

Gryme's Dyke, Stanway Green

A short assessment of the archaeological impact
of contractor's groundworks at the southern
end of the Gryme's Dyke Middle earthwork

February 2000



Archive report

on behalf of
Colchester Borough Council
and
Colchester Museum Service



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CAT Report 63

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Pl. 1 General view of site area looking north

Gryme's Dyke, Stanway Green

A short assessment of the archaeological impact of contractor's groundworks at the southern end of the Gryme's Dyke Middle earthwork

(TL 963 233)

CAT project ref.: 002d

Summary

The site, which is located at the southern end of the Gryme's Dyke Middle earthwork (Scheduled Ancient Monument 10h), was visited at the request of Colchester Museum Service in relation to a possible breach of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments Act. The halted work had progressed to a point where four small trenches (approximately 2.0 x 1.0 m by up to 1.0 m deep) had been excavated into the area of the earthwork rampart, which at this point slopes down from a crest height of approximately 2.0 m just to the north of the site to about 0.5 m on the site area. A record of the site was made consisting of an annotated measured sketch plan with measured depths of deposits, and photographs.

Observations of the trench sections showed that much of the area had previously been badly disturbed by existing cable trenches down to a level approximating to, or below, the modern surrounding ground surface, and most of the excavation had taken place within their backfill. Clean silty sand and gravel deposits at the base of the trenches may represent the natural subsoil, though this could not be confirmed. However, on the western side of the site, levels of disturbance were much less. Here subsoil deposits which could not be differentiated from those in the base of the trenches occur to a height of between 0.2 and 0.4 m above the modern ground level and probably represent remains of the earthwork bank. The proposed groundworks include the digging of a further trench, approximately 1.0 x 1.0 m and 1.0 m deep, sited in these deposits.

Background to the report (Fig. 1)

Reason for this report

This report was undertaken at the request of Colchester Museum Services on behalf of Colchester Borough Council following the discovery of groundworks for the relocation of electricity installations at the southern end of Gryme's Dyke Middle earthwork (TL 963 233), which were reported to be in breach of the existing legislation protecting Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Gryme's Dyke

Gryme's Dyke, Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) 10h, is the most westerly and longest of a number of large linear earthwork dykes at Colchester. Most of the dykes were built in the late Iron Age to define and protect the important settlement centre of Camulodunum (Colchester), though some can be dated to the early Roman period which is probably when Gryme's Dyke was constructed (*CAR 11*, 111). The dyke survives for much of its length as an upstanding earthwork and was originally fronted by a ditch on its west side, now mostly infilled. its course can be traced for several kilometres, from New Bridge, north of the River Colne, to Stanway Green (Gryme's Dyke North and Middle) where the earthwork passes through a short dog-leg to the west before running on to the Roman River (Gryme's Dyke South).

There have been three excavations on the dyke near the present site (Fig. 1). Two trenches were dug by C F C Hawkes, one to the north in 1956, and another just to the south on the line of the dyke in 1957; however, little or nothing is known about the results of his work (*CAR 11*, catalogue of excavations and observations, nos 21 and 33). More recently, in 1977 an excavation close to the area of Hawkes' 1956 trench revealed the structure of the bank and demonstrated the presence of the former land surface sealed beneath it. The level of this surface corresponded approximately with that of the present surrounding ground level (*CAR 11*, catalogue of excavations and observations, no 20). The finds from this excavation, which include a small quantity of pottery and a coin (a Claudian *as* dated AD 55-75), form an important group in discussions relating to the dating of the dyke and in suggesting an early Roman date for its construction.

The groundworks trenches (Fig. 2)

The site was visited by the author on the afternoon of Tuesday 15th February, when all work had been halted, and a record of the groundworks as completed to that time was made consisting of a sketch plan, reproduced here as Figure 2, together with some photographs. The site works as completed at that time consisted of four separate machine-excavated

trenches, each revealing a length of electricity cable, and situated close to the base of two existing telegraph poles supporting a transformer. The main surviving bulk of the Gryme's Dyke Middle rampart, approximately 2.0 m in height, survives immediately to the north of the site of this work, and from that point the rampart remains slope down through the works site, so that the northern part of the site is approximately 0.5 m above the surrounding ground level while just beyond its southern extent the bank has almost completely faded away.

The four contractor's trenches (Fig. 2, Trenches 1-4) varied in size and shape but can be summarised as generally between 1.5 and 2.0 m long, about 1.0 m wide (though Trenches 1 and 4 also had short lengths of narrow trench extending from them), and between 0.5 and 1.0 m deep.

The trench sections showed that most of the site area is badly disturbed, with the trenches having been dug almost entirely through modern deposits, mostly the backfill of existing electricity cables. Modern brick fragments, concrete, and pieces of plastic were observed in the sections and in the spoil. In Trenches 1, 2 and 4 the backfill consisted of a dark brown sandy loam, though in Trench 3 it was a fairly clean pale brown silty sand and gravel. Rapid cleaning of areas of the sections showed that the cable cuts appeared to be quite wide, sloping up into the sides of the trenches, and tops of cuts were found only in the narrow trench extensions to Trenches 1 and 4. At no point across the central and eastern area of the site was the topsoil recorded as less than about 0.5 m in depth. The base of each of the trenches consisted of clean silty sand and gravel which had been slightly bitten into around their edges away from the base of the cable cuts. This deposit could be natural subsoil as it appeared to be quite clean, and no finds material was seen in it during its limited examination; however, its definite origin could not be firmly established. The 1977 excavation recorded the old land surface beneath the rampart at approximately the same general level as that of the modern surrounding ground, and while the area of the works site is approximately 0.4-0.5 m above the modern ground level (as represented by the road), the general depths of modern soil across the site, at between 0.5 and 0.7 m deep, would suggest that any rampart material here may already have been removed. It should be noted that it is not clear to what extent the cuts for the cables alone affect the general depth of modern soil in this area, or to what extent this represents a more general soil disturbance or accumulation. Also the road surface may be artificially high in relation to other surrounding surface levels.

On the western edge of the site, close to the road, the levels of disturbance appeared to be much less. The tops of the existing cable cuts were observed in the narrow sections of trench, and beyond these the modern topsoil was between 0.1 and 0.2 m deep resting on silty sand and gravel which appeared quite clean. Though no differentiation could be made between this material and that at the base of the trenches on the rest of the site, and no indication of a former land surface was seen, it seems probable that it represents the remains of the rampart bank at between 0.2 and 0.4 m high above that of the surrounding ground levels.

Proposed further groundworks

During the site visit of 15th February 2000, a workman described what was proposed for further groundworks. This work is as follows:

- the southern telegraph pole (one of the pair supporting the transformer) to be removed
- the transformer to be relocated on a concrete base close to the road which will require the excavation of a further trench approximately 1.0 x 1.0 m in area and 1.0 m deep (area outlined and hatched on Fig. 2)
- the relocated transformer to be connected by cables, probably through the area of Trenches 1, 2 and 3 to the remaining telegraph pole. This will involve digging out the baulks between these trenches.

Note: an accurate plan of the site is currently in preparation.

Abbreviations

CAR 11 *Camulodunum 2*, C F C Hawkes and Philip Crummy, 1995

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Pl. 2 Site area looking south, Trench 1 in foreground.



Pl. 3 Site area looking north, Trench 4 in foreground.



Pl. 4 Site area looking north to site of proposed trench (middle left of picture), Trench 4 in foreground.

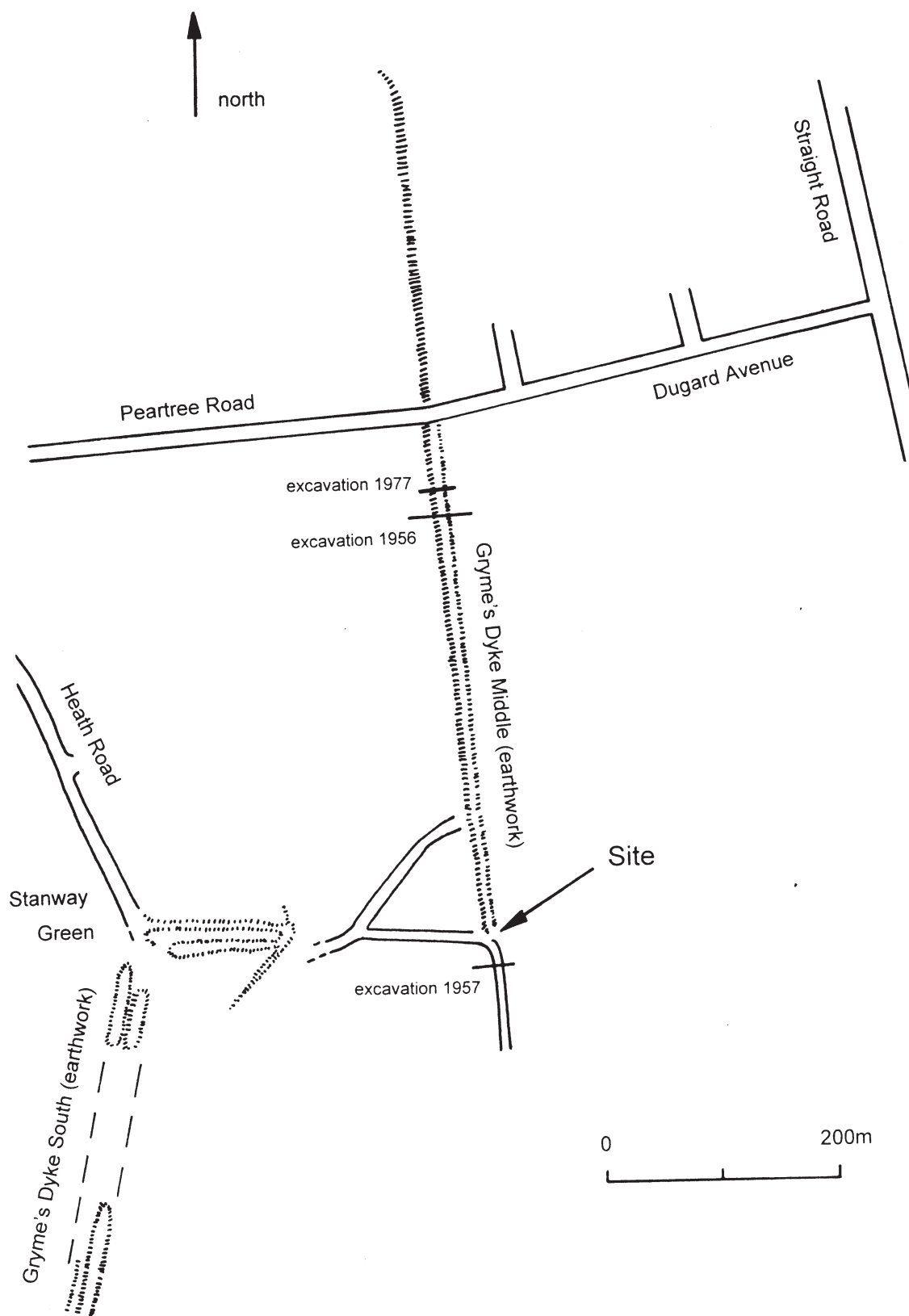


Fig.1 Gryme's Dyke, Stanway Green: site location

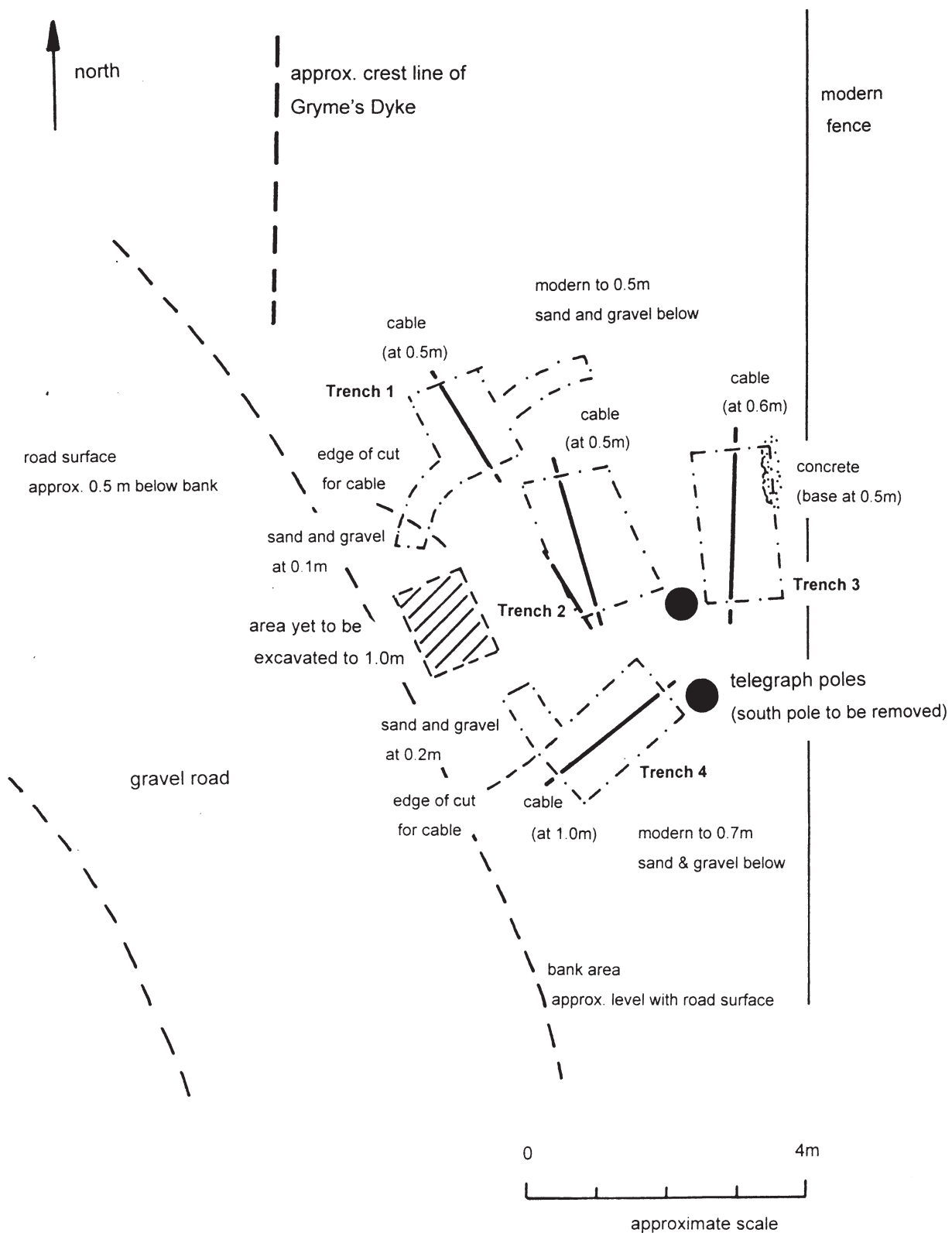
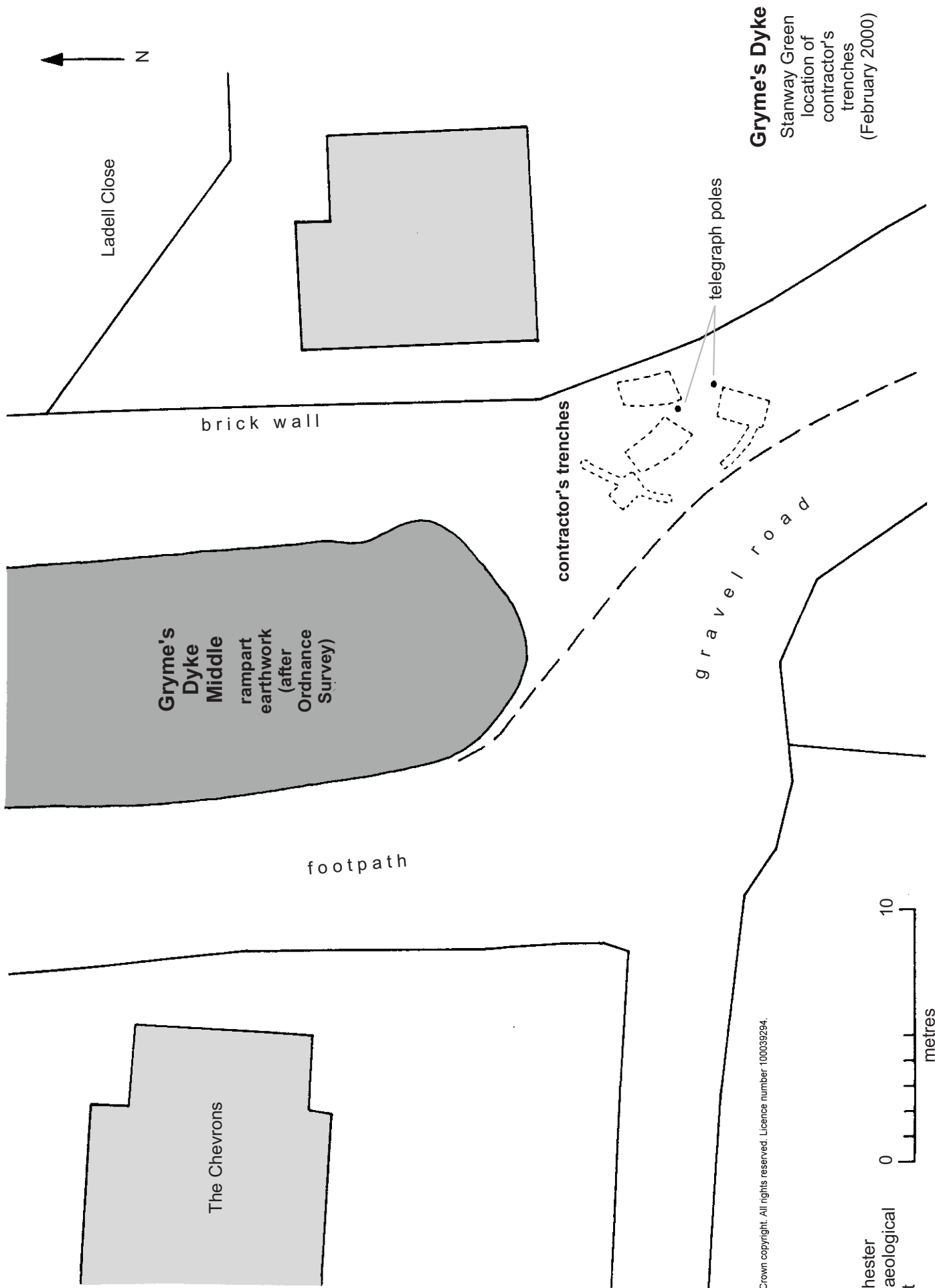


Fig.2 Gryme's Dyke, Stanway Green: sketch based plan of disturbed area



Gryme's Dyke
Stanway Green
location of
contractor's
trenches
(February 2000)

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