

**JACKS LANE CROSSING (WEST)
PRIORS GREEN
TAKELEY
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
BY
TRIAL TRENCHING**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**



October 2007

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Document Ref.	1770rep.doc
Report Issue Date	October 2007
Circulation	RPS Planning
	Countryside Properties Plc
	ECC Historic Environment Management
	Essex Historic Environment Record

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**JACKS LANE CROSSING (West)
PRIORS GREEN, TAKELEY**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
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Client: RPS Planning (on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc)
FAU Project No.: 1707
NGR: TL 5726 2154
Site Code: TAPG 07
OASIS No.: essexcou1-27425
Date of Fieldwork: 2nd May to 3rd May 2007

SUMMARY

As part of an ongoing programme of construction works associated with housing development in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex, ECC Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by RPS Planning to evaluate by trial trenching the western crossing point of Jacks Lane, an unmade track bisecting the development site which is thought to be medieval in origin.

Two trenches were excavated across the ditches to either side of Jacks Lane, and also incorporating part of the track itself. Modern consolidation/ re-surfacing layers were identified at the surface, overlying two earlier layers of cobbles and stone/ grit, while both ditches showed evidence of periodic re-cutting, suggesting that the route has been regularly maintained. Although it is conjectured that Jacks Lane is medieval in origin, no evidence for this was uncovered within the trenches.

The results from this evaluation are virtually identical to those of an earlier evaluation on the eastern crossing.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

This report presents the results of a trench-based evaluation at Prior's Green, a c. 30ha housing development with associated access roads, services, and landscaping, on the northern outskirts of the historic village of Takeley, Essex (planning application UTT/0816/00/OP). The investigation comprised two targeted trenches on the western crossing of Jacks Lane (TL 5726 2154) and was undertaken in May 2007 by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on behalf of RPS Planning. It follows a series of archaeological evaluations carried out between 2004 and 2006, in connection with the development as a whole, and responded to a Method Statement produced by RPS. An evaluation on Phase 3 of the development and further works on a drainage easement linking the development with a new balancing pond were carried out concurrently but will be reported on separately.

1.2 Report and Archive

The report is structured to describe the background to the project, followed by an assessment of the results of the fieldwork, and a discussion of the archaeological potential. Appendices include descriptions of the trenches, details of the archive contents and the EHER summary. All illustrations are placed together towards the back of the report

Copies of this report will be supplied to the client, the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management Team (HEM) and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER). A version will be uploaded to the OASIS database (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>) following HEM approval. The project archive, including two copies of the report, will be deposited with Saffron Walden Museum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and Topography (Fig 1)

Jacks Lane runs approximately east-west, roughly parallel with the Dunmow Road (B1256), between Smiths Green in the west and Hall Road in the east. The surface of the lane is lower than the surrounding fields by approximately 1m, although this varies along its length. It bisects the Priors Green development, with Phases 1 and 2 to the south and Phase 3 to the north, and is bounded on both sides by substantial ditches and hedgerows comprised of semi-mature trees and bushes.

2.2 Geology

The undisturbed geology was a pale brownish-yellow chalky clay, with bands of mid-orange brown silty clay running through it. The drift geology of the site is generally that of pale brown chalky boulder-clay of the Lowestoft Formation, although this becomes chalkier approximately 2m below ground level. The underlying solid geology of the area is London Clay (BGS map EW222 Great Dunmow v.2).

2.3 History and Archaeology

The evaluation site is located within a wider agricultural landscape, which has evolved from the Neolithic period through to the present day. This landscape is becoming increasingly better understood and documented as a result of archaeological fieldwork taking place in advance of extensive construction development in the Takeley area. This is particularly evident in the recent work at Stansted Airport (Havis & Brooks 2004; Framework Archaeology in prep), evaluation and excavation work undertaken in advance of the re-alignment and construction of the A120 (Fitzpatrick 2001), Frogs Hall (Ennis in prep) and also by recent work undertaken in Takeley itself (Robertson 2005 and 2006) and further west of the Priors Green development, on the south side of Dunmow Road (Roberts 2003).

Dunmow Road (B1256) is thought to follow the approximate line of Stane Street, the Roman road from Braughing/Puckridge to Colchester (Drury and Rodwell 1980). To the northeast at Frogs Hall is a presumptive Roman villa (ESMR 9140) with associated Roman landscape features whilst Warish Hall (ESMR 4572), a Scheduled medieval moated site, lies c.1km to the northwest. Another medieval moated site, Jacks Green (ESMR 4655), is located only c.50m to the west of the Jacks Lane crossing. Jacks Lane, which is thought to have medieval origins, was previously investigated at the eastern crossing point (Robertson 2006b), where the deposits encountered were modern in date, presumably as a result of periodic maintenance and clearing out of the track-side ditches. Recent excavation within the Priors Green Phase 1 (Robertson 2006a) development recorded the remains of a 13th to 14th century farmstead fronting on to the south side of the lane as well as a series of late medieval/ early Post-medieval parallel ditches that seemingly respect its alignment. However, the date at which the lane was first established has not been definitively confirmed by any of the works to date.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the evaluation was to determine the presence or absence, date, character and significance of any archaeological remains present. The research objectives follow those outlined

in the regional research framework (Brown and Glazebrook 2000), with the specific objectives being:

- To confirm the medieval origins of Jacks Lane and/ or
- To determine whether any evidence exists for earlier activity associated with the lane (i.e. is the track actually Prehistoric or Roman in origin?)

4.0 METHOD

The numbering and recording sequences were continued from the Phase 3 evaluation (trenches 1 – 33) in order to avoid un-necessary duplication. The investigation consisted of two machine-cut trenches (34 and 35) located over the roadside ditches running either side of Jack's Lane (Fig 1). Trench 34 was positioned over the southern ditch and measured c.4.3m by 1.6m. Trench 35 targeted the northern ditch and was c.3.7m long by 1.6m wide. Each trench extended part way into the lane itself but was positioned to avoid a recently lain drainage pipe that ran down the centre of the track. Excavation was undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision, and the up-cast was checked for any datable material. The trench sections were then cleaned by hand to further define any surviving features and deposits. The location of each trench was recorded and plans and sections drawn at an appropriate scale. A photographic record including monochrome prints and digital images was maintained throughout the fieldwork. All plans were linked to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

Standard ECC FAU recording and excavation methods were used. All fieldwork methods and recording conformed to the codes of practice and guidance issued by the IFA (1999) and adhered to regional guidelines (Gurney 2003).

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

The results of the archaeological investigation are described below, accompanied by appropriate illustrations which are located to the rear of the report (Figs. 1 and 2). Overall, the investigation encountered a similar sequence of remains to those found during the evaluation of the eastern crossing of Jacks Lane (Robertson 2006b). Machine excavation revealed the previously identified roadside ditches immediately below c.0.16m of modern up-cast resulting from the nearby pipe trench. This modern build-up sat directly over the natural chalky clay into which the ditches were cut. Both trenches extended part way into the c.3m wide lane, where a series of compacted surfaces were encountered and recorded. No datable material was recovered from any of the archaeological deposits.

5.1 Trench 34 (Figure 2 – section 1. Plate 2)

Both roadside ditches had been re-cut at least twice. On the south side of the track, the earliest ditch in this sequence was 900, which was in turn filled by 901. This was cut by a large (c.3.15m wide) ditch (902) that was filled by a sequence of three deposits (903, 918 and 904), which were in turn cut by a narrow ditch (905 - filled by 906 and 917), the latest fill of which (917) contained loose, partially decomposed humic material and had clearly only recently been filled in. A high degree of root disturbance, presumably from the hedgerow, was apparent throughout the sequence.

5.2 Trench 35 (Figure 2 – section 2. Plate 1)

The trench across the northern ditch encountered a similar sequence of deposits to those to the south. The earliest ditch (911 - filled by 912) survived better than its potential contemporary to the south; however, it appeared to be much broader, measuring in excess of 2m wide. This was cut by a narrow ditch (913) with a single fill (914) that had in turn been cut by another broad (c.2.4m wide) ditch (915). Ditch 915 also contained a single fill (916) which, as with 917 to the south, consisted of a very dark, humic material that appeared to have been only recently deposited. Roots from the hedgerow that bounded the lane also disturbed the northern ditch.

5.3 Jacks Lane (Figure 2 – section 3. Plate 1)

The original surface of the lane (910) appeared to consist of a simple layer of stones and grit laid directly onto natural chalky clay. Sealing this was a 0.10m thick deposit (909) that consisted of larger rounded and worn cobbles, mixed with and overlain by a very dark silty clay that contained traces of charcoal, flecks of tile/burnt clay and small grits. These may have constituted the surviving original and archaeologically significant surfaces of the lane. They were followed by a series of more recent homogenous gravel-rich layers, 908 and 907. In addition to the evaluation trenches, an opportunity for limited observations along a lengthy section of the road was afforded by the open utility trench down the middle of the lane, which ran from the Western Crossing to Jacks Green. However, aside from evidence similar to that noted above for periodic resurfacing and infilling of rutted areas, no significant archaeological remains were noted, although thicker deposits of made ground were noted alongside the Jacks Green moated site, which may be associated with its construction (i.e. the spreading-out of upcast from the moat).

6.0 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

No finds were recovered from any of the trenches or features. No deposits with perceived environmental potential were identified and so no soil samples were taken.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from this investigation supports previous conclusions from work at the eastern crossing, which suggests that Jacks Lane has been maintained through time, with periodic re-surfacing and cleaning out of the track-side ditches appearing to have largely removed any earlier deposits/dating evidence for the origins of the track. Based upon spatial relationships with other features in the landscape, including the medieval farmstead uncovered by the Phase 1 mitigation works (Robertson 2006a), it seems reasonable to suggest that the lane was in use during the medieval period, but the evaluation produced no definitive evidence to support this theory, or to confirm or disprove any suggestions of a pre-medieval origin.

It seems likely that the differing characteristics between the ditches/re-cuts along the length of the lane and between either ditch reflect an informal re-establishment and maintenance of certain parts of the route-way when and where necessary, rather than one synchronized event. The only apparent exception is the recent infilling of the ditches with dark, partially decomposed humic material.

While the potential exist for earlier road surfaces to survive below more modern layers, this investigation was unable to conclusively confirm their presence or establish a date for them, although contexts 310 & 309 (section 3) do hold some promise. Despite being severely truncated by successive re-cutting and cleaning-out, the fill sequences in the flanking ditches suggest some chronological depth although, again, no datable or diagnostic artefacts were present in the earlier fills, either here or during the investigation of the eastern crossing. Given the absence of datable material from the targeted areas, coupled with the sequence of re-cuts, this suggests that any deposits containing dating evidence have been removed during periodic re-cutting/ cleaning out.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by RPS Planning on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc. Thanks go to Simon Blatherwick for his assistance throughout the project. Thanks are also due to Breheney Ltd for their assistance on site. R Havis of HEM monitored the site on behalf of Uttlesford District Council. Adrian Scruby managed the project and Matthew Pocock, Andy Robertson and Tony Blowers carried out the fieldwork.

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- Roberts, B. 2003 *Land South of the A120 Essex (Report 1301)* Arch. Solutions client report



Plate 1 – Trenches under excavation, facing south



Plate 2 – Southern flanking ditch (Section 1) looking west

APPENDIX 1: FIELDWORK DATA

All dimensions are given in metres.

Jacks Lane Crossing (west)

Trench	Dimensions (L x W)	Depth	Archaeological Features	Co-ordinates(NW and SE corners)
34	4 x 1.6	1.0	Yes	TL 57256 21536 / TL 57257 21532
35	3.5 x 1.6	0.9	Yes	TL 57263 21542 / TL 57264 21538

APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT DATA

Context	Trench	Type	Fill of	Description
900	34	Ditch		Earliest cut on south side of Jacks Lane. 0.60m deep
901	34	fill	900	Pale yellow grey clay
902	34	Ditch		Second (re-cut) on south side of Jacks Lane. 1m deep
903	34	fill	902	Primary fill. Pale yellow grey clayey silt.
904	34	fill	902	Upper fill. Yellow clay
905	34	Ditch		
906	34	fill	905	First fill. Mid grey silty clay
907	34	Layer		Remnant tarmac/gravel
908	34	Layer		Yellow brown 'hoggin' gravels
909	34	Layer		Dark silty clay with small to large worn gravels
910	34	Layer		Scatter of gravels pressed into the natural clay
911	35	Ditch		1.6+m x 1.9m x 1.2m
912	35	fill	911	Pale yellow brown grey chalky clay
913	35	Ditch		1.6+m x 0.8m x 0.26m
914	35	fill	913	Mid grey brown silty clay
915	35	Ditch		1.6m+ x 2m x 0.5m
916	35	fill	915	Dark clay loam
917	34	fill	905	Upper fill. Dark humic silty clay
918	34	fill	902	Probably same as 903. Yellow clay

APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME : Jacks Lane Crossing and Balancing Pond 2, Priors Green, Takeley (TAPG 06)

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Research Archive

- 1.1 Brief of Archaeological Works
- 1.2 Client Report

2. Site Archive

- 2.1 1 x Context registers
- 2.2 19 x Original Context Sheets
- 2.3 6 x digital images (and CD)
- 2.4 6 x Black and White Prints
- 2.5 1 x Photographic Registers
- 2.6 1 x Plan registers
- 2.7 1 x Section registers
- 2.8 1 x Plans Sheets(A1)
- 2.9 1 x Section Sheets (A1)

No finds

APPENDIX 4: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: Jacks Lane Crossing (West), Priors Green, Takeley	
Parish: Takeley	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 5726 2154	Site Code: TAPG 07
Type of Work: Evaluation by trial trenching	Site Director/Group: A. Robertson ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 2 May – 3 May 2007	Size of Area Investigated: Jacks Lane: c.12sq m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden Museum	Funding Source: RPS Planning (on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc)
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related EHER Nos: 4572, 4655, 9140
Final Report: EAH Summary	
Periods Represented: Modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>As part of an ongoing programme of construction works associated with housing development in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex, ECC Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by RPS Planning, on behalf of Countryside Properties PLC, to evaluate by trial trenching the western crossing point of Jacks Lane, an unmade track bisecting the development site which is thought to be medieval in origin.</p> <p>Two trenches were excavated across the ditches either side of Jacks Lane and part of the lane itself. Two modern consolidation/ re-surfacing layers were identified on the lane, while both the ditches showed episodes of re-cutting suggesting that the route has been regularly maintained. Although it is conjectured that Jacks Lane is medieval in origin, no evidence for this was uncovered within the trenches.</p> <p>The results from this evaluation are virtually identical to those of an earlier evaluation on the eastern crossing.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports:	
Robertson, A. 2006 <i>Jacks Lane Crossing and Balancing Pond 2, Priors Green, Takeley, Essex. Archaeological Evaluation by Trial trenching. ECC FAU/ RPS client report 1703</i>	
Author of Summary: A Robertson (ECC FAU)	Date of Summary: June 2007

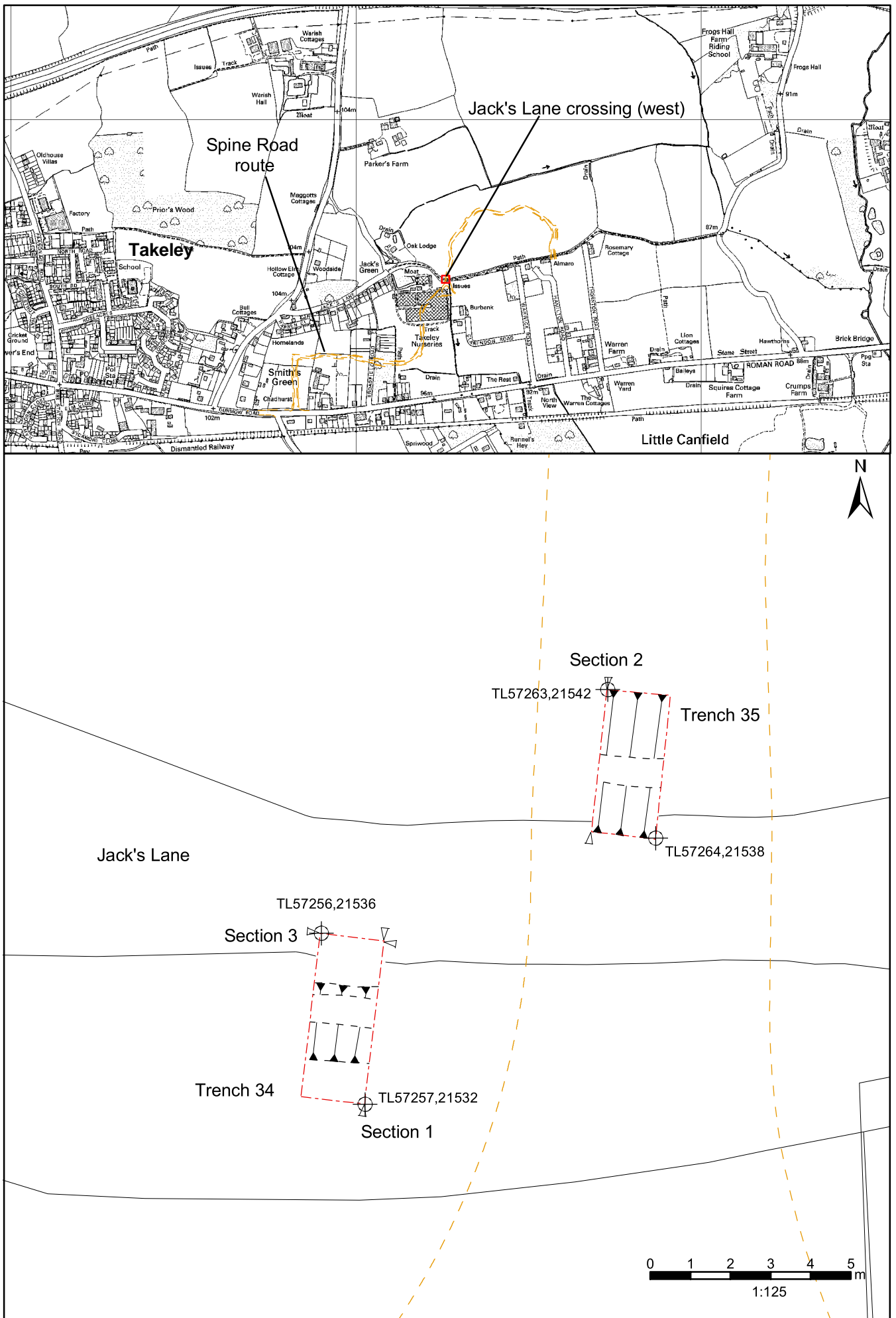


Fig.1. Location of Jack's Lane crossing trench

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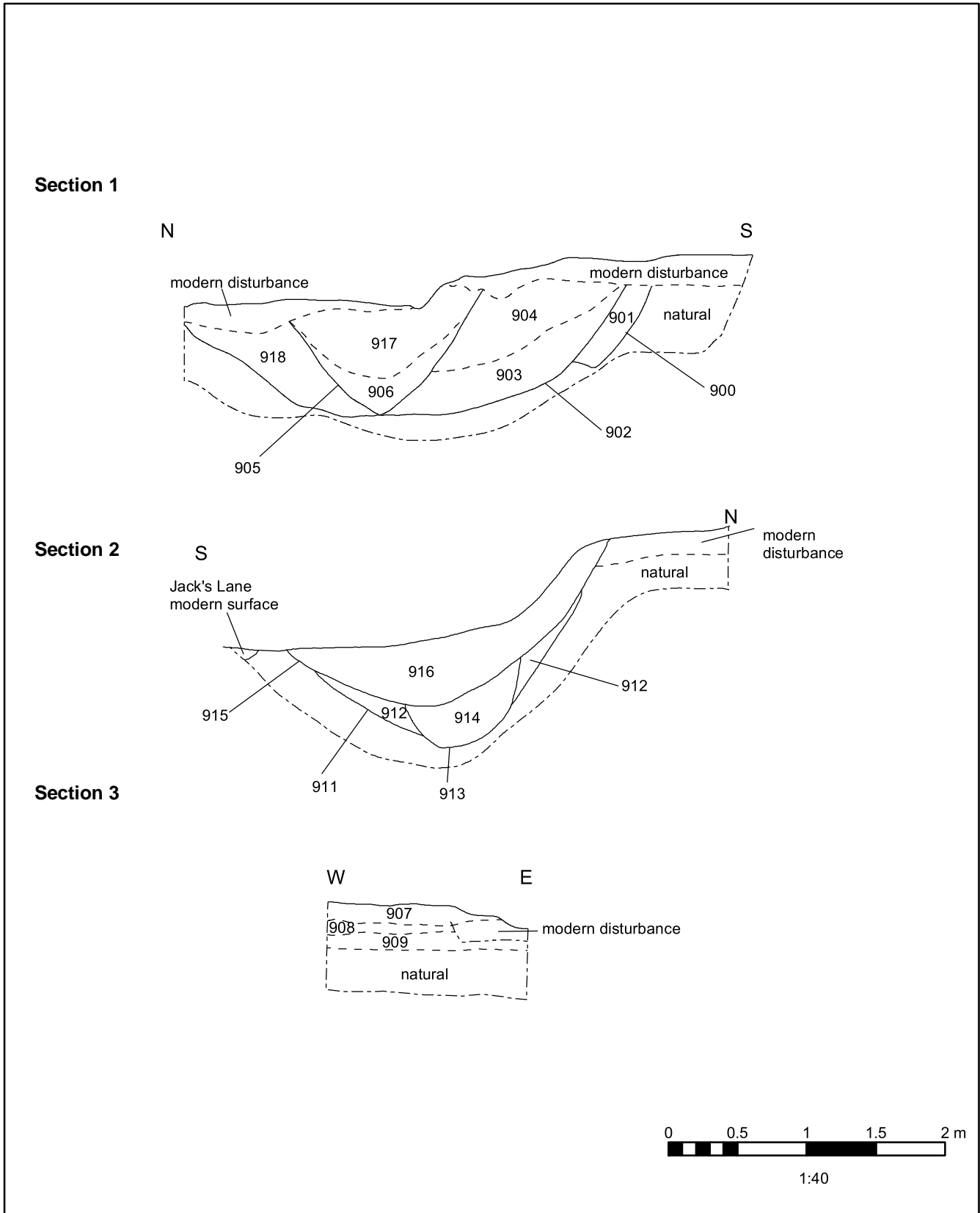


Fig.2. Sections