

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT CALF STREET,  
GREAT TORRINGTON, DEVON**

**by**

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**Exeter Archaeology**

**Report No. 08.30**

**Project No. 6011**

**March 2008**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Scott Wilson Ltd, on behalf of Taylor Wimpey (South-West), and presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by Exeter Archaeology (EA) on land to the north of Calf Street, Great Torrington, Devon (NGR SS 49880 19450) between October 2007 and February 2008. The work was required by the local planning authority, Torridge District Council, as a condition of the grant of planning permission for a housing development (application ref: 1/2227/2003/OUT).

## 2. THE SITE

The development area is situated on the northern side of Calf Street (Fig. 1), adjacent to the historic core of Great Torrington. The site is bounded on the northern and eastern sides by Juries Lane, and by Gas Lane to the west. The land was under pasture, and divided into two major fields by an approximately north-south aligned hedgebank. Towards the southern end of the main field boundary, a curving hedgebank enclosed an additional small area. A further large hedgebank forms the boundary between the development area and Juries Lane.

Topographically, the site occupies the upper reaches of a north-facing slope overlooking a tributary of the River Torridge, and is situated between 86m and 92m AOD. The underlying solid geology comprises Upper Carboniferous sandstones and slates.

## 3. PROJECT BRIEF

A brief for the project was supplied by Scott Wilson Ltd. The principle objective of the programme of archaeological works set out in the brief was:

*...where possible, to identify and record the presence/absence, nature, extent, and date of any archaeological/palaeoenvironmental deposits and or features which are disturbed as a result of the excavation of ground works on the relevant hedge banks.*

## 4. METHOD

Detailed records were made at the position of six trenches along the main north-south aligned hedgebank and at two points along the smaller bank that extended east from its southern end (Fig. 2). A single record was made at an incomplete exposure through the perimeter hedgebank adjacent to Juries Lane on the eastern side of the development area. In all cases the trenches were of sufficient depth to expose the underlying natural substrate.

The resultant sections were cleaned by hand, and recorded using EA *pro forma* hedgebank morphology and context record sheets. Drawn records were made at a scale of 1:20, and located on plan. A photographic record was made using black and white film and colour digital media.

Topsoil stripping in the vicinity of the hedgebanks (see Fig. 2) was also observed and a number of finds recovered.

## 5. RESULTS

The two larger fields were laid to pasture. The smaller enclosure was partially overgrown and contained an area of dense coniferous scrub at the northern end.

### 5.1 The main north-south hedge (Fig. 2, Fig. 3; Sections 2 and 5)

The main north-south boundary comprised a large but irregular bank up to 2.8m wide and 1.3m high, supporting dense bracken with patches of ash and thorn scrub. In plan, the boundary had a gentle S-shaped curve (Fig. 2).

The construction of the bank was consistently of earth throughout, with no evidence of stone or slate revetment except for a modern repair incorporating fragments of broken concrete towards the northern end. The material for the original bank appears to have derived from the excavation of a ditch along the western side (503/521).

The ditch was up to 0.7m wide, and cut into the top of the natural substrate to a maximum depth of 0.28m. The profile was generally similar along the length of the ditch, with moderately sloping sides and an irregular flat or concave base.

Both the core of the bank (502/525) and the fill of the ditch (504, 522, 528) were composed of a friable yellowish-brown silty clay loam. This was indistinguishable from a 0.5m thick deposit of colluvium (515, 520, 527) beneath the modern ploughsoil. A single sherd of undiagnostic medieval pottery was recovered from the base of the ditch, although finds recovered from the upper part of the fill and the colluvium included material of post-medieval date.

Evidence of both the erosion and slumping of the bank and ditch, and remedial post-medieval and modern recutting and deposition of material upon the bank was present at intervals along the length of the boundary (505, 506/507, 526, 527).

Towards the southern end, a ditch of post-medieval date (523/524) had been cut along the eastern side of the hedgebank, probably contemporaneously with the creation of the smaller southern enclosure, described below.

A single feature (517/518) was exposed in section 5. It appeared to be of limited extent (and was not seen in plan) and may be a small pit or posthole. No finds were recovered and its date and function remain uncertain. It was, however, sealed by the primary bank.

### 5.2 The southern enclosure

Extending east from the southern end of the main north-south aligned boundary was an earthen hedgebank up to 2.4m wide and 0.96m high. After some 18m, the bank curved to the south to form a long, narrow, plot extending towards Calf Street (Fig.1).

As with the main north-south boundary, the material of the primary core was indistinguishable from the deposits of colluvium present to either side of the bank. No primary ditch was evident to either side of the bank.

Evidence of late post-medieval and modern maintenance of the bank was present at intervals, and along much of the eastern and northern (outer) face were remnants of a coursed stone and slate revetment.

Pottery of post-medieval date was recovered from both the primary core and the colluvium.

### 5.3 The perimeter hedge

The eastern section of the perimeter boundary against Juries Lane comprised a small earthen bank, 0.8m wide and less than 0.4m high, situated on the upper shoulder of the substantial eroded hollow (over 1m deep) within which the lane now lies (Section 10, Fig. 3).

The bank had a small central core (547), apparently raised from a shallow ditch (545) on its western (inner) side. The ditch fill, 546, could not be distinguished from the colluvium accumulated to the rear of the bank, nor, readily, from the material of the bank itself. All comprised deposits of mid yellowish-brown silty clay. A further deposit of colluvial material (548) had built up against the west side of the bank, whilst the eastern side appeared to have eroded into the hollow of the lane (549).

Further to the west, the northern boundary comprised only a band of vegetation along the shoulder of the hollow. No evidence of the bank was seen, and it is assumed to have been lost through erosion. Trenching revealed a 1.45m thick deposit of colluvium, accumulated against the southern side of this boundary.

### 5.4 Monitoring of groundworks

Monitoring of topsoil stripping and the excavation of service trenches and geotechnical pits revealed no archaeological features or deposits other than the exposure, in section only, of a 3.4m wide and 0.6m deep pit of uncertain date and function (Observation 8, Fig. 2).

Depths of topsoil, colluvium, and the heights of the natural substrate were recorded, and details are contained within the site archive.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The S-shaped layout of the main north-south hedgebank conforms to the general expectation of boundaries associated with medieval strip fields. Whilst the only datable finds from it are post-medieval, there have clearly been significant opportunities for the introduction of material during later repair and maintenance.

Whilst a single sherd of medieval pottery from the lower ditch fill provides an ambiguous date for its primary infilling, a considerable quantity (45 sherds @ 370g) of medieval pottery, from the period prior to 1500 was recovered from the fabric of the bank, the early colluvium, and the ploughsoil. This represents an appreciable background scatter. On balance, therefore, it is considered likely that the primary

core and ditch of the present hedgebank are of medieval origin, or represent a perpetuation of a boundary alignment of that date.

On this basis of the form of the junction with the main north-south hedge, the bank that forms the smaller enclosure to south is thought to be a later addition. A precise date is unknown. A sherd of 19th-century pottery was recovered from the primary bank, although this appears to be intrusive. The overall form and orientation of the enclosure (Fig. 2) displays some conformity with the medieval boundaries, and a later medieval or early post-medieval date would seem likely.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main north-south aligned hedgebank was probably medieval. The inconclusive dating, resulting from the presence of post-medieval ceramics, probably reflects considerable repair and enhancement in later periods.

The smaller southern enclosure is likely to be of later date, although the degree of chronological separation between the two features is not clear, and a later medieval or early post-medieval date is considered probable.

The origins of the current perimeter hedge are uncertain, but likely to be of some antiquity, given the depth of the eroded hollow within which Juries Lane lies to the north.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was commissioned by Scott Wilson and carried out in accordance with their brief. The fieldwork was undertaken by C.S. Wakeham, K. Tyler, M.C. Leverett and S.D. Hughes (EA). The report was prepared by C.S. Wakeham. The drawings and illustrations were prepared by N. Goodwin (EA). The project was administered by J. Valentin (EA) and by A. Mayes (Scott Wilson). The cooperation and assistance of the Roadform site staff was greatly appreciated.

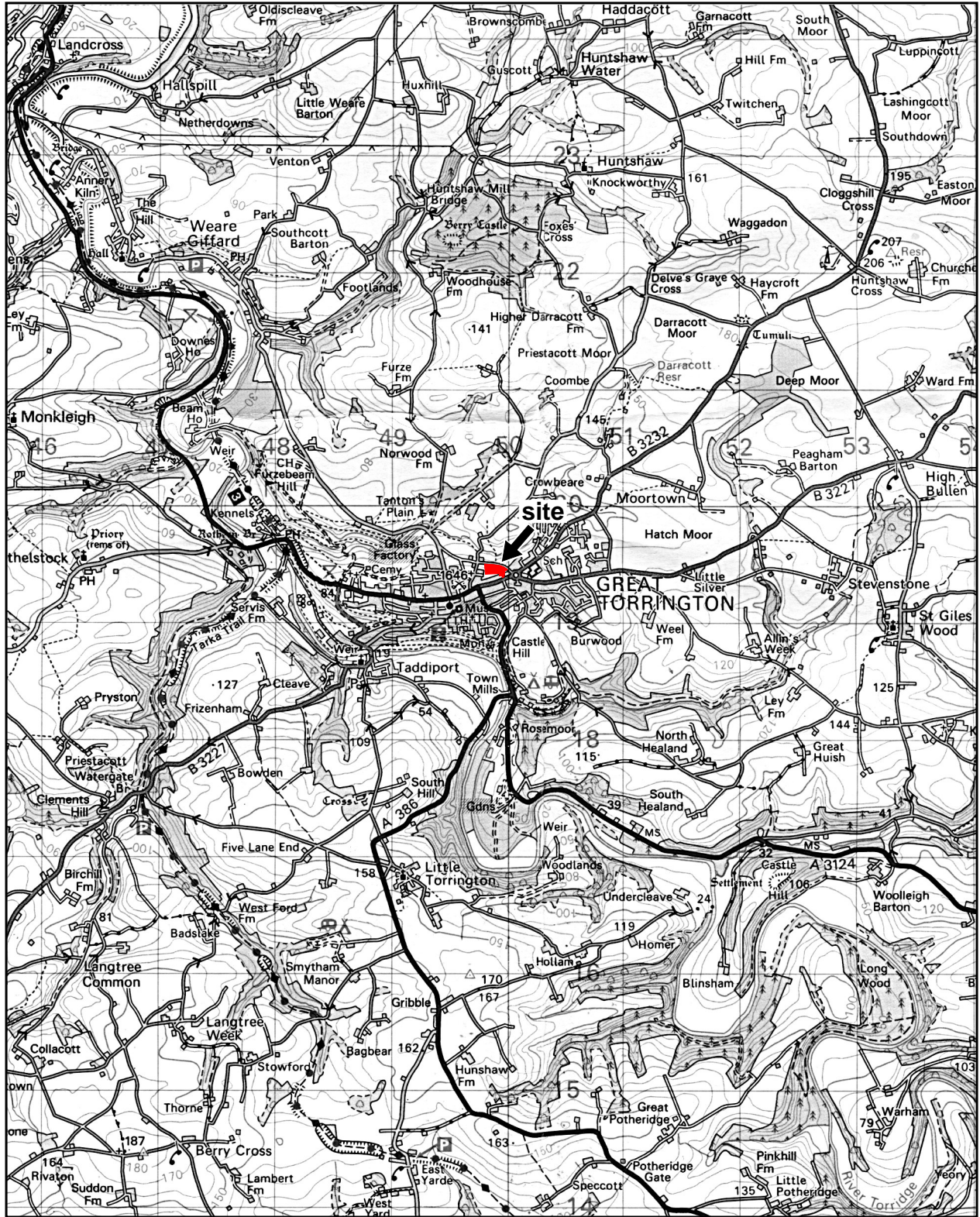


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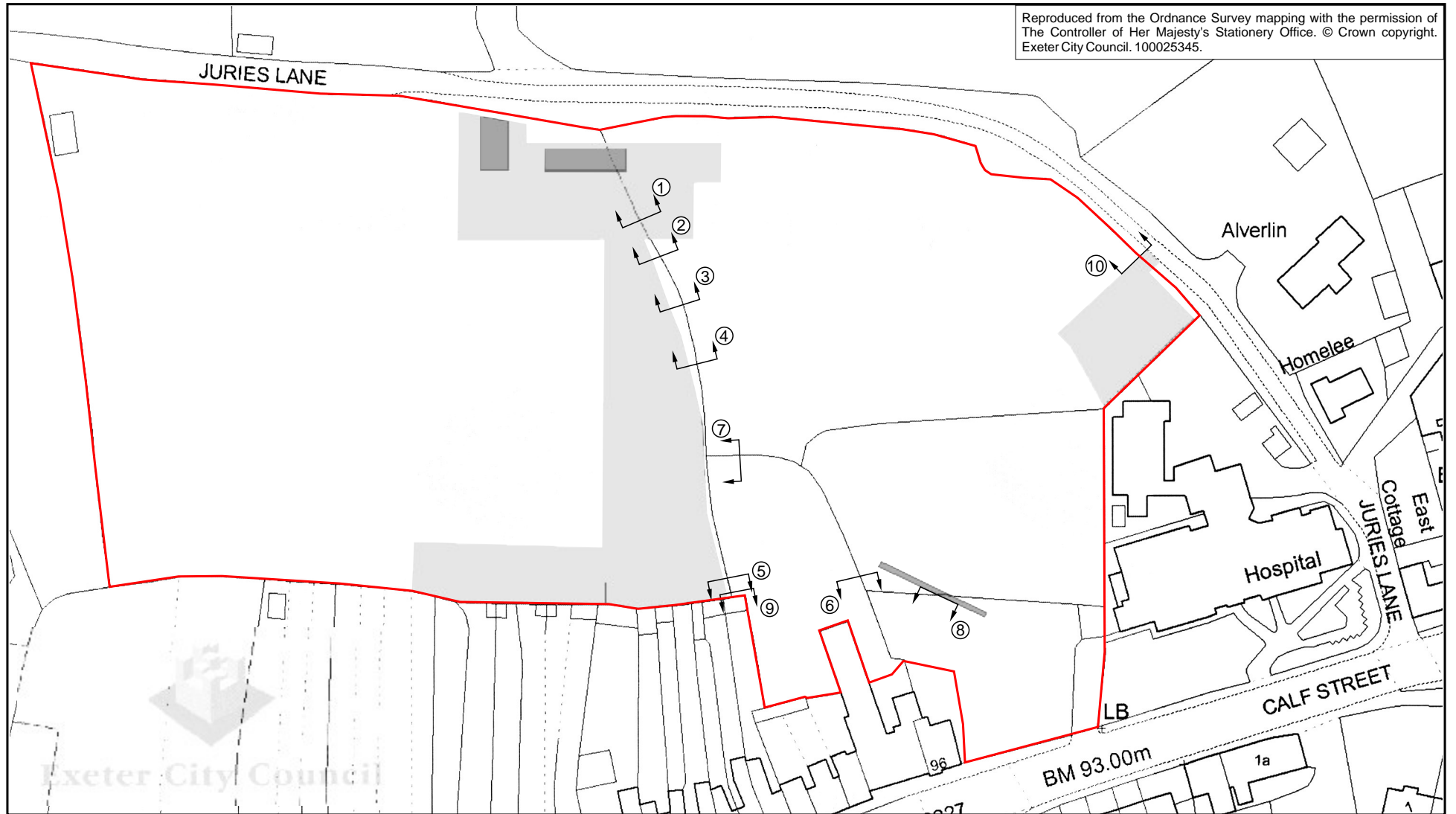


Fig. 2 Location of hedgebank sections, areas of observed topsoil stripping (light shading) and trenches (dark shading). Scale 1:1,000.



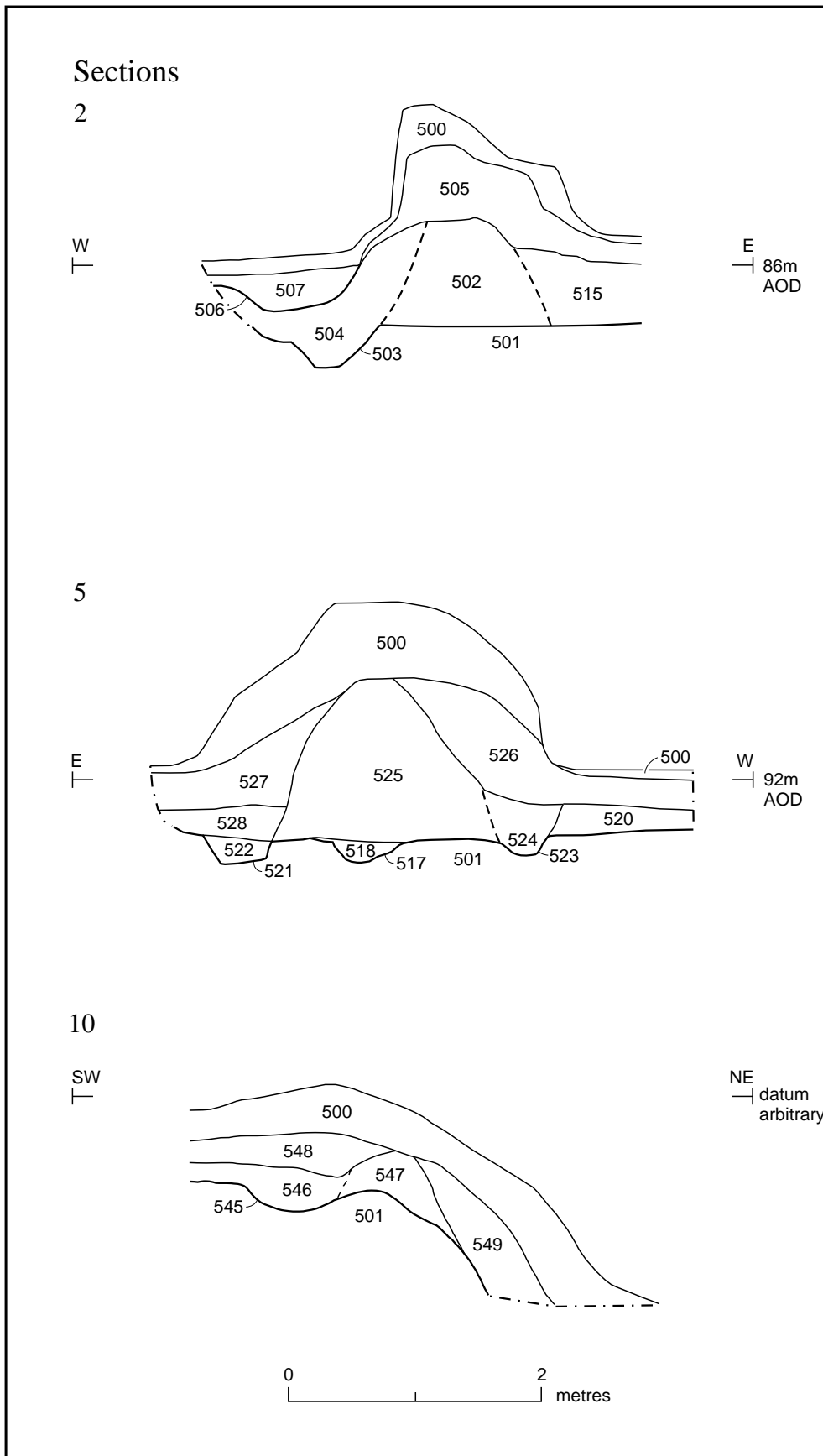


Fig. 3 Hedgebank sections.



Plate 1 General view of the central hedge from the western field.



Plate 2 Section 1 through the central hedge. 1m scale.



Plate 3 Section 3 through the central hedge. 1m scale.



Plate 4 Truncation of northern perimeter scarp. 1m scale.