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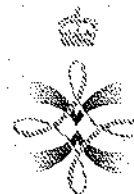
**Dales Gap Farm,
Barrow Hill, Rocester,
Staffordshire:**

**an archaeological evaluation
2000**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



Institute of Field
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Project No. 737
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by
Roy Krakowicz

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the proposed site of a new farmyard building at Dales Gap Farm, Barrow Hill, Rocester, Staffordshire. Two trial trenches (T1 and T2), each 12m in length, were dug across the width of the plot at the southern and northern ends, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. After removal of the topsoil, the trenches were hand cleaned and inspected. They revealed little of archaeological interest, other than a linear, negative feature, aligned northwest – southeast, which was present in both trenches. Artefact finds were limited to a single pot sherd recovered from the exposed surface of the subsoil in trench T1 and two pot sherds collected from the surface of a track immediately to the north of the self-same trench. All three were identified as dating from the Romano-British period.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation on the intended site of a new farmyard building at Dales Gap Farm, Barrow Hill, Rocester, Staffordshire (National Grid Reference SK 112408; Fig.1). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned to carry out the work by Trustees of AHF Dawson (deceased) who owns the land, but which is currently occupied/farmed by their tenant, Mr. Austin Mellor. The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by excavating two trial trenches across the width of the site, at the southern and northern ends respectively. The trenches were dug by a mechanical excavator, whose operator was under the continuous supervision of an archaeologist.

The aims of the evaluation were to ascertain if any archaeological features and deposits were present within the confines of the development area, then to determine their age and extent. In addition, the investigation would attempt to determine the level of survival (or destruction) across the site; to date and characterise any deposits through the recovery of finds and/or environmental material.

3.0 Site Location and History

Dales Gap Farm comprises a group of buildings centred on National Grid Reference SK 112408, approximately 1 mile north of Rocester and 1.5 miles south-southwest of Ellastone (Fig.1). It is situated on Barrow Hill, a spur of land formed by the convergence

of the River Dove and River Churnet valleys. The farm buildings are accessed from the B 5030 road, which passes immediately to the east of them.

The intended site of the cattle stock building comprises a plot of land, measuring 32m long by 25m wide, situated behind (ie. to the north of) the existing farm outbuildings and centred on NGR SK 11254084 (Fig.2). At present, the land is utilised partly as the route of a farm track and partly as the site of an agricultural building. The current tenant farmer, Mr. Mellor, reported that previous landscaping of the ground was necessary in order to accommodate these existing uses. Prior to any new construction work, preparation of the land will require the demolition of the existing building and further landscaping to form a level surface (Fig.3). The latter groundworks will include extensive excavation of an earth banking along the western side of the site and some reduction of the land height in the northern sector.

Barrow Hill has been of interest to antiquarians for many years, but as a result of the suggested presence of Romano-British remains rather than the barrow itself, yet to be located, after which the place is named. A rectilinear, earthwork enclosure, whose southern side passes through Dales Gap Farm buildings, reputedly dates from the Roman period (Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record PRN: 00586). However, evidence for this date is restricted to finds of Romano-British pottery from various parts of the hill. A further confusing factor is the presence of spoil heaps from more-recent gravel workings, which can be easily mistaken for earlier earthworks.

Published accounts of Barrow Hill by Redfern (1886), the Victoria County History series (volumes for Staffordshire, 1908) and by Barnwell (Transactions of the N. Staffs Field Club, Vol. 47, 1913) provide useful background reading on this locale. For a general summary of the archaeology within the Rocester area, one should refer to the report by Esmonde Cleary, A.S. and Ferris, I.M. *Excavations at the New Cemetery, Rocester, Staffordshire 1985-1987*, published in 1996.

4.0 Methodology

A small team, comprised of three field archaeologists from BUFAU, visited the intended construction site at Dales Gap Farm on August 7th, 2000. Iain Ferris (BUFAU) was also in attendance for part of the time. The visit was scheduled to monitor the initial excavation of two trial trenches by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were positioned across the width of the proposed site of the new building (Fig.4), with one at the northern end (trench T1) and the second at the southern end (trench T2). Once the groundwork was completed, the trenches were hand-cleaned and recorded. Any features exposed by the operation were likewise cleaned, then sectioned and recorded. Artefacts recovered during these procedures were placed in labelled bags for subsequent cleaning, cataloguing, identification and possible dating.

5.0 Results

The project specification proposed that two 25m-long trenches would be dug across the width of the site. However, on arrival the archaeologists immediately realised that this would not be practical due to workspace restrictions imposed by an existing building and the topography of the land. Steep banking in the western half of the development area severely limited any machine excavations and as a result the two trenches, when dug, each measured some 12m long by 1.8m wide.

Trench T1, at the northern end of the site, was excavated first. Stripping the layer of topsoil (context 1000) from the banking, showed the former to be c0.15m in depth, but increasing in thickness to 0.25m on the upper portion of the slope. Distributed throughout this layer were small pieces of modern building debris, including fragments of slate tiles and red bricks. Removal of the topsoil along the full extent of the trench revealed the surface of a sandy-silt deposit (1001), within which were many rounded pebbles, including flint. This was deemed to be natural subsoil, hence the excavation was halted at this depth.

During the excavation of trench T1, two sherds of pottery (subsequently identified as Romano-British) were found on the farmtrack surface immediately to the north of the trench. In addition, whilst inspecting the trench prior to cleaning, a third sherd of pottery (of similar age) was found embedded in the surface of the natural subsoil (1001) at the northeast end.

The inspection of the trench also revealed that there were two features cutting into subsoil 1001. The purpose of one was self-evident, in that it comprised a 2.5m-wide and 0.25m-deep depression (F 002) housing the pebble bedding (1003) for the farmtrack. The second feature appeared to be an infilled linear ditch or gully (F001), aligned northwest – southeast and running across the lower slope of the banking. Both features became more clearly defined when the trench was subsequently hand-cleaned in preparation for recording. Feature F001 was sectioned and proved to be a U-shaped cut, c0.48m wide and 0.13m deep, containing a single infill (1002). The latter consisted of a brown, silty deposit that was found to be devoid of artefacts. The feature may be the remains of a larger ditch that was truncated by the previous landscaping of the site, but in the absence of any dating evidence, such a suggestion is pure conjecture.

The excavation of trench T2, at the southern end of the site, involved the removal of a c0.1m-deep layer of topsoil (1000) to reveal the natural subsoil (1001). The depth of the topsoil increased (to 0.2m) on the upper slope of the banking, as in trench T1. Cut into the subsoil was a ditch or gully (F 003), having a northwest – southeast alignment, which appeared to be a continuation of feature F 001. On sectioning, it was found to contain a similar fill (1004) and have the same profile as the latter, but measured c0.8m wide by 0.3m deep. Also present in trench T2 was a 2.5m-wide, single layer of red bricks (1005), inset into the natural subsoil to form the surface for the farmtrack (F 004, a continuation of F 002 seen in trench T1). No artefacts were recovered from trench T2, the features within it, or the immediate surrounds.

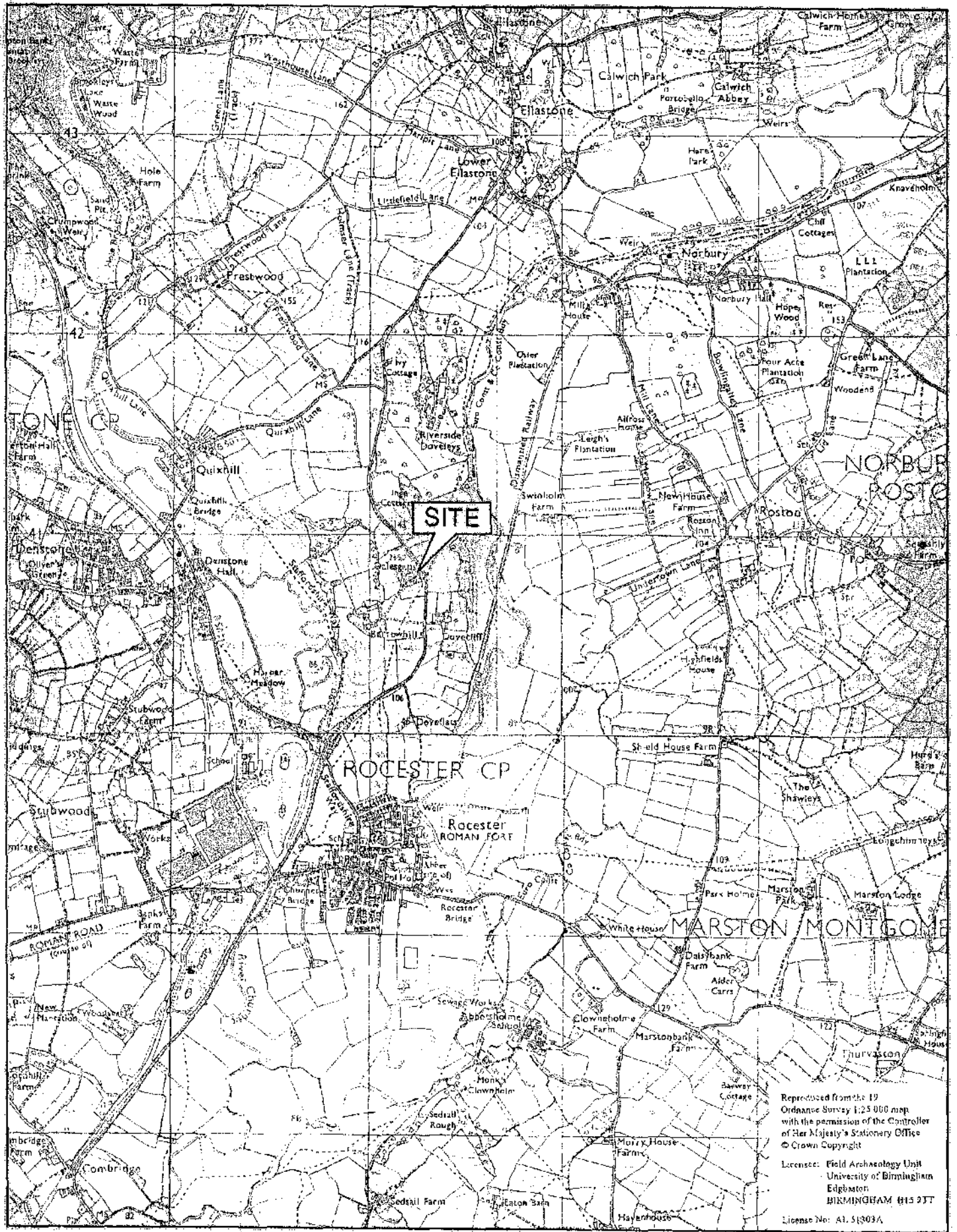
6.0 Conclusions

Due to previous landscaping in the area of the proposed new building, any archaeological deposits and features that may once have been present have been destroyed. Finds of three small sherds of Romano-British pottery add to the evidence for the presence of a Roman site on Barrow Hill, but the nature of that site remains enigmatic.

Given the level of disturbance noted on the site, no further archaeological work is recommended here during the construction of the new building, although this approach must await endorsement by the archaeological officers of Staffordshire County Council.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The project was sponsored by the Trustees of AHF Dawson (deceased). Thanks are due to Mr. Austin Mellor, tenant farmer, who provided and operated the mechanical excavator. Iain Ferris managed the project on behalf of BUFAU and edited this report. The excavation was supervised by Roy Krakowicz, with the assistance of Charlotte Nielson and Philip Mann. Mark Breedon (BUFAU) prepared the illustrations.



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FIG. 1

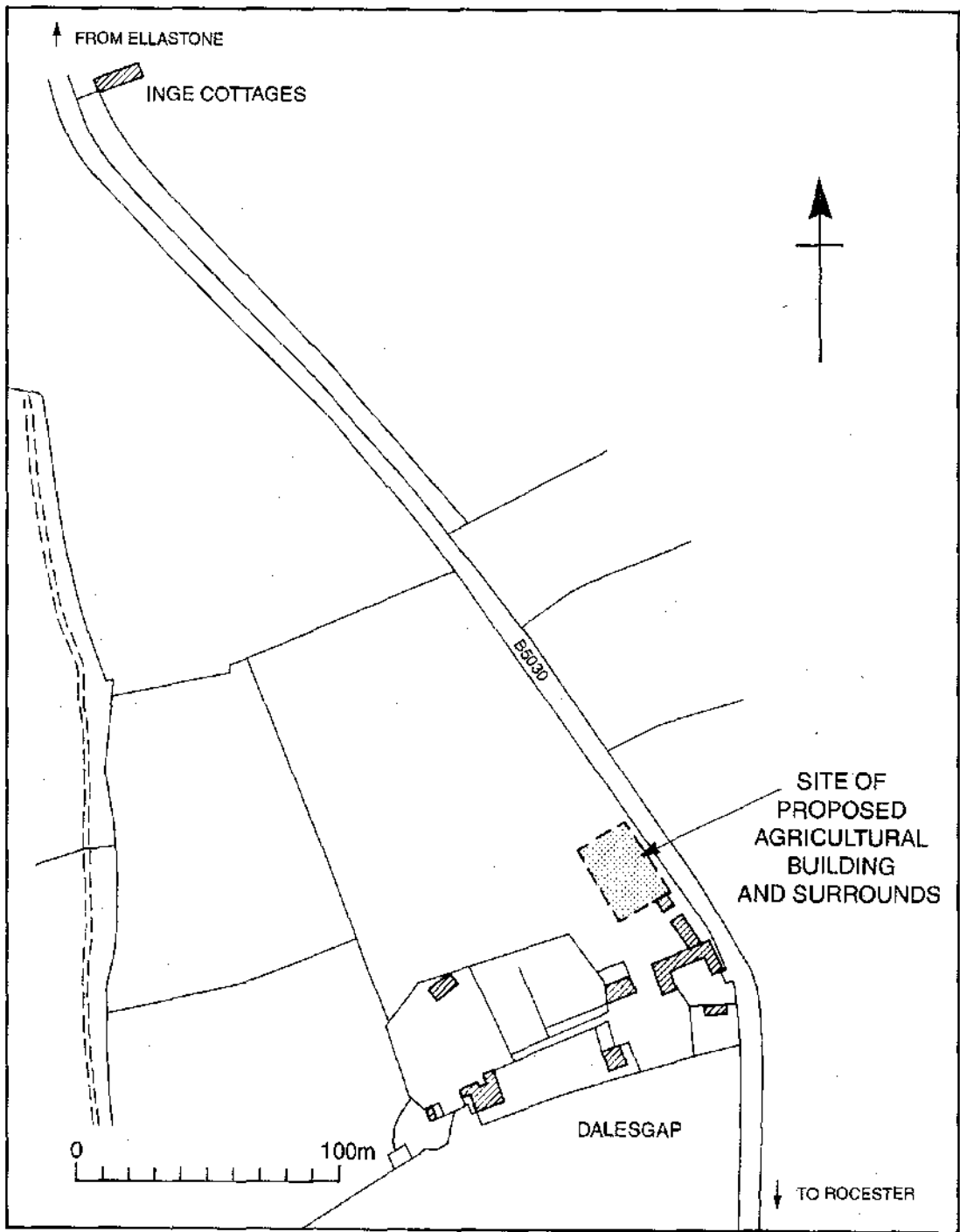


FIG. 2

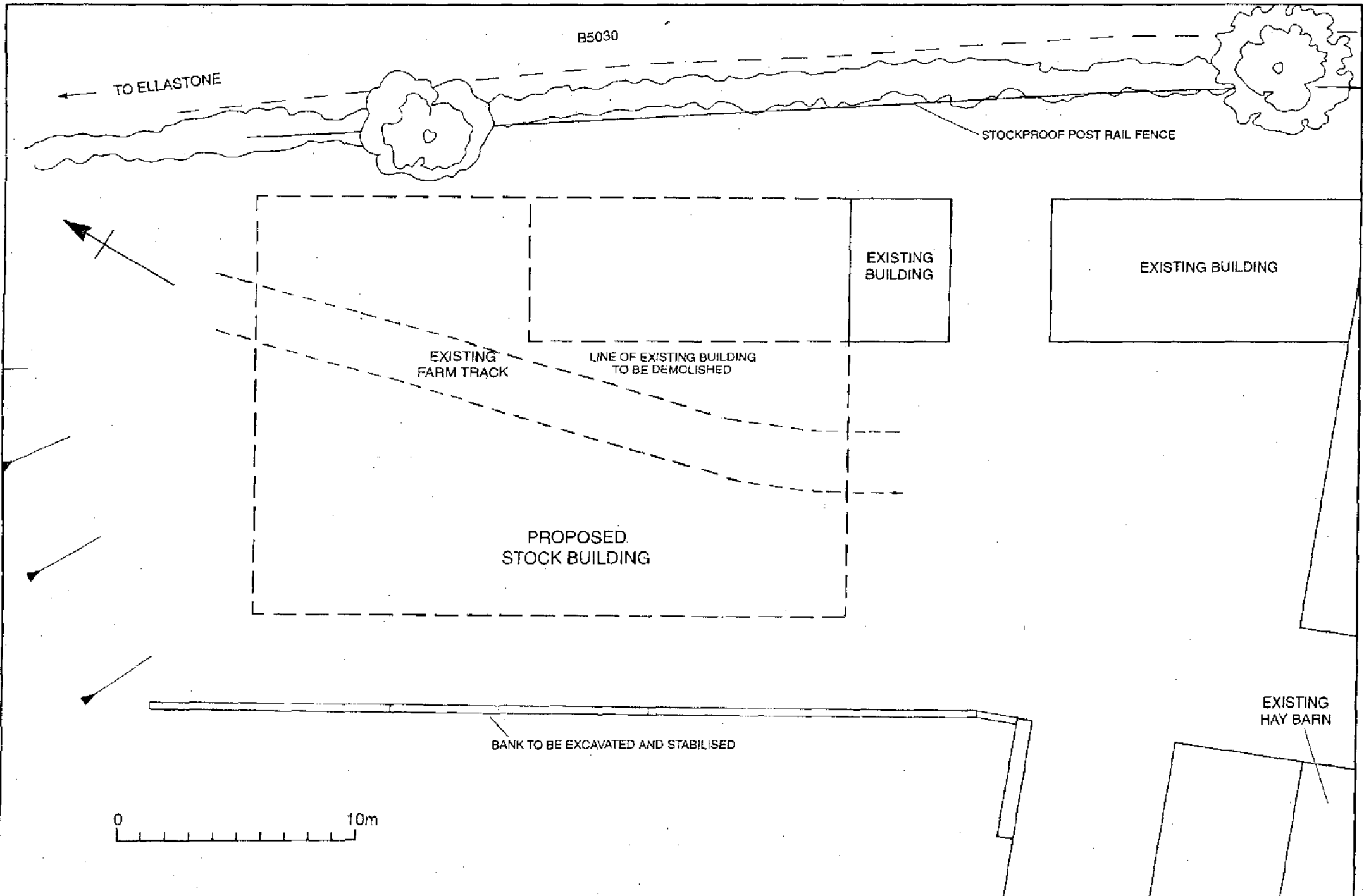


FIG. 3

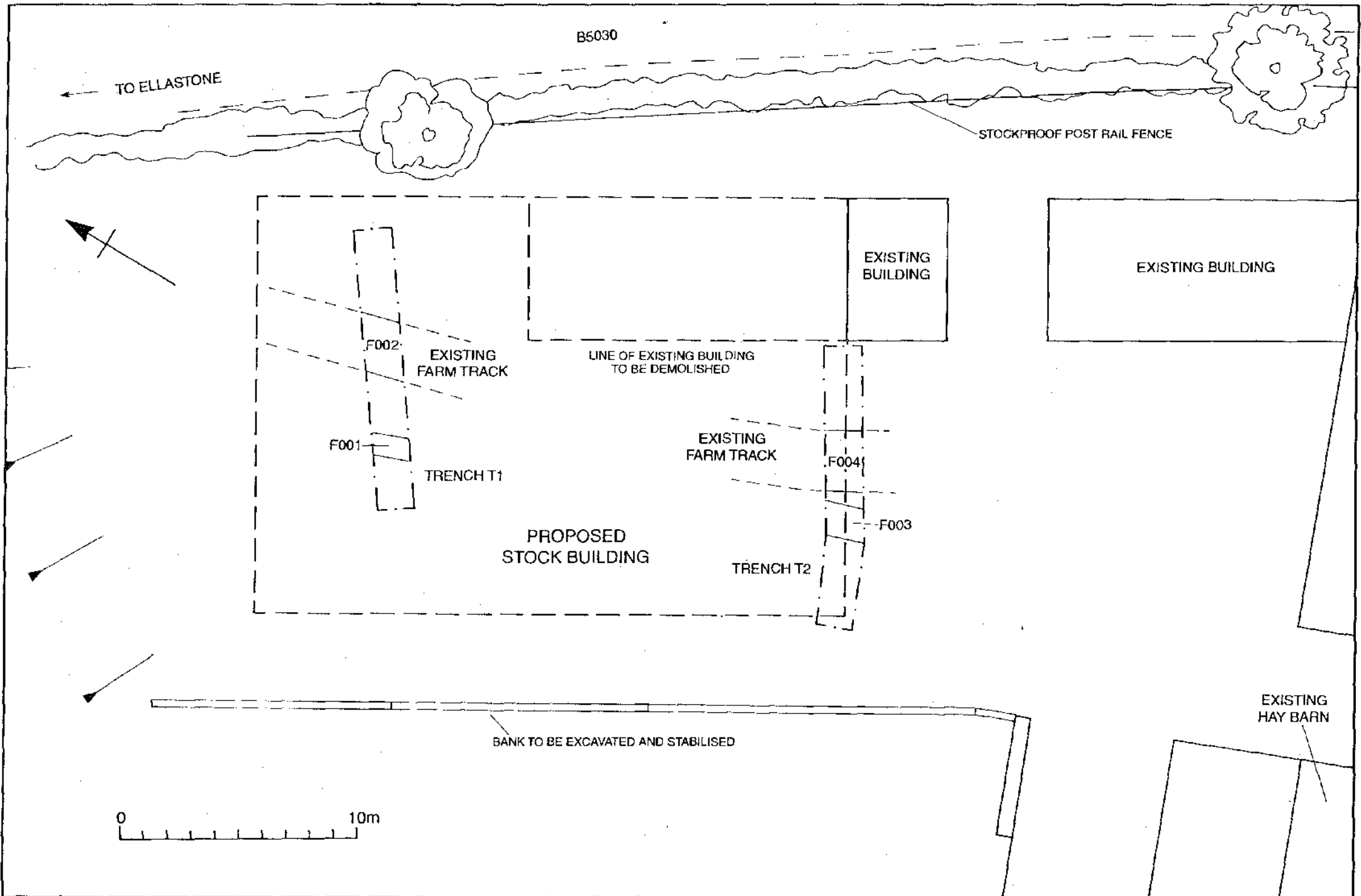


FIG. 4