

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT MASONS YARD, FORE STREET
HOLBETON, DEVON**

**Gerald Wood Homes
on behalf of
The Flete Estate**

by
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Exeter Archaeology

Report No. 07.47

Project No. 6059

June 2007

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Historical background	1
3. Methodology	2
4. Results	3
5. Finds	4
6. Discussion	4
7. Archive	5

Acknowledgements

Sources consulted

Appendix 1 Context descriptions by trench

List of illustrations

Fig. 1. Location of site

Fig. 2 The area in 1765

Fig. 3 The area *c.* 1785

Fig. 4 Extract from the 1842 tithe map of Holbeton

Fig. 5 The site in 1885

Fig. 6 The site in 1905

Fig. 7 Location of evaluation trenches

Fig. 8 Trench 2: plan and section

Fig. 9 Trench 3: plan

Fig. 10 Section through hedge-bank [6004].

Pl. 1. Oblique view of hedge-bank [2004], view to SE

Pl. 2. Section through hedge-bank [6004], view to East

1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the results of an archaeological trench evaluation carried out by Exeter Archaeology (EA) during June 2007 on land at Masons Yard, Fore Street, Holbeton, Devon (centred on NGR SX 6135 5010) (Fig. 1). This work has been undertaken on behalf of Gerald Wood Homes and The Flete Estate in advance of proposed residential development. It represents the first stage of archaeological works required by South Hams District Council, as advised by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Service.

The site is located on the southern edge of Holbeton, adjacent to the cemetery of All Saints Church, to the west of Fore Street. It covers an area of approximately 0.61 hectares and current land use comprises a series of agricultural buildings and fields. It is situated on gently sloping ground with underlying solid geology consisting of Grits and Slates of the Lower Devonian Staddon series (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1974).

The aim of the work was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological features or deposits within the area to be affected by the proposed development, and if present, to establish their date, character, function and extent. The results of this evaluation will inform the planning process and may be used to formulate a further stage of archaeological work should planning permission be granted.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site is of an irregular shape extending back from the west side of Fore Street within the village and ancient parish of Holbeton. The maximum length of the site is some 155m and its width up to 60m, but the site becomes constricted at its east end, with a frontage of only some 12m on Fore Street. The geology comprises Staddon Grits (and slates) of the Lower Devonian Period. There have been no previous archaeological investigations in the area.

This name of Holbeton is not recorded until 1229, when it occurred as *Holbouton*. When the Domesday Survey was made in 1086 the area was presumably included under Flete, then held by Robert of Aumale. But Holbeton was a separate manor by the reign of Henry I (1100–1135), when it was given to Matilda Peverel. It was subsequently in the ownership of the Hele family, passing to the Bulteels in 1716.

Very little can be said about the actual site prior to the parish being surveyed following the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836. The tithe map of 1842 shows the bulk of the site to have comprised five long narrow orchards with a private road along the northern boundary (Fig. 4). The curving nature of the strips strongly suggests that they resulted from the enclosure of former open field plough-strips, although without earlier maps this cannot be proved. There is much evidence of this in the Holbeton area in the late 18th century as can be seen by the numerous small narrow fields on Fig. 3. The tithe apportionment of 1839 and the census of two years later enable something to be said about the occupiers, all the property being owned by John Crocker Bulteel. The private road and northernmost orchard was said to have been occupied by H. J. Millman, who appears to have been a publican, perhaps at the George Inn. The orchard to its south was occupied by John Godfrey, a mason. The

three orchards to its south were smaller, with a maximum width of 10m, the northern one containing a small structure, perhaps no more than a shed. The middle one of the five was occupied by Benjamin Dingle, who was not recorded as living in Fore Street two years later. This strip extended to a building on the street frontage, part of which lay within the site, but the building was not shown on the tithe map as a dwelling. The two strips to the south were occupied by James Denbow and Edward Nichols, both agriculture labourers with cottages on the street, with the 1841 census suggesting that the former was sharing a cottage with James Boolds, another labourer.

A directory of 1850, when Lady Elizabeth Bulteel was lady of the manor, described Holbeton as 'a large straggling village'. In July 1863 the Flete estate was auctioned, comprising 'a noble mansion of baronial character' with 2,602 acres 'including great part of the village of Holbeton', and was said to have been 'sold for £150,000 to an Australian gentleman'. Subsequent directories initially show William Francis Splatt as the lord of the manor and residing at Flete House, but the 'Freehold Residential and Manorial Estate' was again for sale in 1876, but slightly reduced to some 2,420 acres. The purchaser was Henry Bingham Mildmay, and much of the property has been retained by the family.

One is confined to map evidence for the history of the site after the tithe survey. When the area was surveyed at 1:2500 scale by the Ordnance Survey in 1885 a little rationalisation had been achieved with the strips that had been occupied by Benjamin Dingle and James Denbow having been merged, while the shed had been replaced with a larger structure, with four smaller structures present (Fig. 5). The area was re-surveyed in 1905 by which time another structure, identifiable as a smithy, was present. To the north of the site, the churchyard had been extended to abut it (Fig. 6). The next survey was not until the post-war period, the map of 1951 showing further infilling. In particular, an open-fronted structure, some 33m long was present, although parts of three of the strips remained as orchards. The cottage where James Boolds and James Denbow once lived had by then been demolished.

3. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a brief prepared by the Devon County Council Historic environment Service (DCHES Ref: Arch/dc/sh/11136). The brief includes building recording aspects required on the site but these are not included in the present report. A methods statement or Written Scheme of investigation was prepared by Exeter Archaeology in response to the Brief and approved by DCHES in May 2007.

A total of 5 evaluation trenches and 2 test pits were excavated across the site. Due to localised site constraints, the initial 5% sample was reduced to 4% (trenches totalled 93m in length, with each trench 1.5m wide). The trenches were positioned to provide general coverage across the site (Fig. 2).

The trenches were excavated by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. All machining was carried out under the supervision and to the satisfaction of the attending archaeologist.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the standard EA recording system. Single context recording sheets were used as well as individual trench recording sheets. Sections and plans for each trench were drawn at 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50. A detailed black and white print and colour digital photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings, samples, small finds and context sheets on *pro forma* record sheets. Finds were labelled and bagged on site and processed at EA offices.

4. RESULTS

Trench 1 was closed due to the presence of live modern services. Alternative locations immediately to the north across the entrance were also found to have services, including a live electricity cable. A 1m square test pit was excavated adjacent to an existing shed on the south side, but this proved to contain a sewer pipe.

Trenches 4 and 5 revealed no archaeological features. Trenches 2, 3 and 6 revealed features of varying archaeological potential. Detailed context descriptions by trench are set out in Appendix 1.

Trench 2 contained a previously unknown hedge-bank (2004) (Fig. 8; Pl. 1). The hedge-bank was constructed of crudely coursed shillet blocks ranging in size from 0.2 – 0.5m. This was constructed to a depth of approximately 1m within a scarp cut through the natural geology [2003] and revetted with a dark brown silt-clay (2005). It is suggested that this formed the foundations of a larger hedge-bank oriented north-south, the upper extent of which has not survived. The hedge-bank was flanked to the east by a shallow ditch about 2m wide [2006]. This has been heavily truncated, containing only a primary fill of dark brown clay-silt (2007).

Trench 2 also contained three other ditches, [2008], [2010] and [2012] (Fig 8). Two of these ditches [2008] and [2012] yielded no artefactual material and therefore cannot be securely dated. Ditch [2010], however, yielded a significant number of medieval pottery sherds as detailed below.

Trench 3 contained three small sub-circular postholes [3004], [3006] and [3008] (Fig. 9). These postholes had an equidistance of approximately 2m and formed an east-west arc within Trench 3. No pottery was recovered to date these postholes, however, the presence of a well preserved in-situ timber stake in fill (3007) of posthole [3006] and the retrieval of a probable modern iron fragment (possibly relating to agricultural machinery) from fill (3005) of posthole [3004], may suggest a relatively recent age.

Trench 6 was excavated to record hedge-bank (6004) (Fig. 10); as the bank had already been truncated at this point it avoided the necessity of breaching a surviving bank and causing unnecessary damage to the structure. The ‘trench’ therefore merely required cutting back the existing face and removing vegetation, with a small amount of excavation to ascertain the original dimensions, retrieve possible dating material and establish whether a ‘buried soil’ (the old land surface before the bank was built) was present. The existing bank survives a height of just over 1m. It is about 2m wide at the base and composed of subsoil scraped up from the immediate vicinity; not just from the adjoining ditch [6005], which was no more than 1m wide. No buried soil

could be detected and no finds were recovered. Detailed context descriptions of hedge-bank (6004) can be found in Appendix 1.

5. FINDS

Few finds were recovered during the archaeological evaluation. Only ditch [2010], trench 2 and posthole [3004], trench 3 yielded any artefactual material. These finds are itemised by context in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Finds

Context	Trench	Material	Quantity	Weight	Date	Comments
2011	2	Pottery	18 Sherds	170 gms	C12-14th	Medieval South Devon Ware
3005	3	Fe	1 Piece	150 gms	Modern	Modern fragment

Ditch [2010] yielded a total of 18 sherds of 12th – Late 14th century South Devon Ware with a total weight of 170g. Macroscopic inspection identified that all 18 sherds have a micaceous fabric and derive from medieval cooking vessels. The assemblage consists of 6 rim sherds and 12 body sherds.

Posthole [3004] yielded one fragment of modern ironwork weighing 150g. This fragment would suggest a modern origin for posthole [3004], and by extrapolation, for postholes [3006] and [3008] also.

6. DISCUSSION

The evaluation has revealed the presence of localised activity of medieval date in the form of a linear ditch [2010] running approximately north-south through trench 2. Two other ditches, [2008], running approximately northeast-southwest and [2012], running approximately east-west through trench 2 yielded no artefactual material. Ditch [2008] probably represents a partial lateral subdivision within plot 1026 on Fig. 4, perhaps a later phase of ditch [2010]. Ditch [2012] may indicate a further longitudinal subdivision within this plot, although it is unlikely that this extended the full length of the plot. No subdivision was located in trench 4 where map evidence suggested that this plot might have been enlarged by amalgamation.

The tenement plots in this part of the village are known locally as the ‘burgage plots’, although there is no documentary record to indicate that Holbeton was ever a borough. The lack of dating evidence generally from the site is disappointing and the only medieval finds were from a ditch which was aligned north south and could not be associated with the existing plot layout. The present boundaries seem to be generally formed of substantial hedgebanks though the surviving boundary between plots 1027 and 1028 (Fig. 4) appears to have originated as a scarp similar to that found in trench 2 [2003]. The use of hedgebanks in this context is odd: as the strips are so narrow the banks themselves take up a disproportionate amount of space. It is possible that the ‘scarp’ or lynchet was the earlier form of boundary associated with medieval “open field” cultivation and the hedgebanks were added when the plots were turned into gardens for the Fore Street cottages. There is no way of establishing when this might have happened, but none of the cottages along Fore Street appear to be earlier than 19th (or perhaps 18th century) in date (based on external appearance

only). Unfortunately the area around the frontage of the present site has been disturbed and no dating evidence for the building here was obtained.

The three small postholes identified in trench 3 would appear to be relatively modern in date. The presence of a modern metal fragment in [3004], and the survival of timber in a non-waterlogged environment in posthole [3006] would suggest that these postholes derive from activity within the last century.

ARCHIVE

A fully integrated site archive will be deposited with Plymouth Museum, under the accession number AR.2007.17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation was commissioned by Gerald Wood Homes (through A. Lewis) and The Flete Estate (A. Mildmay-White). The project was managed by P.J. Weddell and the site work was carried out by Pete Swindin. Historical research was undertaken by A.G. Collings and the illustrations were prepared by T. Ives.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Unpublished sources

Devon Record Office

Holbeton Tithe Apportionment (1839) & Tithe Map (1842)

Devon Historic Environment Record

Entries for map sheet SX65SW

Westcountry Studies Library

1841 Census

Holbeton parish file

Trewman's Exeter Flying Post 1876

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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Table 1: Test Pit 1

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s)	Description	Interpretation
-	0 – 0.1m	Tarmac	Modern tarmac surface
-	0.1 – 0.25m	Aggregate	Sub-aggregate for tarmac surface
1001	0.25 – 0.28m	Ashy layer	Build up for tarmac surface
1002	0.28 – 0.45m	Light brown coarse sandy clay with slate fragments and charcoal flecks	Soil accumulation derived from modern disturbance
1003	0.45 – 0.65m	Light brown coarse sandy clay with few inclusions	Soil accumulation derived from modern disturbance
1004	0.65m +	Pinkish-red coarse sandy clay subsoil	Subsoil

Table 2: Trench 2

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s)	Description	Interpretation
2001	1.3m +	Coarse orange brown gritty sand and fractured natural bedrock	Natural
2002	0 – 1.2m	Dark reddish-brown clay silt containing extensive stone inclusions and modern disturbance	Topsoil/ disturbed ground
2003	0.4 – 1.5m	Steep sided cut with flat base in section of Trench 2	Hedgerow cut
2004	0.4 – 1.5m	Irregularly coursed bank of roughly hewn stone lying within cut 2003	Masonry hedge-bank
2005	0.4 – 1.5m	Friable dark brown silty clay containing fragments of natural bedrock and stones	Revetting backfill for hedge-bank
2006	0.9 – 1.3m	Shallow concave cut to the east of hedge-bank 2004	Ditch associated with hedge-bank 2004
2007	0.9 – 1.3m	Friable dark brown clay silt	Fill of 2006
2008	0.45 – 0.7m	Moderate sided linear cut with flat base Oriented NE-SW	Ditch of unknown date
2009	0.45 – 0.7m	Reddish-brown clay silt containing eroded natural	Fill of 2008
2010	0.5 – 0.8m	Steep sided linear cut with concave base Oriented N-S	Ditch of 12 – 14 th century date
2011	0.5 – 0.8m	Loose reddish-brown clay silt containing natural bedrock fragments	Fill of 2010
2012	0.4 – 0.6m	Shallow u-shaped cut oriented E-W	Ditch of unknown date
2013	0.4 – 0.6m	Dark brown clay silt containing fragments of natural bedrock	Fill of 2012

Table 3: Trench 3

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s)	Description	Interpretation
3001	0.5 +	Light orange pink silty sand	Natural
3002	0 – 0.05m	Dark reddish-brown clay silt with extensive Root disturbance	Topsoil
3003	0.05 – 0.5m	Mixed dark brown deposit of natural, topsoil and made-up ground	Disturbed ground
3004	0.5 – 0.6m	Small sub-circular cut with irregular sides and base	Posthole
3005	0.5 – 0.6m	Dark brown clay sit containing moderate Natural stones	Fill of 3004
3006	0.5 – 0.73m	Small sub-circular cut with steep sides and concave base	Posthole
3007	0.5 – 0.73m	Dark brown clay silt containing topsoil and in-situ timber stake	Fill of 3006
3008	0.5 – 0.68m	Small circular cut with steep sides and concave base	Posthole
3009	0.5 – 0.68m	Dark brown clay silt containing extensive root disturbance	Fill of 3008

Table 4: Trench 4

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s)	Description	Interpretation
4001	0.5m +	Coarse orange brown silty sand containing fragments of natural bedrock	Natural
4002	0.3 – 0.5m	Orange brown clayey-silt sand composed of mixed natural and topsoil	Subsoil
4003	0 – 0.3m	Dark brown clay silt containing plant material and modern inclusions	Topsoil

Table 5: Trench 5

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s)	Description	Interpretation
5001	0.3 +	Light orange brown silty sand	Natural
5002	0 – 0.3	Dark brown clay silt	topsoil

Table 6: Trench 6

Context No.	Depth (From surface)	Description	Interpretation
6001	1.4m +	Orange brown silty sand	Natural
6002	0 – 0.25m	Dark brown clay silt with root disturbance	Topsoil
6003	0.25 – 1.4m	Orange brown silty sand consisting of redeposited natural	Bank material
6004	As above	Redeposited natural (6003) and topsoil (6002)	Hedge-bank
6005	0.52 – 0.68m	Shallow concave cut visible in section of trench 6	Hedge-bank ditch
6006	0.52 – 0.68m	Dark orange brown silty sand	Fill of 6005

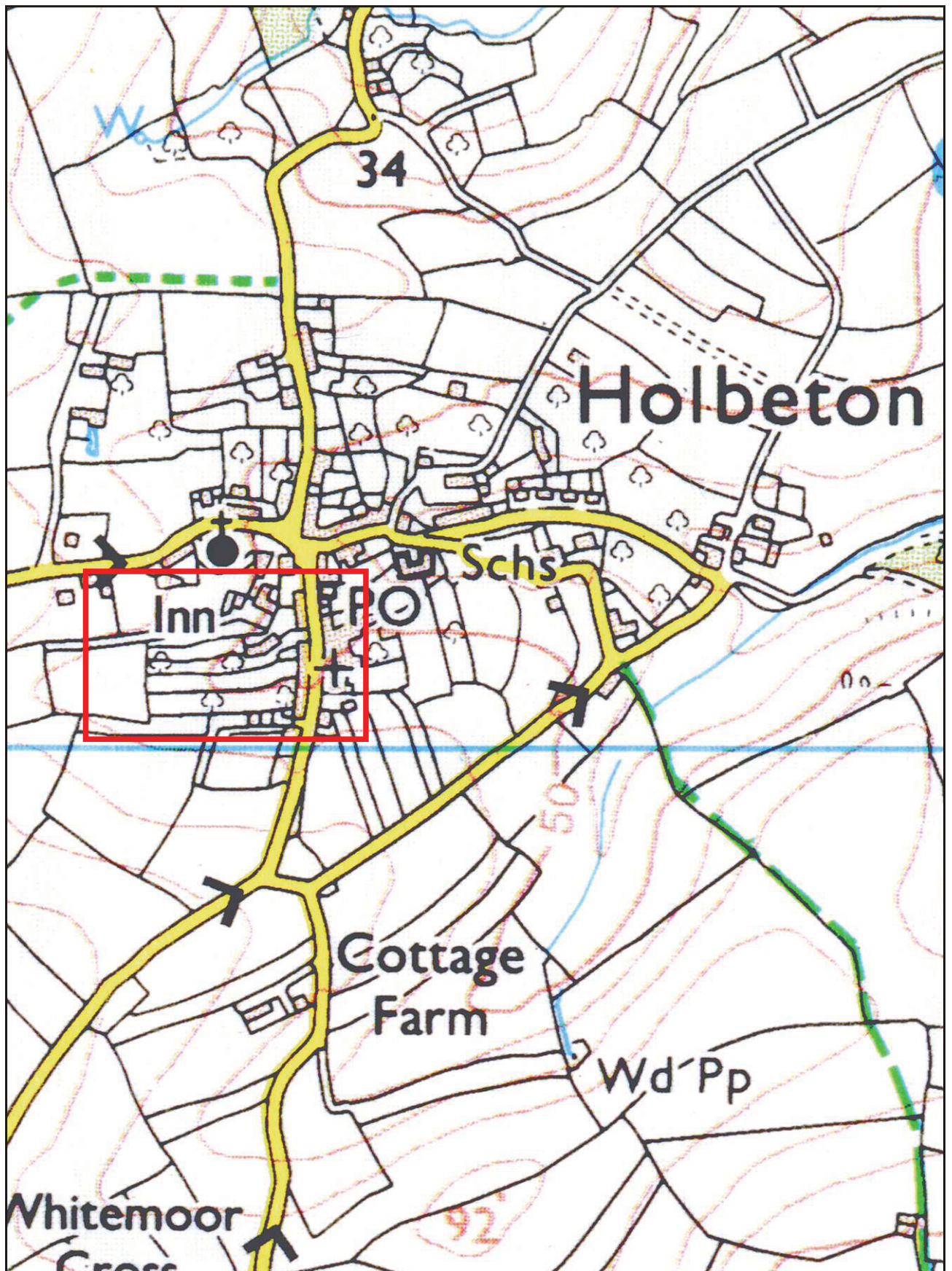


Fig. 1 Location of site. Reproduced from the 1:25000 Outdoor Leisure™ map 20 (enlarged to 1:5000) by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 1995. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100016685.

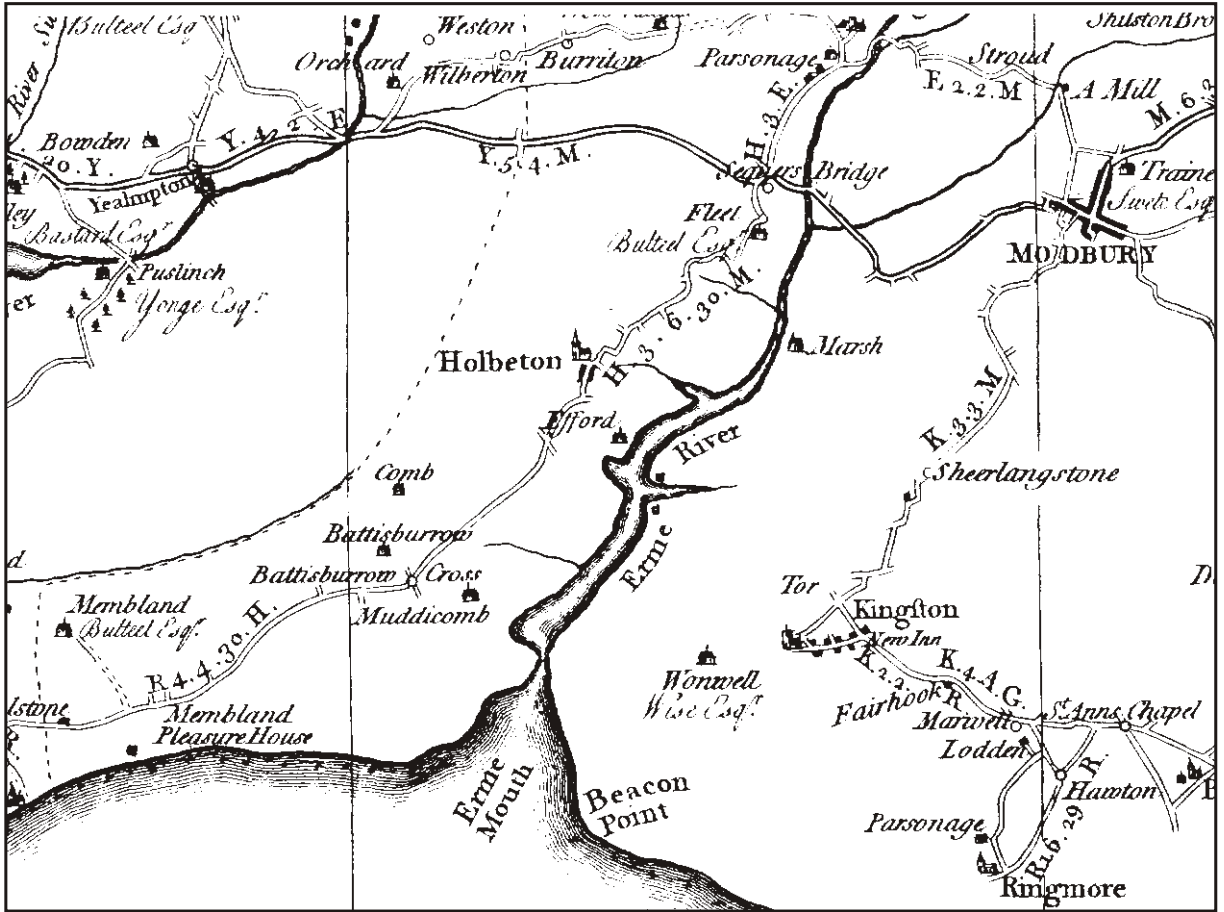


Fig. 2 The area in 1765. Extract from Benjamin Donn's one inch to the mile map of Devon, sheet 10b.



Fig. 3 The area c. 1785. Extract from the Board of Ordnance's six inch to the mile (1:10,560) map sheet No. 19 Part VI, surveyed in 1784-86.

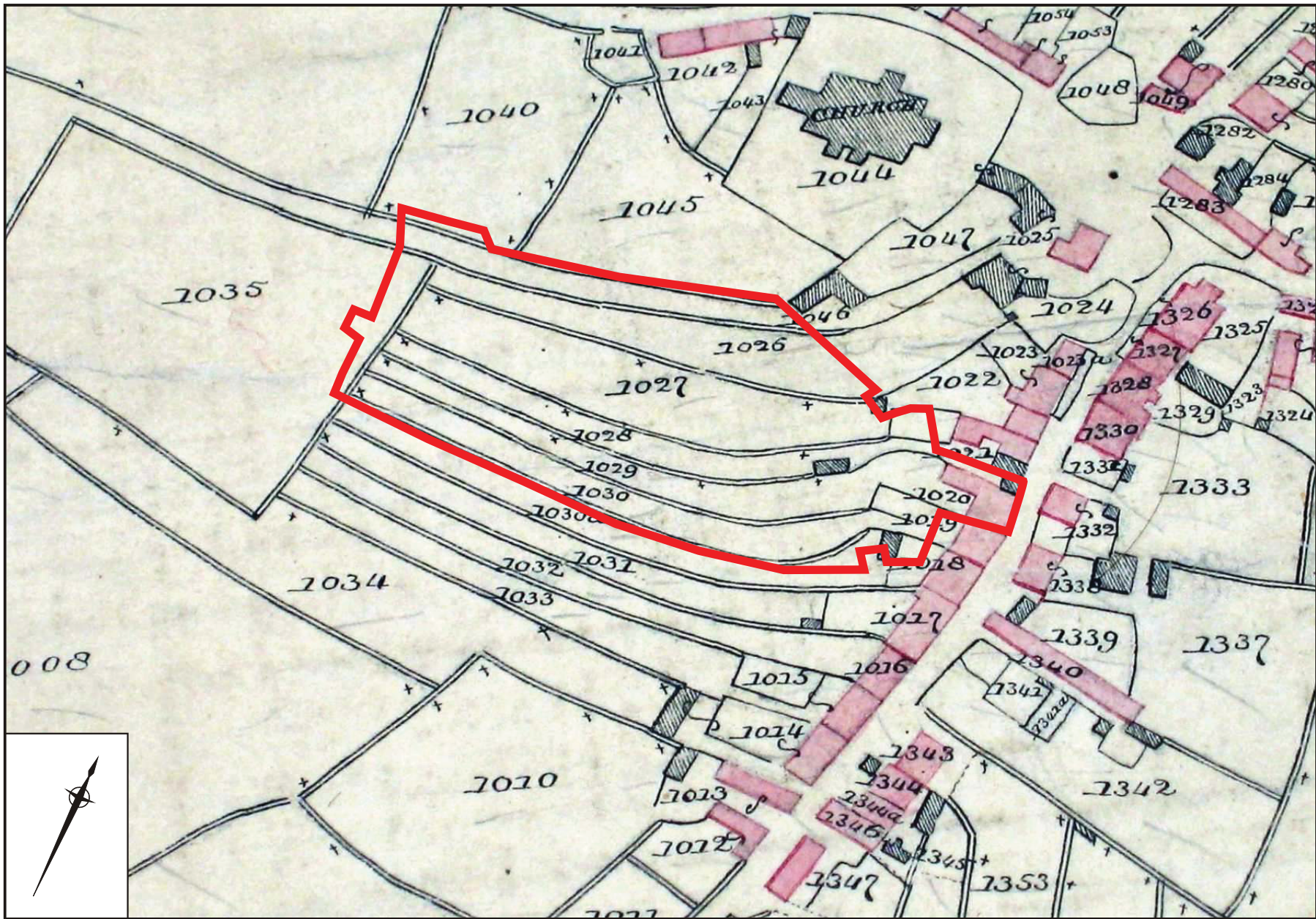


Fig. 4 Extract from the 1842 Holbeton Tithing Map, enlarged to 1:1250.

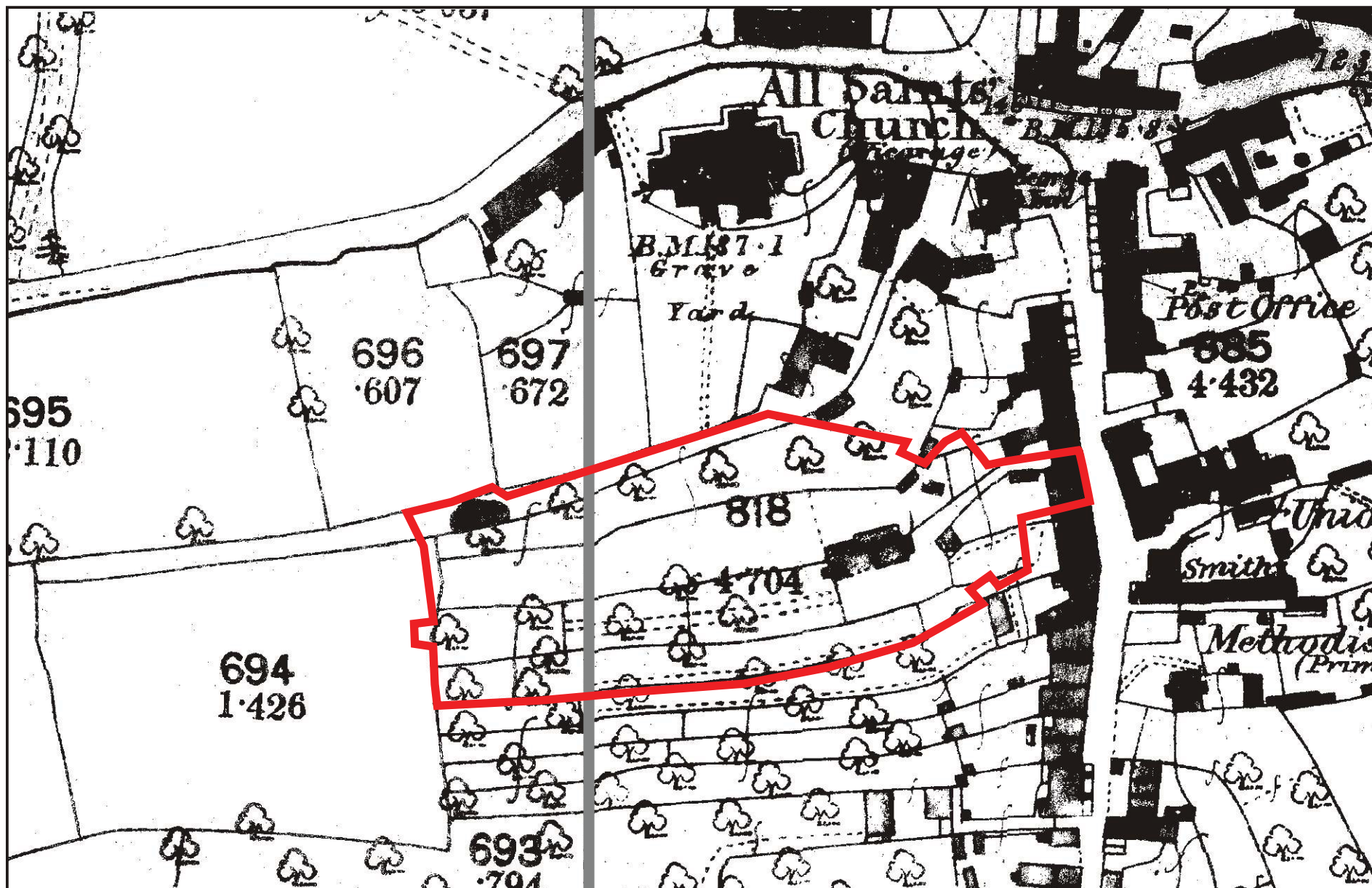


Fig. 5 The site in 1885. Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 map sheets CXXX.1 & 2, published in 1886 & 1887, enlarged to 1:1250.

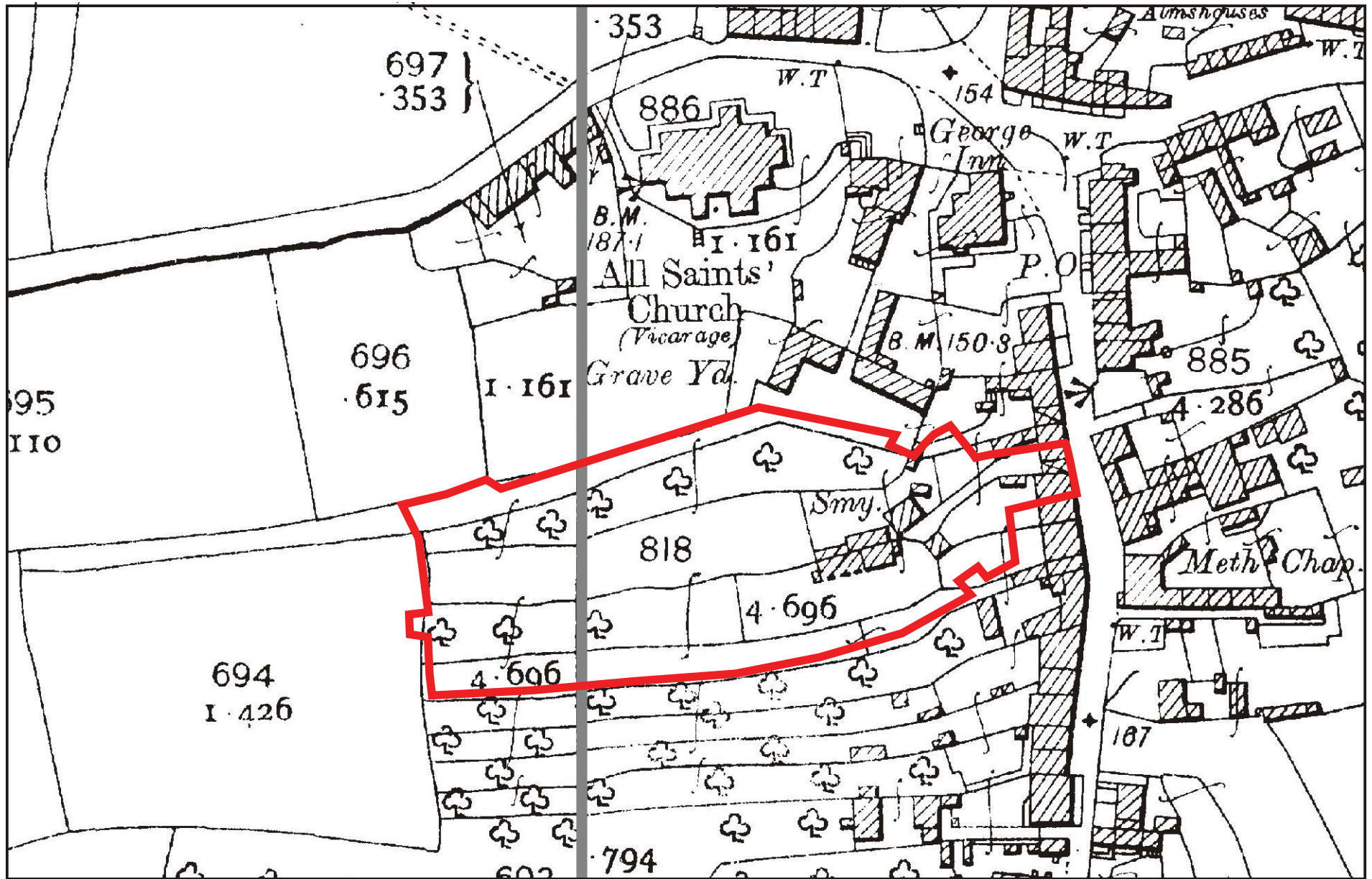


Fig. 6 The site in 1905. Ordnance Survey Second Edition 1:2500 map sheets CXXX.1 & 2, published in 1906, enlarged to 1:1250.

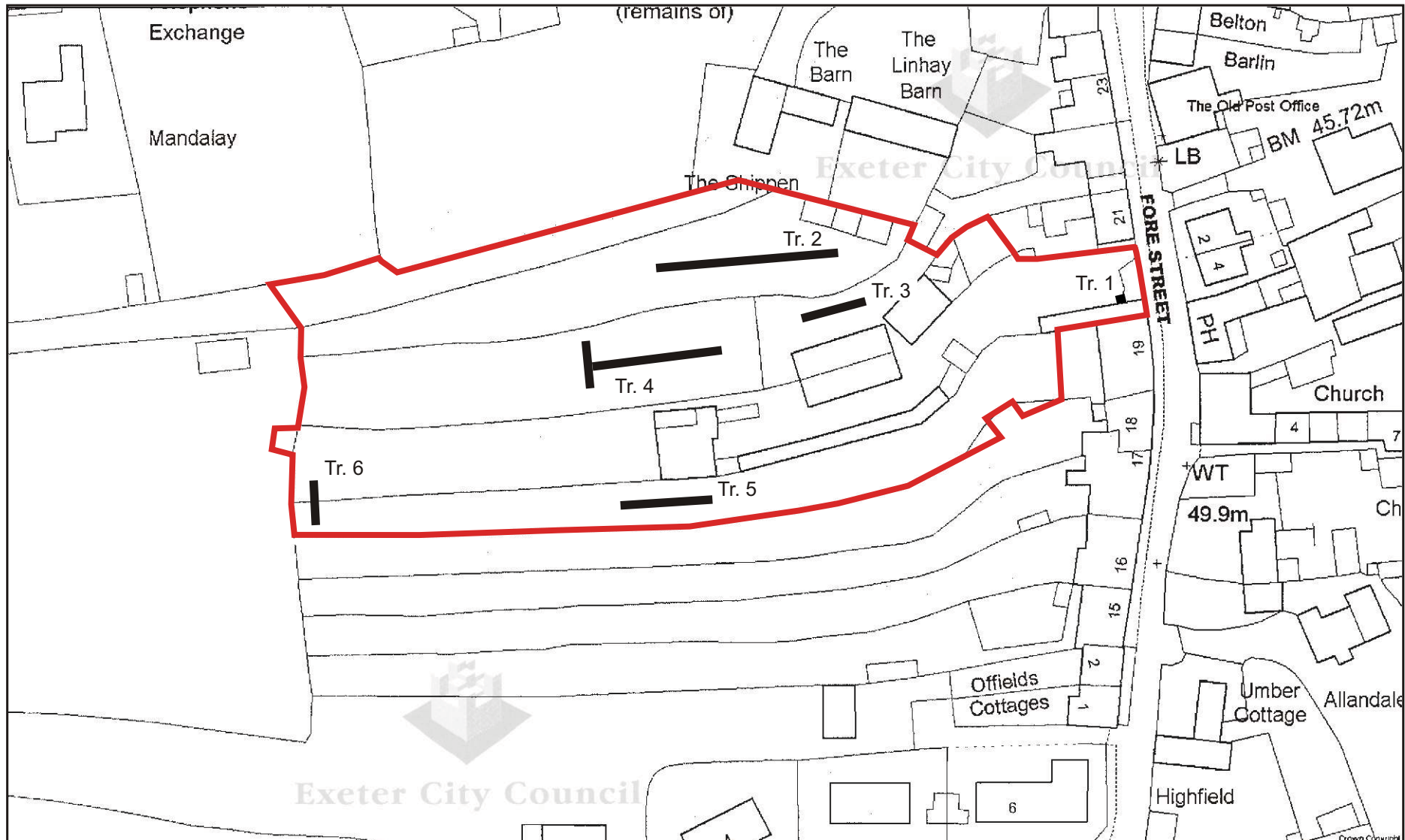


Fig. 7 Trench locations and site area (red). Reproduced (1:1000) from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Exeter City Council 100025345.

Trench 2

Plan

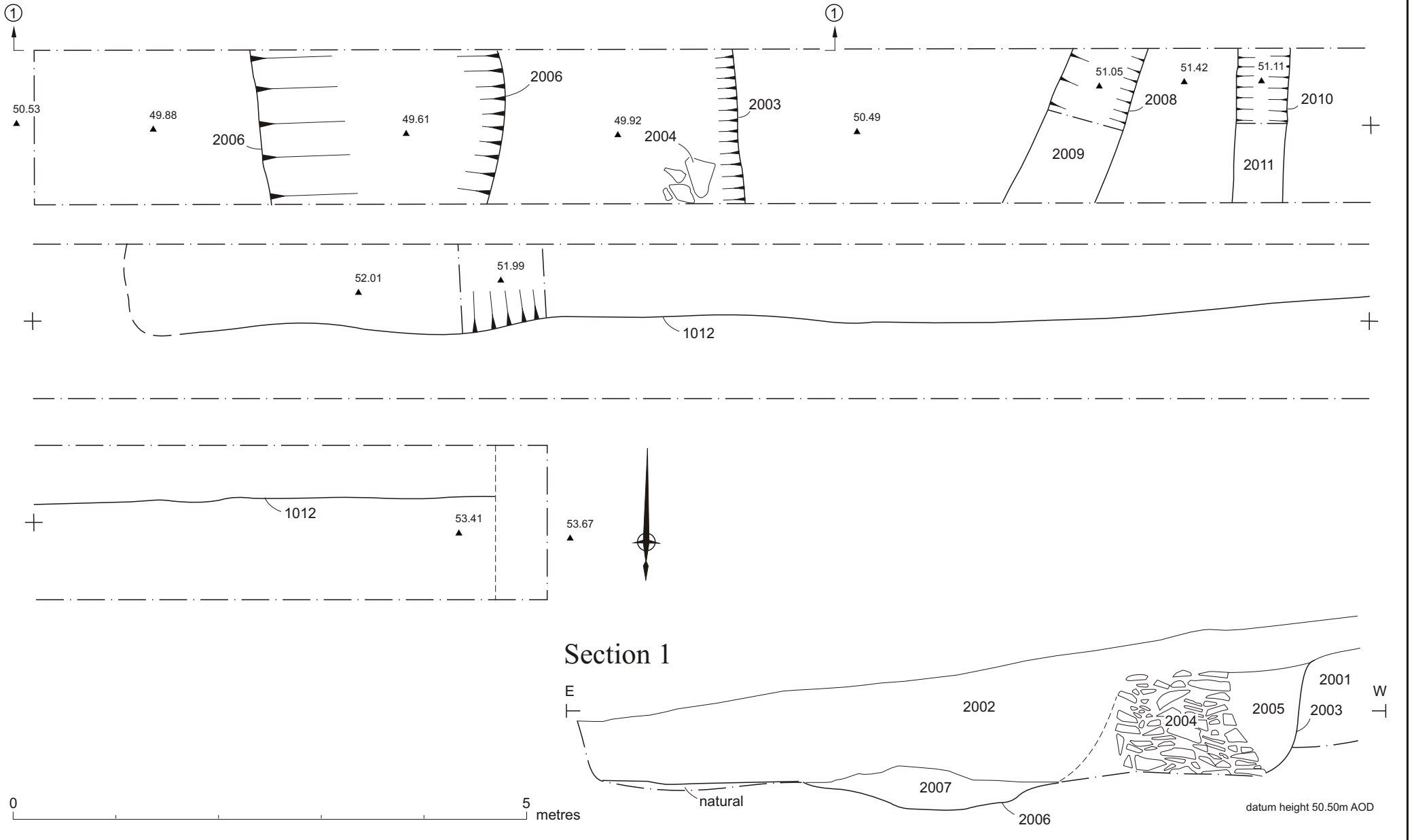


Fig. 8 Trench 2: plan and section.

Trench 3 Plan

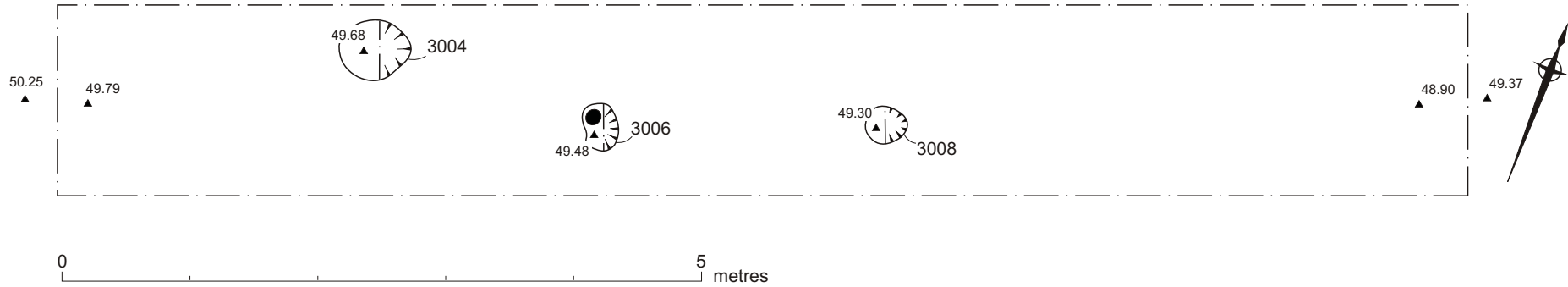


Fig. 9 Trench 3: plan.

Section

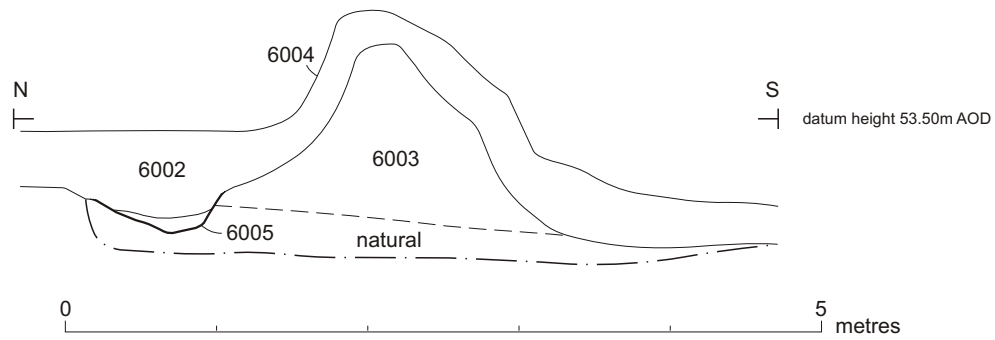


Fig. 10 Section through hedgebank 6004.



Plate 1 Oblique view of hedgebank 2004, looking south east.



Plate 2 Section through hedgebank 6004, looking east.