

Chapman Warren

**Cowfield Farm, Ashchurch
Gloucestershire**

Evaluation Report

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
1991**

INTRODUCTION

In June 1991 the Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation commissioned by Chapman Warren, Town Planning and Development Consultants. The site evaluated was an area of about 27 hectares around Cowfield Farm in the parish of Ashchurch, NE of Tewkesbury.

At present the area south of Cowfield Farm is arable and the fields north of Cowfield Farm are pasture.

The site lies at about 16 m OD and slopes gently away to the north and south. To the west it slopes more steeply down to the alluvial floodplain of the Carrant Brook.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

About ½ km to the south are a number of undated rectangular enclosures evident as cropmarks (GCC SMR 6343).

A Roman pie crust rim (GCC SMR 5485) was recovered from an area 100 m south-west of the site in an area now under industrial use.

Cowfield Farm is identified from historical documents as a medieval moated site (GCC SMR 5477). Within the farm is a 17th century barn and a pigsty both grade II listed buildings. North of the farm medieval ridge and furrow is well defined and survives within the pasture fields, bounded by drainage ditches also probably of medieval date.

STRATEGY

The evaluation trenches were dug using a JCB excavator with a 5 foot toothless grading bucket.

Twenty-four trenches were laid out each 30 m in length. They were either placed on the national grid or placed to locate particular features, eg the ridge and furrow. This gave a sample size of approximately 0.5%.

Earlier ploughsoils were excavated by machine and pottery recovered from it as it was removed. Any features were excavated by hand to establish their type, condition and date. Where archaeological features occur additional trenches were dug to find their density and limits.

SUMMARY (FIGURE 1)

Throughout most of the site an earlier ploughsoil survived. Pottery finds indicate a medieval date, but due to the small quantity of pottery recovered dating cannot be precise.

South of Cowfield Farm, notably in trench 1, 3 and 4 there were Romano-British pottery sherds within the medieval ploughsoil. A layer was identified below this, probably an earlier ploughsoil. This produced Romano-British sherds.

The moated site of Cowfield Farm and the ridge and furrow to the north were located and plotted. During trenching finds were recovered from the ridge and furrow ploughsoil.

The only archaeological features located below the ridge and furrow ploughsoil was an undated ditch in trench 15.

The listed buildings within the farm were not examined in detail, but a photographic record was made to record their present condition and position within the farm.

TRENCHES 1, 2, 3, 4, 23, 24

AREA SOUTH-WEST OF COWFIELD FARM

Below the modern ploughsoil all the above trenches contained a layer redeposited clay (Figure 3). Communication with the farmer, revealed this to be dumped spoil from the construction of the flood relief lagoon situated between Cowfield Farm and Carrant Brook. After the topsoil had been stripped the spoil from the lagoon was spread across the field. This layer varies in depth from 0.16 m to 0.85 m. Typically the bottom of this layer consists of a thin lense of remnant soil overlaid by a discoloured clay. The final dumping was a sandy clay. This layer contained post medieval, medieval and Romano-British pottery.

The dumped layer overlay an earlier ploughsoil which was disturbed by the dumping; most notably in trench 4 where the redeposited clay was up to 0.85 m in depth.

The earlier ploughsoil (Figure 3) consisted of a stiff clay loam. From trenches, 1, 3 and 4 there were four Romano-British pottery sherds, one of which was Severn Valley ware. In addition, there were two possible Romano-British sherds. None of these could be precisely date, although a date of 1st and 2nd century AD may be suggested. In trench 4 some brick or tile fragments were possibly medieval or early post medieval in date. The bottom of the earlier ploughsoil undulates slightly but gave no clear indications of ridge and furrow. There was no sign on the surface as the field contained a well advanced crop of wheat.

In trench 1, the earlier ploughsoil 1/3 overlay an orangey/brown clay ploughsoil 1/5, 0.18 m in depth. Excavated by hand, it produced three Romano-British sherds. A similar layer was identified in trenches 2 and 3.

TRENCHES 8, 5, 6 AND 7

AREA DIRECTLY SOUTH OF COWFIELD FARM

These trenches were positioned south of the moated enclosure to locate any archaeological deposits associated with the moated farmstead.

The moat was located in trenches 6 and 8 south of the farmhouse (Figure 2). East of the farmhouse the moat could be plotted as a depression. The remaining sides could not be accurately defined, although its probable course could be suggested. The moat encloses an area approximately 60 m x 60 m. To the east of the moat a water-filled ditch is a possible extension to the moated area probably enclosing a paddock with buildings adjacent to the moated farmstead.

Trench 5 contained no features.

In trench 6 the southern line of the moat 6/3 was located at the north end. It was sectioned by machine. The moat was 1.6 m deep with an estimated width of 10 m. The sides were sloping gently and the bottom appeared to be flat.

The latest fill in the moat consisted of a mix of clay loam and limestone rubble. Below this was another infill layer of stiff clay loam. This overlay an organic peaty deposit representing its last use as a waterfilled ditch. It contained post-medieval pottery probably 17th to 18th century in date. The bottom of the peaty layer was jagged in places suggesting it had been cleaned out at least once and probably on a regular basis. Below the peaty layer were two clay layers one of which contained one medieval pottery sherd.

On the south edge of the moat was a shallow ditch 6/4 on the same alignment as the moat. It cuts the moat fill and the earlier ploughsoil south of the ditch which suggests a late date. It produced no finds and probably represents an old boundary following the southern edge of the moat.

Trench 7 contained no features.

Trench 8 was only machined down to the level of the limestone rubble to establish the course of the moat. The moat extended along the whole length of the trench and at the western end the moat appeared to start turning to the north.

TRENCHES 9, 10, 11, 21 AND 22 AREA EAST AND SOUTH-EAST OF COWFIELD FARM

Trench 9 contained no features but the earlier ploughsoil contained a Romano-British sherd of Severn Valley ware.

Trench 10 was situated on an area of slightly higher ground. The earlier ploughsoil contained one medieval sherd.

Trench 21 contained no archaeological features. The modern ploughsoil overlay the undisturbed lias clay, no earlier ploughsoil was evident.

Trench 22 was dug in a field adjacent to the M5. Communication with the farmer revealed this field to have been used for storage of tarmac and stone for use in construction of the M5. This was confirmed by a layer a tarmac and rubble below the ploughsoil. There was considerable disturbance to the earlier ploughsoil. The depth of tarmac varied from 0.30 m to 0.80 m in depth.

TRENCHES 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19 AND 20 AREA OF RIDGE AND FURROW NORTH OF COWFIELD FARM

Trenches 12 and 13 were positioned near to the existing farm buildings. There were no archaeological features below the ridge and furrow ploughsoil.

The plan of the ridge and furrow (Figure 2) suggests the farmyard and buildings, including the 17th century timber frame barn, impinge onto this area of ridge and furrow.

In these trenches there were patches of periglacial sandy silt and gravel. In trench 12 this gravel had in places been ploughed up with the clay into the ridges.

Overlaid by the ridge and furrow ploughsoil 15/2 in trench 15 was a ditch 15/7 (Figure 5). Orientated approximately north-west/south-east it was 1.03 m wide and 0.49 m in depth. Curving slightly it contained snail shell fragments but no finds. Its fill was similar to that of the ridge and furrow ploughsoil.

Trench 20 was positioned to test the area for additional features associated with the ditch in trench 15. No archaeological features were located.

Trench 16 contained infrequent patches of burning along the northern half of the trench which was overlaid by the ridge and furrow ploughsoil. It possibly indicates land clearance prior to ploughing in the medieval period but there is nothing to preclude it being earlier in date. The ridge and furrow in trench 16 is shown in Figure 4.

Trenches 17, 18 and 19 produced no archaeological features. The ridge and furrow ploughsoil 18/2 in trench 18 contained one probable medieval sherd and a flint flake. The ridge and furrow ploughsoil in trench 19 produced a medieval green glazed sherd probably 14th or 15th century. In addition there was also an unglazed sherd and some bone fragments.

THE RIDGE AND FURROW (FIGURE 2)

From the evidence of the aerial photographs taken in February 1990, the ridge and furrow extends over most of the site above the Carrant Brook floodplain.

South of Cowfield Farm the fields are under wheat and if it survives it cannot be seen.

North of Cowfield Farm the ridge and furrow is preserved in fields under pasture. It is well defined due to the stability of the heavy clay soil. Where it survives it was plotted onto a map at a scale of 1:1250. The ridge and furrow is cut by later ditches and hedges and the M5 motorway.

In the north of the site where it is cut by the M5 it is bounded to the west by a ditch which divides it from the meadow sloping down to the Carrant Brook floodplain. This northern area is lower at around 15.03 m OD. The ditch curves to the south stopping at a wide bank which defines the higher ground to the south at about 15.80 m OD.

Since the ridge and furrow represent the latest of ploughing it is difficult to interpret the land-use at any one time. Although the ridge and furrow has fairly constant dimensions throughout the site there was no evidence for an infield outfield system where intensive manuring would result in higher concentrations of manure scatter pottery.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

The trenching showed a small concentration of Romano-British pottery in the south-west area of the site. Most of the pottery was within the medieval ploughsoil. A possible Roman ploughsoil was identified below this. This suggests that the small, worn Romano-British sherds were distributed in the manuring of arable fields. There was no evidence to indicate the presence of a Romano-British settlement on the site.

Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4 are likely to have located any features within the immediate area but due to the small sample size there is the possibility of small, scattered features not being located. Lack of Roman pottery from trenches to the east (with the exception of trench 9), suggests the area in the south-west may be peripheral to activity west or south of the site. The Roman pie crust (GCC SMR 5485) found to the west, in an area now under industrial use, may support this.

The only feature located under the ridge and furrow ploughsoil was a ditch in trench 15. It was undated and no firm conclusions can be drawn from it.

The trenches around the farm found no sign of buildings or features associated with the medieval moated farm. The existence of the moat was confirmed, mapped and recorded. The ridge and furrow to the north suggests there was a limited ... beyond the farmstead. Archaeological features and traces of earlier features may survive within the moated enclosure, and in the paddock immediately east of the moat.

The ridge and furrow ploughsoil produced a small quantity of medieval pottery. One sherd dated to 14th to 15th century. The precise dating of ridge and furrow is always problematic. It can only be dated with confidence when recorded stratigraphically in relation to some other feature of a similar date within the medieval period.

CONCLUSIONS

The field evaluation confirmed the boundary of the medieval moated manor and indicated that there are no external settlement features.

A scatter of Romano-British pottery is probably indicative of manuring of fields in the first/second centuries AD. No trace of a settlement was found.

Care should be taken to protect the moated manor site during the course of development. The farm house and historic farm buildings should be recorded in detail prior to any development.

The moated site is low-lying and surrounded by farmyard and an attractive paddock with mature trees and an orchard. Its setting need not be harmed if care is taken with the design of the adjacent development and careful planting.

Cowfield Farm is probably the surviving remnant of a number of buildings within the moated site, going back into the Middle Ages. Care should be taken within the moated enclosure not to damage without record any surviving archaeological features, eg any new

drains etc should be recorded. The partial excavation of the infilled moat would enhance the site.

There is no evidence for significant archaeological deposits in the development area beyond the moated site and no further archaeological action is recommended there.

THE FINDS

The finds were examined by Paul Booth BA. Excluding finds from topsoil, ploughsoil and recent dumping there are 25 sherds (including brick and tile), 1 flint flake and 2 bone fragments.



Context	Type	Find	Date
1/1	Modern ploughsoil	1 brick, 1 sherd	PM
1/2	Recent dumping	4 sherds	Modern-RB
1/3	Earlier ploughsoil	3 sherds	1 RB, 2 RB?
1/5	Roman? ploughsoil	3 sherds	RB
2/1	Modern ploughsoil	1 sherd	PM
3/3	Earlier ploughsoil	2 sherds	RB
4/3	Earlier ploughsoil	1 sherd, 2 bricks	RB brick undated
6/3/A/3	Ditch/moat	2 sherds, 2 tiles	PM
6/3/A/4	Ditch/moat	1 sherd	Med.
7/1	Modern ploughsoil	1 sherd	Med?
7/2	Earlier ploughsoil	3 tiles	Med? PM?
9/2	Earlier ploughsoil	1 sherd	RB
10/2	Earlier ploughsoil	1 sherd	Med.
12/1	Topsoil	2 sherds, 1 brick	Late Med.
13/1	Topsoil	2 tile	PM
16/2	Earlier ploughsoil	1 sherd	Med
18/2	Earlier ploughsoil	1 sherd	Med?
18/2	Earlier ploughsoil	1 flint flake	Undated
19/2	Earlier ploughsoil	2 sherds	Med.

RB - Romano-British

Med. - Medieval

PM - Post Medieval

Cowfield Farm evaluation trench location (positions approximate)

-  evaluation trench
-  limit of proposed development area

0 100 200 300m

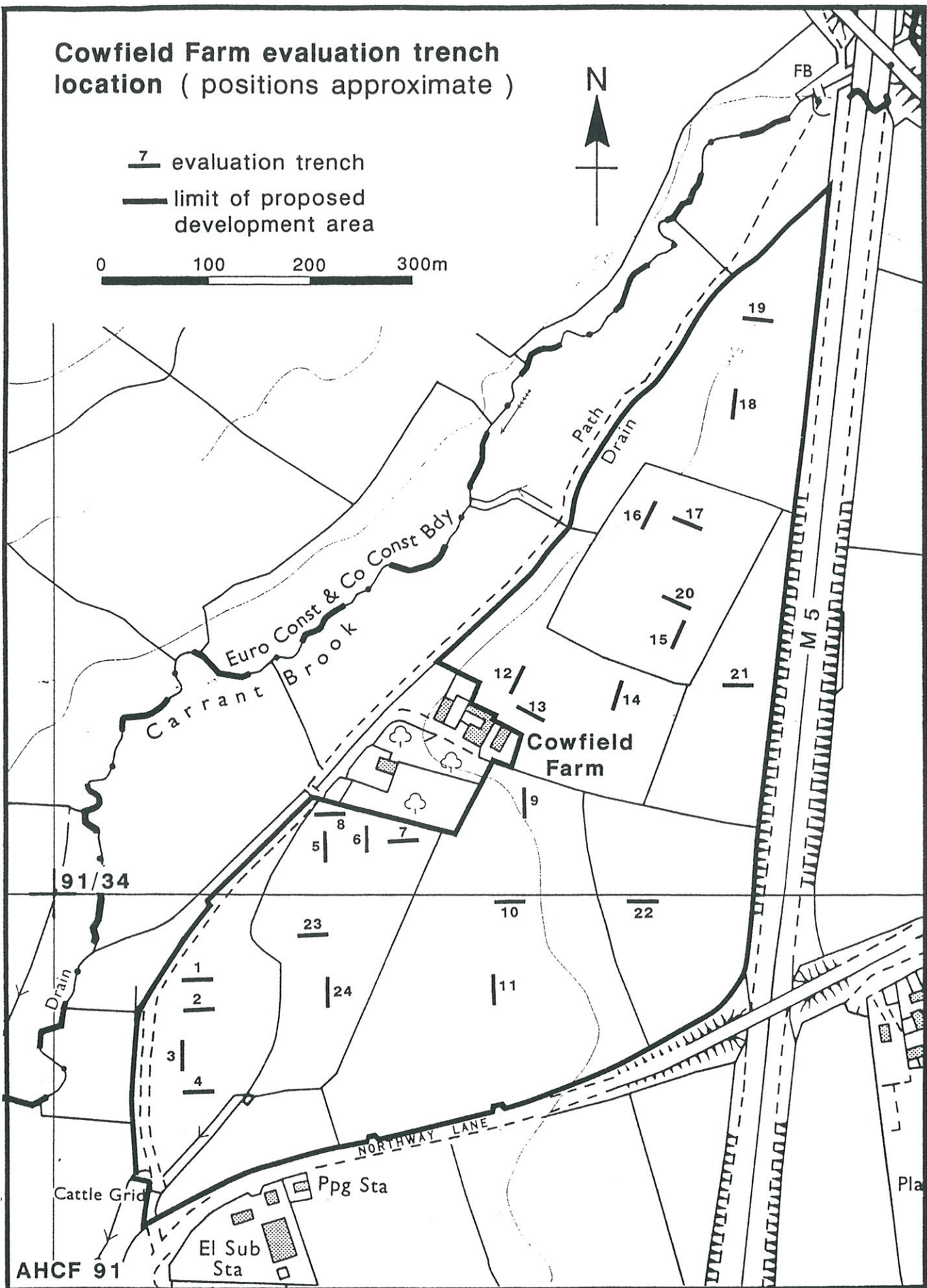
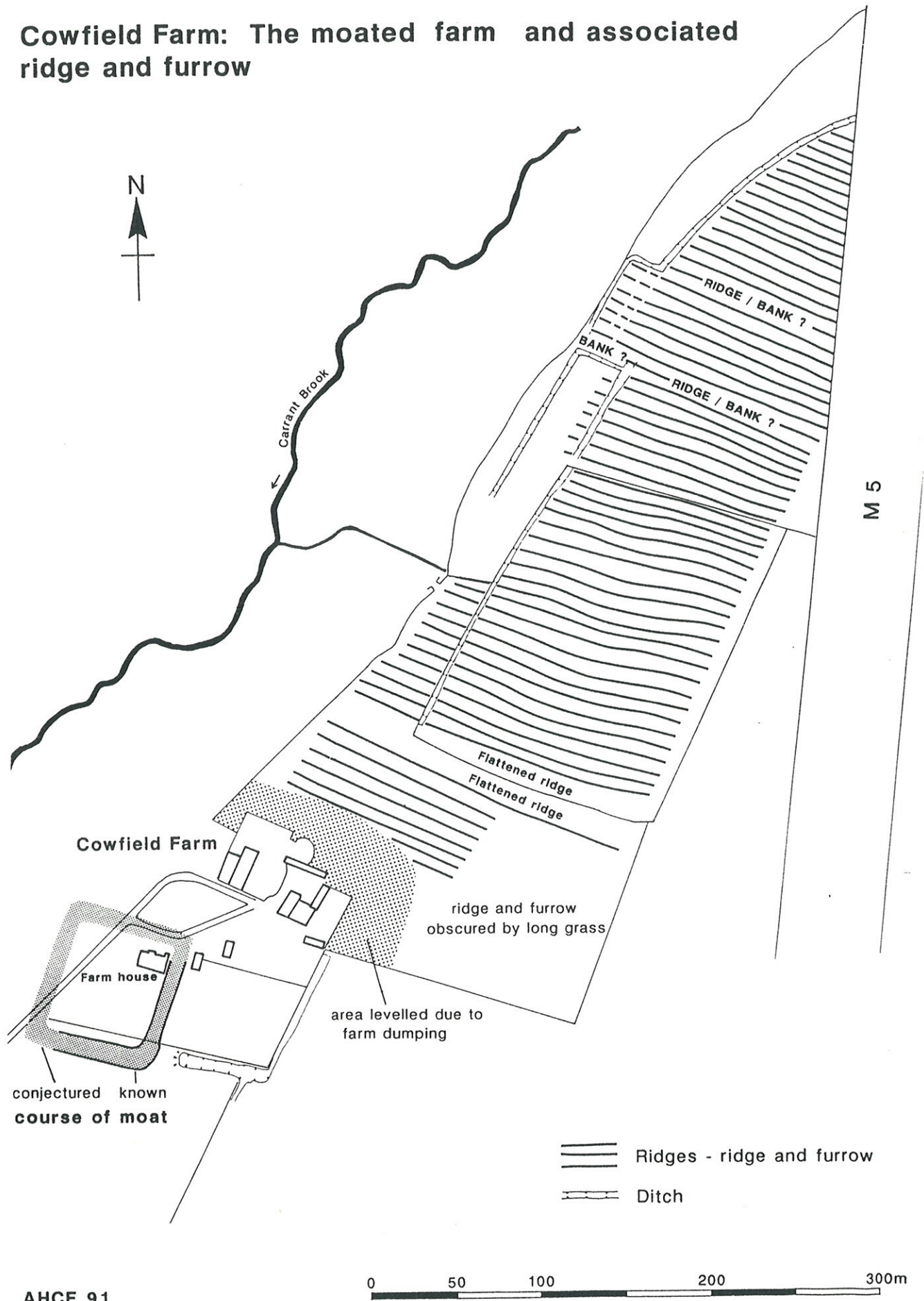


Figure 1

Cowfield Farm: The moated farm and associated ridge and furrow

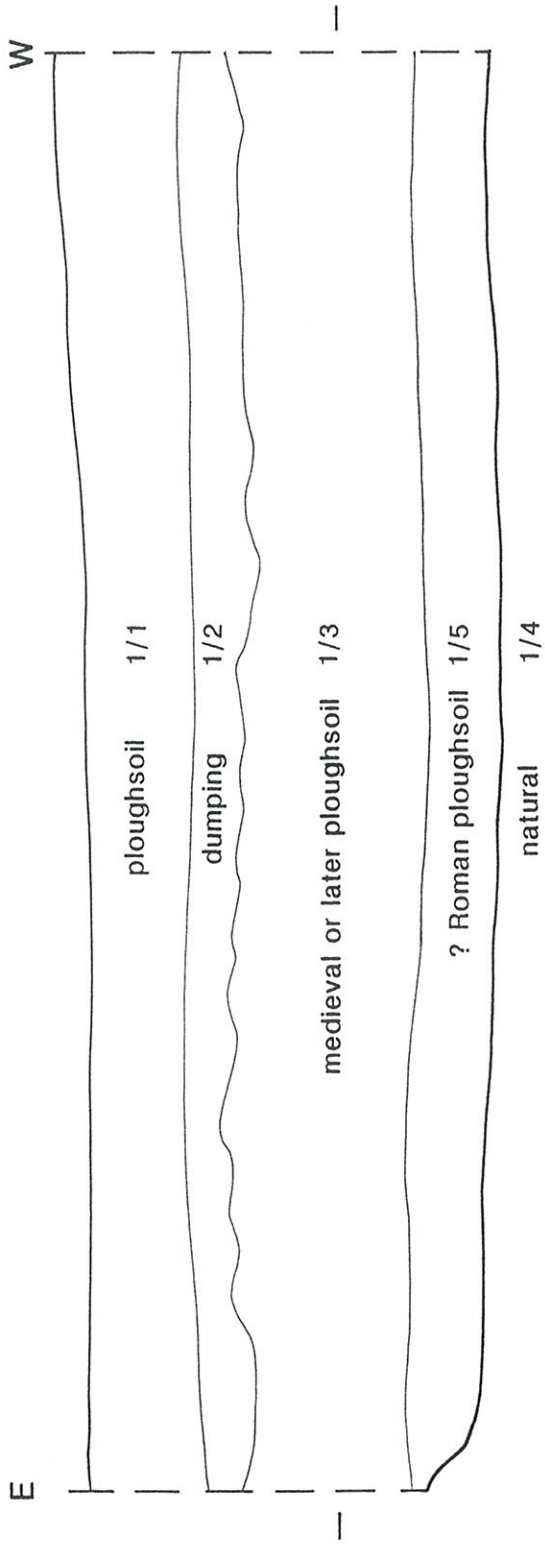


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Figure 2

TRENCH 1 section

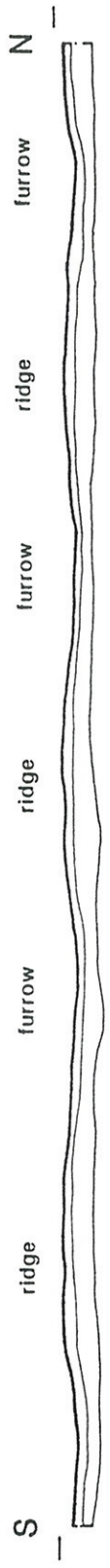


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Figure 3

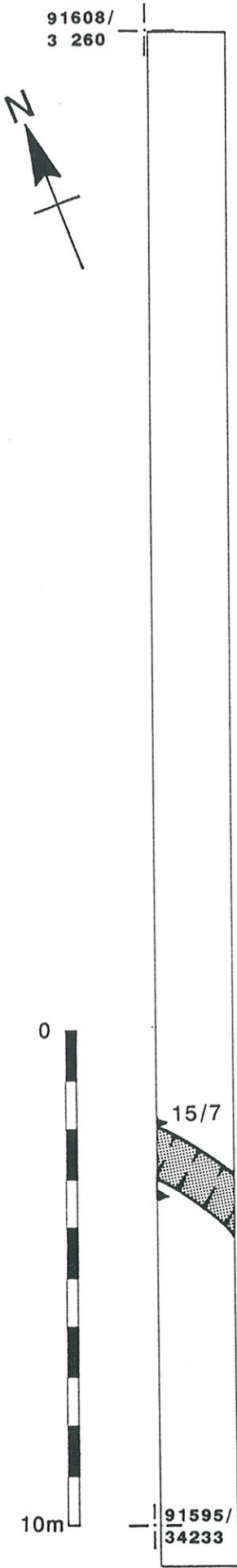
TRENCH 16

Section through ridge and furrow



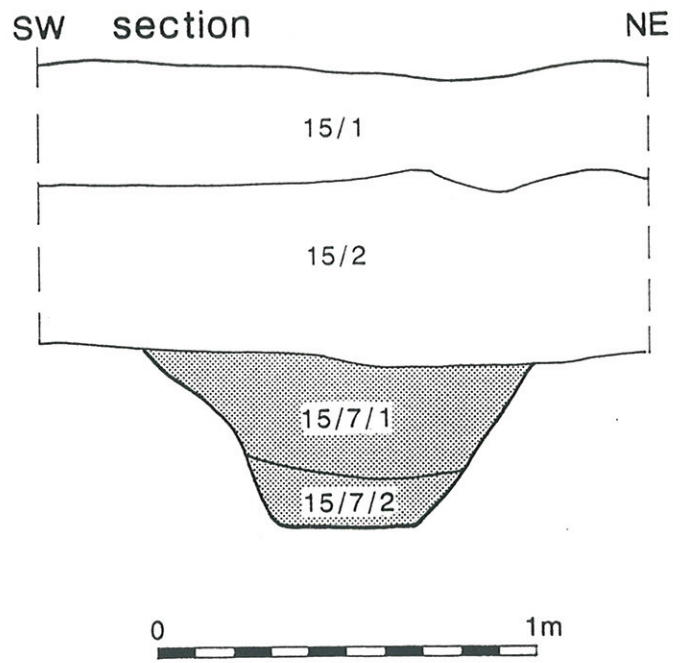
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Figure 4



TRENCH 15

plan



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Figure 5

