

THE
OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT ~~Activity~~



Church Farm, Moreton Lane,
Northmoor, Oxon.
Watching brief 1989-90

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CHURCH FARM, MORETON LANE, NORTHMOOR, OXON

COUNTY MONUMENT NO 141

WATCHING BRIEF OVER ERECTION OF FARM BUILDINGS AND INSTALLATION OF SERVICES 1989-90

SUMMARY

A watching brief for English Heritage was maintained by the OAU over the installation of services and the erection of farm buildings during the period from September 1989 to October 1990. Trenches were only excavated to the minimum depth needed.

Next to nothing was revealed during the erection of the farm buildings but the service trench from the new farmyard to Moreton Lane revealed deposits of Romano-British domestic refuse and N-S ditches. The ditches have subsequently been confirmed by aerial photography.

Several ditch lines continued into the field to the N as slight earthworks. The earthworks in this field were partially levelled and infilled with brought-in material by the previous land-owner.

The site (Fig. 1)

Located on terrace gravel to the SW of the village of Northmoor in a cultivated field (formerly two fields) centred SP 419 024. This field is part of an extensive area of gravel terrace scheduled as County Monument Number 141. To the W cropmarks in cereals show intensive occupation in an area due to be quarried for gravel.

Cropmarks (Figs. 2 & 3)

The field currently under consideration was put down to grass in Spring 1990. By 3 August the unusually high soil moisture deficit had produced a detailed pattern of cropmarks which increased in clarity until rains at the end of August. None of the cropmarks had been recorded previously. They have been plotted by Mr Declan Hurl for the Oxford Archaeological Unit. The preliminary plot is enclosed as Figure 2 and an oblique aerial photograph as Figure 3. The cropmarks appear to represent a pre-Roman agricultural landscape with sinuous boundary ditches preserving the outlines of building enclosures. In places these small enclosures lined trackways and elsewhere ran beneath the trackways. The trackways were finally formed into a series of wide roadways bounded by recut ditches and appear to represent a move to regulate and reorganise the landscape during the Roman period. The ditch fills from the service trench confirm this re-enclosing to have happened during the Romano-British period.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

Part I - The farm buildings. (Fig. 4)

This entailed the construction of a new farmyard on previously arable land. The buildings were steel-framed, the uprights founded in 1.0 m cubes of concrete. The sheep dip was founded approximately 1.2 m into the gravel but was a relatively small hole which only encountered an undated ditch. The hard standing for the dip was laid on the topsoil. The hard standing surrounding for the buildings was laid after the removal of the compacted topsoil to a depth of 0.15 - 0.30 m and no archaeological material was seen.

In 1989 the cultivated field was walked between Moreton Lane and the new farmyard and the heavy scatter of Roman period sherds died out as the new farmyard was approached. The pottery was not collected.

The archaeological features. (Fig 5)

The foundation pits for the central shed located two apparent ditches (F 4 and 5) and one possible pit (F 6). None contained any dating evidence. The hay barn did not reveal any recognisable archaeological features, nor did the drain and yard service trenches which were very narrow.

The majority of the archaeological features revealed by the shed continued an upper filling of brown earth similar to the natural subsoil covering the gravel. Features in narrow trenches were rendered invisible. Only one sherd of Romano-British greyware from the ploughsoil was found during this work.

Between the stanchions the shed wall was founded only 0.2 m deep, less than the depth of the ploughsoil.

Contexts

- F 1 Ploughsoil up to 0.3 m deep.
- F 2 Brown earth subsoil over the gravel.
- F 3 Natural gravel.
- F 4 E-W ditch - No finds.
- F 5 Edge of shallow ditch ? - No finds.
- F 6 Ditch terminal/pit - No finds.
- F 7 N-S - Shallow ditch in sheep dip trench - No finds.

The service trench. (Fig. 6)

A narrow service trench 0.3 - 0.35 m wide by 0.6 m deep was dug along the S side of the farm access road from Moreton Lane to the new farm buildings. The gravel was very dry and the resulting sections rough, dirty, irregular and in places penetrated by roots from the adjacent hedge. Even with cleaning ditch profiles were not clear and often extended below the depth of the service trench. The topsoil was generally 0.3 - 0.4 m deep.

Romano-British wares were recovered from the spoil where substantial ditches were sectioned although E of the trackway F17 settlement features gradually gave way to undisturbed subsoil.

From the beginning of the service trench by the farm gate centred some 24 m from the centre of Moreton Lane, ditches and spreads of Romano-British occupation were encountered immediately below the topsoil for the first 40 m eastwards. From 40 m - 58 m eastwards spreads of dark earth (F16) gradually descended to below the bottom of the trench at 0.6 m deep and rose up as a ditch edge at 64 m forming the SW edge of the trackway (F17). This trackway showed on APs and as an earthwork in the adjacent field to the N.

The trackway (F17) showed as light brown loam (presumably once-removed subsoil) covered by only 0.1 m of topsoil. The E side of the trackway was also defined by a ditch (F18) from 76 - 80 m with gently shelving sides.

The service trench continued along to 100 m when a deep spread of dark grey loam with much 1st- to 4th-century pottery extended to 120 m (F19). Between 120 - 140 m there were occasional ill-defined shallow features (F20). At 140 m a 3.0 m wide N-S ditch (F21) did not contain any pottery. From this point earthworks and shallow patches of dark soil (F22) (sealed by topsoil) gave way by 210 m to undisturbed natural brown earth over gravel. At 247 m a dark soil filled a 3.0 m wide feature which was probably modern, i.e. 19th - 20th century, but contained no datable material (F23). From 250 m to the end of the pipe trench at 260 m there was only undisturbed subsoil over gravel.

The contents

- F8 Ditch - dark brown fill - 1.2 m x over 0.6 m deep.
- F9 Occupation spread - light grey loam - 0.10 m thick beneath the topsoil. Much root action and large roots.
- F10 Ditch/pit - dark soil - more than 1.2 m wide x over 0.6 m deep.
- F11 Ditch - shallow end filled with dark loam - 0.5m wide x 0.55 m deep.
- F12 Occupation spread - similar to F9.
- F13 Ditch - dark loam fill - 1.4 m wide over 0.6 m deep.

- F14 Ditch - dark brown fill - 2.0 m wide over 0.6 m deep.
- F15 Ditch - dark brown fill - 0.5 m wide over 0.6 m deep.
- F16 Occupation spread culminating in ditch defining W side of trackway F17.
- F17 Trackway - light brown once removed subsoil to within 0.10 m of surface. Shows as slight earthwork to N.
- F18 Similar to F16.
- F19 Occupation spread - dark grey loams with Romano-British 1st- to 4th-century pottery.
- F20 Collective number for occasional shallow ill-defined features.
- F21 Ditch - 3.0 m wide x over 0.6 m deep.
- F22 Same as for F20.
- F23 Modern feature - no datable material but loose fill with much uncompacted topsoil suggests disturbance during last century.

Fig. 1

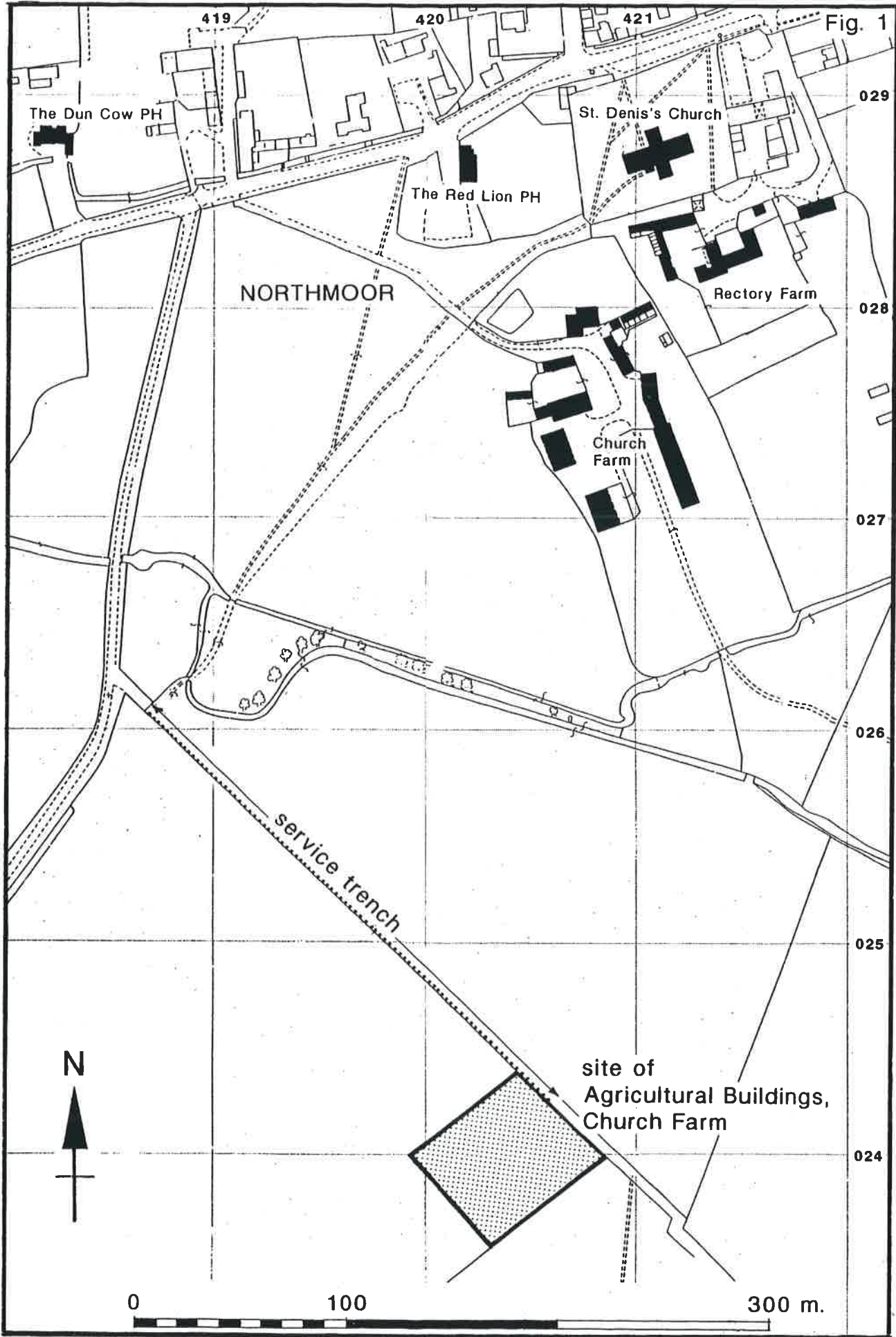
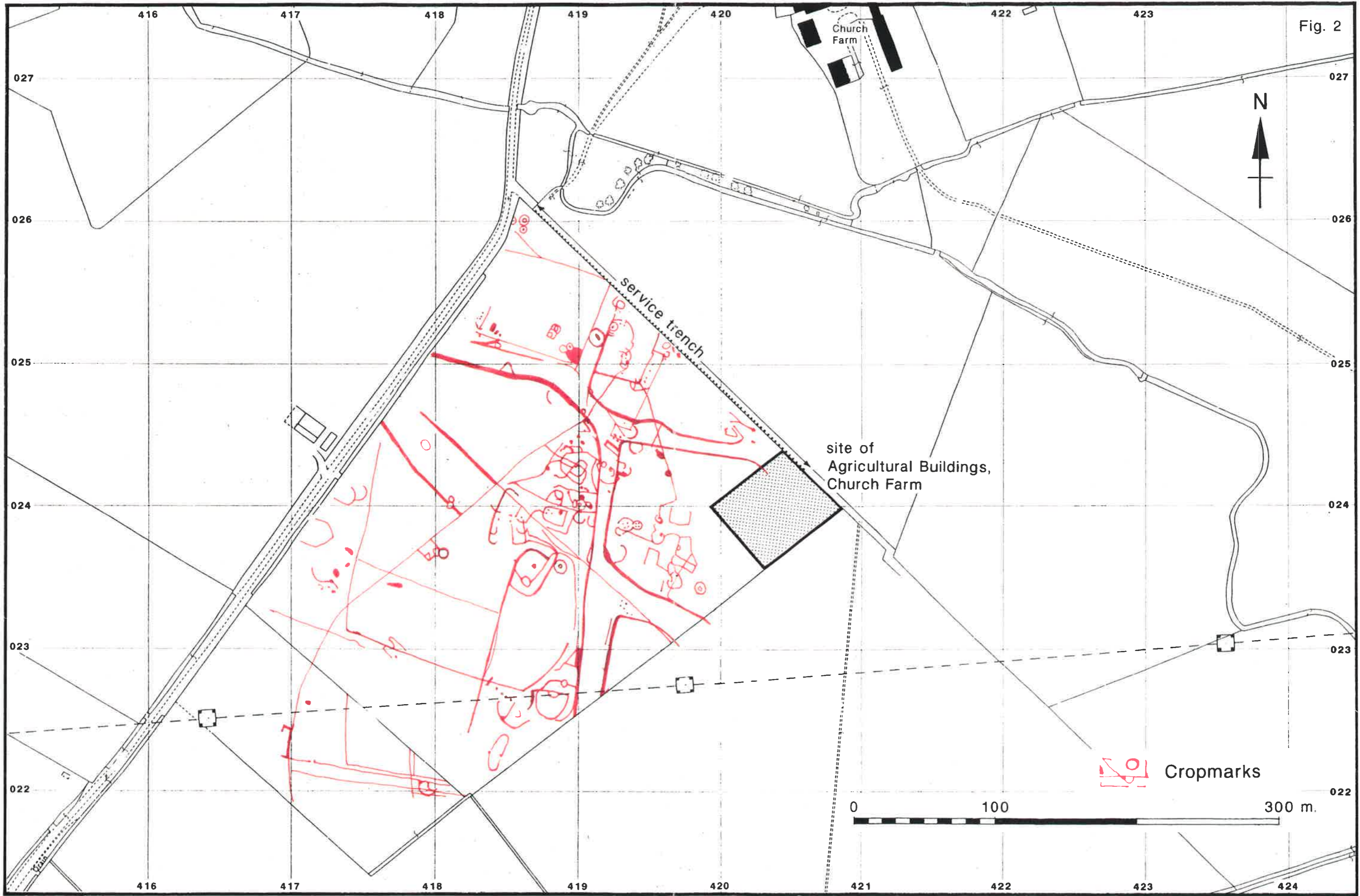


Fig. 2



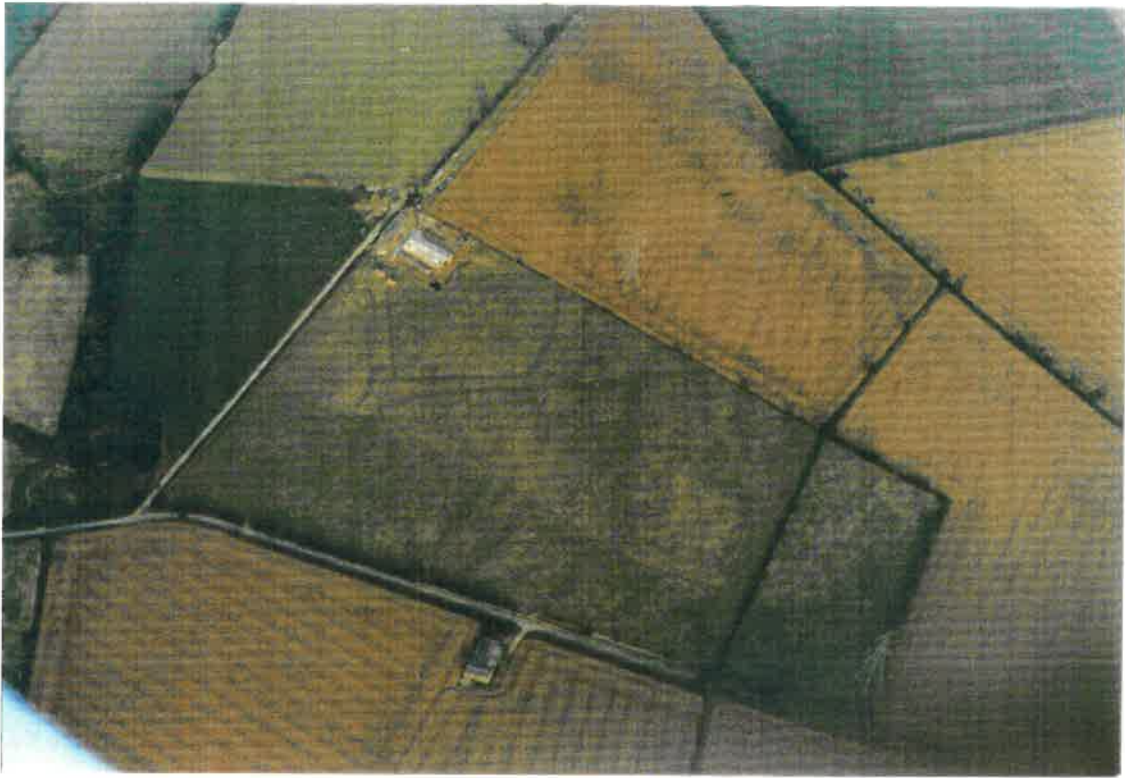


Fig. 3

Church Farm, Northmoor, Oxon. 1989-90
New farm buildings.

Fig. 4

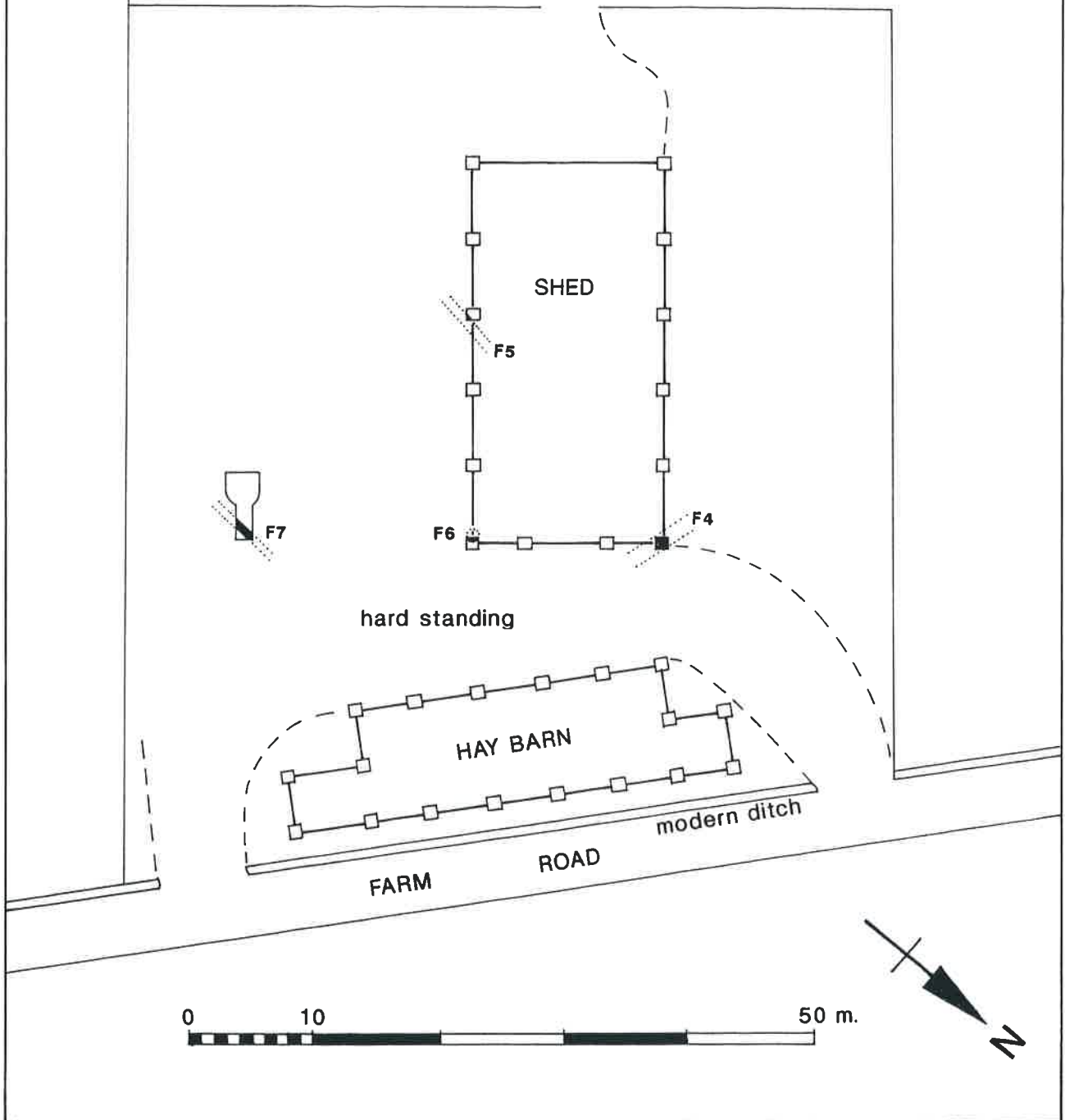
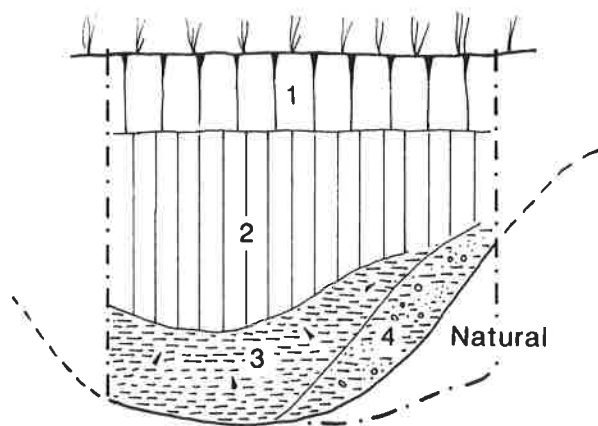


Fig. 5



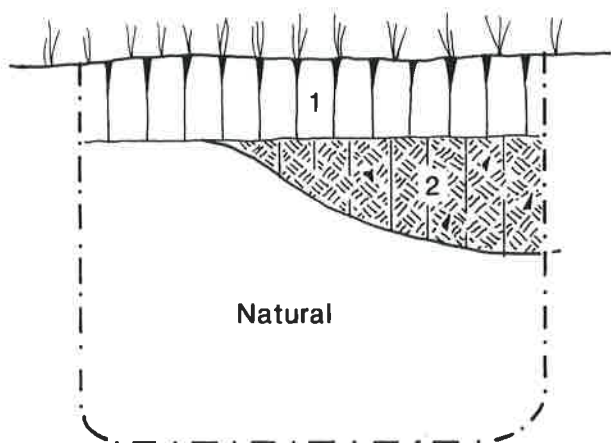
Feature 4 NW pit edge

1 Ploughsoil

2 Brown earth

3 Dark grey silt with occasional charcoal flecks

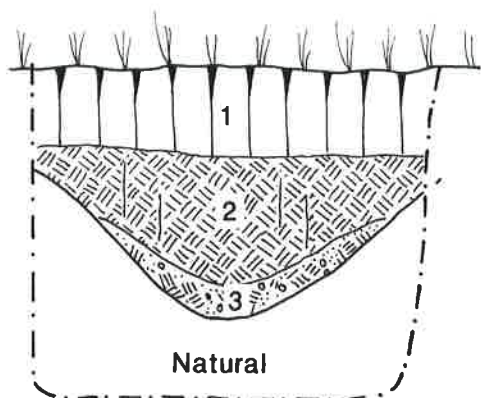
4 Dark grey silt with sandy gravel



Feature 5 NE pit edge

1 Ploughsoil

2 Brown loamy clay with occasional charcoal flecks

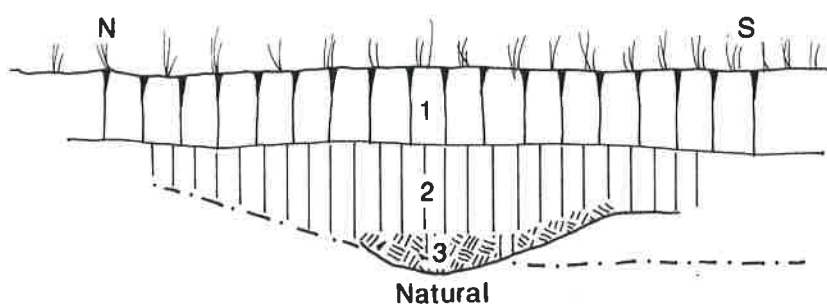


Feature 6 SW pit edge

1 Ploughsoil

2 Grey-brown loamy clay

3 Grey-brown loamy clay with sandy gravel



Feature 7 N-S section

1 Ploughsoil

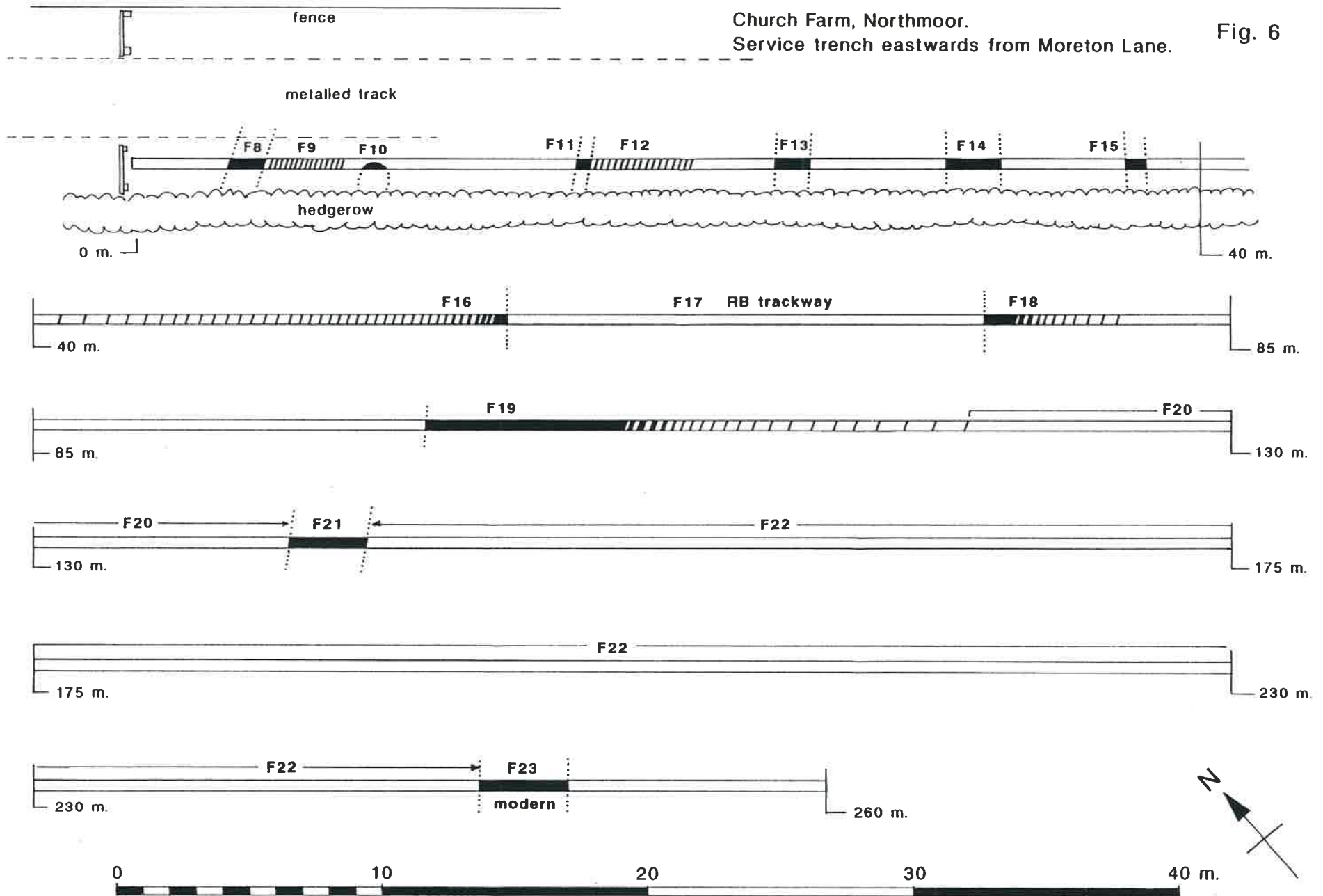
2 Old ploughsoil

3 Grey-brown clay loam with occasional charcoal flecks



Church Farm, Northmoor.
Service trench eastwards from Moreton Lane.

Fig. 6





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