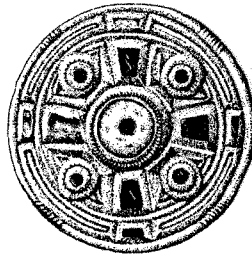


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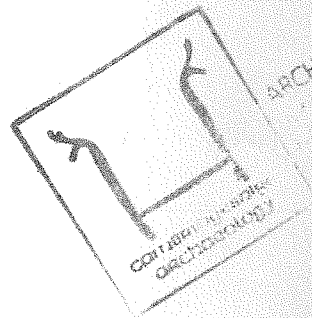
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# Archaeological Investigations on a Proposed Synthetic Pitch at Ernulf School, Eynesbury

S P Macaulay

1994



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**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. A41

*Commissioned By Huntingdonshire District Council*

**Archaeological Investigations on a Proposed  
Synthetic Pitch at Ernulf School, Eynesbury**

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*Report No A41*

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## SUMMARY

*In July 1994 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation at Ernulf School, Eynesbury (TL 182 588), on the proposed site of a synthetic football pitch. The work was commissioned by Huntingdonshire District Council, to fulfil the archaeological condition for the development. Results of recent archaeological investigations to the north (Alexander 1993) and to the south (Kemp 1993) of the site, also by the Archaeological Field Unit, suggested that archaeological remains would be present, in particular the continuation of a Neolithic cursus and Roman trackway, seen as cropmarks from aerial photographs.*

*A single trench, 100m in length was opened to test for archaeological features. Within this, five linear features were recorded. A shallow ditch can be identified as the eastern Neolithic cursus ditch, confirming expectations derived from aerial photographs. A ditch producing Roman pottery was excavated and this appears to relate to a north-south trackway ditch identified from cropmarks, to the north (Alexander 1993) and south. Two other north-south ditches were investigated which yielded no artefacts, however one of these may be the eastern ditch of the Roman trackway. Within the trench, it was not possible to locate the western ditch of the cursus. This may be due to its being obscured or removed, during ground levelling to the west, where beyond a gravel bank a lower ground surface may have existed.*

*An observation was carried out on the stripping of the pitch and laying of drainage/service trenches. The depth at which soil disturbance - that is, the topsoil - ceased over the pitch, meant that no archaeology was revealed; however a raised gravel bank was identified. A service trench which ran along the north side of the pitch, parallel to the evaluation trench, revealed the continuation of four of the five linear features recorded, and importantly, the western cursus ditch. Finally, a Post-medieval ditch, running east-west, was recorded in the north-south drainage trench.*

*In summary the evaluation confirmed the expectations from cropmarks observed from aerial photographs, relating to a probable Neolithic cursus and Roman trackway. Archaeology has been proved to survive beneath the development area, however no evidence was recovered to indicate a mortuary function for the enclosure otherwise interpreted as a cursus.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 7th and 29th of July 1994 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council were employed by Huntingdonshire District Council to conduct an archaeological evaluation on the proposed site of a synthetic football pitch (with floodlighting) on the playing fields, Ernulf School, Eynesbury, St Neots, Huntingdonshire (TL 182 588). This fulfilled the evaluation programme initiated by the County Archaeology Office (CAO).

A draft summary report was produced, after a four day evaluation excavation, and this formed the basis for an observation for the remainder of development. This work was carried out in line with the recommendations of the initial evaluation. As a result of this the archaeology has been suitably protected, it not being visible at the depth at which the stripping of the pitch ceased, and thus recorded only in the service trenches.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Historic and Archaeological Framework

Cropmarks immediately to the south of the development site have recently been re-plotted. This has confirmed that the site lies on the line of a cropmark complex interpreted as a cursus monument, presumably of Neolithic date. In addition an oval cropmark enclosure, possibly representing a long barrow (again presumably Neolithic), lies within the line of the 'cursus' only 10-20m south of the edge of the development area.

A number of SMR entries relating to Romano-British occupation are known within the general area of the development site. In particular one probable villa lies approximately 400m north of the site (SMR entry 684). In 1993 features deriving from an associated settlement were found by magnetometer survey and test pitting 200m east of the probable villa (Alexander 1993). Other archaeological evidence in the area includes a possible Roman villa 300m south west of the site (SMR 4252), a Bronze Age ring ditch about 500m south of the site (Kemp 1993) and a group of other cropmark features, including two further cursuses, lying across the square kilometre south of the development area.

### 2.2 Aerial Photograph Evidence

Interpretation of the features immediately south of the site (*Figure 1*) concludes that they represent a probable cursus or mortuary enclosure, presumably of Neolithic date, running approximately north-south. This feature has a square southern end, about 100m south of the site edge, and on morphological grounds, it would be expected to continue northwards through the site itself. The two cropmark lines of this feature probably represent shallow ditches cut into the subsoil.

On the eastern edge of the cursus (as it will henceforth be described) cropmark evidence suggests the existence of a possible trackway of uncertain date, but presumably not in use during the life of the cursus. This has a sinuous north-south course. It may be related to a north-south track of probable late Roman date observed in test pits 300m to the north (Alexander 1993).

Approximately 15m south of the site edge lies the northern boundary of a large sub-oval cropmark feature. The size and form of this feature, coupled with its location

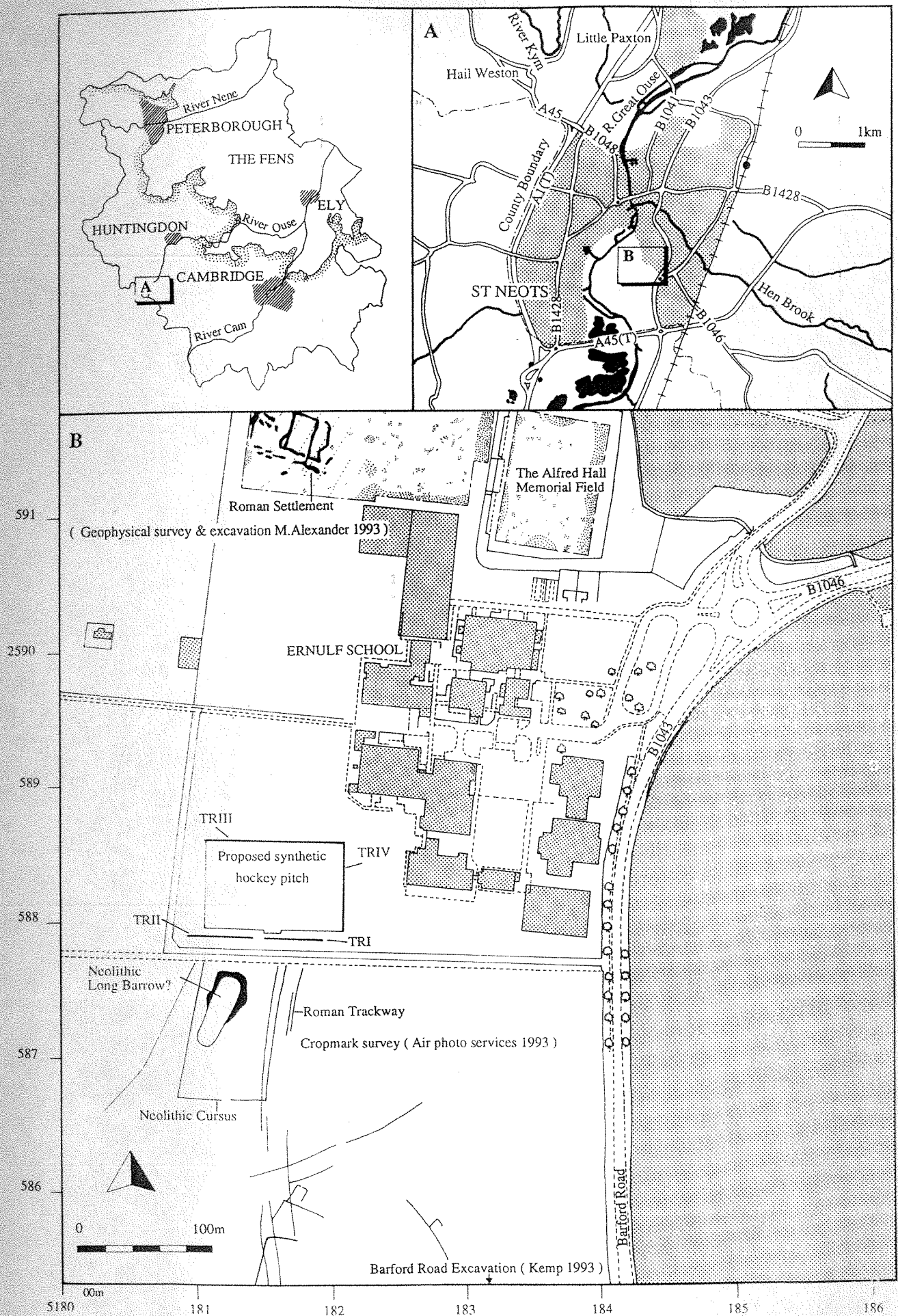


Figure 1 Location plan

within the enclosure previously described as a cursus, have suggested that this may in fact be a ploughed-out long barrow, and the cursus may therefore be a mortuary enclosure. No proof of this is currently available, however, if mortuary deposits were in existence here there is an outside chance that they might be visible as 'pitting' on a magnetometer survey.

### **2.3 Magnetometer Survey (Appendix B)**

In accordance with the brief supplied by the CAO, a magnetometer survey was deemed appropriate for the whole site. An interpretative figure of the results is shown here (*Figure 10*). The data itself is available in a number of formats, as supplied by the contractors and is held in the site archive.

The results of the magnetometer survey were only partially conclusive. One north-south linear feature, with a very low level of magnetic enhancement, was observed running through the eastern part of the site. The location of this feature corresponds well with the expected line of the eastern cursus ditch or the expected line of the eastern trackway edge, being between the two; perhaps 5m from each. Bearing in mind the probable degree of error of AP plotting and geophysical grid and anomaly location, the magnetic feature could represent either AP linear.

A number of discrete magnetic anomalies were also suggested by the Contractor from the survey results. It is possible that any of these may represent mortuary deposits, such as cremations, but the evidence is not robust without corroboration.

### **2.4 Recent Use-history of the Site**

The rather poor quality of the magnetometer survey results can probably be put down to the supposed use of the site as market gardens earlier this century (local verbal information). As well as introducing much ferrous material into the soil, the digging may well have obliterated most archaeological features surviving as shallow deposits in the top of the subsoil. The magnetometer survey results are thus not of the quality seen elsewhere on the playing fields at Ernulf School (Alexander 1993), nonetheless one linear magnetic anomaly has been observed.

## **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the evaluation trenching and recording was to investigate the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological deposits threatened by the construction of the pitch and associated services. This was carried out through observation during the stripping of the pitch and the machine excavation of drainage and service trenches, and the recording of deposits and features revealed.

## **4 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The site lies on 1st and 2nd Terrace gravels, within the flood plain of the River Great Ouse and the site is currently under grass. It is apparent (local verbal information) that the level of the water table has fallen significantly in recent years, the result of a modern pumping stations introduced in the last 10 years. This may have had an effect on the conditions of the drift geology (alluvium) over the area, leading to increased compaction.

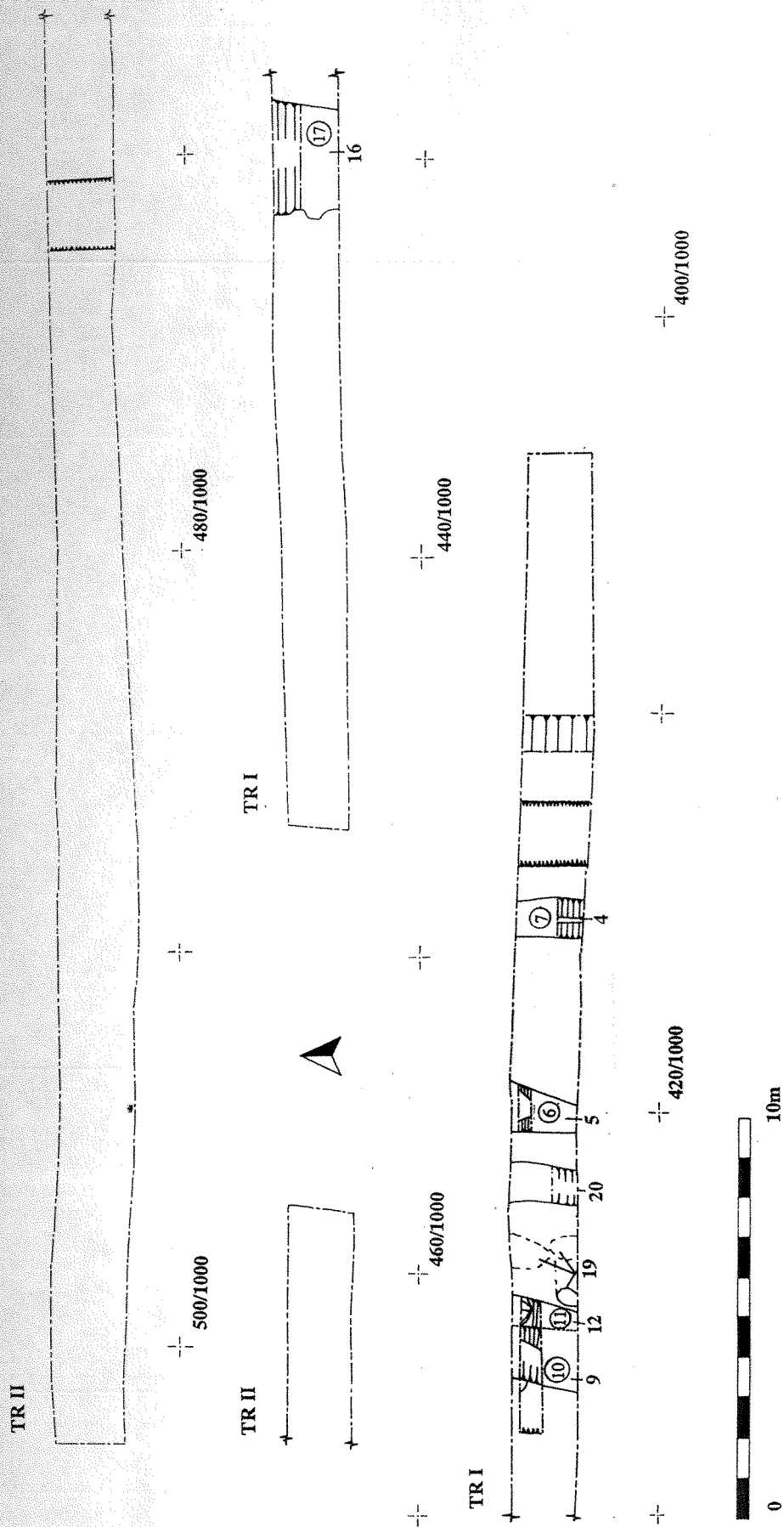


Figure 2 Plan of trenches I and II



## 5 METHODOLOGY

A trench 100m long, running east-west, was opened using a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket (1.6m wide). This trench was positioned approximately 2m north of the base-line used for the geophysical survey. Topsoil was removed and surfaces were cleaned by hand to expose archaeological features. Two machine sondages were opened to test the survival of archaeological deposits below a brown clayey/silt (with medium sand and gravel) subsoil, context 2. The trench was divided into two sections (I and II), as a result of the heavily compacted ground causing machining to be very slow and laborious.

It is important to note that conditions (dry and hot), coupled with recent reductions in the water-level for the vicinity, resulted in extremely compacted ground surfaces which even the mechanical excavator had difficulties digging. As a result archaeological features were often difficult to determine.

## 6 RESULTS

Topsoil (brown sandy/clay with occasional gravel) was discovered to vary in depth over the length of the trench (0.10-0.35m), however on average it was between 0.20-0.30m. Topsoil depth was lowest over the gravel bank 25. There were no artefacts observed during machine excavation.

A brown clayey/silty fine to medium sand and gravel, context 2, was uncovered beneath topsoil and represents natural. This natural drift geology is composed of interleaving deposits of clayey/silt, sand and gravel. Archaeological features are cut into and sealed by this deposit, which extends to a depth of 0.55m at which point fine sands and gravels are encountered.

Five north-south linear features were identified in Trench I (*Figure 2*, eastern half). All but one of these features appeared as discrete soil marks cut into the subsoil from directly below topsoil (the exception is ditch 20).

Ditch 4 appeared 0.30m below the ground level, orientated north-south, 1.05m wide and 0.52m deep. The sides of the ditch were steep and suggested a possible machine cut. The fill was a brown sandy/silt, context 7, which contained modern brick, tile, bone and 19th century pottery. It was this feature that was detected as a linear anomaly on the gradiometer survey.

Ditch 5 ran north-south, only 0.26m below ground level, cut directly below topsoil (*Figure 3*). The ditch had a U-shaped profile, 1.3m wide and 0.80m deep. The ditch had two fills, a yellow brown sandy/silt, context 6, which produced two sherds of Roman pottery and tile and a residual flint flake, and a lower dark yellow brown sandy/silt, context 8, which contained only a single sherd of Iron Age/Roman pottery. It is likely that this ditch may be a continuation of a north-south linear feature, associated with the Roman landscape 400m to the north (Alexander 1993).

Ditch 9/12 had an irregular profile (*Figure 4*), broadly U-shaped, this was the result of 9 being truncated by re-cut 12. Overall the profile of 12 survives as a north-

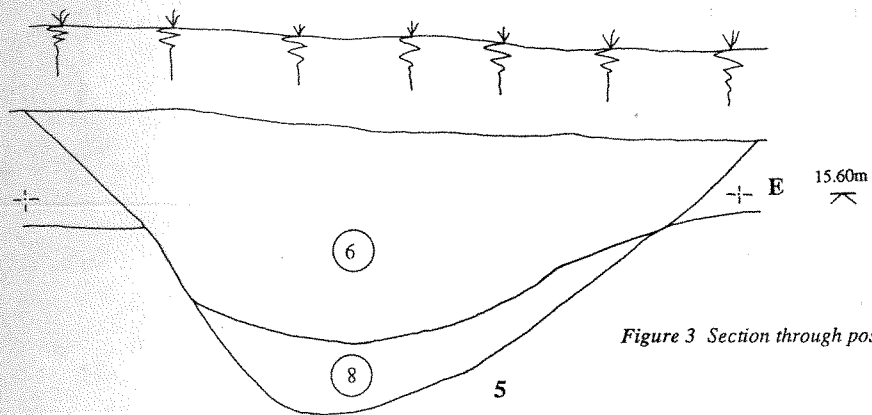


Figure 3 Section through possible Roman trackway ditch

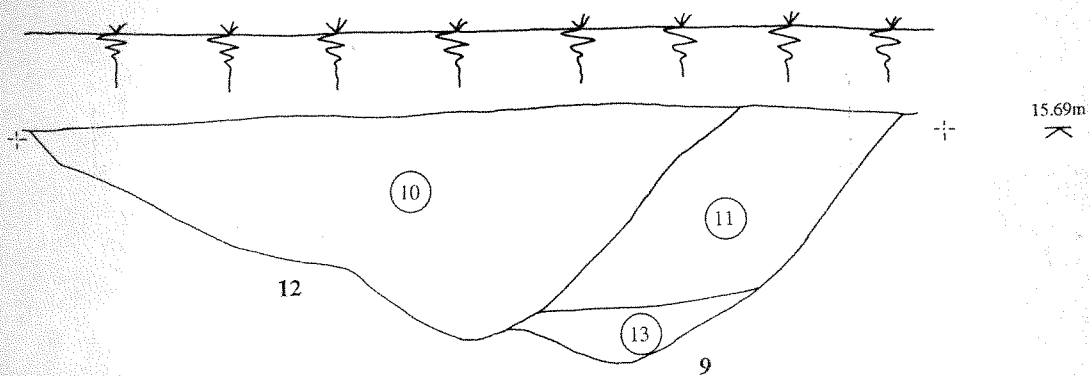


Figure 4 Section through ditch 9/12

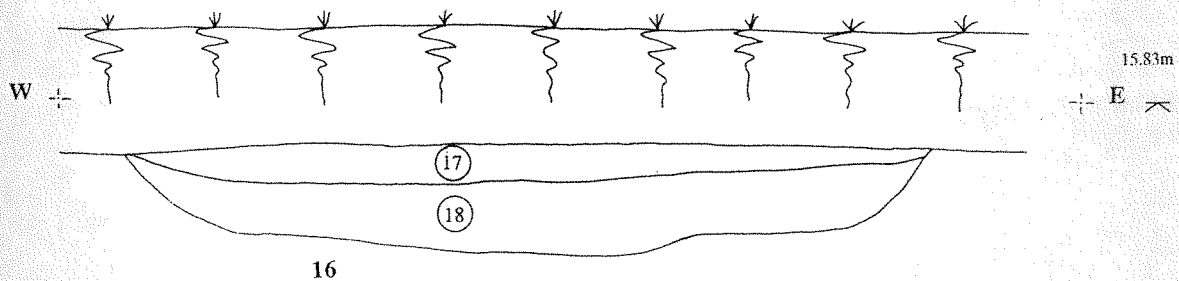


Figure 5 Section through ditch 16



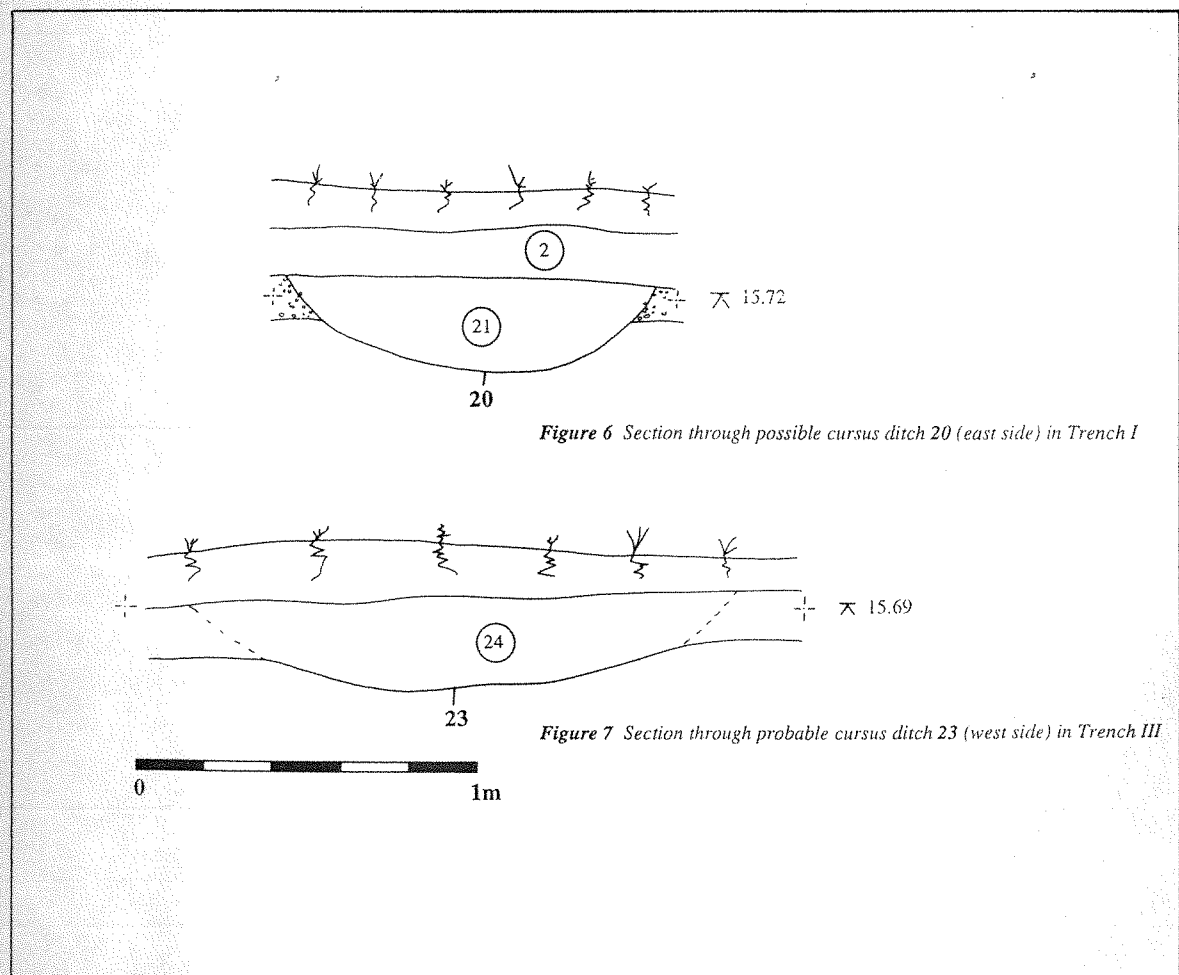
Figures 3, 4 and 5 Sections through Roman ditch, ditch 9/12 and 16

south linear feature, 1.55m wide and 0.65m deep, cut immediately below the topsoil at a depth of 0.25m below the present ground surface. The original cut **9** was filled by a dark brown silty/clay including gravel, context 11, above a yellow brown sandy/clay also including gravel, context 13. The fill of the re-cut **12** was a yellow brown fine silt/sand, context 10. There were no artefacts recovered from these features. This ditch may be the western trackway ditch relating to **5**.

Ditch **16** survived as a shallow scoop, 2.4m wide and 0.35m deep, cut 0.33m below ground surface (*Figure 5*). The feature had two fills, an upper dark yellow brown sand/silt, context 17, which contained modern glass, and a lower strong brown sandy/silt, context 18.

Ditch **20** was the only feature in Trench I to be cut below, context 2. Broadly U-shaped this ditch was 1.10m wide and 0.29m deep (*Figure 6*), orientated north-south. The ditch had a single fill; a strong brown clayey/sand, which contained no artefacts. This feature pre-dates the other archaeological deposits in Trench I and its location fits the expectations of the cursus observed as cropmarks to the south (*Figures 1 and 8*). This feature, if it is the cursus ditch, is supported by the work to the south, where the prehistoric features generally survived only as shallow features (Kemp 1993).

A series of irregular features context 19, was investigated; however these would appear to be natural gullies/tree bowls. No other features were detected towards the west of Trench I.



*Figure 6 and 7 Sections through possible cursus ditch in Trenches I and III*

In Trench II, although evidence for the western cursus ditch was expected (to match **20** on the eastern side) none was observed. A buried topsoil layer identified in the western part of Trench II, represents the former land surface, which has been built up in recent years. A gravel bank was detected in the trench (and across the pitch during stripping) running southwest-northeast. This bank ranged between 18m and 23m wide on the ground. The presence of the gravel bank or terrace may account for the increased depth to the northwest and the subsequent need to build up the land surface during the levelling of the playing fields. Therefore if the cursus ditch survives only as a shallow scoop (cut **20**), it may well have been removed or obscured during the levelling. This might explain its absence from the western end of Trench II.

During the observation of the stripping of the pitch, the only feature of interest visible was the gravel bank, context 25; however, features were noted in the drainage/service ditches (III and IV).

During excavation of the service trenches, archaeological features were identified (Trenches III and IV). Five north-south linear features were noted in Trench III. All ditches within Trench I, with the exception of **4**, were observed to continue to the north through Trench III. The additional ditch recorded was of particular importance as this was the probable western cursus ditch. This appeared as a flat U-shaped ditch **23**, 1.10m wide and 0.23m deep. The fill, **24**, was a strong yellow-brown clayey/sand, containing no artefacts. This feature was positioned where the cursus seen from cropmarks would traverse the field (*Figures 1 and 8*), approximately 24m to the east of the fence line.

Finally, a ditch running east-west was revealed in Trench IV; and while it was not possible to excavate this feature, Post-medieval pottery was recovered from its upper fill.

It has been suggested that the area was subject to market gardening, as with the northern part of the playing fields (Alexander 1993), however the sterile (artefactual) nature of the topsoil does not support this theory. Indeed the ground conditions (poor quality and compaction) make this rather unlikely.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the work at the proposed synthetic pitch at Ernulf school, Eynesbury, have indicated the survival of archaeological deposits, supporting expectations derived from study of the cropmark data. Although ditches seen from aerial photographs, were proved to continue into the development area, there is as yet no evidence to suggest interpretation of the cropmarks as the remains of a mortuary enclosure (*Figure 8*).

Two archaeological features **20** and **23**, appear to represent the cursus ditches (*Figure 8*). They survive only as shallow scoops, however this is consistent with archaeological features of this period in the region (Kemp 1993, Malim 1990). No artefacts were retrieved from either ditch section.

A single ditch **5**, relating to the Roman period, can reasonably be seen to originate with similar features to the north (Alexander 1993). Pottery recovered matches types recovered from this site and may be tentatively dated to AD120-180. It is possible that the ditch to the west **9/12**, may also be related to this feature (*Figure 8*).

The modern ditch **4**, was the only feature detected during the geophysical survey (Appendix A), given the success of the geophysical survey to the north (Alexander

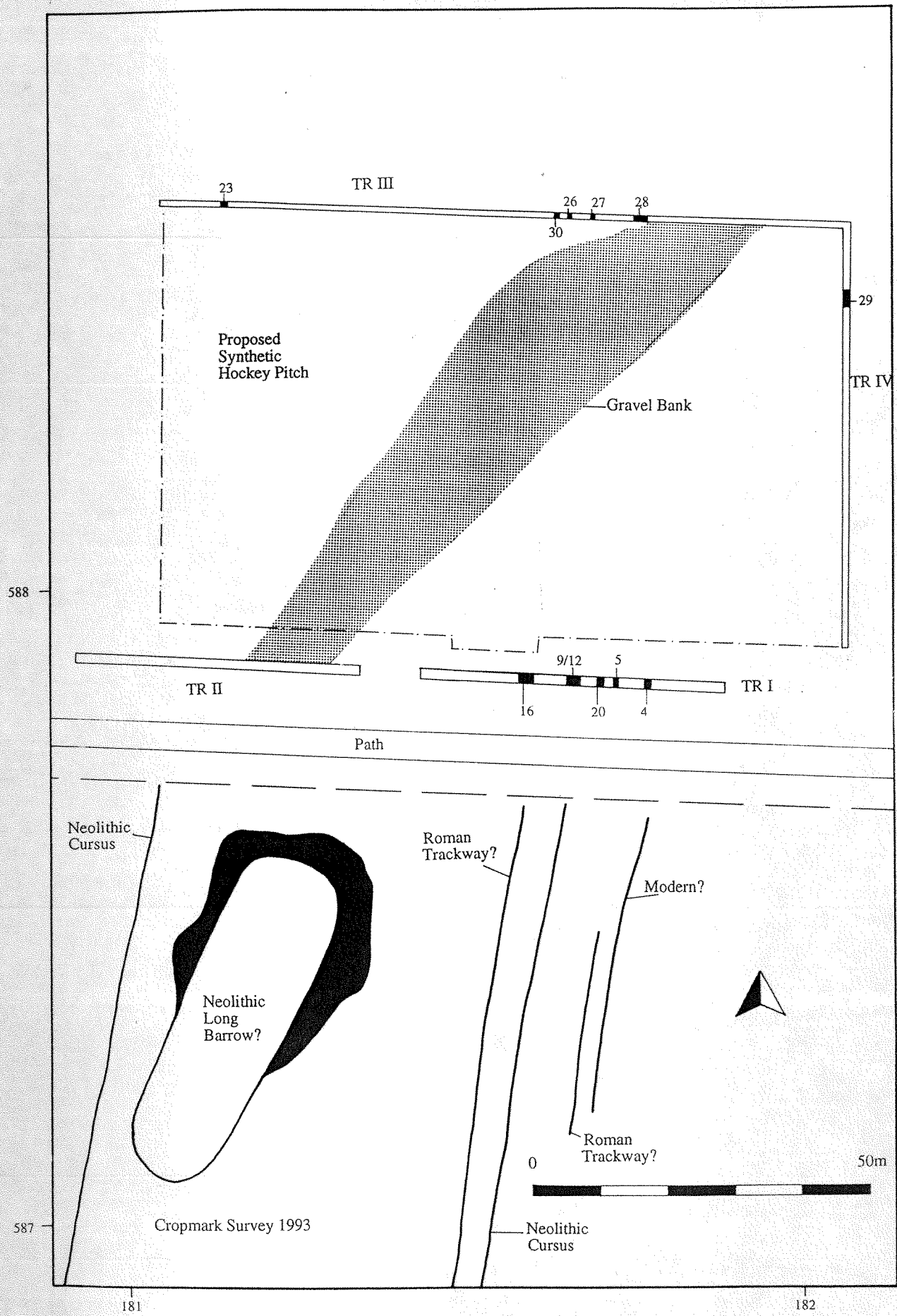


Figure 8 Cropmark and ditch location

1993), this is surprising. However, it is apparent that this area is beyond the Roman settlement area, and has a geology more closely resembling the land to the south (Kemp 1993).

The draft summary report recommended an observation for the remainder of the ground disturbance over the proposed pitch. As removal of topsoil greater than 0.30m would compromise the survival of archaeological deposits already detected, it was recommended that some topsoil be left, thus providing protection for the archaeological deposits. In accordance with the initial report and guidelines from the CAO, ground disturbance was limited to 0.10-0.20m. This depth was exceeded in the service trenches, where it was possible to record the continuation of linear features detected in Trench I. Importantly, it was possible to detect the western cursus ditch, which was not present in Trench II (*Figure 8*).

A gravel bank or terrace was observed running across the site from southwest to northeast during the stripping of the pitch. It is highly probable that it is this terrace which explains the differing alluvial sequences in Trenches I and II, where the lower ground surface to the west has been raised and levelled, thus obscuring the cursus ditch in Trench II. The gravel bank does not appear to affect the western end of service Trench III, and thus the western cursus ditch, 23, was detected. As the other later linear features in this trench, were observed, towards the east, where the gravel bank crosses (*Figure 8*), it may be hypothesised that the terrace rises to the north-east.

In conclusion the evaluation confirmed the existence of a probable Neolithic cursus monument and Roman trackways observed from aerial photographs. No features suggesting a function as a mortuary enclosure were revealed in the trenches investigated. However, given the survival of the ditches, the pitch may now seal more undetected archaeology.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX A - LIST OF CONTEXTS

Ctxt	Description	Nature	Finds	Above	Below	
01	Topsoil	Mid-Brown sandy/clay	None		02	
02	Alluvium (Natural)	Brown clayey/silty fine to med. sand and gravel	None		03	<b>04,05,09</b> <b>012,016 +01</b>
03	Natural	Fine yellow gravel/sand	None			02
04	Cut of N-S ditch	Modern machine cut drainage ditch (V-shaped)	-		02	07
05	Cut of N-S ditch	?Roman trackway ditch (U-shaped)	-		02	06,08
06	Upper fill of ditch 05	Brown fine sandy/silt	Ro. pot		08	01
07	Fill of ditch 04	Brown sandy/silt	Ro. tile, lithic Brick, tile animal bone, modern pot		04	01
08	Lower fill of ditch 05	Dark yellow-brown sandy/silt plus gravel	Ro. pot		05	06
09	Cut of N-S ditch	?Preh/?Ro. ditch (V-shaped)	None		02	13,12
10	Fill of re-cut 12	Yellow-brown sand/silt	None		12	01
11	Upper fill of ditch 09	Dark brown silt/clay plus gravel	None		13	12
12	Re-cut of N-S ditch	?Preh/?Ro/?Med ditch (V-shaped)	None		02	10
13	Lower fill of ditch 09	Yellow-brown sand/clay stoney/gravel	None		09	11
14	Natural	Strong brown sand	None			
15	Natural	Strong brown sand	None			
16	Cut of N-S ditch	Shallow scoop, broad truncated ditch	None		02	18
17	Upper fill of ditch 16	Dark yellow-brown sand/silt	Glass		18	01
18	Lower fill of ditch 16	Strong brown sand/silt	None		16	17
19	'Cut' irregular ?pit 22	Natural Gully/Tree bowls	None		02	01
20	Cut of N-S cursus ditch	Shallow U-shaped ditch (east side)	None		03	02
21	Fill of ditch 20	Brown clay/sand	None		20	02
22	'Fill' of 19	Rusty clay/sand	None		19	01
23	Cut of N-S cursus ditch (only in TRIII)	Shallow U-shaped ditch (west side)	None		03	02
24	Fill of ditch 23	Yellow-brown clay/sand	None		23	02
25	GRAVEL BANK	Not Excavated	None		03	01,02
26	N-S ditch in TRIII	?Same as 9/12				
27	N-S cursus ditch in TRIII	Same as 20				
28	N-S ditch in TRIII	Same as 5				
29	E-W ditch in TRIV	Post-med ditch	P/med pot			
30	N-S ditch in TRIII	?Same as 16				

## APPENDIX B - REPORT ON GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

**Project Co-ordinator:** Dr S M Ovenden

**Project Assistants:** L Harvey, N Nemcek and A Shields

An area of 100m by 80m was surveyed by gradiometry in the south west of the school grounds, Ernulf School. *Figure 9* shows the location of the grid and *Figure 10* shows the data plot of the results.

Magnetic readings were logged at 0.5m intervals along one axis in 1m traverses, using a fluxgate gradiometer (Geoscan FM36) comprising of two fluxgate mounted vertically apart, at a distance of 500mm. The gradiometer is carried by hand, with the bottom sensor approximately 100 to 300mm from the ground surface. At each survey station, the difference in the magnetic field between the two fluxgates is conventionally measured in nanoTesla (nT) or gamma. Generally features up to one metre deep can be detected by this method.

The data set is relatively noisy with several isolated ferrous responses across the site. This high level of magnetic noise may be associated with past use of the area for market gardens. One linear anomaly has been detected in the east of the survey and may represent a continuation of a linear feature apparent in aerial photographs.



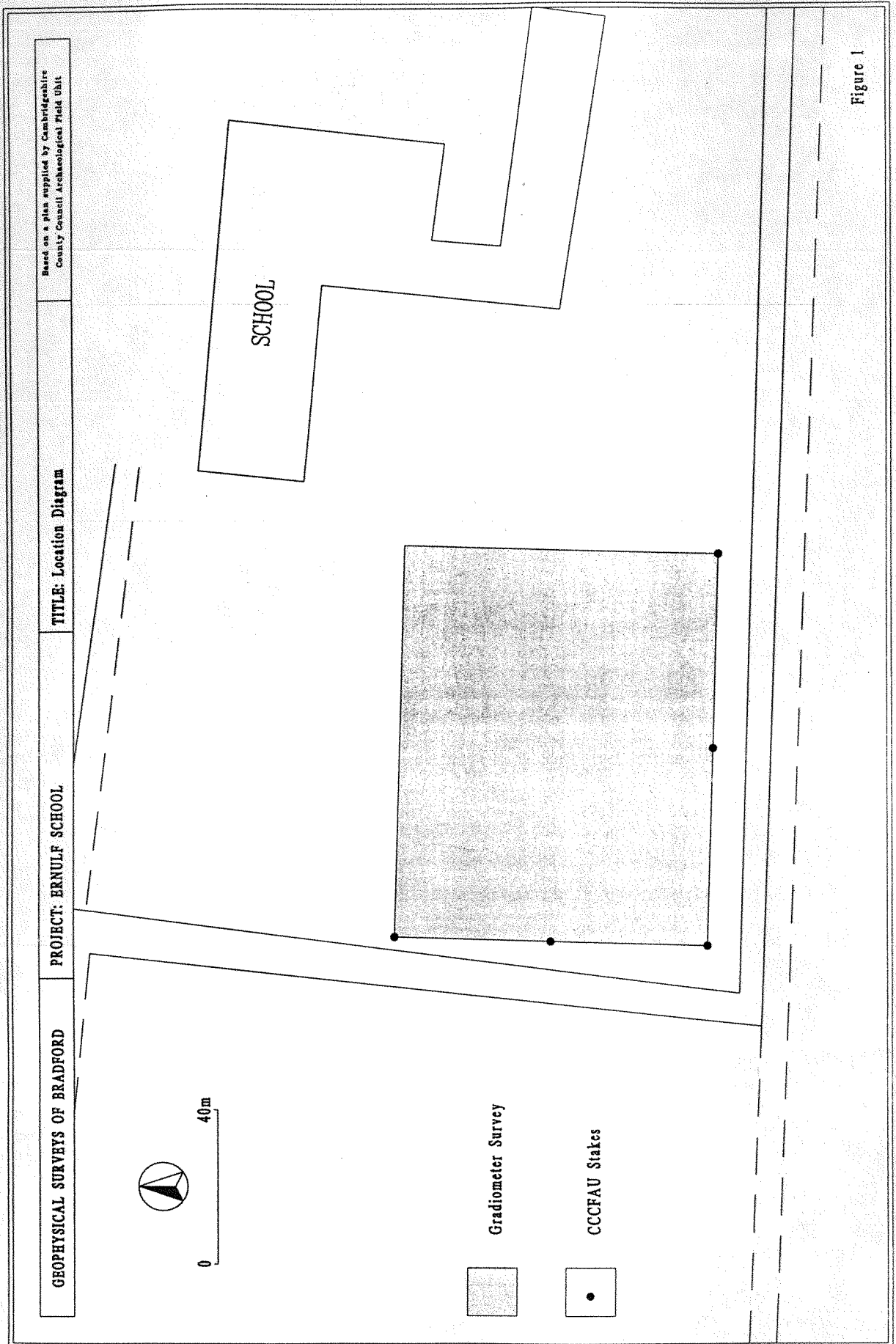


Figure 1

Figure 9 Location of geophysical survey

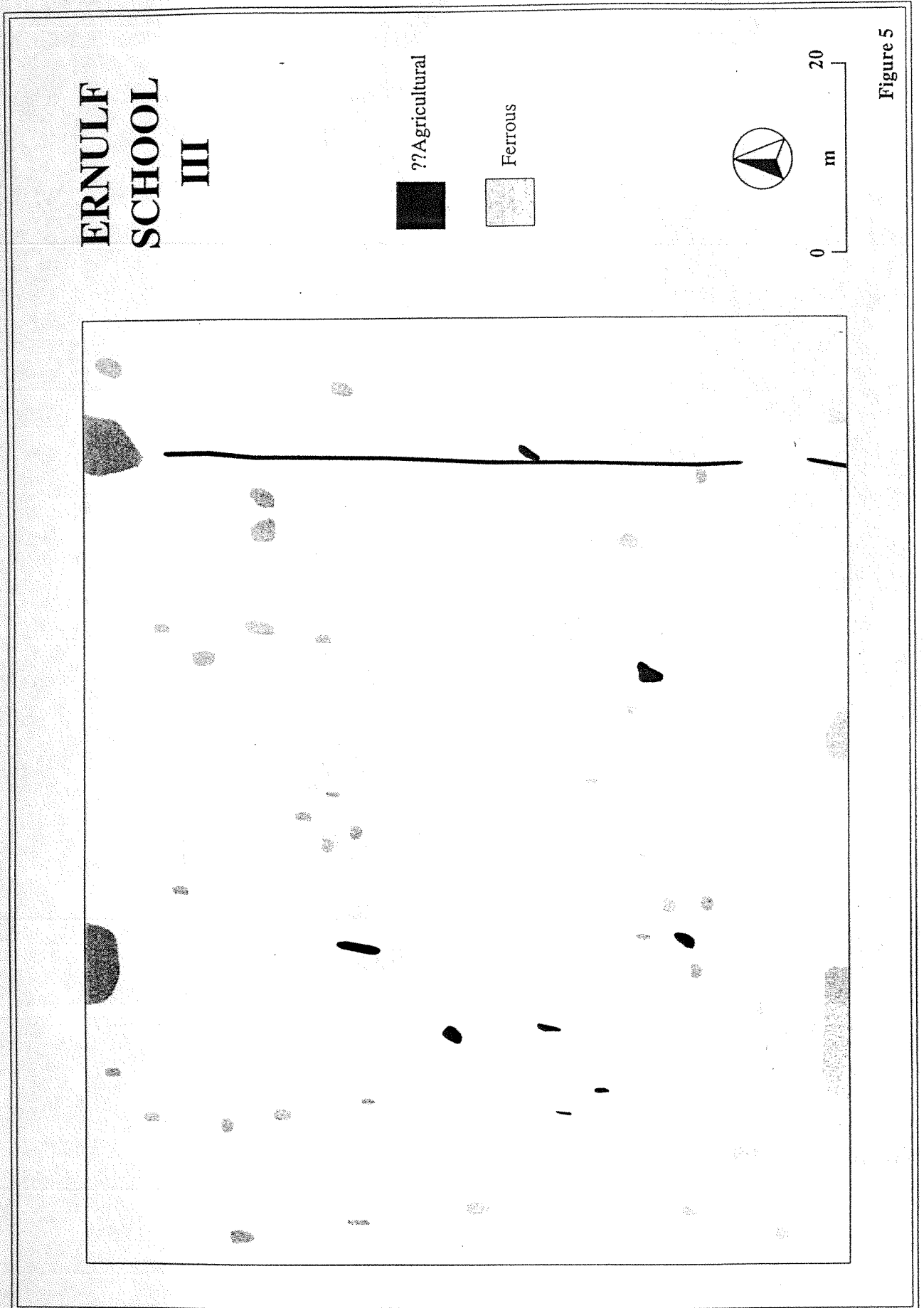


Figure 5

Figure 10 Data-plot of results of survey

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS

**Artefact.** Any object made by people. Generally, this word is used for finds such as pottery, stone tools, or metal objects, but it can be used in a much wider context in that the landscape we have today is a product of human activity and is thus an artefact itself.

**Bronze Age.** Prehistoric period *c* 2000 to 600 BC when bronze was used for many types of tools and weapons.

**Cropmarks.** Archaeological features below the ploughsoil can affect the growth of sensitive crops through moisture retention or loss. For example, the growth of cereal crops over buried ditches or pits will encourage rapid growth leading to tall, dark coloured plants, whereas walls and roads will lead to stunting and faster yellowing of the crop. These discrepancies in crop growth can be easily detected from the air, and by taking photographs the cropmark patterns can be plotted onto maps and given provisional interpretation.

**Cursus.** A linear feature of Neolithic date formed by a bank and ditch on both sides, possible functions suggested for them have been as trackways, horse racing tracks and ritual processional ways.

**Enclosures:** An area defined by a continuous surrounding ditch. These may be enclosures around human settlements, fields, or paddocks for stock. Rectilinear enclosures are ones with straight sides and corners, whilst curvilinear enclosures are ones with rounded sides.

**Fieldwalking.** Technique of archaeological survey. Walking over ploughed and weathered soil, an experienced observer can collect many ancient artefacts, and by plotting the distribution of such find spots on maps an idea of the use of the landscape can be built up for each period of the past.

**Geophysical Survey.** Investigation of changes occurring in the magnetic and electrical characteristics of the soil, which can often be induced by human activity.

**Iron Age.** Prehistoric period *c* 600 BC - AD 43 when iron was used extensively for tools and weapons. The period traditionally ends with the Roman invasions of AD 43 but in fact there was a considerable time of adjustment after this date when the Iron Age way of life continued with little change from Roman influence.

**Medieval.** Historic period that begins with William the Conqueror's invasion in 1066. Post-Medieval is generally considered to date from 1500.

**Mesolithic.** The period from the end of the Last Ice Age at 10,000 BP until the start of the Neolithic period at *c* 3500. The life style of the people was a continuation of hunting and gathering, no polished stone tools or pottery are associated with it in England.

**Modern** The period since modern industrialisation, roughly corresponding to 1800 onwards.

**Natural** The local subsoil that is unaltered, in nature and location, by human action.

**Neolithic.** Prehistoric period *c* 3500 - 2000 BC when farming and pottery were introduced. Stone tools of fine workmanship were produced and exchanged over long distances, but before the use of metals.

**Post-Medieval** This period is generally considered to date from 1500, and is not used for dates after about 1800.

**Roman.** Historic period AD 43 - 410 when much of Britain was part of the Roman empire. The term Romano-British is now widely used to describe the people of this period, as few were Roman themselves, but they were a provincial manifestation of the empire developing in a unique way. AD 410 was the date the legions were withdrawn, but the Romano-British culture continued for some time into the 5th century in tandem with Anglo-Saxon migration.

**Stratigraphy:** Order and relative position of strata. Deposits in archaeological sites will be layered one on top of another, with the highest layer being the latest being the latest deposits, thus giving a chronological relationship to the layers and the artefacts within them. Features (such as ditches, pits, or walls) cut through these layers will obviously date to later events, and will in turn contain their own discrete sequence of deposits. On the other hand features that have been covered by layers are obviously earlier than the deposition of those layers that seal them.



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