

February 2001

**EUXTON HOUSE FARM,
CHORLEY, LANCASHIRE
Archaeological Evaluation**



Euxton House Farm, Chorley
Lancashire

Archaeological Excavation Report

Report no 2000-2001/052/AUA8037

Checked by Project Manager. Date
Passed for submission to client. Date

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February 2001

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lancaster University Archaeological Unit would like to thank Simon Gilbertson and Rosemary Boyd of the Chorley Young Archaeologists Society for commissioning and undertaking the work, and Sam Watkinson of Euxton House Farm for providing the ideal location for an excavation and supplying tea and cakes on site.

The fieldwork was undertaken by the club: Dave Goulden, Helen Gibbons, Rachel Weinhold, Bethan Jones, Caroline Bird, John Ramsdale, Hannah Simmons and Philippa Steele and supervised primarily by Matthew Town. Invaluable assistance was provided by Nick Hair and Jo Clark. The archaeological background research was undertaken by Sam Watkinson, and Chris Howard-Davis commented on the finds. The report was written by Matthew Town, and edited by Jamie Quartermaine and Rachel Newman. The project was managed by Richard Newman and Jamie Quartermaine.

SUMMARY

Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) was commissioned by Chorley Young Archaeologists Club (CYAC) to help undertake an excavation in August 2000, in a field to the north of Euxton House Farm, Euxton, Chorley (SD 5540 1848). It was believed that an early farmhouse had once stood on this site, and it was proposed that an excavation be undertaken by CYAC to establish the character and survival of any remains on site and to investigate the sequence of development of the house.

The earliest documented buildings on the site were erected somewhere between 1515 and 1530. The original farmhouse was dismantled around 1730 and was rebuilt using stone but re-using many of the original oak beams in the floors and ceilings. For a period following the rebuild the farmhouse was used as a tannery.

An excavation trench (17m x 12m) was opened to the north of the present farmhouse, using a mini-excavator to remove the turf. Thereafter it was manually excavated by members of the Chorley Young Archaeologists Club under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist from LUAU.

The excavation revealed no evidence for any early structures within the extent of the excavation area and the earliest identified remains consisted of a large back-filled ditch, which although of uncertain date, began to fill in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Hurdling was recovered from within the fill of the ditch but this was of relatively recent construction. Evidence for several out-buildings was discovered within the area; one to the west of the area was a timber shed and was used for mixing lime mortar. In the centre of the excavation were the remains of a large corrugated iron shed and adjacent to it was a small building. Upon the demolition of these buildings, the whole site had been covered in an extensive deposit of pink sand, and the field returned to pasture.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) was commissioned by Chorley Young Archaeologists Club (CYAC) to help undertake an excavation in a field to the north of Euxton House Farm, Euxton, Chorley (SD 55400 18480) in July 2000. It was believed that an early farmhouse once stood on this site, and it was proposed that an excavation be undertaken by CYAC to establish the character and survival of any remains and to investigate the sequence of development of the house. The work was duly carried out by CYAC and Matthew Town of LUAU.

1.2 BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1 **Historical Background:** the site of Euxton House Farm would appear to have a longer history than the surviving surface evidence. The track, which approaches the house, is considered to be part of the Roman road from Preston to Wigan (Graystone 1996), a supposition supported by the discovery of a small number of Roman artefacts from the orchard on the southern side of the house (S Watkinson pers comm).
- 1.2.2 The earliest documented buildings on the site were erected somewhere between 1515 and 1530 (Farrer and Brownbill 1911), the land for the buildings being given by the Molyneux family of Sefton to the Rigby family of Harrook in recognition for the service the Rigbys had given in raising troops to fight at the Battle of Flodden in 1513 (Croston 1887). Ownership of the farm passed in the late sixteenth century from the Rigbys to the Watkinson family, probably as a marriage dowry. The Robinsons were a well-to-do family, and Edward's grandson, Major Edward Robinson, was to build Buckshaw Hall in 1654 (LRO DDHK). The original farmhouse was dismantled in around 1730 (LRO DDHK Acc 2651) and rebuilt using stone but re-using many of the original oak beams in the floors and ceilings (Baines 1870). The newly rebuilt farmhouse became a tannery for some years, and included a dairy (LRO WCW 1778). The farm was known as Euxton House until the late 1800s, where after it became Euxton House Farm.
- 1.2.3 **Structural Remains:** the first recorded buildings were a timber-framed house and a cruck-framed barn dating to the early sixteenth century. The character of the internal rooms of the house and the contents is recorded by the will of Edward Robinson who died here in 1608 (LRO WCW 1608). The barn was extended at some date before 1700 (LRO DDHK), and still stands on the opposite side of the track to the present farmhouse. The timber-framed house no longer survives, although elements of this house have been incorporated into the later build (c1730). This includes the sides and lintel of one of the fireplaces in the present house which is believed to have come from the front doorway of the original house. There is also a boundary stone carrying the initials 'ER' (Edward Robinson) built into one of the small barns.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 EXCAVATION

- 2.1.1 An open area (17.8m x 12.2m) was excavated in the field to the north of Euxton House Farm (Fig 1) and was located by taped measurements with respect to the present farmhouse. The turf and topsoil was excavated by a tracked mini-digger, employing a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket, working under full archaeological supervision. The mechanical excavation was undertaken carefully in level spits, typically of c100mm depth, although this depth was varied subject to the identified archaeological deposits. Following the removal of the topsoil, the excavation area was manually cleaned. Features exposed were manually excavated and negative features were half sectioned. In particular, three rectangular and parallel areas, within the southern part of the open area, were selected for more detailed excavation to investigate structures beneath an overlying sand deposit.
- 2.1.2 Recording was by means of the standard LUAU context recording system, with context records and supporting registers and indices. A full photographic record in colour slide, monochrome, and digital formats was made. A scaled plan and section drawings were made of the trenches at appropriate scales, which have been subsequently reproduced within a CAD environment (AutoCAD14).
- 2.1.3 Samples for the assessment of palaeoenvironmental information were taken from soil horizons that appeared to have potential for environmental analysis, but in the event the material did not warrant further analysis at this stage.

2.2 FINDS

- 2.2.1 All finds were retained for analysis and bagged according to context. All artefacts were recorded and have been processed and temporarily stored according to standard practice (following current Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines). The ceramics have been analysed by the LUAU in-house finds specialist.

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition 1991). The paper and digital archive, along with the finds assemblage, will be deposited with Astley Hall Museum, Chorley.

3. EXCAVATION RESULTS

3.1 MAIN TRENCH (FIGS 2 AND 3)

- 3.1.1 The topsoil in the main trench was excavated using a mini-digger and this operation was continued until the first significant archaeological deposits were encountered; all subsequent deposits were then hand dug. All finds from initial cleaning and from the machining were allocated the context number, [1].
- 3.1.2 Removal of the topsoil revealed a deposit of a light pink soft silty sand, [3], containing very occasional sub-angular stones, which covered the whole width of the central section of the trench. This deposit measured 11.5m in length, and 4m in width, and was interpreted as a dump of sand which appeared to have been laid to cover the underlying structures on their demolition, and to level up the ground. To the south of this was revealed a sandstone wall, [15], orientated east/west, which was approximately one course (0.2m) in height and well-dressed. This was abutted to the south by an extensive deposit of rusty iron objects in a dark brown loose silty matrix [2]; this deposit underlay, and was similar to, the topsoil. It was observed to extend between wall [15] and the southern extent of the excavation area. This deposit was mostly removed by machine during the initial excavation of the topsoil, and work at the southern end of the excavation area was suspended when asbestos was encountered. Selective excavation of this deposit, [2], to the west of wall [15], yielded an iron buckle from a boot and some sherds of post-medieval pottery (*Section 3.2*).
- 3.1.3 To the north of sand dump [3], a linear feature, [20], interpreted as a ditch, was identified, which was cut into natural subsoils. It partly underlay the sand dump, but for the most part underlay the topsoil. To the north of this ditch, topsoil directly overlay natural subsoils. A small sub-oval pit, [5], was visible in the north-east corner of the site, beyond ditch [20]; it contained a light brown mortary deposit, [6], from which no finds were recovered.
- 3.1.4 **Trench 1:** in order to investigate further the structures beneath sand dump [3], three trenches were excavated across the deposit. The first trench to the east measured 5.6m by 1.5m and was orientated north/south. On removal of the dump, which became progressively deeper towards the north end, underlying structures became visible. The east end of wall [15] was uncovered and was revealed to be part of a rectangular structure, which had an eastern side (2.5m long), and a northern side, with traces of a southern return; the latter sections of wall extended beyond the western limit of the trench. Sections of the wall had been robbed, leaving demolition rubble in the foundation trenches, but the remaining elements enclosed a sandstone flag floor, [16], which was very worn. The structure was 2.5m by at least 3.2m in size, and this, coupled with the worn floor, is broadly consistent with it having been a small out-building for the farm; however, its precise function was not evident from the observed remains. A deposit of building rubble was identified to the east of structure [15] comprising a mid grey sandy silt, [7], with a large percentage of broken concrete, sandstone, slate, lumps of iron and bricks. A pipe, [28], ran across the north side of the building and to the north of the pipe was a cement floor, [13], which extended over the rest of Trench 1, except in the north-east corner where it had been removed. A cut for a plastic water-pipe, [29], ran across this floor. Where floor [13] had been removed, a deposit of dark blackish grey, very gritty clay silt,

[9], was revealed, which contained a large percentage of bone and wood; this was interpreted as pre-dating the present farm. This deposit overlay natural subsoil, [14], a light pink fine-grained sand.

- 3.1.5 **Trench 2:** the second trench was excavated parallel to, and west of, the first, and measured 5.6m by 1.5m. On removal of the pink sand, [3], a concrete floor, [17], was identified, probably overlying a similar sandstone floor to that encountered in the first trench (there numbered [16]). The floor also butted wall [15], which was visible at the south side of the trench. In the north, where floor [17] had been removed, was an organic layer, [11], which was identical to layer [9] encountered in the first trench. This was removed to reveal a mixed clay deposit, [30], which shelved below deposit [11] and was thus not fully uncovered. A box section dug in the north-west corner of [11] revealed the natural sand identified in the first trench, [14]. The plastic water pipe, [29], was also encountered continuing through the trench.
- 3.1.6 **Trench 3:** the third area was much larger, measuring 5.5m by 6m. On removal of pink sand [3], a sub-rectangular concrete floor was uncovered, which was slightly further to the north than floor [17] in the second trench, but otherwise identical, and this was taken to be part of the same floor. This had a scar across the top where plastic water-pipe [29] had been inserted into it, showing that the pipe post-dated the structure. The floor had very defined edges on its north, west and south sides which suggests that it was laid down within a standing building, of which all trace had been removed in this trench. This was also suggested by the recovery of a long iron strip along the western face, which may have been the remnants of a side wall, perhaps indicating that the superstructure was of corrugated iron. Beneath this floor and to the west of the structure an organic layer, [8], was uncovered, which was similar to layers [9] and [11] in Trenches 1 and 2 respectively. This layer contained large lumps of worked and unworked wood, some of which may have been remnants of a demolished structure. Several sherds of relatively early post-medieval pottery were recovered from the deposit, but these were closely associated with modern and other post-medieval pottery, glass and iron objects, which suggest that the layer was disturbed.
- 3.1.7 A row of three stakes [31] was also visible forming a line at approximate right-angles to concrete floor [17]; these potentially formed a support frame for a further building that would have been set against the putative corrugated iron shed. Within deposit [8], and south of the line of stakes, was a box-lined pit, [18], set on the same axis as the stakes. The pit measured 0.9m by 0.55m and was 0.6m deep. The box was built onto a wooden frame, with panels on each side to form the sides and base; it had probably been pre-constructed before being set into the hole. At the base of the box was a soft layer of whitish-orange lime mortar, [19], containing occasional pieces of wood, which would perhaps suggest that the box had been used for mixing lime. This was covered with a backfill deposit, [12], which contained a modern bottle and crockery, and was overlain by pink sand [3]. Removal of the box structure showed deposit [8] to be quite shallow, only 0.05m deep, perhaps suggesting that the organic layers were the remains of farm yard accumulations onto which the structures had been built. The deposit was found to seal the plastic water-pipe, [29], that had been encountered in the first two trenches and therefore [8] was clearly of relatively recent date.
- 3.1.8 The trench was partly extended to the north-west in order to investigate the relationship between deposit [8] and a large ditch (*Section 3.1.9*). Deposit [8] was

found to overlay the infilled ditch, [20], although only limited investigation was undertaken of this deposit.

- 3.1.9 **Ditch [20]:** two sections were excavated across ditch [20] (*Section 3.1.3*) to investigate its character, one at the east of the excavation and one across the middle. Section 1 to the east revealed that the ditch was broad and flat bottomed with a fairly steep sloping north side, although its south side coincided with the baulk and thus was not revealed; the ditch was approximately 3.3m wide and 1m deep. The fills consisted of a primary deposit of very dark brown silty loam, [23], incorporating water-logged wood, brick and post-medieval and modern pottery. The secondary fill was a mottled red orange clay deposit, [22], again containing post-medieval pottery, and this was overlain by a deposit of dark brown-silty clay loam, [21], containing small stones and rootlets, which also sealed the top of the ditch. Deposit [21] was overlain by both the topsoil on the northern side, and sand layer [3] on the southern side. The ditch cut into natural sand [14].
- 3.1.10 The central section across the ditch showed the same general profile as the first, demonstrating a broad flat bottom with a steep north side. The fills were marginally different, and appeared to consist of a number of dumps of material, all introduced from the northern edge. The primary fill, [24], was a fairly sterile sandy clay; the deposit overlying it was a dark greyish brown silty clay containing some organic material, [25], and the deposit overlying that was a very organic friable black silty clay which held fragments of wood, including the remains of some hurdle fencing. It was initially suggested that this was the remains of wattle and daub walling from an early building; however, on removal it was found to be sealing a piece of late nineteenth or early twentieth century pottery, confirming its fairly recent date. Efforts to remove the fencing resulted in a slot being excavated further south, and this revealed the other edge of the ditch, with a similar profile to that encountered to the north; the whole ditch, therefore, measured c4m wide, and it appeared to align with the hollow which now forms the edge of the garden around the house. The fencing is likely to have at one time lined the southern edge of the ditch, but fell in as the ditch went out of use. A land drain, [27], was found to enter the ditch from the north and a 2.3m long section of stone culvert was exposed, which comprised a stone capping and base stones, with brick side walls. The culvert was dug into the natural subsoil and back-filled, with redeposited natural material. Clearly ditch [20] provided a drainage run-off at some point in its life although this is unlikely to have been its primary function.

3.2 FINDS

- 3.2.1 Approximately 1100 fragments of artefacts and ecofacts were recovered during the excavation, from selective overburden layers [1-3], and [11], pit fills [6] and deposits [4], [7], [8] and [12].

MATERIAL TYPE	QUANTITY
Ceramic vessel	314
Ceramic building materials	24
Clay Pipe	3
Glass (vessel and window)	357
Ironwork	211
Copper alloy	1
Industrial residues	152
Leather	6+
Textile	1
Wood	3
Animal bone	20

- 3.2.2 For the purposes of this report only the pottery and glass were examined in any detail, as these two groups afforded the greatest potential for dating, and for characterising the nature of activity on the site. The majority of the material examined was of early to mid-twentieth century in date. It comprised principally tea- and other table wares, usually white wares from the lower end of the market, suggesting its origin in a relatively low-status household. Other vessels included occasional fragments of brown stoneware cooking vessels and grey stoneware storage jars (two of them complete 2lb jam jars). There was also a marginally earlier (late nineteenth century) element represented amongst the table wares, and reinforced by occasional fragments of late black-glazed redwares. Although the ceramic evidence was recovered in large fragments, suggesting that the deposits in which it lay were relatively undisturbed, many of the fragments were heavily burnt, to the extent that some had been re-fired to stoneware hardness. It is thus suggested that most of this material had reached the site as a result of the spreading of domestic middens. Such a mechanism would also account for the large amount of light, clinkery industrial-type residues found, which could well represent the remains of domestic fires.
- 3.2.3 There was very little indication amongst the ceramic and glass vessels of earlier activity on the site; a large fragment of brown stoneware tankard (possibly a Liverpool product) was recovered from the topsoil of layer [1], as were small fragments of pearlware and manganese-streaked ware (all later eighteenth century types). Fragments of Staffordshire-type slip-decorated possets were recovered from deposit [8], and ditch fill [23], and could be as early as the late seventeenth century, although local production of such vessels continued well into the eighteenth century. A single fragment of 'sea-green' wine bottle of later seventeenth or early eighteenth century form was also recovered from deposit [8].

3.2.4 Without x-ray, no positive identification could be made of the metalwork. The leather and textiles appeared to be very recent; the one identifiable fragment was a thick, well-made strap, either from a belt, or harness.

C	Ceram vessel	CBM	Clay pipe	Iron	Ind residue	Animal bone	Copper alloy	Wood	Leather	Textile	Glass
1	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*
2	*			*	*	*			*		*
3	*	*		*					*		*
4				*							*
6	*	*									
7	*			*	*						*
8	*			*	*	*			*		*
11	*	*	*	*		*					*
12	*	*		*							*
21	*	*	*	*	*	*					*
23	*	*	*								

* presence of material group within context

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 While it had been hoped that the remains of an early farmhouse would be identified, the excavation demonstrated no evidence for any medieval, or indeed early post-medieval, structures, within the extent of the area excavated. The earliest identified remains consisted of the wide ditch, [20], which had lower fills that were apparently a result of natural silting and its upper fills were clearly a product of deliberate back filling. The fills include material of late seventeenth / early eighteenth century date, but these do not necessarily date the original cutting of the ditch, a principle demonstrated by the recent excavations of a medieval moated site at Clayton Hall (LUAU 2000), which was found to have only post-medieval fills within the ditch reflecting the later recutting or cleaning out of the ditch; indeed if a ditch is kept clean it will only have material post-dating the last episode of cleaning.
- 4.1.2 Adjacent to the southern edge of the ditch was the collapsed remains of hurdling which is likely to reflect a former line of fencing along this side of the ditch. A deposit of organic rubbish extended only to the southern edge of the ditch, which suggests that the ditch was at that stage still serving as a physical barrier. There were also several nineteenth / twentieth century buildings on the southern side of the ditch, and this complex contrasted with a marked dearth of comparable activity on the northern side of the ditch; it can therefore be argued that at this time the line of the ditch acted as a boundary and indeed may have done so also at an earlier date. The ditch is in line with a linear hollow that extends westwards from the excavation area and also with a field boundary beyond the edge of the farmship boundary. This may suggest that this ditch served as a field boundary, although it should be noted that a ditch of 3.8m width is exceptionally wide for this purpose and it may therefore indicate that in this area at least it formed a more substantial barrier, perhaps associated with buildings; other functions for this feature, cannot, however, be ruled out.
- 4.1.3 Upon the demolition of the temporary buildings, the whole site was covered in an extensive deposit of pink sand, and the field was returned to pasture.

4.2 FURTHER WORK

- 4.2.1 Despite the dearth of significant results from the present excavation area, there is potential for further investigation in other parts of the site. Irregular earthwork features have been identified from around the extent of the garden to the north and these would warrant recording by topographic survey. As the most significant feature identified by the excavation was the ditch, the survey should place considerable emphasis on recording the line of the ditch and examining the potential for any corners. Subject to the results of this element of recording, there may be a case for further sub-surface examination to establish the character of the earthworks.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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LRO DDHK Accounts of Robinson Estates

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LRO WCW 1608 Will and Inventory of Edward Robinson

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5.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

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APPENDIX 1 CONTEXT LIST

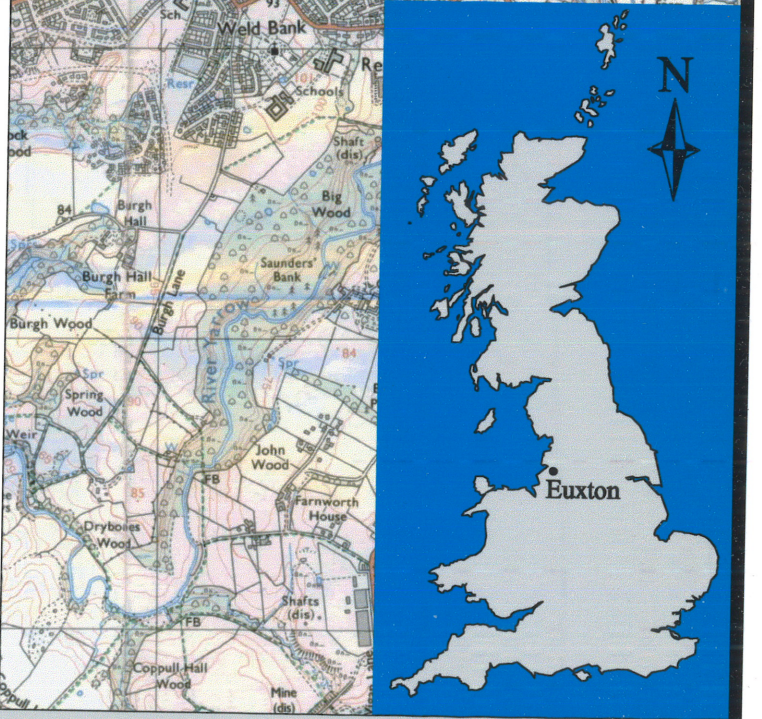
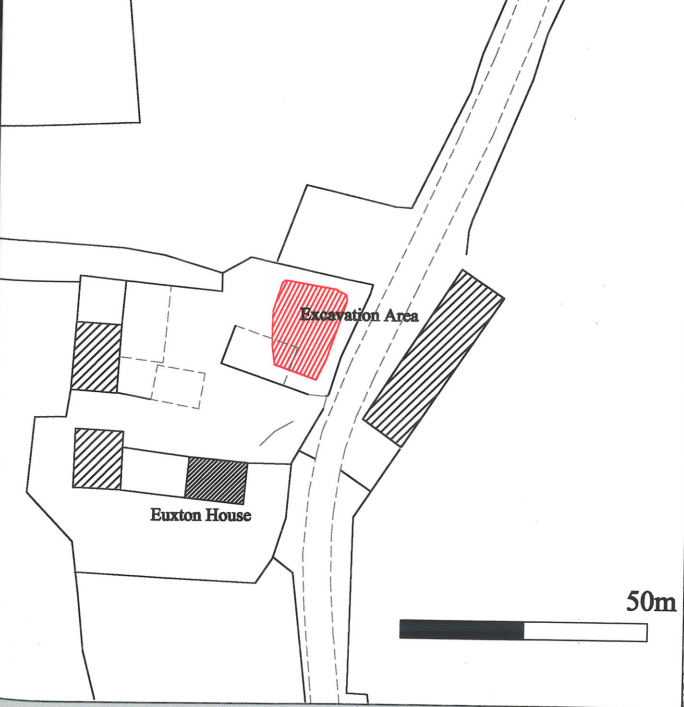
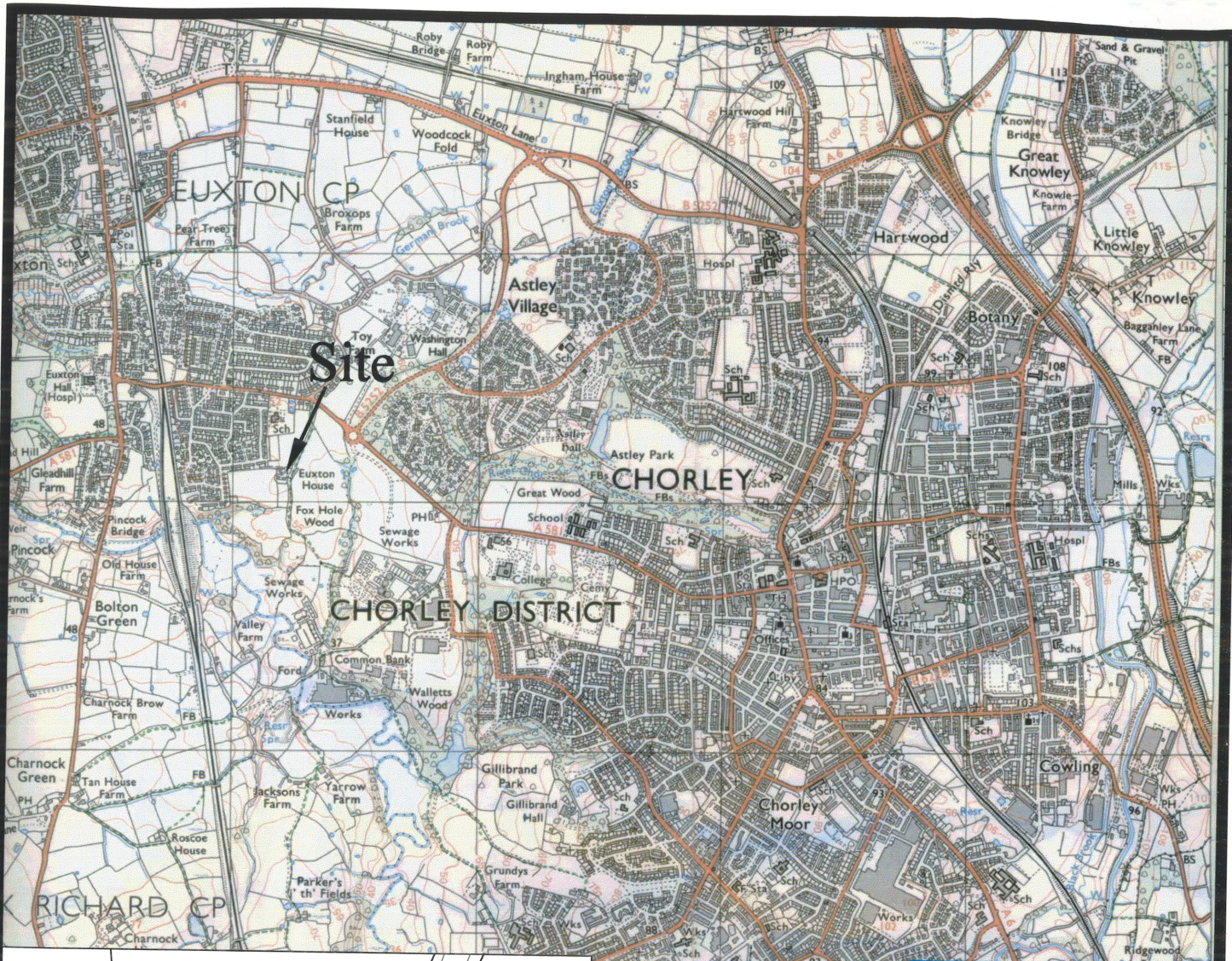
NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
01	Unstratified Topsoil
02	Dump of ferrous objects within a silty matrix to the south of wall
03	Pink sand dump
04	Carbonised grain deposit below [3]
05	Pit cut filled by [6]
06	Fill of pit [5]
07	Dark silty deposit east of baulk containing concrete and fragments of iron
08	Dark organic layer with pieces of wood overlies cut for plastic pipe
09	Dark organic layer with pieces of wood, immediately below floor [13]
11	Dark organic layer with pieces of wood
12	Backfill over box [18]
13	Concrete floor, cut through by water pipe [27]
14	Natural sand subsoil
15	Heavily robbed sandstone wall
16	Highly worn sandstone floor within structure [15]
17	Concrete floor of structure
18	Wooden box-lined pit formed by a series wooden panels; it contains [19]
19	Mortar deposit within [19]
20	Cut for major east/west ditch
21	Upper fill of ditch [20], dark brown silty loam
22	Clay fill of ditch [20], red/orangey clay
23	Lower fill of ditch [20], dark brown silty clay loam
24	Lowest fill of ditch [20] in central sondage, light orangey brown silty clay
25	Central fill of ditch [20] in central sondage, dark grey brown silty clay
26	Organic silty clay fill of ditch [20] in central sondage
27	East/west aligned brick culvert with capping stones
28	Pipe cut
29	Water Pipe cut
30	Mixed clay deposit below [11]
31	Row of three stakes adjacent to box [18]

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1: Location Map

Fig 2: Euxton House – Site Plan

Fig 3: Ditch [20] – East-Facing Section



based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:25000
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0 250 500
 metres

Figure1: Location Map



PROJECT:

EUXTON HOUSE
FARM
LANCASHIRE

DRAWING No:

2



DRAWN BY: A. Scott

DATE: November 2000

KEY

- Concrete
- Sand
- Clay Silt
- Sand Silt
- Ditch Fill
- Silt
- Flag Floor
- Mixed Clay

TITLE:

Euxton House-Site Plan

COMMISSIONED BY:

Chorley Young
Archaeologists Club

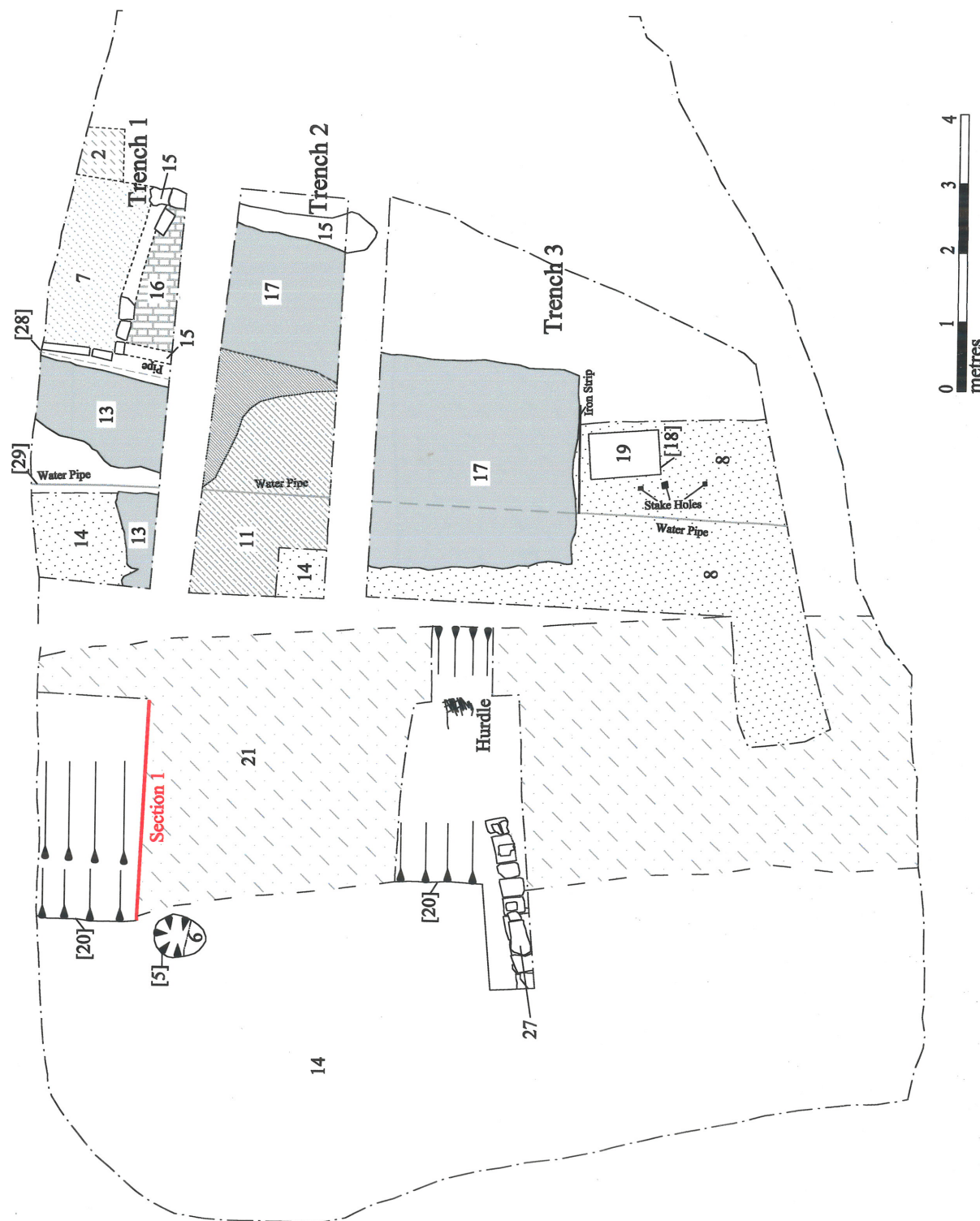


Figure 2: Euxton Farm House - Site Plan

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

STORY INSTITUTE
MEETING HOUSE LANE
LANCASTER
LA1 1YF
TEL: 01524 848666

PROJECT:

EUXTON HOUSE
FARM
LANCASHIRE

DRAWING No:

3

DRAWN BY: N. Hair/A. Scott

DATE: November 2000

KEY



Clay



Sand



Silt Clay



Silty Sand



Stone

TITLE:

Ditch [20] East
Facing Section

COMMISSIONED BY:

Chorley Young
Archaeologists Club

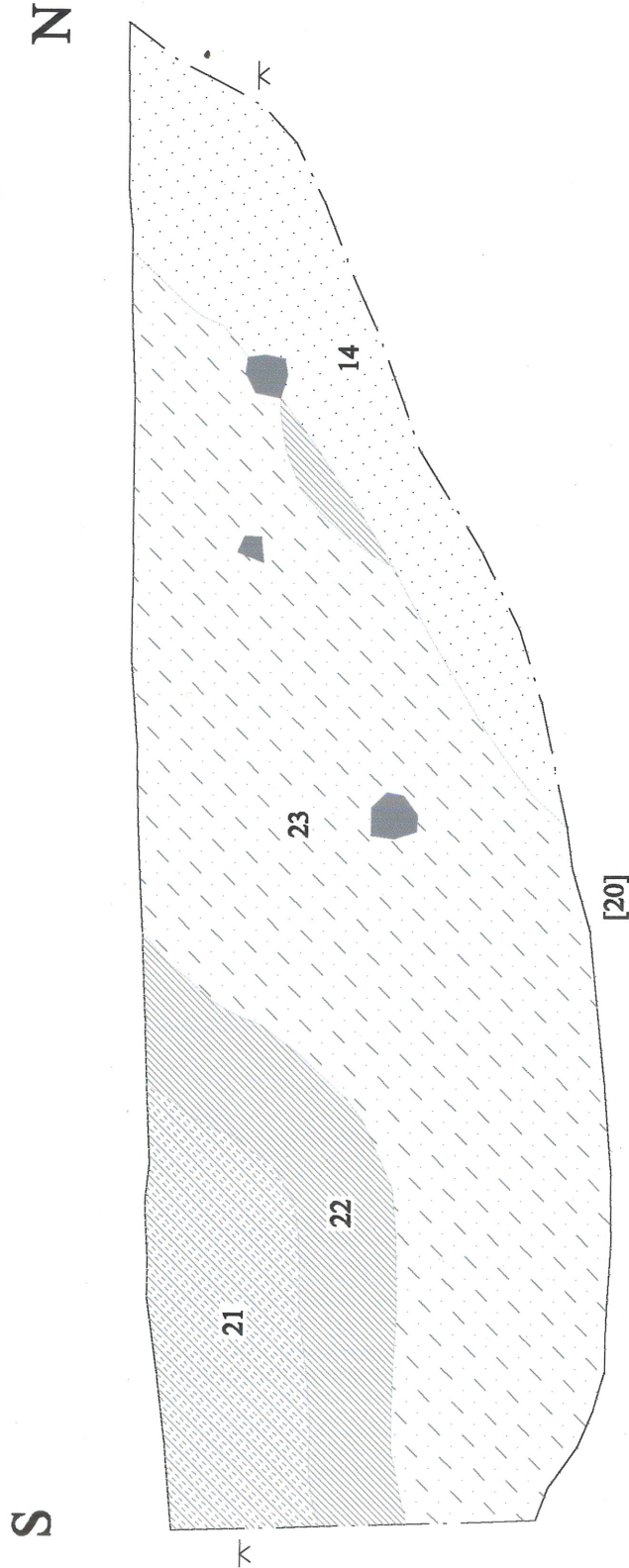


Figure 3: Ditch [20] East Facing Section

PLATES

Plate 1: Site under excavation, viewed from the south-west

Plate 2: Box-lined pit, [18], and associated organic deposit, [8], viewed from the west

Plate 3: Eastern slot through ditch [20], facing west

Plate 4: Hurdle fence in base of central section through ditch [20], from north



Plate 1: Site under excavation, viewed from the south-west



Plate 2: Box lined pit, [18], and the associated organic deposit, [8], viewed from the west



Plate 3: Eastern slot through ditch [20], facing west



Plate 4: Hurdle fence in base of central section through ditch [20], from the north