

**Oakleigh Crescent,
Godmanchester,
Cambridgeshire**

**An Archaeological
Evaluation 2002**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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Oakleigh Crescent, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire
An Archaeological Evaluation 2002

by
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1.0: SUMMARY

A small-scale archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 5 Oakleigh Crescent, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire (centred on NGR TL 245957033), in advance of proposals for the construction of a new building within the rear garden of a dwelling. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, under instruction from the landowner, Mrs. S. Smith. The proposed development lies close to the centre of the Roman town of Godmanchester, near to the site of the Roman crossroads and marketplace. Two test-pits were hand-excavated. The southernmost test-pit revealed a possible surface of Roman date. The northern test-pit identified part of a possible pit, and another feature. The pottery recovered mainly dated to the 2nd century AD and later.

2.0: INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

2.1: Evaluation

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out in a rear garden area at 5 Oakleigh Crescent, off Pinfold Lane, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire (centred on NGR TL 245957033, Figs. 1-2). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of the landowner, Mrs. S. Smith. The evaluation was undertaken in advance of the construction of a proposed new building, located within the rear garden area. The archaeological evaluation conformed with a Design Brief prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council (Cambridgeshire C. C. 2002), and an Archaeological Specification prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2002), and approved by the council. This fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991).

2.2: Background

The site is located towards the centre of the two mid 1st century forts, established to protect the river crossing, and located within the modern town (Burnham and Wachter 1990, 122-4). Information concerning the morphology of the Roman town derives from several piecemeal excavations conducted by Green (1975), and a synthesis by Burnham and Wachter (1990). The evaluation site is located to the southwest of Ermine Street, which was laid out on a northwest-southeast alignment to the southeast of the river crossing (Burnham and Wachter 1990, fig. 33). The Oakleigh Crescent site lies to the southwest of the junction between Ermine Street, and two routes leading to the northeast, and southwest, possibly following the line of earlier military routes. Green (1975) has suggested that a series of enclosures were laid out at right-angles to the main roads in the Flavian period. These enclosures contained agricultural features, including grain drying ovens and threshing floors, with evidence for a bakery and metalworking close to the main crossroads (Green 1975). An area was cleared to the northwest of the main crossroads, preparatory to the construction of a bath-house and

hostel (*mansio*) 2nd century. In the early 3rd century an area was cleared to the north of the main crossroads in advance of the construction of a possible basilica (SMR No. 1539). Ermine Street was slightly re-aligned to the east, creating a market-place between the two alignments (Burnham and Wachter 1990, fig. 34), located approximately 50m to the east of the evaluation site. The marketplace frontages would have been a prime location for small-scale trade, and an increasing number of small workshops are recorded around the marketplace in the 3rd century. An isled barn, possibly for the storage of produce, was also located within the *mansio* complex (SMR No. 10536). In the later 3rd century a major fire devastated the central area of the town, possibly including the area evaluated, although some, at least of the internal buildings, including the *mansio*, were later rebuilt. There is little evidence of rebuilding within the town during the 4th century, and deposits of rubbish accumulating above the main roads suggest a considerable reduction in the volume of traffic.

The town was partly enclosed in the 2nd century, while the stone defences of the later 3rd century have been more extensively investigated. Although Roman law prohibited the burial of adults and older children within the town walls (Philpott 1991), smaller children were often buried within the town walls. A child cremation associated with pottery figurines (SMR No. 11022) was found elsewhere within Oakleigh Crescent during groundworks for the construction of a garage.

2.3: Aims

The objectives of this archaeological evaluation were:

- (a) To define the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area proposed for the new build, to permit the formulation of a mitigation strategy, if appropriate
- (b) In particular it was intended to provide information concerning the potential of the site to contain structures or features of Romano-British date.

3.0: METHODOLOGY

The evaluation comprised the excavation of two test pits (Fig. 2), each measuring 1m x 1.2m within the area proposed for the new build, together comprising a 5% sample by area of the development (50 square metres). The test-pits were slightly re-located to avoid obstacles in the existing garden area. The test-pits were excavated by hand.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by scale plans and section, and colour and monochrome print photography.

Subject to permission from the landowner it is intended to deposit the archive in the Cambridgeshire County Council Archive Store.

4.0: RESULTS (Fig. 3)

4.1: Test-Pit 1 (Plate 1)

Test Pit 1 was located in the southwest of the proposed development. The test-pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.63m. The earliest deposit encountered comprised an orange-yellow sand (1003), recorded at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface. This layer may be interpreted as the natural subsoil. This layer was tested by hand-excavation, to confirm its interpretation. Above was a dark brown silt-sand layer (1002), measuring a maximum of 0.1m in depth, which contained stone and charcoal inclusions. This layer was sealed by a shallow, and slightly irregular layer of very gravelly-silt (1001), a garden soil, recorded for a depth of 0.2m below the modern surface. Above was the topsoil (1000, not illustrated), which measured 0.3m in depth.

Layer 1002 contained late 2nd century pottery, with residual 1st and 2nd century material. Layer 1001 contained late 2nd-4th century pottery, with post-medieval pottery and clay pipe.

4.2: Test-Pit 2 (Plates 2-3)

Test-Pit 2 was located in the northeast of the proposed development. It was cut to a maximum depth of 0.93m. Clean orange sand (2005) was recorded in the base of a sondage. The sand was cut by two features (F200, F201). Feature F201 (not illustrated) was a small scoop backfilled with a deposit of mixed charcoal and sand (2004), cut by feature F200, which was also dug through a layer of silty-sand (2003). Only part of this feature, a possible pit, could be defined within the test-pit. The primary fill of this feature, a mid-grey silt-sand (2006), with occasional very small stones, was exposed at its uppermost horizon, but not excavated. The excavated, uppermost fill comprised a green-grey, compact silt-sand (2002). The uppermost backfill (2002) of feature F200, and layer 2003 were sealed by a layer of mid-brown sand-silt with frequent stones (2001), heavily disturbed by root action. Above was the topsoil (2000).

Layer 2004 contained pottery of 1st and 2nd century date, and layer 2003 contained ceramics of late 2nd to 3rd century date. Layer 2002 contained 2nd and late 3rd century material and layer 2001 included 3rd and 4th century material.

4.3: Pottery by C. Jane Evans

The small assemblage was generally very fragmentary and there were few diagnostic forms. The presence of Nene Valley colour-coated ware in a number of contexts suggested a CPQ at least in the late 2nd century for these assemblages. Fabrics such as fired grey wares and frog-tempered ware are, however, also associated with 1st to 2nd century deposits at London Road (Hancocks forthcoming) and could therefore be residual. Of particular interest was a handmade sherd of possible Iron Age date from layer 1002. There was little evidence for later activity, the only sherds that could possibly be of 4th century date coming from deposits 1001 and 2001.

TABLE 1: The pottery finds

<i>Layer</i>	<i>Sherd count</i>	<i>Spot date comments</i>
1001	3	Late C2nd-C4th (Nene Valley cc castor box) with post med-pot and clay pipe
1002	30	Late C2nd+ but with residual C1st-C2nd (Nene Valley cc, Nene Valley grey, white ware with red barbotine dots, fumed grey ware). One possible (residual) Iron Age sherd
2002	15	Late C2nd+ (Nene Valley cc ware, shelly ware, white ware)
2001	35	C3rd-C4th (Nene Valley grey ware jar with rouletting, Nene Valley cc, grey wares, shelly wares)
2002	4	C2nd/C3rd? (Lid-seated white ware rim)
2003	23	Late C2nd-C3rd (C2nd Dr 33 cup, Nene Valley cc ware, Nene valley grey ware dish, grog-tempered ware, fumed grey ware, shelly ware, white ware)
2004	2	C1st-C2nd (Dressel 20 amphorae and fumed grey ware, frags. of shelly ware)

Other finds comprised two worked flint fragments, modern iron objects from the topsoil, one piece of lead slag from layer 2000, and a piece of iron slag from layer 2002. A few fragments of animal bone and shell were also recovered.

5.0: DISCUSSION

The features identified comprised a shallow scoop (F201), and a possible pit (F201). *In situ* layers were recorded in both test-pits (1002 in Test-Pit 1, and layer 2003 in Test-Pit 2). These layers contained pottery of later 2nd century date, although earlier pottery, notably including a single fragment of possible Iron Age pottery, was also recorded. Layer 1002 could represent a yard surface or hardstanding, although it is difficult to interpret the features and deposits found, because of the necessarily small size of the areas investigated.

The upper layers investigated (1001 in Test-Pit 1, and layer 2001 in Test-Pit 2) both contained later Roman artifacts, and the former also included intrusive post-Roman finds.

The presence of slag could indicate metalworking activity nearby, as might be anticipated within the vicinity of the marketplace, although this material could also be residual.

The worked flint fragments and sherd of Iron Age pottery could indicate some form of prehistoric activity nearby, as recorded elsewhere in Godmanchester and its environs (e.g. Jones forthcoming).

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Mrs. S. Smith. The fieldwork was undertaken by Kate Bain. The project was monitored for the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council by Jeremy Parsons. The project manager for BUFAU was Alex Jones who also edited this report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

7.0: REFERENCES

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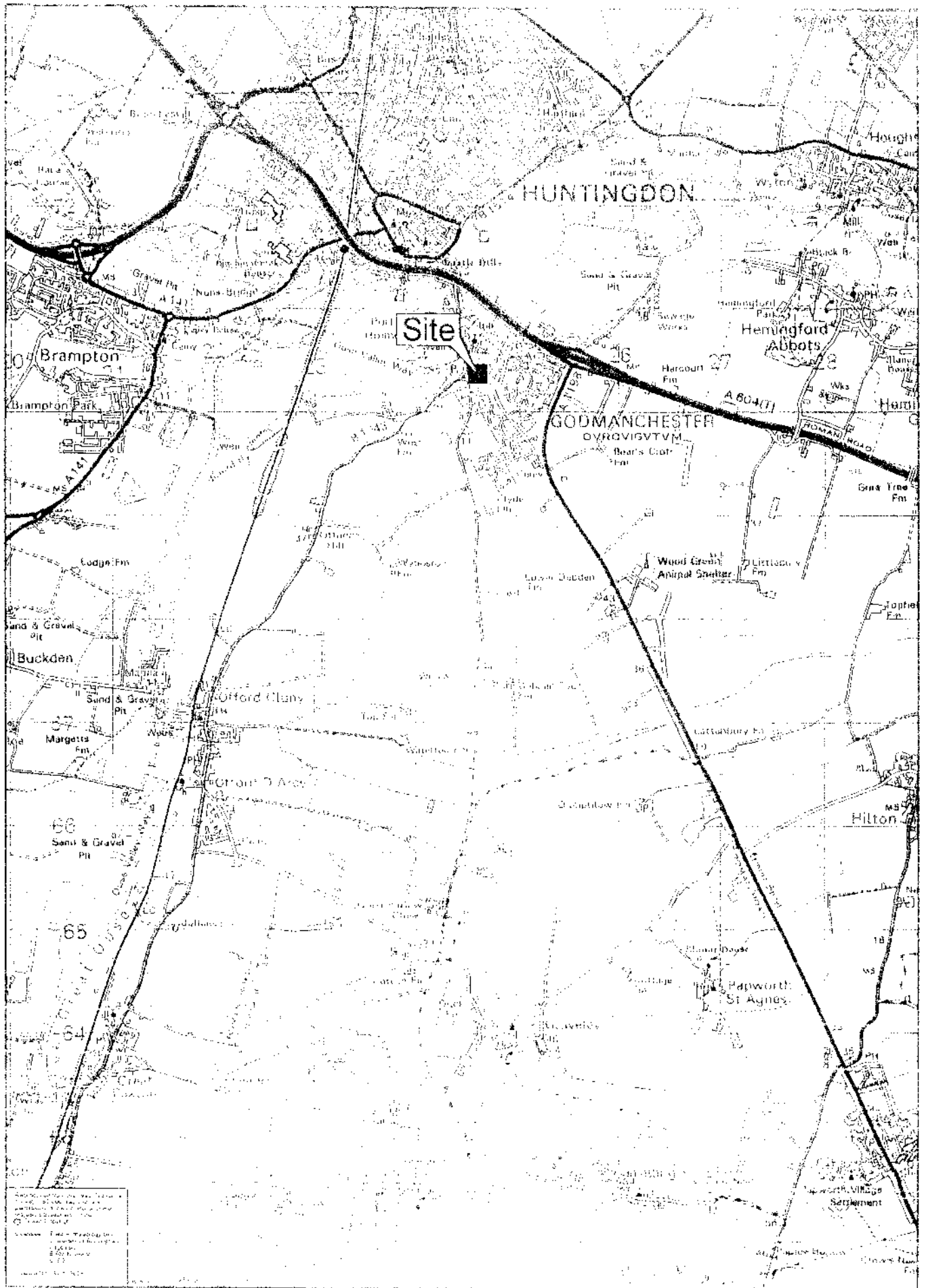


Fig.1

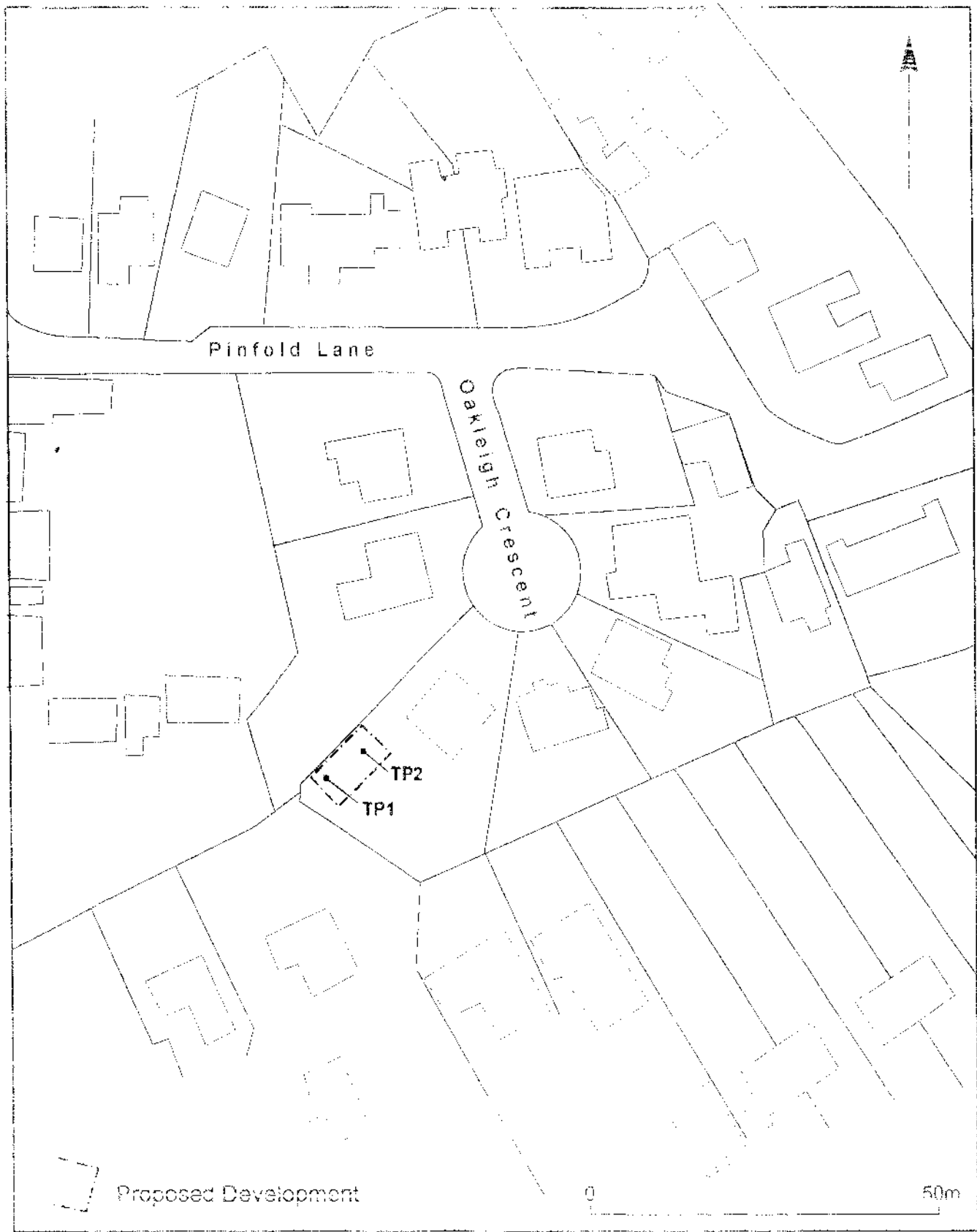


Fig.2

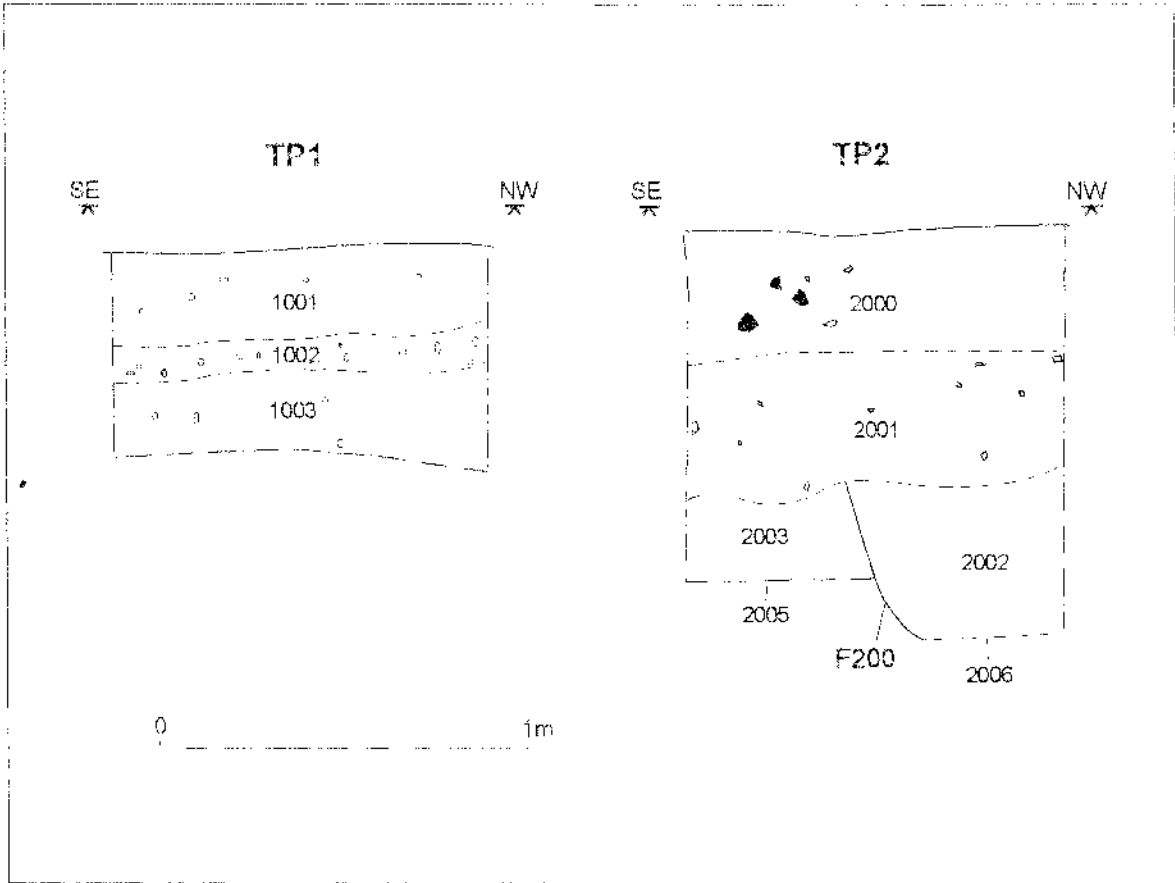


Fig.3

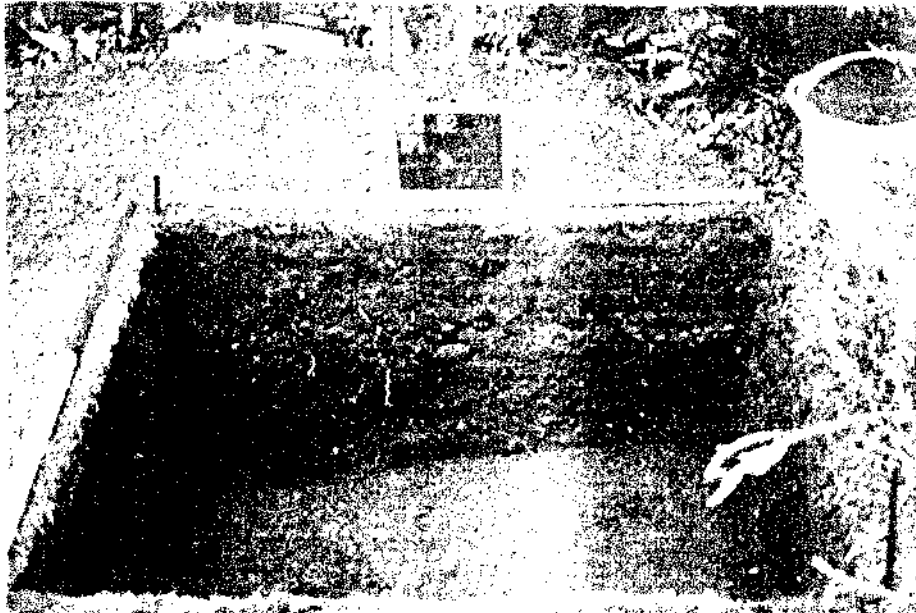


Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3