

Halton Green Farm Lancashire



Archaeological Watching Brief



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SUMMARY

On 25th and 26th March 2002, Oxford Archaeology North undertook a watching brief at Halton Green Farm, Lancashire (SD 3516 4653) on behalf of Mr Michael Cunliffe. The aim of the watching brief was to record any significant deposits uncovered during minor excavations associated with the construction of a horse arena.

The site of the works was a field to the north of Low Road at the junction with a minor road leading to Moorgate and Monkley Gill. The entire eastern part of the field was mechanically stripped of turf, uncovering the remains of several isolated features of post-medieval to modern date, which were clearly associated with the occupation of the farm.

The area in question revealed no features of archaeological significance at the level exposed and, on the available evidence, the recreational landuse will have only minimal impact to any underlying remains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to Mr Michael Cunliffe for commissioning the work and for his co-operation and assistance during the watching brief. OA North wish also to express their gratitude to the staff of FW Huddleston for their excellent machining, and to the staff of LG Packard for their friendly staff. This report was compiled by Vix Hughes, who also undertook the watching brief, the finds being examined by Ian Miller, Jamie Quartermaine and Rachel Newman edited the report and the project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTRACT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 A watching brief was undertaken on the 25th and 26th March 2002 on behalf of Mr Michael Cunliffe by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North), formerly Lancaster University Archaeological Unit, at Halton Green Farm, Lancashire (SD 3516 4653). The aim of the watching brief was to record any significant deposits uncovered during minor excavations associated with the construction of a proposed horse arena.
- 1.1.2 The area along the Lune Valley is known to have numerous archaeological sites of all periods and, in accordance with PPG *Note 16* (DOE 1990), Lancashire County Archaeological Service has required that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the groundworks for the proposed development (Planning Application reference K345-01).

1.2 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1 **Location:** the proposed development site, Halton Green Farm (SD 3516 4653), lies within the hamlet of Halton Green, 1km east of Halton Village, in the county of Lancashire (Fig 1). Halton Green lies just north of a meander on the lower course of the River Lune, to the east of the M6 and off the A683, which extends east from Lancaster through numerous villages of medieval origin. The parish of Halton lies within the Hundred of Lonsdale, in the deanery of Amounderness, and contains the two townships of Aughton and Halton.
- 1.2.2 **Geology and Soils:** the underlying solid geology of the general area is relatively complex with several faults running north-west/south-east through the area. In the immediate locale of the study area the geology comprises mostly Namurian grey mud and siltstones with intercalated sandstones, which date from the Carboniferous period (280 to 345 million years ago) (Countryside Commission 1998, 57). This is overlain by drift geology of glacial boulder clays, and the overlying soils are of the Brickfield 2 series, which are cambic stagnogley soils (Jarvis *et al* 1984).

1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 **Prehistoric:** there are no prehistoric sites recorded within the study area, although activity is recorded from across Lancashire, particularly in the form of flint artefact scatters and axe finds (Middleton 1996); axes seem to be particularly common in north Lancashire (*op cit*, 44). The adoption of pottery products and sedentary farming practices are also attested in other parts of the county (*ibid*), and it is likely that by the end of the Neolithic some settlements were well established and areas of the landscape would have been heavily modified within the Lune Valley. Actual settlement evidence in north Lancashire during the Bronze Age is extremely scarce and is typically represented only by flint scatters (*op cit*, 54).
- 1.3.2 By the Iron Age, the area seems to have been under the aegis of the Brigantes, a tribal group that dominated much of the North (Cunliffe 1991). The Iron Age is

even more poorly represented within the environs of the study area than the Bronze Age (Hazelgrove 1996, 61). There are, however, potential settlement sites known within the wider area and these tend to take the form of irregular enclosures, including several examples from the Lune valley (*op cit*, 65), for instance, one at Cloughton and another at Quernmore (English Heritage 1996). There are no finds of metalwork from the immediate area, however, and the nearest hillforts are mostly to the north and west.

- 1.3.3 **Roman:** a Roman road appears to have been constructed near the study area, as indicated by a milestone found near Caton (Shotter and White 1995, 60), and several antiquarian writers claim to have been able to identify the course of the road, including Baines (1824, 5) who states, with some certainty, that it passed through Caton. More recently several sections of the road have been positively identified, giving a much better picture of the exact route (Shotter and White 1995, 58-62).
- 1.3.4 Although there are no Roman settlement sites within the immediate study area, there are Roman forts at Lancaster and Burrow-in-Lonsdale, both of which show early activity that continued into the late Roman period (Shotter 1997). This, plus the probable position of the road, would potentially make the study area a focus of some considerable activity. The discovery of two second century coins near Halton demonstrates the potential of the area for Roman settlement (D Shotter pers comm; Baines 1824, 30; Farrer and Brownbill 1914, 74). The discovery of a Roman altar in the churchyard of Halton-on-Lune (Baines 1824, 3; *RIB* 601), dedicated to a unit of boatmen, might also suggest settlement in the area, although it is considered more probably to derive from Lancaster (Shotter and White 1995, 90-91).
- 1.3.5 **Early Medieval:** evidence for activity during the early medieval period is neither widespread nor extensive, but isolated finds from the region suggest that it was far from abandoned. Several churches within the immediate area have early Anglian dedications (Tupling 1948) although there is also a strong Irish-Norse influence (Wainwright 1946); it would appear that the early Anglian inhabitants were mingling with Norse settlers by the tenth century (Howson 1959). Fragments of crosses, although limited in the information they can supply, demonstrate that early Christian buildings and related settlements must have existed in the centuries following the Roman occupation. The crosses at Halton show both Anglian and Norse influences, with unusual figurative depictions, which are also seen at Hornby (Newman 1996a, 98). A further fragment of the Halton cross is known to have been built into a farm wall at Halton Green East (SMR 3522). The incidence of such sculpture along the Lune valley suggests it was an area of some significance, and there was possibly the site of an early monastery at Halton (Newman 1996a). For some part of the eleventh century the manor of Halton was held by Siward, Earl of Northumbria, and, after his death, until shortly before the time of the Norman Conquest, the manor along with a large part of the area was under the influence of earl Tostig (*op cit*, 21).
- 1.3.6 There appears to be some reference to Halton as a manor prior to the eleventh century as, according to some sources, the name Kellet, which may relate to the 'chellet' mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 (Faull and Stinson 1986), is stated as having six carucates in the manor of Halton (Mannex and Co 1851, 519; Baines 1824). There is also some suggestion of a salhouse or pit within Halton at this time (Crump 1939, 93).

- 1.3.7 **Medieval:** prior to the Norman Conquest, the *caput baroniae* of the Honour of Lancaster was at Halton, and owed allegiance to the earl of Northumbria (Kenyon 1991, 167). The implementation of Norman control led to an increased development of the study area, and several sites representing the newly defined infrastructure occur within the area. These include the churches of Gressingham and Tatham, and the motte and bailey at Hornby. Lancashire was not immediately reorganised, and in the eleventh century, it continued to be organised around a series of earlier estates including Halton (Kenyon 1991, 139). Shortly after the Norman Conquest, following rebellion and retribution in the North, Roger de Poitou was granted control of a large amount of the estates (*op cit*, 152). Placing such a large part of the area that would become Lancashire under the control of one person established unity and defined the extent of the county of Lancashire (*op cit*, 154); the centre of administration was also moved from Halton to Lancaster, and the modern county began to develop (*ibid*). As the county developed, so did its settlements and urbanism encouraged by local lords grew after the eleventh century, numerous settlements being granted borough status, with markets, including Hornby (Crosby 1994).
- 1.3.8 There was a general population growth throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Newman 1996b, 117), but in the fourteenth century a series of disasters, notably the Black Death, reduced the population considerably, leaving several deserted and shrunken settlements across Lancashire (*ibid*). Hornby was such a case, as although it had been planted by a powerful local ruler, it all but disappeared, leaving only evidence for the major structures such as the castle and priory (White 1996, 128).
- 1.3.9 **Post-Medieval:** Saxton's (1577) and Speed's (1610) county maps of the area both clearly show Halton to the west of Halton Green, indicating that the settlement here was of sufficient size and importance to be recognised on these early maps. The documented sites in the environs of the study area relate to this period. There are three listed buildings in the immediate area: Halton Green West Farmhouse (SMR 2847) is a grade II* seventeenth century barn; Halton Green East Farmhouse is a grade II* listed building of the seventeenth century (SMR 15754), and this has an associated grade II listed, nineteenth century barn (SMR 15755). The eighteenth century and the Industrial Revolution had a particularly large impact on the area, with the development of several textile mills and the expansion of the transport infrastructure at the same time, including the establishment of canals, followed by railways, and improvements to roads. In addition the total, government sanctioned, enclosure of the rural landscape during the late nineteenth century meant that the last areas of truly wild countryside began to disappear; interestingly, the Enclosure of Halton parish was carried out under a private act in 1800 (LRO AE 5/6), and is earlier than that in surrounding parishes.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 A watching brief was maintained during the topsoil strip for the proposed horse arena, the extent of which was 40m by 30m at the eastern end of the field (Fig 2); it was methodically stripped using a toothed bucket on a 360° mechanical excavator. The stripping commenced from the east side of the field towards the west, and the spoil was retained on site to enable the subsequent levelling of the site. A programme of field observation accurately recorded the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features within the groundworks. This work comprised observation during the groundworks, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation.
- 2.1.2 The recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, on OA North *pro-forma* sheets, and their accurate location, either on plan and/or section. Records were kept of all the sections of the watching brief even if the results were negative. A plan was produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance (Fig 2). All areas of archaeological interest were fully photographed, both in general terms and in specific details.

2.2 FINDS

- 2.2.1 All finds were treated in accordance with standard OA North practice. Analysis of the pottery was based solely on visual inspection of individual sherds, and has been described using the terminology developed by Orton *et al* (1993). A catalogue of the artefacts have been included in *Appendix 2* in Object Reference Number order.

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The paper and digital archive will be deposited in Lancaster City Museum with the excavated material; a further copy will be made available for deposition within the County Record Office (Preston), and a summary sent to the LSMR (Lancashire Sites and Monuments Record) and NMR (National Monuments Register).

3. RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The 40m area at the eastern end of the field was mechanically stripped of turf, commencing from the east side of the field towards the west (Fig 2); the excavations were taken down to a maximum depth of 0.5m. Test excavations were also undertaken on either side of an electricity cable (Feature **06/07**) which extended south-west/north-east through the northern part of the stripped area (Fig 2). The depth of excavated turf and underlying brown, loamy topsoil, **01**, varied from 0.2m to 0.31m. Below the topsoil was a mid brown clayey silt subsoil layer, **02**, which extended over the entire area and had an average depth of 0.2m. In the deeper areas an earlier subsoil of mid brownish orange sandy silt was seen, **03**, which was identified as the the natural subsoil. In addition, four features were discovered in the stripped area, the results of which, are outlined below (Fig 2).

3.2 FEATURE DESCRIPTIONS

3.2.1 **Feature 04:** this was an amorphous spread of disintegrated mortar, between layers **01** and **02**. The feature extended over an area of 0.9m x 0.5m and was only 0.1m thick. The material was loose and contained some small chunks of mortar and a few pieces retained a recognisable plaster surface. The feature was located towards the south-east corner of the stripped area and was interpreted as a dump of material perhaps resulting from internal modifications to one of the nearby buildings on the farm.

3.2.2 **Feature 05:** this was a small area of burnt material extending over an area of 1.4m x 0.8m and had a maximum thickness of 0.15m. The feature was located on the southern side of the stripped area slightly further west than **04**. There was a high concentration of charcoal, suggesting that this was a product of *in-situ* burning, and was interpreted as the remains of a bonfire. A total of six iron nails, two fragments of glass, and one fragment of pottery were recovered from this feature; the pottery was of modern date. The presence of nails suggests that some of the burnt material may have been structural timbers of some form and the fact that none of the nails were particularly bent suggests that whatever was burnt was not disassembled prior to being burnt. This would accord with the comments of the landowner that a chicken coup had been situated in the field and had subsequently been destroyed.

3.2.3 **Feature 06 / 07:** this was a long linear straight cut, **07**, with a squared profile, dug relatively recently for the insertion of an electricity duct and cable. It was located on the north side of the stripped area and was aligned approximately south-west/north-east. It contained an orange ceramic duct, below which was the cable. The trench was backfilled with a mixture of the material excavated in order to insert the pipe; this material comprised a mid-brownish orange clayey silt, **06**, with frequent inclusions of pottery and small stones, coal fragments and flecks of mortar.

3.2.4 **Feature 08:** this was an irregular, ill-defined area of compact gravely material with inclusions of charcoal, coal, bone and iron objects. The feature was located towards

the south-west corner of the stripped area; it extended over an area of 1.9m x 1.5m and was only 0.1m thick. There was evidence of burnt material but not sufficient to indicate *in-situ* burning. The finds from this feature included nine iron objects, all apparently nails, some of which were bent as if they had been pulled or extracted from timber. There were also two fragments of glass, three of animal bone, and three of pottery. The feature is interpreted as a dump of rubbish and debris from the adjacent farm.

3.3 FINDS

- 3.3.1 In total, 139 fragments of artefacts and ecofacts were recovered from the watching brief, and in general the material was poorly preserved. The assemblage comprised ceramic vessel sherds, iron objects, ceramic building material, clay tobacco pipe, animal bone, and glass.
- 3.3.2 **Pottery:** the finds assemblage was dominated by fragments of pottery (83 sherds), the majority of which was retrieved from topsoil **01**. In general terms, the pottery was in poor condition, and comprised small fragments. It included a range of kitchen and table wares, the bulk of which may be dated to the nineteenth century, although a single fragment of Tin Glazed Earthenware and several fragments of manganese-speckled ware are likely to be of eighteenth century date. The only stratified pottery was three fragments of creamware (1013), retrieved from Feature **08**, all of which dated to the nineteenth century.
- 3.3.3 **Other Finds:** in addition to the pottery, a total of 21 iron objects, 18 fragments of glass, three sherds of clay pipe, three fragments of animal bone, and 12 fragments of ceramic building material were retrieved. The iron objects were mostly nails, together with a single length of chain and hook, which may have been used as a gate clasp. The glass included fragments of both window and vessel glass, all of which are likely to be of nineteenth century date. The fragments of clay pipe were all stems, two of which being probably nineteenth century in date, and one of which may be of eighteenth century date. The ceramic building materials included fragments of brick, tile, and plaster.
- 3.3.4 **Conclusions:** the finds for the most part are of little archaeological significance, and are likely to represent night-soiling during the late eighteenth/nineteenth centuries.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The stripped area (40m x 30m) was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.5m and the watching brief revealed that, over this area and to this depth, there were no features of archaeological significance. It is likely that any features that may have existed have been totally destroyed by continued agricultural exploitation of the land; the site is in close proximity to the Halton Green farm buildings. However, this does not preclude the existence of other features in the surrounding landscape.

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APPENDIX 1 CONTEXT LIST

Context Number	Description
01	Topsoil: dark brown silty clay
02	Subsoil: mid brown clayey silt
03	Subsoil: mid brownish orange silt
04	Deposit: mortar spread
05	Deposit: burnt material
06	Fill: pipe trench for electricity
07	Cut: pipe trench for electricity
08	Deposit: debris spread

APPENDIX 2 FINDS LIST

Object No.	Context No	Quantity	Material	Description	Date
1001	01	1	Iron	Concretion of chain and hook	Modern
1002	01	79	Pottery	Vessel fragments	Eighteenth – Nineteenth Century
1003	01	12	Ceramic Building Material	Tile and brick fragments	Modern
1004	01	14	Glass	Window and bottle pieces	Nineteenth Century
1005	01	3	Clay pipe	Stems	Nineteenth Century
1006	01	6	Iron	Nails	-
1007	01	8	Residue	Coal	-
1008	05	2	Glass	Window fragments	Nineteenth Century ?
1009	05	1	Pottery	Vessel fragments	Nineteenth Century
1010	05	6	Iron	Nails	-
1011	08	2	Glass	Bottle fragments	Modern
1012	08	3	Bone	Animal	-
1013	08	3	Pottery	Vessel fragments	Nineteenth Century
1014	08	9	Iron	Nails	-

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1: Halton Green: Location Map

Fig 2: Trench Location Plan

PLATES

- Plate 1: General view of topsoil stripping, looking south
- Plate 2: Mortar Spread **04**, looking west
- Plate 3: Burnt Deposit **05**, looking north-west
- Plate 4: Gravel Spread **08**, looking east



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Figure 1: Halton Green: Location Map



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PROJECT:

Halton Green Farm

DRAWING No:

02



DRAWN BY: ELC

DATE: May 2002

LOCATION:

KEY

TITLE:

Trench Location Plan

COMMISSIONED BY:

Mr Michael Cunliffe

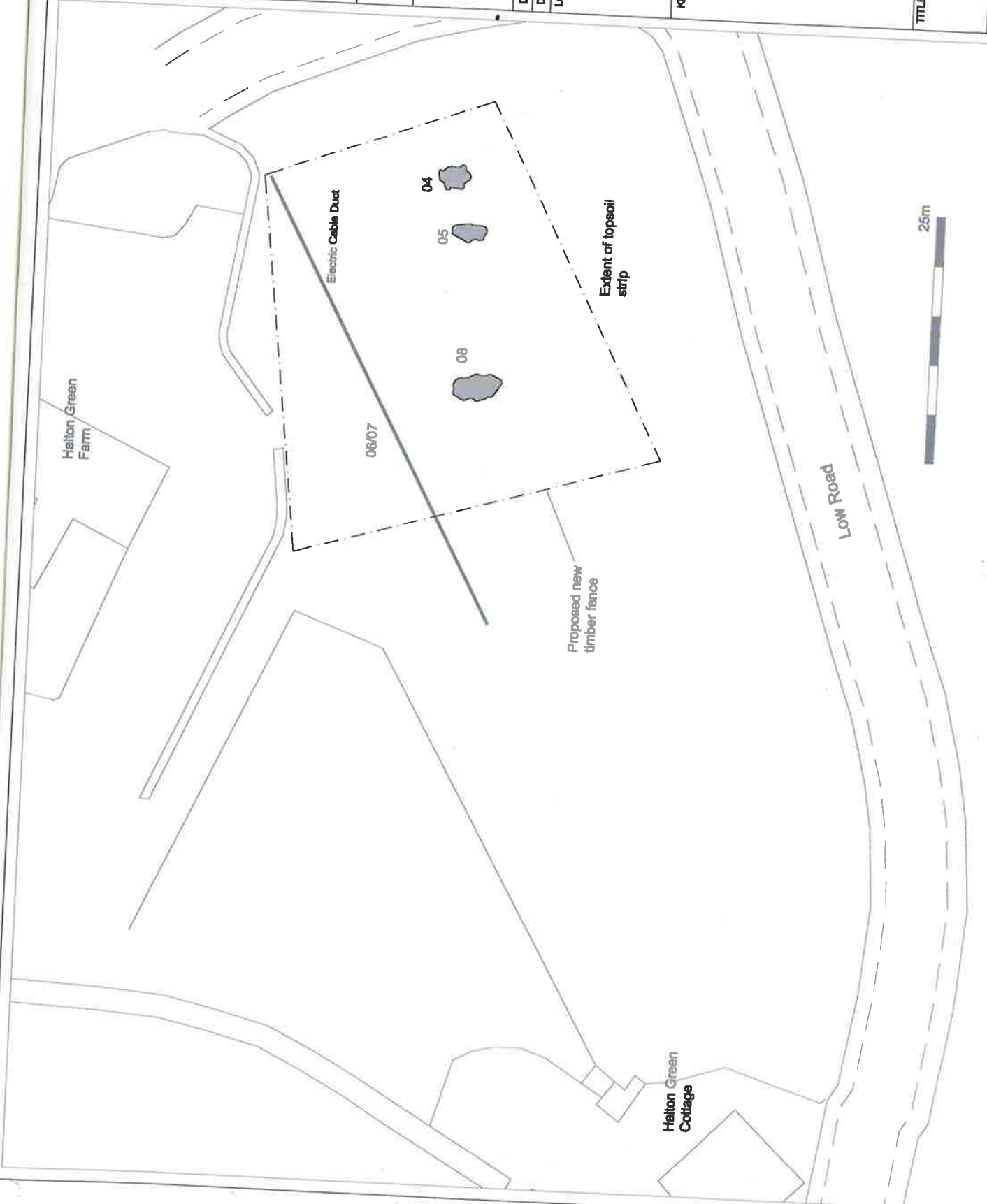


Figure 2 : Trench Location Plan



Plate 1: General view of topsoil stripping, looking south



Plate 2: Mortar Spread **04**, looking west



Plate 3: Burnt Deposit *05*, looking north-west



Plate 4: Gravel Spread *08*, looking east