

Land adjacent to
The Royal Oak, Blackthorn
Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR 6228 1934

Oxford Archaeological Unit

January 1995

Land adjacent to The Royal Oak, Blackthorn, Oxon BLR094

Archaeological Evaluation

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to the Royal Oak public house in Blackthorn, Oxon, revealed evidence of medieval agricultural usage followed by post medieval land consolidation and building.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by the Broughton Beatty Partnership to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to the Royal Oak public house in Blackthorn, Oxon (NGR SU 62281934). This was in accordance with the guidelines of PPG16, and the advice of the County Archaeologist Mr Paul Smith, and related to Planning Application CHS 569/93 to build three detached dwellings on the site.

BACKGROUND (Fig. 1)

Blackthorn lies approximately 3 miles E of Bicester, on Lower Oxford Clay. The village partly surrounds a large 'green' with long narrow parcels of land radiating from it, particularly on the S and E sides. This arrangement of land is suggested as being characteristic of medieval workshops in the front of the plot, supported by a croft to the rear. The proposed development area is part of one of these parcels of land. The site at present contains a derelict cottage ('Regina') and associated outbuildings, of uncertain date, but possibly early 19th century.

Although no recorded archaeological excavation has been conducted in the area, Iron Age and Romano British pottery has been found in the vicinity.

AIMS

As required by the brief set by the County Archaeologist, the aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence/absence, extent, character and condition of archaeological deposits in the area due to be affected by invasive development.

METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)

Six trenches were sited to correspond with the footprints of the proposed buildings and their services. Each trench was 1.5 m wide. The total length of trenching was approximately 64 m, amounting to 3% of the total development area. In some cases the trench length and/or position was altered slightly to avoid tree roots, heavy undergrowth, services or standing buildings.

Each trench was machine excavated, using a 360° tracked excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, initially down to the first significant archaeological horizon or

natural, whichever came first. In parts of each trench, the later archaeological deposits were then removed to sample the underlying stratigraphy.

Significant archaeological deposits were cleaned by hand and where necessary excavated to recover dating evidence.

Recording was by standard OAU procedures (OAU Fieldwork Manual ed. D. Wilkinson 1990). All features and deposits were assigned unique context numbers trench-by-trench. The trench number acts as a prefix to the context number (ie 4/1 = trench 4 context 1).

The fieldwork took place between December 19th and 21st 1994. The County Archaeologist Mr Paul Smith visited the site on the 20th.

RESULTS

General

Natural subsoil, a compact pale brown/orange clay, was exposed in all the trenches. In the N end of Trench 1 lenses of coarse sand were noted within the natural.

The water table was unexpectedly high, approximately 62.78 at the S end of the site and 62.16 at the N end.

Root disturbance was heavy in the top 0.40 m of deposits in most of the trenches, but did not extend deep enough to disturb or damage the lower deposits.

Trench 1 NW-SE 16.8 m x 1.5 m (Fig. 3)

The Northern 11 m revealed the natural subsoil overlaid by a 0.10 m deep layer of mottled grey/orange silty clay with charcoal flecking, (1/7) which produced no dating evidence. This was sealed by a layer of dumped small rubble 1/6, 0.10 m deep, which extended the full length of the trench. At a point approximately 11.5 m from the N end of the trench, (5.5 m N of the N wall of the cottage), 1/6 was overlaid by a compact mottled grey/brown clay dump 1/4, which produced 18th century pottery dating. This was cut by a lightly founded unmortared rubble wall 1/5, 0.9 m wide and 0.40 m deep. This extended along the W side of the trench to the N edge of the layer 1/4. 18th century pottery was also recovered from the fabric of the wall.

With the authority of the County Archaeological Officer, the trench was extended to the front of the standing cottage. Although hampered by a concrete covered modern service trench, it was seen that the wall 1/5 butted up to the limestone rubble foundation (1/12) underlying the present building.

Overlying layer 1/4, the wall 1/5, and the limestone layer 1/6 was a general layer of mid/dark grey silty clay 1/3, which produced some 19th century sherds from the S end of the trench.

Sealing layer 1/3 was a mid grey brown silty clay layer 1/2, at the S end of the trench, and,

overall a very humic silty loam topsoil 1/1.

Trench 2 SW-NE 5.0 m x 1.5 m (Fig. 4)

The clay subsoil 2/8 was overlaid by a mid grey silty clay 2/7, up to 0.15 m deep, and a mottled orange-grey silty clay 2/6, up to 0.25 deep.

In the E end of the trench, 2/6 was cut by a shallow feature, possibly a pit, seen only in the S section, 2/5. This was filled with a grey silty clay 2/4 and an orange brown silty clay 2/3.

The pit fill 2/3 and the layer 2/6 were overlaid by a buried ploughsoil 2/2 and the topsoil 2/1. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the deposits in this trench.

Trench 3 NW-SE 14.8 m x 1.5 m (Fig. 4)

The natural clay 3/4 was overlaid by a general dumped layer of limestone rubble 3/3 averaging 0.15 m deep, a remnant of buried topsoil 3/2, 0.14 m deep, and the topsoil 3/1, which at the N end of the trench was heavily contaminated by modern rubbish and building debris. No dating evidence was recovered from the buried deposits.

Trench 4 NW-SE 8.50 m x 1.5 m (Fig. 5, NB Sections 1 and 2 are incorrectly labelled)

The natural clay 4/12 was sealed by a dark grey silty clay layer 4/9, averaging 0.20 m deep, and appearing to tip slightly to W. Sherds of sand-tempered unglazed 13th century pottery were recovered from this layer, as was an iron blade, probably a bill, set into the remnant of a bone handle (SF.1).

Layer 4/9 was cut by a rubble wall footing 4/11 in the S half of the trench, oriented NW-SE, approximately 0.90 m wide and 0.45 m deep as seen in section, and at least 5.0 m long, although the S extent of the wall was not clearly identifiable. The building to which this wall relates presumably stood immediately to the E of the trench.

In the E section, within the putative building, was a layer of mixed orange brown clay and small rubble 4/13, dumped over the medieval layer 4/9. This probably served as a make up for a floor, rather than a floor surface in itself, as no finds or signs of occupation were noted in it.

To the W and NW of the wall 4/11 and overlying 4/9 was a general dumped layer of limestone rubble 4/5. This extended across the trench to an indistinct edge of NW-SE aligned uncut limestone blocks 4/6, to the E of which was a layer of compacted yellowish grey clay and small rubble 4/7. These contexts both appeared to be contemporary with and respecting the wall 4/11.

13th century sherds were recovered from within the silty clay matrix of 4/5, although they were considered to be residual, the stones having sunk into the medieval layer beneath and

the sherds being excavated from the underlying material.

The wall 4/11 and its contemporary surfaces were sealed by 4/4 and 4/3, buried cultivation and topsoil dating to the 18th/19th centuries.

Layer 4/3 was sealed by a mortar/gravel surface 4/2, which may well have related to the derelict building NW of the trench. This was itself covered by 4/1, the present topsoil.

Trench 5 NW-SE 10.5 m x 1.5 m (Fig. 6)

The natural clay 5/5 was overlaid by a dark grey silty clay 5/4, up to 0.16 m deep. 13th century pottery was recovered from this layer.

This was sealed by a dumped layer of mixed orange/grey clay and small rubble 5/3. A quantity of 13th century pottery was recovered from this layer.

Aligned NW-SE, and partly revealed along the E side of the trench was a rubble wall footing 5/6, at least 0.90 m wide. Both N and S ends of this wall were exposed, aligning with the ends of the W wall of 'Regina' cottage. Within the matrix of the wall were the decayed stumps of two wooden posts. It was felt that the wall cut layer 5/3, although this could not be proved within the excavated area.

Sealing layer 5/3 was a 0.10 m deep layer of small limestone rubble cobbling 5/2. This was sealed, as was the wall 5/6, by the present topsoil 5/1.

Trench 6 SW-NE 5.8 m x 1.5 m (Fig. 4)

The natural clay 6/6 was overlaid by a layer of dumped limestone rubble 6/5, 0.10 m deep. Sealing this layer were two, apparently water laid silty deposits 6/4 and 6/3, totalling 0.30 m in depth. Fragments of roof tile were recovered from 6/4. Layer 6/3 was sealed by a buried topsoil 6/2 and the present topsoil 6/1.

DISCUSSION

The small assemblage of 13th century finds, from a buried topsoil layer (4/9 and 5/4) indicate some medieval activity on the site, but the lack of evidence of building, or of domestic occupation and refuse suggest that this activity was of a low level agricultural nature. There is a preponderance of medieval finds from the W side of the site, which could suggest that Trenches 4 and 5 might be close to a site of occupation, but this must be a very tentative possibility.

Not until the 18th century is there clear evidence of building, and this appears to have been preceded by a major programme of consolidation of the site by dumping limestone rubble, presumably to alleviate the problem of the high water table. Only in the far SE corner of the site (Tr.2) was this dumped layer not present. In Tr.6 the stone layer is sealed by apparent water laid deposits, suggesting that this end of the site continued to be subjected to flooding until modern times.

The evidence of building (Tr.4, 5, and 1) aligns with the present derelict structures and probably represents outbuildings, and in the case of Tr. 1 (1/5) possibly a garden wall.

There is some contradiction between the apparent date of these excavated structures, as indicated by the pottery, and the apparent age of 'Regina' Cottage, as suggested by its appearance. Further documentary research may show that the cottage is older than it appears. An alternative explanation could be that the present building was constructed on the foundations (1/12) of an original structure. It was not possible to clarify this point during the evaluation.

The only direct evidence for dating of the structures is the 17/18th century pottery from the wall in trench 1. The presence of two decayed stumps of wooden posts in the wall in trench 5 suggests a late date, the wood should not have survived from a medieval structure. The wall in trench 4 post-dates the 13th century and pre-dates the 18/19th century, its use being contemporary with deposits 4/7 and 4/13 which are undated. It would seem likely that the wall may belong to buildings of the 17th/18th century.

CONCLUSION

Despite the restraints on the extent of the evaluation, the results suggest that the site was not occupied until the post-medieval period. This suggests that assumptions concerning the long parcels of land radiating from the green need to be reconsidered. Given that the area appears to have been characterised by a very high water table, it may well be, as suggested by the archaeological evidence, that the plots were only ever intended for agricultural use, and not occupation in medieval times.

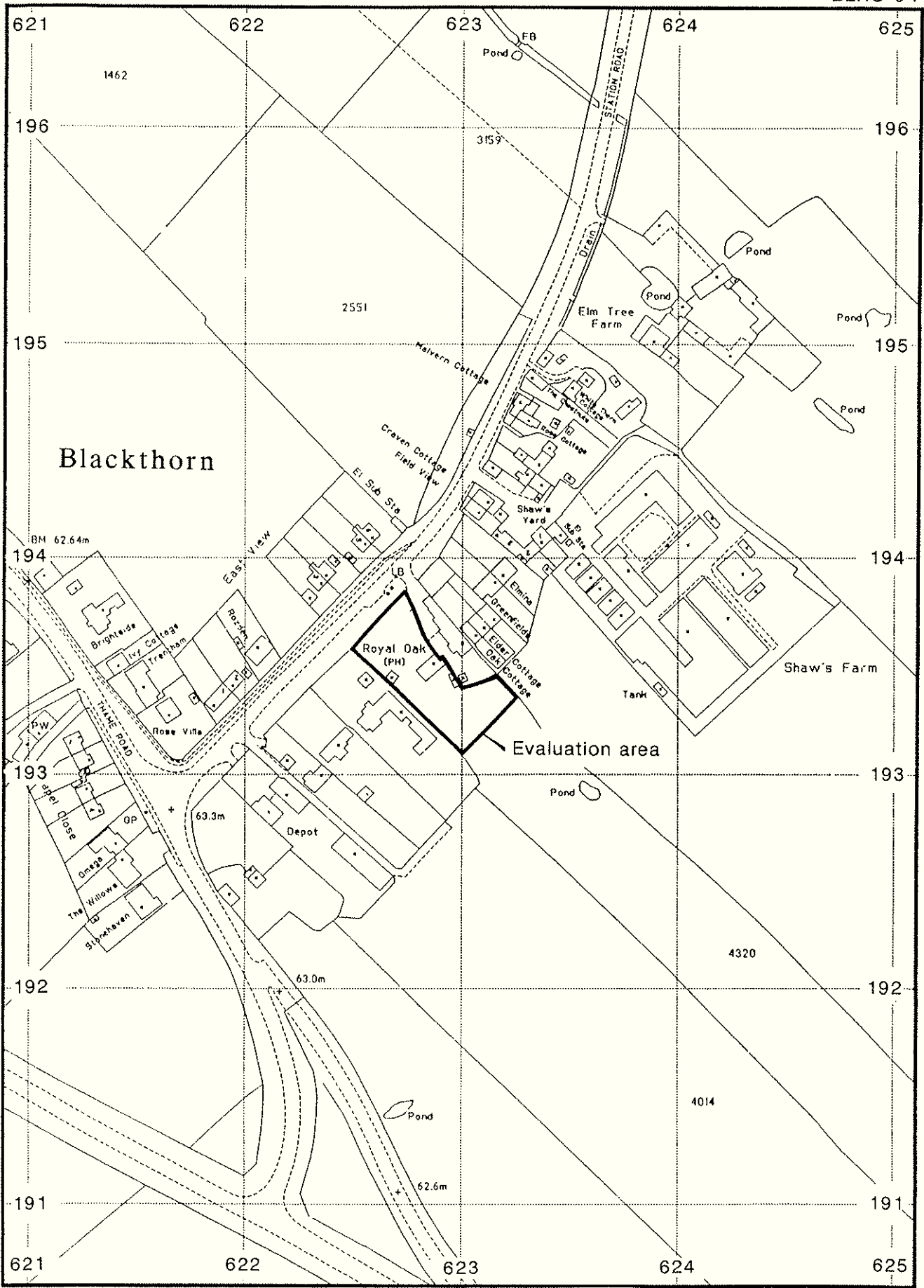
Alan Hardy
OAU
January 1995

LAND ADJACENT TO THE ROYAL OAK, BLACKTHORN, OXON.

TABLE OF CONTEXTS

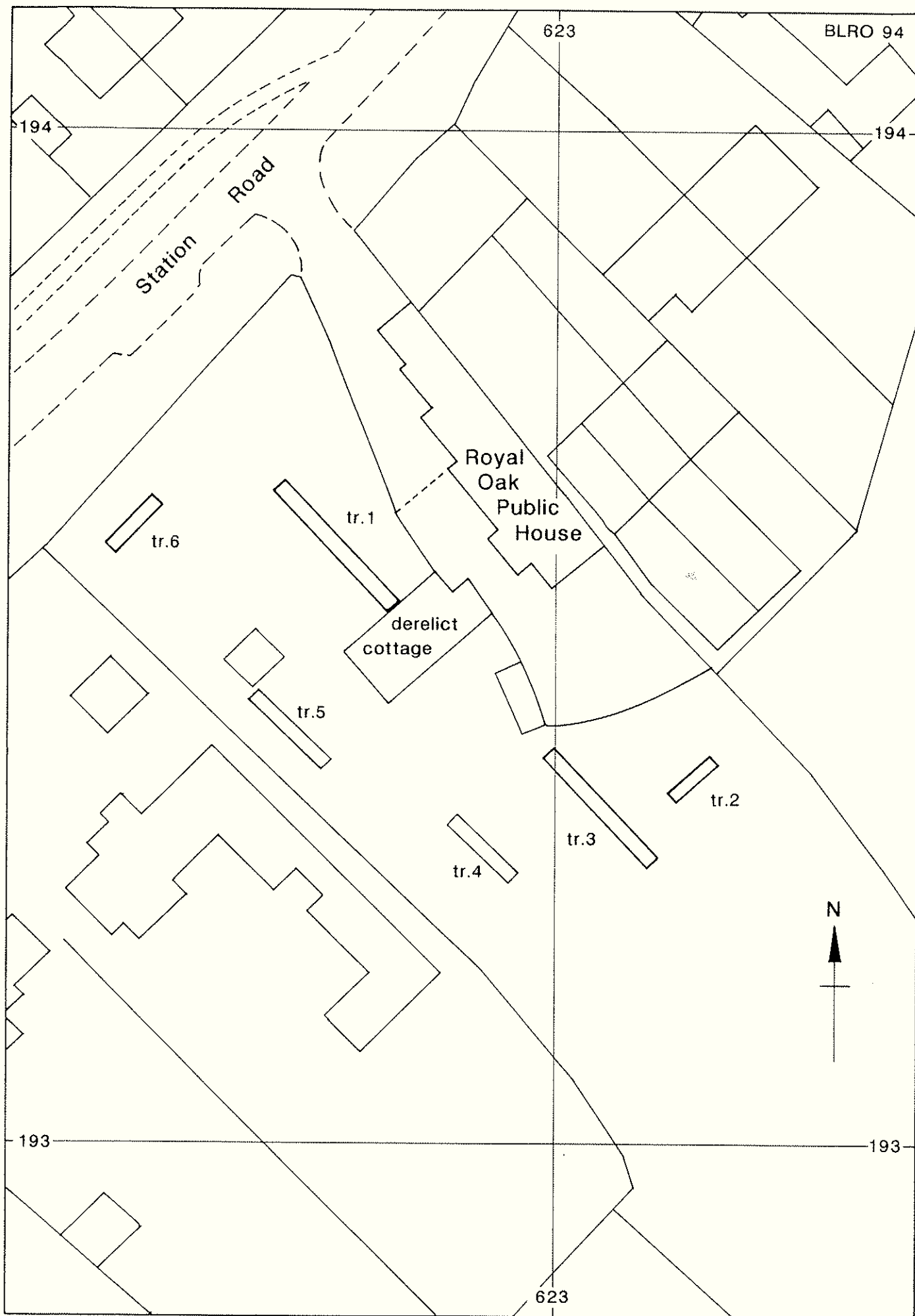
| CXT | TYPE | WIDTH | DEPTH | DATE | COMMENTS | FINDS |
|------|---------|-------------|-------|--------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1/1 | LAYER | - | <0.27 | MOD | TOPSOIL | |
| 1/2 | LAYER | - | 0.10 | MOD | DUMPED DEPOSIT | |
| 1/3 | LAYER | - | <0.28 | E.MOD | ACCUMULATION | 18th/19th c. pot |
| 1/4 | LAYER | - | <0.23 | P.MED | LEVELLING | 18th c. pot |
| 1/5 | WALL | 0.55 x 4.70 | 0.32 | P.MED | GARDEN WALL? | 17th/18th c. pot |
| 1/6 | LAYER | - | 0.10 | P.MED | CONSOLIDATION | |
| 1/7 | LAYER | - | <0.17 | MED | FLOOD DEPOSIT | |
| 1/8 | LAYER | - | <0.12 | - | NATURAL | |
| 1/9 | LAYER | | | - | NATURAL | |
| 1/10 | CUT | 0.55 x 4.70 | 0.32 | P.MED | CUT FOR WALL 1/5 | |
| 1/11 | LAYER | | | - | NATURAL SANDY LENS | |
| 1/12 | FOOTING | - | >0.50 | P.MED? | COTTAGE FOUNDATION | |
| 1/13 | TRENCH | 1.00 | - | MOD | PIPE TRENCH | |
| | | | | | | |
| 2/1 | LAYER | - | <0.25 | MOD | TOPSOIL | |
| 2/2 | LAYER | - | <0.05 | P.MED | BURIED SOIL | |
| 2/3 | FILL | - | 0.06 | P MED? | UPPER FILL OF 2/5 | |
| 2/4 | FILL | - | 0.26 | P MED? | LOWER FILL OF 2/5 | |
| 2/5 | CUT | c.2.0 | <0.40 | P MED? | SHALLOW PIT | |
| 2/6 | LAYER | - | 0.25 | P MED? | FLOOD DEPOSIT | |
| 2/7 | LAYER | - | 0.22 | P MED | FLOOD DEPOSIT | |
| 2/8 | LAYER | - | - | - | NATURAL | |
| | | | | | | |
| 3/1 | LAYER | - | 0.16 | MOD | TOPSOIL | |
| 3/2 | LAYER | - | 0.14 | P.MED | BURIED TOPSOIL | |
| 3/3 | LAYER | - | 0.15 | P.MED | DUMPED STONE LEVELLING/SURFACE | |
| 3/4 | LAYER | - | - | - | NATURAL | |
| | | | | | | |
| 4/1 | LAYER | - | <0.18 | MOD | TOPSOIL | |
| 4/2 | LAYER | - | <0.20 | MOD | MORTAR FLOOR SURFACE | |
| 4/3 | LAYER | - | <0.25 | MOD | BURIED TOPSOIL | |
| 4/4 | LAYER | - | 0.06 | E.MOD | ACCUMULATION | 18th c. pot |
| 4/5 | LAYER | - | <0.25 | P.MED | DUMPED STONE LEVELLING/SURFACE | 13th c. pot (residual) |

| | | | | | | |
|------|---------|--------------|-------|--------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 4/6 | FEATURE | 2.5 N-S | - | P.MED | KERB? PART OF 4/5 | |
| 4/7 | LAYER | - | - | P.MED | CLAY/STONE SURFACE | |
| 4/8 | VOID | | | | | |
| 4/9 | LAYER | - | 0.20 | MED | CULTIVATION LAYER | 12th/13th c. pot. Iron bill blade. |
| 4/10 | DEPOSIT | - | - | P.MED | PART OF 4/11 | |
| 4/11 | WALL | 0.90 x >4.50 | 0.80 | P.MED | BUILDING TO E. | |
| 4/12 | LAYER | - | - | - | NATURAL | |
| 4/13 | LAYER | - | 0.18 | P.MED | FLOOR MAKE UP | |
| 4/14 | CUT | 0.90 x >4.50 | <0.80 | P.MED | CUT FOR WALL 4/11 | |
| | | | | | | |
| 5/1 | LAYER | - | 0.25 | MOD | TOPSOIL | |
| 5/2 | LAYER | - | 0.10 | E.MOD | COBBLED LAYER | |
| 5/3 | LAYER | - | <0.18 | P.MED | MAKE UP FOR 5/2 | 13th/14th c. pot |
| 5/4 | LAYER | - | 0.10 | MED | CULTIVATION SOIL | 13th c. pot |
| 5/5 | LAYER | - | - | - | NATURAL | |
| 5/6 | WALL | 7.0 x >1.1 | - | P.MED | NW-SE WALL | |
| 5/7 | CUT | 7.0 x >1.1 | - | P.MED | CUT FOR WALL 5/6 | |
| | | | | | | |
| 6/1 | LAYER | - | 0.20 | MOD | TOPSOIL | |
| 6/2 | LAYER | - | 0.22 | MOD | BURIED TOPSOIL | |
| 6/3 | LAYER | - | <0.10 | E.MOD? | FLOOD DEPOSIT | |
| 6/4 | LAYER | - | 0.20 | P.MED | FLOOD DEPOSIT | Post med roof tile. |
| 6/5 | LAYER | - | 0.10 | P.MED | STONE CONSOLIDATION | |
| 6/6 | LAYER | - | - | - | NATURAL | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |



Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map of 1993 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright Site location scale 1:2500

Figure 1

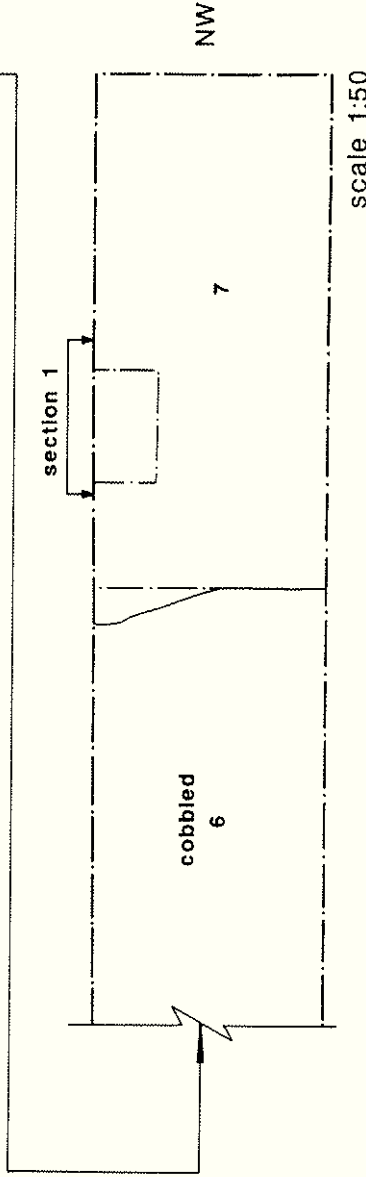
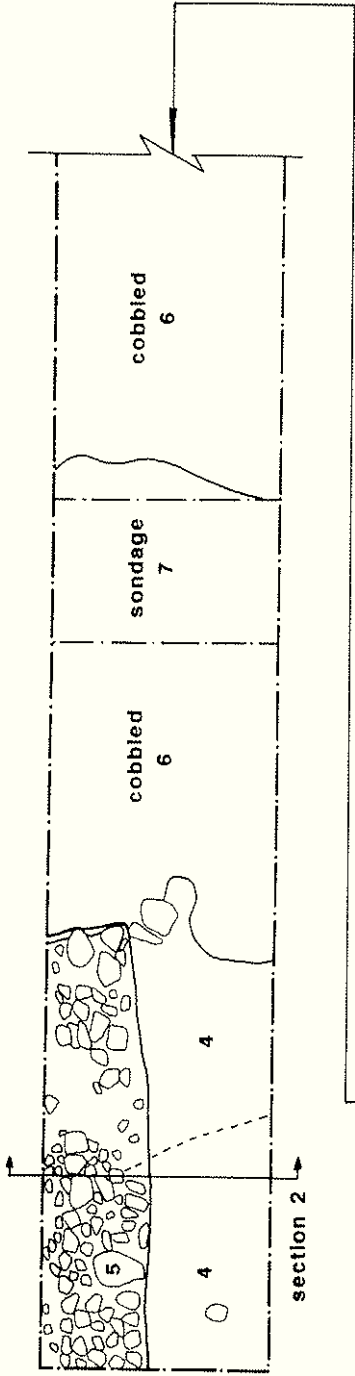
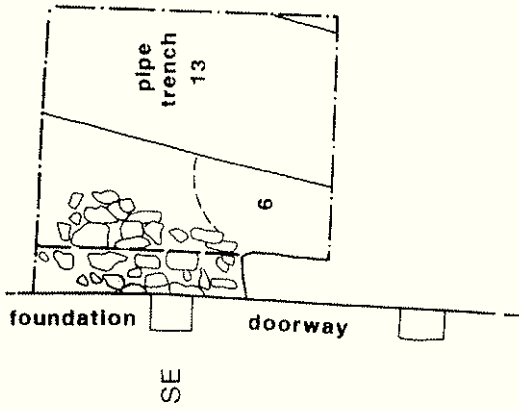


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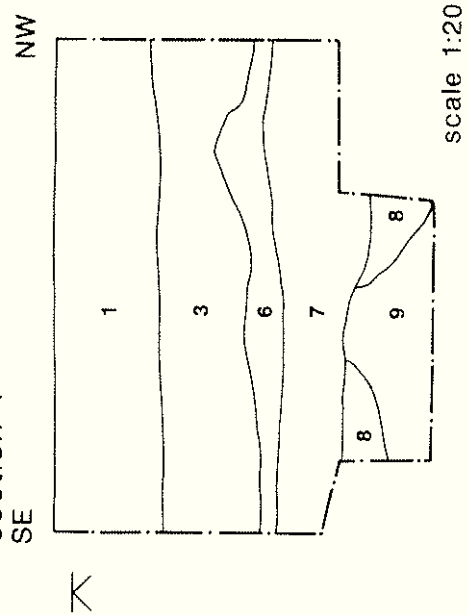
Trench location

Figure 2

Trench 1



section 1



section 2

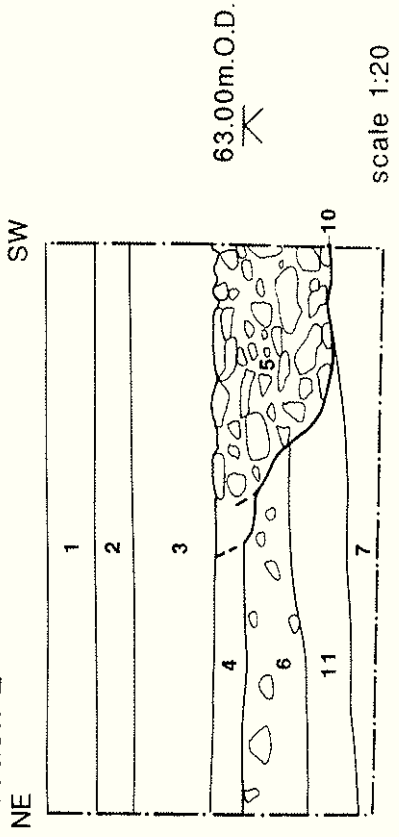


Figure 3

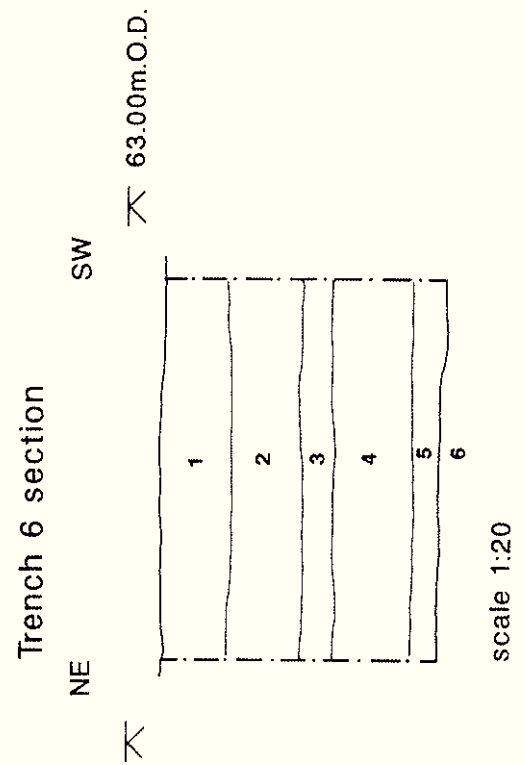
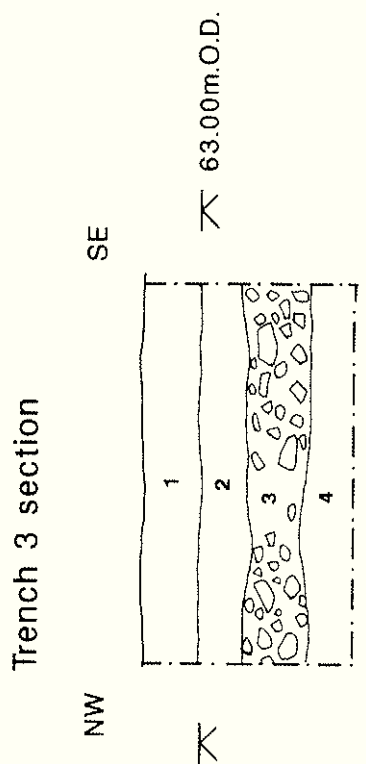
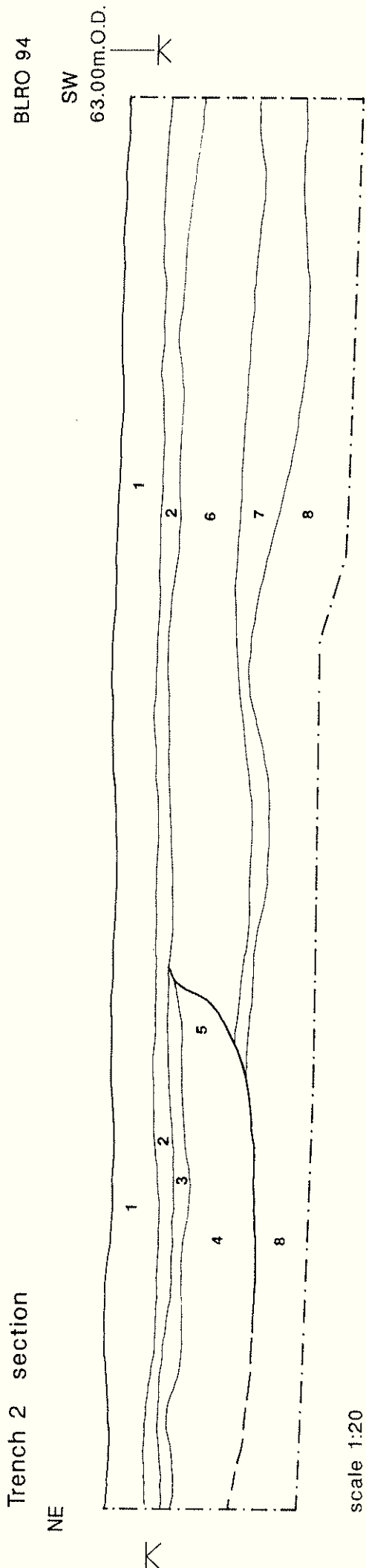
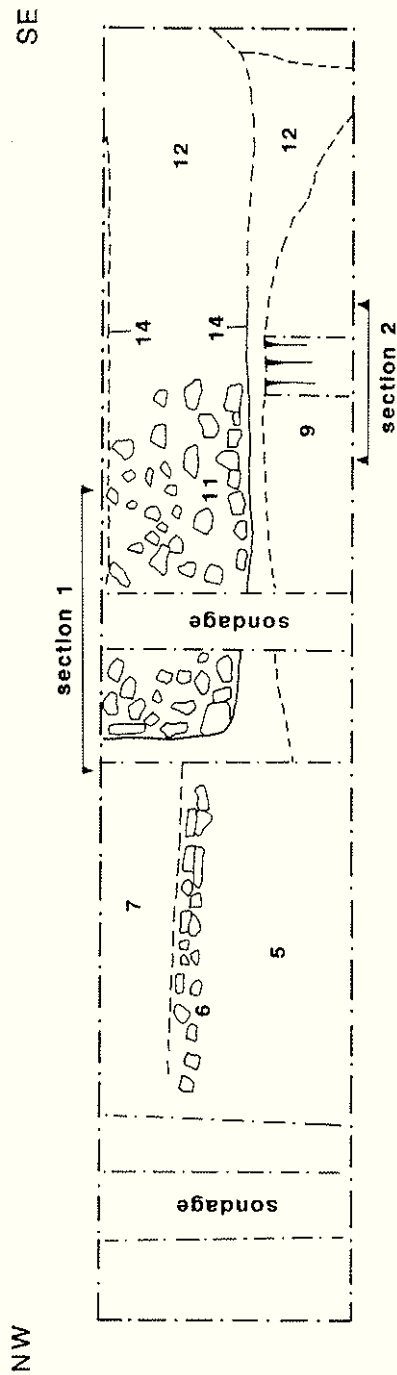


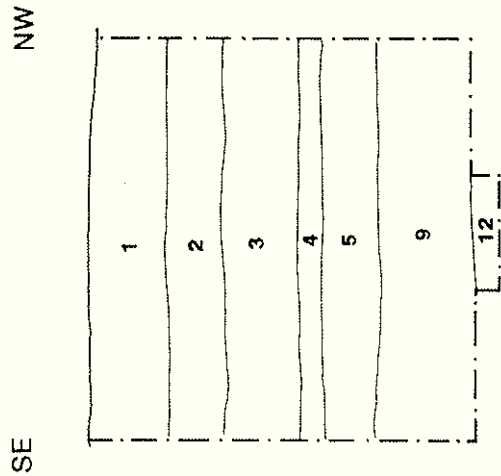
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Trench 4



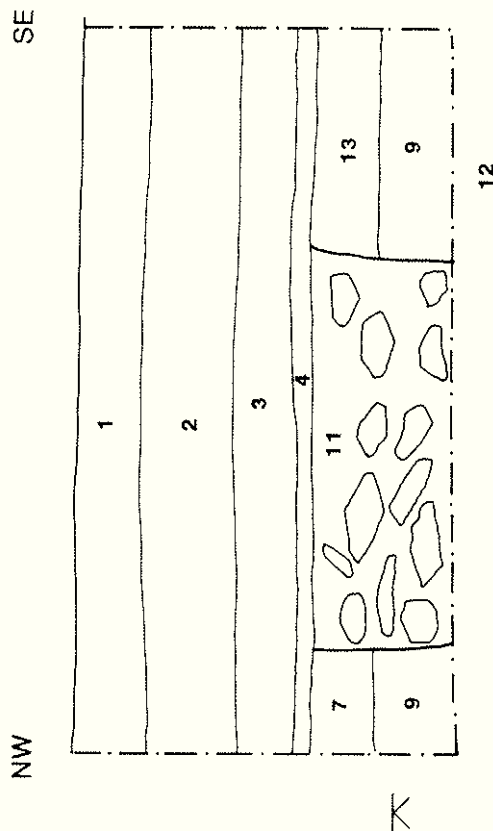
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section 1



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section 2



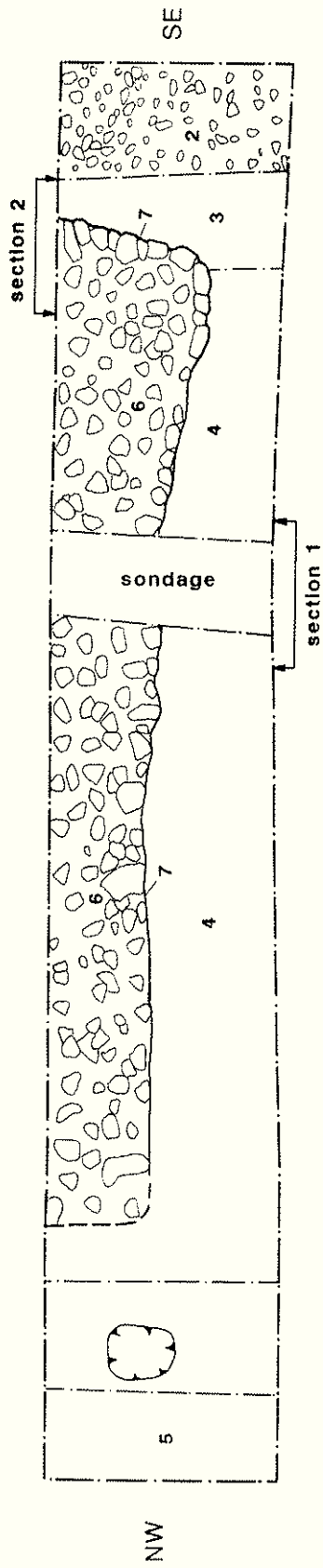
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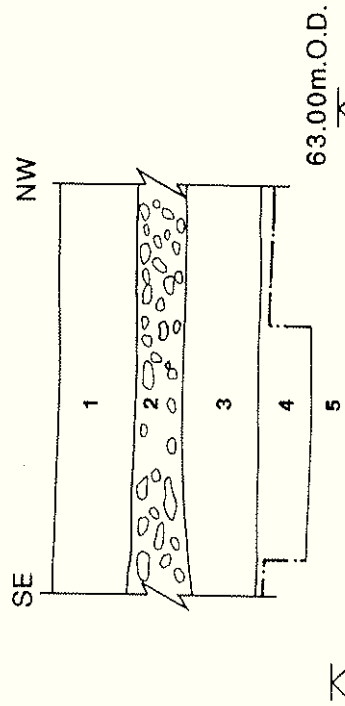
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Trench 5



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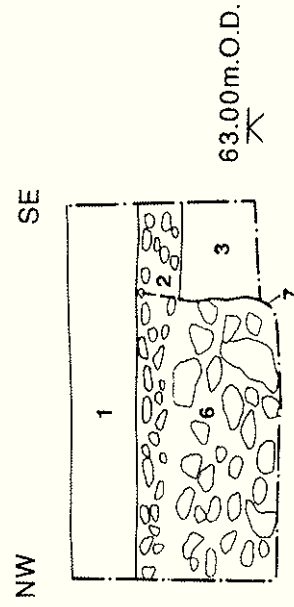
section 1



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section 2



63.00m.O.D.

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