CHISLET (KE)

Highstead Farm, Chislet, Kent

Archaeological Assessment

Oxford Archaeological Unit
June 1989

CHISLET: HIGHSTEAD FARM, KENT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

In June 1989 an assessment was carried out by OAU on behalf of Brett Gravel Limited in advance of gravel extraction. The area assessed lay immediately to the west of Highstead Farm, in the parish of Chislet, Kent.

The site lies on the crest of the south facing slope of the 100ft gravel terrace, south of the Thanet Way and 2 miles south east of Herne Bay. The gravel terrace lies between the Blean forest to the west and the now silted up Wantsum channel to the east. The Roman road from Canterbury to the fort of the Saxon shore at Reculver runs just west of the assessment area. The Canterbury Archaeological Trust excavated an area of Highstead village in 1975-6 where they found Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic remains with an Iron Age hill fort and settlements overlain by Roman field ditches and a possible Anglo-Saxon building. In 1950 a Roman bee-hive quern was reported as found just to the west of Highstead Farm buildings. The high level of archaeological remains to the south-east of the villlage indicated that settlement activity in the area had been high and an archaeological assessment was deemed necessary to see if this activity had spread to the north-west of the present village.

SOIL TYPES

The modern ploughsoil was between 17cm and 44cm thick, it overlay a yellow, very sandy loam which had areas of hard packed gravel. The natural gravel was very sandy and red-brown in colour. Below the yellow subsoil were the remains of tree throw holes and areas of manganese and iron staining.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The strategy was based on a 2% sample of the area for extraction. The sample consisted of fifteen 30m long 1.7m wide machine-dug trenches arranged in a grid pattern which were supplemented by seven smaller trenches. Four trenches were dug on the line of the haul road.

The ploughsoil and subsoil were machined off except in trenches where features cut into the subsoil.

All features in the trenches were hand excavated.

FINDS

The finds were very sparse considering the presence of a multi-period site so close to the proposed development area.

Several pieces of medieval pantiles were recovered along with one piece of Victorian white glazed ware from Trench 14, one medieval rim sherd from Trench 16 and one weathered undatable sherd from Trench 8.

Six flints were found, one probable Neolithic blade, five of them undated (two flakes, two cores and one reused core).

No bones were recovered.

The tile and pottery is consistent with field manuring while the level of flints recovered would form part of the expected "background noise" for prehistoric activity in the area. For details see Table 1.

TABLE 1

TRENCH	CTX	FINDS	REMARKS
4	1	flint	
7	1	tile	
8	1	flint	
8	3	sherd	from subsoil
9	1	tile	
9	8	flint	from ditch top
11	5	flint	from ditch top
14	1	sherd (Victorian)	
15	1	1 tile, 2 flints, 1 horseshoe	
16	1	1 tile, 1 rim sherd (medieval) 1 burnt flint	
17	1	1 tile	
18	1	tiles	
26	1	brick	

ARCHAEOLOGY

Trenches 1-5

Trenches 1-5 lay in the western half of the field which appeared lighter than the eastern half on the aerial photographs.

Underneath the yellow subsoil was a red-brown sand which lay above the gravel. Trenches 1 and 2 were machined to a depth of 1.5m but no archaeological horizon was noticed. In Trench 2, a small, circular pit was fount to be cut into the yellow subsoil. It was filled with charcoal and yellow sand. There were no finds from this feature. One flint was found in the modern ploughsoil of Trench 4.

Trenches 6-15, 20-27

These trenches lay in the eastern part of the field which showed as a darker area on the aerial photographs. This was due to the number of glacial disturbances/relict water channels running through the subsoil southwards towards the edge of the gravel terrace. Red-brown gravel lay immediately below the ploughsoil in trenches 8,9 and 20.

Archaeological features were found in Trenches 20,22, 9, 10 and 11. Trench 20 contained one possible small post hole cut into the subsoil. Irregular in shape it had a diameter of 0.18cm and was 0.05m deep.

Trenches 22, 9, 10 and 11 contained gullies which were cut into the subsoil. The similarity of the fills to the subsoil made recognition of these features difficult. The gullies were fairly small being about 0.60m wide on average and surviving 0.40m deep. The largest ditch was in Trench 9, 1.0m wide and 0.60m deep (0.40m into the subsoil). The gullies were confined to an area c.140m east west and 40m north south. They were arranged on two alignments, north/south and east/west in Trenches 9 and 10, and north-north-east/south-south-westandwest-north-west/east-south-east in Trenches 9, 11 and 22. This possibly suggests two phases of enclosure systems. The scarcity of finds makes dating impossible. The only finds were two flints from ditches in Trenches 9 and 11 but these could have been residual. Only Trench 9 contained a small amount of tile, from the modern ploughsoil.

Trench 9 also contained two small charcoal filled pits similar to the one in Trench 2. Again no finds were present.

Trenches 16-20

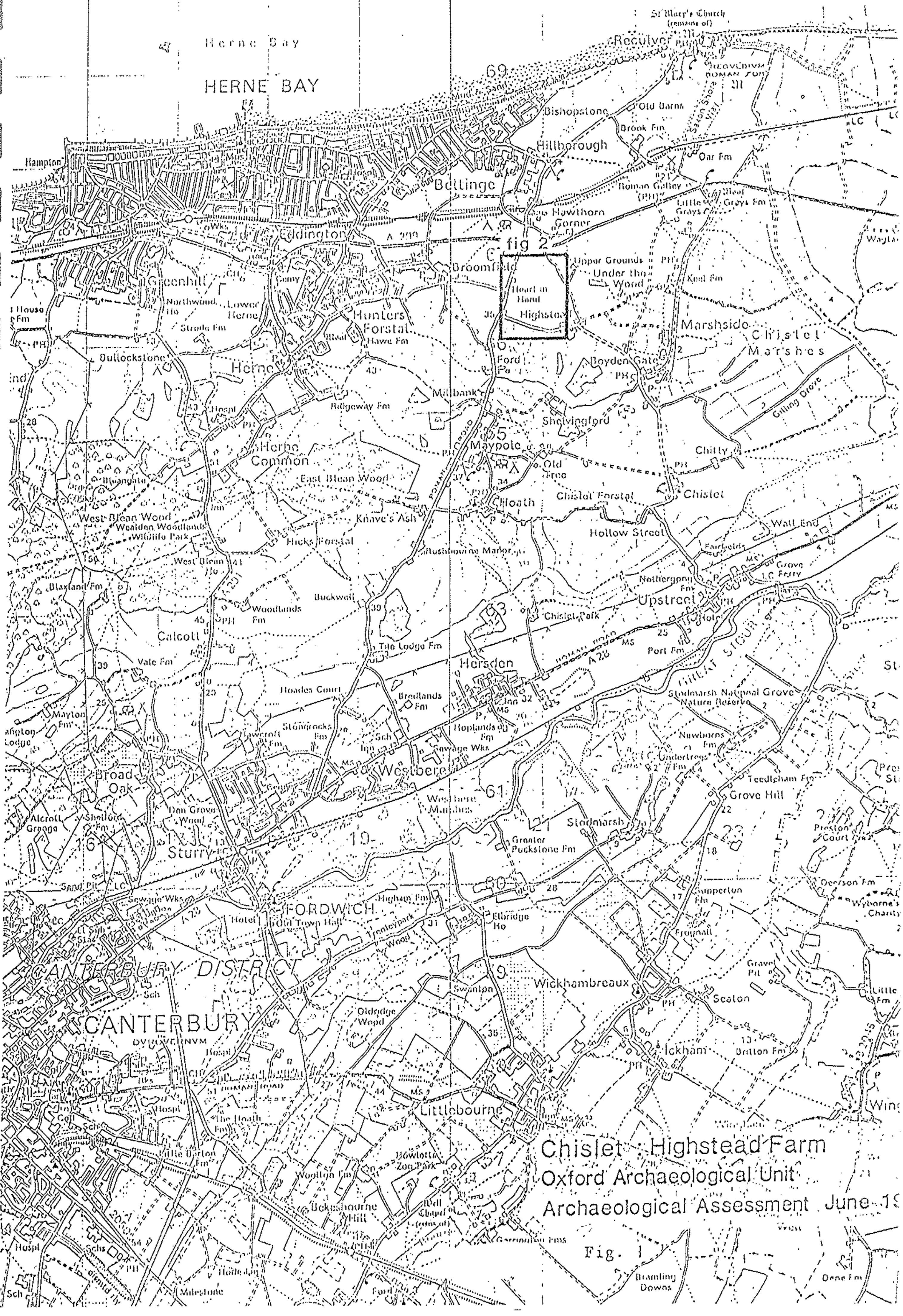
Four trenches were excavated on the line of the haul road. No archaeological features were located.

Summary

The proposed extraction area subject to this phase of assessment contained a small area of undated enclosure ditches and gullies. There was little evidence of domestic activity, three small pits with charcoal in their fill. The finds from the topsoil are consistent with medieval manuring of the fields and flint scatters from off-site prehistoric activity.

The Roman bee-hive quern (NAR TR26NW26) reported to have come from the field subject to this assessment is perhaps wrongly attributed to this spot. It was found 'during the course of sinking of drainage pipes'. No drainage pipes were found during the assessment and the present farmer has no knowledge of them. The field drains sufficiently as not to need artificial drainage.

John Moore
Mark Roberts
14 June 1989



HERNE BAY
Reculver
Bishopstone
Hillborough
Beltinge
Eddington
fig 2
Broomfield
Heart in Hand
Highstead
Greenhill
Hunters Forstal
Herne
Marshside
Chislet Marshes
Boyden Gate
Millbank
Shelvingford
Maypole
Herne Common
East Blean Wood
Hoath
Chislet Forstal
Chislet
West Blean Wood
Knave's Ash
Hicks Forstal
Hollow Street
Rushbourne Manor
Upstreet
Calcott
Chislet Park
Hersden
Westbere
Broad Oak
Sturry
Stodmarsh
FORDWICH
CANTERBURY DISTRICT
CANTERBURY
Wickhambreaux
Ickham
Littlebourne
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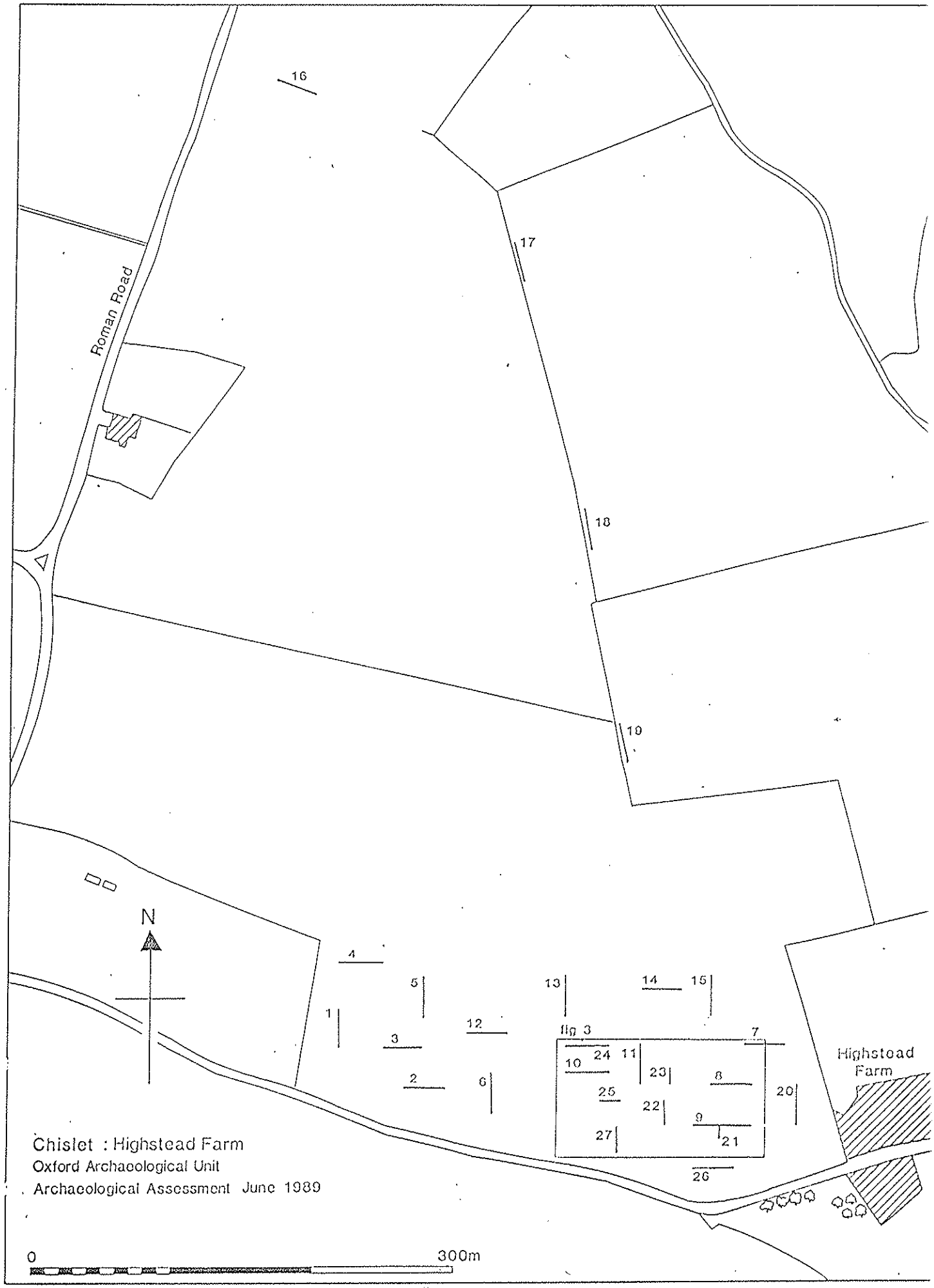
Fig. 1


16
17
18
19
Roman Road
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26
27
fig 3
Highstead Farm
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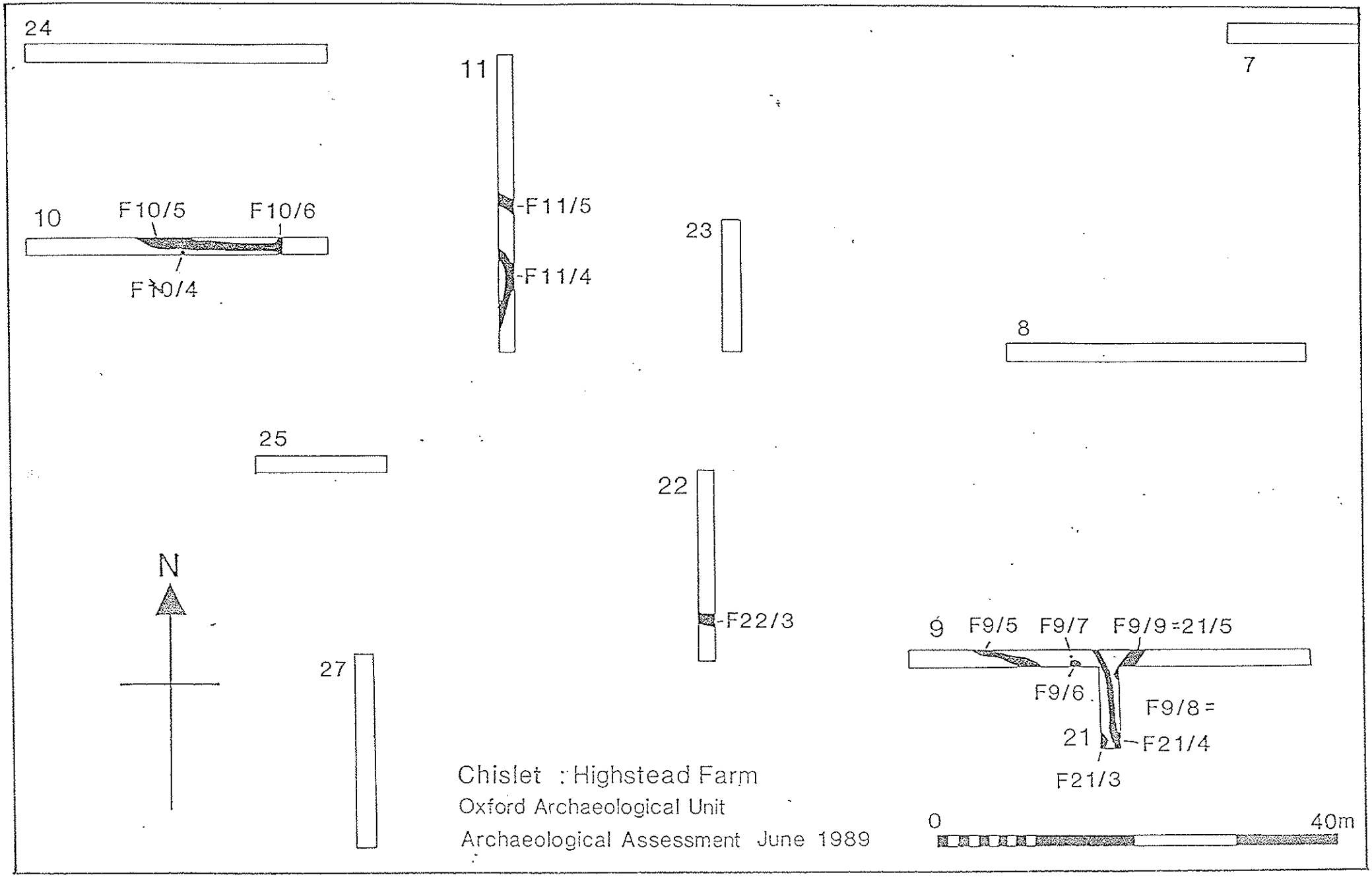
0
300m

Fig. 2


24
11
7
10
F10/5
F10/6
F10/4
F11/5
F11/4
23
8
25
22
F22/3
N
27
9
F9/5
F9/7
F9/9=21/5
F9/6
F9/8=
21
F21/4
F21/3
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0
40m

Fig. 3