BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

MOUNT PLEASANT, CHESTERTON, NEWCASLE-UNDER-LYME

An Archaeological Evaluation 1998

B.U.F.A.U.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 566
December 1998

Mount Pleasant, Chesterton, Newcastle-Under-Lyme: An Archaeological Evaluation 1998

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT MOUNT PLEASANT, CHESTERTON, NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME

By Gary Coates

1.0 Summary

A trial trench was excavated across the possible corner of the rampart and ditches associated with the Roman fort at Chesterton by staff from the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in December 1998. The purpose of the excavation was to assess the extent to which these ramparts survived and the degree to which they would be affected by a proposed housing development. No evidence of the Roman fort was recovered from the evaluation trench, although the area had been subjected to significant levelling associated with the construction of Victorian terraces and post-war housing. The construction of an access road from Mount Pleasant to Chesterton High School, during its development, may also have had a major impact on any surviving archaeology. A record of the identified stratrigraphy was made.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an evaluation trench excavated within an undeveloped area between two rows of housing, to the west of the village of Chesterton. The excavation itself consisted of a single 30m long trench excavated by machine and further investigated by hand archaeological excavation. This was carried out in the prior to development, as a condition of the planning consent, to assess the extent to which the south-western corner of Chesterton Roman fort and any associated archaeological features survived and would be affected by the proposed development. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to carry out this excavation to define the survival, nature, extent and significance of any archaeological deposits encountered. The work was carried out in accordance with the Staffordshire County Council *Brief with Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation at Mount Pleasant, Chesterton, Staffordshire*, prepared in July 1997.

3.0 Site Location (Figs. 1 & 2)

Chesterton is a village in the north-west suburbs of Newcastle-under-Lyme. The application site is a 950 square metre area of disused land at the north-western end of Mount Pleasant, centred on N.G.R. SJ 8309348943, and to the south of the south-western corner of the present Chesterton High School. The area remained undeveloped after the demolition, and replacement, of the two adjacent rows of terraced houses in the 1970s.

4.0 Archaeological Background

The application site encompasses the southern corner of the Roman fort at Chesterton (Staffordshire Sites and Monument Primary Record Number 1771). The site of the fort had been suspected to be of Roman origins since the 16th century when Sampson

Erdeswick described "*ruins of a very ancient town....the walls have been of miraculous thickness*" and Camden referred, in 1586, to Newcastle as "*No called in respect to an old castle anciently situated near it at Chesterton*" (Charlton 1961, 26). In 1686, R. Plot referred to Erdeswick and Camden, but claimed there was no visible remains in his time (ibid.). S. Shaw referred to "*...an oblong plot of ground higher than the rest of the land, which to the north west is strongly defended by a vast ditch or stone quarry*", in his 1798 *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* (ibid.). John Ward also gave a size of 370 by 370 yards for the fort at Chesterton in his *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent* (1843). The line of the fortress rampart also seemed to have been preserved in the field boundaries in the late-19th century, as can be seen from the 1899 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 3).

The first excavations took place in 1905, conducted by Charles Lynam but proved fruitless, as did the 1925 Pape excavations on the north-west corner of the fort. However, Pape's excavations in 1933 found evidence of Roman occupation of Flavian date in the north-east corner of the fort (ibid.). In 1956, J.H.Kelly excavated near to Pape's trenches and discovered artifacts of late-1st and early-2nd century dates, but no sign of any defences (ibid.).

In the 1950s, Chesterton Secondary Modern School, now Chesterton High School, was built on the site of the possible interior of the fort, which may have had a detrimental effect upon any remaining archaeological deposits in this area.

The principal excavations of the fort were undertaken between 1969 and 1971, during the demolition of the Victorian terraced housing and the construction of the present houses, by F.H.Goodyear (Goodyear 1970; 1976) and particularly focused on the south-eastern defences of the fort (Fig. 4), establishing the line of the south-eastern arm of the defences and the southern corner of the fort. The structure of the rampart and ditches was established, and ovens, sited immediately inside the rampart, were uncovered together with the *intervallum* road. The sandstone rampart was 7.6m wide, with turf revetments and timber lacing. Two ditches were located, the inner up to 4.6m wide and cut 1.2m deep into the sandstone bedrock with a 'cleaning' channel; the outer, cut into clay, was of similar dimensions (Jones 1975). Other structural evidence included a post-hole setting, possibly relating to a tower. Artifacts recovered from the excavations included fine and coarse pottery, metalwork, glass and a carnelian ring-seal with winged Victory; the samian pottery indicated an early Flavian date, towards the end of the First Century A.D.

Goodyear excavated two trenches, CF and CF' within the application site, only to a sufficient enough depth to identify the rampart and inner ditch (Goodyear, 1976; 5). No further archaeological investigation has taken place on this site until the present evaluation.

5.0 Objectives

The general objectives of the trial trench were to define the survival, nature, extent and significance of any archaeological deposits encountered, so that appropriate mitigation strategies could be devised.

The specific objectives, relating to the Roman fort, were :

a) to define the extent of survival of the rampart and ditches, and features internal to them and,
b) to determine the extent of survival of features outside the fort defences, and to assess the potential degree of destruction and/or truncation of deposits caused by the construction of the now demolished terraced houses, on the southern part of the site.

6.0 Method

The excavation of the overburden in the trial trench was carried out by a J.C.B. Excavator, fitted with a 1.6m wide, toothless ditching bucket and operated under archaeological supervision. The uppermost horizon, in which evidence of 20th-century building activity was identified, was recorded before re-machining these deposits down to the natural weathered sandstone horizon. Any significant archaeological deposits were excavated by hand and recorded on pro-forma record cards supplemented by scale plans, section drawings and photographs, where appropriate. Where no archaeological deposits were identified the stratigraphy was recorded and photographed. These records comprise the site archive, which, at the time of writing, is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. After completion of the excavations the trench was backfilled by machine.

7.0 The Trial Trench (Figs. 5 & 6, Plates 1 & 2)

The entire trench was covered with a 0.3 to 0.4m thick deposit of topsoil (1000), this had a high clay content and contained a large percentage of domestic rubbish and building rubble.

The southern half of the trench contained the foundation walls (see Fig. 5) of the Victorian terraced houses, demolished in the 1970s and visible on the 1899 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 3). They can be related to the side and rear walls of the properties as the 1899 map clearly shows that the houses were built with their frontages facing the valley vista, in an opposite direction to the remainder of the houses. These walls were contained within a general levelling layer (1002) of dark brown clay, mixed with building rubble and domestic rubbish, associated with the demolition of these houses. In places these deposits measured up to 0.95m in depth below the topsoil. These demolition deposits and walls were generally cut into the natural weathered sandstone (1001).

In the northern half of the trench, a road (1003) had been cut into the natural horizon (1001). This road consisted of a hard-core surface bedded upon a mixed clay deposit, which had an overall depth of 0.3m to 0.4m, and contained modern debris. The route of this road lined up with the end of Mount Pleasant and the rear entrance to Chesterton High School and may have been an access route associated with either the construction of the school or the houses.

An apparent bank in the northern extreme of the trench would appear to be made up of natural deposits (1001), possibly re-deposited and including a lens of grey sand-silt (1004) and some root disturbance

The overall level of the ground drops from 175.56m A.O.D. at the top of the northern end of the trench to 173.10m A.O.D. at the southern end, and would seem to indicate a natural break of slope that has been subsequently disturbed by the modern activity on the site.

8.0 Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Site

There was no evidence of the fort rampart or associated ditches within the northern part of this trial trench, which would seem to suggest that they lie beyond the application site and some re-assessment of Goodyear's projected ramparts may be necessary. Although there was some disturbance associated with the construction of an access route, this was not deep enough to have totally obscured any deposits associated with the rampart or ditches. There was also no indication of the presence of these features within the vicinity of the trench, as there were no associated artifacts recovered which could be dated to the period of the fort.

The levelling and Victorian wall foundations in the southern half of the trench showed the degree of disturbance to which this area of the site had been subjected. Any former archaeological remains would be unlikely to have survived this disturbance, which is likely to be true for the whole southern part of the site.

9.0 Acknowledgements

The excavation was supervised by Gary Coates, assisted by Andy Hammon and John Hovey. The project was managed by Simon Buteux. The illustrations were prepared by John Halsted and the report was edited by Simon Buteux.

The excavations were sponsored by The Staffordshire Housing Association, for whom Jacqui Allcock, the Project Development Officer, liaised. Christopher Welch and Chris Wardle monitored the project on behalf of Staffordshire County Council.

Potteries Waste Ltd., Chesterton, provided the J.C.B. excavator and Traction Equipment (Stafford) Ltd. provided the site fencing.

10.0 References

Charlton, J.M.T. 1961 *Excavations at the Roman Site at Holditch 1957-1959* North Staffs Journal of Field Studies Vol. 1, 1961, pp. 26-50

Goodyear, F.H. 1970 *The Roman Fort at Chesterton, Newcastle-Under-Lyme* North Staffs Journal of Field Studies Vol. 10, 1970, pp 103-5

Goodyear, F.H. 1976 *The Roman Fort at Chesterton, Newcastle-Under-Lyme: Report of the Excavations of 1969-71* North Staffs Journal of Field Studies Vol. 16, 1976, pp. 1-15.

Jones, M.J. 1975 *Roman Fort-Defences to A.D. 117 with special reference to Britain* British Archaeological Reports 21

Staffordshire County Council 1997 *Brief with Specification for an Evaluation at Mount Pleasant, Chesterton, Staffordshire*

Maps

1899 Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1:2500

Figures

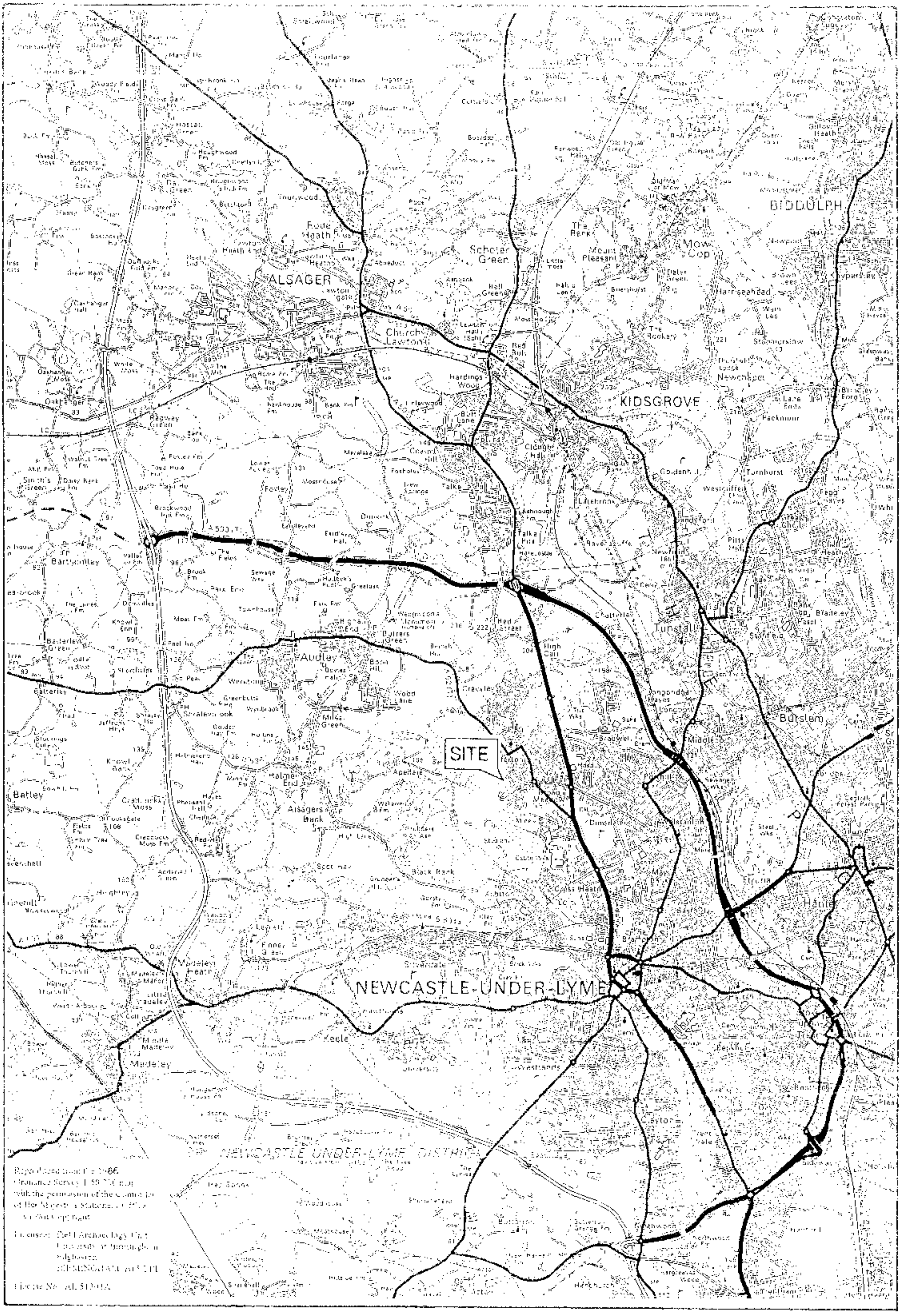
SITE
NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME
KIDSGROVE
ALSAGER
BIDDULPH
Tunstall
Burslem
Audley
Madeley
Keele
Talke
Church Lawton
Rode Heath
Scholar Green
Mow Cop
Harriseahead
NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME DISTRICT

Fig 1

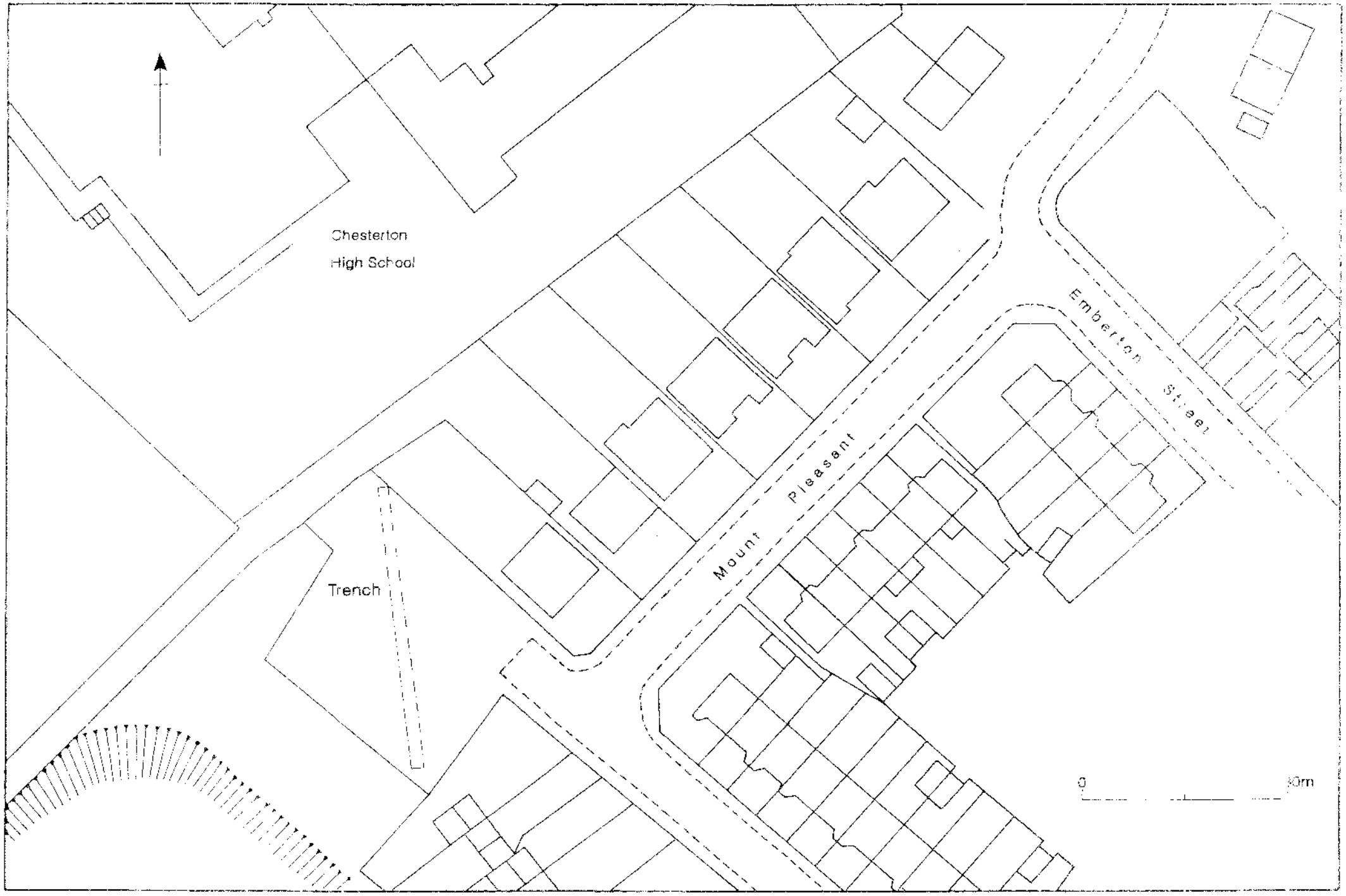
Chesterton
High School
Trench
Mount Pleasant
Emberton Street
0
30m

Fig 2

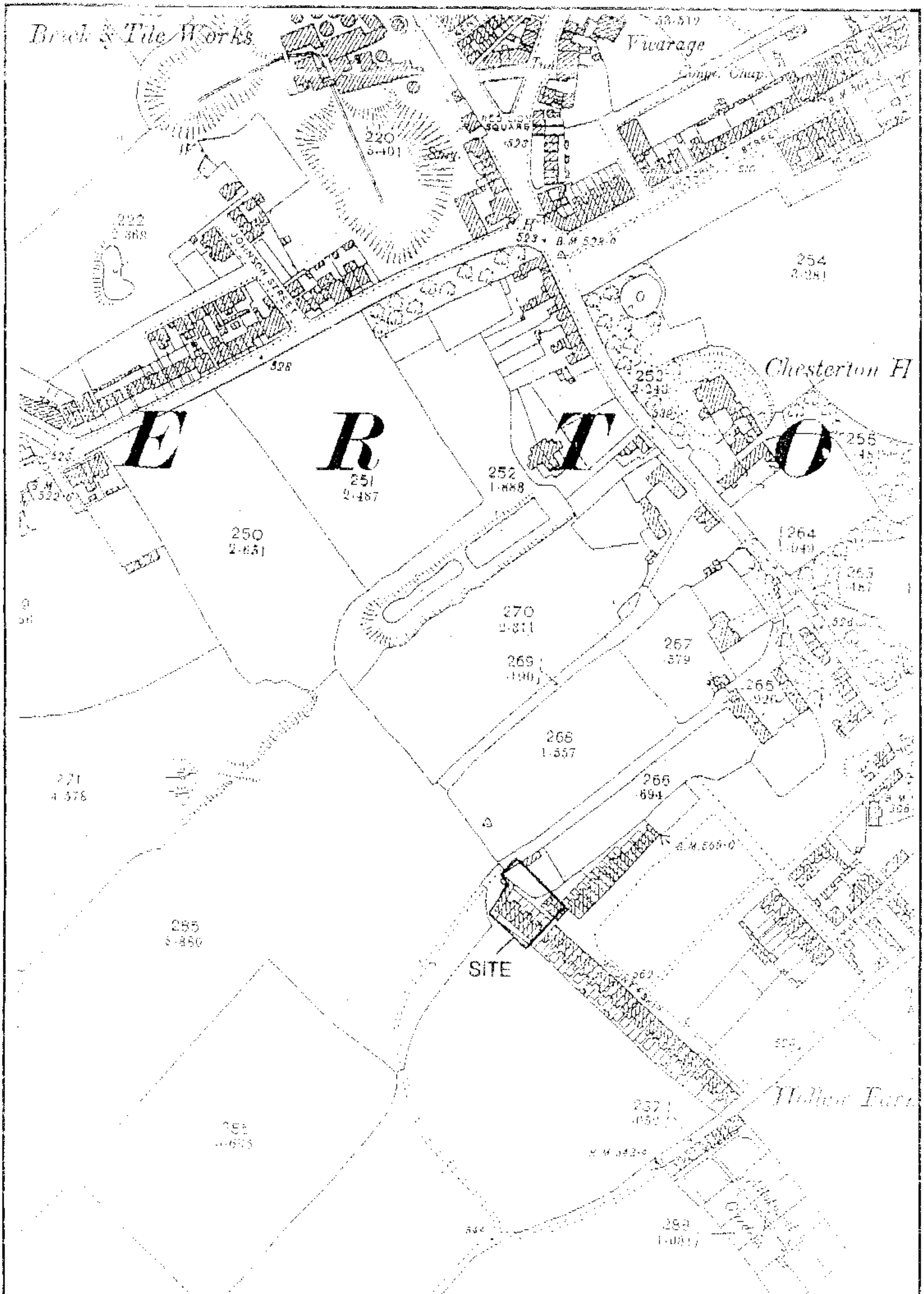
Brick & Tile Works
Vicarage
Chesterton Fl
JOHNSON STREET
E R T O
220
5·401
222
2·868
254
2·081
253
2·243
255
250
2·651
251
2·487
252
1·868
264
1·049
270
2·811
267
·579
269
·190
268
1·557
266
·694
271
4·578
285
5·850
SITE

Fig.3

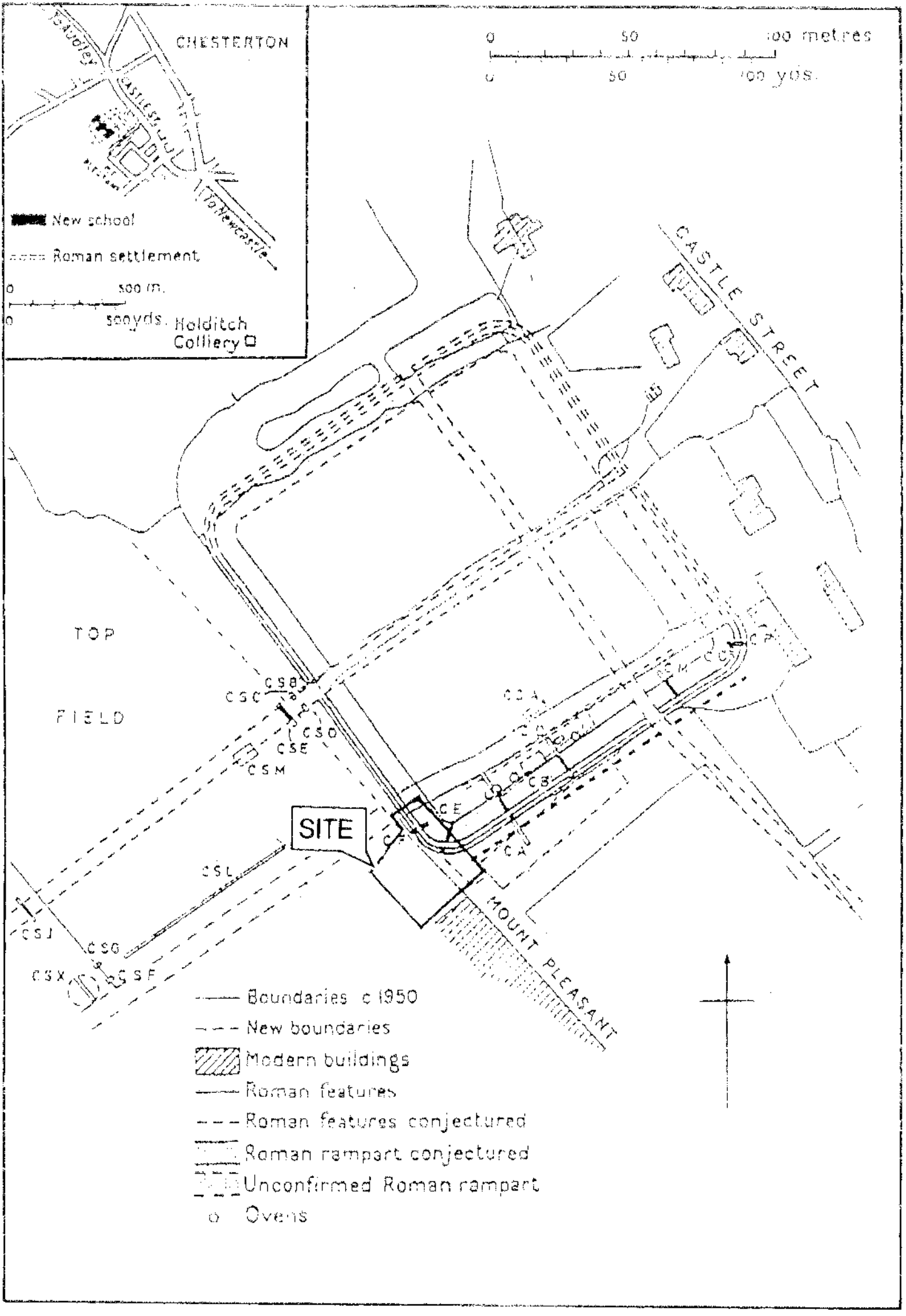
CHESTERTON
New school
Roman settlement
500 m.
500 yds.
Holditch Colliery
0 50 100 metres
0 50 100 yds.
CASTLE STREET
TOP FIELD
SITE
MOUNT PLEASANT
Boundaries c 1950
New boundaries
Modern buildings
Roman features
Roman features conjectured
Roman rampart conjectured
Unconfirmed Roman rampart
Ovens

Fig 4

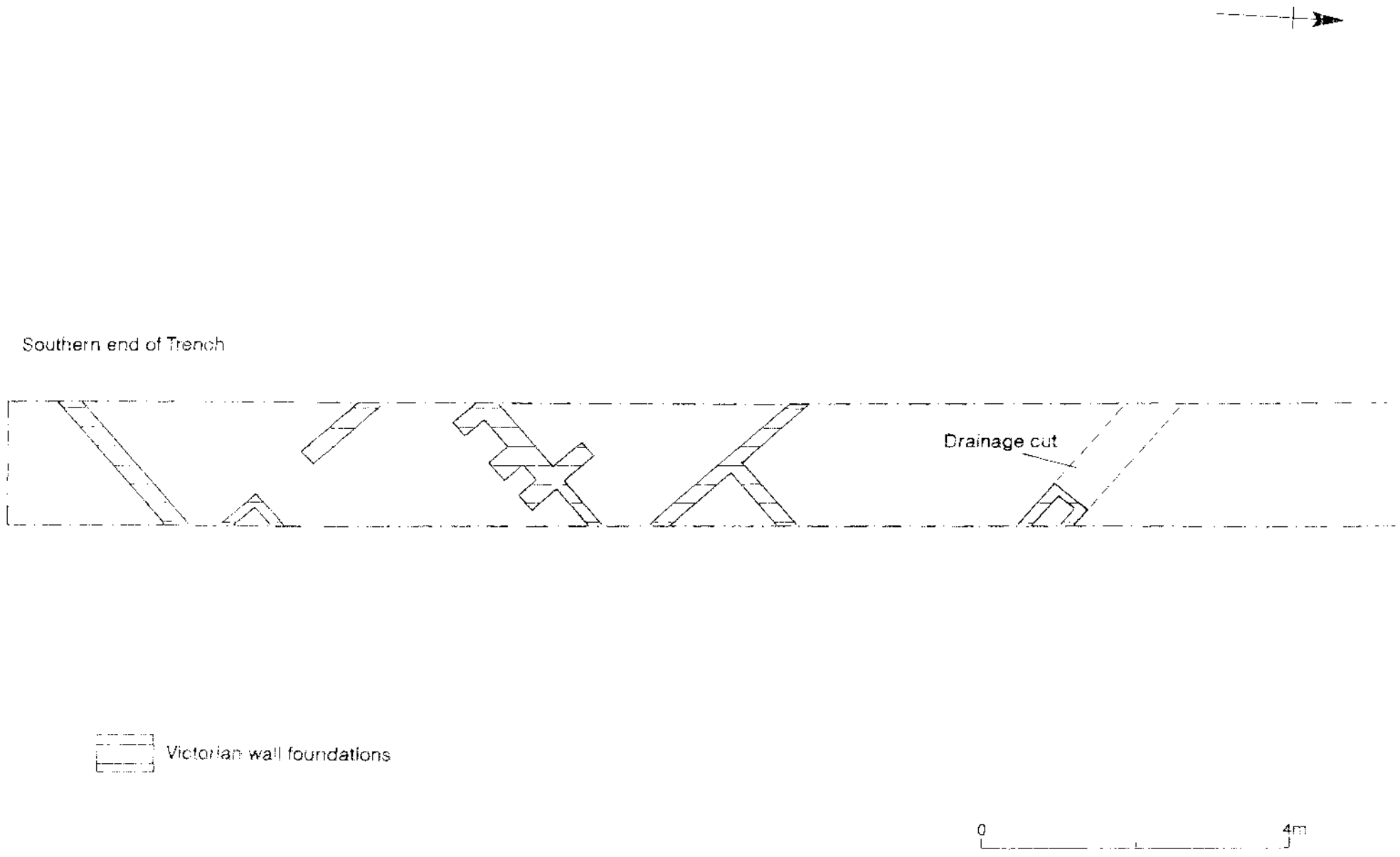
Southern end of Trench
Drainage cut
Victorian wall foundations
0
4m

Fig.5

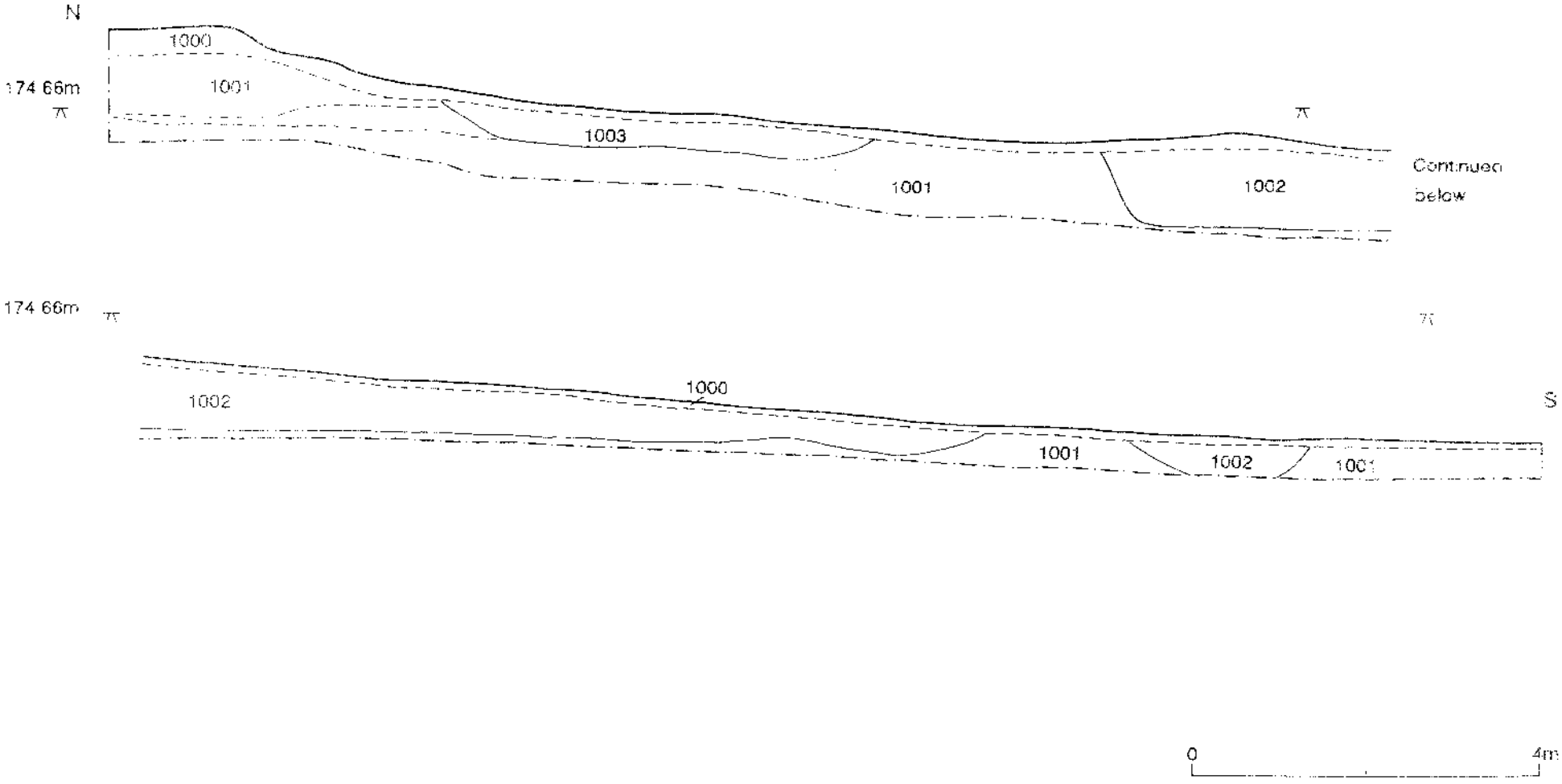
N
174.66m
1000
1001
1003
1001
1002
Continued
below
174.66m
1002
1000
1001
1002
1001
S
0
4m

Fig.6

Plates

Plate 1.

Plate 2.