

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 818

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
'Honeypots' Plantation, Shropham, Norfolk**

38228 SHM

B. P. Hobbs

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Contents

Summary

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Geology and Topography
- 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background
- 4.0 Methodology
- 5.0 Results
- 6.0 Conclusions

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Figures

- Fig.1 Site Location
- Fig.2 Location of Trial Trenches

Local Authority No.076759

Fig.1 is based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 'Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings' Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Norwich (09/05/2003). **Reference copy: no further copies to be made.**

Location: 'Honeypots' gravel pit, Shropham, Norfolk
Grid Ref: TL 9832 9466 (c)
HER No.: 38228 SHM
Date of Fieldwork: 12th December 2002

Summary

An archaeological watching brief at 'Honeypots', Snetterton gravel pits, Shropham, entailed the monitoring of eleven geotechnical trial pits evenly distributed over a 15 hectare area of land where mineral extraction was proposed. No cultural features or finds of archaeological interest were observed in the excavated trenches.

1.0 Introduction

A programme of archaeological work was undertaken at 'Honeypots', Snetterton gravel pits, off Bradcar Road, Shropham in an arable field approximately 15 hectares in size. The area was of interest as adjacent fields previously revealed archaeological features and deposits dating between the Neolithic to Romano-British periods. This project involved the machine excavation of eleven trial trenches, all between 3.6m² and 4m², on the site of proposed mineral extraction. The work was commissioned by D. K. Sykes Associates, Mineral Planning and Development Consultants, on behalf of Ayton Asphalte of Shropham.

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: EJR 26/02/02) and a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The sample area was located in a field on a fairly steep slope which shelved northwards down to the wooded valley of the River Thet and covered a range of contours from 44m to 32m OD with high ground, a low hill, to the south. The south-west side of the field was bounded by a belt of woodland, while the 'Honeypots' plantation, the south and south-east side of the sample area have all been utilised for mineral extraction and arable fields lie to the south and east.

On top of the deep upper chalk solid geology the natural deposits are a mixture of orange and yellow sands and gravels that overlie a red-orange boulder clay with occasional flint outcrops. Large flint cobbles are found on occasion within the gravels and drainage is good in these areas.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

Honeypots Plantation itself is in an area of archaeological interest, as reference to the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER) confirms. In particular prehistoric activity is well represented.

- An imported ceremonial stone axe (HER 17042) of probable Bronze Age date, was found in the field in 1980, while to the south of Honeypots Plantation a Neolithic hand axe (HER 9026) was found in 1970. Three concentrations of burnt flint (HER 9048, 9049 and 9050) have been located to the east of the site and are thought to indicate the presence of prehistoric 'pot-boiler' mounds and additionally, Romano-British pottery (HER 9031) has been found in fields to the south and medieval sherds (HER 32915) from a field to the west.
- An excavation (HER 36218) carried out in an adjacent field to the south-east of the current site in 2001 located a sequence of archaeological features and deposits of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval date. Features included prehistoric pits, ditches and post-holes, the majority of excavated features being of Iron Age date (Whitmore 2002).
- An archaeological survey of exploratory boreholes was conducted in the field to the south-west of the current site, on the south side of the 'Honeypots' Plantation. This produced no finds or evidence of features of an archaeological interest (HER 36218).

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that the excavation of the trial pits be supervised by the constant attendance of an archaeologist.

Machine excavation was carried out with an hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. The trial trenches were excavated to the dimensions of two widths of the machine bucket, which was 1.8m wide. This set the dimensions of the trial pits between 3.6m² to 4.0m² and was convenient for the exposure of the subsoils along a wide section of trench.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken. Site conditions were damp and cool and slightly overcast but visibility was clear.

5.0 Results

Fig. 2

The location of the trial pits were spaced relatively evenly across the field constituting the sample area.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was situated near the top of the rise in the south-west corner of the sample area at a height of c.43.5m OD. It was excavated to a depth of 1.1m where the natural yellow sandy gravel was exposed. The gravel was covered by a mid grey-brown clay silt subsoil, 0.80m in thickness containing moderate to frequent small angular flints. The topsoil had a thickness of c.0.30m and consisted of a mid to dark grey brown sandy loam with moderate to frequent small angular flints.

No features were observed in the base of the trench or in the exposed sections.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located c.10m on the southern edge of the sample area, 250m to the east of Trench 1, at a height of 41m OD. Natural gravel was recorded at a depth of 0.82m, over which lay a grey brown silty clay subsoil (0.54m) and a sandy loam topsoil (0.28m).

A slight irregular depression in the base of the trench, against the east side, was investigated and found to be c.0.10m deep and filled with a grey brown silty clay similar to the subsoil. The base of this depression was uneven and it was interpreted as a natural feature. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was situated in the southern part of the sample area at a height of 42m OD, 60m north of the southern edge of the field and 130m to the north-east of Trench 1. It was excavated to a depth of 0.80m where natural gravel was encountered. The natural gravel was overlain by the subsoil (0.60m), which in turn was overlain by the topsoil (0.20m), which were both similar in composition to those deposits recorded in Trench 1.

No features were observed and no artefactual evidence was recovered from the trench.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was located in the south-east part of the sample area, 100m to the north-east of Trench 3, at a height of 39m OD. The deposits encountered were similar to those recorded in Trench 3, although the natural gravel was reached at a depth of 0.89m.

No archaeological features were observed nor finds located in this trench.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was located in the centre of the sample area, 95m north of Trench 3, at a height of 37m OD. Natural gravel was encountered at a depth of 0.92m. This deposit was overlain by a subsoil slightly darker than previously recorded, consisting of a grey-brown clay silt with frequent root traces (0.50m). The topsoil (0.33m) was a sandy loam consistent with that recorded in the previous trenches.

No features or finds were observed.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was situated in the north-eastern part of the sample area, 100m to the north-east of Trench 5, slightly down slope at a height of about 34.3m OD. The natural gravel here was reached at a depth of 0.89m, the subsoil (0.69m) a mid grey brown clay silt with root traces and moderate to frequent small flints. The mid brown loamy topsoil (0.20m) contained reasonably frequent small flints.

This trench exhibited no traces of features or finds of archaeological interest.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was located in the far north-east corner of the field, at a distance of 100m to the north-east of Trench 6, at a height of 30m OD. The trench was relatively shallow at 0.80m, at which depth the natural yellow-orange gravel was recorded. The covering clay silt subsoil (0.58m) was a mid grey colour and the topsoil (0.22m) contained frequent amounts of small angular flint gravel and occasional brick fragments. A slight depression in the gravel near the north side of the trench filled with material similar in composition to the subsoil was investigated. This was found to contain no dating evidence and with its irregular edges and base it was interpreted as a tree bole. No other features were observed in the trench.

Trench 8

Trench 8 was located in the centre of the north end of the field, close to the boundary, at a height of about 32.5m OD. The position of the trench was situated within a swathe of standing neglected maize. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.81m onto the natural gravel, which contained more sand than previously noted. The overlying subsoil (0.54m) was slightly darker in colour than that of the trenches (1-4) on higher ground further up the hill. The topsoil was a dark loam with moderate to frequent small flints and contained frequent maize roots.

No features were observed in the trench and no finds, other than post-medieval brick fragments from the topsoil.

Trench 9

Trench 9 was positioned in the north-west part of the sample area, c.70m to the south of the northern edge of the field, at a height of 35.2m OD. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.91m where the natural gravel was met. The subsoil (0.62m) was a grey brown clay silt with moderate small stones. The topsoil (0.29m) contained root traces and moderate to frequent small flints.

No finds or features were observed in the deposits of this trench.

Trench 10

Trench 10 was in the north-western part of the sample area, 100m to the west of Trench 9 (height unrecorded). This trench was 0.92m deep, where a natural clayey sand and gravel deposit was found. The subsoil (0.70m) was slightly thicker here than in some of the trenches to the east, although possessed the same grey-brown colour and clay silt texture. The topsoil was slightly thinner (0.22m) and exhibited patches of dark organic material within the soil which were probably traces of manuring.

No features or finds of archaeological interest were observed within this trench.

Trench 11

Trench 11 was situated near the south-west corner of the field, 25m north of the 'Honeypots' Plantation, at a height of c.35.5m OD. It was excavated to a depth of 0.87m whereupon a mid yellow clay natural with gravel inclusions was observed. The natural differed here from that recorded in the rest of the trenches, a variation due to the different topography in this area. It was observed that immediately to the west of this trench there was a depression which contained standing water which indicated an underlying deposit of clay preventing the water from draining naturally. The subsoil in this trench contained slightly more clay in its make-up than that previously observed in the other trenches, otherwise it was similar in composition and contained moderate small flints. The topsoil was unremarkable in composition and contained moderate small stones and traces of organic material.

No features or finds of archaeological interest were located within the trench.

6.0 Conclusions

The lack of archaeological evidence observed might be considered surprising given the range of remains and features found previously in the adjacent field (Whitmore 2002).

Artefacts might have been expected in the trenches near the northern edge of the field, at the base of the steep slope, but none were recovered. Only natural features were found, in Trenches 2 and 7, which were interpreted as tree boles, (due to their uneven bases, irregular edges and their position on the eastern edge of the sample area close to standing woodland).

The absence of evidence for any cultural activity may be due to the sample area being beyond the limits of the significant prehistoric activity previously recorded. An expansion of any settlement into the sample appears unlikely as the ground becomes less well drained as it gets closer to the river. That no evidence for later activity, such as the medieval field systems, was found either may indicate that such activity was located closer to the village of Shropham, to the south, and did not continue this far north.

Acknowledgements

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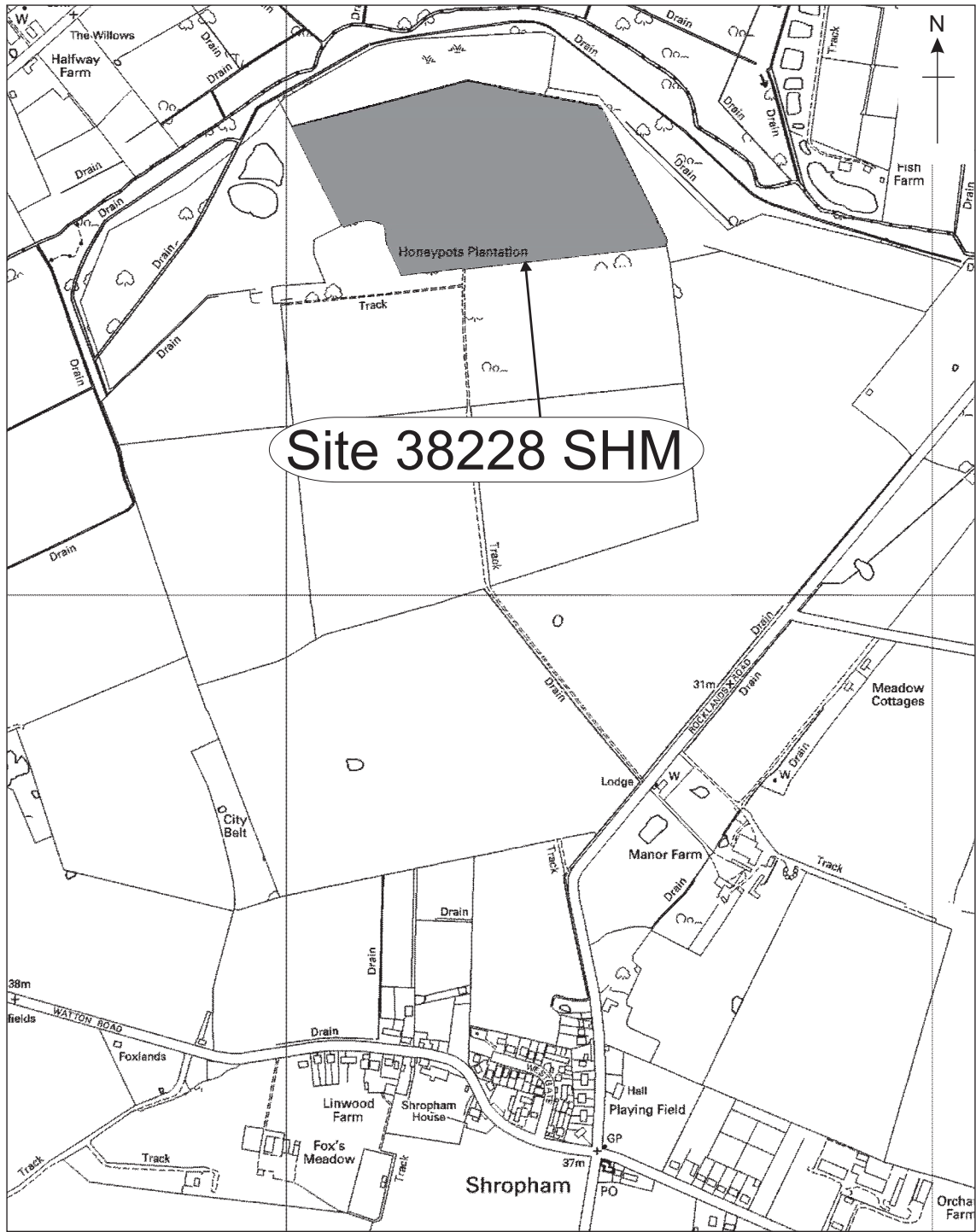


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:10,000

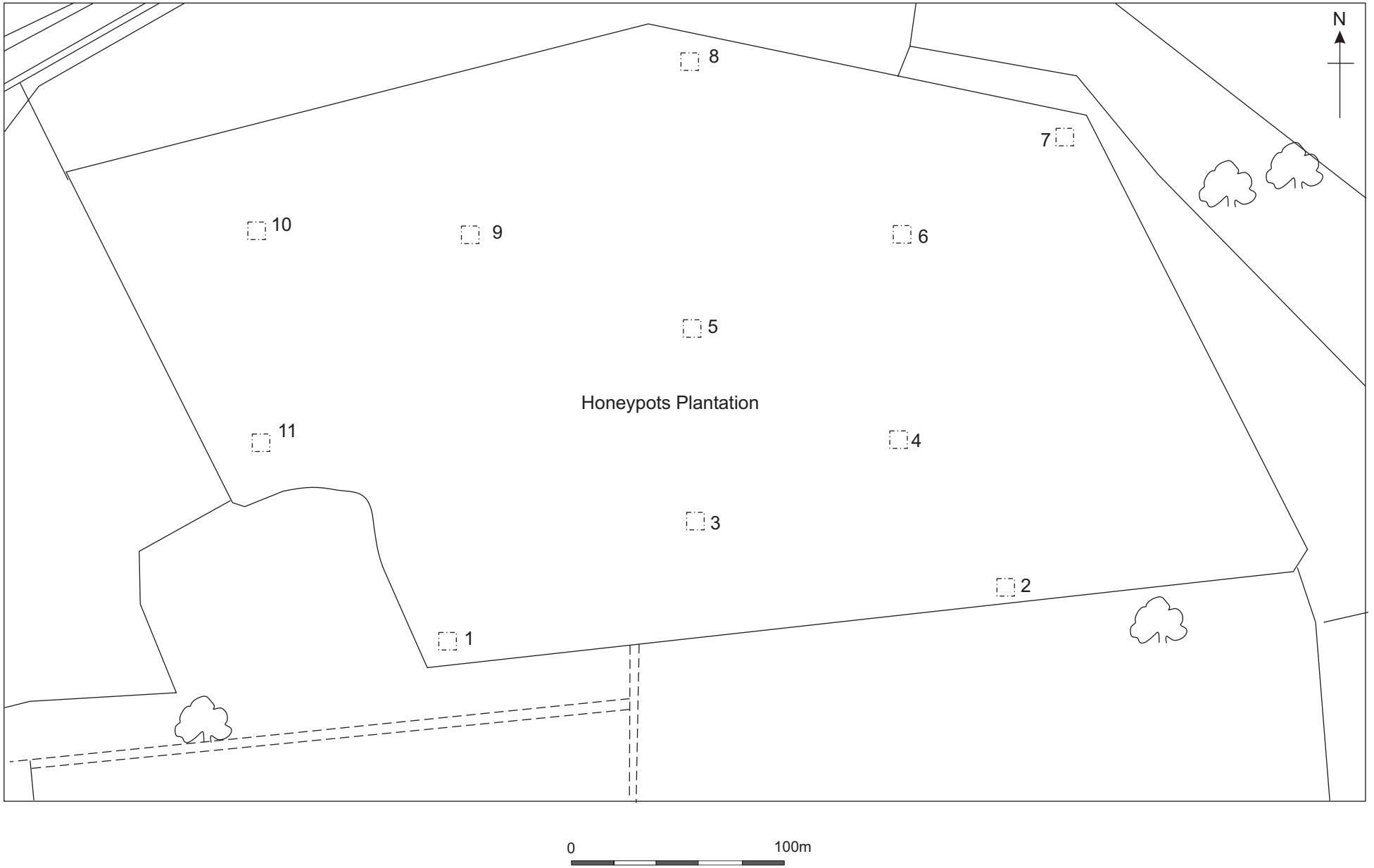
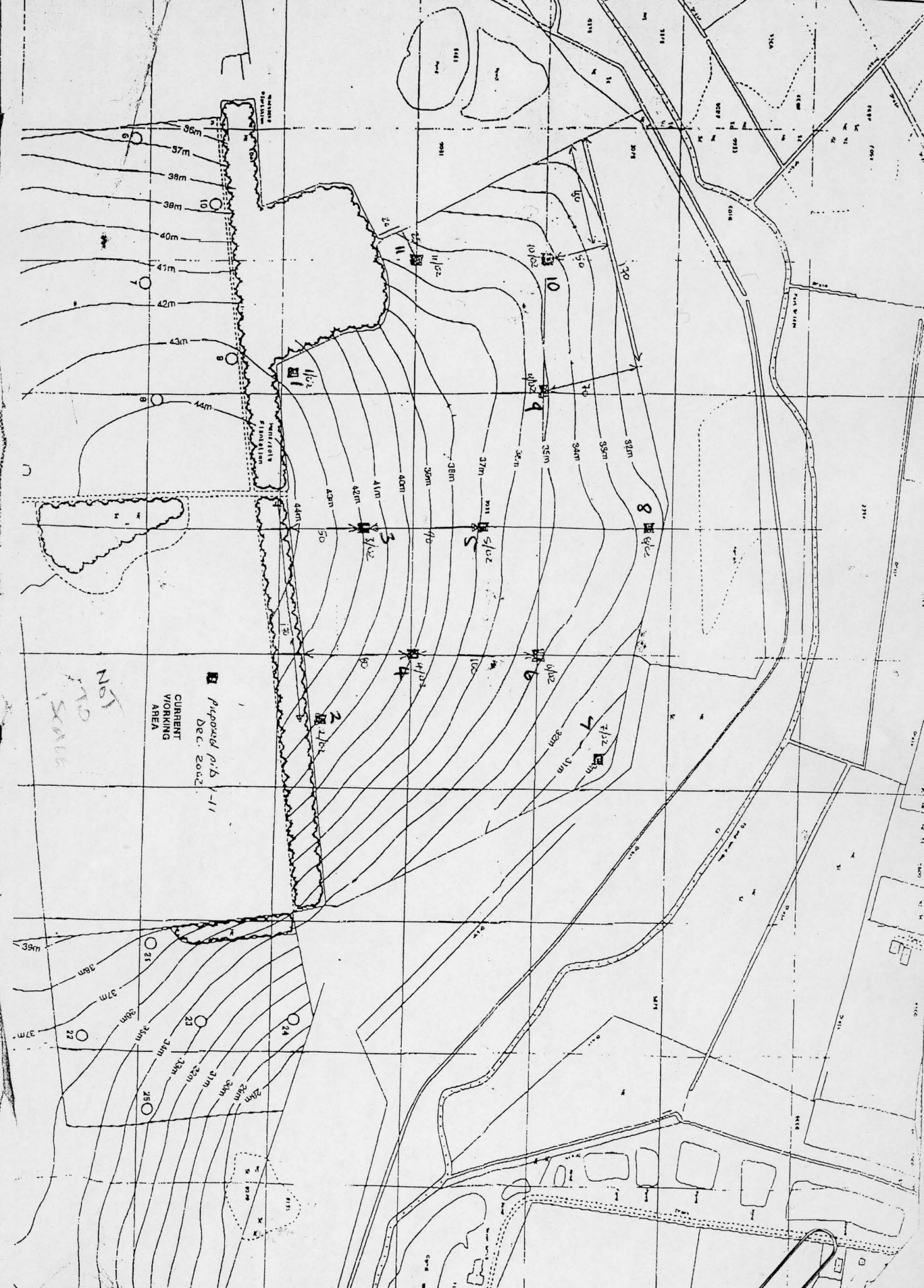


Figure 2. Location of Trial Trenches. Scale 1:2500



Proposed p.v.b.
Dec. 2002
CURRENT
WORKING
AREA

NO 1
NO 2
NO 3

NO 1
NO 2

