

**32a AVENUE ROAD**

**WITHAM**

**ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AND**

**MONITORING**

**JULY 2005**



**Essex County Council**

**Field Archaeology Unit**

**32a AVENUE ROAD**

**WITHAM**

**ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND MONITORING**

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**32a AVENUE ROAD,  
WITHAM, ESSEX  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND MONITORING**

Client: Parkland Developments Ltd

NGR: TL 8217 1512

Planning Application: BTE/1624/04

Site Code: WH21

Dates of Fieldwork: 19-20 and 31 May, and 1 June 2005

**SUMMARY**

*An archaeological trial trenching evaluation and monitoring of foundation trenches was carried out on the site of a residential development at 32a Avenue Road, Witham.*

*A large ditch, 6m wide and over 2m deep, was identified, crossing the western end of the development area on a north-east/south-west alignment. The line of the ditch corresponds with the projected line of the outer enclosure ditch of Chipping Hill Camp, a hill-fort constructed in the Late Bronze Age, refortified in the Middle Iron Age, and reoccupied at intervals up to the medieval period. Only the upper fills of the ditch were excavated due to the limited disturbance expected from the house foundations. The only dating evidence recovered from the ditch was two sherds of medieval pottery dated to the 12th-14th centuries from its uppermost fill. This is consistent with early medieval recutting of the outer ditch recorded in an excavation on the northern side of the hill-fort by Davison in 1969.*

*Two intercutting post-medieval quarry pits were also investigated. No other archaeological features or deposits were identified.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report describes the results of an archaeological trial-trenching evaluation and subsequent monitoring of foundation trenches on a residential development at 32a Avenue Road, Witham. The work was undertaken by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on behalf of Parkland Developments Ltd, in accordance with an archaeological brief prepared by Vanessa Clarke of the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management (ECC HEM) Team (Clarke 2005) and the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by ECC FAU (2005). ECC HEM monitored the work on behalf of the local planning authority.

The site archive will be deposited in Braintree Museum. A .pdf version of this report will be submitted to the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS).

## **2.0 BACKGROUND (Fig. 1)**

### **2.1 Topography and Geology**

The development area is located to the west of Witham town centre and its main thoroughfare, Newland Street, and 120m south-east of the railway station (TL 821 150). The development area is located to the rear of numbers 28-36 Avenue Road. Access from the south was by means of a metalled driveway between numbers 32 and 34 and from the east direct from Station Road. Land to the north of the site was occupied by an office block and the station car park.

The development area was formerly the site of a timber yard which had been demolished and levelled prior to the archaeological trial trenching. The ground comprised mixed topsoil and demolition rubble and was roughly level at around 26m OD. The underlying drift geology was boulder clay of the Springfield Till, consisting of silty sandy clay and clayey gravel.

### **2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background**

The following background uses the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford. The development lies on the edge of the area of the prehistoric hill-fort known as Chipping Hill Camp (EHER 8106-8110); a detailed description of its history and the excavations carried out in its area has been published by Rodwell (1993).

The Chipping Hill Camp lay on a spur overlooking the River Brain, and was strategically chosen to control movement to and from the Brain valley at its junction with the Blackwater valley. It was originally constructed in the Late Bronze Age and refortified in the Middle Iron Age, and has

been reoccupied on several occasions since then. Roman occupation is suggested by finds found in the area of the hill-fort, and it may have been the site of Edward the Elder's burh established at Witham in AD 912, although evidence on the ground is elusive. More certainly, Chipping Hill was the focus of the late Saxon and Norman town and market, before these moved to their present location along Newland Street in or shortly before 1212, when Witham received its market charter. The outer enclosure ditch was cleaned out in the early 13th century, and the hill-fort may have continued in use as a fortified manor. Much of the Chipping Hill earthworks were still visible in the 1830s (Wright 1836), although large areas have since been destroyed by the London-Colchester railway, quarrying, terracing, and recent housing and commercial development.

Previous excavations of Chipping Hill Camp (Rodwell 1993, 8-33) have recorded inner and outer ramparts and ditches, with the outer circuit possibly represented by more than one ditch. The line of the outer ditch has been projected as crossing the western end of the development area (Medlycott 1998). Where previously excavated, the outer ditch was V-shaped in profile, between 7m and 8m wide, and a little over 3m deep. The previous excavations have concentrated on the western and northern part of the earthworks, however, and no part of the projected circuit to the south and east has been confirmed by excavation. In addition, the south-eastern part of the earthworks appears to be less well preserved than elsewhere, partly because the slope of the hill-top is less pronounced on this side, and partly because of recent levelling and terracing.

The development area lies outside the area of the medieval town extending along Newland Street. A quantity of medieval pottery (EHCR 8436) recovered to the south of Avenue Road may represent deposits extending from the medieval town along Newland Street.

### **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The archaeological work was undertaken to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains threatened by the development and to record them. Specific research objectives were:

- to determine the location of any defensive ditches associated with the prehistoric hill-fort crossing the site area
- to identify evidence of associated prehistoric or Saxon occupation
- to identify the range of objects that were in use and comment on their status etc
- to assess the quality of any environmental deposits surviving on site

## **4.0 METHOD (Fig. 2)**

The evaluation trenches were opened under archaeological supervision, using a 360° tracked mini-excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Trenches 1, 2 and 3 were located along the wall lines of the proposed new buildings and Trench 4 in the open area in the east of the site. Because the house footings were to be only about 1m deep, it was agreed with the ECC HEM monitoring office that if the enclosure ditch was encountered only minimal excavation would take place. When archaeological features were identified in Trenches 1 and 2, after consultation with the ECC HEM monitoring officer, additional Trenches 5, 6 and 7 were excavated to define the extent of the features and to help understand their significance.

All trenches were hand-cleaned and areas of archaeological potential investigated. All work was carried out in accordance with IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists) by-laws and guidelines. Standard ECC FAU excavation and recording methodologies were employed.

Further to the evaluation trenching, two monitoring visits were made to observe the machine-excavation of the foundation trenches of the new building at the west end of the site. Due to the instability of the sides of the trenches monitoring was restricted to observation and recording from ground level.

## **5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Figs 2 and 3)**

Initially, four evaluation trenches (1-4) were excavated, and after consultation with the monitoring officer, a further three trenches (5-7) were excavated to elucidate the results. No archaeological features were identified in the remaining trenches (3 and 4) and they are not described below.

The results of excavation and recording in Trenches 1, 5 and 6, and the monitoring of house foundation trenches in the surrounding area, are described together in a single section, as these results appear to be interrelated. The evidence of Trenches 2 and 7 also seem to be related, and they are also described together. Full details of the evaluation trenches and archaeological features are included in Appendices 1 and 2.

### **5.1 Trenches 1, 5 and 6 and foundation trench monitoring**

Trench 1 was bisected by a modern sewer pipe, but two slots excavated on either side of this pipe recorded brown silty fill deposits (2, 3 and 4). A possible edge to this feature was recorded

in the north-west of the trench, although this area was rather disturbed, and there was no clear evidence of any other edges to this feature within the trench. Two sherds of medieval pottery dated to the 12th-14th centuries were recovered from the top of the uppermost fill, 2.

The excavation of Trench 6 some 4m further east identified the eastern edge (16) of the large feature recorded in Trench 1, aligned north-east/south-west. A small extension to the trench was excavated by machine and cleaned by hand to a depth of 1m to record a section at right angles across the edge of the feature (Fig. 3, Section 1). Feature 16 was not bottomed, but the exposed section showed its edge sloping down at c. 45°, and two successive fills of brown clay-silt (14 and 15), similar to those in Trench 1. No finds were recovered.

Trench 5, to the south-west of Trenches 1 and 6, contained further brown silty clay fill deposits (6 and 7), similar to those recorded in Trench 1. Fill 7 contained fragments of charcoal and a small piece of baked clay, but no datable finds were recovered.

The western edge of feature 5 was clearly identified during monitoring of machine excavation of the foundation trenches for the new house in the west of the site. This edge was aligned north-east/south-west and identified in four of the east-west foundation trenches over a length of 11m. Orange and brown clay-silt fill deposits (18, 19 and 20), clearly continuous with fills 6 and 7 recorded in Trench 5, were visible to an overall depth of over 2m. One piece of animal bone pelvis was recovered from these fills (17), but no datable finds. Brick and plastic visible in the side of the foundation trenches in the south-east corner of the new house indicates modern disturbance in this area, and prevented investigation of the foundation trenches to record the projected line of feature 16, recorded in Trench 6 (see Fig. 3).

It is possible that the two cut edges recorded (5 and 16) relate to two different features, but their near-parallel alignment, and the extent and similarity of the related fills, strongly suggests that they formed the edges of a single ditch aligned north-east/south-west. The ditch was around 6m wide, and although its base was not identified, it was at least 2m deep.

## **5.2 Trenches 2 and 7**

The earliest feature in Trench 2 was a vertical-sided pit (12) over 0.55m deep which had been cut through natural gravel deposits (Fig. 3, Section 2), and interpreted as a gravel quarry. The single fill (11) of this pit contained clay-pipe stems and a sherd of post-medieval pottery. Pit 12 was apparently truncated by a second pit (10) (Fig. 3, Section 2), over 6.6m north-south and over 0.7m deep. The eastern edge of this large pit was identified in Trench 7, indicating that it was over 10 metres east-west. Further clay-pipe stems, fragments of post-medieval roof tile and



bottle glass were recovered from its fill (9). Pit 10 may represent an upper fill of the original pit 12 rather than a feature in its own right; if so, pit 12 would have also have been very large.

## **6.0 FINDS** by Joyce Compton

Small groups of finds were recovered from six contexts in all. The material has been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context. Full details are provided in Appendix 3. Most of the datable finds are post-medieval with the exception of those from fill 2 of feature 1. Two sherds of medieval coarse ware from this context are broadly datable to the 12th to 14th centuries. The post-medieval material is not more closely datable, but is pre-Victorian in character. The baked clay fragment from the fill of feature 5 would not be out of place in a prehistoric context, but in itself is not intrinsically datable. The flints, unstratified in Trench 5, are unworked and are thus also not intrinsically datable.

No further work is required on any of this material. The finds should be retained until the archiving stage, when selected discard could take place.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS (Fig. 4)**

The evaluation trenching and subsequent monitoring of foundation trenches has identified a feature interpreted as a large ditch crossing the west end of the development area on a roughly north-east/south-west alignment. Although it is conceivable that the cut edges 5 and 16 and their related fills are two separate features, such as two large adjacent quarry pits, it is much more likely that they were part of the same feature, in the form of a large north-east/south-west orientated ditch. The ditch extended for over 20m in length and was around 6m wide and over 2m deep. The position and orientation of this ditch coincide with the projected line of the outer enclosure ditch of Chipping Hill Camp, constructed in the Late Bronze Age and re-used in the Middle Iron Age and at intervals up to the medieval period (Rodwell 1993, 8-33).

The full profile of the ditch was not recorded because of the limited scope of the archaeological work in response to the limited disturbance involved in the construction of strip foundations. The ditch is a little narrower than in other sections excavated across the outer enclosure ditch, but the difference is not great, and may merely be the result of truncation of the upper part of the ditch. The only dating evidence recovered was two sherds of medieval pottery dated to the 12th-14th centuries. This material is not well stratified, as it was recovered from a disturbed top

fill of the ditch, but its presence is consistent with dating evidence from elsewhere in Chipping Hill Camp for medieval re-use of the outer enclosure ditch (see Assessment of Results, below).

A large post-medieval gravel quarry pit was identified in the centre-north of the development area, but no other archaeological features were identified in the south and east of the area.

## **8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS (Fig. 4)**

The archaeological work has located the position of a ditch believed to be the outer enclosure ditch of the Chipping Hill Camp hill-fort. The exact position of this ditch had not previously been identified by excavation in the south-eastern part of the hill-fort circuit. Although only a limited investigation was carried out, and the full profile of the ditch was not recorded, its overall dimensions and location provide a reasonable correlation with excavated sections of the outer ditch elsewhere. The limited scope of the investigation meant that it was not possible to recover significant pottery dating evidence or artefacts from the ditch fills, or to assess the potential for survival of environmental remains. The few sherds of medieval pottery recovered do, however, suggest that the south-eastern part of the outer enclosure ditch may have been open in the medieval period or later, although this conclusion should be treated with caution as the pottery was not well stratified.

The results of previous excavations demonstrate that the outer enclosure ditch was an original feature of the Chipping Hill Camp hill-fort, dated to the Late Bronze Age, with good evidence for it being recut in the Middle Iron Age, and on later occasions up to the early medieval period (Rodwell 1993, 17-27). The best evidence for early medieval clearance of the outer enclosure ditch comes from Trench X in the north of the circuit, excavated by Davison in 1969, where well-stratified early 13th-century pottery was recorded in a re-cut that cleaned out the ditch to a depth of over 2m (Rodwell 1993, 21 and fig. 16). The presence of medieval pottery at the 2005 site is therefore consistent with the results of earlier excavation of the outer enclosure ditch, even if the quality of the recent evidence is poor.

The main significance of the 2005 investigation is that the line of the south-eastern circuit of the outer enclosure ditch has now been confirmed on the ground by fieldwork. This work suggests that the outer ditch survives substantially intact, with over 2m depth of ditch fill present, even where there has been extensive modern truncation. Former land surfaces and shallow features appear not to have survived modern truncation on the present site, and may not survive over the wider area. There is potential, however, for any future investigation of this part of the south-

eastern area of the Chipping Hill Camp earthworks to be more precisely targeted on the line of the outer enclosure ditch. Any future archaeological work on the line of the ditch should include at least one trench designed to record its full profile, the sequence of fills and recuts/clearances, and artefacts and environmental evidence, especially pottery dating evidence.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Essex CC Field Archaeology Unit would like to thank Parkland Developments Ltd for commissioning and funding the archaeological work, and especially Rob Crow for his help in liaison on site and for providing a mechanical excavator. The archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by T. Ennis and A. Turner, and the monitoring of foundation trenches by T. Ennis, of the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit. The project was managed by P. Allen of Essex CC FAU. The report was prepared by T. Ennis and the background to the Chipping Hill Camp and the assessment of the fieldwork results was undertaken by P. Allen. The project was monitored by V. Clarke of the ECC Historic Environment Management Team.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Clarke V.	2005	<i>Design Brief for Archaeological Trial Trenching at 32a Avenue Road, Witham.</i> ECC internal Publication
ECC FAU	2005	<i>Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Trial Trenching at 32a Avenue Road, Witham.</i> ECC Report
Medlycott, M.	1998	<i>Witham. Historic Towns Assessment Report</i> , Essex CC Report
Rodwell, W.	1993	<i>The Origins and Early Development of Witham, Essex.</i> Oxbow monograph <b>26</b>
Wright, T.	1836	<i>The History and Topography of the County of Essex</i> , Vol. I (London)

## APPENDIX 1

### TRENCH DATA

All dimensions given in metres

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Co-ordinates</b>
1	8.4m x 1.6m x 0.2m deep, orientated N/S Topsoil – Grey brown clay silt (disturbed)	NW 582166, 215127 SE 582169, 215119
2	9m x 1.6m x 0.8m deep, orientated N/S Topsoil – Dark grey clay silt (disturbed) Subsoil – Orange gravel and sand	NW 582177, 215134 SE 582181, 215125
3	10m x 1.6m x 0.25m deep, orientated E/W Topsoil – Dark grey clay silt (disturbed) Subsoil – Orange gravel and sand, some grey staining	NW 582176, 215124 SE 582186, 215125
4	10m x 1.6m x 0.5m deep, orientated NE/SW Topsoil – Dark grey clay silt (disturbed), overlain by concrete at E end Subsoil – Orange brown gravel and sand	NW 582189, 215127 SE 582199, 215130
5	5.8m x 1.6m x 0.2m deep, orientated N/S Topsoil – Dark grey clay silt (disturbed)	NW 582163, 215116 SE 582166, 215111
6	7m x 1.6m x 0.2m deep, orientated N/S Topsoil – Dark grey clay silt (disturbed) Subsoil – Orange gravel	NW 582170, 215130 SE 582174, 215124
7	4m x 1.6m x 0.9m deep, orientated E/W Topsoil – Dark grey clay silt (disturbed) Subsoil – Orange sand	NW 582186, 215134 SE 582191, 215134

## APPENDIX 2

### CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

All dimensions given in metres

Context	Type	Trench	Description	Period
1	?Ditch	1	Not defined in trench	Medieval?
2	Fill of 1	1	Light brown silt	Medieval?
3	Fill of 1	1	Mid brown silt	Medieval?
4	Fill of 1	1	Yellow – mid brown sandy silt	Medieval?
5	?Ditch	5	15m+ x c.6m x 2m+ deep	Medieval?
6	Fill of 5	5	Mid brown silty clay	Medieval?
7	Fill of 5	5	Light brown yellow mottles	Medieval?
8	Layer	2	Topsoil in Trench 2	Modern
9	Fill of 10	2	Dark brownish grey clay silt	Post-medieval
10	Pit	2	6.6m+ x 10m+ x 0.7m+ deep	Post-medieval
11	Fill of 12	2	Orange brown clay silt with grey clay bands	Post-medieval
12	Pit	2	1.1m+ x 1.1m+ x 0.55m+ deep	Post-medieval
13	U/S	5	Unstratified finds from trench 5	Undated
14	Fill of 16	6	Grey brown clay silt	Medieval?
15	Fill of 16	6	Orange brown clay silt	Medieval?
16	?Ditch	6	5m+ x 2.5m+ x 0.7m+ deep	Medieval?
17	U/S	Foundation	Unstratified find from fill in foundation trench	Medieval?
18	Fill of 5	Foundation	Orange clay silt	Medieval?
19	Fill of 5	Foundation	Grey brown clay silt	Medieval?
20	Fill of 5	Foundation	Brown clay silt	Medieval?

## APPENDIX 3

### FINDS DATA

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
2	1	1	12	Animal bone; cattle tooth	- 12th-14th C
		2	20	Pottery; body sherds, medieval coarse ware	
7	5	-	30	Charcoal; three joining fragments of burnt round-wood, diameter 45mm	-
		1	68	Baked clay fragment	-
9	10	-	4	Clinker (Discarded)	-
		2	6	Oyster shell fragments, decayed (Discarded)	-
		2	42	Roof tile fragments	Post med.
		1	4	Bottle glass, decayed	Post med.
		5	18	Clay pipe stems	Post med.
11	12	2	8	Clay pipe stems	Post med.
		1	4	Pottery; body sherd, green-brown internal glaze	Post med.
13	Finds	2	32	Flints, unworked	-
17	Finds	1	52	Animal bone; pelvis fragment, large mammal	-

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **INDEX TO ARCHIVE**

**SITE NAME: 32a Avenue Road, Witham**

**SITE CODE: WH21**

#### **Index to Archive:**

##### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Copy of the Brief for the Excavation
- 1.2 WSI

##### **2. Research Archive**

- 2.1 Client Report
- 2.2 Finds Report

##### **3. Site Archive**

- 3.1 Context Record Register
- 3.2 Original Context Records (1 to 20)
- 3.3 7 Trench Sheets
- 3.4 Plan Register
- 3.5 Section Register
- 3.6 Levels Register
- 3.7 2 A4 plan sheets
- 3.8 2 A4 section sheets
- 3.9 Trench location plan
- 3.10 Photographic Register
- 3.11 Site Photographic Record (One Set of Colour Slides, Colour and B/W prints)

#### **Not in File**

- 1 large plan sheet
- 1 large section sheet

#### **Finds**

The finds occupy less than one box.

## APPENDIX 5: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

<b>Site name/Address:</b> 32a Avenue Road, Witham	
<b>Parish:</b> Witham	<b>District:</b> Braintree
<b>NGR:</b> TL 8217 1512	<b>Site Code:</b> WH21
<b>Type of Work:</b> Archaeological Evaluation and Monitoring	<b>Site Director/Group:</b> T. Ennis ECC Field Archaeology Unit
<b>Date of Work:</b> 19 to 20 May 2005, 31 May and 1 June 2005	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> 87m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Location of Finds/Curating Museum:</b> Braintree	<b>Funding source:</b> Parkland Developments Ltd
<b>Further Seasons Anticipated?:</b> No	<b>Related HER Nos.:</b> 8106-8110
<b>Final Report:</b> July 2005	
<b>Periods Represented:</b> Prehistoric?, Medieval?, Post-medieval	
<p><b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b></p> <p><i>An archaeological trial trenching evaluation and monitoring of foundation trenches was carried out on the site of a residential development at 32a Avenue Road, Witham.</i></p> <p><i>A large ditch, 6m wide and over 2m deep, was identified, crossing the western end of the development area on a north-east/south-west alignment. The line of the ditch corresponds with the projected line of the outer enclosure ditch of Chipping Hill Camp, a hill-fort constructed in the Late Bronze Age, refortified in the Middle Iron Age, and reoccupied at intervals up to the medieval period. Only the upper fills of the ditch were excavated due to the limited disturbance expected from the house foundations. The only dating evidence recovered from the ditch was two sherds of medieval pottery dated to the 12th-14th centuries from its uppermost fill. This is consistent with early medieval recutting of the outer ditch recorded in an excavation on the northern side of the hill-fort by Davison in 1969.</i></p> <p><i>Two intercutting post-medieval quarry pits were also investigated. No other archaeological features or deposits were identified.</i></p>	
<b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b> -	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> T. Ennis	<b>Date of Summary:</b> July 2005





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Fig.1. Site location

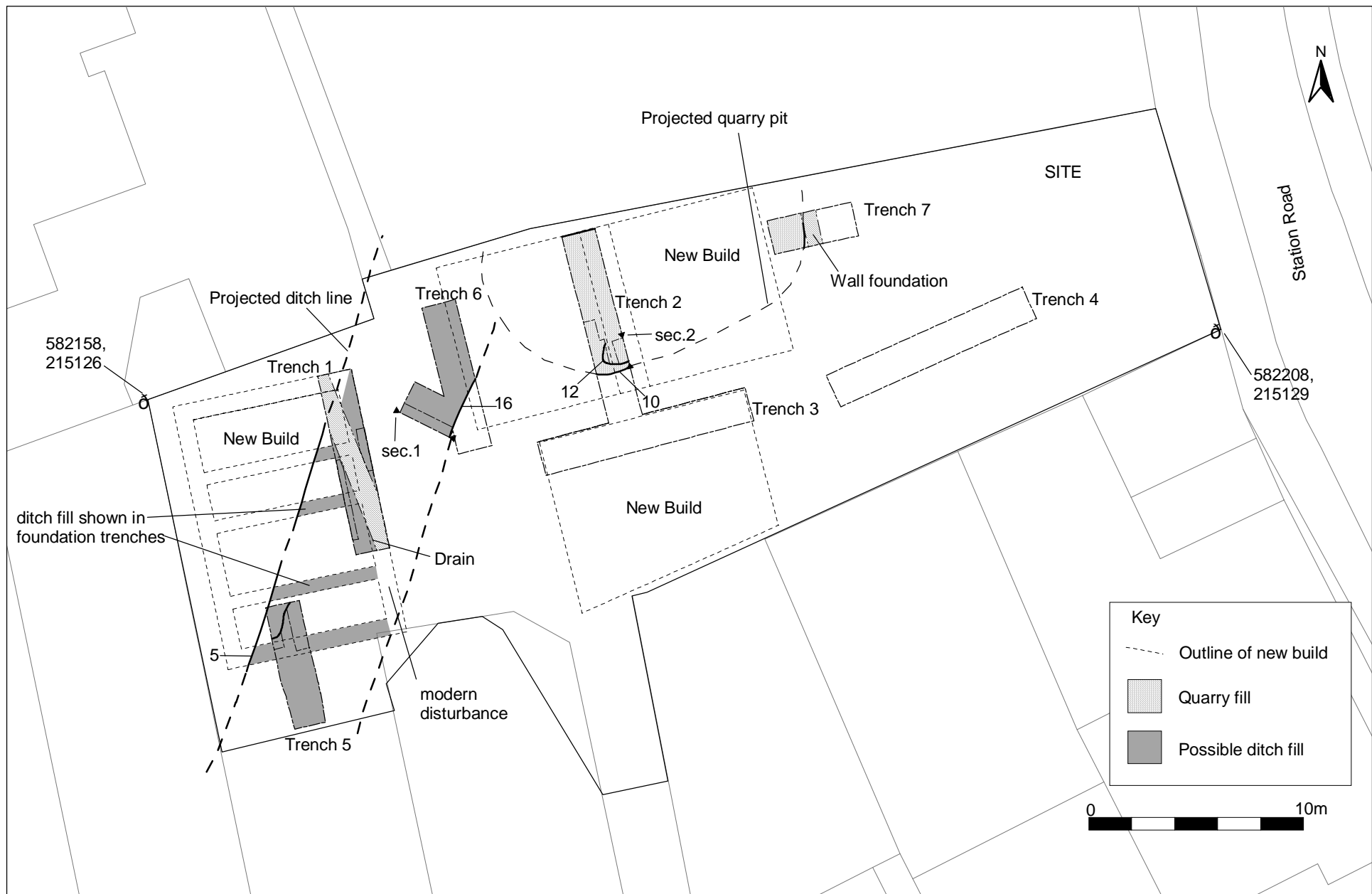


Fig.2. Location of evaluation trenches

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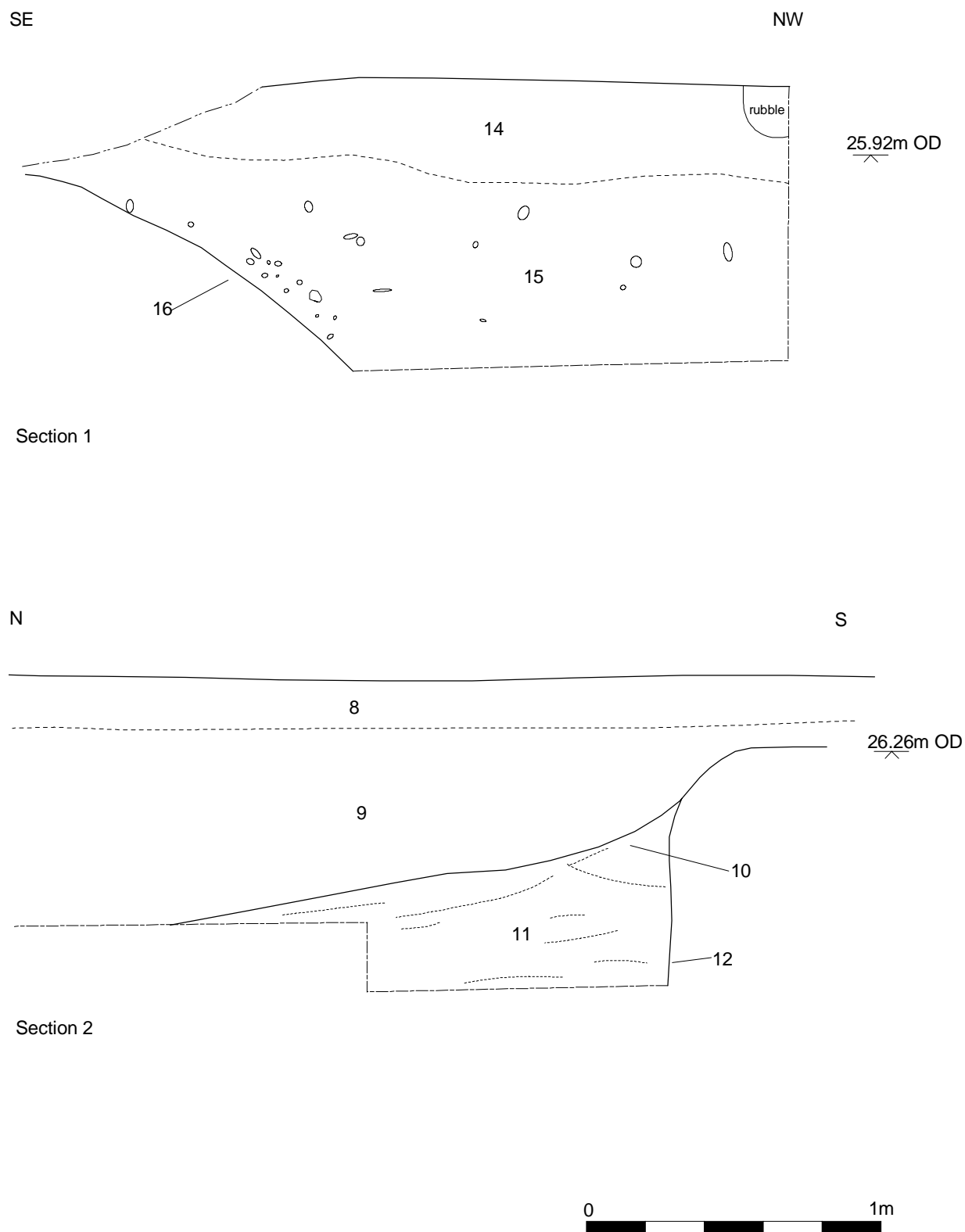
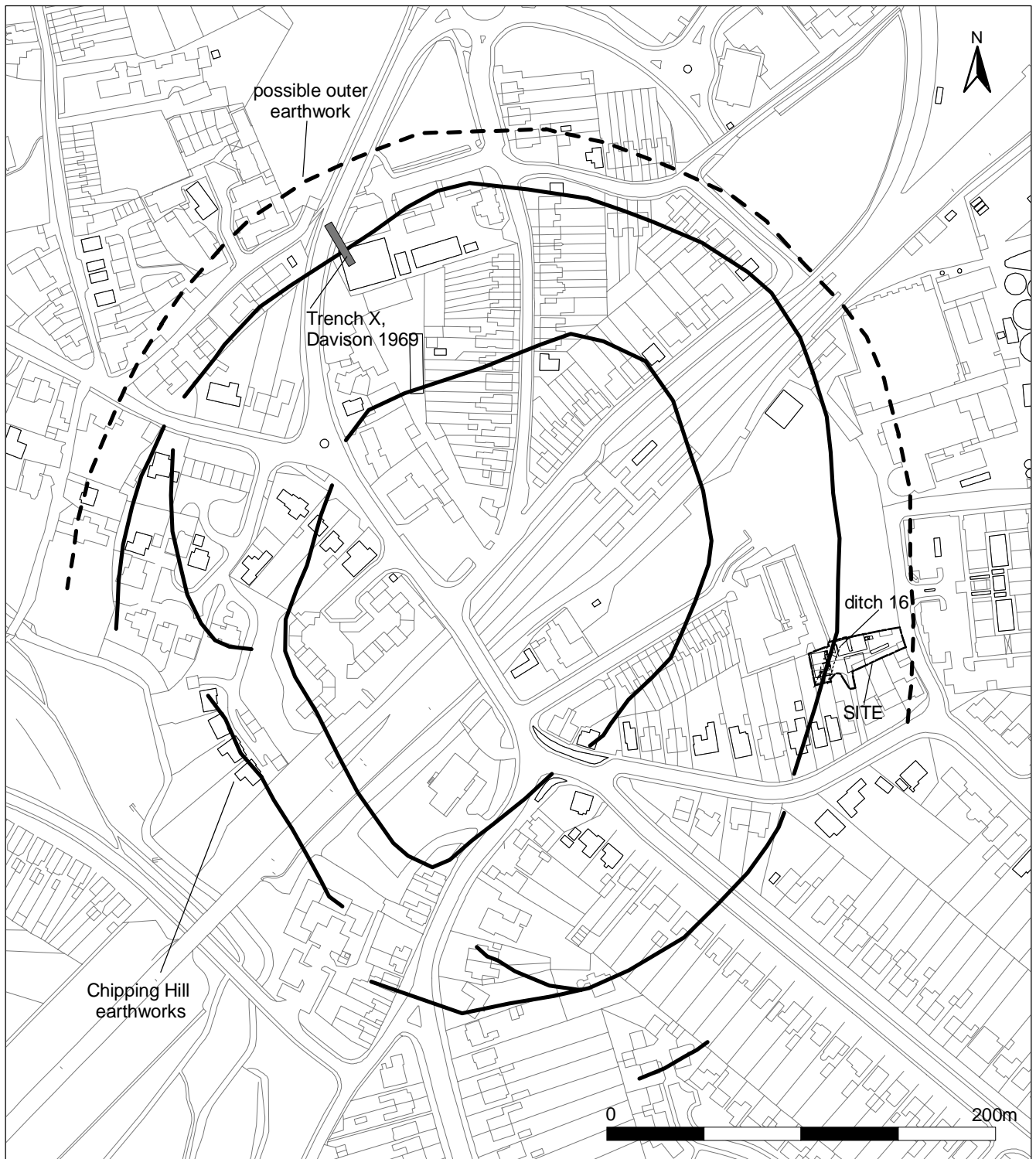


Fig.3. Sections 1 and 2



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Fig.4. The site, showing the probable position of the Chipping hill defensive ditches (after Rodwell 1993)