

**Land off Laurel bank,
Felden Lane,
Hemel Hempstead**

An Archaeological Evaluation

for

Twigden Homes

June 1997

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Hemel Hempstead
An Archaeological Evaluation**

by Alan Ford and Graham Hull

Report 97/50

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land off Laurel Bank, Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead (TL 039 058) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. Alan Simpson of Twigden Homes Ltd. Southern House, The Wharf, Godalming, Surrey

The proposed developments comprise two separate planning applications, a single new house with access road replacing 'Laurel Bank' (app. no. 4/00464/97/FUL) and a further eight detached houses to the rear of the site (app. no. 4/00463/97/FUL). Both developments include provision for carparking and landscaping. The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential as it is adjacent to Boxmoor Roman Villa.

St Albans Museum Service carried out an initial phase of archaeological evaluation on the western side of the site prior to the determination of application no. 2/0277/95. The area occupied by 'Laurel Bank' was included within the remit of this evaluation but was not available for investigation. A further phase of evaluation, as a condition on the granting of planning consent, was requested by Mr. Tony Hurley, Planning Archaeologist for Hertfordshire County Council to cover the area of 'Laurel Bank' and to compliment the findings of St Albans Museum Service. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, **Archaeology and Planning** (PPG 16, 1990) and Dacorum Borough Council's archaeological policies.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr. Tony Hurley, Planning Archaeologist for Hertfordshire County Council, archaeological advisor for Dacorum Borough Council.

The field work was undertaken by Alan Ford and Graham Hull on the 17th-19th June 1997. The site code is FLHH 97/50.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located above the flood plain of the River Bulbourne at a height of c. 90 m. above OD, sloping down to the north and west. The site is bounded to the south-west by the grounds of Boxmoor House School and to the north-east and west by gardens of properties fronting onto Felden Lane. The eastern part of the site was, until recently, occupied by a garden centre and the western half of the site is grassland. The underlying geology is a mixture of clay-with-flints (BGS 1990) and chalk marl which has been affected by colluvial creep.

Archaeological Background

The site lies directly adjacent to the Roman Villa of Boxmoor, which is a scheduled ancient monument (Herts 57). This Villa was first recorded and partially investigated during the 19th century. More extensive work was undertaken on the villa during the 1960s in advance of work to extend Boxmoor House School. This excavation recovered a plan of the main villa building and showed it to have had an initial timber construction possibly destroyed or demolished by fire and superseded by a masonry structure (St. Albans Museum Service 1995). Soil creep had occurred over the earliest phase of the villa, possibly due to soil erosion following woodland clearance. Ancillary

buildings associated with the main residence were not noted during these excavations but are likely to be present.

An evaluation of the western part of the present proposal area was undertaken by St. Albans Museum Service in 1995. This revealed the presence of two ditches, that may have flanked a trackway. A number of pits, a lynchet bank and a flint wall were also recorded. A further evaluation to the west of the present proposal suggested that the wall was part of a building incorporating an oven. All these features have been associated with the earliest phase of the villa and dated to the mid to late first century AD. Quantities of flint prepared for use in building and other building materials, including *Tegula Mammata* were recovered suggesting further buildings that may incorporate a hypocaust or plastered walls are in the vicinity.

The 1995 evaluation also recovered a quantity of Prehistoric flint and a single sherd of coarse pottery, which suggests activity in the vicinity of the site since the Neolithic period. This tallies with evidence from the course of the new A41 by-pass that prehistoric settlement extended onto areas of clay-with-flints. Work on the route of the new A41 by-pass also showed there to be peat deposits associated with periglacial 'pingos' at Boxmoor Common. Such deposits would provide important evidence for the vegetation history of the early Flandrian period (St. Albans Museum Service 1995).

Further settlement evidence of Roman date is known from the area including villas at Gadebridge to the north of the site and to the north-east, close to Hemel Hempstead railway station. Roman cremations with grave goods are recorded in the vicinity from 19th century gravel workings (Herts SMR).

Hemel Hempstead was an important centre, with four mills, by the time of the Domesday survey (St. Albans Museum Service 1995) suggesting a large agricultural hinterland to provide grain for the mills. The concentration of Roman material from the area and Prehistoric settlement evidence indicates that this was probably also true in earlier periods.

Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. This was achieved by the excavation of three trenches (Fig. 2). Trenches 1 and 2 were placed in the area of 'Laurel Bank' to evaluate the access route from Felden Lane. These two trenches were 1.6 m wide and 25 m. and 13 m. long respectively. Trench 2 was excavated in a curve due to the limited space available for a machine to work in. Trench 3 was excavated in the western part of the site already evaluated by St Albans Museum Service. This trench was 20 m. long and 4 m. wide and placed to parallel trenches 2 and 5 of the St Albans evaluation.

The trenches were excavated, under archaeological supervision, by a JCB type machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Machine excavation was undertaken onto the first clearly natural surface as overlying deposits were unclear and the spoilheaps monitored for artefacts. The trenches were closely inspected for the presence of possible archaeological features, which were hand cleaned prior to the excavation of representative sections. The trenches and spoilheaps were metal detected to aid in the recovery of metal artefacts.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Trench 1

This trench was excavated on a roughly south-north alignment within 'Laurel Bank' to evaluate the route of the proposed new access route. The trench was 24.0 m. long and 0.70 m. deep with 0.20 m. of topsoil overlying 0.50 m. of friable brown silt/clay subsoil with a diffuse horizon onto the underlying clay-with-flints natural. No archaeological features or deposits were observed but a single sherd of Roman grog tempered pottery with oxidised surfaces was recovered from the spoilheap.

Trench 2

This trench was excavated on a roughly west-east alignment curving onto a more northerly alignment to the east. The trench was 12.70 m. long and 0.80 m. deep with 0.20 m. of topsoil overlying 0.60 m. of friable brown silt clay subsoil with a diffuse horizon onto the underlying clay-with-flints natural. No archaeological features or deposits were observed but two Prehistoric flint flakes and two Post Medieval potsherds were recovered from the spoilheap.

Trench 3

This trench was excavated on a roughly west-east alignment. The trench was 19.60 m. long, 3.80 m. wide and 0.50 m. deep at the west end increasing to 0.80 m. deep at the eastern end. 0.15 m. of topsoil overlay 0.4 m. of friable brown silty clay subsoil onto a

natural geological deposit of clay-with-flints. A chalky marl was present against the western edge of the trench. The subsoil/natural horizon appeared to be marked by a concentrated band of flint nodules.

A linear feature (F02), interpreted as a ditch was recorded in trench 3. This feature was orientated northeast-southwest and was 1.3 m. wide and 0.3 m. deep (Fig. 3, Plate 1). The primary fill of this ditch (50) is distinguished from the secondary fill (51) in that the former has a higher concentration of flints. The slumping, evident in section, may be the result of soil creep from the higher ground to the south of the site. A single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from context 50.

Finds from unstratified contexts in trench 3 included two sherds of pottery of Roman date, three pieces of animal bone, 27 pieces of Roman brick and tile and eight struck flints.

The Finds

The Pottery

A small assemblage of seven potsherds was recovered during the course of the evaluation. Only one sherd was recovered from a stratified context (fill (50) of ditch F[02] in trench 3), this was a small abraded sherd of sandy grey ware of Roman date. A single rimsherd of grog tempered potty with oxidised surfaces was recovered from the spoil of Trench 1, this was probably a fragment of storage jar of Roman date. Two sherds were recovered from the spoil of Trench 2, these were both post-Medieval in date. A decorated bodysherd of micaceous greyware and a base sherd of grog tempered ware with reduced surfaces were recovered during the course of stripping Trench 3 in the vicinity of F[02]. Both these sherds are of Roman date. A single

bodysherd of grog tempered ware of Roman date was recovered from the modern ground surface to the north of the site. The assemblage is too small to draw any conclusions other than that Roman activity is present nearby and that ditch F[02] is probably Roman in date.

The Animal Bone by Andy Smith

Three fragments of unstratified bone were recovered from Trench 3 comprising two fragments of tibia from a cow and one fragment of cow pelvis. The tibial shaft had been truncated by machine damage but possessed a small cut mark at the distal end. As this group is unstratified and constitutes such a small assemblage no conclusions can be made concerning local animal husbandry.

The Brick and Tile

A small assemblage of 34 unstratified brick and tile fragments of Roman date was recovered from the spoil, the machined trench surfaces and the modern ground surface. The majority (27 pieces weighing in total 1748 gm.) were in the southern part of the evaluation area, from the spoil of trench 3. Three fragments (total weight 136 gm.) were recovered from the spoil of trench 1 and a single fragment weighing 8 gm. was recovered from the spoil of trench 2. Three fragments (weighing in total 126 gm.) were recovered from the modern ground surface near trench 3.

The Struck Flint by Steve Ford

A small assemblage of eight struck flints, of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, was recovered during the course of the evaluation. All the flints were unstratified from the

spoilheaps or the machined surfaces of the trenches. The assemblage comprised an intact flake and a broken flake from Trench 2 and three intact flakes and three broken flakes from Trench 3. No diagnostic pieces were included in the collection with which to provide a more accurate date.

Conclusion

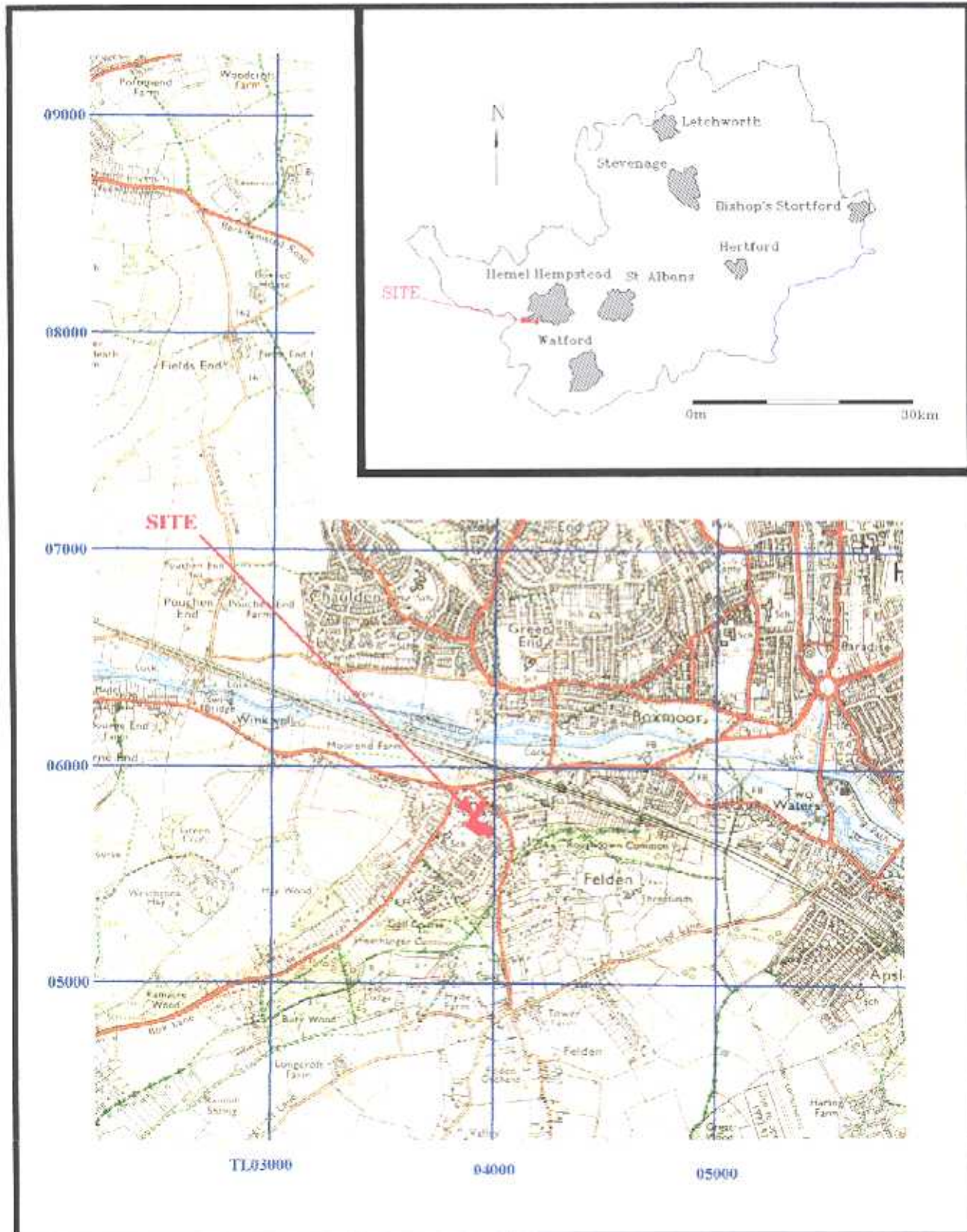
The evaluation has established that the Roman ditch recorded by the St. Albans Museum Service (1995) in their trenches 2 and 5 is likely, to continue northwards and is seen in the TVAS trench 3 as F02. The ditch either terminates or turns, north of this trench as it is not evident in TVAS trench 2. Roman activity, probably associated with the villa, is likely to have occurred across the site, although the greatest proportion of the finds of all types is from trench 3 and it seems that activity associated with the villa decreases as one moves northwards. Prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the site is attested to by the struck flints, although it is not possible to draw any firmer conclusions as to its nature. No deposits of Medieval date were recovered from the site.

References

- BGS, 1990: **British Geological Survey**, 1:50 000, Sheet 238, Drift Edition. Keyworth.
- PPG 16, 1990: **Archaeology and Planning**. Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (HMSO)
- ST. ALBANS MUSEUM SERVICE 1995; Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead. An Archaeological Evaluation. St. Albans Museum Service report. St. Albans

APPENDIX 1 - Trench Details

Trench No.	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	24.00 m.	1.60 m.	0.70 m.	0.20 m. garden soil over 0.50 m. friable brown silty clay subsoil. Natural = Clay-with-Flints.
2	12.60 m.	1.60 m.	0.80 m.	0.20 m. garden soil over 0.60 m. friable brown silty clay subsoil. Natural= Clay-with-Flints. Trench excavated in curve to facilitate machine use.
3	19.60 m.	3.90 m.	0.50 m.- 0.80 m.	0.15 m. topsoil over 0.40 m friable brown silty clay subsoil. Top surface of natural weathered into subsoil. Subsoil-natural horizon marked by flint concentration? Natural = Clay-with-Flints, Chalky marl present against W edge of trench. F[02] Ditch.



Felden Lane,
Hemel Hempstead, 1997

Figure 1. Location of site within Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire



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Sheet TL00/10, 1:25000

Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead, 1997

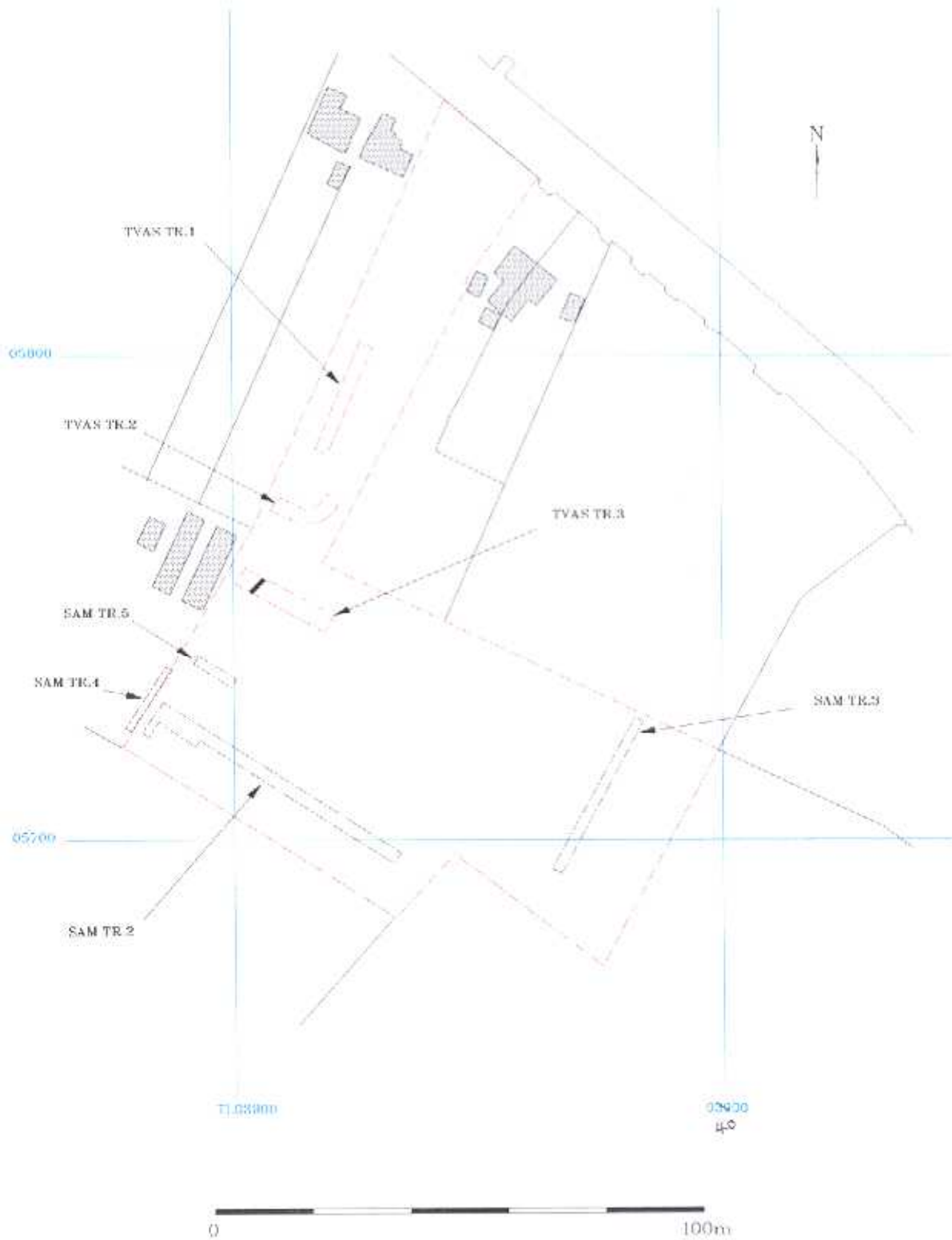
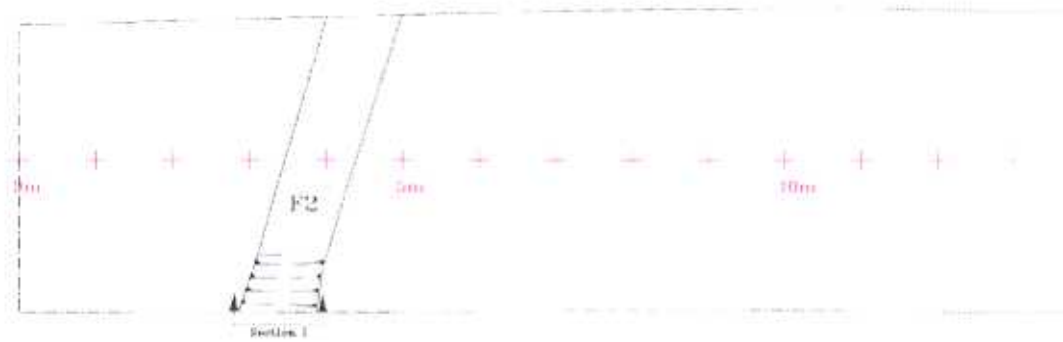


Figure 2. Trench location plan.

Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead, 1997

Trench 3



Section 1

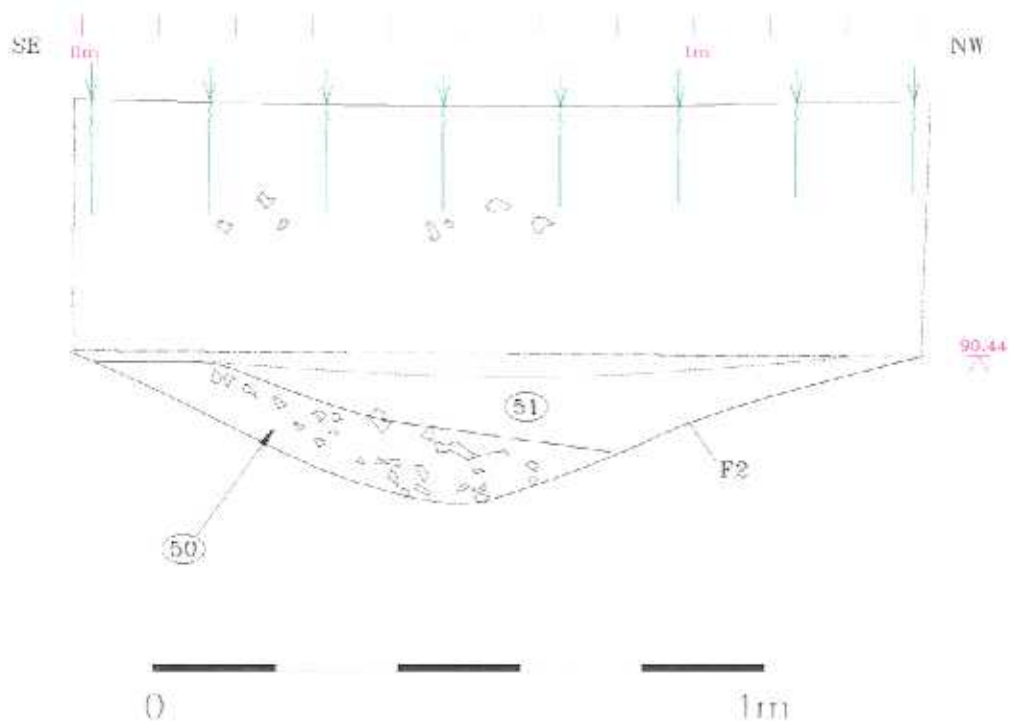


Figure 3. Plan of Trench 3 and section 1.

FLHH97/50



Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead, 1997. Trench 3, general view, looking south east.
Scale 2m.



Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead, 1997. F2 looking south west. Horizontal scale 0.5m.