

**NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

Report No.839

**An Archaeological Evaluation at  
Marmont Priory Farm, Upwell, Norfolk**

38184 VPW

Kenneth Penn

July 2003

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Local Authority No.076759

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Location: Marmont Priory Farm, March Riverside, Upwell, Norfolk  
Grid Ref: TF 4930 0140  
HER No.: 38184  
Date of Fieldwork: 23rd to 25th April 2003

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## **Summary**

*The excavation of six evaluation trenches on the site of a proposed lake revealed part of a ditch system that had previously been recorded by aerial photographs. The ditches were interpreted as drainage ditches, two of which were shown to have been recut. No evidence of the remains of Marmont Priory, a 13th century Gilbertine cell, known to have existed within the survey area was found. The evidence gleaned from the aerial photographs suggests that this area had been used for pasture or arable since the middle ages.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Fig.1

The site, the location of a proposed lake, lay at Marmont Priory Farm, Upwell, in an area of arable fields a little distance north of the River Nene (Old Course). The archaeological work and report were commissioned by Dr Ian Harding

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief for Evaluation issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref:ARJH 19/03/03) and a Project Design prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: JB/1573).

The intervention 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 site lies to the west of Upwell village. The village lies along a former roddon (of the Old Croft River) whilst the River Nene (Old Course) enters from the west, past the Priory, which stands on the raised silt roddon of the Nene (which merges here with the roddon of the Old Croft River).

The Priory lies on the roddon with lower ground to the west. It is on this lower ground that the air photographs reveal what may be early fields or their bounding drains. The area is very low-lying, c.3.50m OD and was probably ill-drained until medieval reclamation and enclosure.

### 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The main point of archaeological interest known to have existed within the sample area was Marmont Priory. It is worthy of note that this was a Gilbertine cell (rather than a full priory), founded in the early 13th century, with a house established soon after. No church was built as services were conducted at the parish church. Whether a chapel existed at the site is not certain, although the discovery of a burial here (see below) might suggest that some such building existed. The priory house is thought to lie below the present 18th century farmhouse.

The founder gave his own land to found the house, which therefore lay within what had been his fields or pasture, whether it was already drained is not known. The founder reserved the right to pasture sixty head of cattle with the canons' beasts (VCH *Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely* Vol 2 1948, 258). This suggests that the land was pasture rather than arable at this general date.

The area lies in ancient Cambridgeshire (moved to Norfolk in recent years) and the land divisions should be compared with the pattern of medieval fields in the Cambridgeshire silt fen. These have been reconstructed by David Hall who records strip fields bounded by dykes and not ridged up, but usually of a great length (Hall 1996; Hall and Coles 1994, fig. 91).

Previous archaeological work undertaken within the survey area includes a watching brief in 1997 at Marmont Priory farmhouse (Historic Environment Record (HER) 25832). This work recorded modern finds beneath a deposit of recent silt (Bates 1998). An subsequent watching brief recorded a burial just south of the proposed lake development site and remains of the priory house at a former barn and ditches parallel to the River Nene which contained late medieval pottery (Phillips 1999).

Air photographs taken in 1990 (TF 4901 A-C) revealed a double-ditched trackway (HER 32225) and systems of strip fields bounded by drains, possibly connected with reclamation by the former landowner or the priory.

### 4.0 Methodology

Fig. 2

The objective of this evaluation 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 six trenches, each 5m x 5m was excavated, to provide a 5% sample of the development site (150m<sup>2</sup>); in the event Trench 6 was extended and 180m<sup>2</sup> were excavated.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

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.

A level was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark of 3.72m on the south end of Marmont Priory Farm, with a temporary bench mark set up within the evaluation area.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

The site was fairly level and had been used for arable purposes, stubble from the previous crop was still present.

## **5.0 Results**

Figs 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,9 & 10

### ***Trench 1***

Fig. 2

Trench 1 was laid out north-west to south-east with dimensions of 5m x 5.5m. Removal of ploughsoil, a dark brown sandy loam ([40]) between 0.35m and 0.40m deep exposed the natural subsoil, a pale yellow-grey silty sand. A cutting was dug to establish the depth and character of this deposit, which was found to be at least 0.40m deep. There were no archaeological features or finds from Trench 1.

The same loamy ploughsoil and natural subsoil were found across the entire excavation site.

### ***Trench 2***

Figs 2, 3 & 4

Trench 2 was laid out north-west to south-east with dimensions of 4.5m x 7m; the ploughsoil ([37]) was removed by machine, exposing a linear feature ([15]), running north-to-south. This was interpreted as one of the drainage ditches seen on air photographs and was c.3.5m wide. On the surface of the subsoil, it appeared as a band of dark red- brown silty loam.

Excavation of this feature revealed two probable cuts, with an original ditch ([17]) 0.80m deep with a flat base 2.10m wide, with two fills. The fills consisted of a grey silt-clay ([12]) at the west, and a mottled sand ([16]) at the east. A recutting appears to be represented by ditch [15], significantly deeper at 1.10m, but with a narrower flat base, 0.90m wide. This later phase of ditch contained four fills. The primary fill was a dark grey silty clay ([14]), which lay below a grey sandy silt ([13]). This was followed by a dark grey silt-peat deposit ([11]) and then by a grey brown sandy silt ([10]), with brown mineralization. This final deposit lay directly below the ploughsoil. A land drain was recorded at some depth in [10], with no obvious cut.

The phase 1 ditch [17] may have filled from the east, perhaps from a bank. It is probably that the mottled sand ([16]) deposit found was silting from a bank, with [12] the result of a slow silting process. The phase 2 ditch ([15]) also seems to have primary fills entering from the east side. The boundary between deposits [10] and [12] was indistinct.

The topsoil [37] overlying this feature produced a coin of Charles 1.

### **Trench 3**

Figs 2, 5 & 6

Trench 3 was laid out north-west to south-east with dimensions of 5.0m x 5.7m. An irregular feature was recorded along the west side of the trench ([1] and [3]). At its most substantial ([1]) this feature, thought to be an irregular ditch, was 0.55m deep with four distinct fills. The basal fills ([8] and [9]) were very dark silts: [8] with shells. These were succeeded by a pale sand ([7]) and then an orange brown silt ([2]).

Deposit [2], thought to have been slow filling, produced two sherds of medieval pottery, a sherd of post-medieval pottery, and fragments of medieval brick and tile. Fill [7] produced a fragment of non-local stone. Deposit [4], also thought to have been slow filling from the northern part of this feature ([3]), produced a single medieval sherd and post-medieval ceramic building material.

Elsewhere in the trench, a small irregular feature ([5]) was interpreted as probable animal disturbance.

The topsoil ([38]) produced a single post-medieval sherd.

### **Trench 4**

Figs 2, 7 & 8

Trench 4 was laid out north-west to south-east, with dimensions of 5m x 5m. Removal of the ploughsoil exposed a large east to west linear feature, apparent as a band of dark silt ([18]). Enlargement of the trench showed this to be at least 4m wide and probably one of the drainage ditches or dykes seen on air photographs. Excavation showed this feature (only part of which could be investigated) to be a ditch ([18]) 1.3m deep below the ploughsoil, with a sloping side at the west and the beginnings of a flat base.

The primary sandy silt ([25]) was followed by a thin lens of grey silt ([24]), then a sand layer ([26]), followed by a succession of four similar silty fills ([20] to [23]), and a final slow filling deposit ([19]) of dark red-brown silt.

### **Trench 5**

Fig. 2

Trench 5 was laid out east to west, it measured 5m x 6m, but was devoid of any archaeological features, with no sign of the ditch seen in Trench 4 to the west.

### **Trench 6**

Figs 2, 9 & 10

Trench 6 was laid out to confirm the position of the ditch seen in Trench 4 (but absent in 5). Trench 6 was 1.7m wide and 19.0m long, with the south part widened to plan the large ditch ([28]), seen as a band of red-brown silt and found to be at least 5.5m wide. Towards the northern part of the trench another large linear ([27]) feature, running east-to-west, was recorded. Excavation showed this to be a ditch ([36]), possibly recut. The first ditch cut was c.0.50m deep below the surface of the natural subsoil and seen only on the northern side (largely obscured by ditch [27]). Its primary fill ([34]) was a laminated sand with 'charcoal' lenses, followed by a slow filling deposit of grey silt ([33]).



Context [27] appears to represent the recutting, about 0.60m deep below the subsoil, with a single fill of grey-ginger mineralised sand-silt ([35]). A modern land drain ([32]) cut this ditch.

## 6.0 The Finds

### 6.1 Pottery

Pottery came from several contexts, and included sherds of medieval pottery, as follows:

Context	Description	Fabric	Description	Number	Date
2	Fill of ditch [1]	Thetford type ware	Body sherd	1	10th to 11th century
2	Fill of ditch [1]	Grimston Ware	Jug	1	Late 12th to 14th century
2	Fill of ditch [1]	Glazed red earthen ware	Cooking pot	1	16th to 18th century
4	Fill of ditch [3]	Grimston ware	Body sherd	1	Late 12th to 14th century
38	Topsoil	Staffordshire slip ware	Body sherd	1	1650 to 1800 AD

#### The Pottery

### 6.2 Ceramic Building Material

The site produced six fragments of brick and flat roof tile (0.505kg, [02], [04] and [11]); no complete examples were recovered.

Context	Form	Number	Date
2	Brick	2	Medieval
2	Flat roof tile	2	Medieval
4	Unidentified	1	Post-medieval
11	Brick	1	Undated

#### The Ceramic Building Material

### 6.3 Small Finds

A single silver coin (SF1) was recovered from context [37] and has been identified as a 17th century Charles I half groat.

### 6.4 Stone

A fragment of un-worked non-local stone (0.123kg) was collected from context [04].

## 6.5 Shell

Mussel, fresh water and land snail shells (0.022kg) were recovered from ditch fills [08], [12] and [14]

## 6.6 Faunal Remains

### Summary

A total of 0.426kg of faunal remains was recovered from one context ([2]).

### Methodology

The bone was examined primarily to identify species present and any butchering that has occurred to the animals. The remains were also examined for condition and modifications such as gnawing or working. The work undertaken so far constitutes an assessment of the material only.

### Results

Context [2], the fill of ditch [3], produced a complete metatarsal from a horse; a single knife-mark was noted on the distal end which may suggest that the animal was skinned. A fragment of upper jaw from a pig was also identified, this too had been butchered. Other pieces of bone were not identifiable to species but could be identified as large mammal; the remains were quite heavily butchered. All of the bone was dark brown in colour, which would indicate time in a waterlogged and quite organic deposit. Some of the pieces show surface damage from insects and rodent gnawing.

### Conclusions

The faunal remains recovered during this evaluation probably represent domestic butchering waste. The butchering of the horse may not have been for human consumption as this has never been a popular meat in this country; it may have been used for hide or food for dogs.

Context	Context Weight (kg)	Species	Species Quantity	Comments
2	0.426	Horse	1	Metatarsal with knife cut - ?skinned
		Pig	1	Upper jaw fragment, butchered
		Unidentifiable	8	Butchered fragments of large mammal

The Faunal Remains

## 7.0 Conclusions

The features recorded in Trenches 2, 3, 4 and 6 were clearly the elements of the ditch system previously recorded in air photographs and likely to have been dug to drain the low-lying ground. It is likely that this was done initially to improve marshland for grazing rather than to create arable land. Each of the strips seen on the air photographs was less than 20m wide (and over 150m long). The date at which this drainage system was constructed is not known, although presumably medieval and to be compared with the fields studied by David Hall (commented on

above). It is possible that work to drain the fields surrounding the priory was connected to its establishment or a subsequent wish to improve the small landed endowment. References to continued grazing rights, however, suggest that part of the land, at least, remained as grazing.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

### **Acknowledgements**

The work was undertaken for Dr Ian Harding of Marmont Priory Farm, whose advice and help is gratefully acknowledged. The work was carried out by the writer, assisted by Neil Moss, and Becky Crawford. Machining was carried out by Warden Plant Hire of Wisbech.

Finds were processed and recorded by Lucy Talbot. Richenda Goffin provided specialist analysis of the pottery and Julie Curl assessed the animal bone. This report was edited by Alice Lyons and illustrated and produced by Maggie Footitt.

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- |                         |      |  |
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|                         | 1948 | Victoria County History <i>Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely</i> Volume 2, 258                          |



### Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Trench	Type	Description	Finds
1	3	Cut	Ditch	
2	3	Deposit	Fill of [1], orange-brown silt	Two medieval pottery sherds and one post-medieval glazed red earthen ware sherd. Medieval brick or tile also found
3	3	Cut	Ditch	
4	3	Deposit	Fill of [3], orange-brown silt	One medieval sherd. Post-medieval ceramic building material
5	3	Cut	Natural feature?	
6	3	Deposit	Fill of [5], mid brown sandy loam	
7	3	Deposit	Fill of [1], grey-white sand	Stone
8	3	Deposit	Fill of [1], dark brown-black silt	
9	3	Deposit	Lower fill of [1], dark grey-black silt-clay	
10	2	Deposit	Fill of [15], mid grey fine sandy silt	
11	2	Deposit	Fill of [15], dark grey silt peat	Brick fragments
12	2	Deposit	Fill of [15], light grey silt clay	
13	2	Deposit	Fill of [15], pale grey fine sandy silt	
14	2	Deposit	Fill of [15], dark grey-ginger silty clay	
15	2	Deposit	Ditch	
16	2	Deposit	Fill of [17], mottled orange/pale grey fine sand	
17	2	Cut	Ditch	
18	4	Cut	Ditch	
19	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], red brown silt	
20	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], red-brown silt clay	
21	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], grey silt	
22	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], mottled grey-brown silt	
23	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], black peaty silt	
24	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], grey silt	
25	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], pale grey-yellow sandy silt	

<b>Context</b>	<b>Trench</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b> Finds</b>
26	4	Deposit	Fill of [18], pale yellow sand, banded	
27	6	Cut	Ditch	
28	6	Cut	Ditch	
29	6	Deposit	Topsoil in Trench 6, dark sandy loam	
30	6	Deposit	Fill of [32], modern loam and mixed material	
31	6	Deposit	Fill of [32], modern mixed material	
32	6	Cut	Cut for drain	
33	6	Deposit	Fill of [36], light grey silt	
34	6	Deposit	Fill of [36], pale yellow-orange laminated sand and charcoal	
35	6	Deposit	Fill of [27], mid-grey fine sandy silt	
36	6	Cut	Ditch	
37	2	Deposit	Topsoil	17th century coin
38	3	Deposit	Topsoil	Post-medieval sherd
39	4	Deposit	Topsoil	
40	1	Deposit	Topsoil	

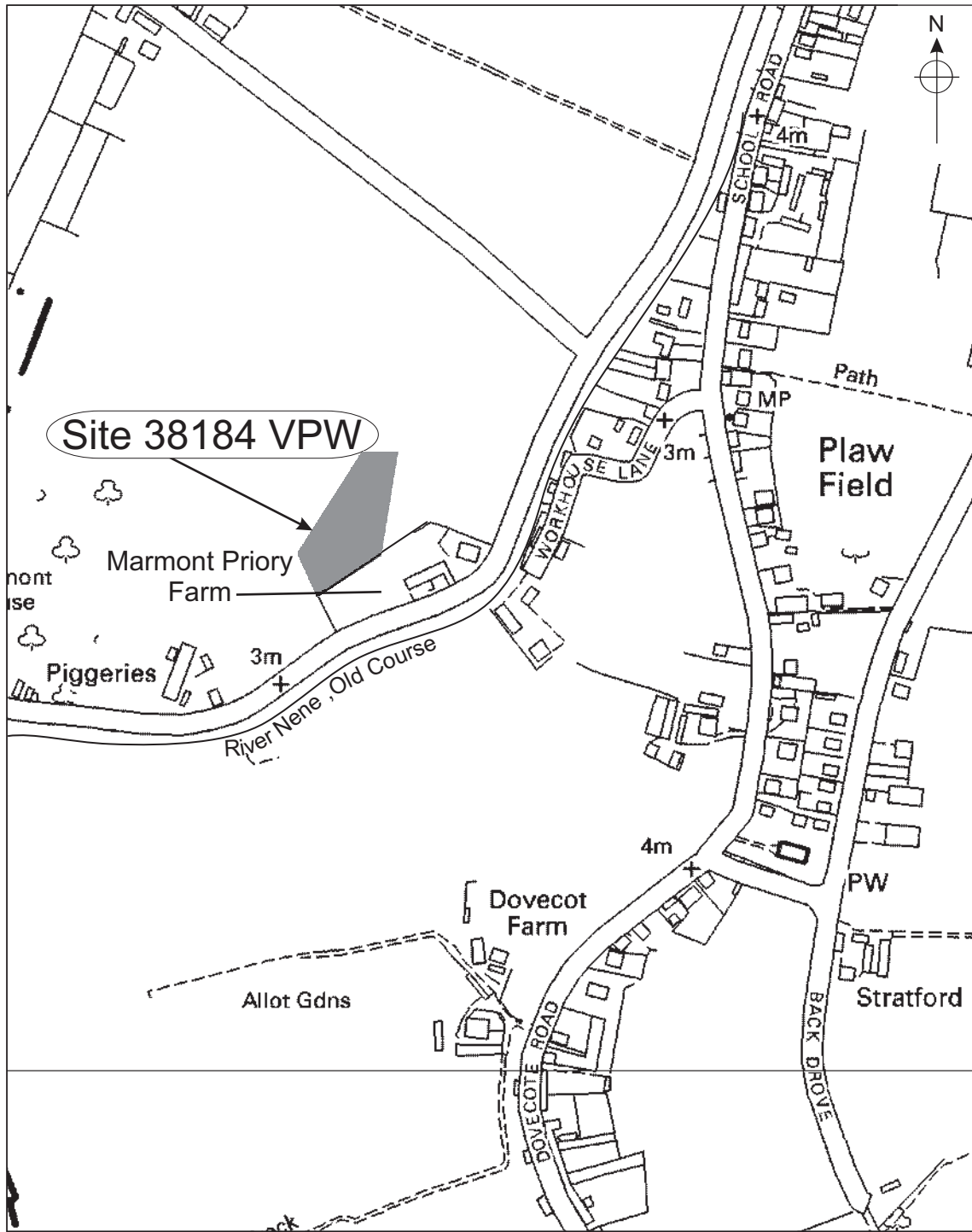


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:5000



Figure 2. Marmont Priory Farm and Trench Locations. Scale 1:1000



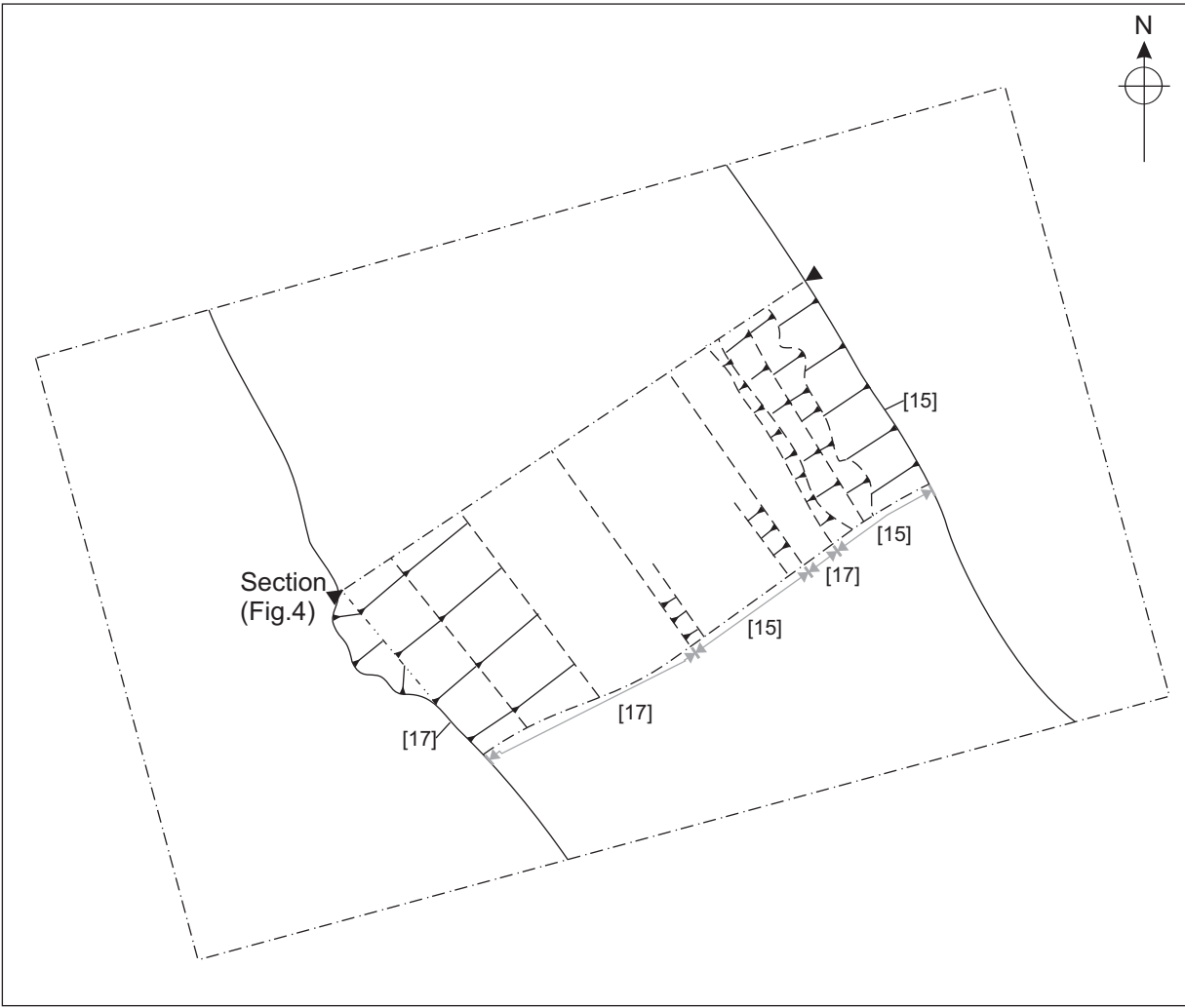
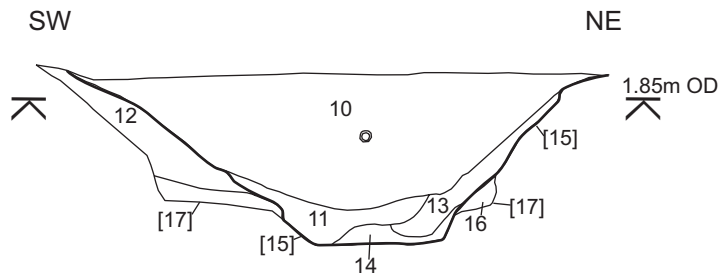


Figure 3. Trench 2, plan. Scale 1:50



South-east facing section



Figure 4. Trench 2, sections through ditches [15] and [17]. Scale 1:50

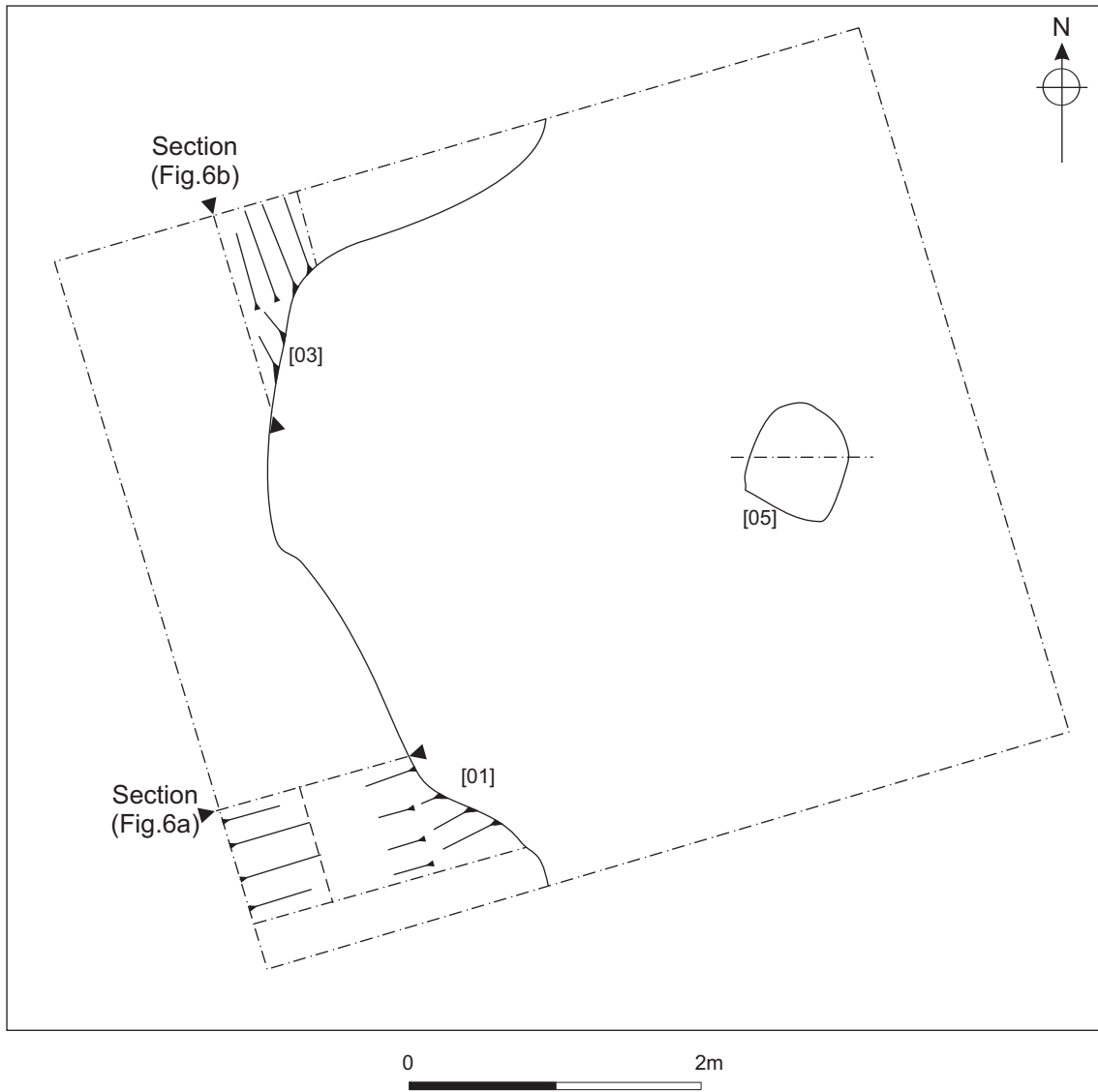


Figure 5. Trench 3, plan. Scale 1:50

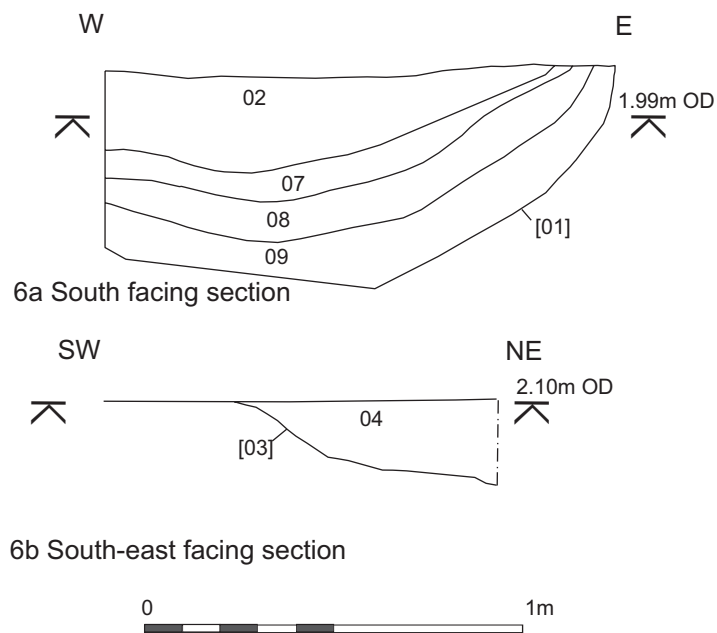


Figure 6. Trench 3, sections through ditches [1] and [3]. Scale 1:20

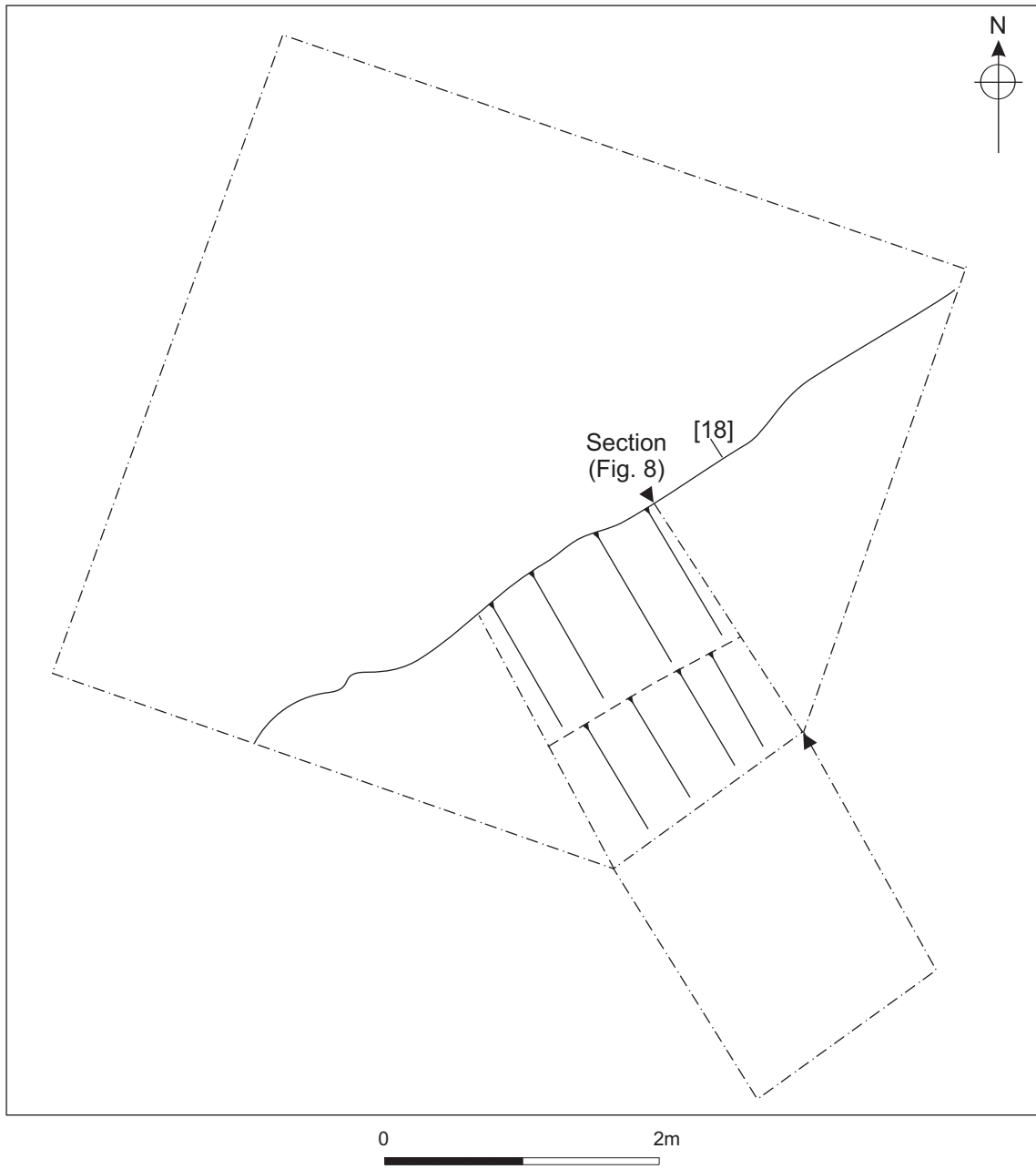


Figure 7. Trench 4, plan. Scale 1:50

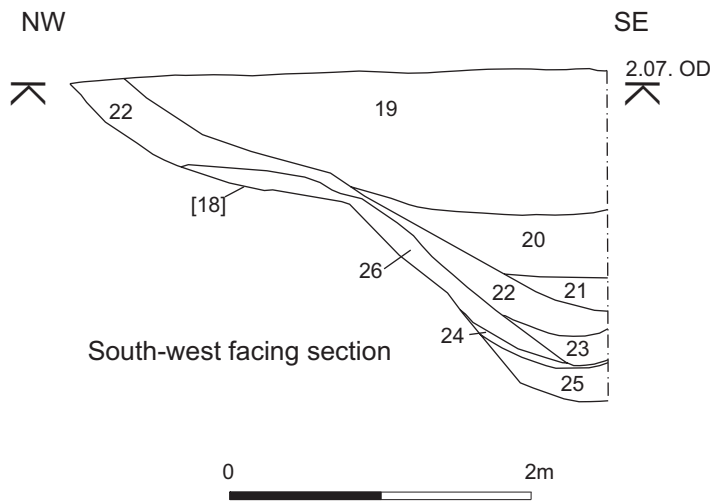


Figure 8. Trench 3, section through ditch [18]. Scale 1:50

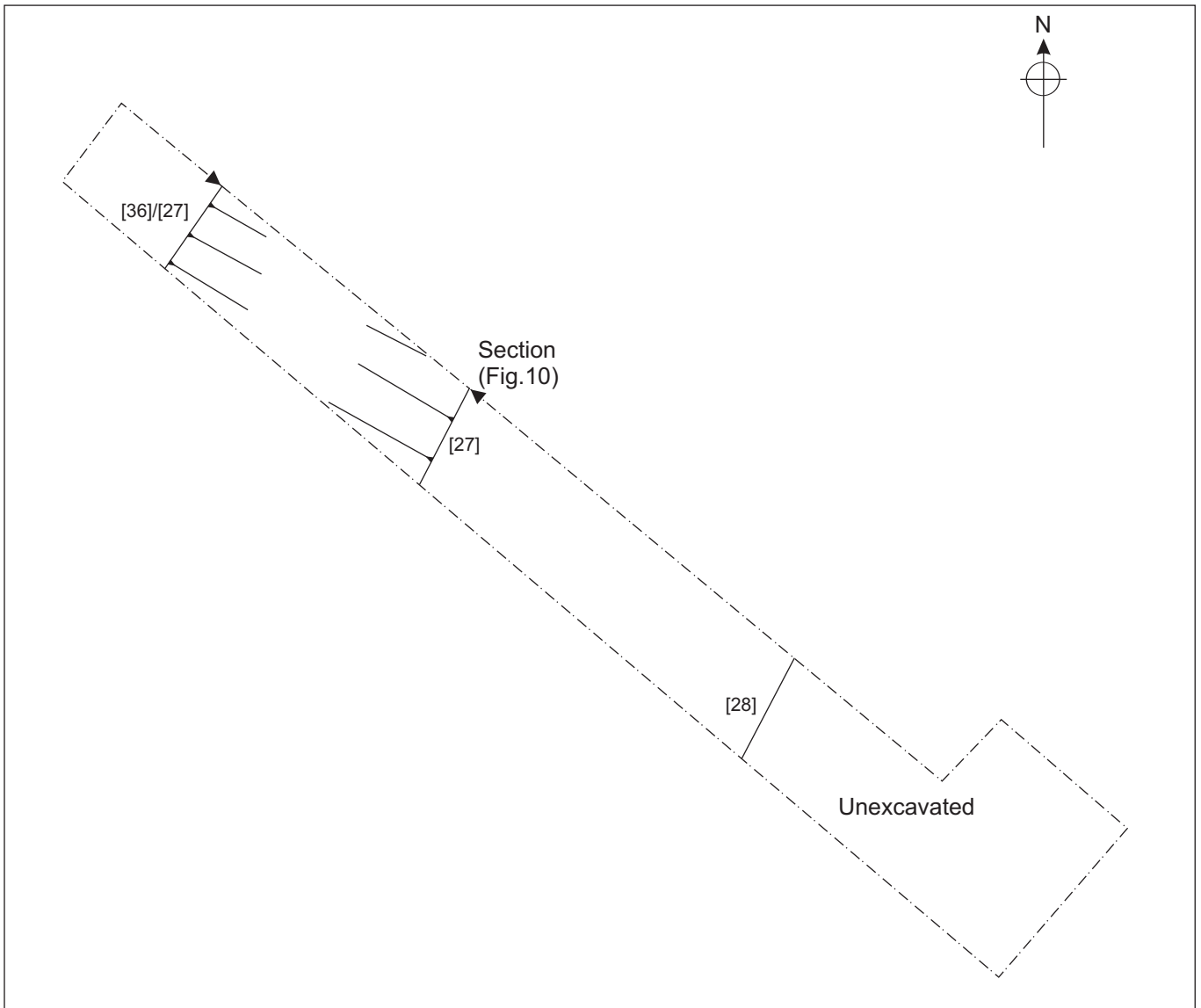


Figure 9. Trench 6, plan. Scale 1:100

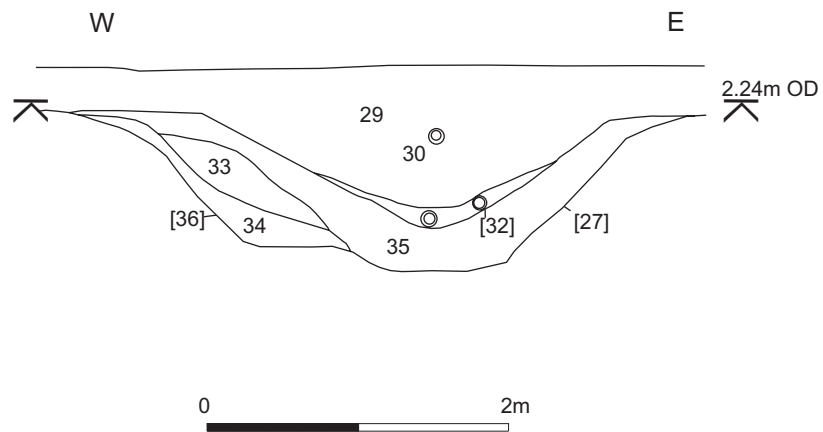


Figure 10. Trench 6, sections through ditches [27] and [36]. Scale 1:50