

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**Excavations at
Kirby Lane, Melton Mowbray,
Leicestershire, 1997**

**Site Narrative and
Post Excavation Assessment**

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. **489**
September 1997

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Post Excavation Assessment**

by
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With a contribution from J. Greig.

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Excavations at Kirby Lane, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, 1997. Site Narrative and Post Excavation Assessment

by Lucie Dingwall

Summary

An archaeological excavation was carried out at Kirby Lane, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire between August and September 1997. Medieval plough furrows were identified, cutting across earlier linear features, including a substantial northwest-southeast aligned ditch. Finds of pottery and worked flint were associated with these features.

Introduction

The following report provides a preliminary statement on the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken prior to residential housing development of land at Kirby Lane, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (SK 746176) (Fig.1). The work, undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) between August and September 1997, was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of David Wilson Homes Limited. The excavation followed an archaeological evaluation of the site undertaken by the Leicestershire Archaeological Unit in February/March 1994 (Meek 1994) and conformed to an archaeological specification produced by BUFAU (BUFAU 1997).

Archaeological Background

Previous archaeological evaluation of the site comprised trial trenching and a resistivity survey. The trial trenching (Meek 1994) involved the excavation of 27 trial trenches, between 6m and 50m in length, in three fields adjacent to the corner of Kirby Lane and Edendale Road. Two areas containing significant archaeological deposits were identified, Areas 1 and 2 (Fig. 2). In Area 1 the trial trenching revealed linear ditches, partially truncated by ploughing, which were interpreted as elements of a prehistoric enclosure or enclosure system, together with possible posthole- and pit-type features. Pottery of probable Late Iron Age date was recovered from a recut of one of the ditches, whilst flint artefacts, including a scraper, were also recovered indicating earlier prehistoric settlement. In Area 2, a probable enclosure ditch and possible pit- and posthole-type features were identified, suggesting a settlement focus. Finds of pottery sherds and flint artefacts again indicated a prehistoric date.

The resistivity survey, undertaken in two areas by the Ross Walk Archaeology Training Scheme (Coward 1994), recorded a number of regular linear features in both areas, interpreted as medieval plough furrows. A north-south linear feature was also identified in Area 2. This was presumably the ditch encountered in the evaluation, interpreted as part of a possible field system.

This preliminary report outlines the principal results of the excavation in the area of the prehistoric activity identified in the evaluation and provides a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the archive and finds. This is followed by an updated project design which includes proposals for further analysis leading to full publication of the results.

PART 1: SITE NARRATIVE

Objectives

The objective of the excavation was the preservation by record of significant archaeological features and deposits in Areas 1 and 2, through obtaining information on the layout, function, date, material culture and economy of the settlement foci identified during the evaluation.

Method

The information provided by the geophysical survey and the evaluation trial trenches was used as the basis for a strategy of targeted excavation. Two areas of potential settlement foci were defined (Fig 2). In each of the areas a 360 degree mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove the topsoil under archaeological supervision. The subsoil surface or the uppermost archaeological horizon was exposed and manually cleaned as necessary. Recording was by means of pro-forma record cards for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (scales 1:20 and 1:100) and sections (scales 1:10 and 1:20) and monochrome print and colour slide photography. Spatial recording of artefact locations was normally two-dimensional within context, and by segment for linear features. Three-dimensional recording of artefact locations was limited to selected features. Appropriate samples were taken for environmental analysis.

Area 1: an area of approximately 2,500 square metres was stripped of topsoil. All features were planned and significant features were targeted for detailed excavation and recording. A minimum of 50% of discrete features (e.g. pits and postholes) was excavated, and sampling of linear features was approximately 5% or sufficient to determine their date and function.

Area 2: an area of approximately 2,000 square metres was stripped of topsoil. As in Area 1, all features were planned and significant features were targeted for detailed excavation and recording. Sampling levels were as for Area 1.

Results

A summary of all excavated features and contexts listed by area is provided in the appendix.

Area 1 (Fig. 3)

Topsoil was mechanically stripped in Area 1, to an average depth of 0.35m, exposing a subsoil of brown boulder clay with chalk scatters, changing to a more mixed deposit containing orange brown silt towards the north. The subsoil was extremely dry when the topsoil was first stripped, which made initial identification of features very difficult. The few features that were identified became clearer following the onset of more showery weather. Several modern field drains were identifiable, running predominantly southwest-northeast across the area. These were cutting a series of well-defined medieval plough furrows, on average 1.8m wide and approximately 7m apart, which ran east-west across the area.

Three earlier features were cut by the plough furrows. The western-most of these was a linear feature (F106), between 1m and 1.5m wide, running north-south across the whole of Area 1. Three sections were excavated across this feature (a 5% sample), and it was found to be a roughly V-shaped ditch, with a maximum depth of 0.45m in the southernmost section, and shallowing out to a depth of 0.2m in the northernmost section. The ditch was filled with a compact, yellow brown silty clay (1008,1011 and 1017), and possible worked flint was recovered from the southernmost section (F106/S1).

10m to the east of this feature was another linear feature (F101) on a similar alignment, first identified in the 1994 evaluation (context 12). This feature, which extended northwards for 11m from the southern edge of Area 1, was cut by the first plough furrow, but was not discernible beyond the second plough furrow (Fig. 3). Two sections were excavated across the feature, which proved to be a shallow U-shaped ditch, approximately 0.6m wide and a maximum of 0.25m deep. It was filled with brown silty clay (1006,1007) containing irregular patches of orange sand. Several very small, highly abraded potsherds were recovered from the fill of the southernmost section (F101/S1), and possible worked flint was recovered from both excavated sections.

Running northwest-southeast near to the eastern edge of Area 1 was a third linear feature (F107). It was 0.5m in width, and extended northwards from the southern edge of Area 1 for nearly 40m. Three sections were excavated through this feature, showing it to be a shallow gully, ranging in depth from 0.2m in the southernmost section to 0.1m in the northernmost section. No finds were recovered from the fill of this gully.

The only other potential features in Area 1 were several small pit- and posthole-type features (F100, F102-104, F108-111). These were concentrated in the southeast of Area 1, in particular clustering around the shallow gully in the east (F107). These were all half-sectioned, and proved to be very shallow, ephemeral features averaging less than 0.1m in depth. The exception was F100 which was a more substantial, irregular feature containing a high concentration of charcoal. However, this may have been of natural origin, possibly a tree throw hollow. No artefacts were recovered from any of these features.

Area 2 (Fig. 4)

Topsoil was mechanically stripped in Area 2, to an average depth of 0.4m, exposing a very mixed subsoil of brown boulder clay in the southwest of the area, gradually changing to yellow brown clay with orange brown sand and gravel patches towards the north and east. As with Area 1, the subsoil was extremely dry when the topsoil was first stripped, so definition of archaeological features was poor, especially with the mixed nature of the subsoil. The shape of the trench was modified due to the presence of the pond to the north, and a public amenity area for the housing estate in the west.

A modern land drain ran southwest-northeast across the area, cutting east-west aligned medieval plough furrows. The plough furrows were less well-defined in this area than those in Area 1, probably due to the difference in subsoil in the two areas, but retained roughly the same spacing and width characteristics.

A linear feature (F207), extending northwards from the south section and definable for 36m, was exposed in Area 2. This feature corresponded to contexts 55 and 70 identified in the 1994 evaluation. Although the ditch almost certainly continued to the northern edge of Area 2 and beyond, it was not possible to define it further, since this area had been disturbed by the installation of storm drains and subsequent flooding when the drains overflowed. The ditch, aligned northwest-southeast, narrowed considerably to the south, ranging from 4.5m to 2.8m in width. Two sections were excavated across the ditch (Fig. 5). In the northernmost section (S1), the ditch was 4.4m wide, with a stepped profile, and a depth of 1.15m. The earliest fill was a thin band of orange sand (2013), overlain by a blue grey clay (2010) flecked with orange sand and containing a lens of blue clay (2015). Fragmented animal bone and a flint blade were recovered from the blue grey clay (2010), which was overlain by brown silty clay (2009). In the southernmost section (S2), the ditch was V-shaped with a flat bottom, and although of a similar depth, was only 2.9m wide. The lower fill (2017) consisted of waterlogged blue clay, overlain by a fill of blue brown clay (2016) containing a high concentration of molluscs. A flint blade and a possible scraper were recovered from the latter context.

Several possible pit- and posthole-type features (F200-204, F206, F208-209) were sampled by half-sectioning. Most of these features proved to be poorly-defined, shallow scoops and were probably non-archaeological. However, three were more substantial and well-defined. F203 was a small posthole/stakehole, 0.1m in diameter, from which a post-medieval potsherd was recovered. F200 and F204, a stakehole and a posthole respectively, lay to the west of the ditch (F207) and a possible flint flake was recovered from the fill of F200.

Sondages were also excavated in selected areas to test material which had been identified during the evaluation as potentially of archaeological origin, but excavation proved these to be natural subsoil changes.

Following the sample excavation and recording of all significant features in Area 2, a T-shaped trench was mechanically excavated a further 0.4m through the subsoil in order to try and define any linear features that may have been present, but were not visible in the dried-out surface of the subsoil. However, the results of this exercise were negative.

PART 2: ASSESSMENT REPORT

Factual Data

Table 1: Site records

	<i>Area 1</i>	<i>Area 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
Feature Records	16	10	26
Context records	19	17	36
Drawings			
A1			3
A3			7
A4			2
Photographs			
Black and White			74
Colour slide			72
Sample records			1
Assemblage summaries	4	7	11
Survey record sheets			23

Table 2: Finds

1994 Evaluation

	<i>Area1</i>	<i>Area2</i>	<i>Total</i>
Prehist Pottery	7	1	8
Worked flint	23	27	50

1997 Excavation (Totals include Unstratified Finds)

	<i>Area1</i>	<i>Area2</i>	<i>Total</i>
Prehist Pottery	14		14
Medieval pottery	1	4	5
Post-med pottery	3	3	6
Worked flint	9	25	34
Bone frags		74	74
Glass	1		1

Prehistoric Pottery

A total of 18 sherds of pottery were recovered from the excavation, of which 16 were from stratified contexts within features. The 14 possible prehistoric sherds, all recovered from one ditch section (F101/S1), were very small and extremely abraded. A full report of the prehistoric pottery, including the 8 sherds recovered from the evaluation, will be carried out by Ann Woodward.

Flint

A total of 28 pieces of humanly-struck flint and 6 natural flake chunks were recovered during the excavation. An initial scan of the assemblage has revealed the presence of the following items: 4 blades, 2 scrapers, 2 cores and 20 waste flakes. Two of the blades were taken from stratified contexts within the large ditch in Area 2. A full report of the combined flint assemblage from the evaluation and the excavation will be carried out by Lynne Bevan.

Animal Bone

74 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the fill of the ditch section (F207/S1) in Area 2. The bone was very fragmented and poorly preserved and has no potential for further analysis.

Environmental Samples

Environmental samples taken from those features containing dateable material (F101, F106, F207) have been processed. Any charred plant remains from the residues will be identified and a full report will be prepared by Angela Monckton.

The Environmental Potential of the Pond by James Greig

A trial boring was carried out in the pond to the north of Area 2 (Fig. 2), to assess the potential for dateable environmental evidence. To examine the depth and nature of the pond deposits at this site, a Dutch auger was used, taking care not to disturb the biota of the pond.

The trial boring was made at the pond edge where the water was about 0.5m deep. Beneath this were about 0.5m of modern, black organic detritus. This overlay 0.25m of buff clay which did not look organic except by staining from the modern black material above. The boring seemed to show that the pond only contains rather modern organic deposits with natural clay beneath. It appears to be a relatively modern feature, with no great depth of deposits.

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Discussion and Proposal for Further Work

The features identified in both areas of the excavation have clearly been very heavily truncated by later agricultural activity. The most significant feature is the substantial northwest-southeast aligned ditch (F207) recorded in Area 2. This ditch contained very little dating evidence apart from two flint blades and a scraper which suggest a Neolithic/Bronze Age date. It is possible that the two posthole-type features nearby may be indicative of a settlement focus in the area to the west of the ditch. This area now forms part of a grassed-over amenity area, and is therefore protected from further below-ground disturbance. There is currently a proposal to undertake a watching brief in the area immediately to the south of Area 2 in an attempt to locate the projected line of the ditch (F207). The results of the watching brief will be incorporated into the final report.

It appears that the features recorded in Area 1 have been even more badly affected by plough truncation, especially in the northern part of the area. The small amount of surviving archaeology is probably all that remains of prehistoric agricultural activity which may have been associated with the ditch in Area 2. However, the few sherds of pottery recovered from the central gully (F101) during the evaluation suggest a later, possibly Iron Age date.

Following a full examination of the few finds and environmental samples, an updated report on the results of the excavation will be prepared and offered to the Leicestershire Archaeology Society for publication in their transactions. An attempt will be made to review the results in the context of other excavated prehistoric sites in the county, such as Enderby, Normanton le Heath, and Tixover.

Proposed Publication Synopsis

Prehistoric Settlement at Kirby Lane, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

by Lucie Dingwall

with contributions by Lynne Bevan, Angela Monckton and Ann Woodward

Summary

Acknowledgements

Introduction - the site and its landscape setting, background to the excavation, objectives and methodology

The Results - an illustrated account outlining main features and site characteristics

Flint by Lynne Bevan

Pottery by Ann Woodward

Charred Plant Remains by Angela Monckton

Discussion

References

Acknowledgements

The excavation was directed by Lucie Dingwall, with a field team of Gary Coates, Chris Hewitson, Georgina Holt, Cath Kidd and Paula Wallis. Gwilym Hughes managed the project and edited this report, and Nigel Dodds prepared the figures. Ellie Ramsay processed the environmental samples and James Greig carried out the environmental assessment of the pond. The project was monitored by Forbes Marsden for John Samuels Consultants, and by Anne Graf and Richard Knox for Leicestershire County Council. Thanks are due to David Wilson Homes for their help and assistance during the excavation.

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- Meek, J. 1994 *An Archaeological Evaluation at Kirby Lane - Edendale Road, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire*, LAU Report 94/08.
- Monckton, A. 1995 'Environmental Archaeology in Leicestershire', *Trans. Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 69, 32-41.

Appendix

List of stratigraphic units and finds quantifications

Area	Strat unit	Description of strat unit	Construct keyword	Prehistoric pot	Medieval pot	Post-medieval pot	Flint	Animal bone	Charcoal
1	1000	Topsoil	LAYER						
1	1001	Fill of F100	HOLLOW						
1	1002	Fill of scoop F102	SCOOP						
1	1003	Fill of scoop F103	SCOOP						
1	1004	Subsoil	LAYER						
1	1005	Fill of scoop F104	SCOOP						
1	1006	Ditch fill (F101/S2)	DITCH						
1	1007	Ditch fill (F101/S1)	DITCH	14	1		2		1
1	1008	Ditch fill (F106/S1)	DITCH				2		
1	1009	Gully fill (F107/S1)	GULLY						
1	1010	Gully fill (F107/S2)	GULLY						
1	1011	Ditch fill (F106/S2)	DITCH						
1	1012	Gully fill (F107/S3)	GULLY						
1	1013	Fill of scoop F108	SCOOP						
1	1014	Fill of scoop F109	SCOOP						
1	1015	Fill of scoop F110	SCOOP						
1	1016	Fill of scoop F111	SCOOP						
1	1017	Ditch fill (F106/S3)	DITCH						
1	1019	Cleaning layer	LAYER				3		
1	F100	Negative cut - possibly root hole	HOLLOW						
1	F101	Linear cut	DITCH						
1	F102	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
1	F103	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
1	F104	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
1	F106	Cut of ditch	DITCH						
1	F107	Cut of gully	GULLY						
1	F108	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
1	F109	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
1	F110	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
1	F111	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
2	2000	Topsoil	LAYER						
2	2001	Fill of stakehole F200	STAKEHOLE				1		
2	2002	Fill of scoop F201	SCOOP						
2	2003	Fill of scoop F202	SCOOP						
2	2004	Fill of posthole F203	POSTHOLE			1			
2	2005	Subsoil	LAYER						
2	2006	Fill of posthole F204	POSTHOLE						
2	2008	Fill of scoop F206	SCOOP						
2	2009	Ditch fill (F207/S1)	DITCH				2		
2	2010	Ditch fill (F207/S1)	DITCH				1	74	
2	2011	Fill of hollow F208	HOLLOW						
2	2012	Fill of scoop F209	SCOOP						

Area	Strat unit	Description of strat unit	Construct keyword	Prehistoric pot	Medieval pot	Post-medieval pot	Flint	Animal bone	Charcoal
2	2013	Ditch fill (F207/S1)	DITCH						
2	2015	Ditch fill (F207/S1)	DITCH						
2	2016	Ditch fill (F207/S2)	DITCH				3		
2	2017	Ditch fill (F207/S2)	DITCH						
2	2018	Cleaning layer	LAYER				5		
2	F200	Cut of stakehole	STAKEHOLE						
2	F201	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
2	F202	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
2	F203	Cut of posthole	POSTHOLE						
2	F204	Cut of posthole	POSTHOLE						
2	F206	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						
2	F207	Cut of ditch	DITCH						
2	F208	Cut of hollow - poss natural	HOLLOW						
2	F209	Cut of scoop	SCOOP						

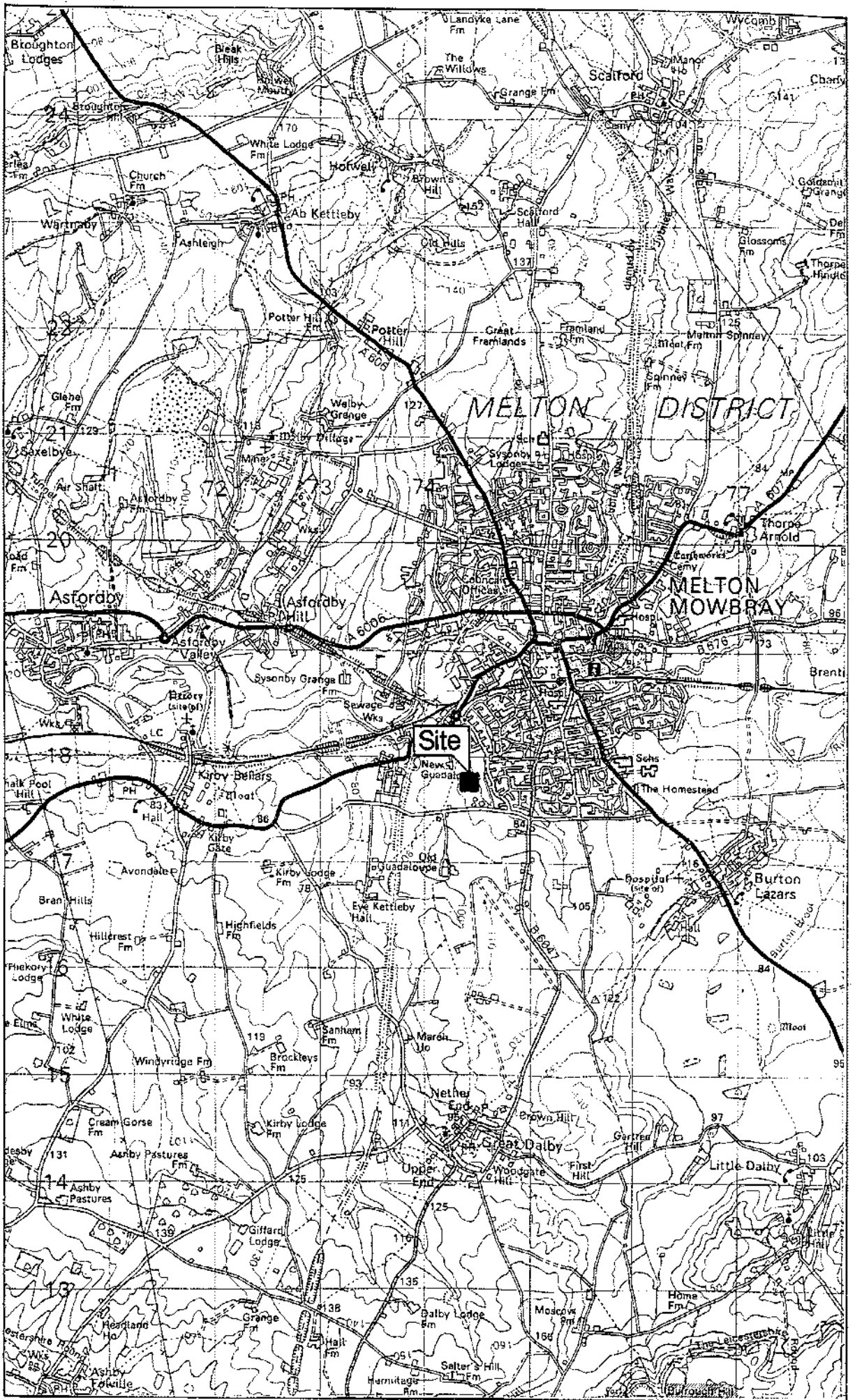


Fig 1

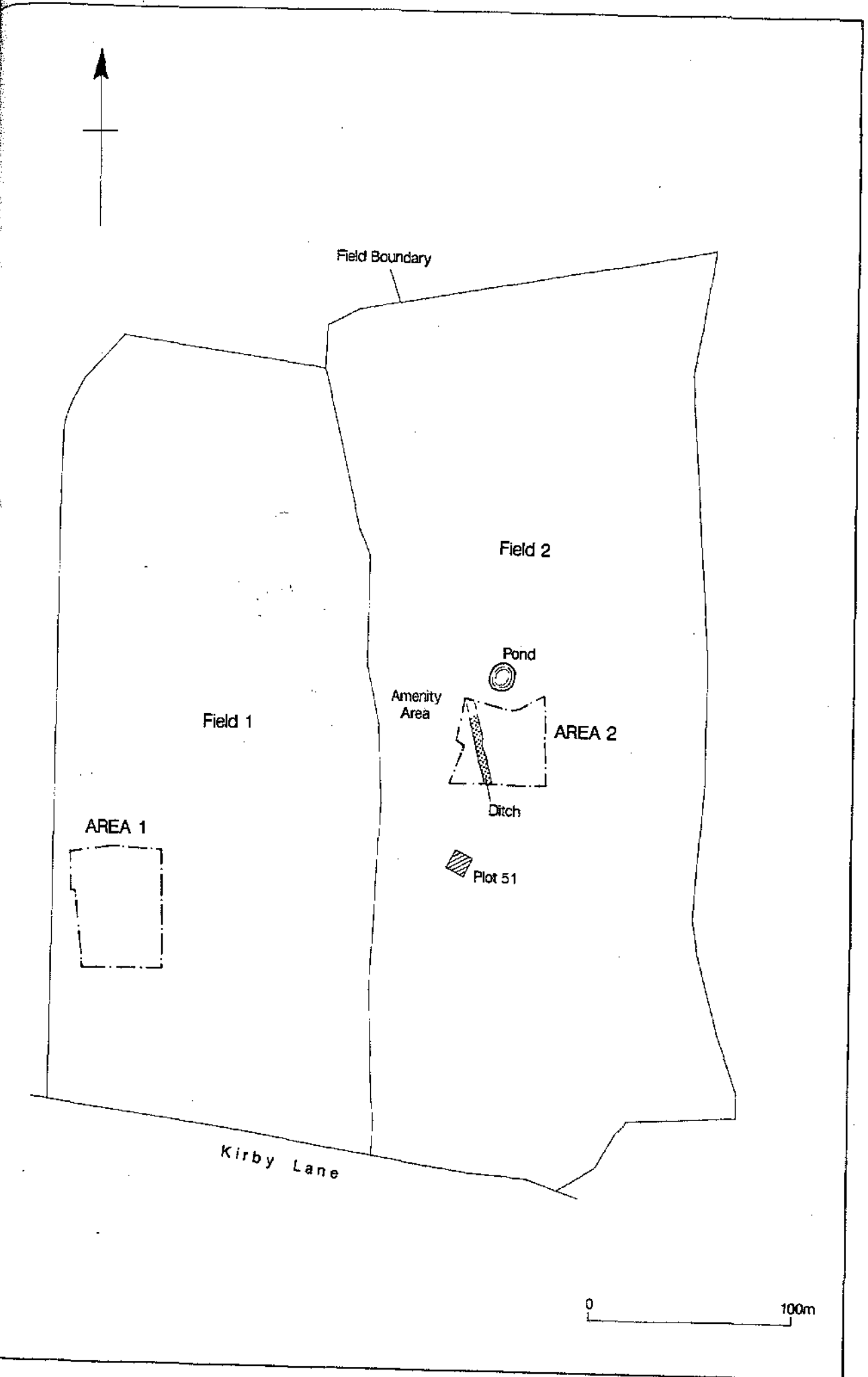


Fig.2

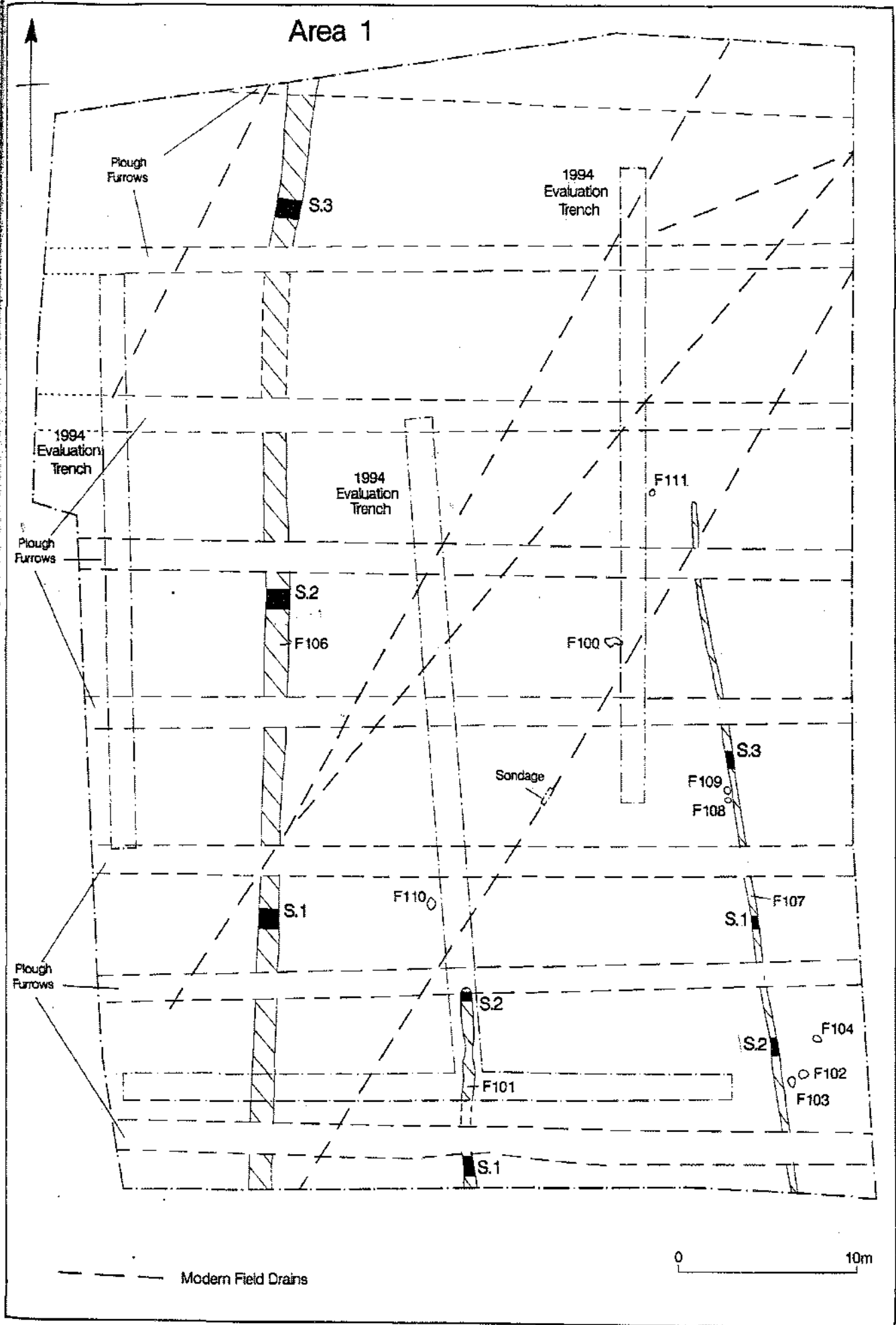


Fig.3

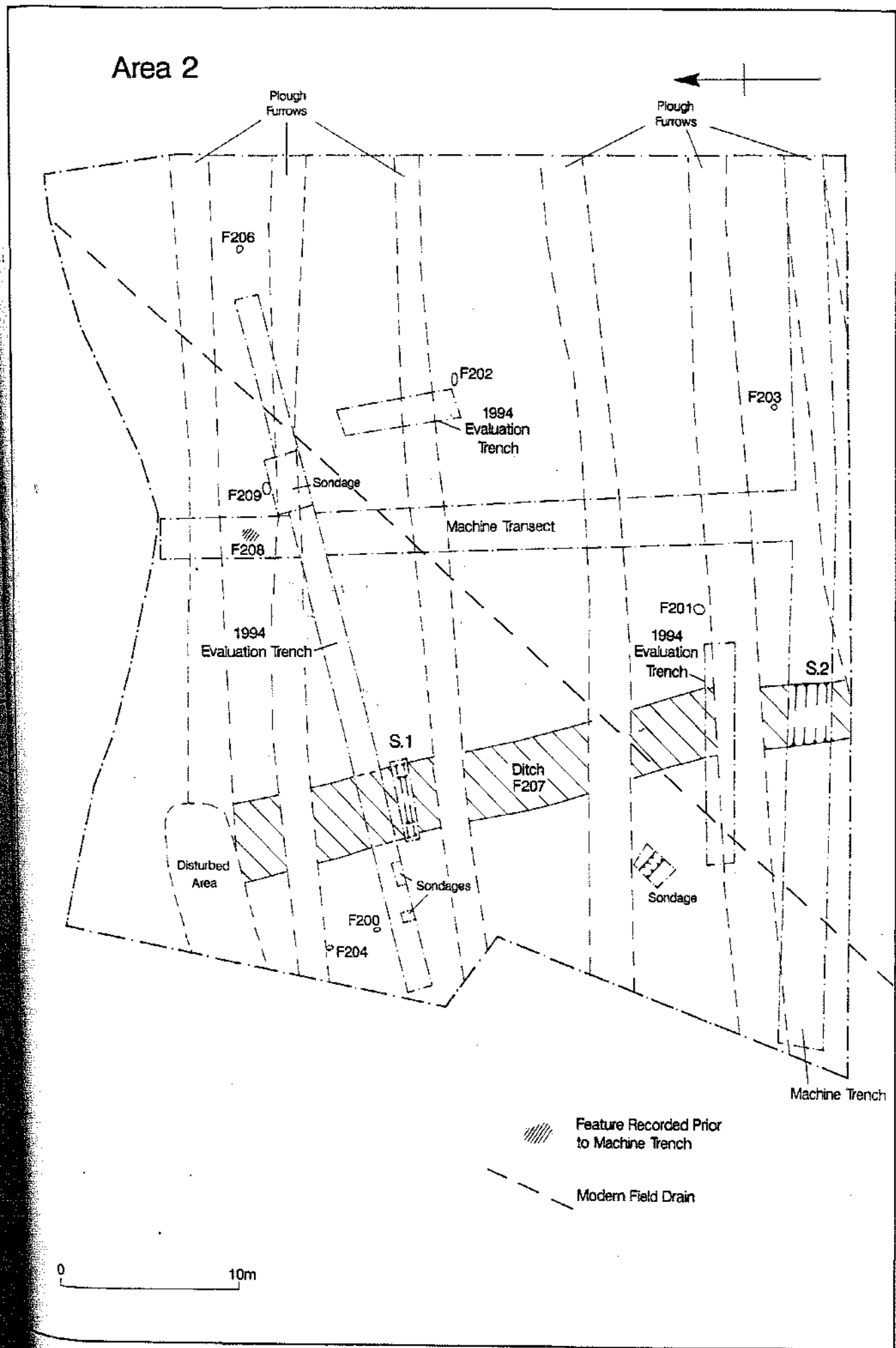


Fig.4