

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No 801

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
Hornbeam, Back Lane,
Burnham Market**

37468 BVM

John Ames

March 2003

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Local Authority No.076759

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Location: Hornbeam, Back Lane, Burnham Market

Grid Ref: TF 8352 4195

SMR No.: 37468 BVM

Date of Fieldwork: 4th and 5th November 2002

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Hornbeam, Back Lane, Burnham Market, where an existing bungalow was demolished to allow a new dwelling and garage to be constructed. This building work took place in an area of archaeological interest, as demonstrated by recent excavations at Creake Road to the south-east of Back Lane (Percival in prep). The watching brief at Hornbeam, Back Lane, however, found no archaeological features or deposits. Although the presence of residual Romano-British finds in the topsoil indicated that the activity recorded at Creake Road did possibly extend to the north-west into the area monitored during this watching brief.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: 4/11/02 DG). Whereby as part of the programme for the construction of a new dwelling and detached garage it was requested that an archaeologist be present during the machining of the foundation trenches. This watching brief was also undertaken in accordance with a Method Statement for watching briefs prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU).

The watching brief was commissioned by Mr M Turner and Mrs C Key of Little Melton Property Services, who were also the building contractors.

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

2.0 Geology and Topography

The site overlies an area of valley gravels with the underlying geology of the surrounding area being chalk.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The place name 'Burnham' applies to a number of contiguous parishes in north-west Norfolk. It is likely that they once belonged to a single unit before becoming divided into separate areas, each with its own (manorial) church. The 'estate' of Burnham probably divided into several landholdings or manors, each of which had a manorial centre and ultimately a church. This gave rise to the separate parishes of Burnham Ulph, Westgate, Sutton, Norton, Overy and Deepdale. The process of land division continued, but with more mixed landholdings, so that separate manors sometimes extended into others. Burnham Market was not a separate estate or parish with its own church but a market place established within Westgate coming to dominate the others and giving its name to the whole area. Burnham Market is the largest of the modern-day settlements, amalgamating the former hamlets Westgate, Ulph and Sutton. It developed along a long narrow green or market street (market granted in

c.1270) between the churches of Westgate and Ulph. This market street is essentially the east-to-west limb of a crossroads, the north-to-south arm of which is the present Creak Road.

Little is currently known of the earlier settlement or ecclesiastical history of the Burnhams. Archaeological finds, principally from fieldwalking and metal detecting do, however, shed some light on pre-medieval activity. A long history of human occupation in the area is apparent, and this was intimately related to the early topography of the river valley and the deposits of gravel. Mesolithic flintwork has been found in the Burn Valley and Neolithic and later prehistoric material appears in a number of fieldwalking collections from the neighbourhood. It has been thought that Mesolithic finds from the area (Site 18496) points to seasonal occupation of the gravel plain close to the River Burn, somewhat obscured by the deposition of marine-borne sands and shingles and later activity on this site (Smallwood 1995).

Three ring ditches of probable Bronze Age date (Site 12787-9) have been located by aerial photography to the south on the gentle slopes opposite the excavation site that took place at Ulph Place (Site 34581).

Romano-British material is also well-presented in the area. The site of a probable Romano building has been identified west of Mill Farm (Site 18496) and Roman pottery is common in most local finds assemblages.

It is the quantity and quality of Early and Middle Saxon finds from the area however, which suggest that Burnham was becoming a settlement of some significance and status at this time (a 'productive site': Andrews 1992). Finds from along the river to the north-east of Burnham Market may point to the centre of the original settlement activity lying nearby. Aside, from a considerable amount of pottery, high quality metal finds – including objects from the continent – suggest the presence of important, non-domestic activity. The character of these finds could indicate the existence of a trading centre (which did not survive) to the west and south of the river Burn from the Middle Saxon periods onwards. This raises the possibility of comparison with other early ports or trades, known as 'wics'.

The topography of the river valley and gravel deposits seems to have determined the pattern of settlement here to a large degree. The site of the church of St Andrew is not known precisely but it probably lay on the eastern side of Burnham Market, since it was united with Burnham Overy in c.1421. Skeletons accompanied by 12- to 13th-century pottery were found beneath the road 200m east of Burnham Ulph church (All Saints) during road works in 1927, 1951 and 1962 (Site 1753), suggesting the presence of a cemetery which may have belonged to St Andrew's church.

Evaluations and excavations of the site at Ulph Place (Penn 1999) showed the presence of Late Saxon to early medieval occupation to the south and also led to the recovery of Middle Saxon pottery from a layer of gravel overlying the undisturbed natural. Also exposed was a deposit of creamy yellow 'clay', environmental analysis of which showed it to be a sandy silt with a foraminifera assemblage indicative of a freshwater flood deposit and pottery suggesting a 12- to 14th-century date (Penn 1999).

The recent excavations at Creak Road (Percival in prep (Site 32791)) showed four main phases of activity at the site, with a less significant prehistoric presence. These broadly paralleled those suggested by the evaluation (Crowson 1997) with the addition of a Middle Saxon phase. The Romano-British activity recorded was

significant and included two large ditches with curved corners defining rectangular fields or enclosures which contained a 'T' shaped malting-oven. The Creak Road excavations suggest a continuity of agricultural use from the 2nd century to the present day. Of particular interest is the malting oven, which indicate that malting and brewing, significant to the region in the medieval and post-medieval period, had their origins in small scale production in the Roman era.

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to record archaeological remains revealed during the excavations of the foundation trenches. The methodology adopted by the contractors was to excavate the trenches by a Case JCB to the depth of approximately 0.80cm to 1m. The excavated material was loaded directly into a dump truck which was in-turn placed onto the spoil heap located at the eastern side of the site. After each load of excavated material was placed onto the spoil heap there was a visual inspection as well as metal detecting. All finds recovered from the spoil heap were recorded by using the trench lettering sequence, however, still classified as unstratified.

The bungalow previously occupying the site had been demolished and all the building debris removed from site. No visual inspection or metal detecting of deposits was possible prior to the excavation of the foundation trenches.

Each trench was allocated a letter in sequence and any finds located from within the trenches were given a context number relating to that specific trench.

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 the relevant features and deposits.

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

The site, weather conditions and access was very good. Although, access to the trenches was at times limited because of the amount of machinery operating within a restricted space.

5.0 Results (Appendix 1)

A considerable amount of previous movement of topsoil and subsoil was recorded. This was possibly due to the new development being in the location of previous buildings which had disturbed the topsoil to subsoil sequence.

No archaeological features or deposits were located during the watching brief. The foundation trenches were very narrow. It should be noted that not all of the foundation trenches reached natural sands and gravels. Although no archaeological features were observed, the residual Romano-British finds, from the topsoil, give an indication that Romano-British activity had been present in the vicinity. This observation is supported by the results of the 1998 excavation at Creak Road.

The pottery finds from the project (6.1 below) consist mostly of undiagnostic sandy grey ware body sherds of an unknown origin but of presumably local manufacture, dating to the 2nd century AD. Neither of the two possible Roman coins retrieved (6.3 below) were positively identified nor closely datable.

6.0 The Finds (Appendix 2)

6.1 *The Roman Pottery (Appendix 3)*

A total of six sherds of abraded Romano-British pottery, weighing 0.033kg, were recovered during this project from five separate deposits. The pottery consists mostly of undiagnostic sandy grey ware body sherds of an unknown, but presumably local origin. A single sandy grey ware dish was identified in the same deposit ([005]) as a grey fine ware fabric colloquially referred to as 'London-type' ware known to have been manufactured at West Stow in north-west Suffolk.

Although it is not possible to assign a close date to this assemblage the presence of a straight-sided dish and a fragment of 'London-type' ware do suggest an approximate date of the 2nd century AD. This pottery however, shows many characteristics of residual material (abraded, with a small average sherd size (5.5g)) and may not have been retrieved from its primary site of deposition.

6.2 *Ceramic Building Material*

The site produced a single fragment of ceramic building material weighing 0.017kg ([19]) and although the form is unidentifiable the fabric is possibly of Roman date.

6.3 *Small Finds*

Small find numbers were allocated to two copper alloy artefacts, which includes one Roman coin (SF1 [20]) and a slightly damaged flat, discoidal object, possibly a coin (SF2 [21]).

6.4 *Shell*

A single oyster shell weighing 0.110kg ([19]) was also recovered.

7.0 Conclusions

This watching brief has proved informative in terms of understanding that Romano-British activity possibly extended in a north-westerly direction from the known Romano-British occupation that was revealed during the 1998 Creake Road excavation (Percival in prep). Although, the finds are all residual, Romano-British remains could be expected to survive below the modern make-up and subsoil deposits within and beyond the area affected by the modern development.

Acknowledgements

The author, who also conducted the fieldwork, would like to thank Mr M Turner of Little Melton Property Services and the contractors for Little Melton Property Services. Lucy Talbot for processing the finds and commenting upon them, Alice Lyons for supplying the pottery report, Kenneth Penn and Sarah Percival for the archaeological and historical background information. The report was edited by Alice Lyons, illustrated and produced by Maggie Foottit.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description/interpretation	Period
01	Trench A	Topsoil 0.30m, dark brown Subsoil 0.50m, mid-to-dark brown	Modern
02	Trench B	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, light brown silty sand	Modern
03	Trench C	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, mid brown silty sand	Modern
04	Trench D	Topsoil 0.60m, dark brown Subsoil 0.20m, light ginger brown silty sand	Modern
05	Trench E	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, pale brown silty sand	Modern
06	Trench F	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, mid brown silty sand	Modern
07	Trench G	Topsoil 0.60m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, mid-to-dark brown silty sand	Modern
08	Trench H	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, mid-to-dark brown silty sand	Modern
09	Trench I	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, light brown silty sand	Modern
10	Trench J	Topsoil 0.40m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, light ginger brown silty sand	Modern
11	Trench K	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, pale brown silty sand	Modern
12	Trench L	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, pale brown silty sand	Modern
13	Trench M	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.30m, pale brown silty sand	Modern
14	Trench N	Topsoil 0.60m, dark brown Subsoil 0.20m, mixed brown and light brown silty sand	Modern
15	Trench O	Topsoil 0.60m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, mid-to-dark brown silty sand	Modern
16	Trench P	Topsoil 0.60m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, mid-to-dark brown silty	Modern

Context	Category	Description/interpretation	Period
		sand	
17	Trench Q	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, mid-to-dark brown silty sand	Modern
18	Trench R	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, mid-to-dark brown silty sand	Modern
19	Trench S	Topsoil 0.50m, dark brown Subsoil 0.40m, mid-to-dark brown silty sand	Modern
20	Topsoil	0.50m, dark brown	Modern
21	Topsoil	0.60m, dark brown	Modern

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Period	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)
01	Roman	Pottery	1	0.001
02	Roman	Pottery	1	0.012
04		Animal bone	-	0.175
05	Roman	Pottery	2	0.010
05	Prehistoric	Flint	1	-
06	Roman	Pottery	1	0.004
16		Animal bone	-	0.013
17	Roman	Pottery	1	0.004
19	?Roman	Ceramic building material	1	0.017
19		Animal bone	-	0.009
19		Shell	-	0.110
20	Roman	Copper Alloy (SF1)		-
21		Copper Alloy (SF 2)		-

Appendix 3: The Roman Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)
1	Sandy grey ware	-	1	0.002
2	Sandy grey ware	-	1	0.013
5	Sandy grey ware	Dish type 6.19	1	0.009
5	'London-type' ware	-	1	>0.001
6	Sandy grey ware	-	1	0.004
17	Sandy grey ware	-	1	0.004
Total			6	0.033

The Fabrics

London-type' ware or West Stow ware (West 1990, 76; Tomber and Dore 1998, 185).

Sandy grey ware (Andrews 1985, 92).

The Forms

6.19.0 Bowl straight sides which may be upright or angled, plain rim or may have external groove just below the rim.

Brancaster (Andrews 1985): 71, 157.1-7. Icklingham (Plouviez 1976): 34. Scole (Rogerson 1977): 119, 128.177.

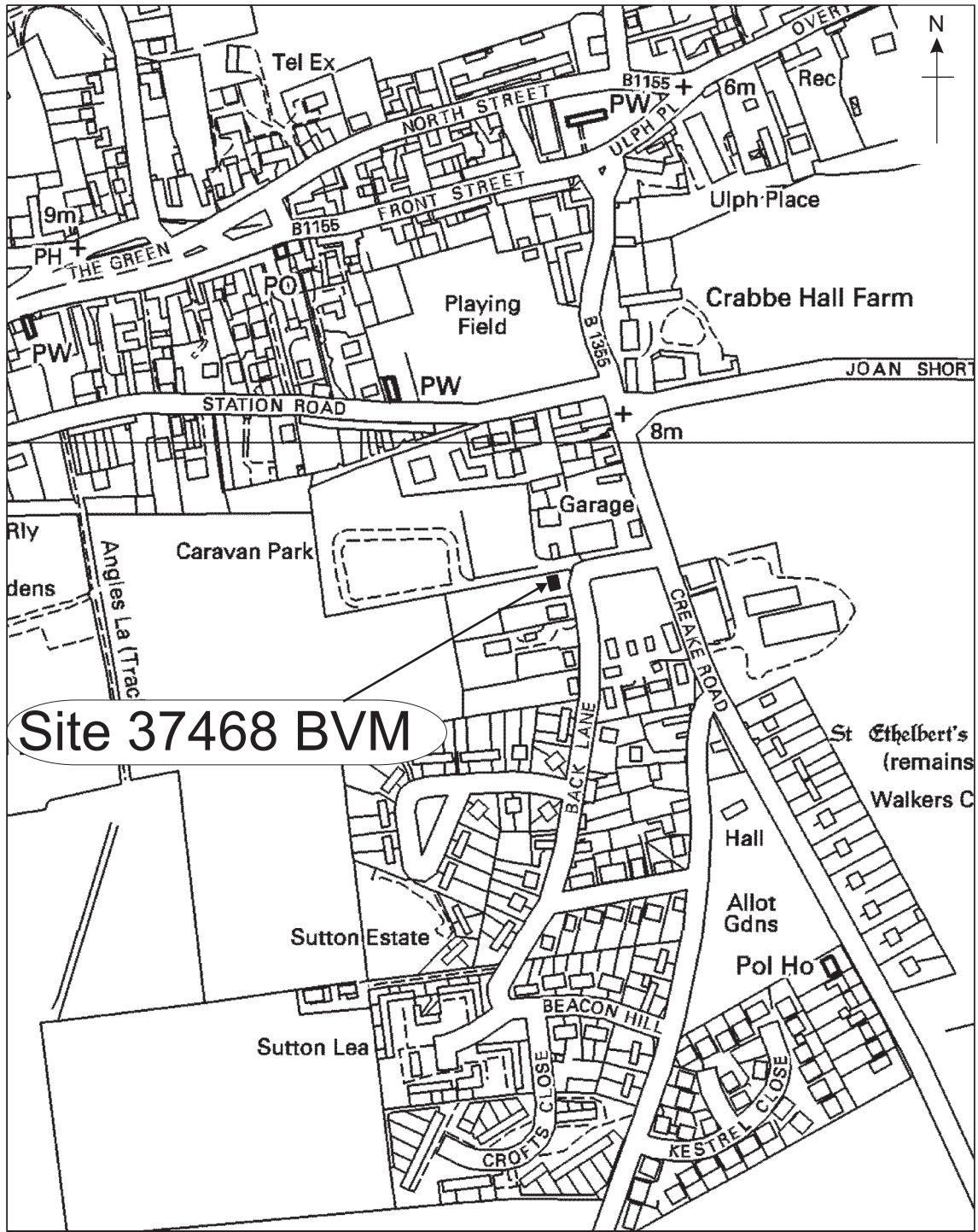


Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:5,000

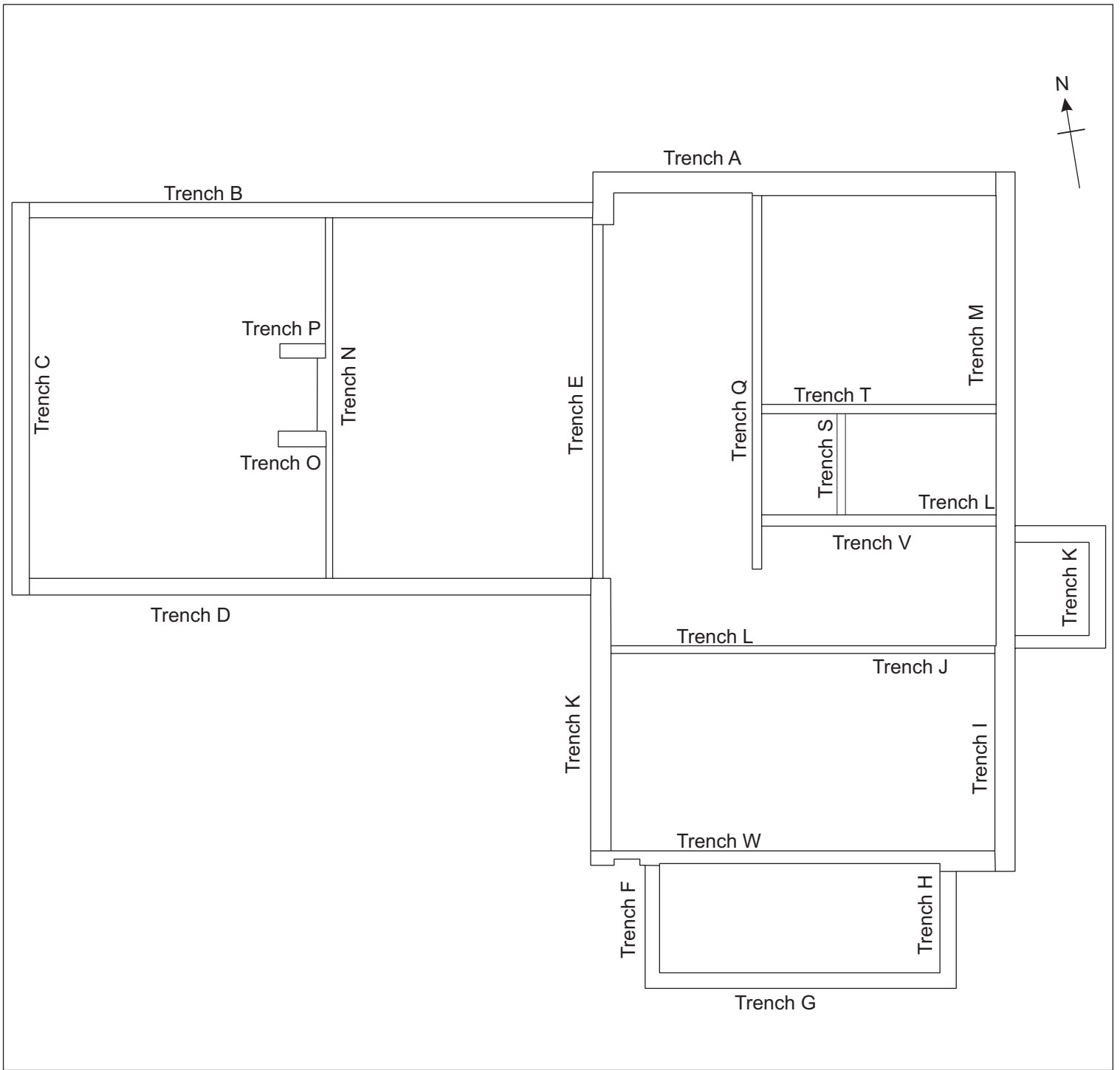


Figure 2. Ground-floor Plan of Foundation Trenches. Scale 1:100