

THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE



*ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY and  
EVALUATION at NORTH FARM,  
ELWICK, near HARTLEPOOL*

*(NZ 457 324)*

**A report to JacksonPlan Ltd.**



**28th March 2008**

THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

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***ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY and  
EVALUATION at NORTH FARM,  
ELWICK, near HARTLEPOOL***

*(NZ 457 324)*

**In connection with Planning Application H/2008/0026**

**A report to JacksonPlan Ltd.**

**Fieldwork and report: Percival Turnbull & Deborah Walsh**

**28th March 2008**

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*CONTENTS*

Epitome	page 1
Introduction	paras 1-3
The Site	paras 4-7
The survey	paras 8-17
The Rigg & Furrow: Discussion	paras 18-21
The evaluation Trenches	paras 22-29
Conclusions	paras 30-31
List of figures	page 9
Figures 1-14	follow page 9

*EPITOME*

On instructions from JacksonPlan Ltd, planning consultants, a programme of archaeological survey and evaluation was undertaken at North Farm, Elwick, near Hartlepool.

Work was required in support of a planning application (Hartlepool Borough Council, H/2008/0026) for the conversion of farm buildings to residential use, the construction of new houses, and the installation of car parking, services *etc.* A Brief for the work was supplied by Tees Archaeology.

Two areas of rigg and furrow cultivation were surveyed and recorded: their possible significance is discussed in the report.

Five trenches were excavated in order to evaluate the area: all were archaeologically negative.

A peripheral position in relation to the mediaeval village is suggested for the site. It is further suggested that the existing landscape is primarily a result of the land enclosure of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY and  
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**INTRODUCTION**

1. On instructions from JacksonPlan Ltd, planning consultants, a programme of archaeological survey and evaluation was undertaken at North Farm, Elwick, near Hartlepool.
2. Work was required in support of a planning application (Hartlepool Borough Council, H/2008/0026) for the conversion of farm buildings to residential use, the construction of new houses, and the installation of car parking, services *etc.* A Brief for the work was supplied by Tees Archaeology, with whom the archive (including original survey data, black & white photographs and colour slides) will be deposited.
3. Work was carried out in March 2008 by Percival Turnbull and Deborah Walsh, of this Practice.

**THE SITE**

4. The site (Fig. 1) lies on the edge of the village of Elwick at (National Grid Reference) NZ 457 324. It is currently a working farm, with a mixture of older and modern agricultural buildings. Most of the site is under concrete hard standing, apart from the grass fields considered and surveyed in this report.
5. Elwick is of mediaeval origin: it was until 1866 a township in the parish of Hart, and became thereafter a parish. There is now a distinction between the parishes of Elwick and Elwick Hall, though Hutchinson (*History and Antiquities of the County Palatinate of Durham*, 1785) treats them as the same thing. The list of clergy starts in 1200, which is a plausible date for the church itself. Hutchinson quotes an advertisement of 1779 of Elwick: '*This parish consists of about eighteen farm-houses....It is said, that in this parish there is neither a town or village, cottage house for the poor, surgeon or apothecary, midwife, blacksmith, joiner, house-carpenter, mason, bricklayer, cart- or wheel-wright, weaver, butcher, shoemaker, taylor, or barber, schoolmaster or schoolmistress, alehouse, public bakehouse, grocer or chandler's shop or a corn mill*' This exhaustive list of deficiencies is a little surprising, since Elwick seems on the face of it a typical Durham 'green' village, and is listed as 'Regular two-row plan, with a green' by BK Roberts and D Austin (*A Preliminary Check List of Rural Clusters in County Durham*. n.d., but ?1975). Hutchinson was probably referring to Elwick Hall.
6. North Farm is some distance from the village green, which should probably be regarded as the historic *focus* of the settlement. The house itself (Fig. 2) has a much-altered look, and does not appear to be of much historic interest. Some of the farm buildings, however, indicate that this was a considerable farm in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The southern range (Fig. 3) is of such a date, and constructed of much-patched brickwork; in places there are the remains of a limestone wall which

appears to be earlier, and probably represents the first period of building at North Farm. There is a fine, brick-built barn in the foldyard (Fig. 4).

7. It is difficult to be sure how old North Farm actually is. There is no fabric, certainly, to indicate a mediaeval date, and the situation on the edge of the village might suggest that the farm was a creation of Enclosure and the new modes of agriculture which accompanied it.

#### THE SURVEY

8. Surviving earthwork features were surveyed in two areas, Field 1 to the east of the main farm complex and Field 2 to the north: in the latter case only the southern part of the whole field was surveyed, the rest falling outside the area of the proposed development. The survey was carried out at a scale of 1:200, using a plane table and Frank alidade. North was established by magnetic compass. Levels were recorded using a Sokkia level, and referred to an arbitrary site datum established on the concrete road between Fields 1 and 2.

9. Both areas were recorded photographically, using 35mm black & white print and colour transparency film. Advantage was taken of a brief period of sunshine during a generally wet and overcast season, and the low relief stood out with reasonable clarity. Digital photographs were also taken for the purposes of this report.

10. Field 1 (Figs. 5& 6) is a rectangular plot which has been created by the parcelling out of a larger field to the north; residential properties to the east have been built over part of the same field. The longer axis of the field is aligned approximately east-west.

11. The most obvious earthwork feature in Field 1 is a flat-topped bank which runs approximately north to south; the top is an average of 20 cms higher than the ground to the east. On the western side of the bank the ground drops sharply to form a hollow way or lane which leads from the road south of the farm to the north-west corner of the field. This hollow way is heavily rutted by modern traffic. The flat-topped bank is the remains of an old hedge; it continues north of the surveyed area as an existing hedge boundary, still topped by a row of hawthorns. This feature is typical of field boundaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

12. Immediately to the east of the former hedge bank is an area within which nothing survives as earthwork relief; rigg and furrow further east peters out towards this area, and it seems that any former features have been erased by prolonged traffic through the field gate in the western half of the field's northern boundary. There are also signs of disturbance in this area from a drain leading from the direction of the gate.

13. Further east, the rest of Field 1 is covered by broad rigg and furrow, aligned east-west. Three riggs survive to their full width of approximately 8 metres; the ground at the southern boundary of the site (represented by a hedgerow of the type mentioned above) slopes down to the bottom of the southern most furrow. The relief is reasonably well-marked, with the crests of the riggs an average 30 cms above the bottoms of the furrows.

14. Field 2 (Figs 7 & 8) consists of a triangular area, the northern side defined by the limit of the proposed development area and the southern by the rear of a long, modern agricultural building. In the eastern half is a large concrete pad supporting a trough.
15. The western boundary of Field 2 is represented by a wooden fence atop a low bank, some 20 cms above the ground surface on the eastern side. This probably represents the remains of a hedge similar to those noted in Field 1- indeed, just such a hedge marks the field boundary to the north of the surveyed area.
16. The westernmost part of Field 2 is devoid of surviving earthwork features. There are distinct signs of disturbance, and it is certain that rigg and furrow (which may be seen north of the surveyed area) has been obliterated in this area.
17. Well-preserved rigg and furrow survives over the eastern part of Field 2. It is aligned north-south, and the crests of the riggs are from 30 to 35 cms above the bottoms of the furrows. The gauge is slightly narrower than that in Field 1, the riggs being 7 metres broad. The system may be seen continuing to the limit of the field to the north, where the riggs follow a slightly curved line (perhaps under the influence of the considerable slope); at its southern limit the system is abruptly cut by the foundations of the agricultural building.

#### THE RIGG and FURROW: DISCUSSION

18. Rigg and furrow (or ridge and furrow) cultivation is commonly found on grassland in most parts of lowland England, particularly in the Midlands, though it is rare or wholly absent in some areas such as Suffolk and Kent. It may also be found in some marginal areas which are no longer subjected to the plough, such as parts of Teesdale above Barnard Castle. It is common in old parkland, suggesting but not necessitating a *terminus ante quem* of the date of emparkment. It is certain that much has been destroyed by modern cultivation, and 'fossil' rigg and furrow systems invisible on the surface are commonly found during the area excavation of archaeological sites. It was produced as a deliberate process, intended to create self-draining seed beds with a series of drains in the intervening furrows. The processes involved in rigg and furrow cultivation have recently been discussed (David Hall, 1998, 'Medieval fields in their many forms' in *British Archaeology*, 33).
19. There is a general assumption that rigg and furrow is of mediaeval date, and that it represents the ploughing of individual strips held by rotation within open field systems: typically, the strips would measure 11 yards (8 metres) wide by 220 yards (200 metres) long. This 'broad rigg' pattern is readily distinguishable from much narrower riggs which are of modern (usually 19<sup>th</sup> century) date. In some cases, the riggs follow a distinctive planform with an elongated 'S' or 'reversed-S' shape which derives from the early swing into the turn at the end of the furrow necessitated by a long ox-team; this may be regarded as generically mediaeval.
20. It is clear, however, that not all broad rigg systems are mediaeval in date. In the first place, the pattern can only be surely dated to the last time the land was ploughed in a particular way, usually immediately before Enclosure, which may be as

late as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Difficulties also arise where rigg and furrow fits neatly into the pattern of Enclosed fields; there may be cases where Enclosure has followed pre-existent boundaries, but that may not be taken as a general rule. In many cases, therefore, rigg and furrow may be of much later date than is sometimes thought, and a great deal of it may be contemporary with or later than the enclosure of the land. A large area of what might be thought mediaeval rigg and furrow near Eggleston in Teesdale seems to have been made by ploughing up of former moorland, watched with approval by the traveller John Byng at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

21. The rigg and furrow cultivation at North Farm, which occupies an area much greater than that considered in this survey, is difficult to date. Certainly, the form of the broad riggs fits the mediaeval model well and, though there is no clear sign of the 'S'-shaped form, the riggs which extend north from the area surveyed as Field 2 do follow a distinctly sinuous line. There is, however, a general alignment of the system with the Enclosed fields, and the orientation of the riggs changes from one such field to another, which suggests contemporaneity. It might be argued that the difference in gauge between Fields 1 and 2, slight but distinct though it is, makes it unlikely that the riggs represent individual land strips in the classic mediaeval fashion, which would be expected to be of a fixed width. On balance, it seems probable that the riggs at North Farm date from the period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century land enclosure, though the possibility of mediaeval origins cannot be dismissed.

#### THE EVALUATION TRENCHES

22. Five trenches in all were excavated (Fig.9), three measuring 10 metres by 2 metres, and two measuring 5 metres by 2 metres. In each case, turf and topsoil were removed in thin spits of circa 5 cms by a JCB excavator fitted with an edentulate ditching bucket. Surfaces were then hand-cleaned for recording and for the identification of any archaeological features. A constant watch was kept on exposed surfaces and on spoil heaps for loose finds.

23. Results were as follow (vertical measurements are taken from the ambient ground surface by the side of each trench):

#### 24. TRENCH 1 (Fig. 10)

(i) This measured 10 metres by 2 metres, and was aligned north-south. It was excavated 5 metres south of the 'indicative' position shown in the Brief, in order to avoid a nine-inch drain leading out of the agricultural building 4 metres from the eastern edge of the trench.

[101] 0-15 cms Dolomite hard-core

[102] 15-30 cms Black, silty soil containing brick, timber and other modern rubbish. A distinct oily smell suggesting hydrocarbon contamination. This deposit was confined to the northern 5 metres of the trench; south of this [101] directly overlay the natural clay.



(ii) The underlying natural subsoil consisted of an orange-brown clay with pebbles and occasional patches of sand. It was very disturbed by the passage of heavy machinery; pieces of brick and stone were pressed deeply into the natural surface.

(iii) No object was recovered of other than modern date, and no feature or deposit of archaeological significance was disclosed.

25. TRENCH 2 (Fig. 11)

(i) This also measured 10 metres by 2 metres; it was aligned east-west and located in an area of garden towards the south-west corner of the site. Because of access difficulties and the locations of drains and trees the trench was excavated slightly to the south and to the east of the 'indicative' position given in the Brief.

[201] 0-5 cms Turf

[202] 5-35 cms Fine, black loam representing a rich garden soil. Small amounts of modern (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century) white chinaware. The soil was thinner (20 cms) at the eastern end of the trench, where the underlying natural surface sloped upwards.

(ii) The orange-brown natural clay directly underlay the garden soil. No object was recovered of other than modern date, and no feature or deposit of archaeological significance was disclosed.

26. TRENCH 3 (Fig. 12)

(i) This measured 5 metres by 2 metres and was aligned east-west. It was situated near the north-west corner of the site, in a part of Field 2 just to the west of the surviving rigg and furrow.

[301] 0-10 cms Turf

[302] 10-20 cms Fine, dark brown loam with a few small pebbles and no other inclusions.

[303] 20-60 cms Pale, grey-brown loam with a few pebbles. Probably a gleyed version of [302].

This directly overlay orange-brown natural clay.

(ii) A single small (5 cm) piece of white chinaware of late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century date was found at the base of [303], lying directly on the surface of the natural clay. It is considered that this might have gravitated downwards through the fine loam as a result of 'churning' caused by earthworm action (worms are very abundant over this site), stopping at the interface with the firmer natural clay deposit.

(iii) No object was recovered of other than modern date, and no feature or deposit of archaeological significance was disclosed.

27. TRENCH 4 (Fig. 13)

(i) This trench measured 10 metres by 2 metres and was aligned north-south, perpendicular to the axis of the rig and furrow. It was begun 1.5 metres north of the southern boundary of Field 1 in order to avoid a service trench.

[401] 0-10 Turf

[402] 10-30 Mid-grey to brown loam soil with a few pebbles but no other inclusions. Very similar to [302] No pottery or other dated finds. This deposit was slightly deeper (to 35 cms) in the centre of the trench, equivalent to the bottom of the furrow. Although the surface of the orange-brown natural clay followed the profile of the rig and furrow, rising under the rig, there was no trace of anything which might be an old turf line or buried soil beneath the rig and furrow.

(ii) No object was recovered of other than modern date, and no feature or deposit of archaeological significance was disclosed.

28. TRENCH 5 (Fig. 14)

(i) This trench measured 5 metres by 2 metres and was aligned east-west on the crest of a rig.

[501] 0-10 cms Turf

[502] 10-30 cms Mid grey loam ploughsoil, identical to [402].

(ii) No object was recovered of other than modern date, and no feature or deposit of archaeological significance was disclosed.

29. None of the trenches produced any evidence to suggest a date for the rig and furrow cultivation at North Farm. Nor was there any trace indicative of settlement or of any other activity of an earlier date than the rig and furrow. The single piece of datable evidence, the modern sherd from [303], is probably not of much significance, as has been discussed. It is striking that not a single piece of mediaeval or 'early Modern' pottery was recovered from any part of the site.

### CONCLUSIONS

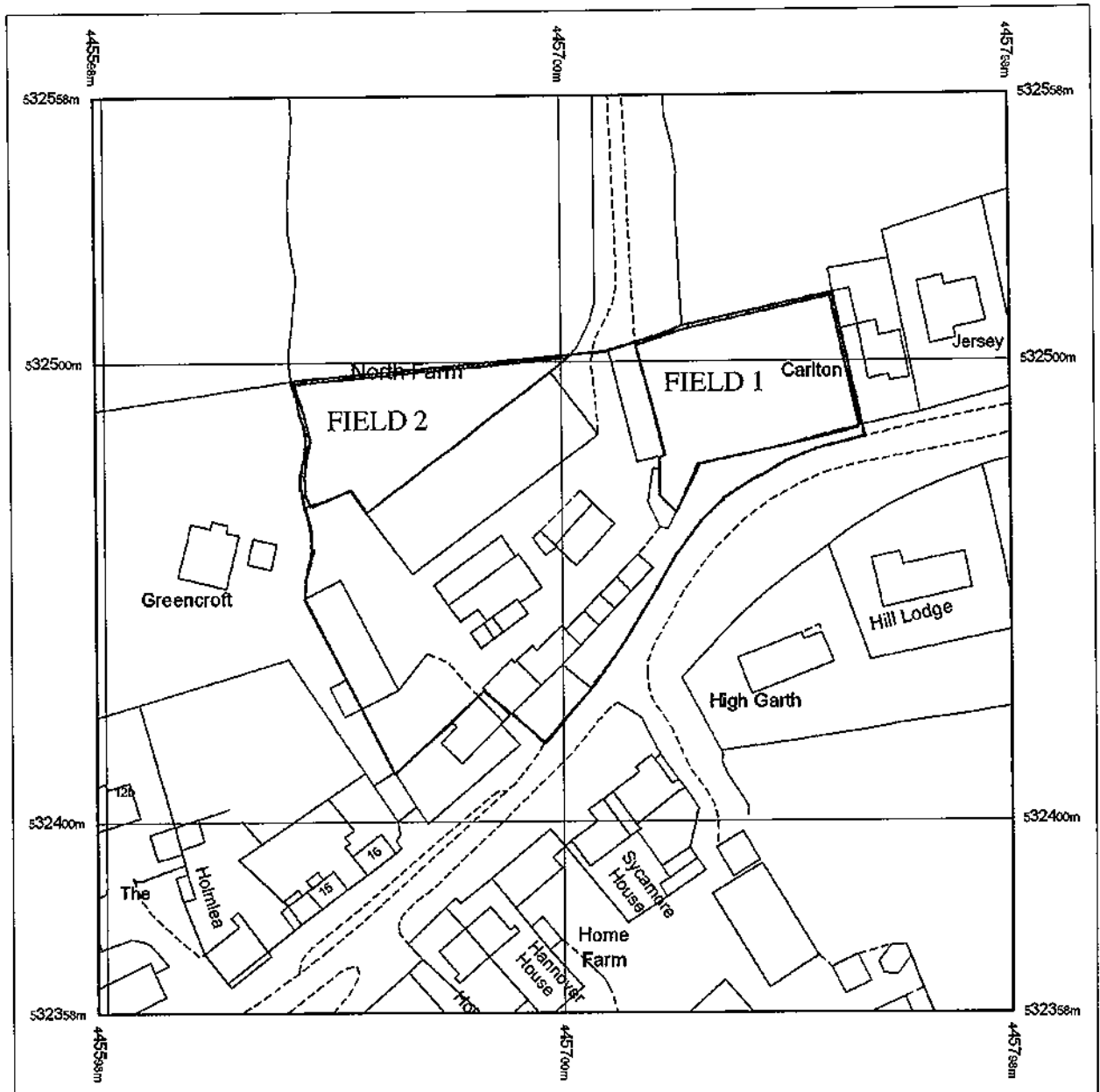
As a result of this survey and evaluation, the following may be said:

30. There is no sign of mediaeval settlement or other activity on the site. Given the fairly small sample area, it is possible that such evidence exists elsewhere on the site. On the other hand, the total absence of mediaeval pottery, and of anything at all earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is probably significant, particularly when the physical distance from the village green is considered. On balance, it is probable that the site occupied by North Farm was liminal or peripheral to the mediaeval village.

31. It is still difficult to suggest a date for the rigg and furrow cultivation at North Farm. Mediaeval origins remain possible, but the balance of probability seems to lie on the side of a more modern date, probably about the time of the land's Enclosure.

*LIST OF FIGURES*

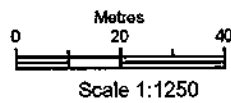
- Fig. 1            Site location, showing areas surveyed
- Fig. 2            The farm frontage
- Fig. 3            The southern range of buildings
- Fig. 4            The old barn
- Fig. 5            Rigg and furrow in Field 1
- Fig. 6            Survey of Field 1
- Fig. 7            Rigg and furrow in Field 2
- Fig. 8            Survey of Field 2
- Fig. 9            Location of trenches
- Fig. 10           Trench 1
- Fig. 11           Trench 2
- Fig. 12           Trench 3
- Fig. 13           Trench 4
- Fig. 14           Trench 5



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**North Farm, Elwick**

**Fig. 1**

**Site location (red) and Fields 1 & 2 (blue)**



**North Farm, Elwick**

**Fig. 2**

**The frontage of North Farm**



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**North Farm, Elwick**

**Fig. 3**

**The south range of buildings**



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North Farm, Elwick

Fig. 4

The early barn



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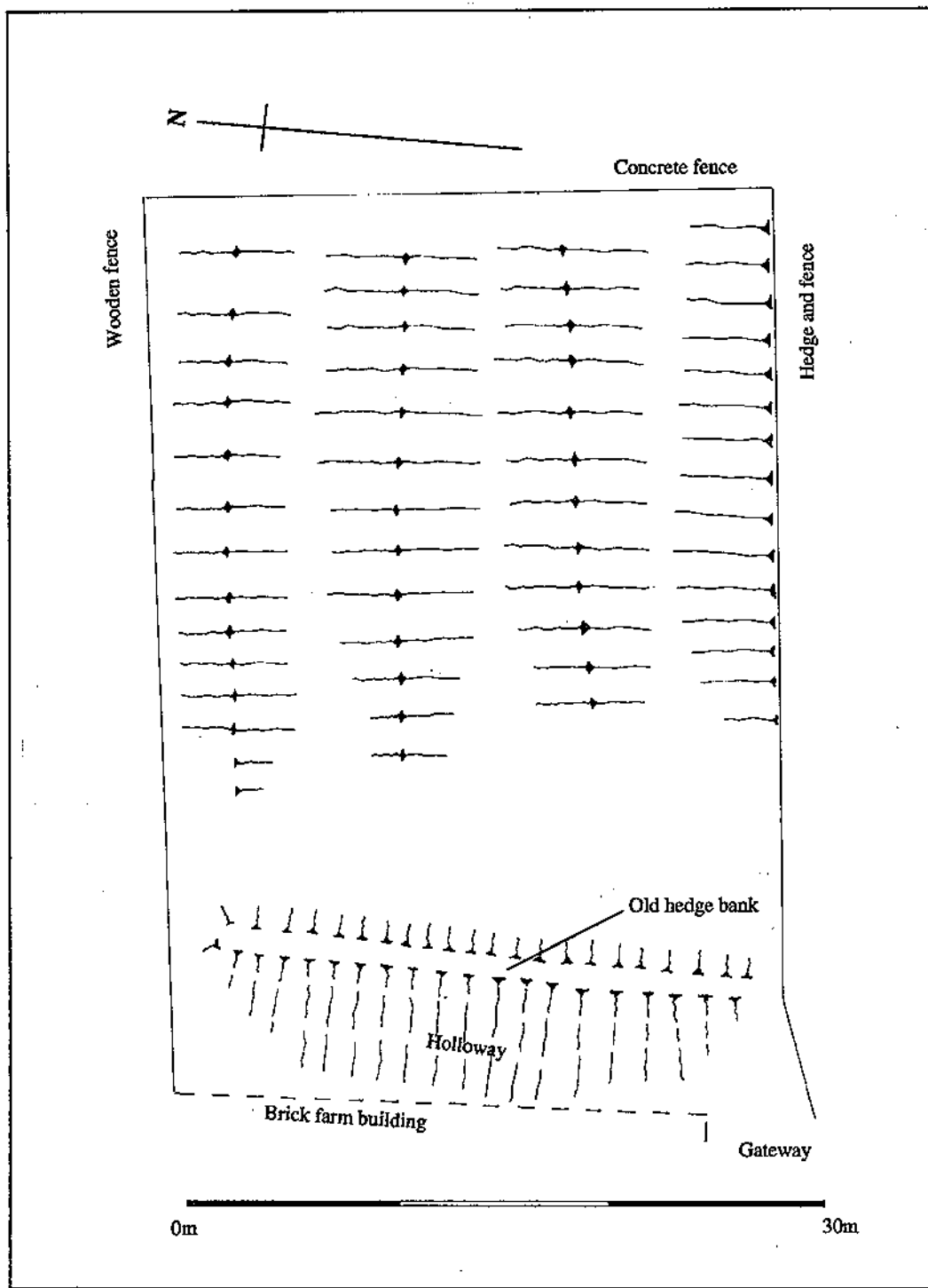
North Farm, Elwick

Fig. 5

Field 1: rigg and furrow



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North Farm, Elwick

Fig. 6

Field 1



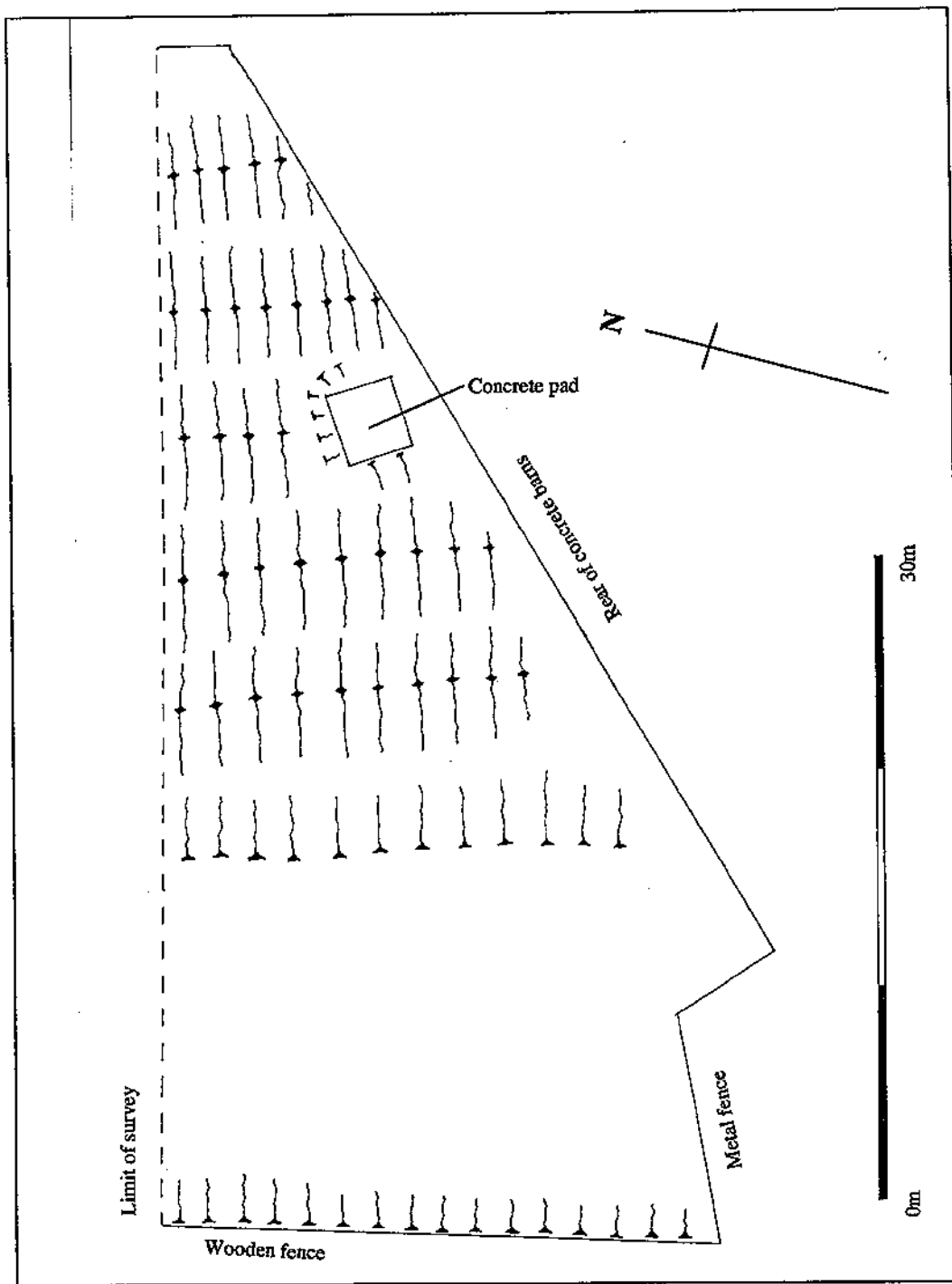
North Farm, Elwick

Fig. 7

Field 2: rigg and furrow



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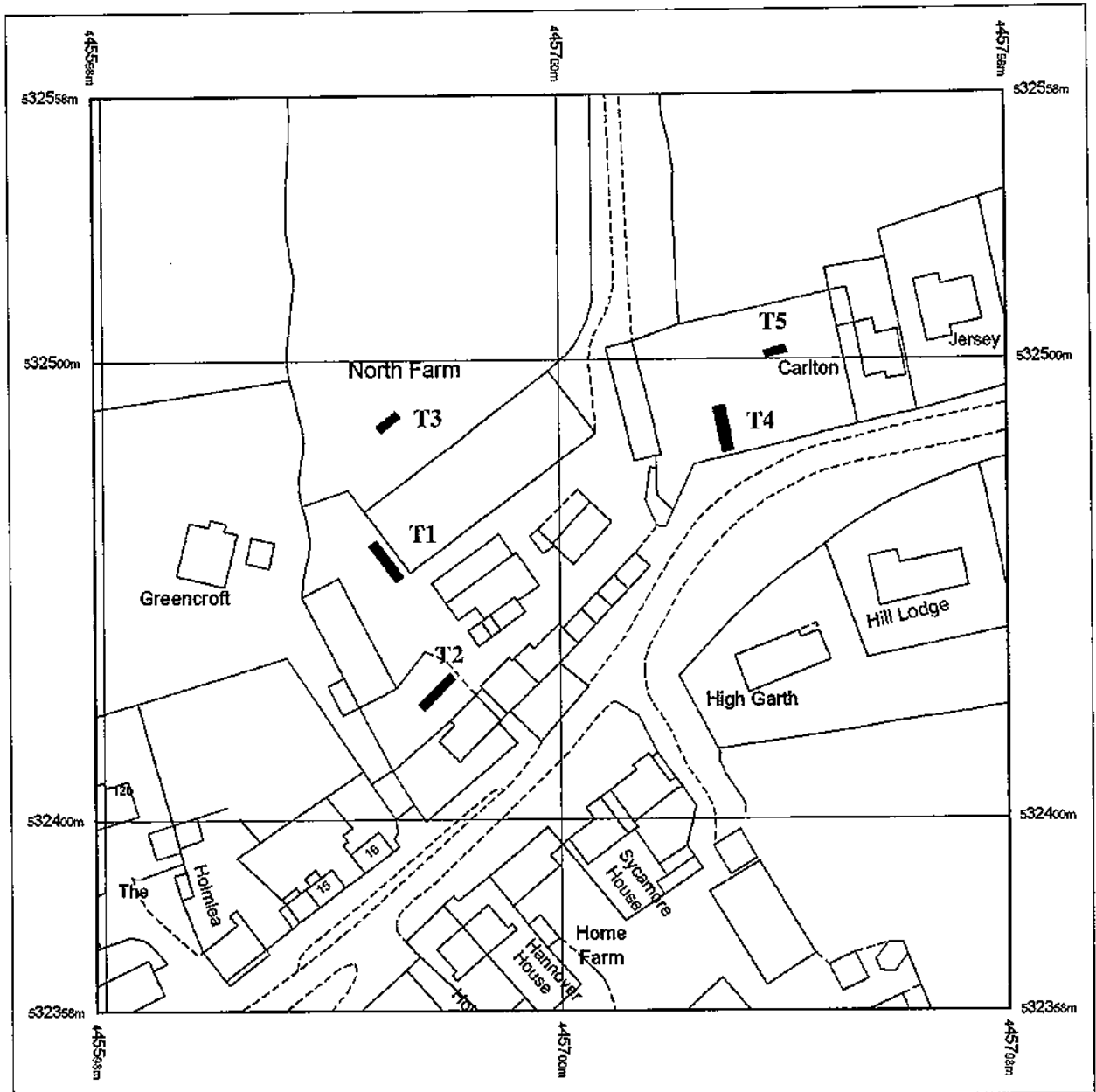


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Fig. 8

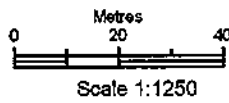
Field 2



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**North Farm, Elwick**

**Fig. 9**

**Location of evaluation trenches**



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Fig. 10

Trench 1, looking north



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Fig. 11

Trench 2, looking west



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North Farm, Elwick

Fig. 12

Trench 3, looking west



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Fig. 13

Trench 4, looking south



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North Farm, Elwick

Fig. 14

Trench 5, looking east