

# BRONZE AGE FEATURES AT DIMMOCK'S COTE ROAD, WICKEN

Simon Bray

1992

Archaeology Section  
Property Department  
Shire Hall Castle Hill  
Cambridge CB3 0AP  
Tel. (0223) 317312



*Report no. 67 Aerial photograph showing present quarry site and adjacent cropmarks (Photograph by Ben Robinson, 1992)*



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TL545/722

<b><u>Contents</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Abstract	2
Introduction	2
Background	2
Impact of Development proposal	7
Planning Policies	7
Methodology	7
Results	8
Discussions of results & Recommendations	14

**Figures**

1	Site location plan	3
2	Trench location plan	4
3a	Aerial photograph showing cropmarks in fields next to site	5
3b	Extract from Cambridgeshire's SMR showing cropmarks & findspots around the site.	6
4	Soil profiles along trenches I & II	9
5	Plan and section of feature [18]	10
6	Trench plan showing Bronze Age gullies	11
7	Sections through gully [4&15]	12
8	Sections through gully [5&14]	13

**Specialist Reports**

Appendix A	Pottery report by Gavin Lucas	15
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### **Abstract**

*A proposal to extend an existing limestone quarry near Wicken, Cambridgeshire, led to a field evaluation of the area being conducted by the Archaeology Section of Cambridgeshire County Council.*

*The results were minimal but encouraging: Two Bronze Age gullies and an undated shallow sub-rectangular pit were identified.*

*The site archive and finds are deposited with Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeology Section.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The applicants (Euston Lime) commissioned the Archaeology Section of Cambridgeshire County Council to conduct an assessment on a quarter of a hectare of land in the parish of Wicken, Cambridgeshire. The work was required as a condition of planning permission being granted to extend the existing limestone quarry at Dimmock's Cote Road (fig. 1) and was conducted in July 1992.

1.2 An initial consultation of the County's Site and Monuments Record (SMR) showed that there were several sites of importance in adjacent fields visible as cropmarks (fig. 3a), and as individual findspots (fig. 3b).

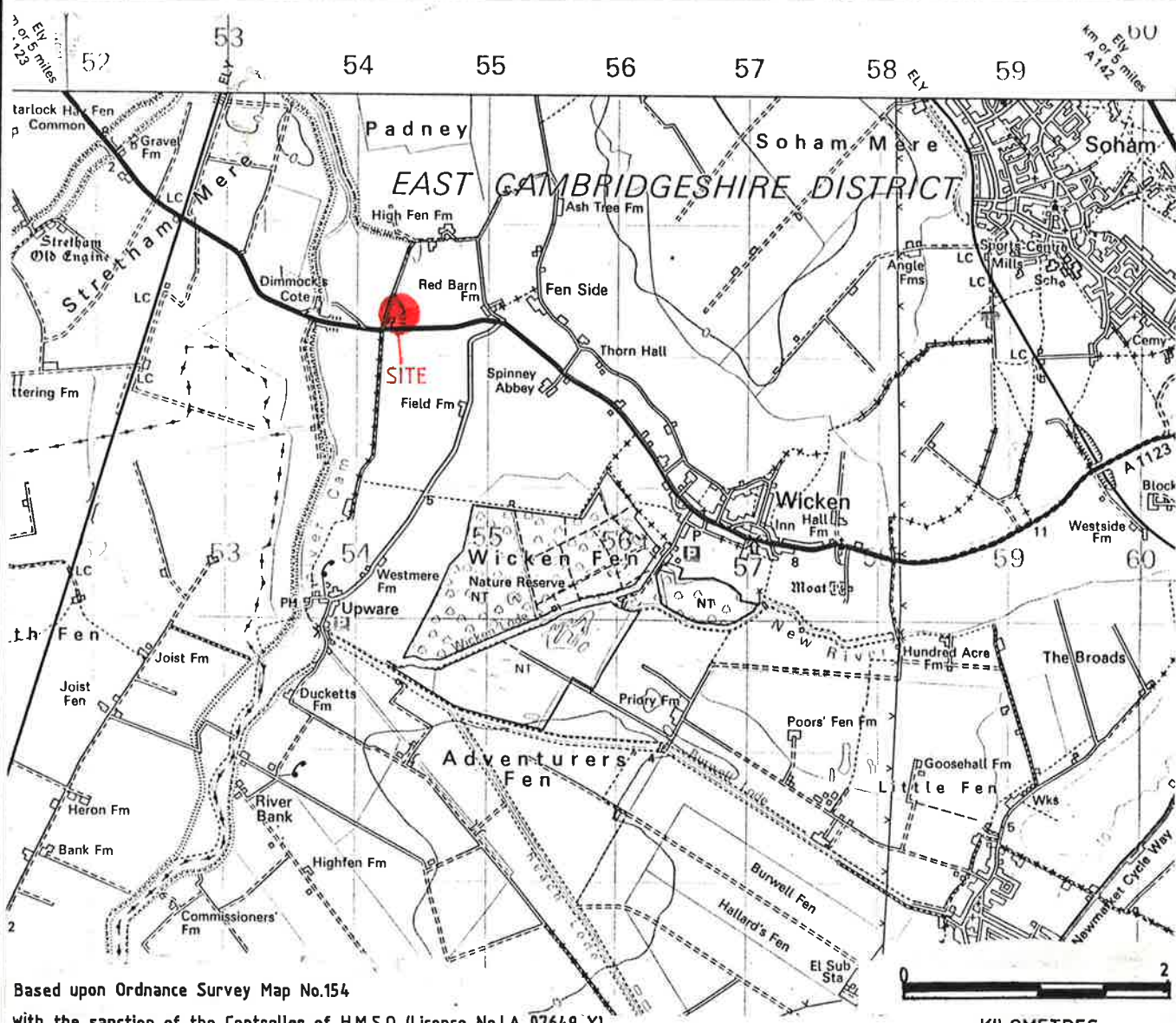
- 1.3 The aims of the excavation were to:-
- Assess the preservation of any surviving archaeology.
  - To assist the County Archaeology Office with recommendations for archaeological investigations of the remainder of the field (fig. 2).

### **2.0 Background**

Dimmock's Cote lies close to the parish boundary of Wicken and Stretham, approximately 800 metres east of the River Cam. It is situated on the fen edge on an outcrop of limestone gently rising up to about 6m OD at the southern end of the site. This area forming part of the Isle of Soham.

Both Wicken and Stretham are fen-edge parishes that are noted for their Prehistoric and Roman settlement. Within one kilometre of this site many artefacts have been found representing a range of periods including:- Mesolithic flints, a dense scatter of Neolithic flint tools, Roman field systems, cremations and inhumations, and Late Saxon and Medieval hut sites.

When the quarry was initially opened in 1951 four Roman skeletons and the remains of a building were uncovered (SMR No. 06973). Recent quarrying in 1978 disturbed the burial of an 18th century adolescent girl buried on high ground near the River Cam. Further recent quarrying on the northern edge of the quarry is said to have revealed the limestone footings of a building of unknown date possibly associated with the Roman structures discovered in 1951.



Based upon Ordnance Survey Map No.154  
with the sanction of the Controller of H.M.S.O (Licence No.LA 07649 X)

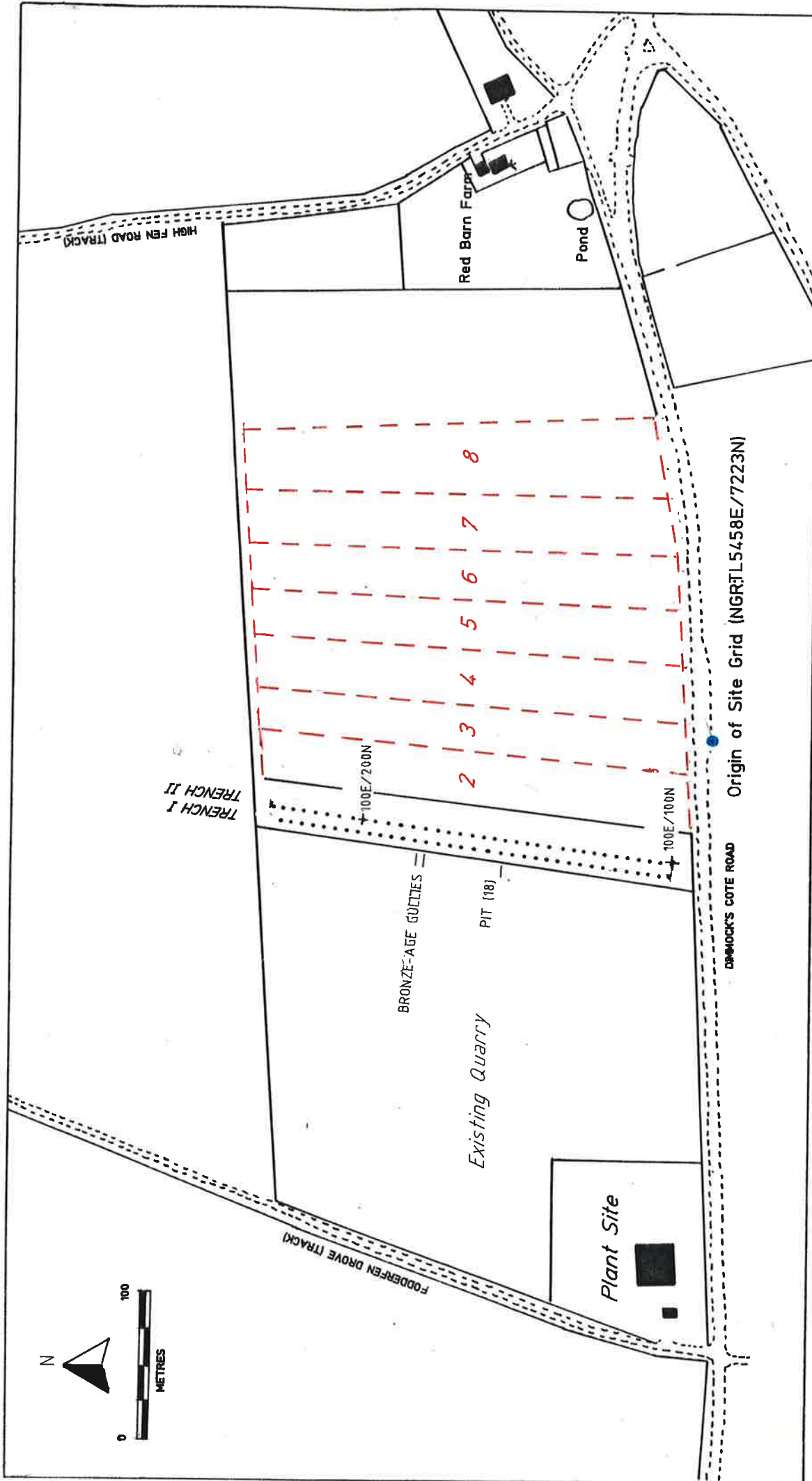


Archaeology Section  
Cambridgeshire County  
Council

WICDC92 - SITE LOCATION  
PLAN



Date  
FIG. 1 27/7/92



Archaeology Section  
Cambridgeshire County  
Council

**WIDCC92 - TRENCH LOCATION  
& LIMIT OF EXTRACTION**

Extent of proposed, phased,  
Limestone extraction  
Location of Trenches I & II

FIG. 2

Initials  
S.B

Date  
27/07/92



AREA UNDER INVESTIGATION

LARGE ROMAN ?

RECTILINEAR ENCLOSURE

RING-DITCH

LARGE RECTILINEAR ENCLOSURE

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN ROBINSON 1992



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Cambridgeshire County  
Council

WICDC92 - AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH  
SHOWING CROPMARKS AROUND  
QUARRY SITE



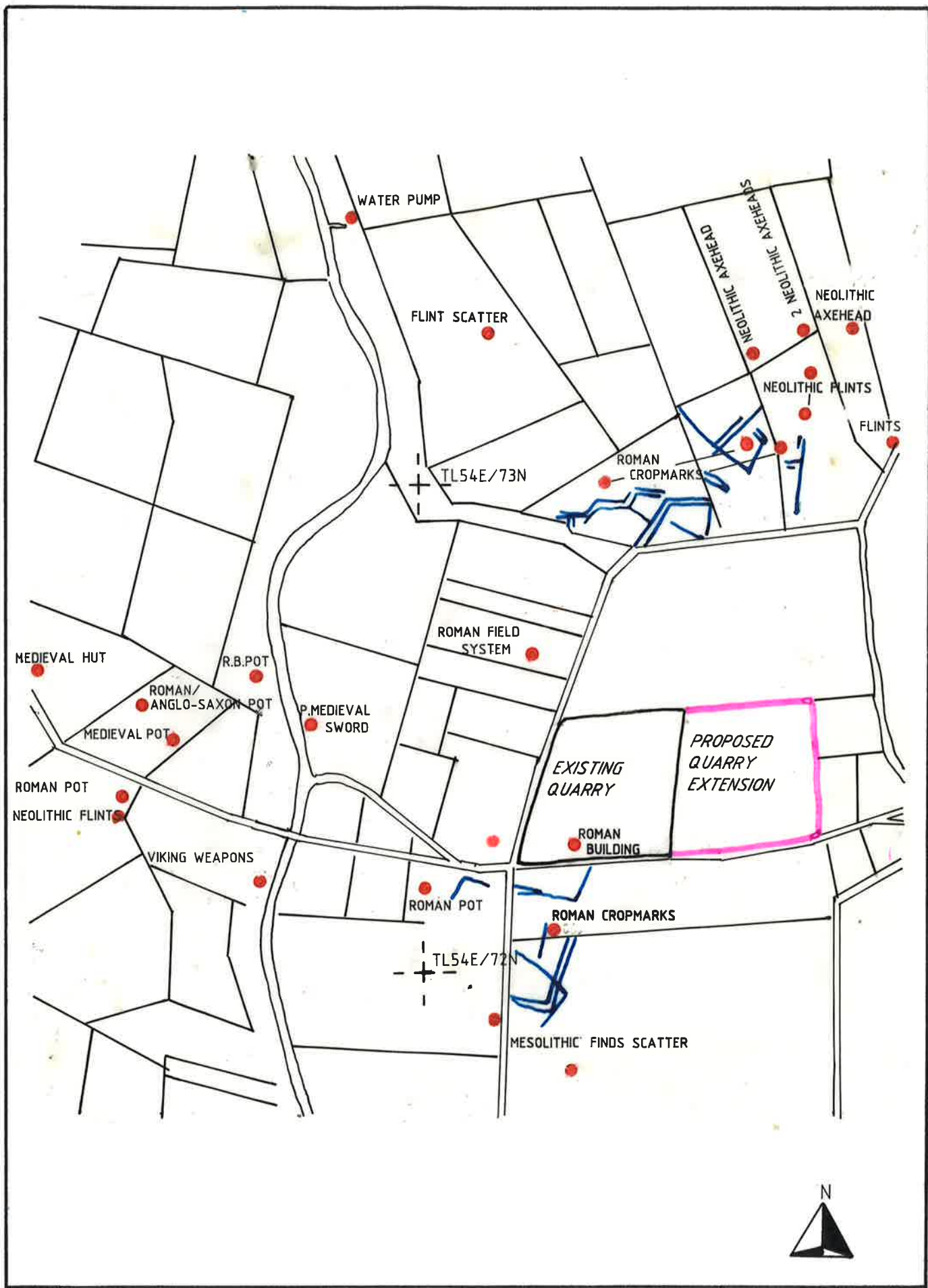
FIG. 3

Initials

S.B

Date

10/08/92



 <p>Archaeology Section Cambridgeshire County Council</p>	<p><i>EXTRACT FROM CAMBRIDGESHIRE'S SMR SHOWING CROPMARKS &amp; FINDSPOTS AROUND THE SITE</i></p>	fig. 3b	
		<p>Initials <i>S.B</i></p>	<p>Date <i>10/08/92</i></p>

The name Dimmock's Cote seems to originate from 1394, taken from a Landowner, Hugo Dymmok. The word "Cote" or "Coates" is a derivative of cottages (Reaney, 1943, p24)

Aerial photographs taken in 1975 and in 1992 show clear, complex cropmarks in all fields next to the quarry except the one proposed for limestone extraction (fig. 3b). In the field to the south, cropmarks show a large rectangular enclosure (SMR No. 06981; fig. 3a). Fieldwalking over which has produced a large amount of Roman pottery. Recent aerial photographs in July 1992 showed a previously unrecorded ring-ditch as a cropmark in the field immediately to the west of the quarry (fig. 3), which is probably the site of a burial mound.

### **3.0 Impact of Development Proposals**

3.1 The proposed quarry will lead to total extraction of limestone, which will remove all archaeological deposits and finds. This work to be is to be phased over eight years, and will consist of a series of 30 metre wide strips which will be open mined from the west to east.

- Phase I is a limited area, 2400 metres square, an initial strip to allow the normal function of the quarry to continue while planning permission is being sought for the next seven phases.
- Phase II - VIII is to incorporate the whole of the eastern field (fig. 2).

### **4.0 Planning Policies Affecting Archaeologically Sensitive Areas**

4.1 The Department of the Environment, Planning Policy Guideline No. 16 "Archaeology and Planning" 1990, requires local planning authorities to request a prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological field evaluation before deciding upon a planning application on any site where important archaeological remains may exist. This evaluation may lead to requirements for preservation of all or parts of the site, or for further archaeological work.

4.2 Cambridgeshire Aggregates (minerals) Local Plan 1989 states that an applicant will be expected to investigate the archaeological potential of any area under consideration.

4.3 Cambridgeshire County Council Structure Plan requires that, where there is no overriding case for preservation of an archaeological site, opportunities will be sought, prior to the granting of planning permission, for excavation and recording of the site.

### **5.0 Methodology**

5.1 Two trenches, aligned north/south, were opened by a 360° mechanical excavator with a 2 m wide toothless ditching bucket (fig. 2). The area under investigation represented a 26% sample of the total area of the site. The trenches were opened in two phases to see at what level archaeological features first became apparent: initially the plough soil was removed to the sub-soil and this was subsequently removed to the natural limestone.

Areas of interest within the open trenches were then cleaned by hand and any features/anomalies planned, sampled and recorded using the Archaeology Section's single context recording system. All cuts were given a number in square brackets and fills and layers in a circle. The east facing trench sections were drawn at 50 metre intervals to demonstrate the amount of overburden across the site.



5.2 To supplement the archaeological knowledge of the immediate area of the quarry a very limited random fieldwalking programme was conducted as part of the assessment in the remainder of the field proposed for future extraction (fig. 2 (phases II -VIII)). Conditions proved ideal for fieldwalking with little natural stone in the ploughsoil and the topsoil being a fine, loose loam which was washed and showed artefacts very clearly.

## 6.0 **Results**

Initially, 0.25 m - 0.30 m of ploughsoil was removed along the length of each trench (fig. 4). Directly beneath the ploughsoil an intermittent 0.10 m thick layer of plough mixed subsoil was noted. Beneath this a layer of sub-soil, 0.30 m deep, was recorded through which the features were clearly cut.

6.1 Trench I A large sub-rectangular pit, 4 x 3 m, (fig. 5) was recorded at 91E/137.70N. Upon excavation it was found to be 0.75 metres deep, with vertical sides and a flat base. Cut from directly below the base of the ploughsoil it contained a very disturbed, mixed fill of redeposited limestone natural, giving an indication of rapid backfilling soon after its original use. In the base of the feature two distinct mounds were recorded, of a similar material to the surrounding fills, but slightly darker in colour. These may represent the deliberate burial of an unknown, decayed substance.

At the north and south sides of the feature two cuts were recorded, [25 & 26] ( fig. 5). On the south side, a narrow, straight sided, flat bottomed cut [26] is perhaps a posthole. All of these later cuts respected the sides of the initial cut of the pit. No conclusive dating material was recovered, although two small, abraded sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery and a small animal bone fragment were recovered from the upper layer (19), which are likely to be residual.

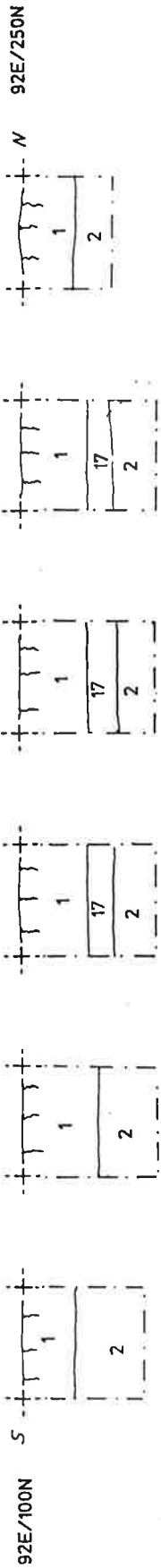
Two shallow gullies [14 & 15], orientated east/west were recorded at 92E/188.5N and 92E/199.5N (fig. 6), continuing into trench II. Both were filled by a single homogeneous fill (fig. 7 & 8), pottery from which has indicated a Late Bronze Age date (Appendix. A).

6.2 Trench II The continuation of the two gullies recorded in trench I were identified in this trench at 100E/189N and 100E/199N, [4,5] (fig. 6). Both of these features contained stratified Late Bronze Age pottery. Feature [4] had three medium sized postholes, diam: 0.30 m, cutting across the bottom of the feature (fig. 7). The relationship between the gully and the postholes had been lost by a recut of the gully (fig. 7) but it would seem likely that they are of a contemporary date as they were not seen to continue either side of the gully.

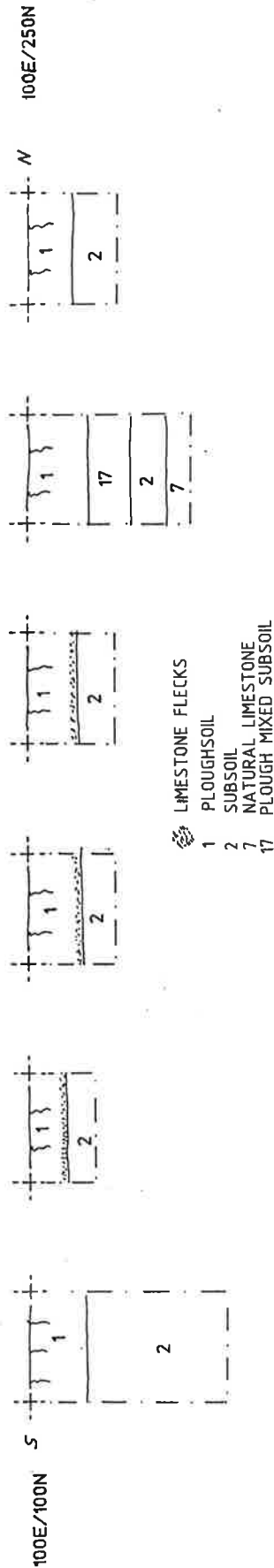
## 6.3 Fieldwalking Results

Fieldwalking produced several large abraded Late Bronze Age sherds and two weathered Bronze Age flint flakes. The presence of large sherds in good state of preservation suggests that agriculture practices are causing active damage to buried Bronze Age features.

*EAST FACING PROFILE ALONG TRENCH I*



*EAST FACING PROFILE ALONG TRENCH II*



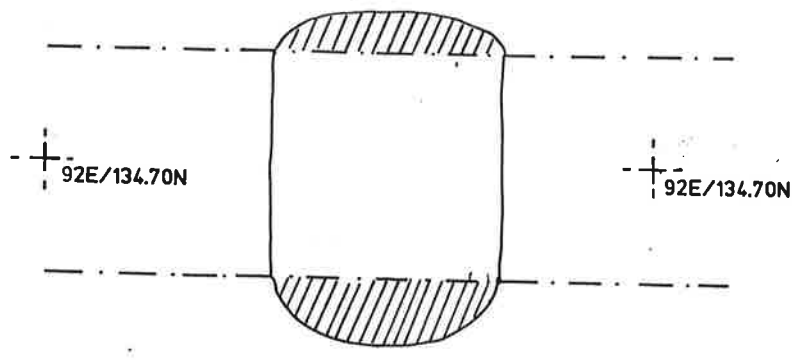
- LIMESTONE FLECKS
- 1 PLOUGH SOIL
- 2 SUBSOIL
- 7 NATURAL LIMESTONE
- 17 PLOUGH MIXED SUBSOIL




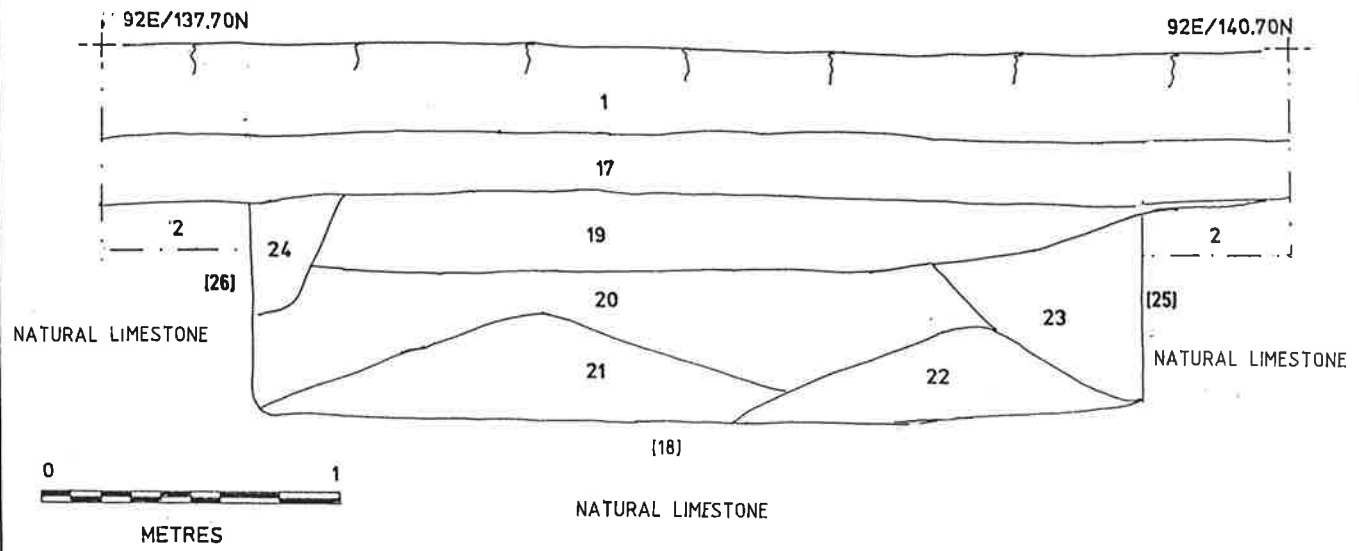
Archaeology Section  
Cambridgeshire County Council

*WICDC92 - EAST FACING PROFILES  
ALONG TRENCHES I & II*

Scale	FIG. 4	
Initials	S.B	Date
		10/08/92



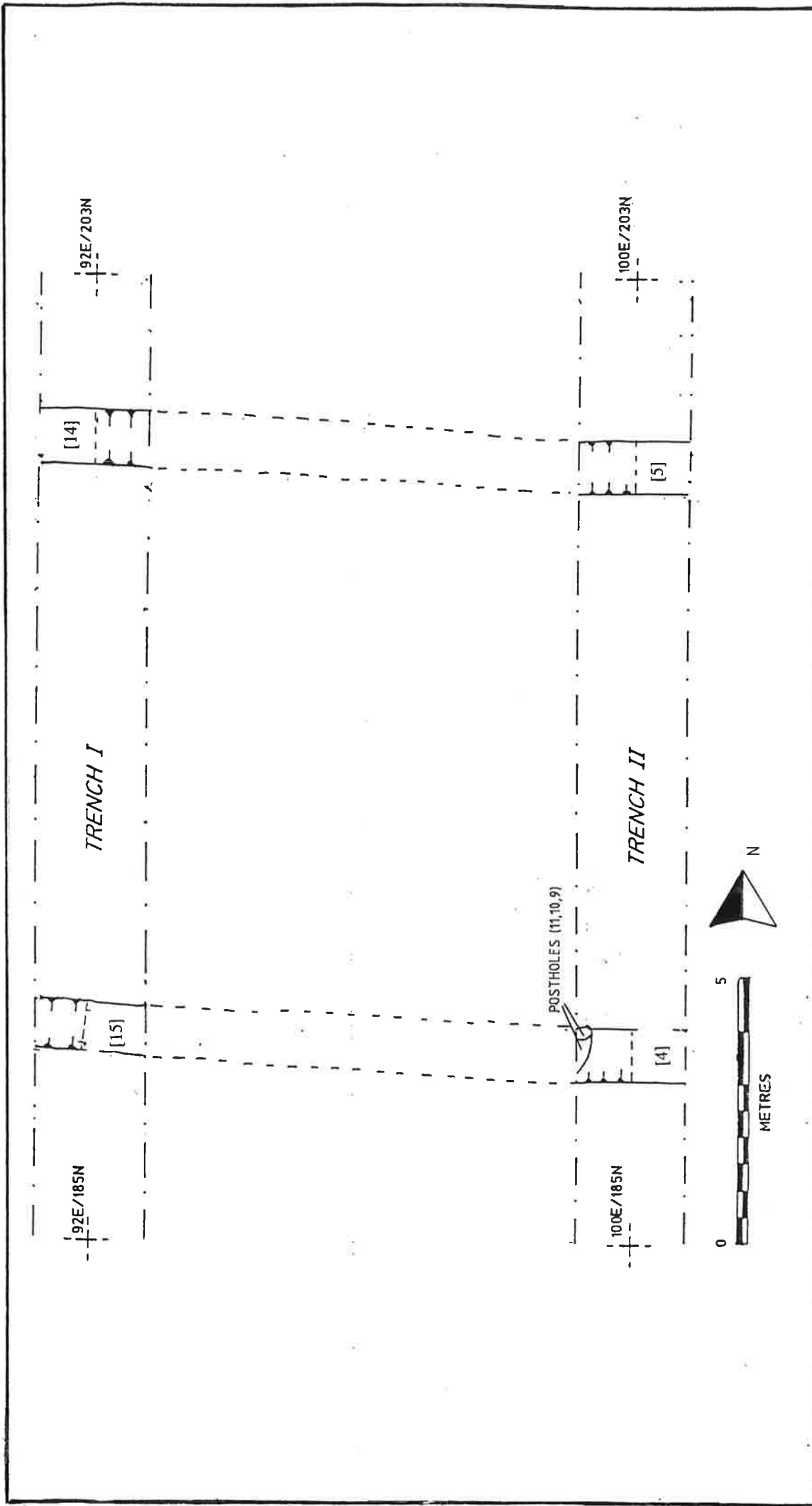
 Unexcavated



  
 Archaeology Section  
 Cambridgeshire County  
 Council

*WICDC92 - PLAN AND EAST  
 FACING SECTION OF FEATURE  
 [18]*


<i>FIG. 5</i>	
Initials <i>S.B</i>	Date <i>10/08/92</i>



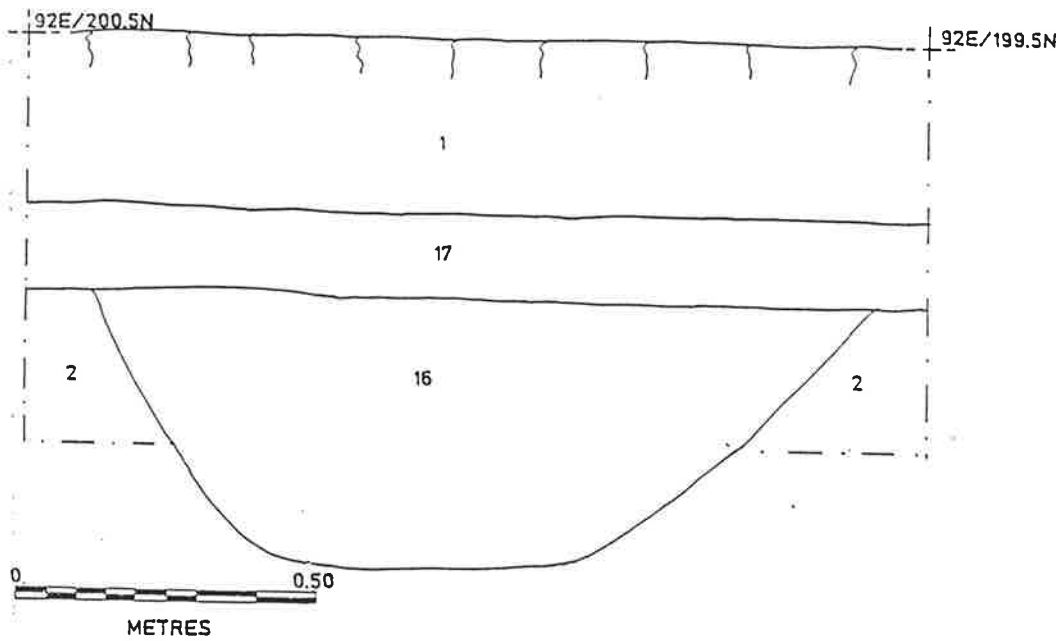
WICDC92 - PLAN OF LATE  
BRONZE AGE GULLIES

FIG. 6

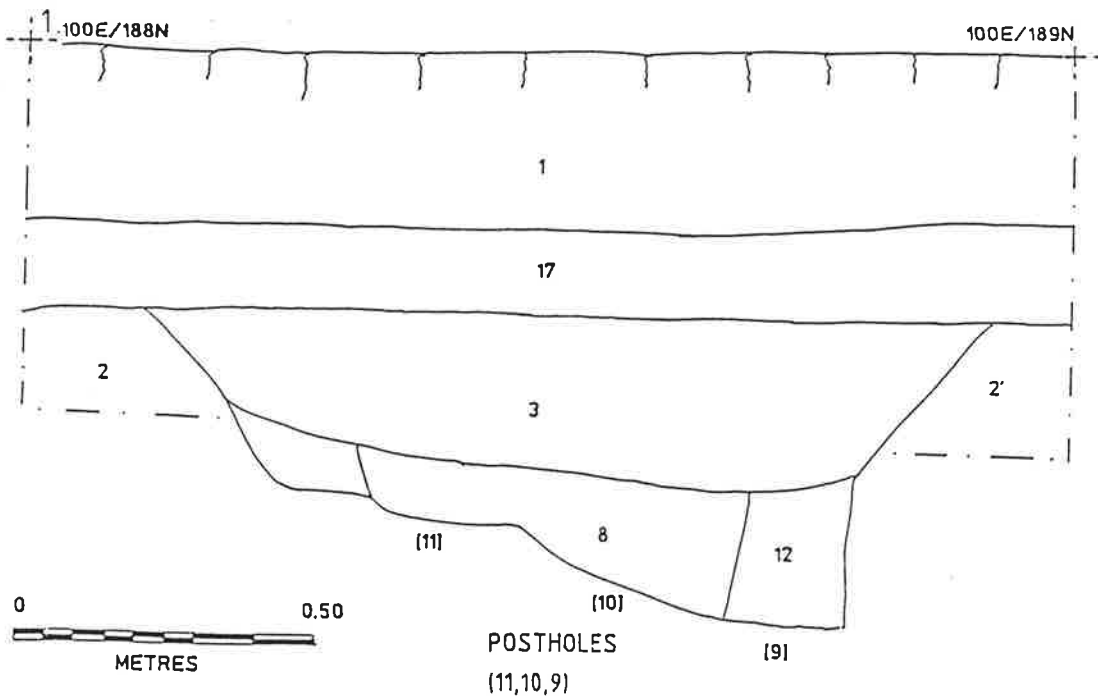
Initials	Date
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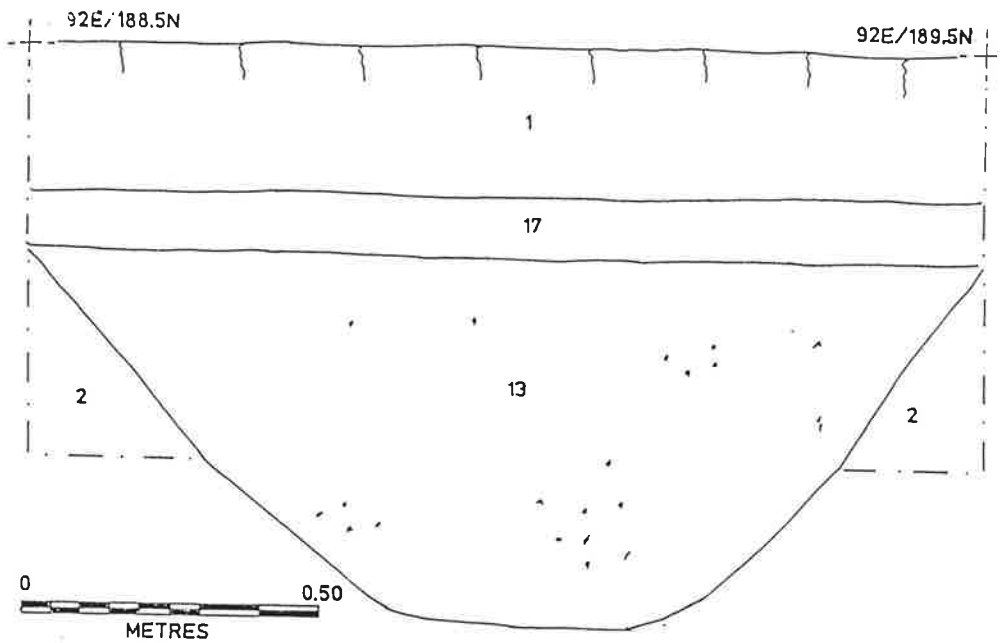
**TRENCH I - EAST FACING OBLIQUE SECTION THROUGH BRONZE AGE GULLY [15]**



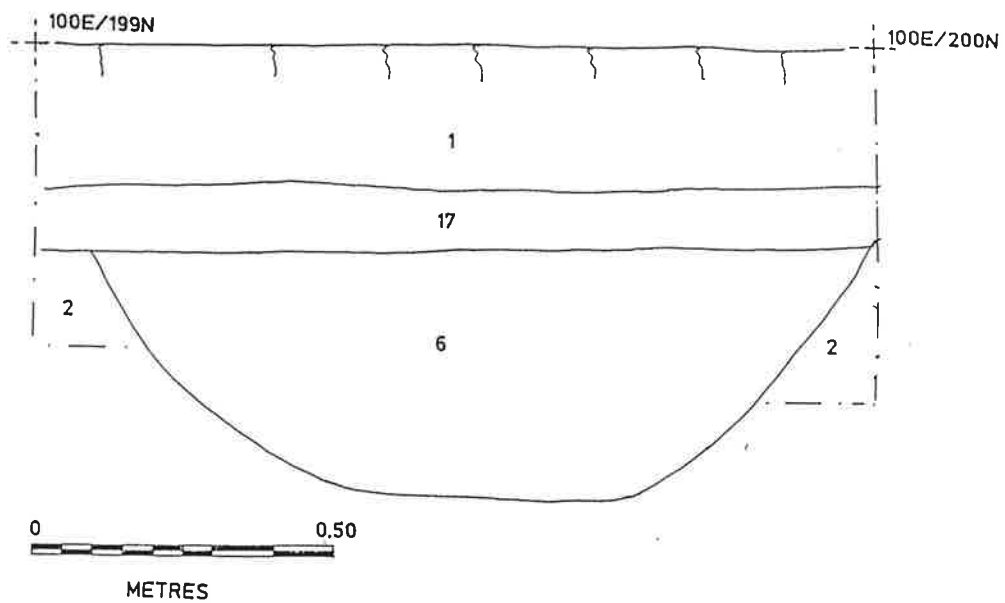
**TRENCH II - EAST FACING SECTION THROUGH BRONZE AGE GULLY [4] & POSTHOLES [9,10,11]**



*TRENCH I - WEST FACING SECTION THROUGH  
LATE BRONZE AGE GULLY [14]*



*TRENCH II - EAST FACING SECTION THROUGH  
LATE BRONZE-AGE GULLY [15]*



## **7.0 Discussion and Recommendations**

7.1 Rising up from the fens the Isle of Soham has provided a focus for intense activity since early prehistoric times to the 20th century. It presents a rare opportunity to view an ancient archaeological landscape in its entirety, and how that landscape is being affected by modern land management policies. The area directly around the quarry has been known to have a wealth of sites with evidence of activity from the Mesolithic (7500-3500 BC) onwards with the notable exception of any material from the Bronze Age.

This assessment has successfully demonstrated that, despite the lack of cropmarks or recorded findspots on the threatened field, there are significant surviving archaeological remains. The limited area examined means that any interpretation of the evidence is tenuous at this stage. Nevertheless the two gullies recorded in both trenches, dated by stratified Late Bronze Age pottery, has provided the first evidence of activity of this period in the area. The presence of the pottery (which is usually not well preserved due to poor firing leaves a fabric weak and friable) could be an indication of an adjacent contemporary settlement with associated field system. Similarly the newly discovered ring-ditch to the west of the quarry (fig. 3) could be a Bronze Age in origin and form part of a contemporary ceremonial landscape.

7.2 The importance of the archaeological potential within the area proposed for limestone extraction (fig. 2) makes further archaeological investigations inevitable. The quarry company favours a phased extraction policy (fig. 2), quarrying only 30 m wide strips, allowing continued cultivation in the remainder of the field. In order for the proposed archaeological works to cause minimum disturbance to the day-to-day operation of the quarry a phased approach may be appropriate. This would entail stripping the areas before quarrying followed by the examination, excavation and recording of any archaeological deposits. This programme of works would allow a complete plan and interpretation of the site to emerge over the timescale of the extraction programme, giving maximum archaeological information at minimum expense to the developer, and with no disturbance to agricultural activities.

APPENDIX A

POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS AT DIMMOCK'S COTE ROAD,  
CAMBRIDGESHIRE 1992

By  
Gavin Lucas

A number of small and very abraded sherds in a soft to hard, dark fabric, with red-brown surfaces and tempered with frequent ill-sorted angular white quartz up to 5 mm were identified from various contexts. None were of large enough to be certain even of the vessel type, but several sherds indicated that they may be of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron-Age. One sherd had a projecting triangular cordon, possibly from an urn, and another appeared to be a rim with frilling typical of certain bowls of this period. The number of sherds in each context is listed below:

003 2

006 3

012 2

013 12

016 10

019 2

**Spoilheap** (midway along trench II) 3 sherds.  
2 Roman/Medieval sherds.

From the surrounding field came 6 sherds of a shell-tempered ware (Roman/Medieval) and 2 Post-Medieval glazed sherds.



**Bibliography**

- |                  |   |   |
|------------------|---|---|
| Reaney P.H, 1943 | <i>Placenames of Cambridgeshire &amp; the Isle of Ely</i> | The Placenames of England, Vol. XIX           |
|                  | <i>Sites and Monuments Record</i>                         | Cambridgeshire County Council                 |
| Phillips C.W     | <i>The Fenland in Roman Times</i>                         | Royal Geographic Society Research Series No.5 |