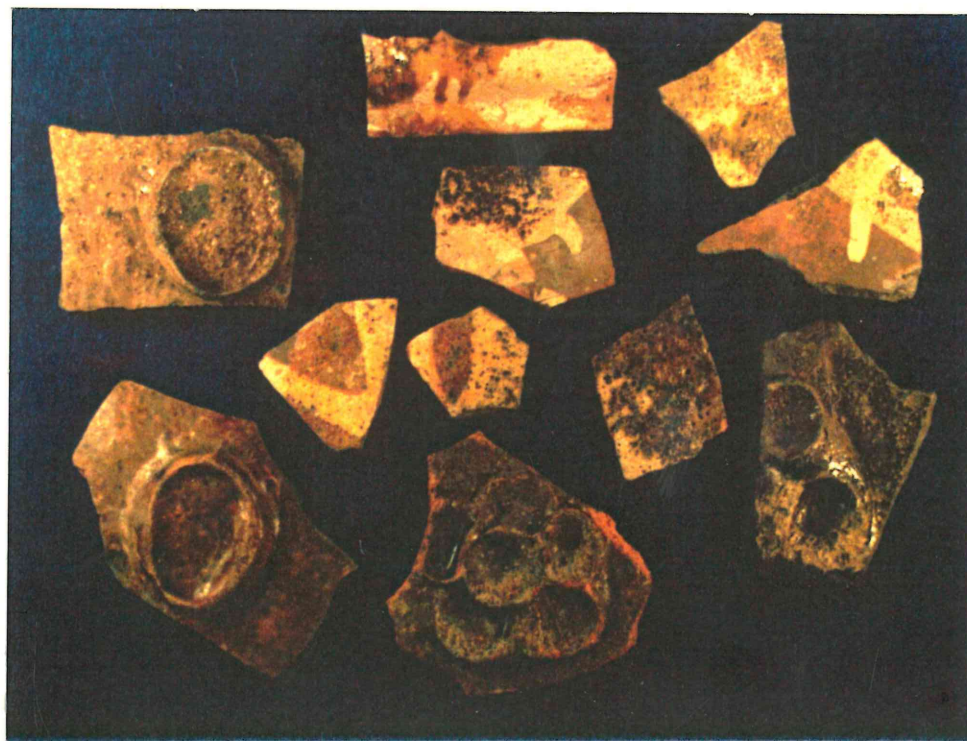


THE MEDIEVAL KILN SITE OLD CHURCH LANE, COLNE



Cambridgeshire
County Council

OLD CHURCH LANE, COLNE, 1992

- AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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Report no. 41

Glazed and decorated sherds from Colne kilns



cambridgeshire
archaeology

The Medieval kiln site, Old Church Lane, Colne - an archaeological assessment 1991.

Summary

An archaeological assessment was carried out at Old Church Lane, Colne (NGR TL/3705/7603) in December 1991 by the Archaeology Section of the Cambridgeshire County Council on behalf of Messrs. T.H.N & B. Bluff.

Trenching representing a 2.8% sample demonstrated the existence of a kiln site probably dating to the 13th and 16th centuries on the west boundary of the proposed development area.

It is suggested that this represents the eastern edge of an industrial area first reported in 1921 from the neighbouring properties. Other features in the south, east and north of the site were interpreted as recent disturbance associated with the farmyard and jam factory. It is possible that this disturbance has already obliterated features of an earlier date on the south-west margin of the site

In the light of the importance of an unploughed Medieval kiln site within Cambridgeshire the issues of preservation or total excavation are discussed.

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Introduction

Assessment brief

An assessment to determine the presence of archaeological material was undertaken on Old Church Road, Colne. It was undertaken on behalf of the landowners T.H.N. and B. Bluff in advance of an application for planning permission for a small housing development. The site at the time of the assessment was an operating 'farm yard' occupied by farm buildings, trackways and hard standing.

The assessment was intended to test presence/absence and quality of four known possible elements:

1. Traces of Shifted Medieval Village known to exist to north
2. Medieval/early Post Medieval street frontage on section of Old Church Lane running West to East.
3. Traces of extension of moated site to north
4. Kiln and pottery site found in 1921.

Strategy

The positioning of trenches was constrained by the standing buildings, access routes and services of a working farm yard. In addition there was no definite information on the layout of the proposed housing available. Therefore the areas trenched were selected from a limited number of options to provide the best overall picture of the archaeology of the area with special emphasis on the 4 known possible elements rather than any attempt to assess the impact of individual buildings.

Five trenches were excavated (A-E) (see map).

Trenches A and B were intended to test the presence of archaeological features in the northwest of the site, especially those associated with the kilns, moated site and Shifted Medieval Village.

Trenches C and E were intended to identify any features associated with the Shifted Medieval Village/moated site in the north-east of the site. They also provided the possibility of gathering information on the kiln material if the site was extensive or the find spot inaccurate.

Trench D was primarily intended to assess the existence of any evidence of Medieval and Post Medieval structures on the street front. It was hoped it would also provide further information on the alignment of any linear features originating from the archaeological sites to the north.

An additional trench in the east of the site (the court yard of the jam factory) was considered as an option. However the results from the other trenches suggested it would be unlikely to produce any additional information from what seemed likely to be a heavily disturbed area.

Methodology

The trenches were stripped by a machine operated by landowner, B. Bluff. All exposed features were hand excavated. Since both larger scale excavations and/or preservation are both options for the site, disturbance of archaeological features was kept to a

minimum consistent with identification of the character of archaeological remains and their level of survival.

All features were planned (by offsetting), and photographed and recorded as necessary.

Background information

Geology and topography

The Old Church Lane site lies at the east end of the ridge overlooking the Ouse valley. As such it overlooks the low lying areas of both the Ouse and the Fens. The ridge is capped by boulder clay up to just west of Colne. The site itself lies on a narrow band of gravel of the 1st river terrace. This is surrounded by exposures of the Ampthill Dark Grey clay (BGS Geological map). The area of Colne therefore represents a junction of Boulder clay (afforestation and fuel?), amphill clay (clay source?), fen peats (fuel?) and gravel terrace (well drained for settlement and agriculture?). If this interpretation is correct it may mean these considerations outweighed others such as the inconvenience of having to use road transport to reach the Fenland waterways or large markets like the town of St. Ives.

Background research

Setting.

The present village of Colne is south and east of the original village presumably centred on the now ruined Old St Helen's Church and lying between, and to the south of the two moated sites (SMR 1079 and 1082). The period of the change in location of the village is not known. From architectural evidence the church seems to date from the 13th century but was mainly 14th century and later. The remaining structure, the porch, is of 16th century date suggesting continued activity on the 'old Colne' site at this time.

It would seem there ought to be an important relationship between old Colne to Earith looks as though it ought to be very important if Colne was an industrial centre. Colne lacks a waterway for cheap transport of bulky material such as pottery. The Cranbrooke drain (believed to be part of the Roman Car Dyke system) lies approximately one mile from Colne but its value as a transport route during the Medieval period is not known. On the other hand Earith is well placed on the river Ouse. In fact the name Earith means 'muddy or gravelly landing place' (VCH Hunts II, 153). However it is interesting to note that the modern village of Colne still concentrates around the Bluntisham to Somersham road. The original line of the Bluntisham to Somersham road is not known. Options include the present footpath running from south of Colne through 'old Colne' and Colne Green to Somersham Bishops Palace and/or from old Colne to the bend in the present Earith to Somersham road at Deadman's Hill (see fig 6). Indeed 'old Colne' may have sat at the original cross roads of the Bluntisham/Somersham and Earith/Somersham roads. Whatever the correct option old Colne seems to have been on a route to Somersham. It is possible therefore that whatever industries existed in Colne during the Medieval period it was in some way dependent upon Somersham and more particularly the Bishop's Palace there.

Old Church Lane site

The Old Church Road site lies 30m to the south of the 'Drury manor' moat. The 1814 enclosure map shows no occupation in the area although it is marked as old enclosure suggesting ownership is well established presumably because it is linked to the neighbouring moated site.

Little is known of the moated sites at Colne. Any structures on the west moat, believed to have belonged to the La Leghe family, and the east moat, traditionally known as Drury's Manor, are said to have been demolished before 1787. The landowner reports excavations on the central island of 'Drury's Manor' in the 1920s which found nothing.

This suggests whatever structures existed on the island were of timber. The site has subsequently been ploughed and the ditch partially cleared out to provide a wildfowl sanctuary. The 1887 OS map shows the remains of arms on the east side of the moat which do not show on modern maps. This supports the idea that the original entrance was in fact on the eastern side leading to what is now called Old Church Road but seems to have been the original access to the old Colne village. The western bridge onto the central island of the moat shown on the 1887 map seems to be a relatively recent change of layout.

Previous work

The excavations on the moated site in the 1920s (see above) may be associated with the campaign which found the kiln site and pottery dump in 1921. Tebbutt (1949) gives the north-east corner of the neighbouring property to the west of the proposed development site as the find spot (see fig 2). Unfortunately neither the records nor the finds from either excavation seem to survive although the Norris Museum at St Ives, the Ordnance Survey at Southampton and the Public Record Office at Kew have been asked for any additional information they may have been given by Tebbutt (it is possible the original records were destroyed by bombs in World War 2). So insubstantial was the evidence it was felt reasonable to be careful about accepting the accuracy of the report of the kiln.

Local knowledge

The clients (the landowners) reported that the council housing in the neighbouring property was built about the same time as the reported find of the kiln and pottery. This might mean that the kiln was in fact exposed by the building works further to the west or south than is recorded or that work in this area simply attracted attention to already visible archaeological features.

The eastern half of the proposed development area is still covered by the remains of a jam factory. The buildings which housed it already appear as early as the 1887 OS map (25" 1st Edition) (fig 5) and possibly on the Enclosure award map of 1814 (fig 4).

The clients also said they had recently erected an agricultural building in the north west corner of the site (see fig 2, building A). They reported finding nothing while digging the foundations. Mr Bluff also remembered finding nothing while digging up the area between building A and building C (fig 2), and between buildings C and D and the southern boundary of the proposed development area.

Results.

Trenches C, D and E.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of trenches. In Trenches C, D and E removal of topsoil and/or hard-core exposed features cut into natural subsoil (fig 7). None of the trenches produced features which could be demonstrated to be earlier than modern times. Trench C produced two features (**cuts 13 and 14**) apparently associated with the adjacent jam factory. Trench E produced no features, simply exposing the natural gravel subsoil. Trench D exposed a series of apparently modern, machine dug, disturbances. This fitted with the landowners statement that the area in front of the barns had been heavily disturbed. The western most feature produced redeposited Saxo-Norman pottery (**context 19**). Natural subsoil in trench D was a mix of gravel and orange clay.

Trenches A and B.

The stripping of topsoil from trenches A (fig 7) and B (fig 8) exposed a stratified sequence of contexts dating from 13th century to modern times. Figure 9 shows the stratigraphical diagram for trenches A, and B. Figures 8 and 10 show the distribution of the contexts. Although the underlying natural was gravel, many of the fill and layers had a high clay content.

The major elements of the kiln area

Context 31

Directly under the topsoil is a low mound of pottery(**context 31**). In its centre it is as much as 20 cm deep. This layer continues as a thin scatter of individual pot sherds down a slight slope to the south of the mound suggesting the spreading of the original dump by weathering. The dump contained both 13th and 16th century pottery (with possibly transitional material of an intermediate date). There was no apparent stratigraphy in the small sample excavated though the sherds tended to be laminated (ie they lay flat). One possible interpretation of this is that a pottery dump has been redeposited, in shovel loads, from some other point on the site.

Contexts 39 and 41

Within or below **context 31** are **contexts 39 and 41**. These comprise an area of apparently heated, but not burnt, and now very plastic, pink clay mixed with fabrics similar to those in the pottery mound. This may represent an unfired part of the wall of an old kiln or, more likely, it may be the weathered remains of unfused wasters.

To the south of the main pottery dump, and pre-dating it, was a low-lying area which was filled with a series of layers of humic soil mixed with frequent pot sherds. The majority of the pottery from these contexts was predominantly fabric 3 suggesting a 16th century date. These layers also contained the best evidence of burning found on the site. Though no charcoal or ash was recovered, lenses within these contexts showed as concentrations of burnt(?) pottery fragments and darker soil.

Context 47

Beneath **context 41 and 39** is a thin lens of clean redeposited gravel (**context 47**). This seems a slight feature but raises interesting problems. If it is an accidental spillage it suggests digging activity close by (eg construction of new kiln) however in the small

area excavated in 1991 no features contemporary to 47 were dug deep enough to disturb natural subsoil. Another possibility is that the gravel was put down to dry up the slight dip in which it lies allowing some other activity to be continued. If this idea of the need for surfacing is feasible we could then extend this interpretation to the pottery mound itself.

Context 46

Below the gravel lens is a clay layer (context 46) which spread out, becoming part of the surface 35. This is a thin layer of what appeared to be clayey trample covering the area around and under the pottery dump. Following the idea of a floor surface suggested by context 47, context 46 again suggests the action of feet and a concentration of activity over this area. The trampling may explain the strange relationship between 48 and 46.

Context 48

It is suggested that 48 is the fill of a robber trench of a brick and mortar wall cut through 46 and the underlying layer 57. However the junction between 46 and 48 is then 'blurred' to such an extent that 46 is spread over 48 (see fig 10).

Context 57

Underlying 46 is a layer of mortar fragments. This is interpreted as the demolition layer of the structure which now survives only as 63.

Contexts 63 and 76

Context 63 is a curved band of dense, but unconsolidated, mortar at the base of the robber trench 76. It ended in the east section of test pit A in a tip of a block of mortar still containing two brick fragments. It was not possible to excavate any further without excavating (and destroying) other elements of the site unnecessarily. However the distinctiveness and shape of 63 suggests it is the base of a robbed-out brick structure. This is further supported by the mirroring of the contexts in the unexcavated south end of test pit A which would provide a continuation of a sub-circular wall line (see fig 8). The kilns dating to the 1500s at Bourne were brick built and free-standing structures (Hilary Healey *pers comm*). The existence of kilns of this type and date at Colne would fit well with the production of fabric 3 type pottery.

Contexts 49, 53, 67, 68, 52, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 70, 64

The proposed kiln of which 63 is the last traces seems to have been partially dug into context 49. 49 shows no sign of heating, therefore if 63 was a kiln it must have had a floor which was subsequently also removed.

Context 49 is one of several dump layers filling a substantial depression. One of the lower of these layers, **context 68**, produced two sherds of a non-local (possibly Grimston) pottery dating to the 13th or possibly 14th centuries. Directly over the gravel natural a very distinctive layer occurred, a fine dry silt very different in character to the compact clays overlying it (**context 64**) (see fig 10). This might be a water-lain deposit from some form of flooding of the hollow (**context 72**). **Context 64** shares many characteristics with 37, the layer underlying much of 36. It is difficult to see flooding as a major factor in the area of the site from the available evidence. However water would have been available from the spring which still continues to feed the 'Drury Manor' moat today.

Context 72

The origin of the depression (**context 72**) underlying the other structures is another problem. During excavation it appeared to be artificial in origin. Activity in this area in the 13th century is demonstrated by fabric type 1. This is a plausible date for this hollow. However so little of this feature was exposed during the excavation that interpretation is difficult. Many types of Medieval pottery kiln had large stokepits (Musty 1978) and it is possible that this is what context 72 is. If this is correct our current understanding of the stratigraphy of the site would rule out context 72 being associated with the probable kiln traces of context 63. This would leave us with having suggest a second, earlier, kiln approximately on the same site. Other excavated features associated with potting might include clay storage pits, water ponds or soakaways. The lack of domestic refuse seems to rule out a domestic feature such as a rubbish pit.

Context 73

The kiln and pottery dump are located on a low ridge. This may be partly artificial since it is possible that the slope (**73**) is created by excavation. Since trench D showed that the natural in the south of the proposed development area includes patches of pure clay, it is possible that **73** is a borrow pit associated with pottery kiln. Indeed it is possible to go further and tentatively suggest that since it seems to have been backfilled during the time of fabric 3 that it was a borrow pit associated with fabric types 1 or 2. A change in the borrow pit used by the pottery may have contributed to the change in fabric.

Contexts 34 and 65

The final set of features associated with the kiln area are two cuts (**34** and **65**) running apparently north-south on the eastern extreme of the site. Stratigraphically they are separated by the trample layer **35**. Neither feature had both edges in the trench so it is difficult to say from their observed form whether they are the results of ditching or quarrying. However, it is difficult to see why the layers here would be quarried, so it seems safe to assume on the present evidence that they were ditches. Roughly in the same position and believed to be on the same alignment, skirting the kiln area, it is possible that they represent 2 phases of a boundary ditch. Though suspiciously convenient for the purposes of this assessment these features may give the physical limit to the industrial area.

Finds

The vast majority of the finds were ceramics. The lack of domestic debris such as metalwork or food debris is very obvious. The main finds came from the following contexts:

19, 31, 68, 39, 41, 44, 45, 46, 38

Pottery Assessment by Hilary Healey

Three fabric types were identified by microscopic examination:

1. Dark grey-brown to black surface, red and grey core. Inclusions of sand and of oolitic limestone grit. The latter have occasionally leached out, leaving small holes on the surface of the fabric. No glazed sherds were present.

Forms identified are jugs, pipkins, bowls, 'ginger jars' and at least one bung-hole jar. Several basal angle sherds show a pronounced sagging base with external knife trimming. Sherds are of thick walled vessels, and the ?jug rims with handles attached are similar in form to jar rims.

2. A harder fired, grey sand tempered ware which is basically similar to fabric 1 but may turn out to be of a slightly different (later?) date. Few diagnostic sherds are present but these include jugs, bowls and a flat base, probably of a jug. One or two sherds appear to have been glazed.

3. Red fabric with a varying proportion of sand; a few sherds are completely free of sand, but this seems to be exceptional. Examples of sherds with both a white slip and a clear glaze are present. Forms include jugs, bowls, jars and two-handled jars with bung-holes.

Additional material

Notable amongst the few sherds which fell outside the three main fabric types were two small groups of pottery:

2 sherds of a ware similar to that produced at Grimston, Norfolk, dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. Unfortunately the form is difficult to identify and therefore date more closely.

A group of sherds of shell tempered Saxo-Norman pottery associated with a lava quern. Unfortunately these came from a modern disturbance.

Fragments of flat roof tile, one with a peg-hole in the corner also occur, together with several lumps of fired clay which may be parts of kiln structure but this is by no means certain.

Discussion of pottery

The material seen consists chiefly of body sherds, but sufficient rim, handle and base pieces are present to give some indication of vessel forms. These diagnostic sherds suggest, by comparison with similar material from other counties, that fabric 1 may be of 13th century date, and fabric 3 of 16th century date. Fabric 3 is similar to the type of pottery known as 'Cambridge Sgraffito', although no examples of sgraffito decoration are present in this collection.

The large quantity of material in a comparatively small number of fabrics, combined with the wasters and fragments of fired clay, strongly suggests that there were kilns in the area of excavated pottery which operated over a considerable period, though not necessarily continuously. This would be comparable to centres in neighbouring counties, such as Lyveden, Northants and Bourne, Lincs.

Conclusions.

Traces of Shifted Medieval Village known to exist to north

No traces of Medieval building were noted. On the available evidence it is suggested that 'old Colne' does not extend into this part of Old Church Lane site. This is consistent with the existence of the kiln site here (see below). The risk of fire and quite probably the nuisance value of the fumes mean that kilns would have been unwelcome within a settlement. Although the location of kilns in villages suggests these were not overriding factors (McCarthy and Brooke 1988).

Existence of Medieval/early post Medieval street frontage

Trench D was so heavily disturbed by modern farming activity it is hard to be certain that no Medieval features ever existed here. The lack of evidence for any extension of the Shifted Medieval Village into this area would make a formal street front unnecessary. In addition it is possible to suggest that the road into old Colne appears not to have passed along this East/West part of Old Church Road but further to the west on what is now the North/South section of Old Church Road (see fig 2). If this is correct it is likely that any buildings, such as the potters accommodation, would cluster there rather than in the assessed area.

Traces of extension of moated site

There was no evidence for additional ditches associated with the moat in this assessment. It has already been noted that the moat did have arms on the west side not shown on recent maps. This suggests that the entrance and therefore ancillary structures such as access roads would be to the west between the moat and Old Church Road. One possible trace of the moated site is **context 36**, a thick layer of loam. It has been suggested that this may be the upcast from excavation of the moat. However there is no evidence available for the construction of the moat nor is the relationship of the kiln area to **context 36** clear.

Kiln site found in 1921

The assessment trenching identified the eastern edge of a multiple phase kiln area. It can be seen to extend into the gardens of the houses to the east where it has obviously been disturbed by gardening and tree planting.

This area of the site is well preserved (the pottery dump survives as a low mound beneath a shallow layer of topsoil). The structure, stratigraphy, and phasing of the area could not be completely understood within the remit of an assessment excavation which was seeking to minimise damage to the monument. However it is possible to present an interim statement on the elements of the site and their chronological sequence.

Extent of kiln site and associated features

The assessment seems to have given a reasonable indication of the extent of the industrial area (fig 11). The current development area probably includes only the eastern edge of a quite extensive site.

The north and south of the area are delimited by the slopes noted in trench B. The eastern limit of the area is more conjectural. However three sources of evidence combine to give an eastern limit to the area of the archaeological importance:

- a. the possible boundary ditches,
- b. the lack of discoveries of material during the digging works associated with the recent farm buildings, and
- c. the *fait accompli* of existing disturbances

To the west the site extends beyond the boundary of the assessed area. The pottery dump excavated in the assessment definitely extends into the neighbouring properties. However it is sufficiently far from the position of the kiln reported by Tebbutt to suggest the existence of at least one more kiln and pottery dump to the north west. The dwellings and workshops of the potters are often associated with their kilns. If the north - south length of Old Church Road is the original Colne road it would suggest that further features will be found under the houses, and their front gardens, to the west of the kiln site. Unfortunately there is no documentary or map evidence of the Medieval field boundaries to confirm what is essentially speculation.

Although it is apparent that the site extends into the adjacent properties, the most completely preserved portion of the site is likely to be that lying in the development area where the top layers have not been turned over by cultivation.

Vulnerability of the site

The remains seem well preserved having not been ploughed. This means that they are sensitive to disturbance - containing information already destroyed on other sites - and easy to disturb not being covered by a great depth of soil. The risk of disturbance is graphically demonstrated by the amount of pottery freshly disturbed by a tree recently planted in the neighbouring garden.

The remains also demonstrate how difficult the positive identification of a pottery kiln is. In county terms this means that it is virtually impossible to expect to see kiln structures to be positively identified simply by finds in the ploughsoil. In terms of the development area it would be possible for past disturbances of kiln to have passed unnoticed (the unreported 'discovery' of the pottery during the planting of the tree is a case in point). This also suggests future disturbances of other elements of the site would not be noticed and therefore would be difficult to manage on a voluntary basis.

Other features noted during excavation

All other features noted in the assessment can be assigned to three other activities of 19th and 20th century date: farmyard activities, the jam factory and the fruit tree orchard to the north of the proposed development area.

Discussion

Assessment excavation at Colne has demonstrated the existence of a long-lived pottery production site. It recovered evidence pointing to kiln structures which implied a phased sequence of construction. This suggests the possibility of a well preserved assemblage of products and kiln types. In addition the lack of plough damage suggests the possibility of surviving associated structures.

As a Medieval kiln site, this is of both local and national importance. Cambridgeshire is unusual in that to date no Medieval kiln sites have been excavated in the county, and this absence causes severe limitations in the study of regional pottery types, which in its turn affects national studies. The origins of the well known type known as Cambridge Sgraffito, for example, remains obscure.

This would seem to point to the need to either preserve the site as a future source of information about the past in Colne and Cambridgeshire or totally excavate the area of the site affected by the development to rescue the information before it is destroyed.

It is not within the remit of the assessment to put forward a programme of future work. This should be agreed with the County Archaeologist's office.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Simon Bray, Ray North and Chris Montague who took part in the assessment excavation, and Erika Guttman and Stephen Williams who have helped with the finds processing. Support was provided by other members of the Cambridgeshire Archaeological Section especially Tim Malim and Gerry Wait.

The pottery report and information on pottery industries in the region was supplied by Hilary Healey.

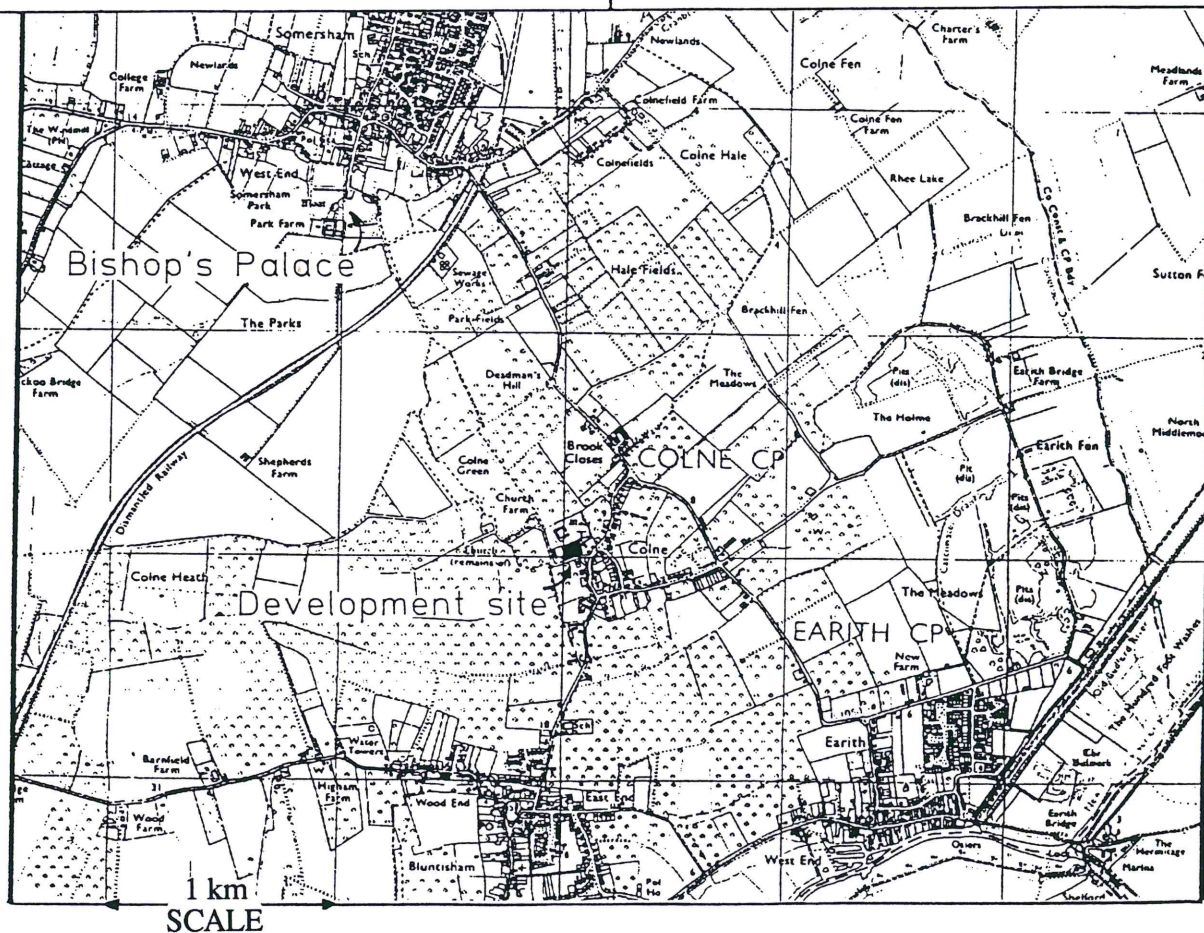
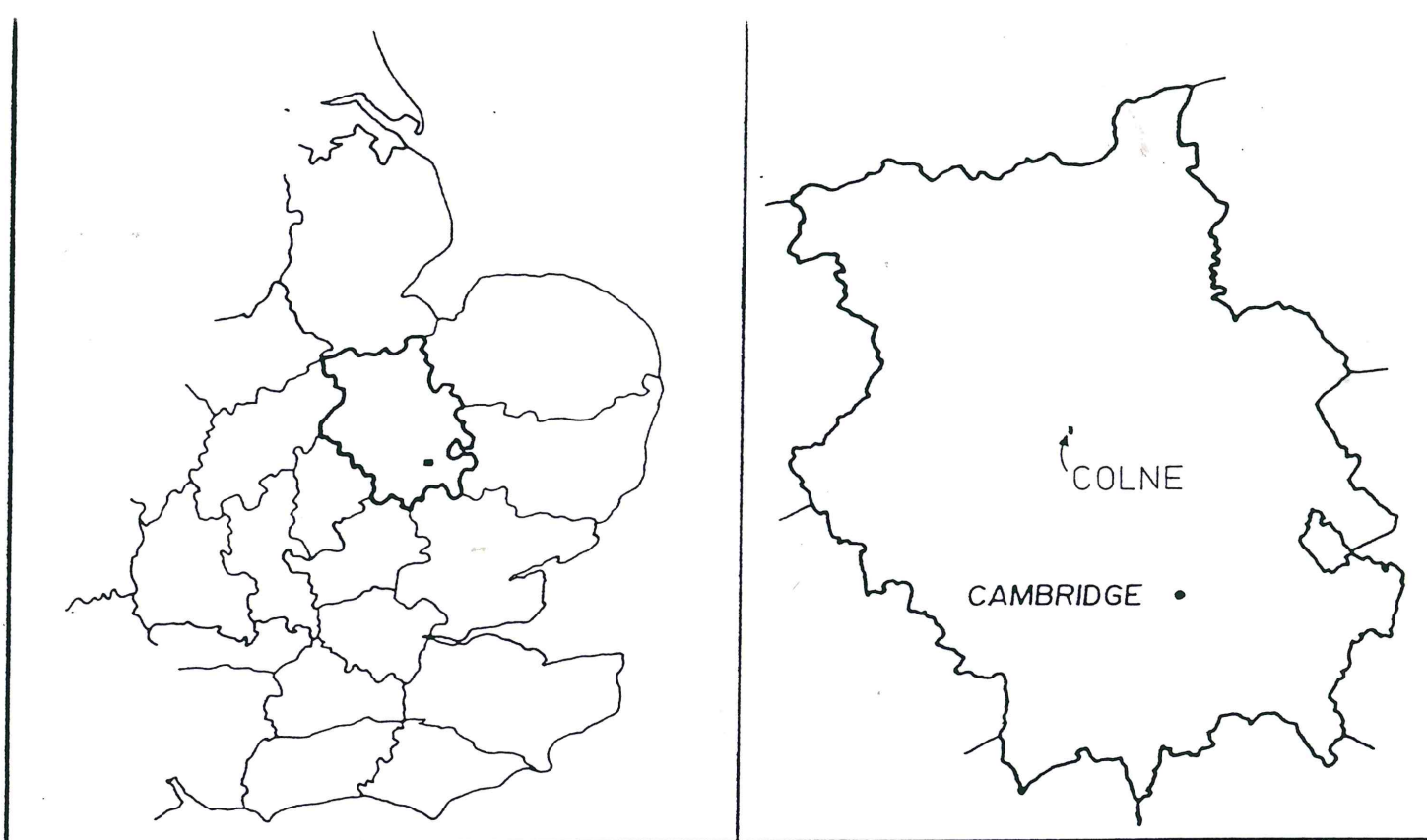
Historical research was assisted by the County Record Offices of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

An assessment excavation in the depths of December would have been much harder without the active support of Bruce Bluff and his family.

Kit Watson 17/1/92

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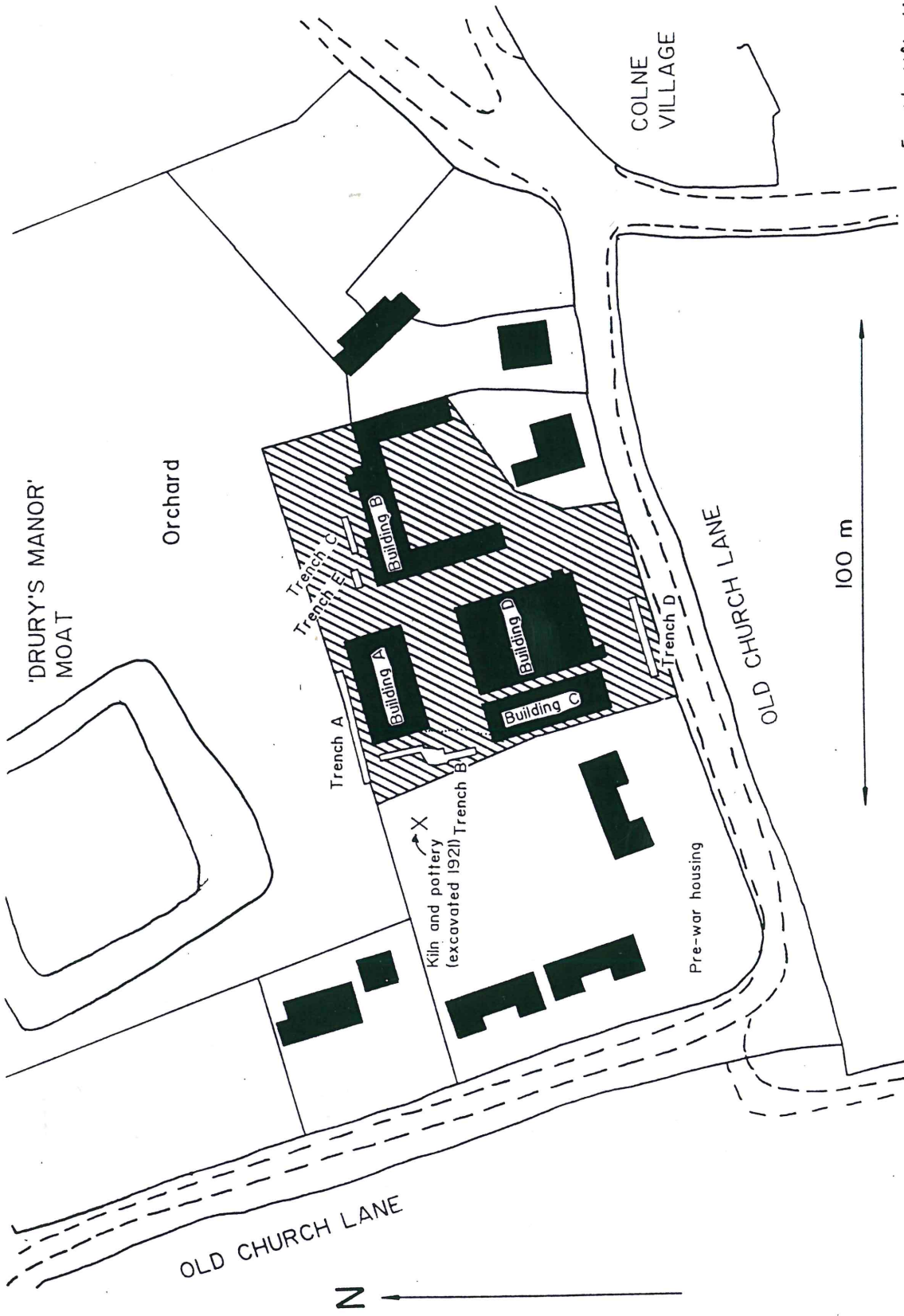
Site location plan

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Figure 1



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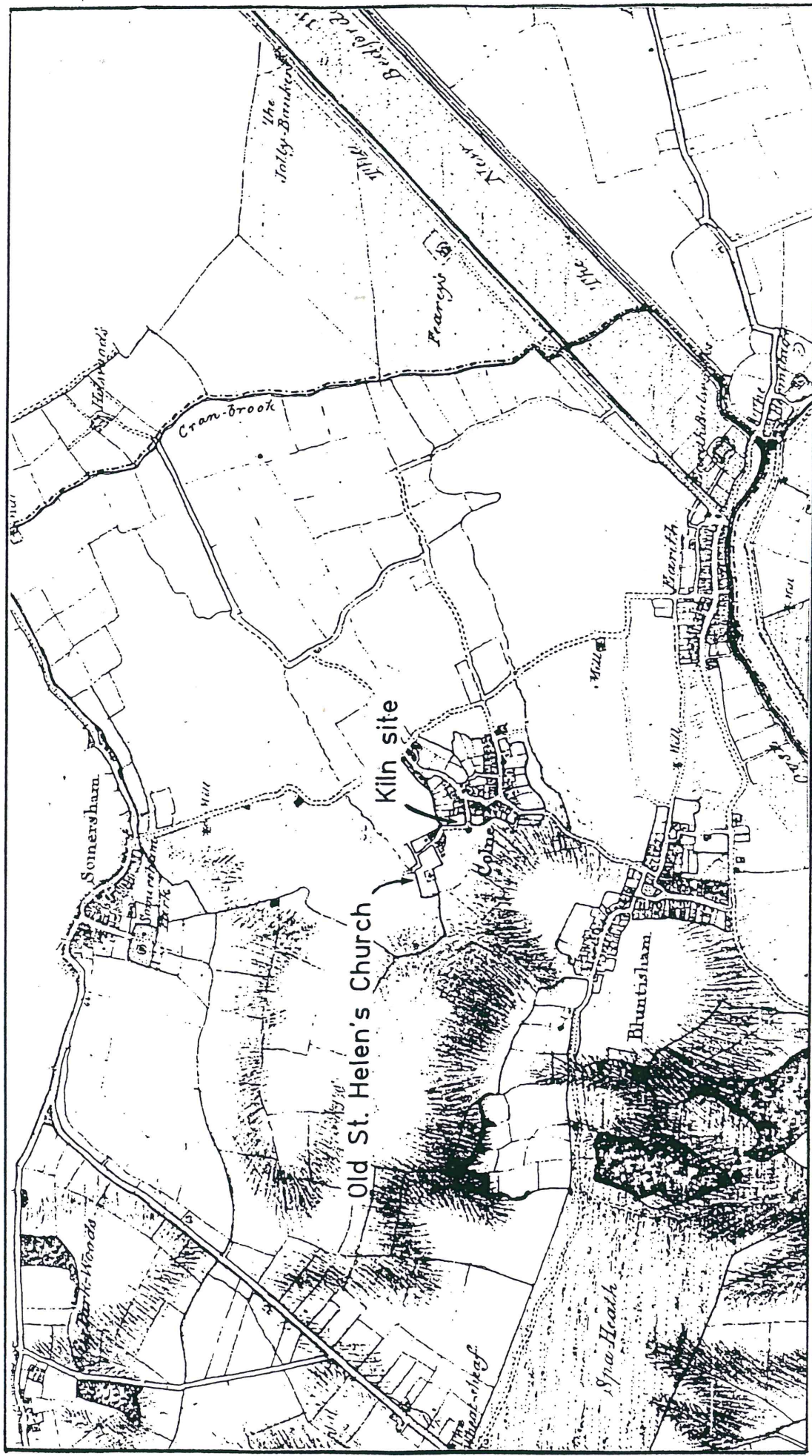


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Proposed development area showing trenches
and buildings

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Figure 2		



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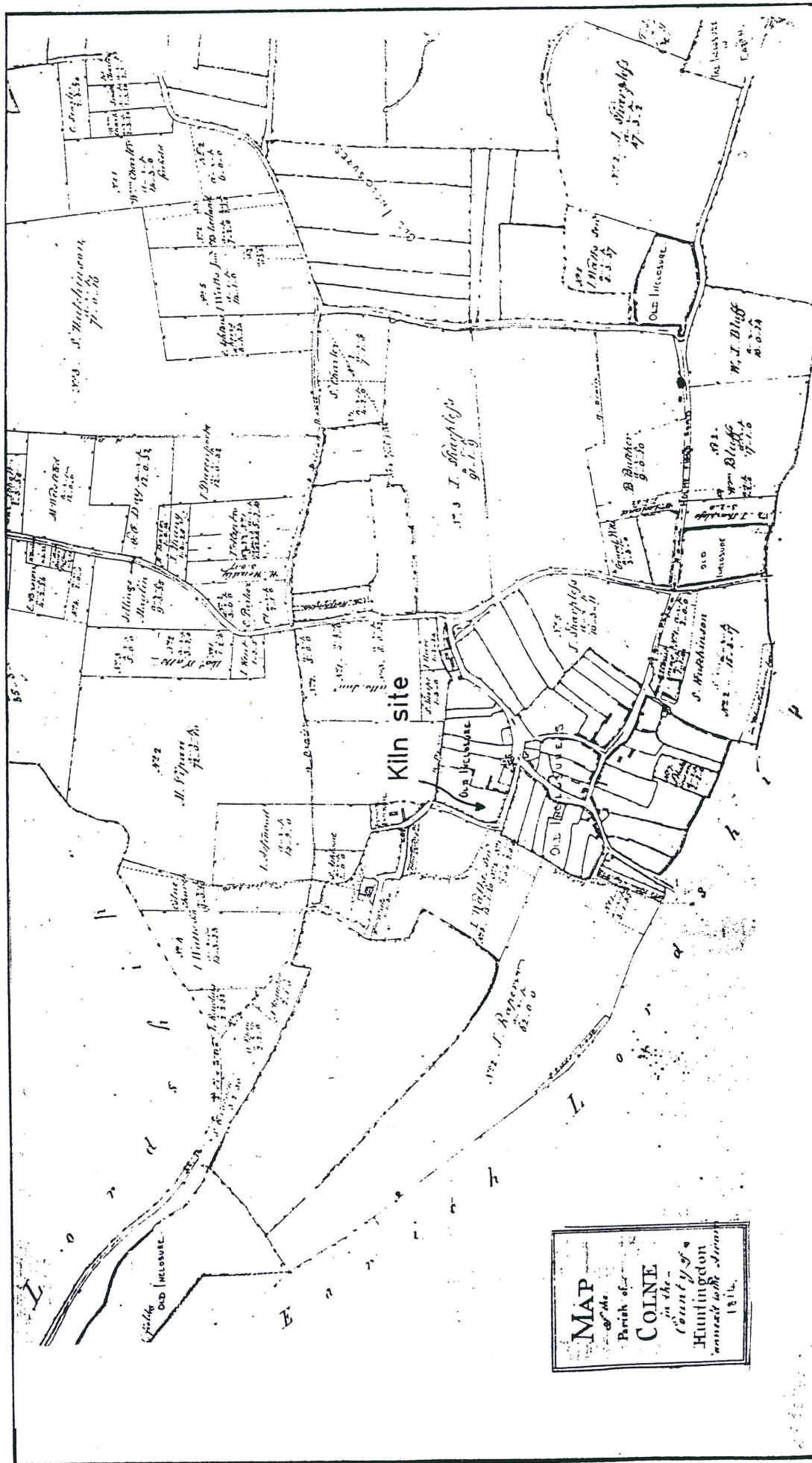


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Draft 6" OS map 1810
(note street layout around old church)

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Figure 3	



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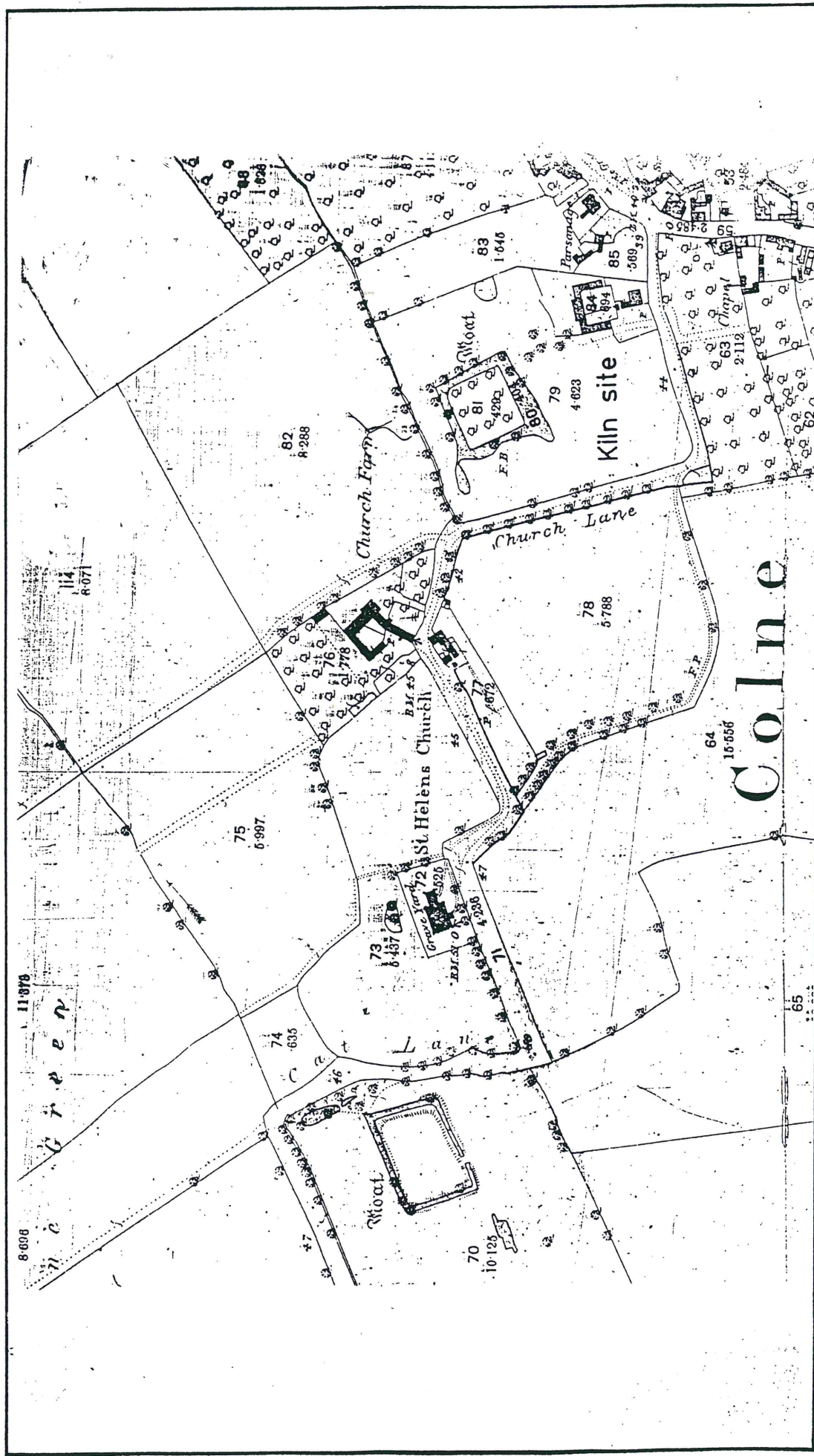


Enclosure map of 1814

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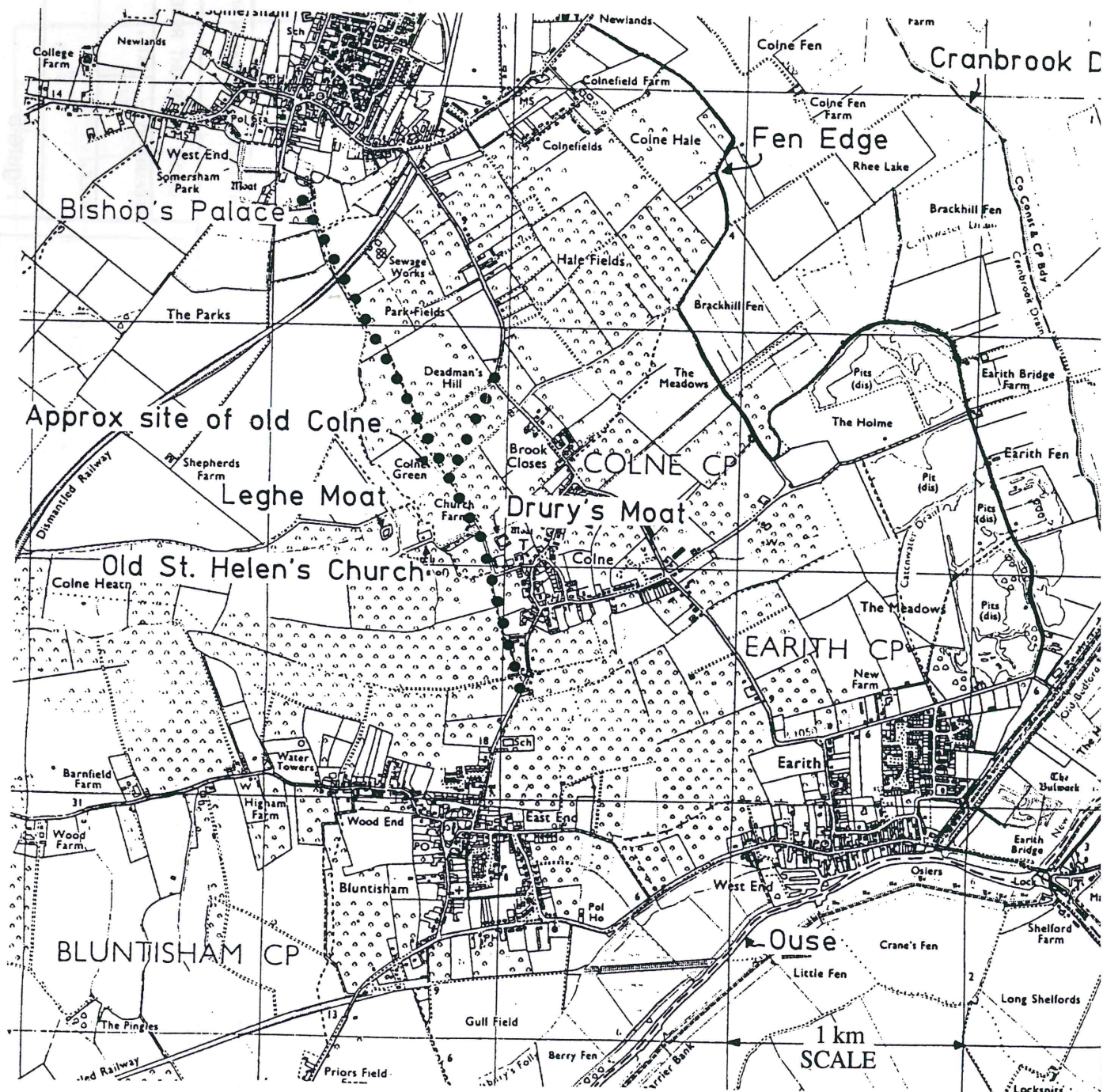
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1887 First edition 25" OS MAP showing
the old church; both moats, the jam factory
and the area containing the kiln site



Based upon Ordnance Survey
with the sanction of the Controller of H.M.S.O (Licence No LA 07649 X)

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Map showing possible
routes through old Colne

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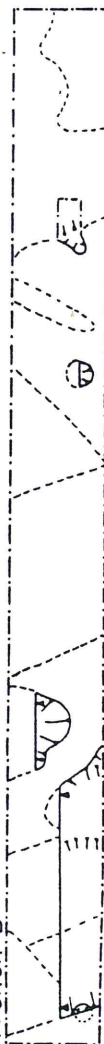
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Figure 6

Trench C



Trench D



Trench E



Trench A



N

3 metres



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Plans of trenches A, C, D and E

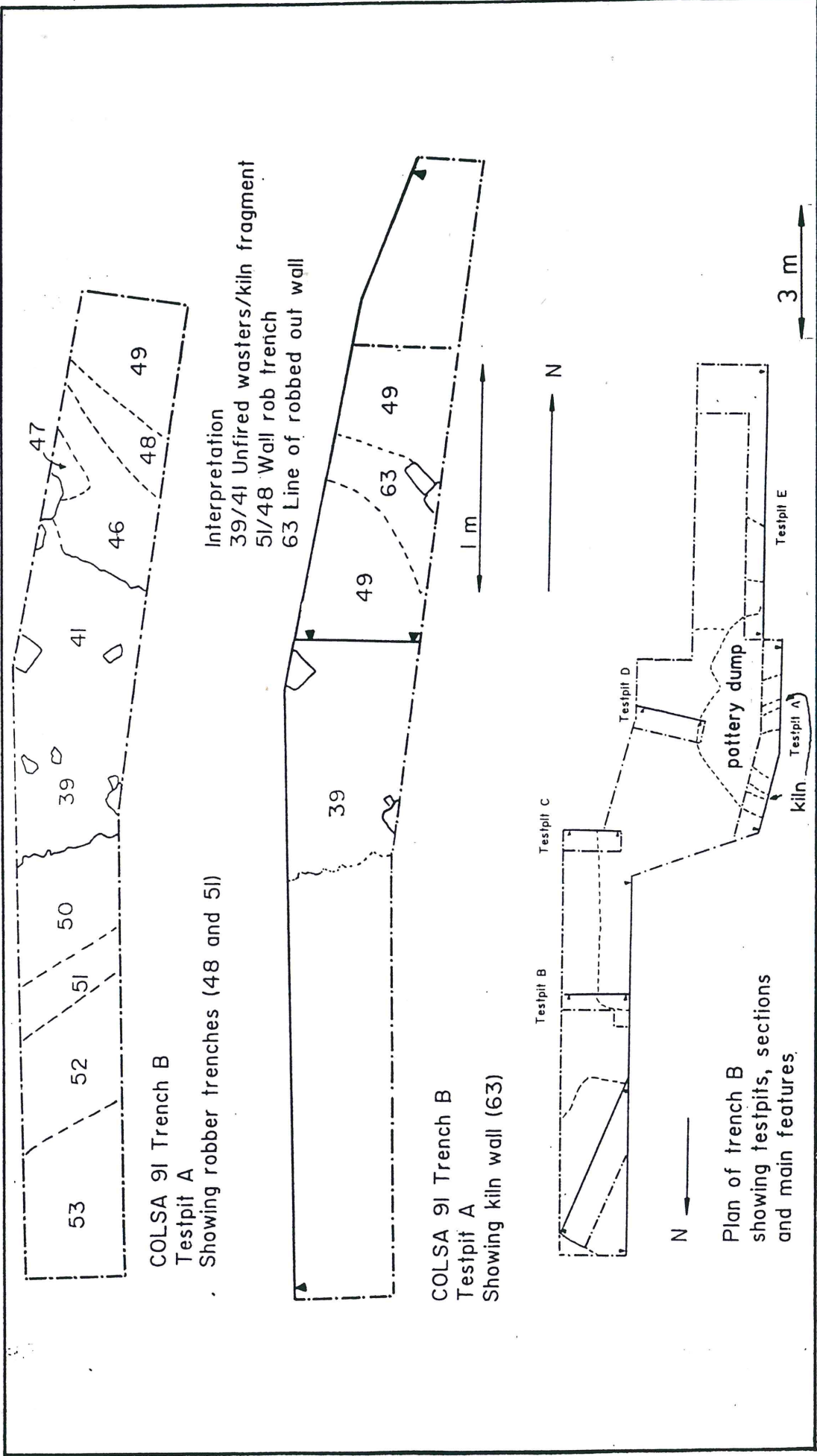
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Figure 7



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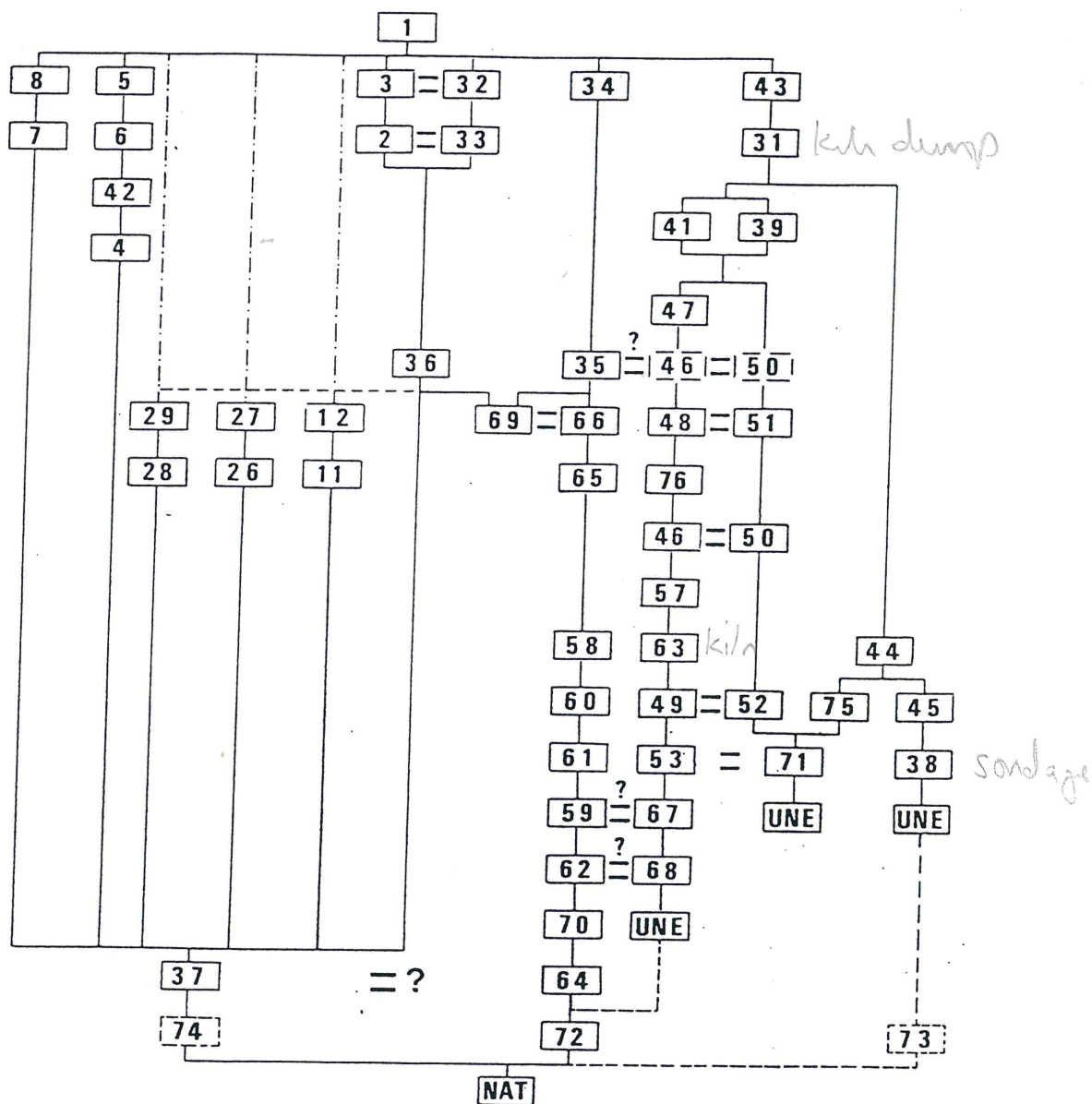
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Plan of trench B and testpit A during excavation
with interpretation
(note differing orientations)

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see plans



NAT = natural subsoil
UNE = unexcavated



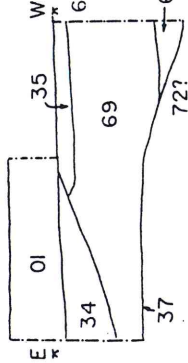
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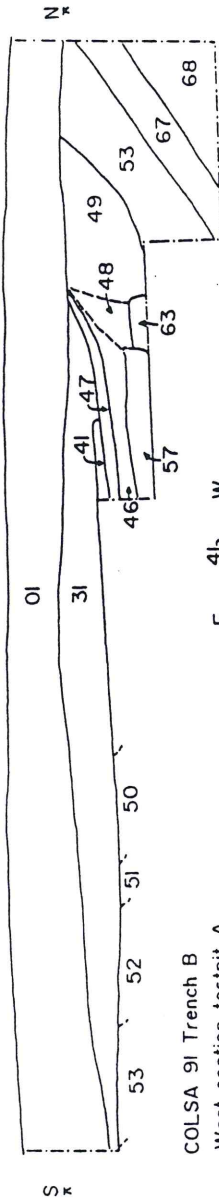
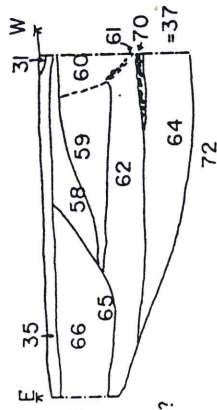
Stratigraphical diagram
for trenches A and B

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Figure 9	

COLSA 91 Trench B
South testpits C

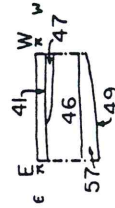


COLSA 91 Trench B
south section testpits D

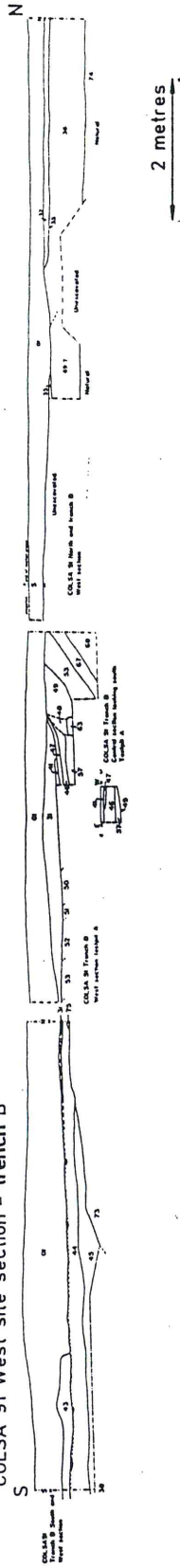


COLSA 91 Trench B
West section testpits A

COLSA 91 Trench B
Central section looking south
Testpits A



COLSA 91 West site section - trench B



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Sections showing stratigraphy over kiln in trench B

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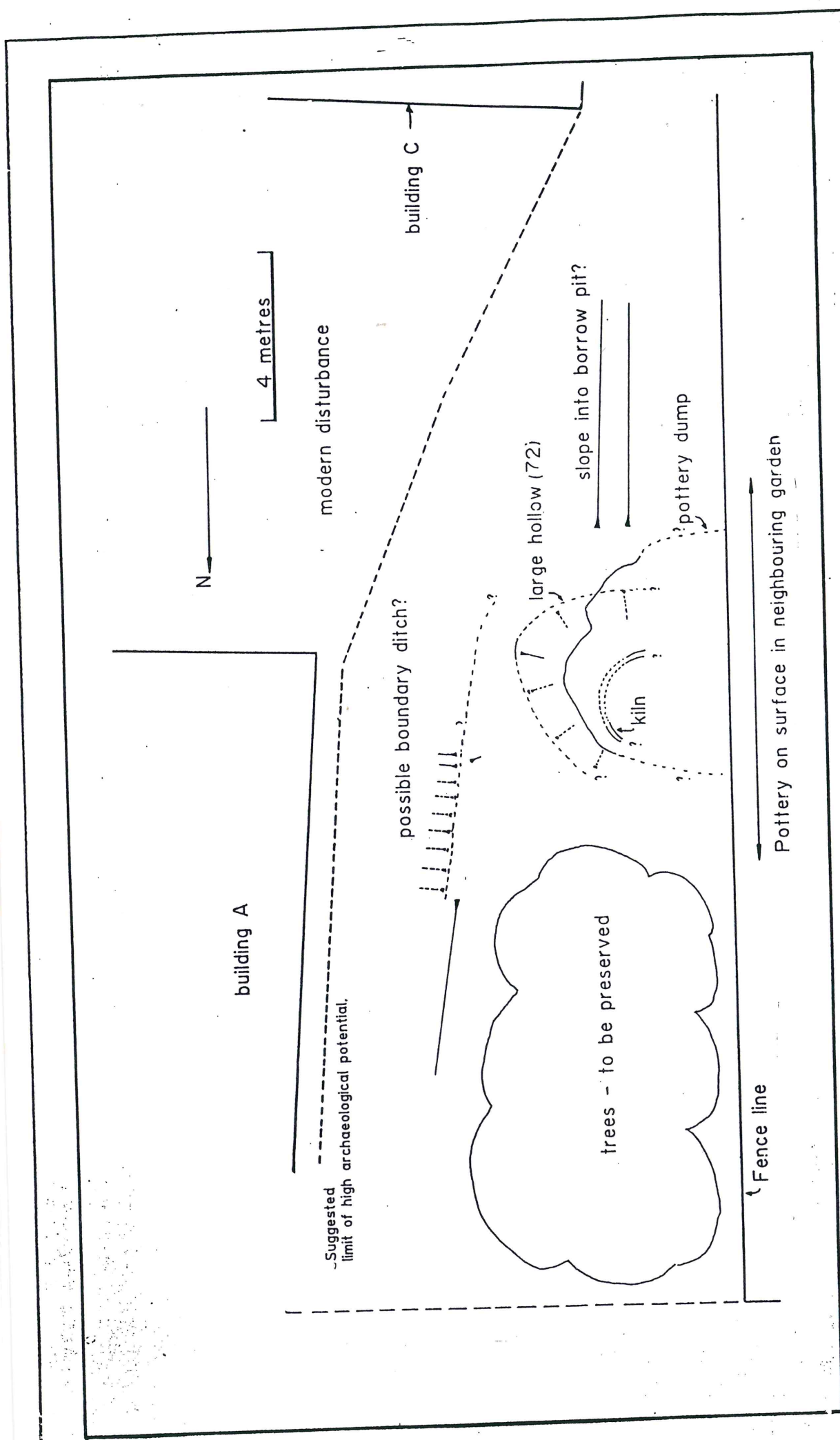


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Pottery from Old Church Lane,
Colne

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Figure 12	



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Figure 11	

Plan showing archaeological elements, modern disturbances and other factors affecting area of importance. (Fenceline used as baseline)

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