

# Archaeological Evaluation at 'The Spike', High Street, Sawston

T L Sutherland BSc, HND, PIFA

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Editor: Paul Spoerry PhD  
Illustrator: Melodie Paice BSc

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Archaeological Field Unit  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn  
Cambridgeshire CB2 5HD  
Tel (01223) 881614  
Fax (01223) 880946

## **SUMMARY**

*In February 1995 an archaeological evaluation was carried out, in advance of residential development, by The Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council, on an area of land to the east of 'The Spike', High Street, Sawston, Cambridgeshire (TL 489/487).*

*Seven trenches were excavated in a small area set aside for the first stage of the housing development, after which, a Fluxgate magnetometer survey was carried out across the remainder of the large field.*

*Several linear features were recorded in the trenches, which appear to be the remains of boundary or drainage ditches. No dating evidence was retrieved from any of the features on the site, which is significant as the surface of the field was littered with an abundance of late nineteenth and early twentieth century pottery and glass. These artefact remains are therefore very well sorted within, but restricted to, the plough soil.*

*The geophysical survey located a large linear anomaly, which runs along the same alignment as a track marked on the 1885 OS map, and a series of anomalies, which have been interpreted as pits and small linear features, in the east of the site.*

*A further stage of evaluations was carried out over several of these latter anomalies. These were found to be comparable to those features discovered in the initial phases, in that their fills were very similar and they contained no datable evidence. At least one substantial ditch was discovered which did not show up on the geophysical survey. This infers that its fill contains relatively little magnetically enhanced material, which correlates well with the complete lack of datable artefacts from any negative feature. These points generally emphasise the past rural nature of the site.*

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# **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT 'THE SPIKE', HIGH STREET, SAWSTON**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In February 1995 an archaeological evaluation was carried out in advance of residential development by The Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on an area of land to the east of 'The Spike', High Street Sawston, Cambridgeshire (TL 489/487).

Seven trenches were excavated in the north-west corner of the site, in an area set aside for the first stage of the housing development. These excavations were divided into two phases, Phase 1 consisting of four trenches and Phase 2, three trenches. The location of the site and the positions of the trenches are given in Figure 1.

Phase 2 was excavated several days after Phase 1, at the same time as a Fluxgate Magnetometer survey was undertaken over the remaining area of the site by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford (see Appendix A).

## **2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE.**

The underlying geology is Middle Chalk (British Geological Survey 1985). Sawston lies approximately 11 km to the south of Cambridge, and 1 km to the east of the River Cam. The site lies 1 km to the south of the village at 25.00 m OD. It is generally flat, and has a recorded history as an open field since at least 1811 although a small wooded area existed in the south-east of the site in this period (1811 Inclosure Map, P136/26/1B, Fig 2). The High Street runs north/south 250 metres to the west of the site, areas of woodland lie to its north and east, and a housing estate lies immediately to the south.

## **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Several prehistoric finds have been made within the parish. Within the village itself, Neolithic flint tools were found 500 metres to the north of the site near the Vicarage (SMR 04113). Other Neolithic tools, including an axe, were recovered within the area of the Spike, 300 and 150 metres respectively, to the south of the site (SMR 04109 and 04103).

A large Iron Age Hillfort, one of seven in Cambridgeshire, exists 2 km to the west of the village at the site of the paper factory, although very little of this is now evident above ground.

There are remains of Roman occupation to the north of the village in the form of a group of rectangular or D shaped enclosures which can be seen as a series of crop-marks (SMR 4118). These appear to be associated with a scatter of Roman pottery found to their immediate south-east. (SMR 4115).

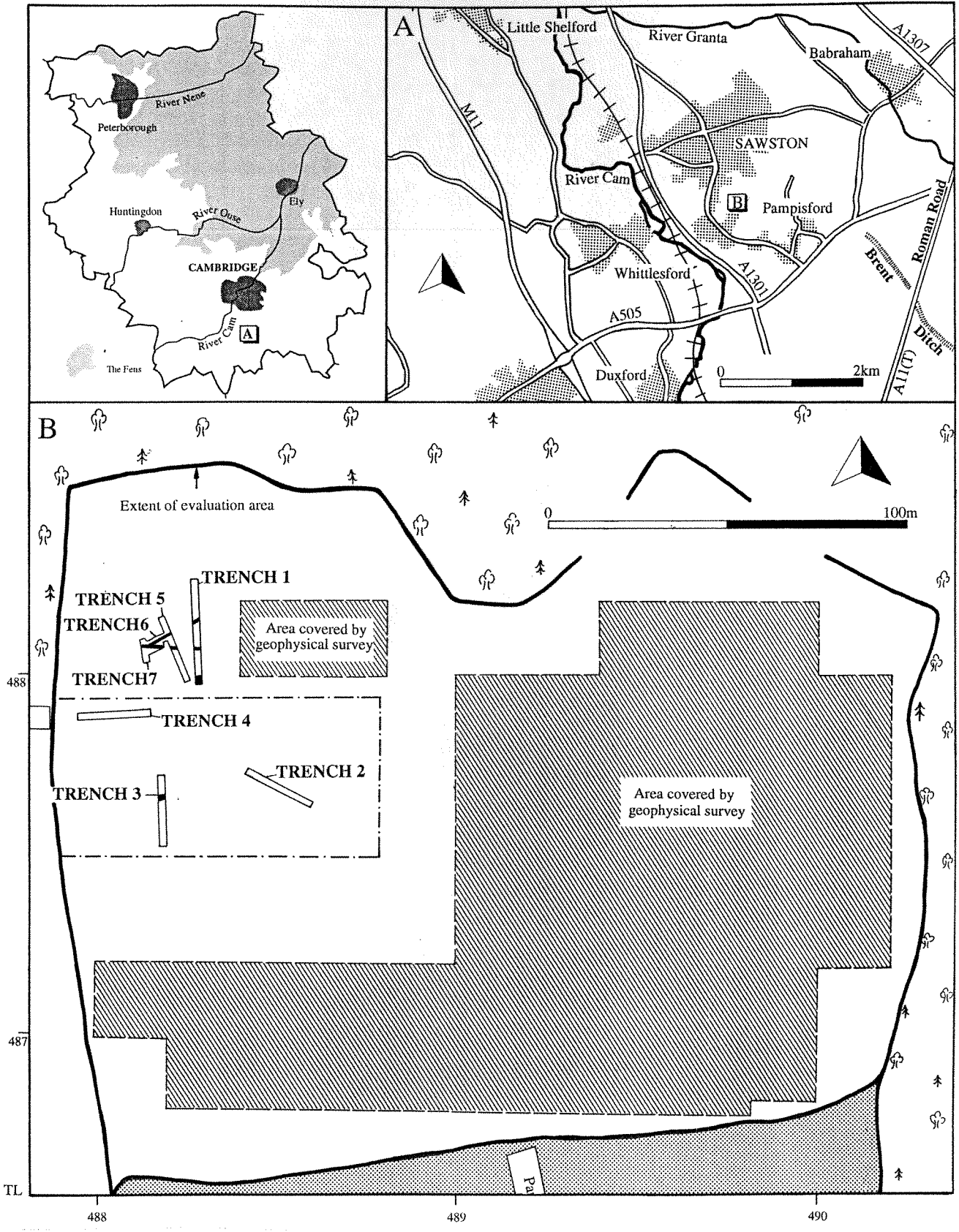


Figure 1 Location plan

The village of Sawston seems to be Anglo-Saxon in origin as it is first mentioned in the 10th century as *Salsingetune*, either 'farm of *Salse*' or 'of *Salses* people', and later in Domesday Book (1086) as *Salsiton(e)*, (Reaney 1943: 96-7). An Anglo-Saxon burial was found on Huckeridge Hill north of Sawston (SMR 4537), although it is unclear whether it relates to the settlement at Sawston, or to an Anglo-Saxon/ medieval village at Dornford Farm to the north-west, where there are a series of earthworks and crop-marks (SMR 10958). No finds of this period have been found in Sawston itself.

The main medieval estate, known as Pryatts or Sawston manor, was held by the Pirot family from the time of the Domesday survey until the late fourteenth century. The early manor, destroyed in 1553, stood on the site of the present Sawston Hall which was built soon afterwards. A flooded earthwork to the south of this site may represent part of an earlier moat (SMR 01267). Medieval Sawston was centred around this Manor, in the vicinity of which the church of St. Mary the Virgin and several fifteenth and sixteenth century houses can also be found. A medieval or post-medieval cross, now a war memorial, stands at the junction of High Street and Church Lane.

Sawston was enclosed by an act of Parliament in 1802, its general extent indicated later on the Inclosure map of 1811 (Fig 2).

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

Seven trenches, one 30 metres, four 20 metres and two 7 metres in length, were machine excavated using a 1.6 metre wide toothless bucket. The first four of these were placed randomly in order to cover the assessment area (Phase I). The latter three (Phase II), were placed in order to trace the features discovered in the primary trenches.

The topsoil and subsoil was removed in each trench to reveal any anomalies, several of which were found cut into the natural chalk. Areas of archaeological interest were then excavated by hand, photographed, and recorded on plan and in section.

A five litre soil sample was sieved from the end of each trench in order to retrieve artefactual evidence missed during the excavation. A five litre soil sample was also taken from the fills of ditches **8** and **12** in order to search for datable material.

After the first phase of the initial investigation, the developers stripped the topsoil from the south of the site which revealed a larger extent of the recorded ditch **2**.

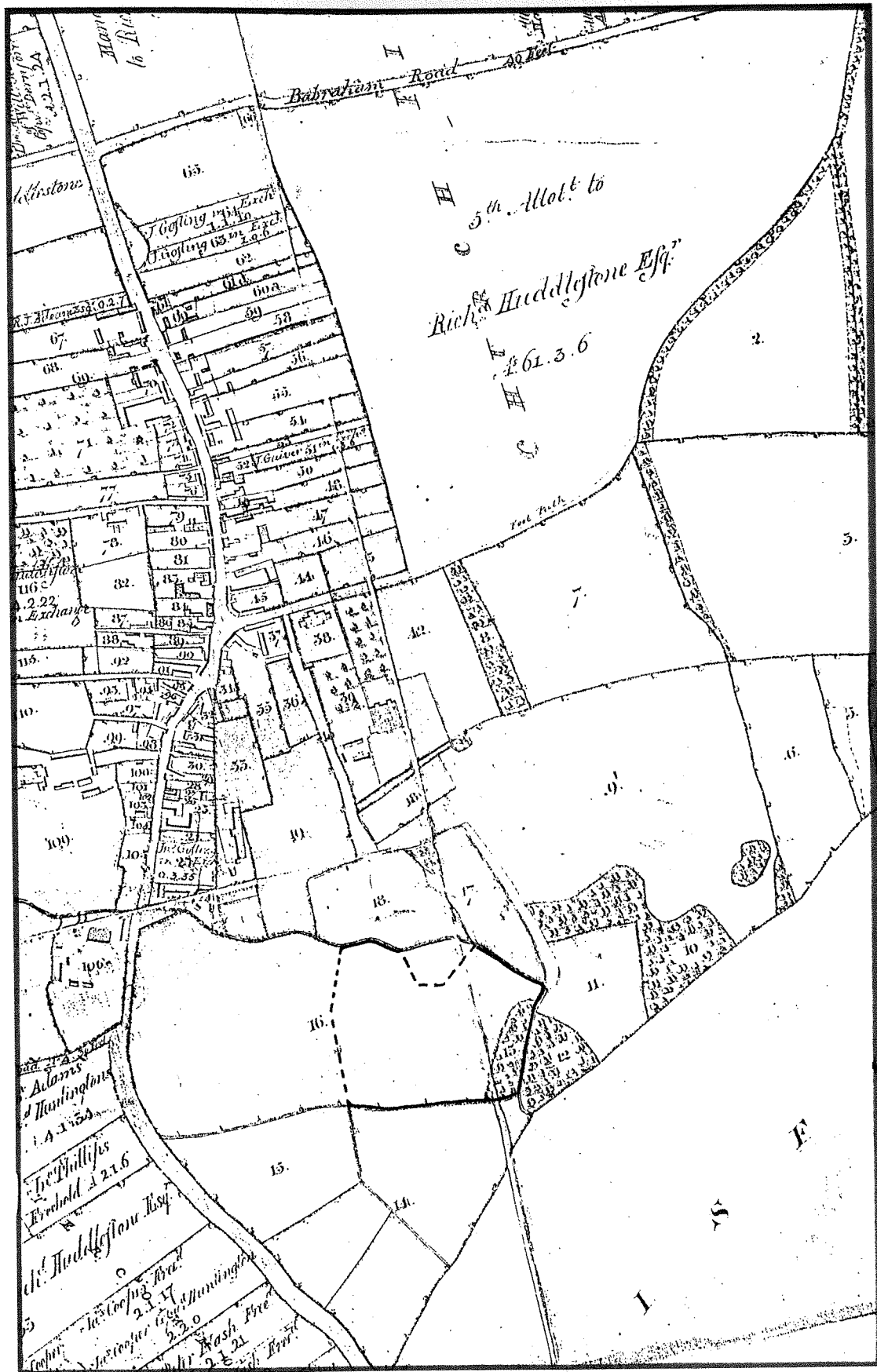


Figure 2 1811 Sawston Inclosure map (site area outlined)

## 5. RESULTS

The depth of the soils over the chalk natural averaged 0.4 metres and consisted of a generally stone free, very dark-brown, sandy loam. This produced an abundance of late nineteenth and twentieth century pottery on the surface, along with a great deal of angular flint pebbles. The soil can be shown to be very well sorted as very little in the way of pottery or stones could be seen below the top seven centimetres of this layer.

One sherd of glass typifies the date of the artefacts found across the surface of the site, in that a date, 1884, could clearly be seen embossed on its surface, giving a date after which it must have been deposited.

All but two trenches uncovered features cut into the natural chalk.

### 5.1 Sieved soil samples

None of the sieved soils contained any artefactual evidence. This strengthens the hypothesis that this part of the development area contains no activity evidence earlier than that mentioned above.

### 5.2 Phase 1

#### 5.2.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was positioned in the north of the site and ran north/south across an area which retained water on the surface (Fig 1). It contained three negative features and an area of dark soil which lay just above the natural. Each was investigated in turn.

In the base of the trench, above the natural chalk, lay a very thin layer (1-2cm) of mottled clay (6), which in turn lay beneath a 0.1 metre layer of black waterlogged soil (5). This black soil overlay all the negative features and therefore post dated them.

A 1.2 metre wide by 0.1 metre deep ditch **8**, could be clearly seen cut into the chalk running east-north-east/west-south-west, in the middle of the trench. It had shallow sides and a relatively horizontal, yet uneven, base. It was filled (7), with a mixture of topsoil, black soil and occasional patches of chalk fragments all of which were apparently waterlogged as the ditch quickly collected water which rose above these layers. An abundance of small mollusc shells were found in the lowest levels. No dating evidence was found within this feature.

A 1 metre wide by 0.3 metre deep ditch **12**, could be seen in the southern third of the trench running in an east/west direction. It had smooth sloping sides, of approximately 45 degrees, and a U-shaped base. It contained a very dark brown fill (14), which became darker as it neared the base where it was almost black. The lower part of the fill contained small chalk fragments and a proliferation of small molluscs. No dating evidence was discovered in this feature.

To the south of the ditch cut **12**, and overlying the natural chalk, there was a 0.12 metre thick layer of mottled clay and chalk which tapered at both sides (10), and contained evidence for its disturbance by large roots and possible plough damage.



In the very south of the trench a large area of clay was uncovered which appeared to lie in a cut into the natural chalk. This feature was excavated with the machine to a depth of approximately 1.7 metres before a chalkier fill was encountered. It had the appearance of a very large U shaped feature cut into the chalk, however, when the sides of the trench were widened it could be seen that the feature was more of a concave or bowl shaped depression. The sides of this trench, which were too deep and too unstable to allow accurate recording, collapsed minutes after their excavation, prompting its immediate backfilling.

#### **5.2.2 Trench 2**

Trench 2 was positioned in the east of the site and contained no archaeological features (Fig 1). The topsoil lay at a depth of 0.35 metres above a weathered chalk natural and showed no signs of water logging.

#### **5.2.3 Trench 3**

Trench 3 was positioned in the south of the site and ran north/south across an area which was significantly drier than the area of Trench 1 (Fig 1). It contained one negative feature and to the south of this, an area of clay lying just above the natural chalk. Each was investigated in turn.

The topsoil was found to be approximately 0.42 metres deep, and lay directly on the weathered natural chalk.

A 1.3 metre wide by 0.55 metre deep ditch 2, ran across the trench 5 metres from its northern end in an east/west direction. It had smooth, steep sides and a partially flat, U-shaped base. It contained a sandy silt fill (1), which had a recognisably different fill of chalk fragments in the northern side. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

The layer of olive brown clay (15), which lay above the chalk natural, to the south of the above feature, was at least 10 cm thick when close to the ditch but, gradually faded out to less than 1-2cm over the chalk.

#### **5.2.4 Trench 4**

Trench 4 was positioned in the west of the site and contained no archaeological features (Fig 1). The topsoil lay at a depth of 0.37 metres above a very thin layer (<1 cm) of silty clay which in turn lay over the natural chalk. This trench showed evidence of water logging, similar to the conditions of those in Trench 1.

### **5.3 Phase 2**

#### **5.3.1 Trench 5**

Trench 5 was positioned so as to check the alignment of the ditches 8 and 12, and the area around the depression in the very south of Trench 1, (Fig 1). It was cut in a north, north-westerly direction and contained three negative features, two of which appear to relate to those in Trench 1.

A feature which initially appeared to have a rectangular cut was cleaned up and half sectioned and found to be an irregular depression with uneven sides and a very uneven base. Its fill was the same as the dark humic layer (5), which lay above the clay. This in turn covered the chalk natural in this area of the site. The feature formed no distinct shape and appeared to be of no archaeological interest.

The southern end of the trench did not reveal any evidence for the large hollow feature which was encountered in Trench 1, which therefore appears to be limited to that area.

The remains of both cuts **8** and **12**, could be seen continuing in their respective directions, **12** having a similar width and **8** being slightly narrower. Part of the fill (14), of ditch **12**, was excavated and was found to contain an abundance of molluscs in its lower fill and the skeleton of a dog. The ditch **8**, was not investigated at this point.

### **5.3.2 Trench 6**

Trench 6 was positioned so as to follow the alignment of the shallower ditch **8**, and to find the intersection of the ditches **8** and **12**, which were expected to cross further to the west. The trench was cut in a west, south-westerly direction from the northern end of Trench 1 (Fig 1), for 10 metres until the junction between the two cuts could be seen.

The cut of the deeper ditch **12** could clearly be seen to continue westward across the new trench whereas the cut of the shallower ditch **8** could clearly be seen to terminate at the junction with **12**.

A section was excavated across the more shallow of the two ditches **8**, at a point half way along the trench. where a different profile was recorded to that in Trench 1. This showed a 0.8 metre wide by 0.23 metre deep ditch with one, almost vertical, side to the south and a shallower, 45 degree, slope in the north. It had a slightly concave base and contained a fill (7), which was an orangey grey at the bottom, slowly changing to a greyey orange at the top. None of the abundant mollusc shells found in its other section were evident in this fill.

### **5.3.3 Trench 7**

Trench 7 was positioned at the end of Trench 6 in order to cut a deep section across **12** and check that ditch **8**, did in fact terminate at ditch **12**, and was not masked by a bank or another anomaly.

The section across ditch **12**, revealed a profile that was the same as that in Trench 1, in that the dimensions and the fill were comparable. No trace of ditch **8**, could be seen to continue past ditch **12**.

## **6. INTERPRETATION**

The excavation evidence suggests that this area of the site has been poorly drained for some time. Phase 1 excavations were limited in time and scope, and so when the feature in the south of Trench 1 was uncovered it first appeared to be a large paleochannel, although the later collapse of the sides made it appear more concave than linear. Phase 2 excavations re-evaluated one of the sides of this feature and found that the trench had coincidentally been placed across the centre of what was in fact the remains of a large circular 'solution hollow' which had collected a quantity of clay in the resulting depression.

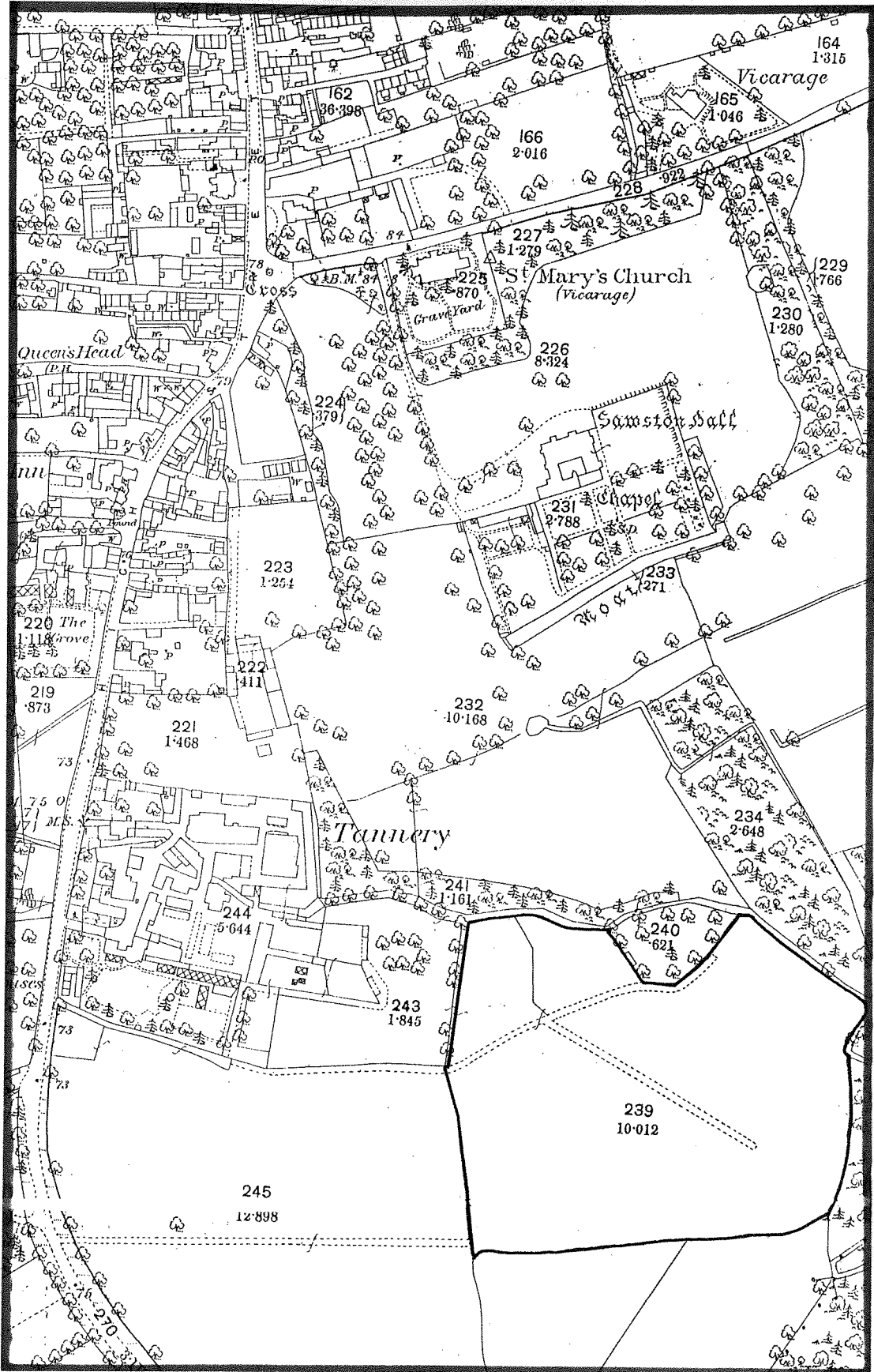


Figure 3 1885 Ordnance Survey map (site area outlined)

The large ditch 12, which could be seen in Trenches 1, 5, 6 and 7 appears to be a drainage ditch comparable with those which surround the site at present and may therefore represent an older field boundary. The feature to its immediate south appears to be the remains of a small bank which shows evidence of root disturbance and plough damage. The shallower ditch 8, appears to run into the former ditch and must therefore be seen as contemporary or later. It may have been cut to help alleviate the obvious problems of surface water which result in this area. Both ditches contained small molluscs in large numbers although interestingly they were not evident in the west end of the shallower ditch 8, the fill of which had the appearance of being back-filled, rather than silted up like the others.

The small irregular depression, which lay to the south of the ditches, appears to be a natural feature and may represent an animal burrow or a tree root cavity.

The area appears to have been waterlogged due to an initial very high water table which allowed the water to collect over the chalk and deposit fine silts and clays. These have then prevented water draining through the chalk in drier weather when the water table has fallen. The continuing waterlogged conditions have produced a very dark gleyed soil at the base of the topsoil which results in the black topsoil at this horizon.

The ditch in Trench 3, appears to be another field drain and can be seen to run in a similar direction to that of a track (marked on the 1885 OS 1: 2500 map, Fig 3), which ran across the field at this point.

The abundance of late nineteenth and twentieth century material, which lies on the surface across the whole site, and yet not in the excavated features, suggests that the ditches were cut and silted up, or were back-filled, before this material was deposited. As these features are also not on either the 1811 Inclosure map (Fig 2), or the later 1885 OS map (Fig 3), one may assume that they also pre-date this period, although if they are simply drainage ditches and not field boundaries this may not be the case.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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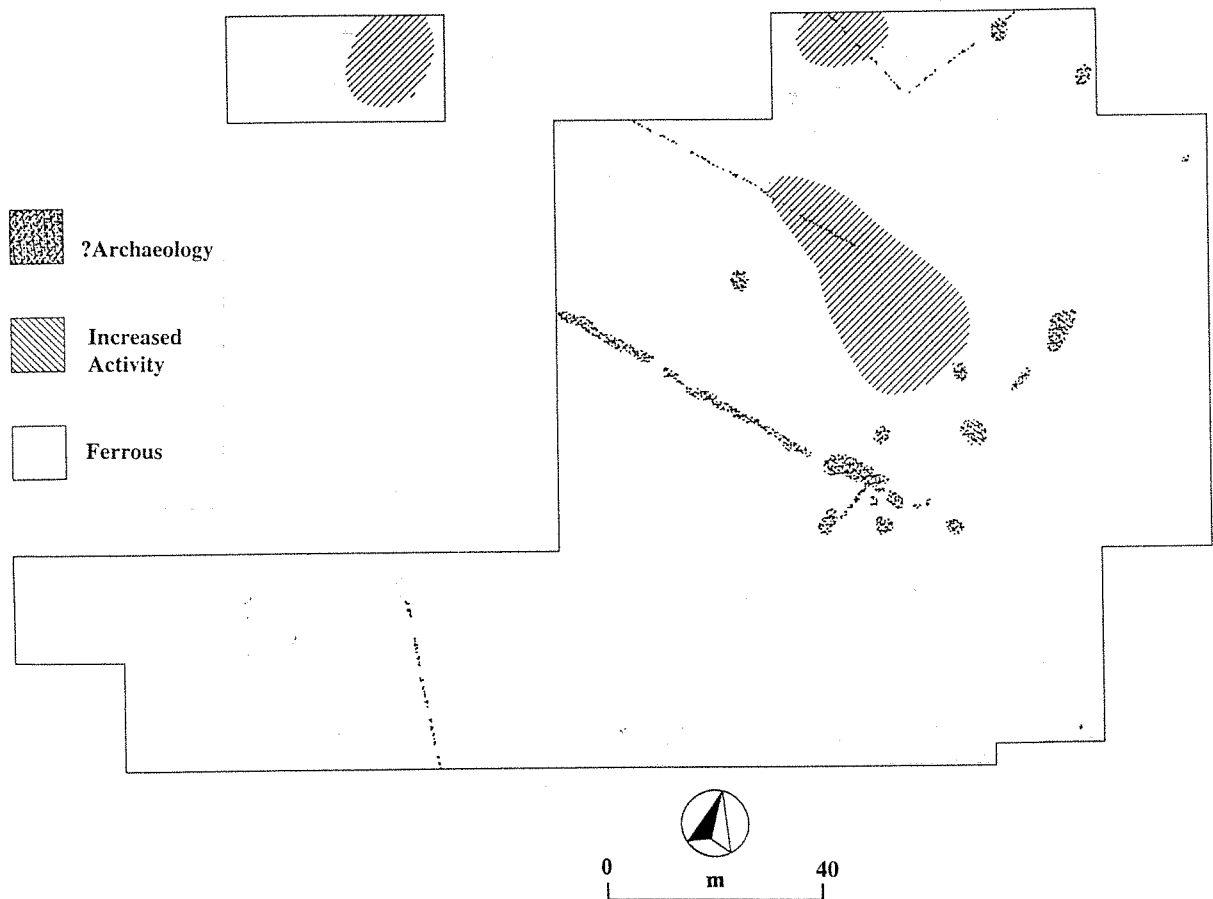
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## APPENDIX A

### GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY RESULTS

The geophysical survey results (see below), identified a large linear feature which could be seen to correspond to the alignment of a track shown on the 1885 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 3). It also identified an area of magnetic anomalies, such as pits and small linear features, which are often characteristic of settlement. These anomalies should ideally be assessed in a further phase of evaluations.



*Figure A1 Geophysical Survey Results (after Shiel 1995)*

## APPENDIX B

### PHASE 3 EVALUATION

In May 1995 a second phase of brief evaluations took place in several parts of the field (OS field no. 239), where the geophysical survey had suggested archaeological features or where they were visible after the removal of the topsoil by the developers.

### RESULTS

Numerous features were investigated in areas which had already had their topsoil removed for the laying of road foundations. Most of these were found to be natural depressions in the underlying chalk. Two features of potential archaeological interest were excavated and fully recorded.

These were located at National Grid References 48989/48804 (Test Pit 1), and 48954/48777 (Test Pit 2).

The feature in Test Pit 1 consisted of a steep sided, 'V'-shaped, 0.5 metre deep by 1.4 metre wide linear cut **206**, which ran in an east/west direction and contained five fills (201-205). These ranged in colour from a dark grey-brown near the top to black in the base. No artefacts were retrieved from this feature.

The feature in Test Pit 2 consisted of a sub-circular 'U'-shaped cut **216**, which was thinner on one side than the other, and thus formed an almost circular 'crescent' shape. This contained a black humic loam (207), which was a maximum of 0.15 metres deep and 1.2 metres wide. This surrounded an area of grey chalk and clay (208), which lay in a shallow depression 0.10 metres deep above the natural chalk. To the north-east of this feature, a 0.5 metre wide and 0.12 metre deep gully or ditch **209**, appeared to connect to this features thinnest side although it appears to have decreased in width and depth at this point. This gully contained a black humic loam fill (210), and the feature, as a whole, contained no artefacts.

### INTERPRETATION

The feature in Test Pit 1 is a linear land boundary or drainage ditch which did not appear on the geophysical survey. This would suggest that it contains very little magnetically enhanced material that would make it stand out against its background. Although the enhancement of soils overlying chalk is usually relatively poor (Tite 1972), the occurrence of other magnetic anomalies on the geophysical survey suggests that at some time this rate of enhancement changed. The presence of the nineteenth and twentieth century pottery on the site may indicate a period when this change in enhancement occurred either by increased activity or by enhanced material being deposited on it.

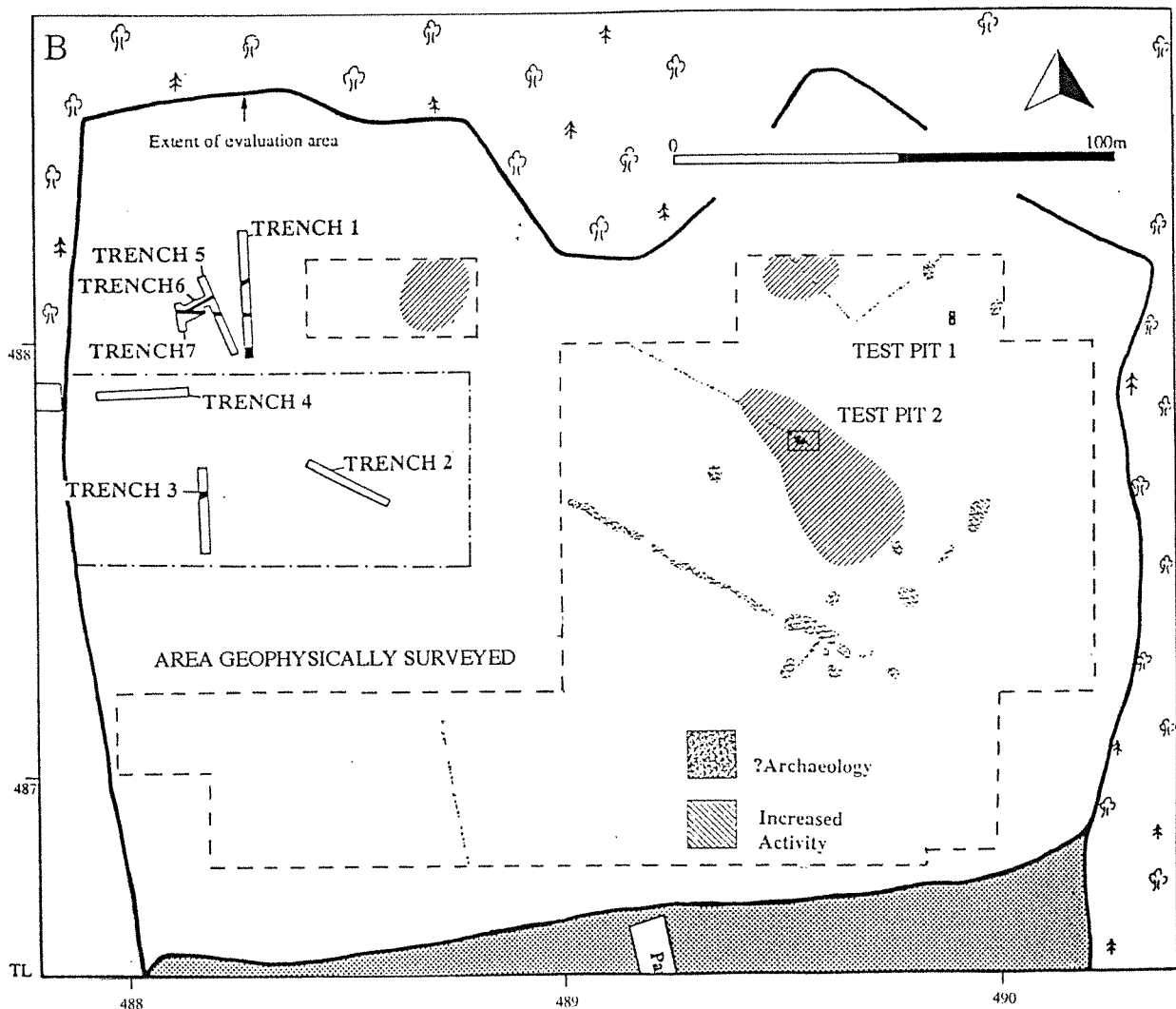
The feature in Test Pit 2 is difficult to interpret due to its irregularity. Its crescent shaped ditch form, with a central mixed clay and chalk fill, suggests however, that it may have resulted from the collapse and decay of a large tree. Such features are relatively common in chalk landscapes. The connection of this feature to the faint

linear alignment on the geophysical survey (Fig A2), may suggest the former presence of a line of trees in this area.

The lack of dating evidence in any of the fills is significant and correlates with the other negative features excavated on the site. As the whole of the surface of the site is littered with post eighteenth century pottery it dates their filling to some time before the nineteenth century. As the fills in all the negative features are similar, in that they have a black humic loam in the deepest parts of the cuts and no dating evidence throughout their fills, it was considered unproductive to investigate any further anomalies located by the geophysical survey.

## CONCLUSION

It would appear that the site has, until relatively recently, been in a rural location with drainage ditches and field boundaries collecting very little in the way of pottery or datable artefacts from nearby settlement. The lack of magnetically enhanced soils in several of the negative features strengthens this hypothesis.



**Figure A2** Location of test pits

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