharred elder seed were found. About 50 snails were seen, with the same snails as the previous sample, and the addition of *Lymnaea peregra* indicating permanent water in the past.

Sample 5, Tr. 2, F202.

The 6 litre sample produced 150 mls of flot with abundant charred material. Charred cereal grains were very abundant; several hundred were seen in the whole flot, of which half was scanned for the present assessment. Wheat including bead wheat type (*Triticum cf aestivum*) grains, oat (*Avena* sp), Rye (*Secale cereale*) and a little barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) were found. Cereal chaff was also present in small amounts and included rachis of rye and free-threshing wheat. Some fragments of leguminous seeds (*Pisum/Lathyrus*) may represent edible legume crops. Weed seeds included abundant large grasses, particularly brome grass (*Bromus* sp), field gromwell (*Lithospermum arvense*) was numerous and small numbers of other seeds, including such plants as *Silene* spp and goosefoots (*Chenopodium* spp) were also found.

Potential

The abundant cereal remains from feature F202 have the potential to provide information about the proportions of the types of grain in the feature backfill, and may suggest that this is a mixed crop, such as those known as maslin in the medieval period. There is potential for more detailed identification of the rachis material which may confirm the types of wheat present. Further identification of the weed seeds may suggest the type of land cultivated or the season of cultivation. It is unusual to find rich cereal deposits in rural contexts, and it would be desirable for this sample to be fully analysed. Although few plant remains were found in the remaining samples, the presence of charred cereals suggest that redeposited domestic rubbish is present, and the distribution of these remains may help to define the areas of domestic activity on the site. The snail shells were recovered in sufficient numbers to permit further analysis. They could suggest the nearby presence of grassland, possibly pasture, as well as that of disturbed ground in the vicinity.

Implications

If further excavation is carried out, the processing of further samples should be a priority, as they could have potential to provide data concerning the nature of nearby cultivation, and the possible nearby processing of cereals. Evidence of crop processing may be found from similar deposits, where the proportions of charred remains can be established from large assemblages of charred material. A range of other features should be sampled, to define areas of domestic or other activity, across the site. This data could also be useful for inter-site comparison, on a local, and possibly regional basis. Further sampling, and analysis of the snails could also provide additional useful data concerning the medieval environment.

7.0: DISCUSSION

The recovery of a sherd of Roman pottery could indicate some form of activity in the vicinity, although it was residual in a medieval feature F200 (Trench 2). Although the dating evidence recovered was limited, the pottery suggests the medieval activity may be dated in the range 13-15th century. No material post-dating 1500 was found, suggesting the permanent abandonment of the site in the later medieval period.

Few, if any features of archaeological interest were found by geophysical survey, possibly because of disturbances associated with buried metal or fencelines. Alternatively, it is possible that the depth of the topsoil overburden may have impeded the visibility of the underlying remains. Trial-trenching did not provide any direct information concerning the location or survival of the possible medieval moat. In the event it was possible to locate only one trench to intercept the moat line (Trench 3). Although two ditches (F300, F301) were located in that trench, neither feature is likely to have formed part of the northern arm of the moat. With the exception of Trench 4, features of probable or possible medieval date were found in all trenches. Numerically, the most common feature type was the ditch or gully, found in Trenches 1, 3, 5 and 6. Pits and post-holes were found only in Trenches 2 and 7, both located within the interior of the possible moat, although, of course, such features could pre-, or post-date the moat. Such features might also be expected outside the bounds of a settlement feature such as a moat.

The form and size of many of the linear features suggests they are unlikely to represent field boundaries, although some could have been cut for drainage. The stepped, rather unusual profile of ditch F501 (Tr. 5), and the identification of a possible palisade trench (F602: Tr. 6), are both notable. Both features could be associated with settlement, or possibly could have formed part of a system of animal pens or enclosures. This latter interpretation would not be inconsistent with the limited quantity, and abraded nature of the pottery recovered. The animal bone assemblage is too small to hint at the site function.

Analysis of the charred plant remains indicates the presence of domestic rubbish on site, although it is not clear if this material derives from adjoining settlement, or from activity *in-situ*.

8.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS (Fig. 7)

8.1: Implications

No evidence concerning the possible survival, and location of the possible moat was provided by this evaluation. Probable, or possible medieval features were identified both within, and outside the plotted location of the moat. The medieval features are fairly well preserved, and protected under a layer of topsoil overburden measuring at least 0.5m in depth. A range of feature types was represented, although none of the identified features could be assigned to a structure. Equally, it is not clear if the medieval remains suggest that the site formed part of the historic settlement core of Bassingburn, or if the identified features were peripheral to that settlement. The identified features were all cut into the subsoil. Features of possible or

probable medieval date were found in all trenches, with the exception of Trench 4. The archaeology, although not intense, was extensive throughout the site.

8.2: Proposals

Salvage recording

It is recommended that the removal of topsoil overburden (either over the entire site, or in the areas of individual house-footprints, roads etc) be monitored by a team of archaeologists to record areas/ features of archaeological interest. Provision should be made for the analysis, and possible publication of a summary of the data from this stage of fieldwork.

Contingency for more detailed recording

A contingency should be provided for the more detailed recording and excavation of features identified during salvage recording, with provision for analysis leading to assessment and eventual publication of the data.

9.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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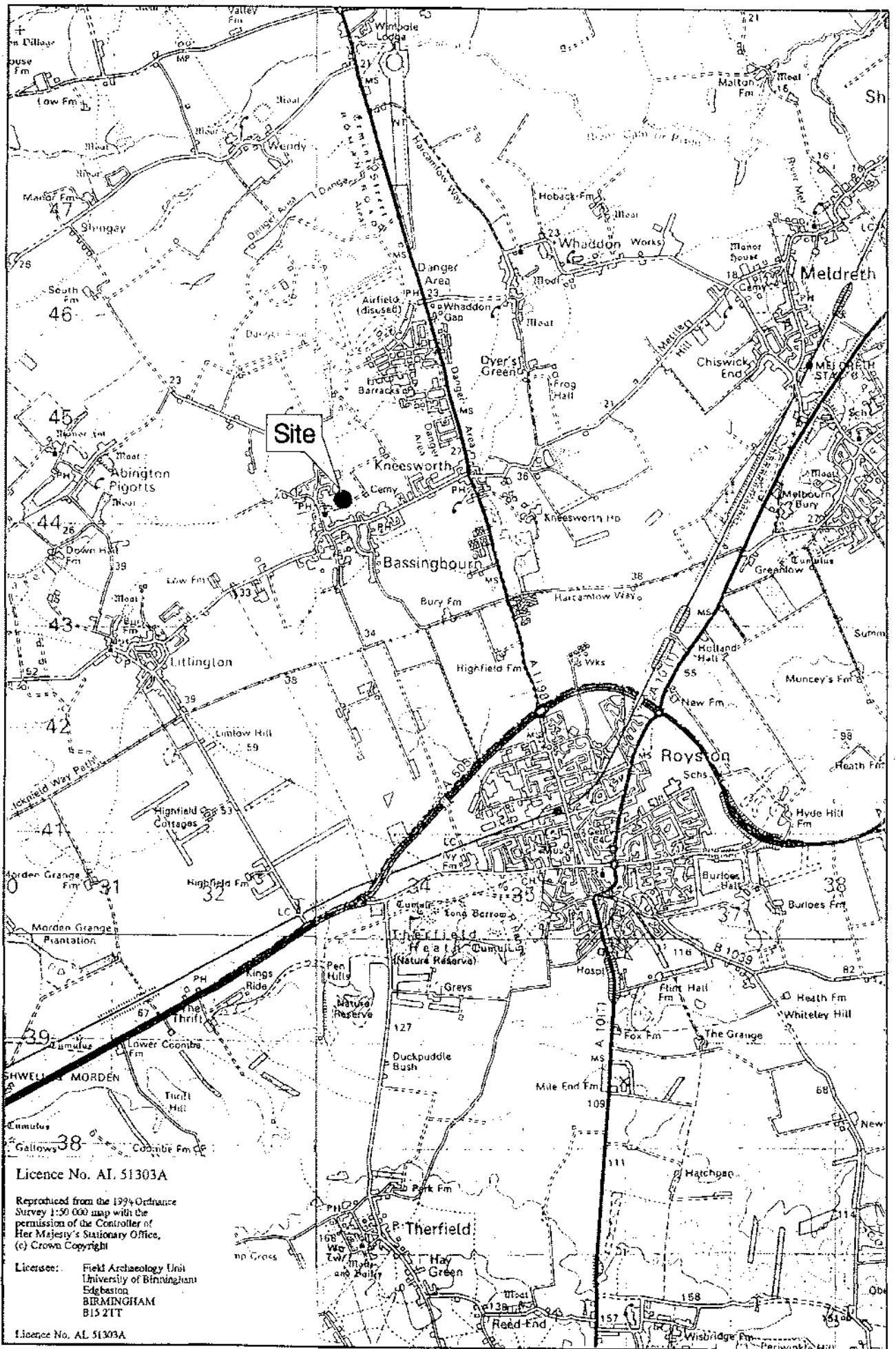
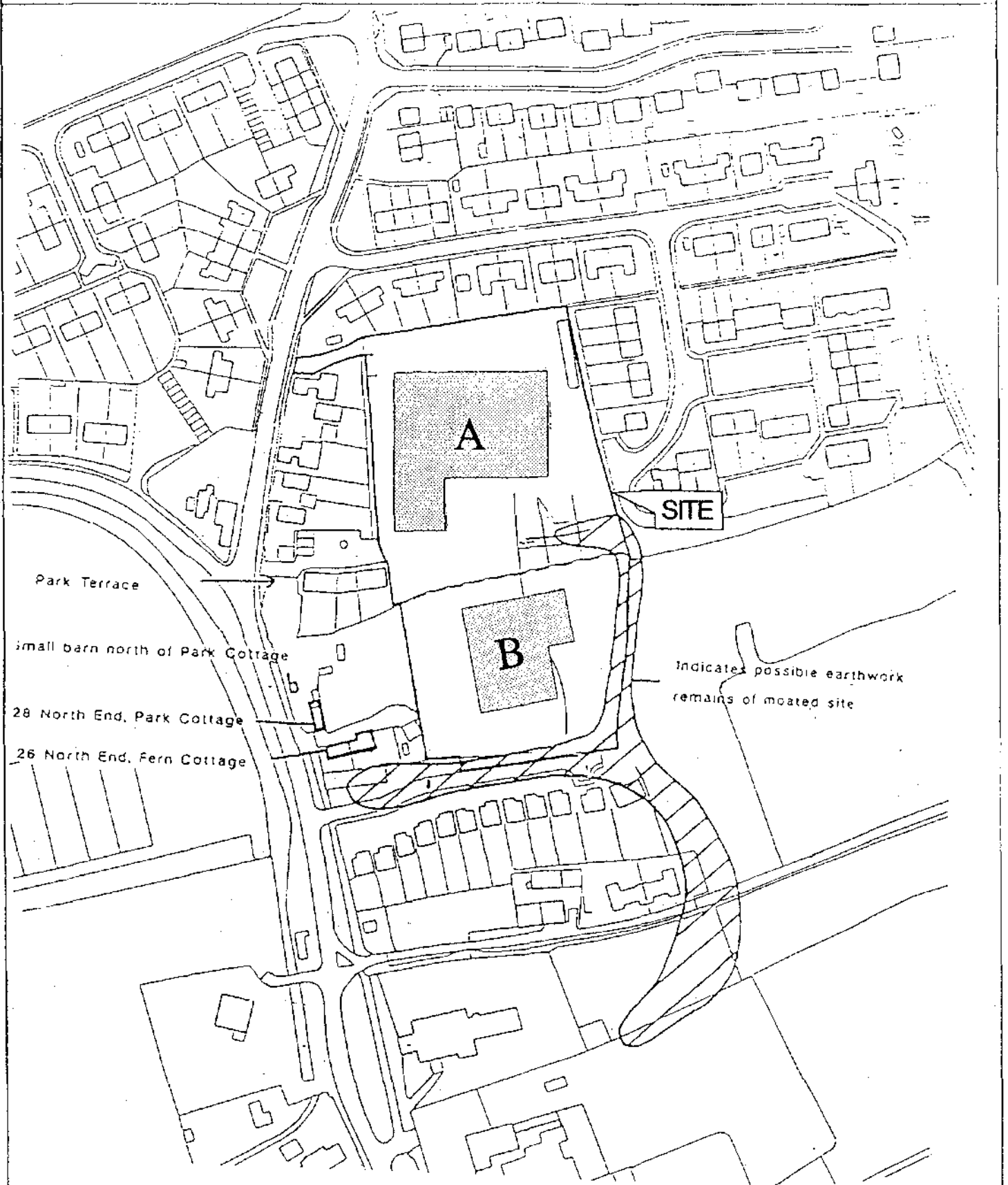


Fig 1

BASSINGBOURN

Location of Survey Areas

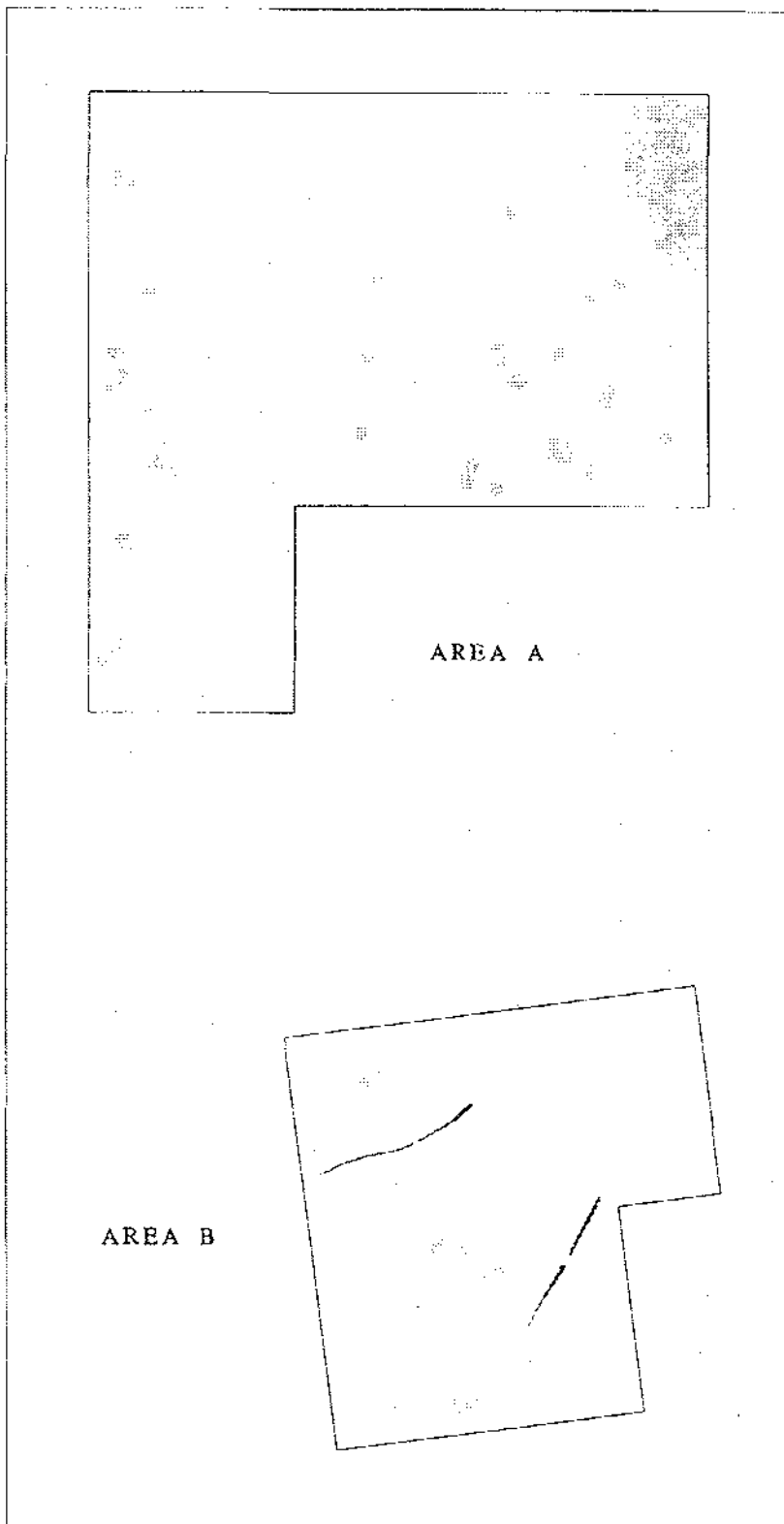


1:2000

Fig 2



GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS OF BRADFORD
PROJECT: BASSINGBOURN
TITLE: Summary Interpretation



■
? Archaeology

■
Ferrous

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Fig.3

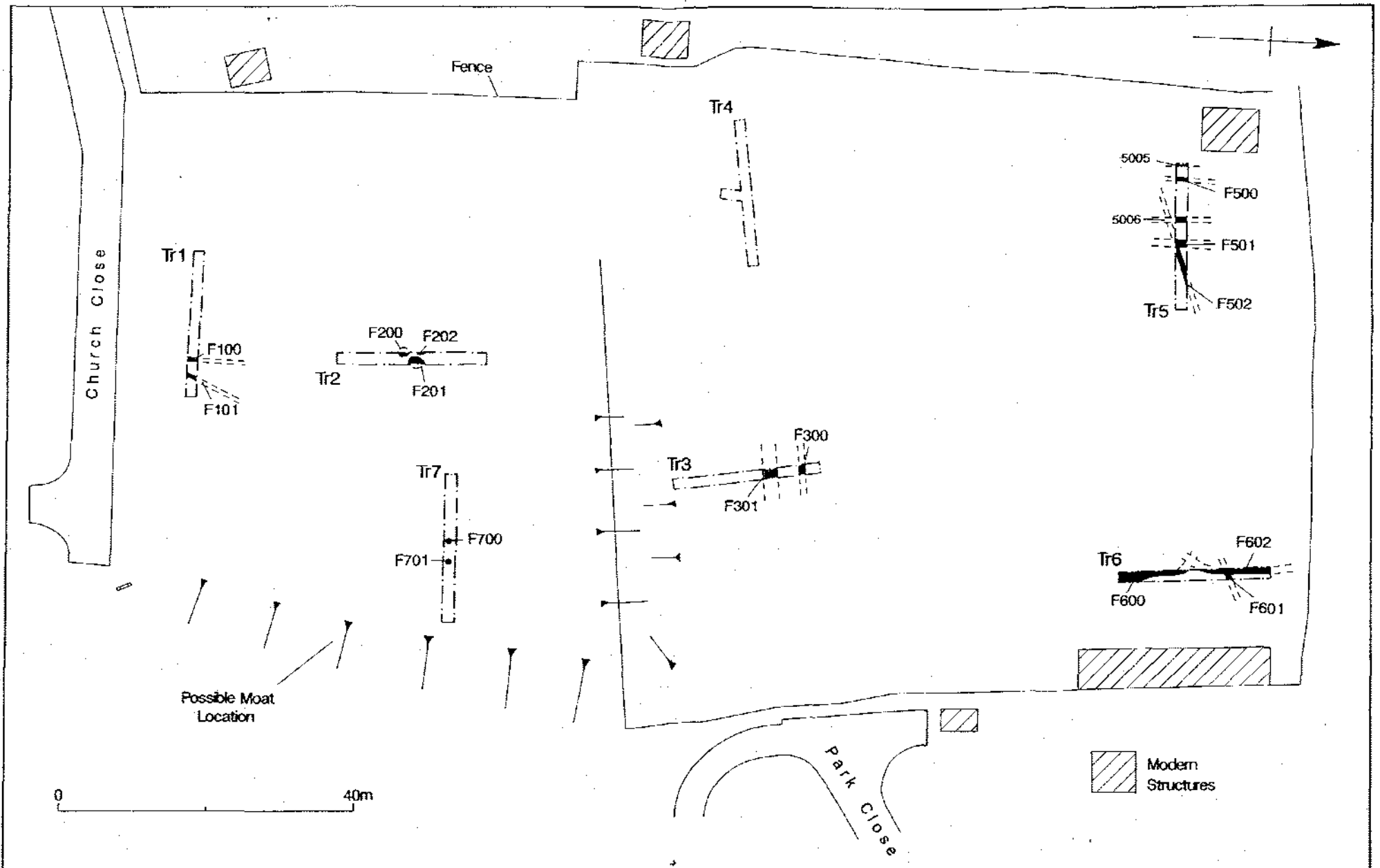


Fig4

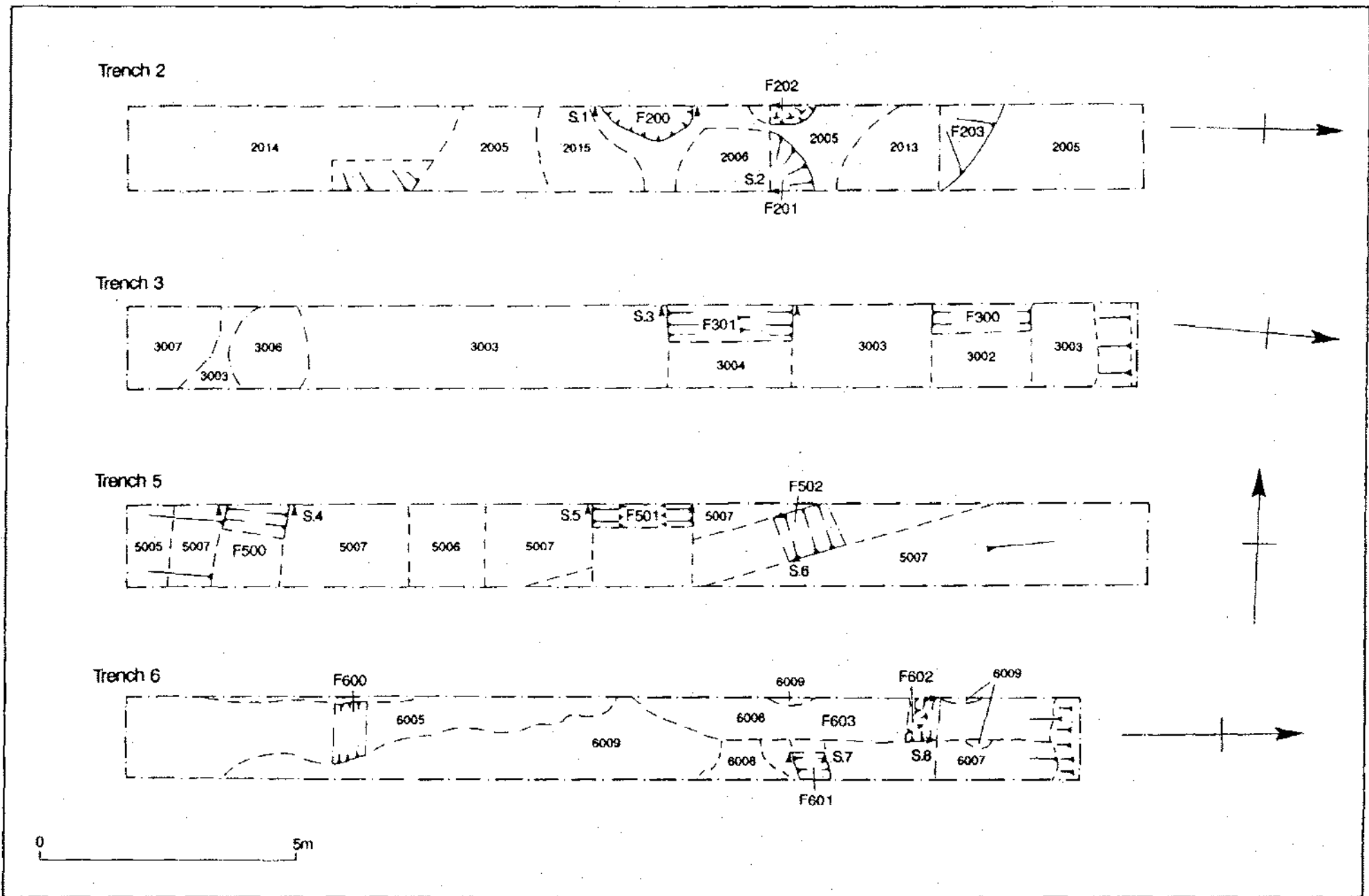


Fig.5

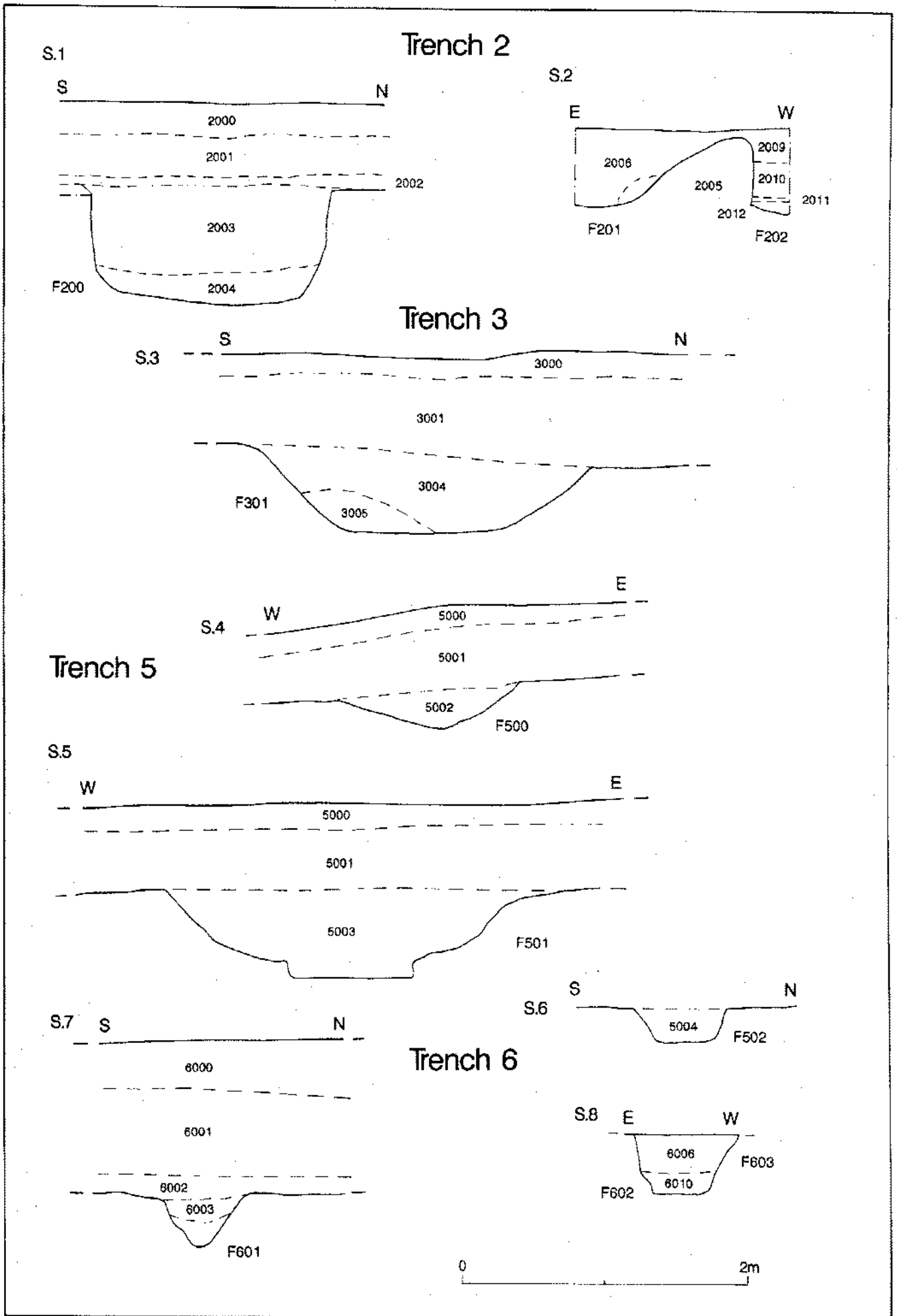


Fig.6

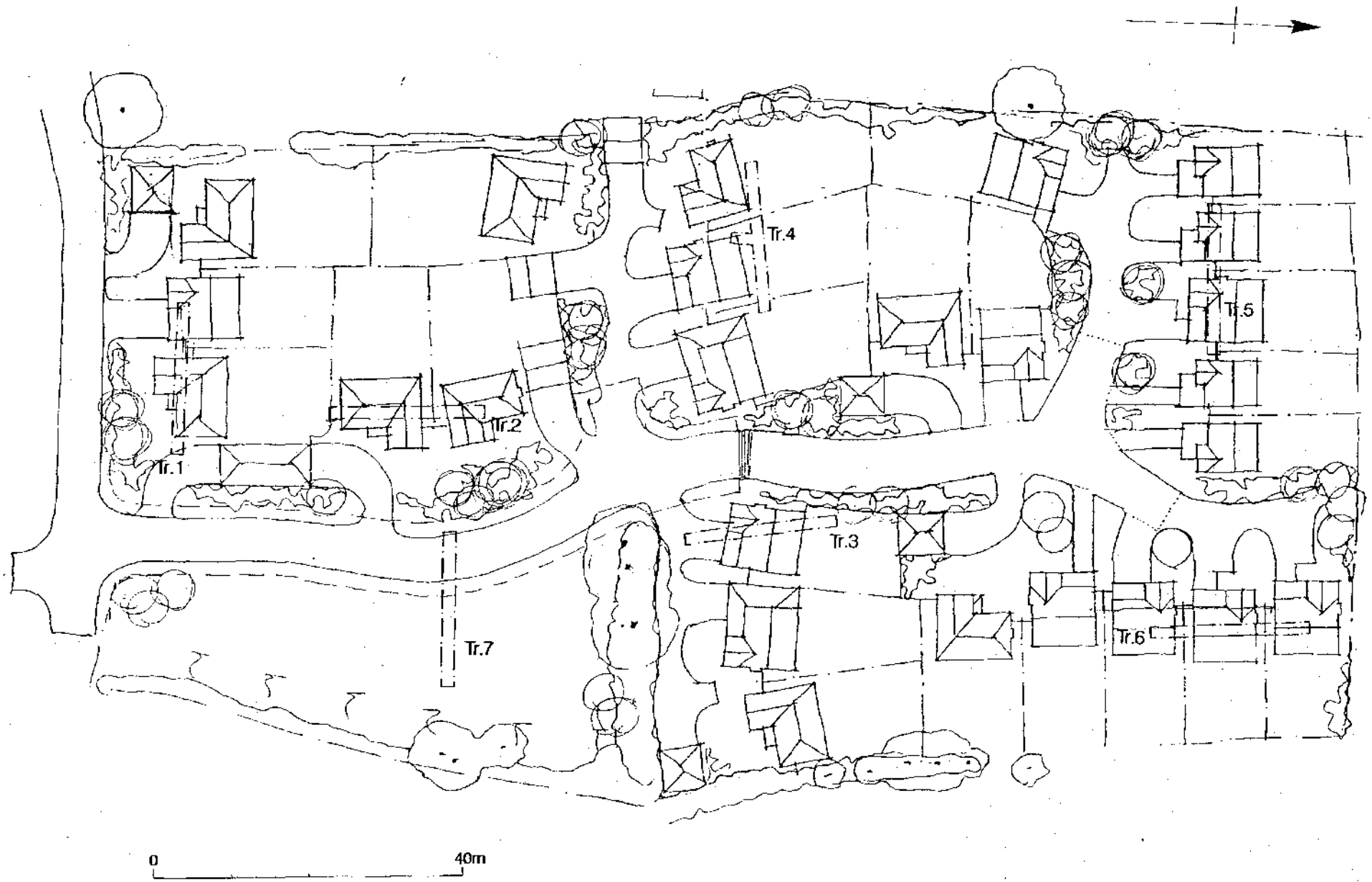


Fig.7