

**Topographic Survey And An
Archaeological Watching Brief
At Brookside Farm, Barnsdale,
Great Easton Leicestershire
(NGR SP8430 9265)**

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For Mr. N. Clarke

Planning Application: 02/0960/3

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Farm, Barnsdale, Great Easton, Leicestershire (NGR SP8430 9265)**

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during topsoil stripping at Brookside Farm, Barnsdale, Great Easton, Leics (SP 8430 9265). The work followed topographic survey of the existing ridge and furrow. A pit revealed during the work contained numerous fragments of worked flint, of probable Mesolithic date. The pit was thought to be a tree-throw, which may have been utilised as a shelter during flint working or else it had occurred nearby while the tree was still standing and the flint incorporated when the tree fell, at a later date. A background scatter of abraded Roman and medieval pottery was also recovered. The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council, Historic & Natural Environment under the Accession Number XA197 2003.

Introduction

This report presents the results of a topographic survey and archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks, prior to the construction of a new access road and new farm buildings at (figures 1 & 2). This work follows the *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief* set by the Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council Heritage Services. This recommended the presence of an archaeologist during the groundworks as the site is located within the medieval historic core of the village.

The Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 171 indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of upper Lias clay with middle Lias silt and silty clay towards the north of the area.

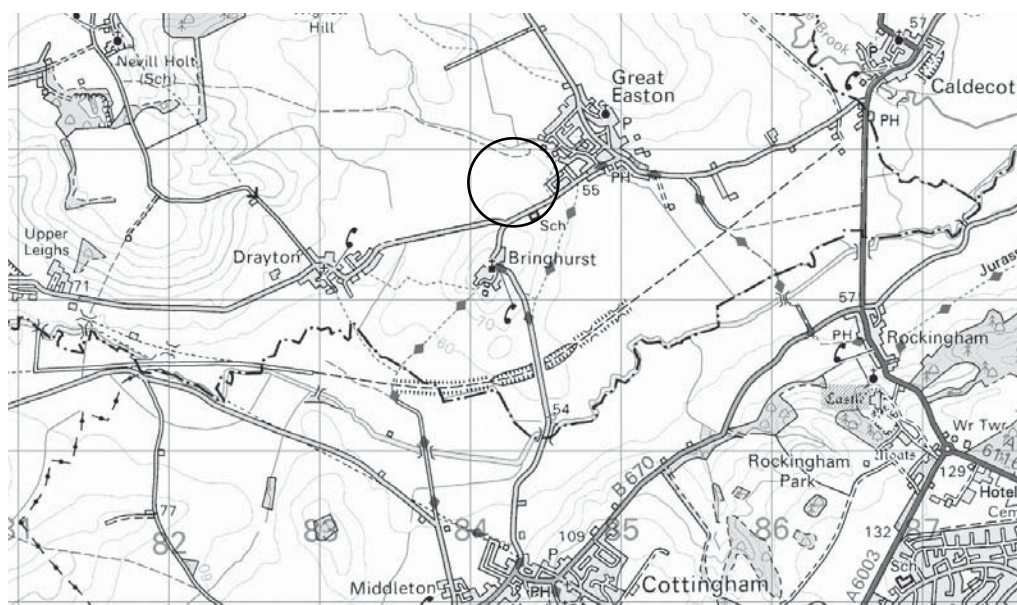


Figure 1: Location Map Scale 1:50000 © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence Number: AL100021186

Aims and Methods

A topographic survey was carried out in order to record the existing ridge and furrow on the site. The site was surveyed using a Leica TCR 307 Total Station. Points were taken along the top of the ridges and the bottom of the furrows. Areas of higher ground were also recorded.

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to observe the groundworks and to record, as appropriate, any archaeological deposits or features encountered. The work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* and the *Design Specification* (see Appendix). The site was visited on seven occasions between the 10th and the 29th September 2003, when the programme of work consisted of topsoil stripping for an access road and new farm buildings (see figure 3). Topsoil was removed using an EX135 with a ditching bucket.

Results

Earthwork Survey

The ridge and furrow on the field south of Great Easton Road, was recorded by EDM survey prior to the watching brief. The earthworks were quite pronounced and there were two different orientations, running SW-NE on the eastern side of the field and NNW-SSE on the western side, separated by a headland (figure 5). These earthworks were formed by repeated ploughing, using a coulter, share and mouldboard. Although the mouldboard had been in use from late prehistoric times, this type of ploughing equipment was common from the eleventh century. From the sixteenth century onwards fields were turned over to permanent pasture, which has had the effect of 'fossilising' ridge and furrow in the landscape (Astill 1988, 70-71). Areas of slightly higher ground lay at either end of the field, adjacent to the hedge boundaries. It is possible that these areas are later in date and are associated with the hedge boundaries themselves, which may have been imposed at the time of enclosure in the eighteenth century.

Watching brief

The topsoil strip for the new access road proceeded south from the gate. In general a section was stripped and the topsoil removed and then stoned up the same day. Topsoil consisted of dark brown silty loam between 0.2-0.25m thick. Removal of topsoil exposed the natural subsoil, which consisted of strong mid-brown clay with moderate stones and small pebbles. Finds were recovered from the ploughsoil. No archaeological features were observed on the access road, however several sherds of pottery and flint fragments were recovered. An area of disturbed ground, approximately 6m wide, with frequent brick and stone, was observed in the NE corner of the field. It may have been part of an old track.

A large rectangular area measuring approximately 50m x 63m (see plan) was topsoil stripped in the second field for the new farm buildings. Topsoil was approximately 0.15-0.2m deep and the depth of the dig ranged from 0.2-0.3m. The exposed subsoil consisted of mid yellow brown silty clay. A number of flints were found in the second

field behind the hedge on the interface between ploughsoil and subsoil but no associated features were located. A single feature was identified towards the northern end of the strip. It was a shallow sub-circular pit filled with a mixture of burnt and unburnt silty clay. There were no other features around it. Eighty-three flints were recovered from the feature and fragments of cattle bone, mostly burnt were recovered from its surface. The feature consisted of a band of dark charcoal-rich fill and scorched clay partly overlain by a layer of unburnt re-deposited clay, (see figure 4).

Conclusion

A large quantity of flint debris was recovered from the fill of a single pit-like feature identified during this watching brief. Unfortunately the flint is not diagnostic but a general later prehistoric date is suggested. The reduction technology used may suggest a Mesolithic date (Cooper- see Appendix 1). The profile of the feature and the presence of the re-deposited clay suggest that it is likely to be a tree-throw. These are formed from the remains of the root bole of a fallen tree, which characteristically results in a crescent or semi-circular area of silting with one good edge and a wider re-deposit of natural subsoil. Although this is itself a natural feature, the presence and abundance of the flint flakes may indicate that the tree throw was utilised by prehistoric flint knappers, perhaps as a natural shelter from the elements, assuming the upturned root ball had not yet rotted. Evidence from Neolithic sites, such as Hinxton, indicates that an accumulation of artefacts in tree throw deposits is likely to have taken place after the tree had fallen (Evans *et al* 1999, 248). It has also been suggested that upturned tree boles may have been formed the basis of shelters, with the addition of poles to provide further structure, perhaps covered in skins or brush (*ibid*, 149). There is no clear evidence for such a scenario at Great Easton. However the presence of charcoal and scorching may suggest that the tree was deliberately removed, perhaps as part of clearance. Much of the flint was also heat- affected and the bone found in the top of the feature was burnt. As an alternative to the shelter idea, it is possible that the artefacts were already on the surface or within the topsoil, and were incorporated into the feature at a later date when the tree fell or was removed. However, whichever explanation is preferred, it is clear that flint knapping and therefore prehistoric, probably Mesolithic, activity was taking place.

There were no further features found in the development area. However, the flint and pottery collected during the topsoil strip provides evidence for nearby prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity. The small size and abraded quality of much of the pottery suggests that it was likely to have been deposited onto the fields during manuring. At some point after the medieval period, the land use changed from arable to pasture and the remains of the medieval strip farming was fossilised as 'ridge and furrow', which has survived to this day. Ridge and furrow have traditionally been considered a particular feature of the extensive pasture-lands of the Midlands, however it has a more widespread distribution (Hall 1982, 5). In recent years, changing land use and development have made it a far less common sight and it is now regarded as a valuable resource.

References

Astill, G., 1988 'Fields' in G. Astill and A. Grant (eds) 1988 *The Countryside of Medieval England* Blackwell pp62-85

Evans, C., Pollard, J., and Knight M., 1999 'Life in woods: tree throws, 'settlement' and forest cognition' *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 18 (3) 1999

Hall, D. 1982 *Medieval Fields* Shire Archaeology. Shire Publications Ltd

Archive

The archive consists of site notes, the finds and two A3 permatrace drawings and will be held by LCCHS under the Accession Number XA197 2003.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tom Stanbridge for his help and co-operation during this watching brief. Jon Coward carried out the topographic survey. Wayne Jarvis and Jennifer Browning undertook the watching brief, Lynden Cooper analysed the flint and Deborah Sawday examined the pottery. The project was managed by Dr. Patrick Clay.

Jennifer Browning
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Appendix 1: The Flints

Lynden Cooper

The un-stratified flint was of a flake technology with hard hammer usage evident. The raw material was till flint of variable quality. No diagnostic pieces were found, but a general later prehistoric date is suggested.

The flint from contexts 2 and 4 was also of till origin, but the quality was fairly good. It was mostly patinated to a blue-white colour, possibly reflecting its greater age, but possibly due to heat treatment. Approximately 25% were visibly heat affected, sometimes to a calcined state with heat spall fractures. Although dominated by flakes the debitage included some bladelets, and several 'blade-like' pieces. Also the cores were of single platform type producing, at least in their later stages of reduction, blade-like flakes. Platform preparation was absent, although two flakes had dihedral butts. The thin butts and diffuse bulbs would suggest soft hammer or punch percussion. The flakes include two core rejuvenation flakes suggesting that knapping occurred at the site. The absence of cortical pieces would suggest that the flint raw material entered the site in a partly reduced manner. Two 'tools' were recovered: a retouched flake (that might be better described as a notched piece with additional contiguous retouch) and a naturally backed utilised blade. Although no diagnostic tool forms were located the reduction technology would suggest a Mesolithic date.

<i>Context</i>	<i>Retouched flakes</i>	<i>Utilise d blade</i>	<i>Flakes</i>	<i>Bladelets</i>	<i>Shatter</i>	<i>Chips</i>	<i>Cores</i>	<i>Total</i>
Unstrat	1	-	44	3	2	-	3	53
2 & 4	1	1	59	17	2	2	5	87

Appendix 2: The Pottery

D. Sawday

The pottery, fifty three sherds weighing 488 grams, was examined under a binocular microscope and catalogued with reference to the ULAS fabric series (Connor and Buckley 1999). The results are shown below, (table 1).

Fabric/Ware	Sherd Nos.	Weight Grams	Av. Sherd Weight
Roman			
GW - Greyware	5	12	
CG – Calcite Gritted ware	1	5	
Roman Sub Total	6	17	2.8
Late Saxon Early Medieval			
ST2/3 – Coarse/Fine Stamford ware	2	16	
LY1 - Stanion Lyveden type ware 1	5	45	
LY2 - Stanion Lyveden type ware 2	1	10	
LY3 - Stanion Lyveden type ware 3	3	25	
LY - Stanion Lyveden type ware	1	1	
BO3 – Bourne B ware	5	14	
MS – Medieval Sandy ware	1	4	
Sub Total	18	115	6.3
Later Medieval/Early Post Medieval			
CW1 – Cistercian ware 1	1	1	
EA1 – Earthenware 1	5	58	
MB – Midland Blackware	2	8	
SW3 – Brown Salt Glazed Stoneware	3	50	
Sub Total	11	117	10.6
Post Medieval/Modern			
EA 2/3/6 - Pantheon ware/Mottled ware/Black ware	17	234	
SW -Unclassified Stoneware	1	5	
Sub Total	18	239	13.2
Totals	53	488	

Table 1: The late Saxon and medieval pottery totals by fabric sherd numbers and weight (grams)

Whilst all the pottery was unstratified, the range of wares present are evidence of activity in the area during the Roman and medieval periods and later. The relatively low average sherd weight confirms that most of this material was probably the result of the manuring of the fields during cultivation. Typically, the medieval wares are all local in origin, Stamford, Stanion Lyveden and Bourne all being major centres of pottery production at the time.

Bibliography

Connor, A., and Buckley, R., Roman and Medieval Occupation in Causeway Lane, Leicester, Leicester Archaeology Mon. 5.

Site/Parish: Brookside Farm, Great Easton, Leicestershire	Submitter: J. Browning
Accession No/ Doc Ref: XA197	Identifier: D. Sawday
2003/great easton2.doc	Date of Id: 26.11.04
Material: pottery	Method of Recovery: watching brief
Site Type: field with r & f	

context	fabric/ware	sherd nos.	weight grams	comments
S. of building A, top/subsoil interface	LY3 – Stanion Lyveden type ware 3	3	25	
	LY2 – Stanion Lyveden type ware 2	1	10	
	EA1 – Earthenware 1	2	5	
	EA2 – Earthenware 2	1	20	
	EA	1	2	Modern porcelain
U/S topsoil strip upper access road	GW - Greyware	1	2	Roman, abraded
	MS – Medieval Sandy ware	1	4	Fine orange sandy fabric, over fired black gl ext, ? Glaphorn
	LY1 – Stanion Lyveden type ware 1	1	23	White slip & gl
	BO3 – Bourne B ware	1	10	
	MB – Midland Blackware	2	8	Coarse fabric, sim to CW1, join
	EA2	2	63	Pancheon rim
	EA3 – Mottled ware	1	8	Mug base
	?SW3 - Stoneware	3	50	Join, with iron rich wash but no white slip, ?17th C.
U/S topsoil – building A+B	GW	2	3	Romam - abraded
	EA1 – Earthenware 1	2	50	Upright jar rim, c.1550-1650+
	EA2	1	25	Bowl rim, 17th C.+
Middle of the access road, (corner)	GW	1	1	Roman, abraded
	BO3	4	4	Abraded, joins

context	fabric/ware	sherd nos.	weight grams	comments
	LY1	3	10	Abraded, joins
	EA1	1	3	
	EA3	1	24	
Lower access road, along bottom field boundary	LY	1	1	abraded
	EA2	1	14	
	EA3	3	16	joins
	EA6	2	22	joins
U/S	CG – Calcite Gritted	1	5	Roman
U/S	GW	1	6	Roman
U/S	ST3 – Coarse Stamford ware	1	1	
U/S	ST2 – Fine Stamford ware	1	15	
U/S	LY1	1	12	
U/S	? CW1	1	1	
U/S	EA2	3	30	
U/S	EA6	1	10	
U/S	SW - Stoneware	1	5	? 17th C.
U/S	modern	1		glazed
U/S (near feature)		1		Roman, abraded

Appendix 3: Bone and Miscellaneous Finds

Context/deposit	Material	Notes
2	Fired clay/daub	4 fragments
2	Bone	3 frags burnt (calcined), 7 frags unburnt but very abraded, 2 fragments charred black, 1 fragment of sheep-sized bone
4	Bone	2 fragments of burnt cattle molar, 1 unburnt bone, c. 60 fragments representing cattle maxilla (burnt),
u/s surface around feature	Bone	Burnt- 2 fragments charred brown, 1 completely calcined

Appendix 4: Context List

Context	Deposit	Description
1	layer	topsoil
2	fill	mixed grey, black, red and brown slightly silty clay of firm compaction with moderate small stones, flints and charcoal flecks
3	cut	ovoid, with shallow sloping sides and a rounded base. Orientated N-S.
4	fill	mixture of red brown clay and blackened clay with frequent charcoal.
5	cut	Prob. same as [3], part of same feature.

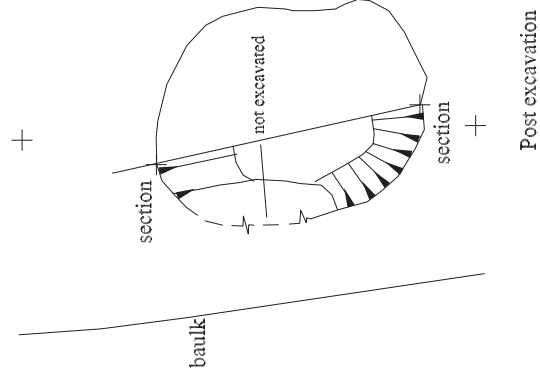
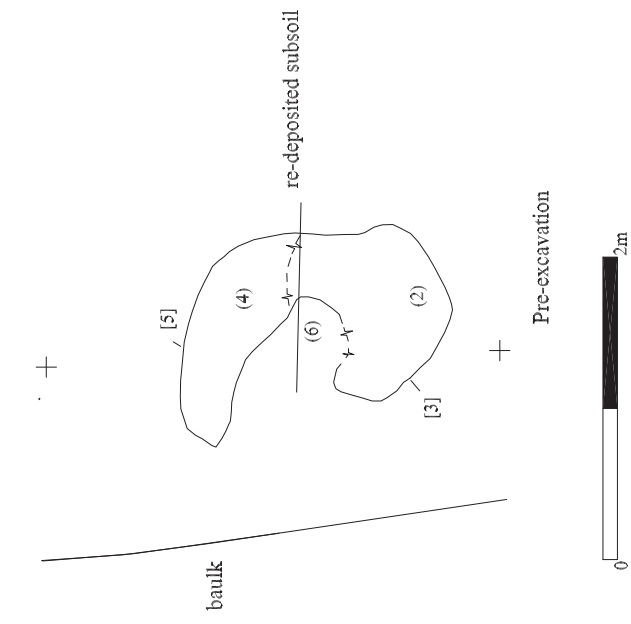


Figure 2: Location of topsoil stripping and the development. n.t.s.



Figure 3: Location of the topsoil strip and identified feature. Scale 1:2000. Right: Location in relation to Great Easton. Scale 1:10 000





Section

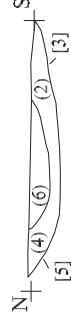


Figure 4: Pre- and Post- Excavation plans and section of feature.

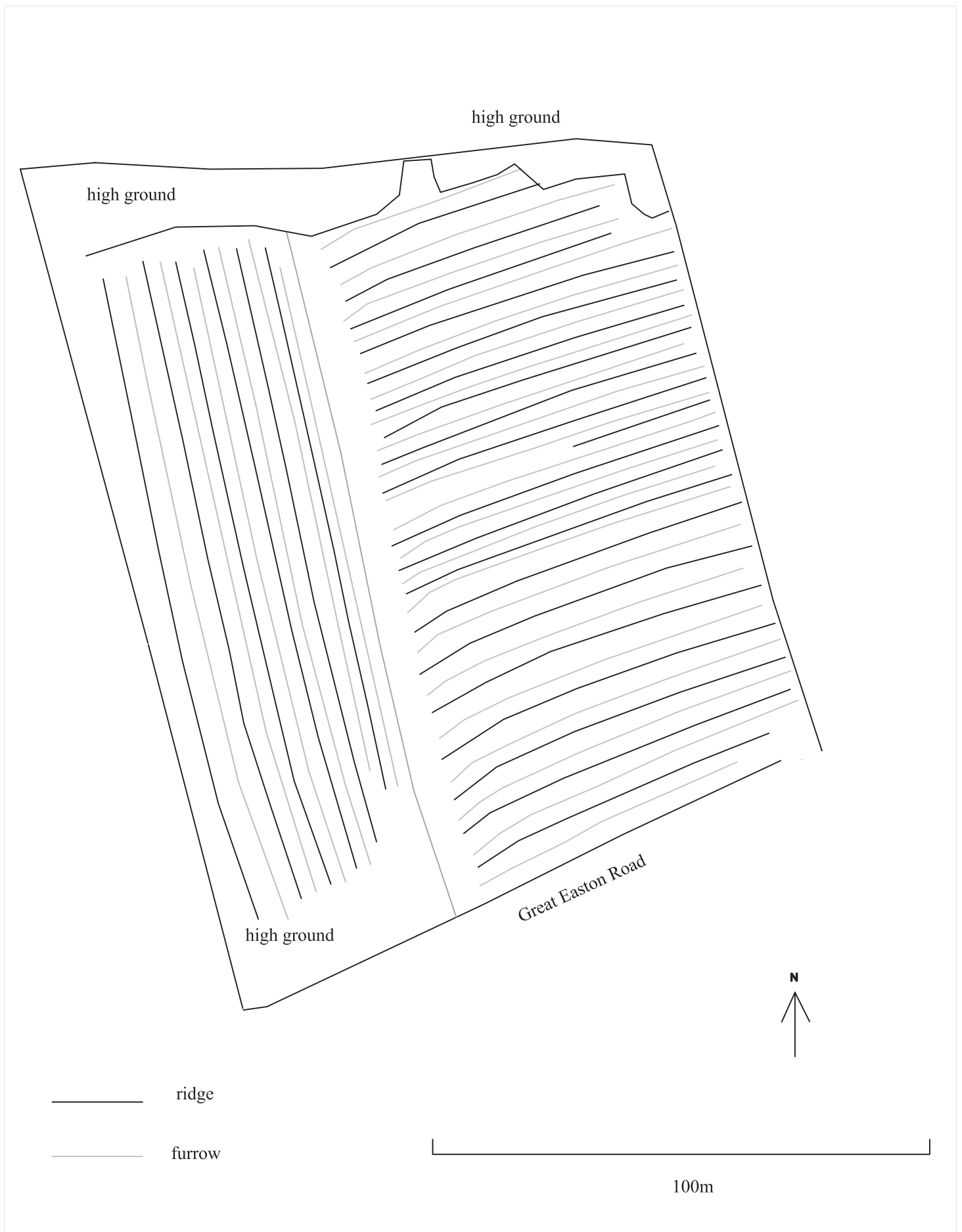


Figure 5: The results of the earthwork survey, showing areas and direction of ridge and furrow.