Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological investigation at The Croft, Aldridge Walsall

March 2010

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	The Croft, Aldridge, Walsall	
Short description	An archaeological investigation of a public open space, called The Croft, at Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands was undertaken. The investigation commenced with a geophysical survey (magnetometry and resistivity) that was followed by the excavation of three trial trenches to target potential archaeological features identified by the survey and to investigate visible earthworks. Two ditches of medieval date, and a pit that dates to the late 16th/early 17th century, were encountered in the northern half of the park. Boundary ditches, several of which are still evident as slight earthworks, are post-medieval or modern in date and correspond with boundaries shown on 19th and 20th century maps. Other features include a backfilled pond, modern services and general disturbance.	
Project type	Trial trench evaluation and geophysical survey	
Site status	-	
Previous work	BUFAU (Gaffney 1995)	
Current land use	Public park	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/period	Medieval/post-medieval boundary ditches	
Significant finds	Medieval pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Walsall MBC	
Site address	The Croft, Aldridge, Walsall	
Study area	3.7 ha	
OS Easting & Northing	405876 300624	
Height OD	163m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Mike Shaw, Black Country Archaeologist	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Simon Carlyle/ Angela Warner (NA)	
Project Manager	Simon Carlyle and Paul Mason (NA)	
Sponsor or funding body	Walsall MBC	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	16th March 2010	
End date	18th March 2010	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content
Physical	Walsall Museum and Local History Centre Project code: TC10	1 box (pottery and bone)
Paper		1 small archive box of site records and photos plus 1 sheet of drawings
Digital		Copy of report, digital photos
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	An archaeological investigation at The Croft, Aldridge, Walsall	
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AT THE CROFT, ALDRIDGE WALSALL MARCH 2010

Abstract

In March 2010, Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to carry out an archaeological investigation of a public open space, called The Croft, at Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands. The investigation commenced with a geophysical survey (magnetometry and resistivity) that was followed by the excavation of three trial trenches to target potential archaeological features identified by the survey and to investigate visible earthworks. Two ditches of medieval date, and a pit that dates to the late 16th/early 17th century, were encountered in the northern half of the park. Boundary ditches, several of which are still evident as slight earthworks, are post-medieval or modern in date and correspond with boundaries shown on 19th and 20th century maps. Other features include a backfilled pond, modern services and general disturbance.

1 INTRODUCTION

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC) have launched a project to enhance the appearance of a public open space, called The Croft, at Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands (site centred on NGR: SK 05876 00624; Fig 1). The main aim of the project is to improve the setting of the park and provide art work and a heritage trail for the enjoyment of the local community and visitors to the area.

Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) was commissioned by WMBC to carry out an archaeological investigation at The Croft to assist in providing information about the history and archaeology of Aldridge, with particular emphasis on establishing whether The Croft had once formed part of the medieval village. The investigation comprised a geophysical survey (magnetometry and resistivity) and the excavation of three trial trenches. A community day was also arranged for local school children to visit the site and get involved first hand with the archaeology in their area. The project was carried out in accordance with the brief issued by Mike Shaw, Black Country Archaeologist, on behalf of WMBC (Shaw 2010) and the approved written scheme of investigation (NA 2010).

This report, which presents the results of the geophysical survey and trial trench excavation, has been prepared in accordance with Appendix 4 of the English Heritage procedural document *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH 1991), relevant sections of *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (EH 2006), and appropriate national standards and guidelines, as recommended by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). On completion, the project archive will be deposited with Walsall Local History Centre and the finds with Walsall Museum.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The Croft is a public open space near the centre of Aldridge, Walsall, and lies within a designated Conservation Area. It comprises a trapezoidal block of parkland, approximately 3.7ha in extent, divided into four unequal areas by two paths that cross near the centre of the park (Fig 1). It is bounded to the west by a car park and commercial properties backing on to Rookery Lane; to the south and east by residential properties fronting on to Erdington Road and Portland Road; and to the north by High Street and Little Aston Road (A454). The parish church of St Mary's lies *c* 50m to the north-east and the Manor House *c* 30m to the north of the park boundary. The park is situated on a gentle, south-west facing slope at approximately 162m aOD, and slight earthworks, the remains of post-medieval and modern boundaries and a pond, are visible across the area.

The underlying rocks are of Triassic age and belong to the Bunter Pebble Beds, which consist of coarse-grained, brownish-red sandstone with conglomerate lenses and layers of well-rounded pebbles. The sandstone is generally weakly cemented and weathers to soft sand with pebble inclusions. These deposits were laid down in the delta of the Budleighensis River, which flowed northwards across the Triassic landscape, between the Welsh Uplands and the Mercian Highlands (BGS 1987).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The following account is based on information obtained from the Black Country Historic Environment Record (HER) and map evidence. The locations of the HER sites are shown in Fig 1.

Aldridge is mentioned in the Domesday survey as 'Alrewic' - the 'wic' (dwelling or settlement) by the alders. It was held by two thegns (nobles), though the king held the soke (right of jurisdiction), suggesting that it may have earlier been a royal manor. The site of the late Saxon settlement at Aldridge is uncertain but it may have been around the parish church of St Mary's and the adjacent manor house site (see below). The straight line of the High Street to the west may be a deliberately laid out extension, perhaps of the 12th to 13th centuries.

The church (1518) dates to at least the late 12th or early 13th century, although much of the fabric dates to the 14th century or later. Parts of the church, including the north aisle and chancel, were rebuilt in the mid 19th century during a programme of restoration. To the west of the church is Manor House (1516), an early 19th-century building that probably occupies the site of the medieval manor house. A number of medieval buildings along the High Street, including a cruck-framed house (6368) at the corner of Rookery Lane, were demolished in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Croft (6292) is an area of open land to the south-west of the church. It is first mentioned in a Will of 1671 and appears to have always been part of the demesne of the lord of the manor. Gould (1978, 45) names the area as 'Hall Croft' on a plan of Aldridge township. Low earthworks visible across the area predominately relate to post-medieval and modern enclosure and property boundaries and a backfilled pond, all of which are shown on early 19th-century tithe maps and later 19th- and 20th-

century Ordnance Survey maps. It is possible that a searchlight battery was stationed on The Croft during WWII and some of the land was used to grow crops.

In the mid 1990s The Croft was the subject of a small-scale archaeological investigation carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), comprising desk-based assessment, geophysical survey of an area of around 0.76ha at the north-west and north-east corners of the site, and earthwork survey (Gaffney 1995). Some of the features identified in the geophysical survey were identified as enclosures shown on late 19th- and early 20th-century maps but otherwise the results were inconclusive.

Small scale archaeological investigations have also been carried out recently in the churchyard (13124) and at the west end of the High Street (13122), although no medieval features were encountered.

3 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY by Adrian Butler

3.1 Geophysical survey methodology

Magnetometer survey
The magnetometer survey was conducted with Bartington Grad 601-2, twin sensor array, vertical component fluxgate gradiometers (Bartington and Chapman 2003). These are standard instruments for archaeological survey and can resolve magnetic variations as slight as 0.1 nanoTesla (nT).

The area was split into four fields (Fields 1-4), divided into a network of 85 contiguous, whole and partial, 20m x 20m grid squares. These were set out manually by tape measure and optical square. The instruments were carried at a brisk but steady pace through each grid, collecting data along 1m spaced traverse lines. Measurements were automatically triggered every 0.25m along the traverses, giving a total of 3600 measurements per grid.All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the guidelines issued by English Heritage and by the Institute for Archaeology (EH 2008; Gaffney, Gater and Ovendon 2002).

The data was processed using Geoplot 3.00u software. Striping, occasionally caused by slight mismatches in sensor balance, was removed using the 'Zero Mean Traverse' function (ZMT) and destaggering of the data was performed as necessary. The processed data is presented in this report in the form of a greyscale plot (scale +4nT to -4nT black ~ white). This has been scaled, rotated and resampled (georectified) for display against the Ordnance Survey base mapping (Fig 2). An interpretative plot has been produced and is shown overlain onto the data (Fig 3).

Earth resistance survey
The resistance survey data was collected with a Geoscan Research RM15 resistance meter, deployed in twin probe configuration with electrode spacing of 0.5m. Data was collected within the same 20m grid units as the magnetometer survey, at a spatial resolution of 1m x 1m and precision of 0.1 Ohms (Ω).

The survey data was downloaded, gridded, processed and displayed using Geoplot 3.00u software. The greyscale results plots, scaled at a standardised -2 to +3 standard

deviations (σ: approximately 100-500Ω) have been reconstructed using MapInfo, as with the magnetometer data (Figs 4 and 5).

3.2 Geophysical survey results

Field 1 (magnetometer & resistance)
Magnetometer survey detected a positive linear magnetic anomaly, probably a ditch, orientated south to north through the area turning through a sharp right angle to the east after *c* 60m (Figs 2 and 3). In the earth resistance data this feature was shown as a low resistance anomaly flanked by high readings, in all likelihood a ditch with a pair of banks (Figs 4 and 5). This corresponds with the slight earthworks that are visible in the field, forming an enclosure that is indicated on James Gilbert's 1817 'Map of the Parish of Aldridge'.

The south-eastern corner of Field 1 was found to contain more positive linear magnetic anomalies orientated north-south and east-west, the latter aligned with similar features in Field 4. These may reflect buried ditches, but, considering the increased levels of resistance detected in the same area, together with some dipolar magnetic anomalies, former buildings in the area may be a possibility.

Weak positive magnetic banding was identified orientated north to south in the west of Field 1, possibly reflecting remnant ridge and furrow ploughing (Fig 3). Similar anomalies were also detected aligned east-west within the enclosure to the west.

Field 2 (magnetometer)
The possible cultivation pattern of Field 1 was detected continuing northwards through the eastern half of Field 2. An intensely magnetic linear anomaly was recorded, passing through the field south-south-west to north-north-east. Such an anomaly typically indicates an iron pipeline or live electrical cable. Another linear anomaly, possibly a ditch, was located orientated parallel with the modern north-east to south-west path. Within the field, two sizable dipolar (paired positive-negative) anomalies were identified, likely indicating pieces of ferrous debris.

Field 3 (magnetometer)
Initially, the most apparent magnetic anomalies detected in Field 3 were a region of many dipolar anomalies indicating ferrous and ceramic (brick) debris encompassing the northern part of the site, closely following the enclosed area that can be identified as the plots of numbers 36 to 38 Little Aston Road on Gilbert's 1817 map. This was bordered on the south and eastern side by positive linear magnetic anomalies, possibly indicating a ditch or a brick wall. A 25m diameter circular area of dipolar readings immediately to the south of the enclosed area was evidence of a backfilled pond known to exist from at least 1880 through to 1930.

A positive linear anomaly orientated to the south-west from the house plots may indicate a relatively recent ditch, based on the highly magnetic response from the fill. Surrounding that ditch, a positive anomaly, of similar enhancement to the former, was detected forming a rough 'U'-shape, possibly indicating a narrow ditch running from the road in the north-east, south-west and around to the pond in the north. A pair of positive anomalies running adjacent to the west of the north-east aligned path, one of which was a continuation from Field 2, may indicate a pair of ditches or a form of construction for an earlier route for said pathway.

Field 4 (magnetometer and resistance)
The south of Field 4 was found to contain similar magnetic and resistive anomalies to Field 1 (Figs 2 and 3). The eastern arm of the large enclosure was evident as both low resistance and positive magnetic anomalies, whilst two possible ditches crossed from the corner of Field 1 into an area of confused magnetic signal and high resistance. There is the possibility of collapsed buildings remains, as in Field 1.

The detection of weakly positive magnetic linear anomalies orientated west to east in Field 4 suggests medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, as in Fields 1 and 2. Two lines of four dipolar anomalies were detected on an approximately west to east alignment across Field 4. These were almost certainly iron objects such as utility covers, pole bases, fence posts and so on, now covered by the turf. The block of resistance survey carried out in the north of Field 4 detected a pattern of elevated readings similar to those in the south, possibly indicating a rubble spread adjacent to the park entrance.

3.3 Geophysical survey conclusions

A combination of magnetometer and earth resistance survey has revealed a number of geophysical anomalies of interest. Evidence for former house plots and a pond has been revealed in the north of The Croft (Field 3). Other, ditch features, possibly connected to the former, has been located within the same area. Similarly an enclosure and possible building remains were identified in the south of the site (Fields 1 and 4). Slight indications of rubble were also detected adjacent to the eastern park entrance. Indications of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation were established on north-south and east-west orientations in the southern half of the park.

4 TRIAL TRENCH EXCAVATION

4.1 Summary

Three trial trenches, each approximately 40m long by 1.8m wide, a total area of 216m^2, were excavated to target possible archaeological features identified by the geophysical survey and investigate surviving earthworks (Figs 3 and 5).

4.2 Methodology

The trenches were marked out using hand tapes, in accordance with the trench location plan approved by Mike Shaw, and a CAT scanner was used to detect buried services. Operating under continuous archaeological supervision, a wheeled 360^o mechanical excavator ('rubber duck') fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to remove topsoil and subsoil down to the surface of significant archaeological horizons or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The topsoil and subsoil were stored separately, adjacent to the trenches, and the trenches were secured with temporary fencing. For safety reasons, the individual trenches were opened, recorded and backfilled in the same day so that trenches were not left open overnight.

Archaeological excavation and recording followed the guidelines outlined in the NA *Archaeological Fieldwork Manual* (2006). Trenches containing archaeological remains were cleaned by hand, sufficient to define the features. Each feature or deposit was given a unique number consisting of the trench number and an individual context number (e.g. 302, Trench 3, context 2). The details of each context were recorded on *pro-forma* sheets. The trenches were planned (scale 1:50) and section drawings were made at an appropriate scale (1:10 or 1:20). Levels, which were related to Ordnance Datum, were taken on the trenches at appropriate points, on section datum and on all major features. Trench locations were related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A photographic record was made of the excavation, using both 35mm colour transparency and black and white negative films, supplemented by digital images.

The spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. Artefacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (Watkinson and Neal 1998). The guidelines of the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA 1993) will be followed in the preparation of the archive. There were no archaeologically significant deposits with the potential for environmental analysis.

All works were carried out in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation prepared by NA (2010) and the Institute for Archaeologists' (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (1985, revised 2008) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1994, revised 2008). All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines. The project was monitored by Mike Shaw, Black Country Archaeologist, and Cherry Shine, Principal Regeneration Officer for WMBC.

4.3 Trench 1

Trench 1 was aligned north-north-west to south-south-east and was positioned between several large trees to the south of the path near the south-eastern entrance to the park. No archaeological remains were encountered in the trench and the anomalies shown on the geophysical survey plot were shown to relate to a spread of modern rubble and tarmac filling a shallow depression beneath the turf.

The natural subsoil, which was at a depth of approximately 0.75m below ground level, was a soft mid brownish-red sand (103) with occasional well-rounded pebbles; at the southern end of the trench the density of pebbles was moderate. It was overlain by a mineralized ploughsoil, comprising mid brown sandy silt with occasional angular to rounded pebbles (102), which ranged in thickness between 0.37m and 0.52m.

At the southern end of the trench layer 102 was cut by two amorphous, shallow depressions, 105 and 107, which were filled with dark brown sandy silt; the latter also contained a small amount of charcoal. These features are probably tree boles and are probably relatively modern. Tree bole 107 was truncated by a modern ceramic drain (redundant).

The topsoil was approximately 0.3m thick and comprised dark greyish-brown organic sandy silt (101). Near the centre of the trench, just beneath the turf, there was a dump of modern concrete and tarmac filling a shallow depression in the topsoil.

4.4 Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned roughly east to west and was located near the centre of The Croft, immediately to the south of the backfilled pond. The natural subsoil, which was encountered at a depth of approximately 0.8m below ground level, was a soft mid orangey-red sand (203) with occasional well-rounded pebbles.

At the western end of the trench a linear ditch, 205, aligned north-east to south-west was cut into the natural subsoil (Figs 6 and 7). It measured 1.3m wide by 0.40m deep, had a splayed, V-shaped profile and was filled with light reddish-brown sandy silt (204). A large sherd of late medieval redware was recovered from the interface between the fill and the overlying subsoil, suggesting that the ditch was backfilled around this date.

The ditch was overlain by a mineralized ploughsoil, approximately 0.55m thick, which comprised mid brown sandy silt with occasional angular to rounded pebbles (202). It was cut by two large shallow ditches that corresponded with the linear anomalies shown on the geophysical survey plot (visible in section only). Ditch 207 measured 2.4m wide by 0.6m deep and ditch 210 was 3.5m by 0.45m deep. They were filled with dark brown sandy silt and contained modern rubble, dumps of ash and general refuse; this included plastic wrappers and drinks cans, indicating that they had been backfilled in the last 30 years. The topsoil was approximately 0.3m thick and comprised dark greyish-brown organic sandy silt (201).

4.5 Trench 3

Trench 3 was aligned roughly east to west and was located near the north-eastern entrance to the park, around 20m from the old route of the High Street, The natural subsoil comprised light brownish-red or orange sand (304) with occasional well-rounded pebbles. The ground surface was very uneven, due to various slight earthworks, so the natural sands lay between 0.67m and 0.95m below ground level.

Towards the western end of the trench a linear ditch, 308, aligned north to south and measuring 1.7m wide by 0.66m deep was located, cut into the natural subsoil (Figs 8 and 9). It was filled with mid reddish-brown sandy silt and contained a fragment of hand-made roof tile and sherds of medieval pottery, including Midlands whiteware, which dates from the 12th to the 15th centuries. A piece of slag from a blast furnace was also recovered from the ditch, suggesting that the ditch was backfilled in the 16th century.

The ditch was sealed by a layer of subsoil (303) that was approximately 0.4m thick and consisted of mid greyish brown sandy silt. At the eastern end of the trench this layer was cut by a large, shallow, oval pit, 306 (Fig 10). It had steep concave sides and a flat base and measured approximately 2.0m long by 1.5m wide by 0.35m deep. The fill comprised mid greyish-brown sandy silt (305) and around the southern edge there was a band of rounded pebbles. A sherd of late 16th- /early 17th-century pottery was recovered from the pit.

Overlying the pit was a layer of mid brown sandy silt (302), *c* 0.3m thick, which may represent a further episode of ploughing. Above this was the modern topsoil which was approximately 0.3m thick and comprised dark greyish-brown organic sandy silt (301).

5 FINDS

5.1 **Pottery** by Iain Soden

All three trenches produced a small quantity of pottery (26 sherds; 457g), which dates between the medieval period and the 19th or early 20th centuries. The assemblage has been summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of pottery assemblage

Type/context **Feature**	**101**	**202**	**206** **207**	**302**	**305** **306**	**307** **308**	**Total**
Medieval iron-rich sandy ware (coarse)						2	**2**
Medieval iron rich sandy ware (fine)				1		3	**4**
Midlands whiteware				1		5	**6**
Late medieval redware		1					**1**
Midland Purple					1		**1**
Midland Black				2			**2**
Pancheon-type	1						**1**
19th-century industrially made wares	2		7				**9**
Total	**3**	**1**	**7**	**4**	**1**	**10**	**26**

Since Walsall lies within the purview of two pottery markets, both of which have been relatively well-researched, the identifications, so far as they can be effected, are made in combination with the two type series for Warwickshire and Staffordshire (Ratkai and Soden 1997, Ford 1995, respectively). Since Warwickshire-produced whitewares (usually jugs and pitchers) are predominantly those made at Chilvers Coton (Nuneaton), the Staffordshire equivalents are used here, under their more general title 'Midlands Whiteware'. They are characterised by their vertical red-painted bands, reminiscent of continental (Beauvais) decoration which is not a Chilvers Coton trait. Two sherds also carry accidental splashes of green glaze. They are usually thought of as being of 12th-14th century date (Ford 1995, 34).

The medieval coarsewares are undiagnostic sherds and have a wider date-range of 12th-15th century. They are almost certainly from cooking pots.

The Midland purple sherd is from a wide-mouthed bowl (mid 15th to mid 17th century), as is the late medieval redware (15th to 16th century). The late 16th-century or early 17th-century Midland Black is from a 'tyg' or upright beaker, found throughout Staffordshire and the West Midlands. The closest likely source is Wednesbury, where an industry is attested in documents and occasional wasters have been found since the 1980s (Mike Hodder, pers comm.).

This small assemblage suggests there has been occupation on the site or nearby since the 12th or 13th centuries, although there is nothing to characterise the nature of that occupation.

5.2 **Metalworking debris** by Andy Chapman

A single lump of slag, weighing 420g, was recovered from the fill (307) of ditch 308. It is a very dense slag, with charcoal impressions on the surface and containing some rounded mineral inclusions. It is most likely that it has come from a blast furnace, which would indicate a date sometime after 1500AD.

5.3 **Animal bone** by Karen Deighton

A total of 113g of animal bone was recovered from a late medieval/early post-medieval ditch (fill 307, ditch 308). This material was examined to determine taxa and preservation. The state of preservation was poor, with heavy surface abrasion that adversely affected the recognition of any evidence for butchery or canid gnawing. Identified bone elements were a fragmentary cattle mandible with roots of teeth and a fragment of horncore. The assemblage is too small to allow any interpretation based on the animal bone evidence.

5 DISCUSSION

The archaeological investigation has made a valuable contribution to the corpus of work on the history of Aldridge, and The Croft in particular. The discovery of two ditches, probably backfilled in the late medieval period, is of particular interest. These were not detected by the geophysical survey which raises the possibility that other buried remains relating to this period may be present in the area.

The pottery evidence suggests that the final backfill of the two ditches probably dates to the 15th century, although the fragment of slag from ditch 308 suggests a later, perhaps 16th century, date.

Given that the sherds of pottery from the two ditches were unabraded and that finds were relatively abundant we can suggest that the ditches probably demarcated property boundaries in an area of settlement, rather than that the ditches were field boundaries, in which case we would expect finds to be scarce and pottery abraded.

We can suggest that any settlement dates from around the 12th century to the 15th century. This would fit well with the national situation. The 12th to 13th centuries were a period of population growth and settlement expansion, whilst the 14th to 15th centuries were a time of population decline, especially after the Black Death of 1349-50 that killed around 33% - 50% of the total population. The national population did not thereafter begin to show an overall growth until the early 16th century (Platt 1996, 9-18).

The decline in population had two major consequences; the desertion or shrinkage of villages, and a switch in farming practice from arable to pasture, especially sheep farming which was less labour intensive (Platt 1978, 129-31). This shrinkage of settlement is perhaps the reason for the abandonment of the properties on The Croft. Unusually, however, it would appear that the land was given over to arable, for thickness of the layers above the natural subsoil (102, 202, 303) would suggest a

ploughsoil rather than pasture. This may represent a local difference: Gould (1978-9, 45) has suggested that there was a shortage of arable land in the area by the 16th century when men from Aldridge were fined for ploughing on the Colefield, the extensive area of land to the south of Aldridge around Barr Beacon which gave rise to the name Sutton Coldfield.

The slag from the backfill of ditch 308 is a reminder that the area is well known for early ironworking. A 15th-century bloomery was excavated in the 1960s at Bourne Pool, less than a kilometre to the south-east of the site (HER 2637; Gould 1969-70) and similar bloomery material has been found at Goscote, 4km to the west (HER 2615; Benchmark Archaeology 2009). The slag from the present site, however, is suggested as being from a blast furnace, which would suggest a slightly later date, as blast furnaces are generally thought to have been introduced into Britain in the 16th century.

Pit 306 in Trench 3 is interesting as it is cut into the lower ploughsoil layer. The pottery recovered from its fill would suggest that it is of late 16th to early 17th century date. It would suggest that ploughing of this part of the area at least had ceased for a while at this time, although the overlying layer (302) may also be a ploughsoil and testify to renewed ploughing.

The majority of the anomalies shown on the geophysical survey plots, many of which relate to surviving earthworks in The Croft, were shown by excavation to be post-medieval or modern in date. Probably the earliest is the rectangular enclosure bordering Portland Road on the south side of The Croft (Fig 2). This feature is shown on the tithe map of 1817 as a relict boundary, so it is at least 18th century in date, if not earlier. The boundaries on the north side of The Croft, on the south side of High Street, correspond with property boundaries shown on Ordnance Survey maps of 1886 and 1902 (Figs 11 and 12). The easternmost boundary was encountered in Trench 3 and was found to contain 19th- and 20th-century pottery, glass and other refuse. Other features include a backfilled pond, modern services and general disturbance.

The results of the work have important implications for the area. The discovery of medieval features indicates that evidence for the early history of the settlement of Aldridge does survive buried below the present ground surface. Their depth of burial means that features survive relatively well and could form the basis of further work in the future if wished. On the other hand it also means that they will survive for the future unless there are any major developments in the area, such as pipelines, which would cut down to a sufficient depth to destroy features. Their depth of burial also means that they cannot be detected by geophysical survey; only excavation will tell us more about the early history of Aldridge.

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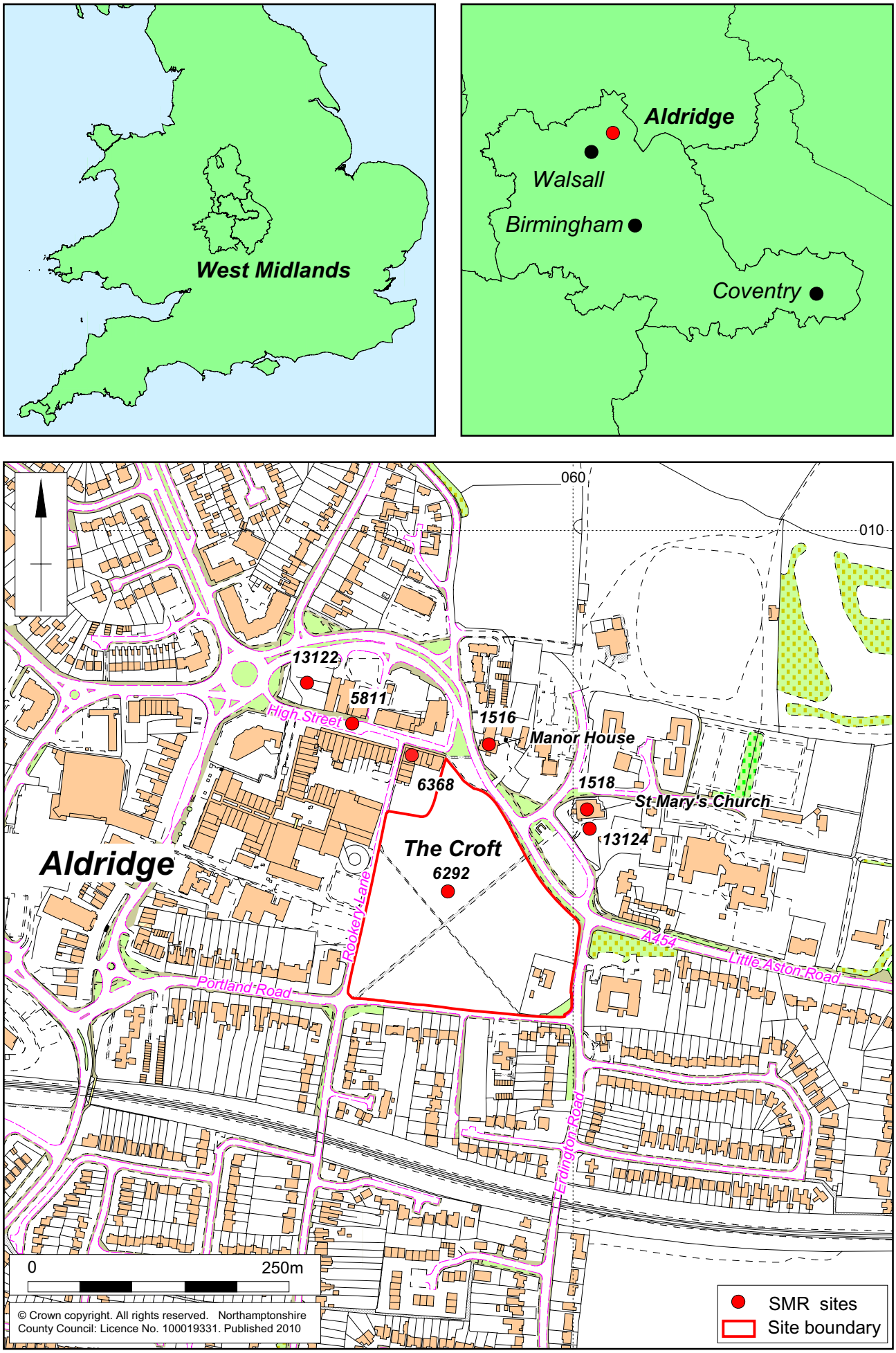
APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF CONTEXTS AND FEATURES

Abbreviations

P pottery; B animal bone; Sg slag; T tile

Trench	Context	Feature type	Date of feature	Finds	Depth [1] (m)
1	101	Topsoil		P	0.67-0.85
	102	Subsoil		P	
	103	Natural substrate		-	
	104 [105]	Tree bole		-	
	106 [107]	Tree bole		-	
2	201	Topsoil		-	0.65-0.92
	202	Subsoil		P	
	203	Natural substrate		-	
	204 [205]	Ditch	14th/15th century	-	
	206 [207]	Ditch	Modern	P	
	208 209 [210]	Ditch	Modern	-	
3	301	Topsoil		-	0.67-0.95
	302	Buried soil		P	
	303	Subsoil		-	
	304	Natural substrate		-	
	305 [306]	Pit	Late 16th/early 17th century	P	
	307 [308]	Ditch	15th/16th century	P B T Sg	
	309 [310]	Ditch	Modern	-	

[1] Depth of archaeological horizon or natural substrate below ground level



Scale 1:5000 Site location and Historic Environment Record (HER) sites Fig 1

Scale 1:2000

Magnetometer survey results Fig 2

Scale 1:2000

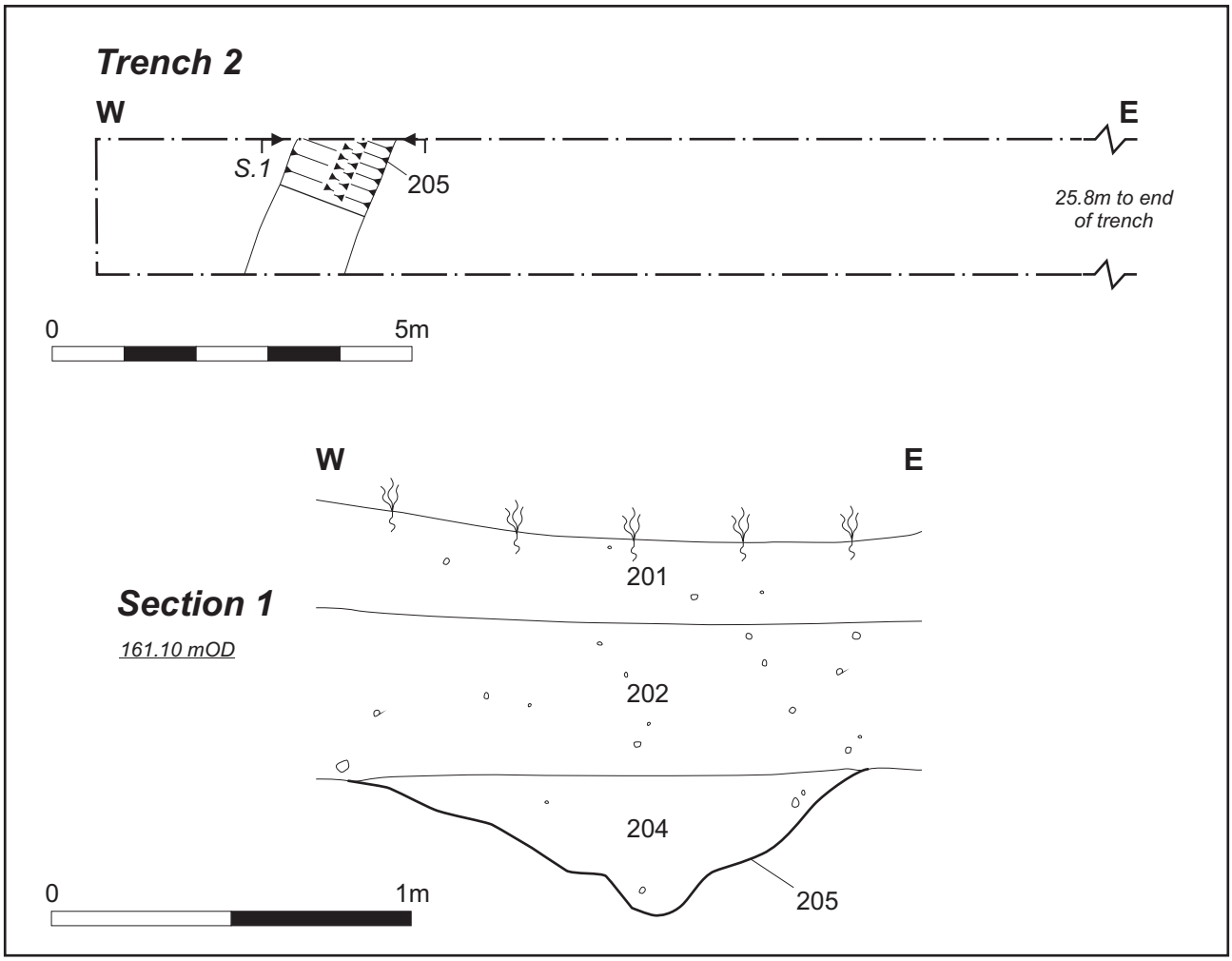
Magnetometer survey interpretation and trial trench locations Fig 3

Scale 1:2000

Earth resistance survey results Fig 4

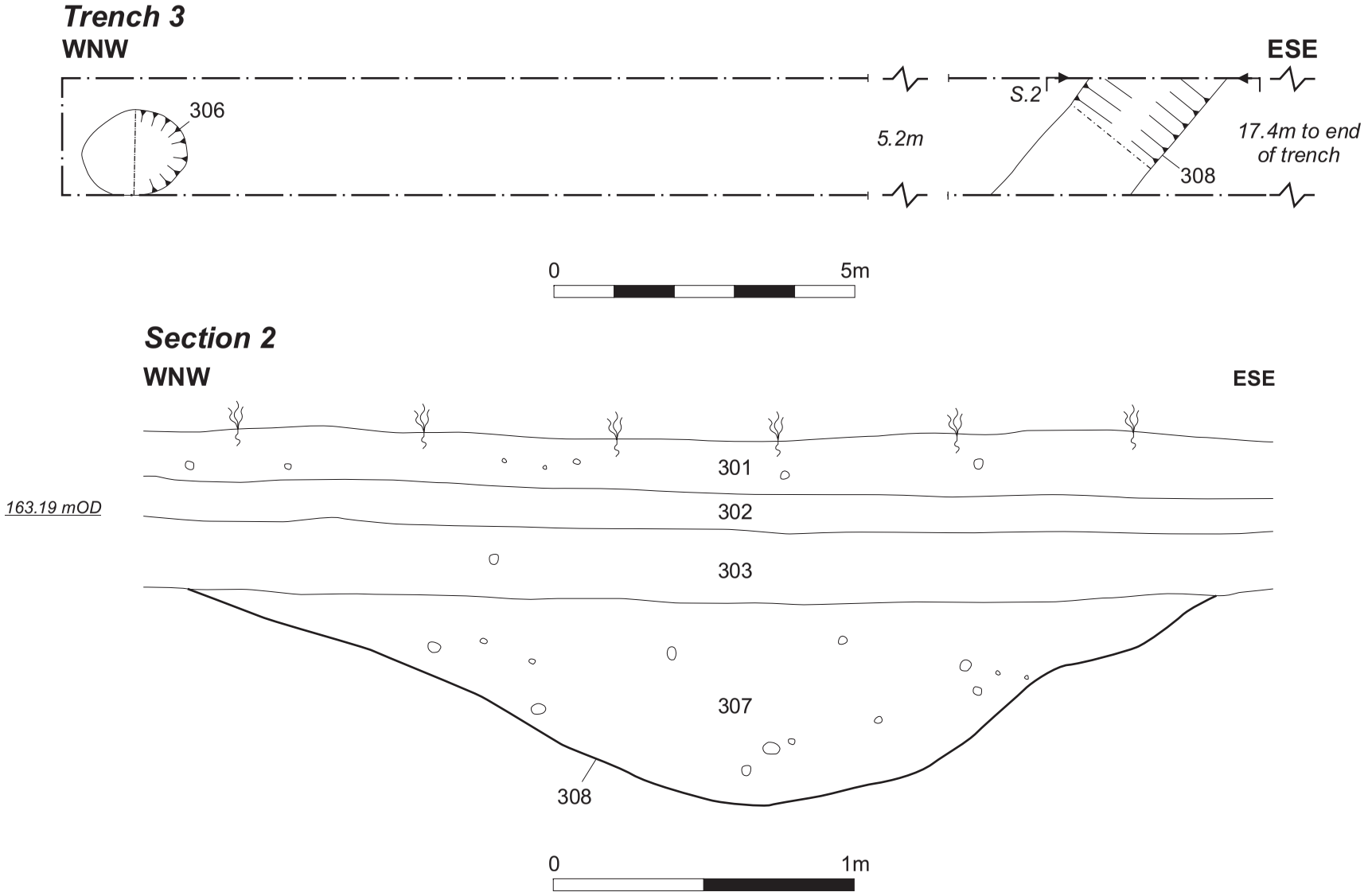
Scale 1:2000

Earth resistance survey interpretation Fig 5



Trench 2, ditch 205, plan and section Fig 6

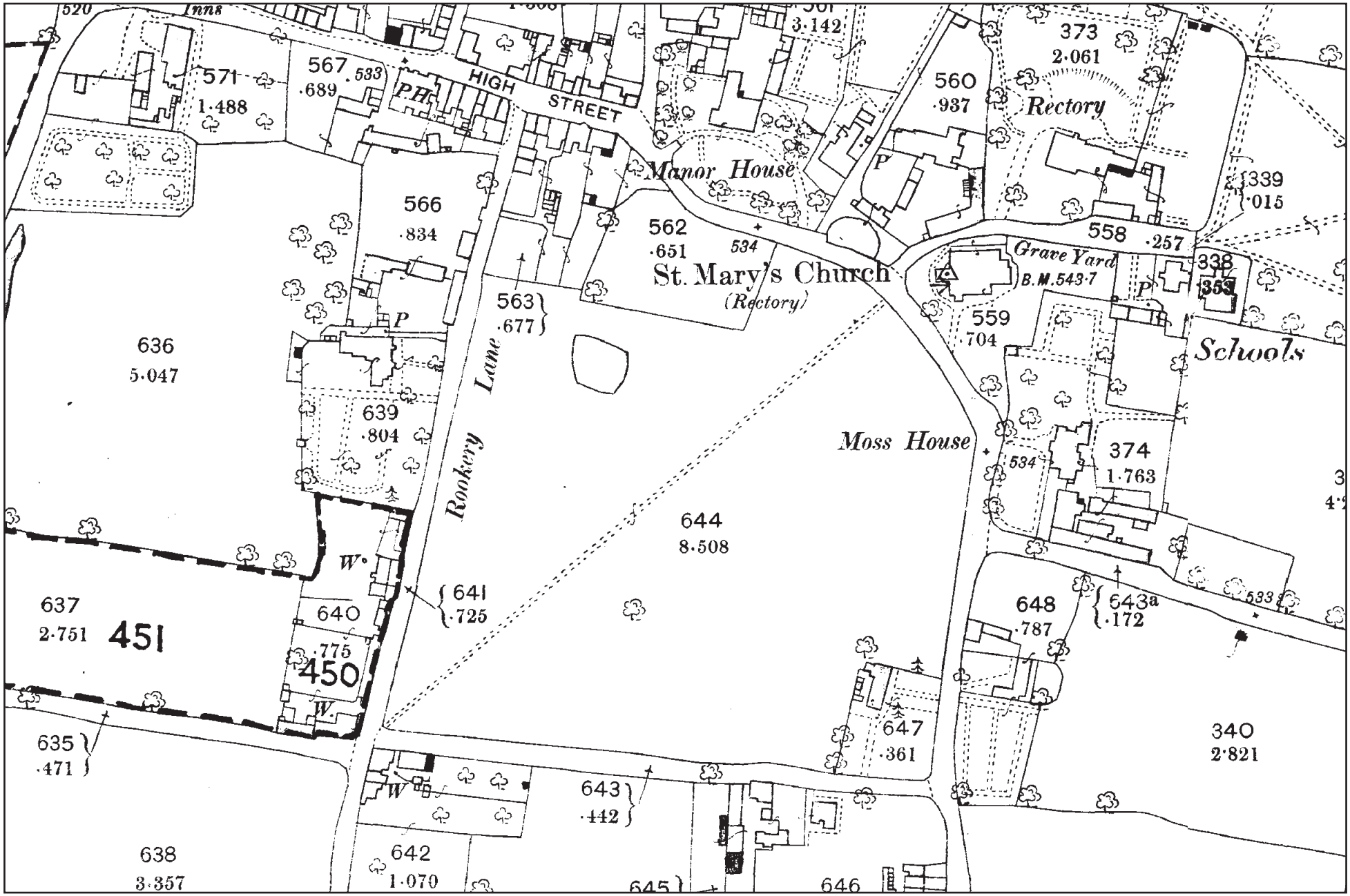
Ditch 205, looking north Fig 7



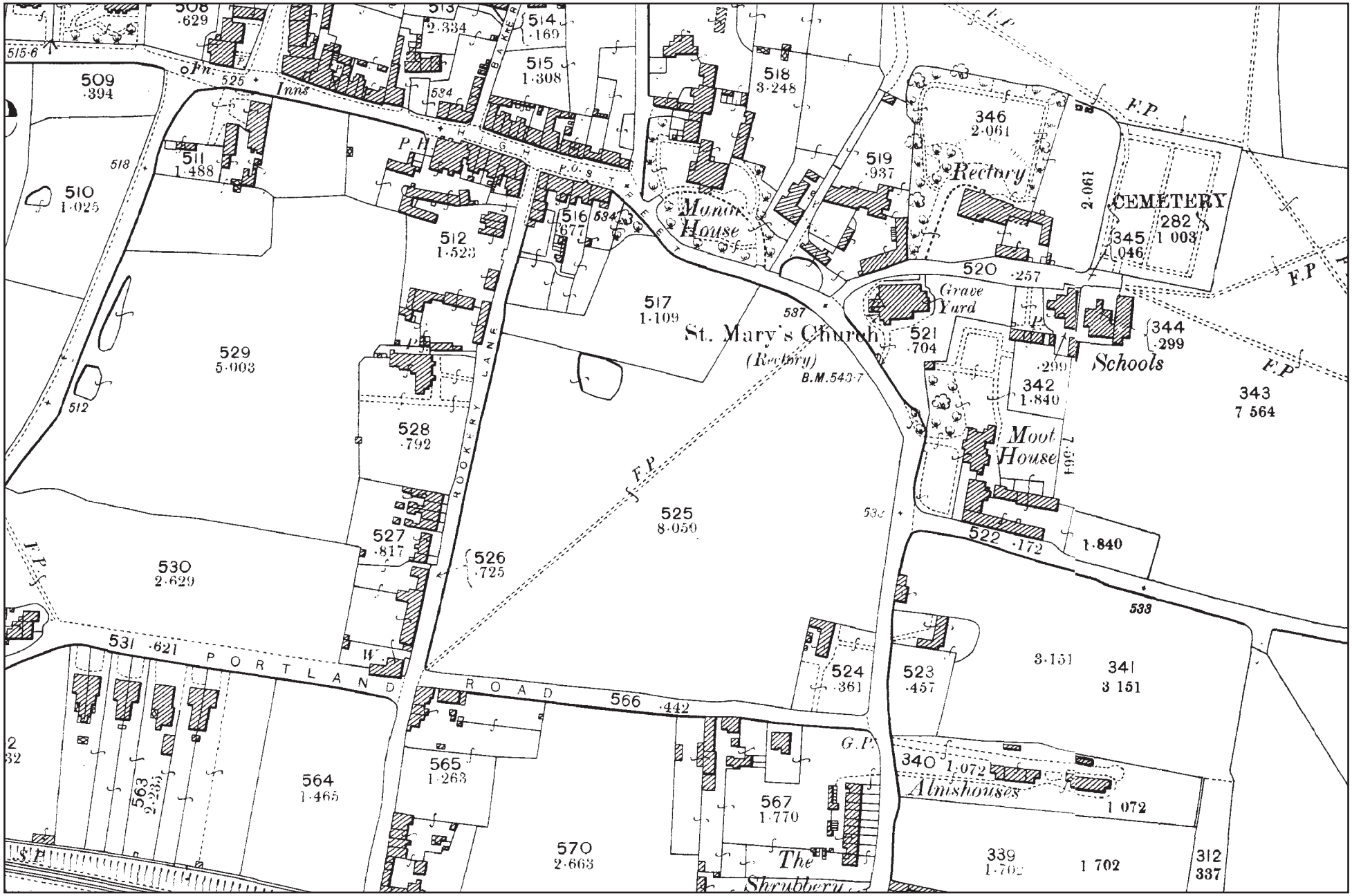
Trench 3, pit 306 and ditch 308, plan and section Fig 8

Ditch 308, looking north Fig 9

Pit 306, looking east Fig 10



Detail from Ordnance Survey map 1886 Fig 11



Detail for Ordnance Survey map 1902 Fig 12

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