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BROOK END

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Tay Homes

CNT Site 4, Shenley Brook End, Milton Keynes,
Buckinghamshire

NGR SP 8360 3545

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

January 1999

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Prepared by:

Date:

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In April, May and June of 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at CNT Site 4, Shenley Brook End, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 8360 3545). An access road, various turning heads and houses under construction occupied the majority of the site. An area of the north-east corner of the site was the last to be developed and was available for inspection: some ridge-and-furrow was identified here.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal comprised the construction of a housing estate at Site 4, with associated access roads and services.

The watching brief was commissioned by Tay Homes. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer.

2 Site Location and Geology

Site 4 is located along the northern edge of Garthwaite Crescent and adjacent to the northern edge of Tacknell Drive, Milton Keynes. It comprised an area of approximately 0.75 hectares sloping sharply down towards its eastern corner, and is located in a narrow area of open fields which separates Shenley Brook End from the deserted medieval village at Westbury (see fig. 1).

The site lies on drift geology comprising Boulder Clay, Glacial Sands and Gravels and Glacial Lake Deposits, over a solid geology comprising Oxford Clay.

3 Background

The parish of Shenley (derived from *scienan-leage*, meaning 'bright clearing') is located to the south-west of Watling Street, and contains two townships; Shenley Church End and Shenley Brook End. The development site is located roughly halfway between Dovecote Farm and Westbury Farm. There is little evidence for prehistoric occupation within Shenley parish, what evidence there is being confined to a small number of possible Neolithic or Mesolithic flints, typically found during the excavation of later settlements. Occasional Bronze Age artefacts have been encountered in the same way. Numerous Roman finds have been made all over the parish, including a tessellated pavement at Dovecote Farm (RCHM 1914, 254), in Shenley Brook End. Despite trial excavations in the farm gardens and investigations in adjoining fields, the exact location and nature of any Roman building here was not established. The present farmhouse dates to the early years of this century; it was however constructed on the site of an earlier, and probably medieval, farmhouse. Excavations have shown that the gardens were substantially landscaped, and no traces now survive of any earlier buildings (Ivens *et al.*, 1994). However, a considerable amount is known of the history of Dovecote Farm (see Fig. 3); it is marked on the Salden map of 1599 and on the 1698 survey. The latter also illustrates a small building, which is thought to be the dovecote which gave the farm its name. More informative is the 1656 Parliamentary Survey into the lands of the Guild of St Margaret and St Katherine at Fenny Stratford, founded in circa 1485. This survey

describes the Guild's lands in Shenley as "All ye Farme House with a Dovehouse two barns Stable and Garden together with a parcell of Pasture Ground...". In all some sixty acres of pasture and arable land are listed (Parliamentary Survey Bucks. 18, PRO E.317 18).

To the north-east of Dovecote Farm (see Fig. 3) is the earthwork complex known as Shenley Brook End Moat, the main components of which are a curving wet ditch which forms its southern and eastern sides and a straight pond-like feature which forms the northern side and gives the site its moated character. The 1698 survey of Shenley Brook End shows a large house on this site, a two-storey building set in an orchard or wooded garden. The surviving earthworks reflect the use of the site for a post-medieval house and garden, but this may only reflect re-use of a medieval moated or possibly even earlier site (Croft and Mynard 1993).

To the west is the deserted medieval village of Westbury, which comprises a vast complex of earthworks in the fields between Westbury Farm and Dovecote Farm. The overall impression from the air is of a ribbon development along two roads; the first is a hollow-way which runs for over a kilometre from Shenley Brook End Moat almost to Westbury Farm, the second runs northwards from Shenley Brook End and meets the east-west route approximately halfway between the two moated sites.

The place name 'Westbury' could imply that there was an easterly site or manor after which it was named. The 'bury' element in the place name is often associated with manor sites and there are several in Milton Keynes, for example Bury Street in Caldecotte and Bradwell Bury in Bradwell. It therefore is at least possible that this site was once the focus for one of the Saxon manors which are noted in Domesday, and which subsequently were taken over by Richard Ingania and Urso de Bercheres.

Extensive excavations on the site of the village in advance of development (Ivens *et al.*, 1994) have shown that the major period of occupation was in the 13th and 14th centuries; it remained occupied, albeit in a reduced form, in the 15th century but practically was deserted by the 16th century. Some evidence of earlier medieval settlement was also recovered in addition to Saxon and Roman use of the area.

The 1599 Salden Estate map of the area of Westbury village, shows a landscape which is beginning to be enclosed. The village of Westbury itself is unmarked although there is a building, which would appear to be Westbury Farm, and sizeable settlements are indicated both at Shenley Church End and Shenley Brook End. Enclosure increased over the following century, with many boundaries traceable on the RCHM earthwork plan (see Fig. 3), an illustration of how relatively little this part of Milton Keynes changed in 300 years before the advent of the new town.

Generally it is assumed that the moated site was the main focus for the manor at Westbury, and that the manor was an amalgamation of the Domesday estates of Richard Ingania and Urso de Bercheres (VCH 1927, 448). Both the origins and descent of Westbury manor are highly complex and who first constructed the moated site remains unknown. Probably it was a member of the Fitz Eustace family, who held the manor at the end of the 13th and throughout the 14th centuries, and may also have had an earlier interest in it. The most likely candidate for the construction of the moat

is Thomas Fitz Eustace who acquired the manor in 1327, and already had obtained permission in 1320 to have an oratory built at his house in Shenley (VCH 1927, 449).

4 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

5 Methodology

Inspection visits were made to the site when its development was already well advanced. The only surviving portion of the site, the north-east corner, was inspected after stripping and reduction, which took place without archaeological supervision. All excavation was by 360 mechanical excavator.

Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil descriptions use *estimated* percentages based on the use of standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

6 Results (Fig. 2, sections 1-3)

The area of the site remaining for inspection was confined to the north east corner of the site. Both the sections and the stripped surface were initially inspected visually for the presence of features and/or finds, which may have been left behind after stripping/truncation.

The section revealed the following sequence:

- (1) – 0.20 m of mid gray slightly silty clay loam with 5% medium-coarse subangular gravel, sealing;
- (2) – buff/brown stiff slightly silty weathered boulder clay, consistent to a depth of 0.50 m.

The stripped surface revealed the remnants of some ridge-and-furrow, which also could be seen in the grassed field beyond the northern boundary of the site (Site 6).

The furrows were cut through boulder clay natural (2) and all measured approximately 1.25 m in width by 0.29 m in depth; these were their measurements after truncation and they may originally have been more substantial. They were filled by (3) which comprised a mixture of (1) and (2) in roughly equal parts. No finds could be attributed to fill (3) with an acceptable degree of certainty, although finds were retrieved from the topsoil. It was noted that the ridge-and-furrow appeared to respect the standing hedge boundary at the eastern edge of the site.

7 Finds

All finds retrieved came from topsoil (1).

Post-medieval Pottery

Six small, highly abraded sherds of white china and two small, highly abraded sherds of terracotta were retrieved, all of which dated to the 19th/20th century.

Metalwork

Two small, highly corroded pieces of iron were retrieved, to which it was not possible to ascribe any form or function.

Other Finds

Two pieces of clay pipe were retrieved, a stem and bowl fragment, which tentatively have been dated to the 18th century.

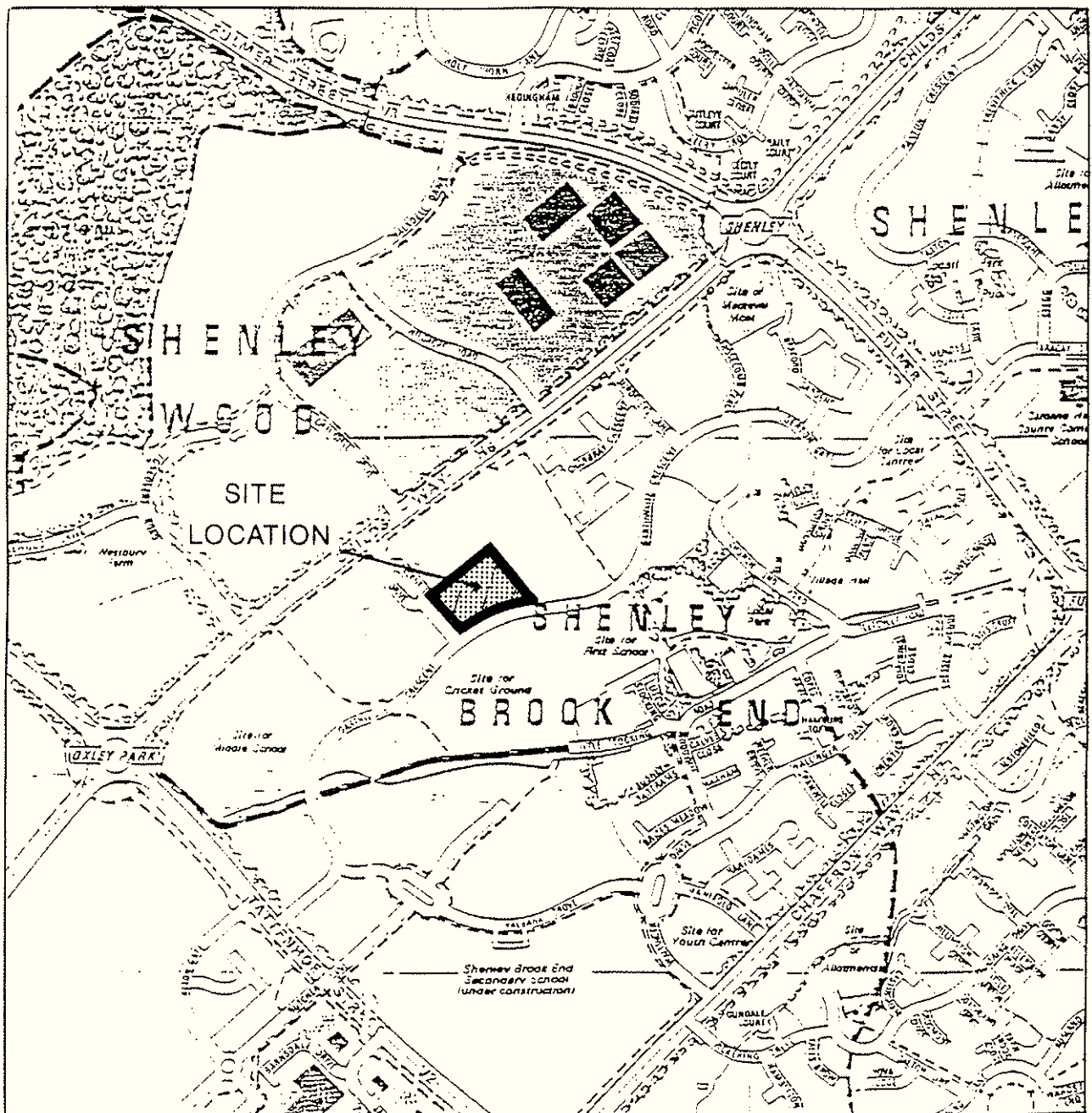
8 Discussion

It is thought likely that the ridge-and-furrow seen represents arable land possibly associated with one of the farmsteads at Westbury or one of the farms at Shenley Brook End, although it is not possible to say this with any certainty; the absence of secure dating evidence is regrettable. Those finds retrieved from the topsoil are not necessarily meaningful; their provenance is a ploughsoil and as such they could have been pulled into the site by the plough from elsewhere.

As noted elsewhere, the ridge-and-furrow is preserved to the north, in Site 6 where it is still under grass, and appeared to respect the standing hedge boundary to the east. This would imply that the hedge either is contemporary with, or predates, the ridge-and-furrow.

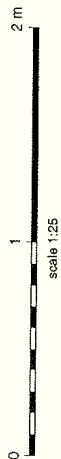
References.

- Croft, R.A. and Mynard, D.C. 1993 *The Changing Landscape of Milton Keynes* Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Monograph Series No. 5
- Ivens, R.J. *et al.*, 1994, *Westbury and Tattenhoe*, Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Monograph Series No. 8 (Aylesbury).
- RCHM, 1914. *An inventory of the historical monuments in Buckinghamshire, volume 2*. (London).
- VCH, 1927. *The Victoria history of the counties of England: Buckingham*, vol. 4 (London).
- Wilkinson, D (Ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



Location of site

Figure 1



Site plan

Figure 2

SITE 6.

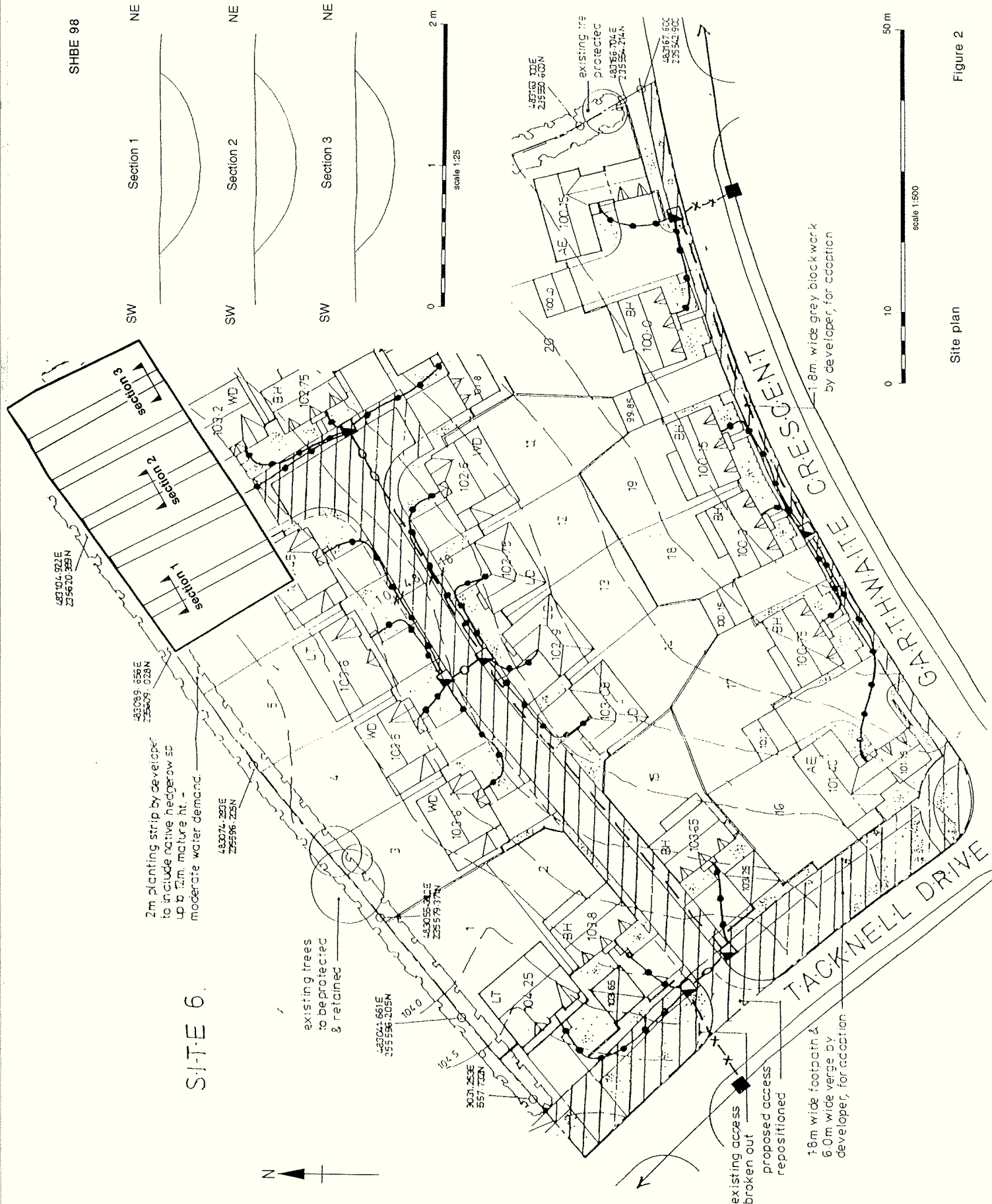
2m planting strip by developer to include native hedgerow sp up to 12m mature ht. - moderate water demand.

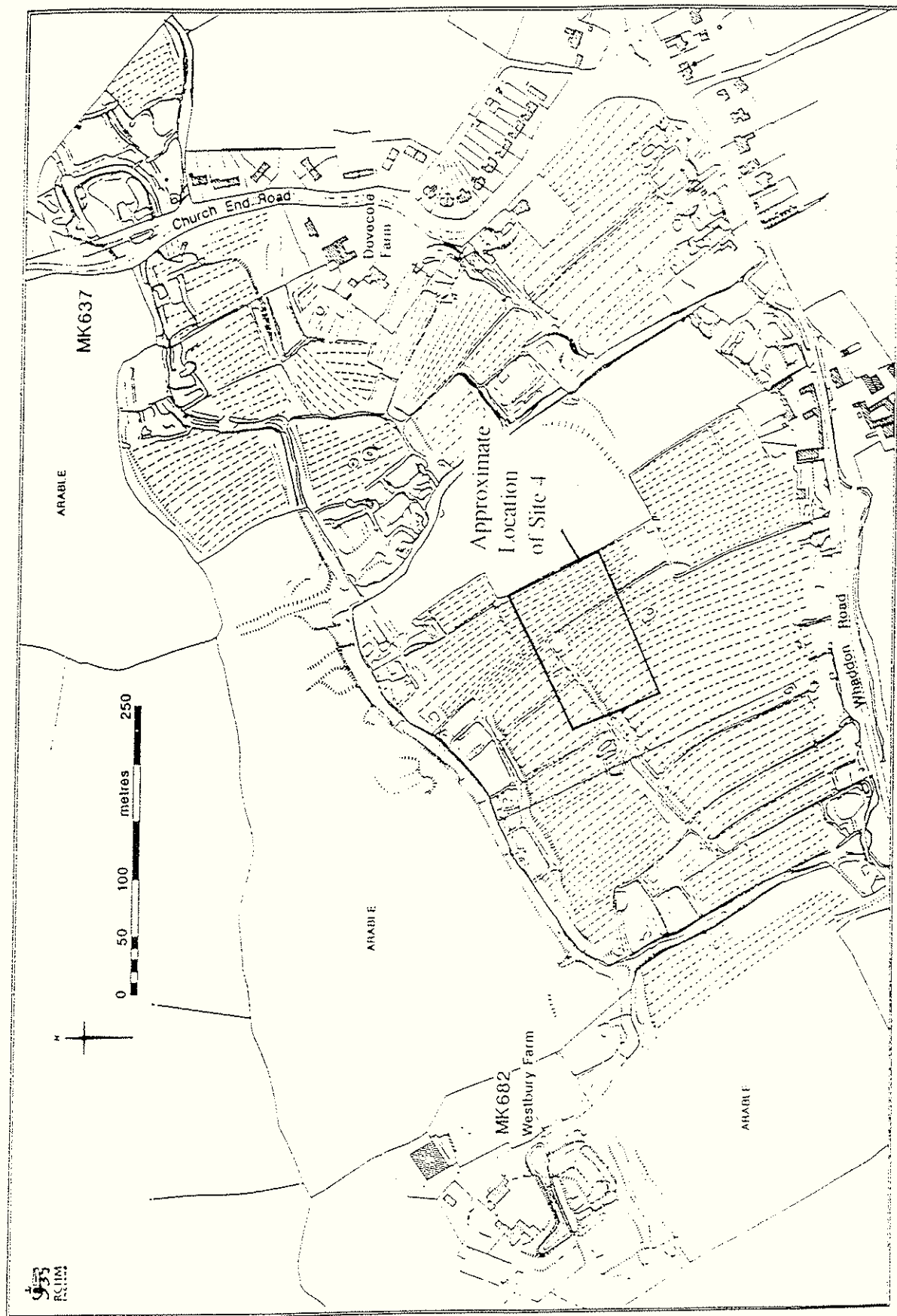
existing trees to be protected & retained

existing access broken out proposed access repositioned

18m wide footpath & 6.0m wide verge by developer, for adoption

11.8m wide grey block work by developer, for adoption





RCHM. earthwork survey



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