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CECORD BUSINESS PARK, GODMANCHESTER, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

An Archaeological Evaluation 1998

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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Chord Business Park, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire
An Archaeological Evaluation 1998

by
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1.0 SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area (centred on NGR TL 250698) proposed for an office development was tested by an archaeological evaluation involving a desk-based assessment and trial-trenching, undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of [illegible] Homes Limited.

The site had been used for agriculture until recently. Trial-trenching identified a group of Roman features, comprising a ditch, a human burial and a post-hole, all located near to the western site boundary, adjoining the London Road (Ermine Street). The fill of the grave contained early-2nd Century pottery.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of approximately 0.6ha of land adjoining London Road, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire (Figs. 1-2). The evaluation was commissioned in accordance with the guidelines set down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment, November 1990). The methodology of the evaluation conforms with a Design Brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office (Cambridgeshire C.C. 1997), and a Specification prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 1998).

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains within the site. In particular, it was intended to test the potential of the site to contain evidence of prehistoric activity, and of Roman roadside activity, settlement or burial.

It is intended to deposit the archive in a store approved by the County Archaeology Office, subject to final permission from the landowner.

3.0 THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

3.1 The archaeological setting

Roman

Roman Godmanchester has been extensively analysed by Dr. H. M. Green. More recently the evidence has been reconsidered by Burnham and Wacher (1990), and by Esmonde Cleary (1987). A detailed understanding of the layout and development of the town and its immediate hinterland is hampered by the limited nature of most archaeological investigations, including much recent work.

The earliest phase of Roman activity was military, comprising two forts constructed on different alignments (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 122), presumably to protect the river crossing to the north. The first forts of timber and turf has been identified, its Claudian date for the earliest fort's construction has been suggested, the second fort's construction is probably associated with the Boudican campaign.

Ermine Street, the main Roman north-south thoroughfare, follows the approximate position and alignment of the modern London Road. Ermine Street was flanked by ditches and gravel pits. In the Flavian period, the town centre was re-planned, with plots running at right angles back from Ermine Street. This earlier phase of settlement was perhaps characterised by ditched enclosures containing buildings, with associated evidence for crop processing and metalworking.

A courtyard building and bath house were constructed in the early-2nd Century. In the 3rd Century a masonry basilica was constructed in the centre of the town which necessitated a slight eastwards re-alignment of Ermine Street. An important feature of the 2nd-3rd-Century townscape was the shrine to Abandinus.

During the late-3rd Century a circuit of stone defences was built, despite a possible interruption during a major fire which affected the courtyard building, temple and bath-house (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 122). It is possible that the 4th Century activity was mostly within the walled circuit.

Unenclosed

Second century cremations are recorded to the north of the town at Green End, and a group of 2nd-3rd Century cremations is recorded from Emmanuel Knoll, 0.6km to the east of the town. In contrast to the suggested contraction of the town in the 4th Century are the extensive 4th Century cemeteries recorded to the southwest of the town, and to the north, in the Park Lane area.

An excavation in 1978 by H. J. M. Green at 3a London Road (Cambridgeshire SMR No. 01543a/b/c), approximately 200m to the south of Fleming Street, identified a sequence of thirteen phases of Roman and medieval activity (Green 1979). The excavation, on the east side of London Road, identified road surfaces and associated ditches, which were repeatedly re-cut. Buildings of Flavian to Hadrianic date were recorded on the eastern side of the road. The line of Roman Ermine Street, presumably re-aligned into the 4th Century, continued in use into the medieval period. Significantly for the Chord Business Park evaluation, the positioning of the excavated transect in the approximately 70m to the east of the eastern side of London Road [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

A recent excavation undertaken by [illegible] along the western side of London Road, to the northwest of the Chord Business Park [illegible] identified ditched plots laid out along Ermine Street, of mainly late-4th century date. One timber-framed building was identified together with a few numbers of inhumation burials, large pit-like features of probable industrial function, hearth-pits and ovens. A preliminary scan of the archaeol

bone suggests that boning-out was part of the industrial activities carried out on the site. The results of the recent excavation suggest that the southern limit of the roadside settlement lay just to the south of the area investigated, based on the diminishing intensity of activity noted towards the southern end of the excavated area. This could possibly suggest that the Cloud Business Park site lay at, or just beyond the southern limit of the roadside settlement along Ermine Street.

The BUFAU excavation of the London Road site (and an earlier evaluation of the same site, SMR No. 11421c) also identified discrete features and artifacts of Neolithic and Bronze Age date.

3.2: The site

The site presently comprises an area of overgrown grassland, containing building debris, probably deposited during the construction of the adjoining new commercial units to the south and east of the site. The centre of the site contains an area of concrete hardstanding. There is a step down in modern ground level away from the London Road frontage, resulting from the scraping-out of up to 0.5m of soils away from the hedge.

Examination of the Godmanchester Inclosure maps, and the late 19th-early 20th Century Ordnance Survey mapping (see Section 10.2 for list) indicates that the site lay within a field. No field boundaries were noted within the site area.

4.0: METHODOLOGY

As a first stage, a desk-based assessment of the relevant cartographic and archaeological sources, including the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record, was undertaken to provide information concerning site use, and to assist in placing the results of trial-trenching in context.

Trial-trenches were positioned to test the site as widely as possible, within the areas proposed for the new office units and the associated car parking. A priority was the testing of the area adjacent to the London Road frontage, which adjoined Roman Ermine Street. The zone immediately adjacent to London Road, not affected by the development, was excluded from the trial-trenching.

In each trench, the overburden, comprising the topsoil and modern dumped material, was removed by a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, working under archaeological supervision to expose the underlying subsoil. In each trench, the subsoil surface was cleaned by hand to define any archaeological features or deposits present. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] confirm their identification. A sample of the archaeological features present were selectively hand-excavated, to define their form and preservation, and to provide datable artifacts.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by plans, sections and photographs, all keyed to the archive.

The human remains were hand excavated on 18 February 1998 following the grant of a Home Office licence on 12 February 1998 (licence No. 9893, HO/98/576/1).

5.0: TRENCHES (Fig. 2)

All trial-trenches measured 1.6m in width. Six trenches (1-6) measured 15m in length. Trench 7 was L-shaped in plan, also measuring a total of 15m in length.

5.1: Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trenches 1 and 2 were excavated east-west across a possible bank adjoining the rear of the hedge on the London Road frontage.

The natural subsoil (1007) was a brown sandy gravel containing patches of green/grey clay flecked with chalk. In the west of the trench the subsoil (1007) was overlain by a layer of orange-brown silt-clay (1005), overlain by a layer of brown silt-clay (1004). Layer 1005 was truncated by the terracing-down of the natural subsoil, recorded in the eastern part of the trench. In this part of the trench the subsoil (1007) was overlain by a redeposited layer of brown clay ploughsoil (1006), which was, in turn, overlain by a layer of concrete hard-core (1003), capped by the tarmac surface (1002) of a track which formerly ran north-south.

Layers 1004 and 1003 were sealed by a layer of topsoil (1000), which increased in depth westwards, towards the roadside bank. This topsoil, and layers 1002 and 1006 in the east of the trench were overlain by a layer of brown clay (1001), containing modern building rubble.

5.2: Trench 2 (Fig. 3, Plate 1)

The natural subsoil in this trench was a brown sand-gravel (2001), recorded approximately 0.70m below the modern surface. The subsoil was cut by a post-hole (F200), a grave (F201), and a ditch (F202), aligned north-south, parallel with London Road.

Only the southern half of the grave was recorded in the trench. As excavated, it was oval in plan, with a rounded southern end. The grave-cut measured 0.6m in width, 0.5m in depth, and was recorded for a length of 1m. The cut contained a single adult human burial (2003), of which only the lower limbs survived. The remains were discussed in more detail in Section 6.0 below. The body had been laid supine and west-east, with the head to the south. The remains comprised part of the skull, including part of the upper body, and both arms with the forearms folded under the upper arms.

The grave-cut was backfilled with brown clay-silt (2002), which contained pottery of 2nd Century date.

The extreme eastern edge of the grave was cut by ditch F302. The outer feature had steep, straight sides and a flat base, which sloped gently eastwards. The ditch measured a maximum of 0.5m in depth and 1.10m in width. It was backfilled with a homogeneous light brown silt-clay (2303).

No further archaeological features were recorded to the east of this ditch.

No relationship could be identified between the post hole and the grave. The post-hole (F200) was approximately circular in plan with a diameter of 0.55m, and measured 0.29 in depth. The post-hole was packed on its northern side with sub-angular stones. The backfill of the post-hole, a light brown clay-silt (2000), was similar to the fill of the grave (F201).

The subsoil, and backfilled features F200-F202, were sealed by a layer of brown clay ploughsoil (2000), measuring up to 0.4m in depth. This ploughsoil was overlain by patches of modern levelling material (2099), in turn overlain by a layer of dark grey sand-silt (2090), which averaged 0.3m in depth. It was sealed in the west of the trench by a lens of brown gravel (2002).

5.3: Trench 3 (not illustrated)

This trench was aligned east-west.

The brown sand-gravel subsoil (3004) was recorded at a maximum depth of 1.2m below the modern surface. The subsoil was cut by a single feature, a ditch (F300), aligned north-south, and measuring a maximum of 0.75m in depth. It measured a maximum of 0.25m in width, and was backfilled with brown silt-clay (3003). The subsoil, and the backfilled ditch were overlain by a brown clay ploughsoil (3002), which measured a maximum of 1m in depth. At both ends of the trench the ploughsoil had been scraped-out to an approximate depth of 0.5m, and had been replaced with a layer composed of light brown fine gravel (3001), measuring 0.3m in depth. This horizon was overlain by a layer of grey clay (3000), which contained a quantity of building rubble.

5.4: Trench 4 (not illustrated)

This trench was dug approximately north-south.

The brown sandy-clay gravel subsoil (4004) was recorded at a maximum depth of 1m below the modern ground surface. The subsoil was overlain by a brown clay ploughsoil (4003), measuring 0.4m in depth, which contained brick and building rubble. This was overlain by a levelling layer of light brown gravel (4002), which varied in thickness from 0.30 to 0.50m. Above was a layer of grey clay (4000), that contained a large quantity of building rubble and averaged 0.20m in thickness.

5.5: Trench 5 (not Illustrated)

This trench was dug approximately east-west.

The orange/brown sandy gravel subsoil (5004), which contained green/grey clay patches, and chalk flecks was recorded at a maximum depth of 0.75m below the modern surface. A machine-cut sondage, dug to a depth of 2m below the upper subsoil surface, confirmed its interpretation. The subsoil was sealed by brown clay ploughsoil (5003). The ploughsoil was overlain by a layer of light brown gravel (5001), up to 0.25m in depth, interpreted as levelling material. Above were layers of building rubble (5000), measuring a maximum of 0.4m in depth.

5.6: Trench 6 (not Illustrated)

This trench was dug approximately north-south across a concrete hardstanding.

The natural subsoil (6003), an orange/brown sandy gravel containing patches of chalk-flecked, green/grey clay, was recorded at a depth of approximately 0.6m below the modern surface. The subsoil was overlain by a layer of brown gravel (6002), measuring 0.3m in depth, interpreted as levelling material for the concrete and brick hardstanding (6001) above.

5.7: Trench 7 (not Illustrated)

This trench was [illegible] to p.o.r.

The natural subsoil in this trench comprised an orange-brown sand-gravel (7002), recorded at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface, which contained patches of green-grey, chalk-flecked clay. The subsoil was overlain by a levelling layer composed of brown gravel (7001), measuring between 0.1m to 0.15m in depth. This was overlain by a deposit of grey clay (7000), measuring 0.2m in depth, which contained building rubble.

No features of archaeological interest were recorded in Trenches 1 and 4-7. Finds were restricted to Trench 2.

6.0 Level Information

TABLE 1: LEVEL INFORMATION

Trench	Top	Bottom
1	13.32	12.81
2	12.22	12.42
3	13.13	11.93
4	13.13	12.78
5	13.19	12.44
6	13.03	12.40
7	13.19	12.97

All heights are expressed AOD.

4.0 SPECIALIST REPORTS

4.1 The Finds by Annette Hancocks

Finds were only recovered from Trench 2 (Table 2). The material was spot-dated. A small quantity of early 2nd-Century locally produced greywares, including a London-type Ware bowl (F201, 2002), a rusticated jar and a Black Burnished ware bowl (both from layer 2006), and a sherd of Lower nene Valley ware from feature F201 were the only diagnostic ceramics recognised. In addition, two fragments of whiteware were noted. The other greywares possibly derive from known kilns at Ecton or Colsterworth.

Five humanly struck flint flakes were recovered, but none of the material was diagnostic.

TABLE 2: THE FINDS
(Excludes human bone)

F200 (2001)
2 fragments of Roman pottery.
1 sherd of whiteware.
1 sherd of rusticated greyware jar.

F201 (2002)
4 fragments of Roman pottery.
3 decorated body sherds of a rusticated greyware jar and 1 sherd of Lower Nene Valley whiteware.
1 flint flake.

F202 (2004)
4 flint flakes.
1 fragment of slag.

layer 2006
6 fragments of Roman pottery.
3 sherds of 'London type ware', including a bowl.
2 sherds of BB1, including a flanged bowl and single greyware sherd.

4.2 The Human Burial by Megan Brickley

One human burial (HB1: F201) was recovered from Trench 2. This comprised the poorly preserved remains of an adult, aged over 25 years, of unknown sex. There are no obvious pathologies in the post-cranial skeleton, but the dental health of the individual was not good. No metric data are available.

Analysis

The skeleton recovered was incomplete, with only about 15% of the total skeleton present. Preservation of the bone was fair to poor, with many of the bones being fragmentary. The incompleteness of the skeleton and fragmentation of the bones makes the determination of the age and sex of the individual difficult.

Sex

The bones of the pelvis, which are probably the single most diagnostic elements for the determination of the sex of skeletal remains, were absent. Areas of the skull were present however, many of the features of the skull required for the determination of sex were either absent or broken. The few features which could be analysed were awarded intermediate scores. It was not possible to obtain any metric data to aid sex determination. The sex of the individual is therefore ambiguous.

Age

Of the bones present all the epiphyses have fused indicating that the skeleton is from an adult individual. Many of the features which might be used for age determination were missing. However, enough molars were present to award a dental wear score (Brothwell 1981). The age category derived from this score was 25–35 years. This may not be completely accurate as the wear scores were developed for use with Neolithic and medieval material. Some of the cranial sutures, which can be used for age estimation, were present, but many were missing. In the sutures that were available in this individual significant closure had occurred; this score would equate with a middle adult (35–45 years) (Bullkstra and Ubelaker 1994). However, there is considerable variation in rates of closure, this is a poor indicator of age.

In the light of difficulties with the techniques used, and the materials present, the safest conclusion about age would be that the skeleton was that of an adult of greater than 25 years of age at death.

Pathology

No pathological conditions were noted on any of the bones available for study from the post-cranial skeleton. A number of interesting features were noted in connection with the dentition. There was an area of non-occlusal surface caries on the maxillary left second molar. Tooth wear was extremely severe on the incisors present. From the one of mandible available for study it could be observed that there was periodontal disease present. This is an inflammatory condition of the tissues around the teeth, and even the material present it is not possible to determine the causative factor. The result of this condition is alveolar resorption, roots of teeth become exposed and caries can develop, its end point being loss of teeth. In the teeth present the condition has not advanced to this stage. Dental calculus (tartar) deposits on some of the teeth of this individual were considerable. Such deposits do irritate the gums and may be the cause of the periodontal disease observed.

7.0 DISCUSSION

The results of the earlier geotechnical survey ([illegible] Design 1997) correlate with the data from trial-trenching, and in particular confirm the identification of the subsoil horizon as recorded by machining and hand cleaning, and further machine testing.

No features of prehistoric date were identified by trial-trenching. A total of six flint flakes was recovered, although unfortunately these were not diagnostic in form.

With the exception of undated ditch F300 in Trench 3, the archaeological features identified were concentrated in the western half of Trench 2.

The feature group in the western half of Trench 2 is difficult to interpret in isolation (examination of the zone immediately adjoining Ermine Street, unaffected by the present development, was outside the scope of the present fieldwork). Although undated, it may be assumed that ditch F202 is of later Roman date. It was probably cut parallel to Ermine Street (London Road), and may be interpreted as a roadside ditch, as is suggested by the location of a Roman roadside ditch by Green (1979) cut on a similar alignment and at a similar distance from London Road, at 5a London Road. The former interpretation is the more plausible. Only one burial was identified. This could suggest that burials were sparsely distributed here, although it is also possible that more extensive modern intrusion (e.g. in the area adjoining Trench 1), could have removed such remains. The function of feature F200 is not clear.

Although difficult to interpret it is clear that more than one phase of activity is represented here; the first phase by the grave (F201), the second phase by the ditch (F202). Although not stratigraphically related to the grave or the ditch, post-hole F200 could possibly represent a third phase of activity.

Although the exact alignment of Ermine Street remains to be identified, the evidence from Trench 2 suggests that roadside activity was confined to a fairly narrow band measuring perhaps 10m from the eastern edge of Ermine Street (in the area of the modern hedgeline). This suggests that the Chord Business Park site lay towards the southern end of the roadside settlement.

The undated ditch (F300) from Trench 3 may be interpreted as a post-Roman feature because of the dissimilarity of its fill with those of the Trench 2 feature group, and the absence of datable artifacts of Roman date.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

8.1 Implications

Although the archaeological remains identified by trial-trenching are relatively confined, they are nevertheless of some importance to our overall understanding of the extent of roadside settlement around Godmanchester, and to our understanding of

the practice of inhumation in the rural hinterland. The human remains identified are unfortunately too disturbed to be very informative.

It is possible that other features or deposits of Roman date may be concentrated within approximately 10m of the contemporary road frontage. Although the uppermost surface of the gravel subsoil is slightly lower in Trenches 3-6 than in Trenches 1 and 2 (see Table 1), it is possible that this difference could be the result of modern disturbance.

8.0: Proposals (Fig. 4)

For the purpose of framing proposals for further work the site has been divided into two zones (1 and 2).

Zone 1

This comprises part of the area on the western margin of the site. The northern and southern limits of this western area (outside this zone) have been disturbed by previous modern activity (see Trench 1 in the south; concrete base in the north).

If the archaeological features in Trench 2 would not be affected by construction of car parking, no further archaeological work may be suggested.

Alternatively, if construction of the car parking would involve the removal of deposits overlying the subsoil in this zone, archaeological features such as those identified during trial-trenching, cut into the upper subsoil horizon, should be preserved by record, that is by sample excavation in advance of construction. This option would involve the analysis of the results, followed by publication in a recognised archaeological journal.

Zone 2

No archaeological features were identified within this zone. The maintenance of an archaeological watching brief to record features/deposits exposed by groundworks should be considered.

9.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was sponsored by Cam Homes Limited. The fieldwork was supervised by Gary Coates, assisted by Toby Hinder and John Williams. The finds were processed by Erica Macey and reported on by Annette Hancocks. I am grateful to H. J. M. Green for making available the results of his work at 8 London Road, Godmanchester. The human remains were examined and reported on by Dr. Megan Brickley, and the illustrations were prepared by Mark Breedon. The project was monitored by Simon Kaner for Cambridgeshire County Council. The report was edited by Simon Buteux.

10.0 References

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11.0 Archives

Huntingdonshire Record Office, Huntingdon

Ordnance Survey, 25 inches/mile, 1885
Ordnance Survey, 25 inches/mile, 1901
Ordnance Survey, 25 inches/mile, 1926

Godmanchester Inclosure Map, 1801.
Godmanchester Inclosure Map, revised 1819.

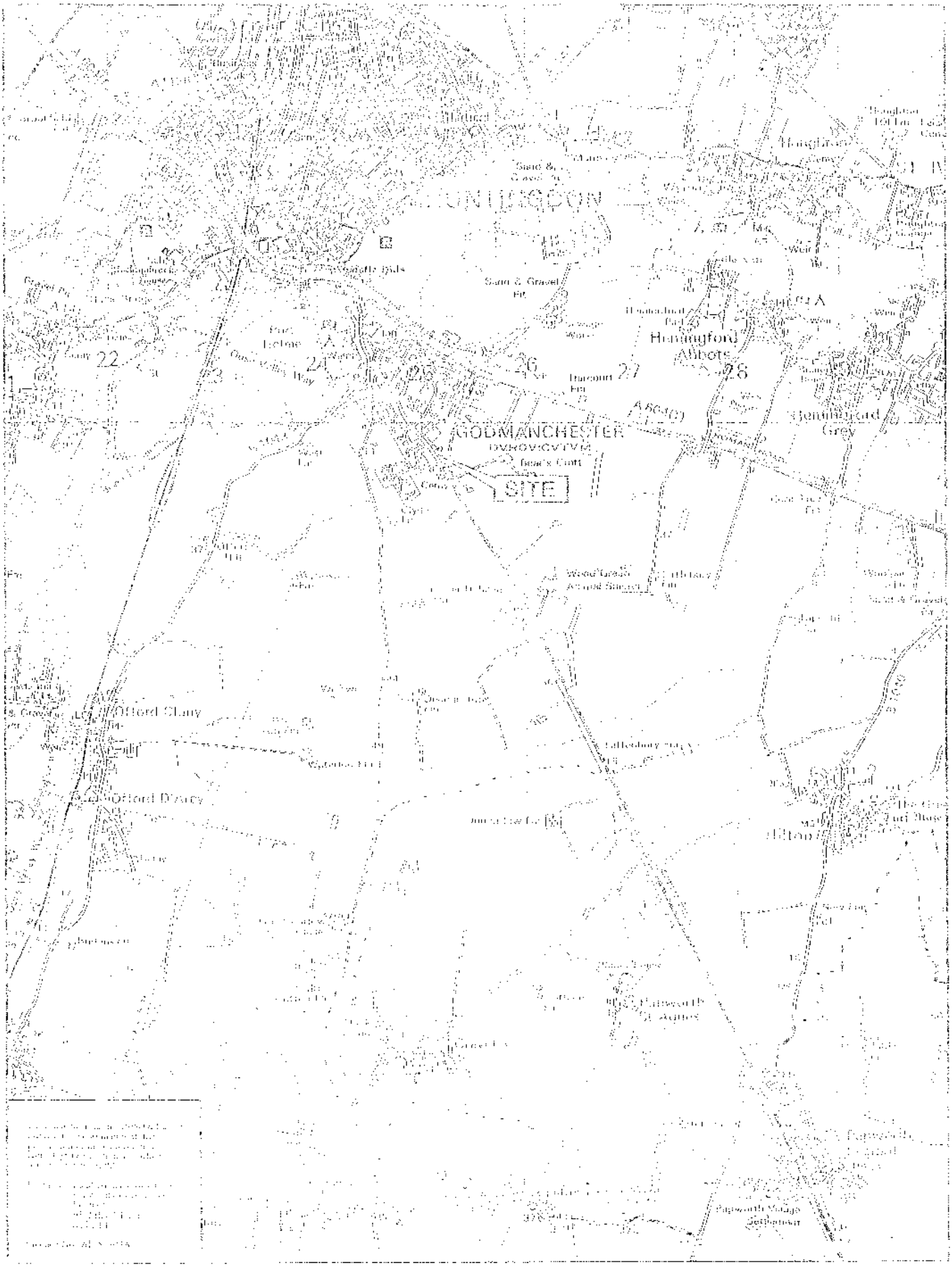

GODMANCHESTER
SITE
Hemingford Abbots
Hemingford Grey
Offord Cluny
Offord D'Arcy
Papworth Everard
Papworth Village Settlement

Fig. 1

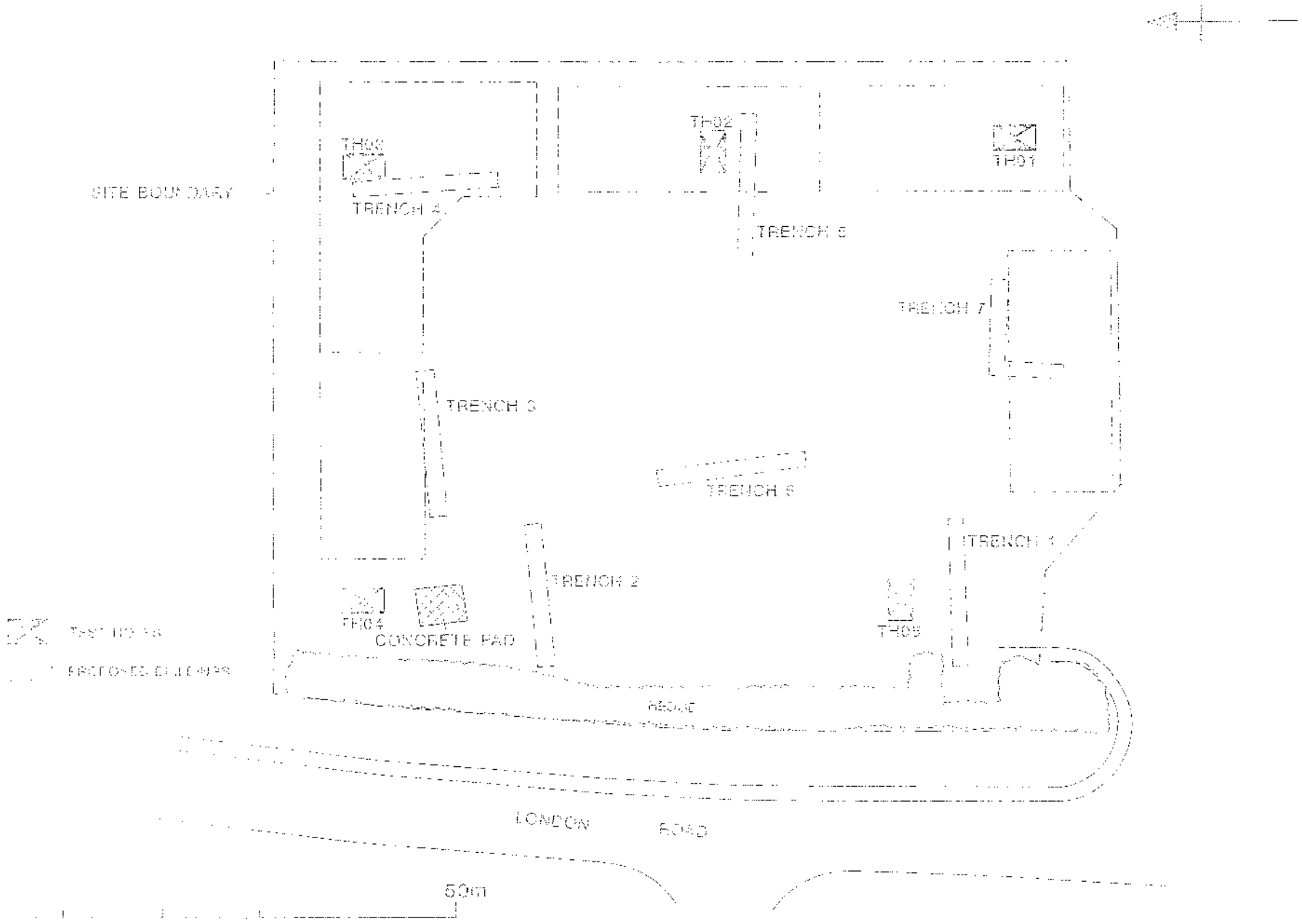
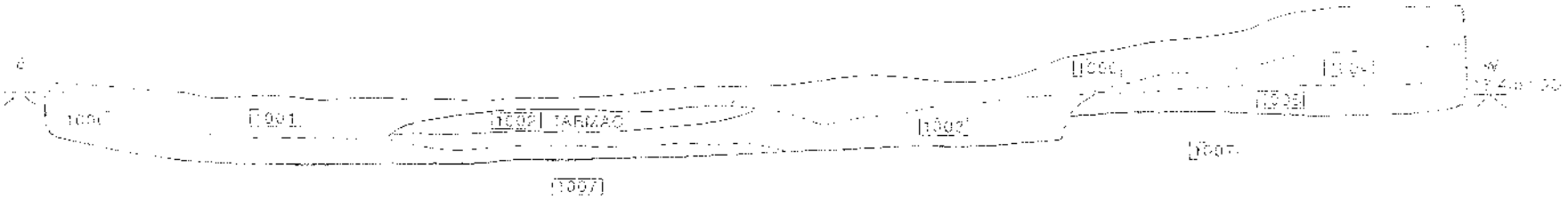
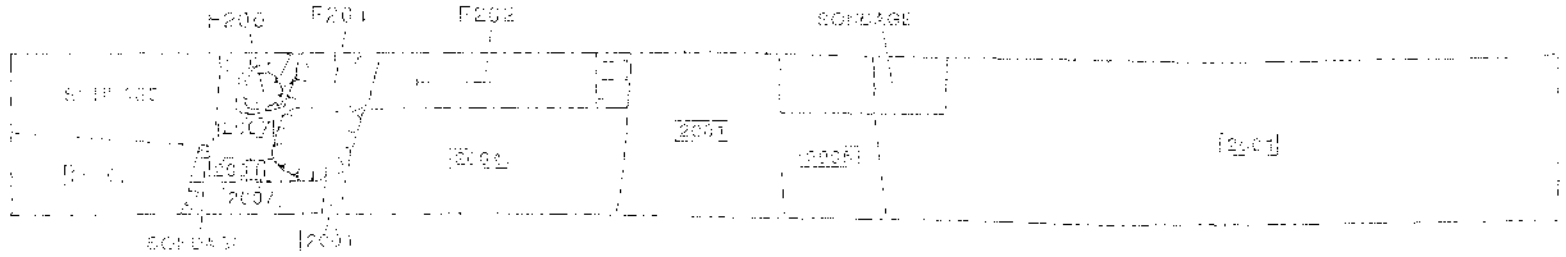

TH03
TH02
TH01
SITE BOUNDARY
TRENCH 4
TRENCH 5
TRENCH 7
TRENCH 3
TRENCH 6
TRENCH 1
TRENCH 2
TH04
TH05
CONCRETE PAD
ABOVE
LONDON
ROAD
0
5m

Fig 2

TRENCH 1 NORTH FACING SECTION



TRENCH 2 PLAN



TRENCH 2 SOUTH FACING SECTION

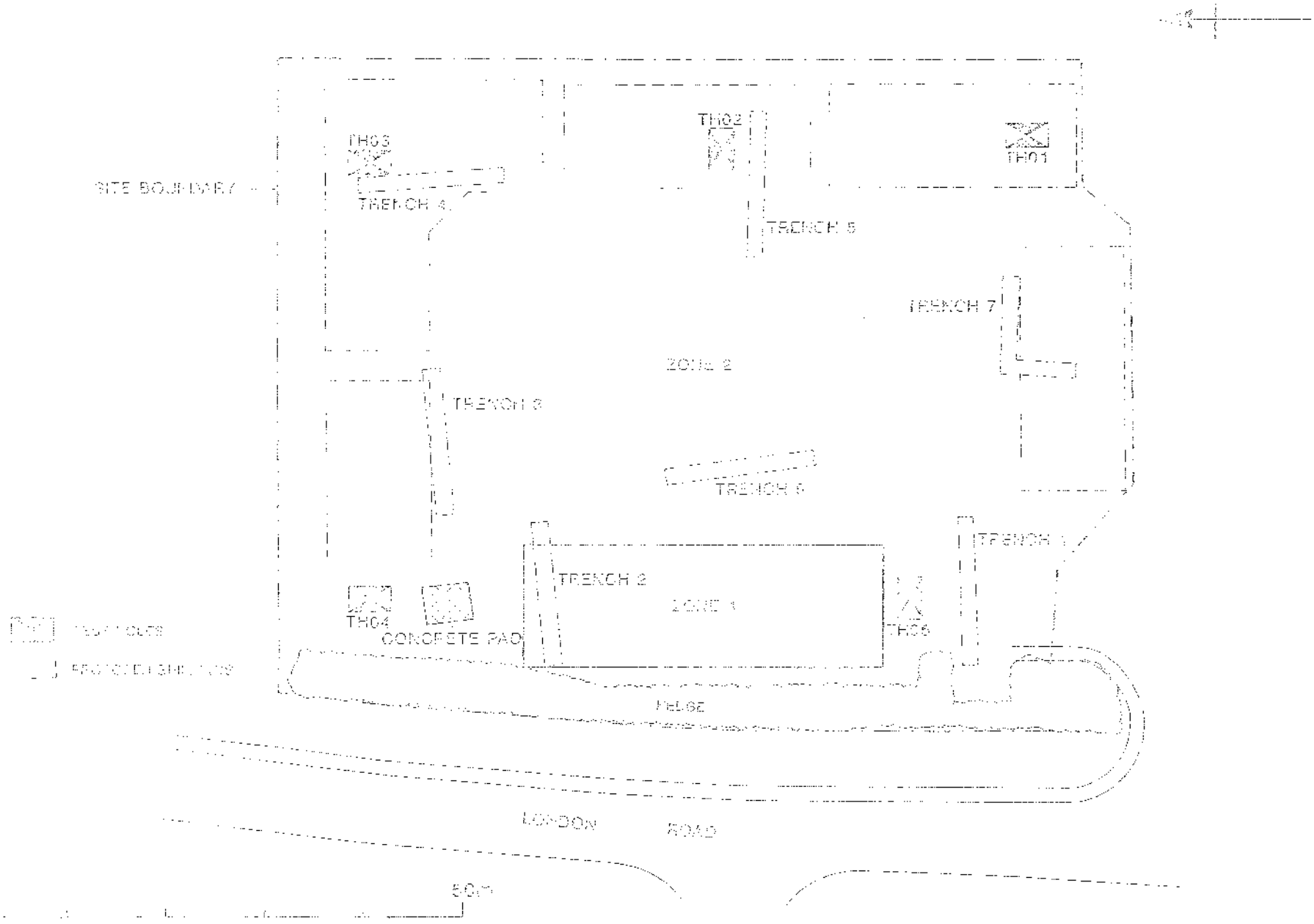

TH03
TH02
TH01
SITE BOUNDARY
TRENCH 4
TRENCH 5
TRENCH 7
ZONE 2
TRENCH 3
TRENCH 6
TRENCH 1
TRENCH 2
ZONE 1
TH04
TH05
CONCRETE PAD
HEDGE
LONDON
ROAD
0
50m

Plate I. Human Burial in Trench 2