

MINLA (OX)  
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# Minster Lovell Hall, Access Road, Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 3234 1138

Archaeological Evaluation Report

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Abstract	1
Introduction	1
Archaeological Background	1
Archaeological Methodology	2
Description of results	3
Deposit Survey	4
Assessment of Importance	4
Appendices	5

Bibliography, table of contexts, medieval pottery report, Illustrations

## **ABSTRACT**

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) excavated two evaluation trenches in advance of a planning permission determination for an access trackway, to Minster Lovell Hall, on ground next to St Kenelm's Church, Minster Lovell. Five undated postholes were located at the S of the site, graves were present in both trenches and traces of a post-medieval structure (?a cottage) were found on the road frontage under a large dump of modern rubbish.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This evaluation has been commissioned by English Heritage Historic Properties South West after a request by the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist for information in support of an application for planning permission for an access road. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with standard OAU specification.

The aims of the evaluation were:

- i) To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains.
- ii) To determine the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- iii) To determine the environmental/ecofactual potential of any archaeological features or deposits.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Akeman Street, the Roman road from Alchester to Cirencester runs to the N of the village. There are several villas in the area to the E around Asthall, on Akeman Street. A 5th-century Saxon cemetery was found in 1872 at Minster Lovell and the Church of St Kenelm was originally a late Saxon Minster Church, with a college of priests. Minsters of this date are usually seen as royal foundations. It was perhaps this Minster which became regulated as an alien cell of the Abbey of Ivry, in Normandy. After the Conquest, by the 12th century, the manor had come into hands of the Lovell family who had links with the Abbey. Minster Lovell was included in the medieval forest of Wychwood and there was also Minster Wood, a park. The Church and Hall were rebuilt in the first half of the 15th century by William, seventh Baron Lovell of Tichmarsh. After the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 the Lovell estates were seized by the Crown as John Lovell was a supporter of Richard III.

As the site lies between the Church and the Vicarage in the heart of the village, which may date back to at least the 9th century (an earlier date could be suggested as a coin of Marcus Aurelius was found at Manor Farm), it could reasonably be expected that archaeological remains would be present on the site.

A map search was carried out on maps postdating 1817, the earliest reliable

small scale map found.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY**

The total surface area of the site which was investigated was 46.25 square metres, this is approximately 24% of the area of proposed impact of the road on the site.

Two trenches (one 15 m and one 10 m long and 1.85 m wide) were positioned to prospect for archaeological material. One lay at the road front of the property and the other was next to a low rise on the edge of the break of slope towards the River Windrush.

These were to be machined in spits down to the top of the geological subsoil (brash). The machining was archaeologically monitored and the trenches were hand cleaned. In both trenches archaeological features were found at a higher level than the brash and machining was halted at that level.

As Trench 2 was through a loosely compacted mound of material the sides of the trench were stepped (in accordance with OAU standard practice) and no excavation was carried out below 1.2 m from the top of the step. There were no appropriate contexts suitable for environmental sampling for evaluation purposes.

## **DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS**

(also see Table of contexts and pottery report in appendices)

### **Undated postholes**

Five postholes were found in the S end of Trench 1. Two of these (113 and 115) were excavated but no finds were recovered. One of the postholes (117) was cut, in plan, by two graves.

### **Graves**

A minimum of eight graves were located in Trench 1. One of these (107) was partially excavated to the skeleton in order to establish that the feature and, in all probability, the other grave-like features were in fact human burials. One grave (207) was clearly detected in Trench 2 and human bones were seen in the end of dump 209. The articulated skeletons were 0.4 and 0.3 m from the surface of the brash i.e at a depth from the present surface of c 1.3 m in Trench 2 and 0.82 m in Trench 1.

Plough furrows were seen cutting the graves in Trench 1.

### **Post-medieval structure and later dump**

A cobbled surface (204) and a partly destroyed wall (210) were found in Trench 2. The wall was overlain by modern dumps of soil and mortar (209 and 202). These layers may be demolition debris as they lie below the upper level of the brash. A large modern feature (208 filled by 203) cut these dumps and cobbled surface. 208 is likely to be pit associated with the later rubbish dump. Over 1 m of rubbish and tipping (201) sealed the pit, mortar dump and cobbling.

## Finds scatter

Pottery was recovered from the subsoil (104) overlying the graves in Trench 1. This pottery was assigned numbers according to its location as it could not be determined whether it came from the graves. The pottery formed a small assemblage of 12th- to 15th century material mostly from East Wiltshire. As it is unstratified its significance in terms of dating the archaeological activity is slight. Context 106 which was a part of 104 contained modern pottery.

## DEPOSIT SURVEY

The N part of the site is fairly flat with a slope at the S towards the Windrush dropping around 2.5 m from the road to the centre and from there a further 2.1 m down the slope to the entrance gate to the hall. A set of levels was taken every 5 m from the road to the gate on the intended line of the road. (NB the depth to the brash in Trench 1 was 0.4 m and in Trench 2 generally over 1 m but at the S end of the trench was 0.4 m- see levels on figure 2 and a schematic representation of the depth to the brash is shown in figure 3).

Level location	m O.D.
0 m (Road)	94.51
5 m (on mounded dump)	95.12
10 m (on mounded dump)	95.08
15 m	94.07
20 m	93.86
25 m	93.78
30 m	93.71
35 m	93.51
40 m	93.21
45 m	92.89
50 m	92.93
55 m	92.54
60 m	91.87
65 m	91.35
70 m	90.82
75 m (at gate)	90.4

Much of the width of the site next to the road has been built up by mounded rubbish dump.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Postholes**

These are undated but must relate to structure/s of some sort which predate the burials, which are also undated but which may be early medieval (see below). Such structures could be seen as a part of settlement focused on the church and so are not rare (if the postholes are medieval). There is no documentation for settlement activity. The survival of postholes is variable in rural conditions and their presence suggests that the later ploughing seen in Trench 1 and other later activity have only slightly truncated the soil profile.

### **Graves**

These graves themselves are undated. A scatter of medieval pottery came from the upper layers of the features in cleaning the trench but these finds could be residual. The graves are outside the graveyard and may be from either an earlier medieval cemetery (which may be late Saxon related to the Minster or post-conquest related to the priory) or from a non-conformist cemetery outside the churchyard wall. However, apart from the fact that the burials seem to be Christian any suggestions about their date is speculative.

### **Post medieval activity by the road**

The structure is not readily identifiable on maps after 1817 (the earliest reliable small scale map consulted) but probably relates to roadside occupation next to the church, a cottage in the heart of the village. The area was used as the village refuse tip in recent memory.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation has revealed undated postholes indicating structures, part of a Christian graveyard and recent roadside occupation.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Sources consulted**

Briggs G, Cook J, and Rowley T 1986 The Archaeology of the Oxford Region  
Oxford

Dickinson T The Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites of the Upper Thames Region, and their bearing on the History of Wessex, circa AD 400-700 Volume II

Rodgers B, undated, Minster Lovell An historic Guide to this Ancient Village

Sherwood and Pevsner 1974 The buildings of England: Oxfordshire

### **Maps consulted**

Ordnance Surveyors Drawing 1817

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1" 1833

Tithe Map 1839

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25' 1880

Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25' 1899

Ordnance Survey 3rd edition 25' 1921

**Table of Contexts**

Tr	CTX	Type	Description	length	width	depth	date (and no of sherds)
1	100	finds reference					4 sherds late 13th to 15th c [OXAQ and OXBB] and bricks
1	101	finds reference					8 sherds (6 13th to 15th [OXBB] and 2 post medieval)
1	102	finds reference					
1	103	topsoil	grey/black silt loam	-	-	0.35	
1	104	subsoil	dark grey stoney sandy loam				2 sherds late 13th to 15th c [OXBB]
1	105	geological subsoil (brash)	yellow sand and limestone				
1	106	stoney layer (?part of 104)	dark grey stoney sandy loam			0.08	Modern pipe
1	107	grave fill	dark brown silty loam with fine limestone pieces			0.38	
1	108	grave fill	dark brown mottled yellow silt loam			0.38	
1	109	skeleton	two femurs, patellas, hands and a pelvis revealed				
1	110	grave cut	E-W cut	1.35	0.8	0.4+	
1	111	grave fill	dark brown silt loam with limestone frags			0.1	
1	112	posthole fill	dark brown clay silt				
1	113	posthole cut	circular		0.3	0.28	
1	114	posthole fill	dark brown sandy loam				
1	115	posthole cut	circular		0.3	0.1	
1	116	posthole fill	dark grey sandy loam	-	-	-	
2	201	dump	loose grey brown silt loam with limestone fragments and mortar	-	-	1+	9 sherds of post medieval
2	202	mortar dump	compact yellow mortar	-	-	0.1	
2	203	pit fill	compact yellow/grey clay	-	-	NFE	5 sherds of post medieval wares
2	204	yard surface	limestone cobbles	-	-	0.05	
2	205	grave fill	yellow brown gritty clay	-	-		
2	206	skeleton	torso and top of pelvis, right arm and lower left arm present				

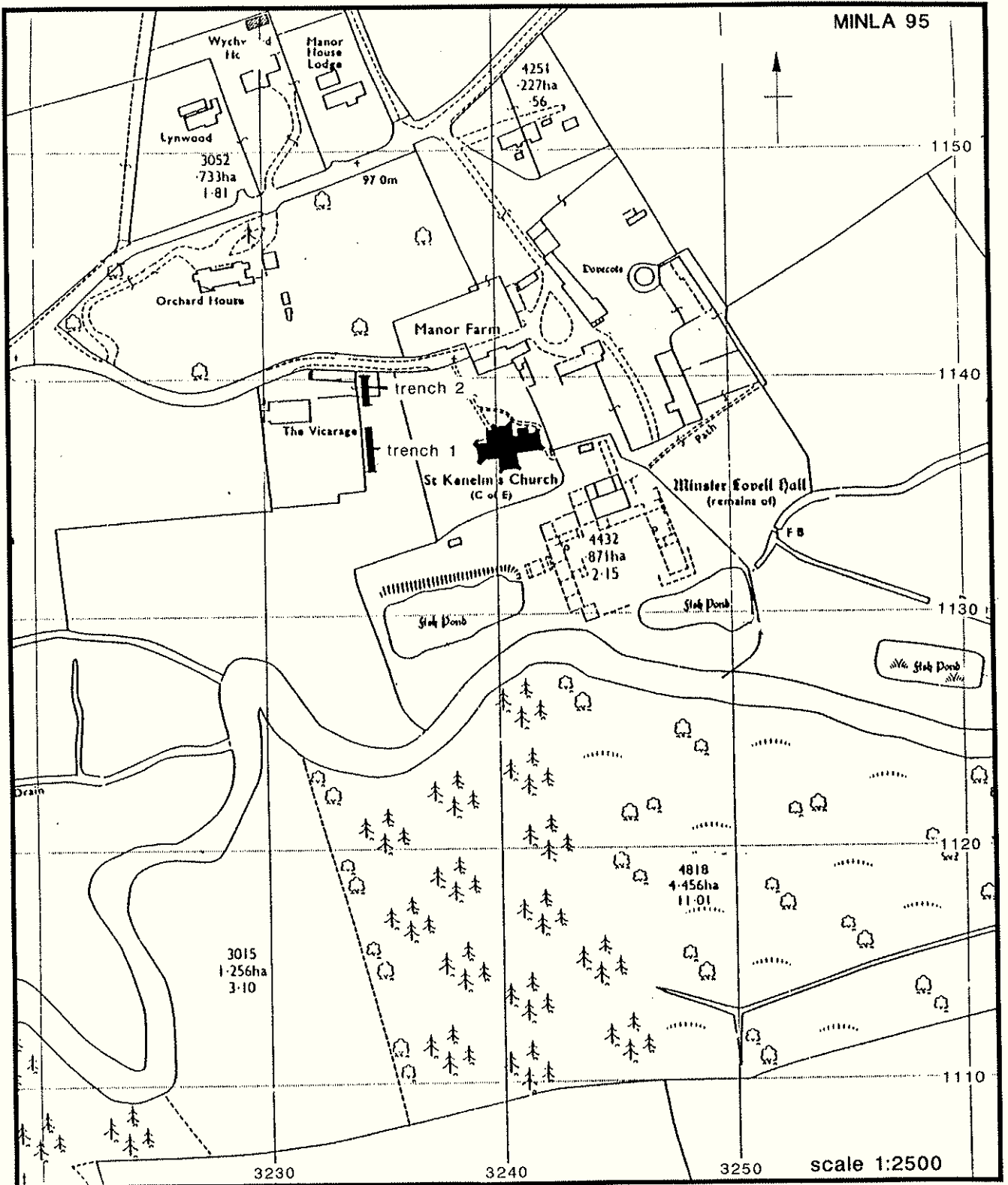


Tr	CTX	Type	Description	length	width	depth	date (and no of sherds)
2	207	grave cut		-	0.37	0.3	
2	208	pit cut		-	1.62	0.6+	
2	209	demolition layer	loose grey silty clay	-	-		
2	210	wall	limestone pieces in rough coursing				1 sherd of post medieval 19th to 20th century
2	211	cut for wall trench	not fully excavated				
2	212	geological subsoil (brash)	compact orange limestone				

## Appendix 2

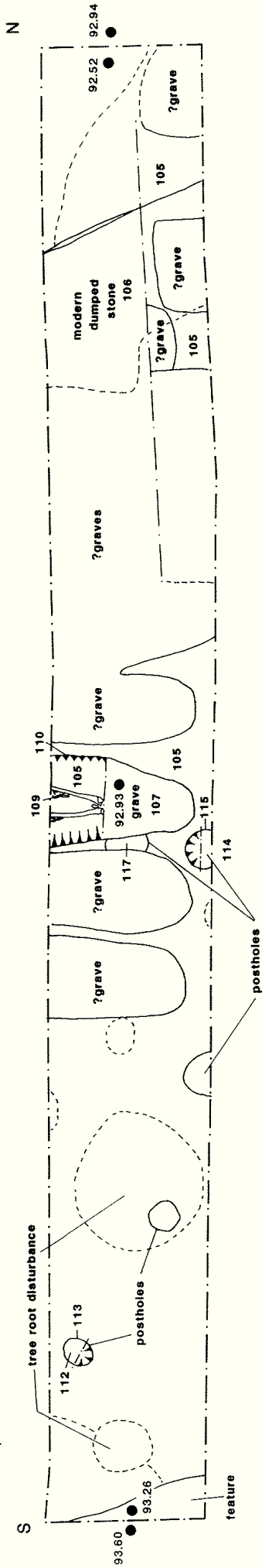
### Pottery by L Whittingham

Thirty-one sherds of pottery were recovered from the evaluation (see table above for contexts and numbers of sherds). The twelve medieval sherds belong to two types of fabrics; the majority are Minety type Ware (OXBB), the remainder East Wiltshire type (OXAQ). Both these types are generally dated between the late 12th to mid 15th century. The post medieval wares comprise 19 sherds of 19th to 20th century earthenware, stonewares and china.

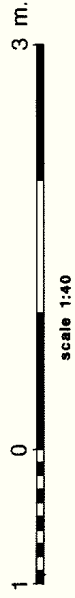


Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map of 1975 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright. Licence No. AL 854166

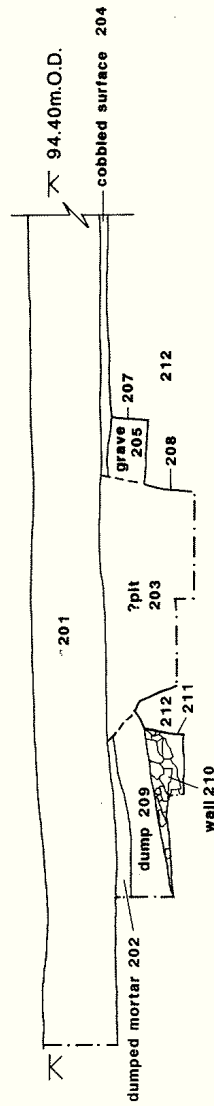
Trench 1 plan



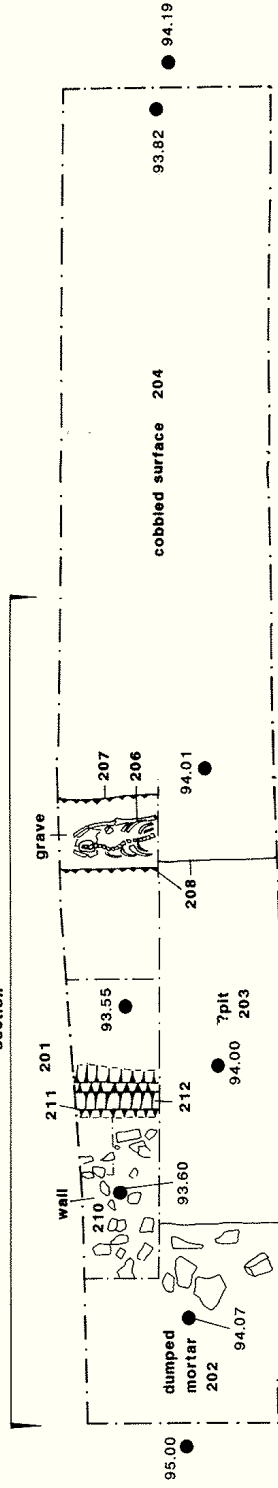
Trench 2



Trench 2 section



Trench 2 section



Trench 2 plan

S

● levels in metres O.D.

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trench plans and section

figure 2

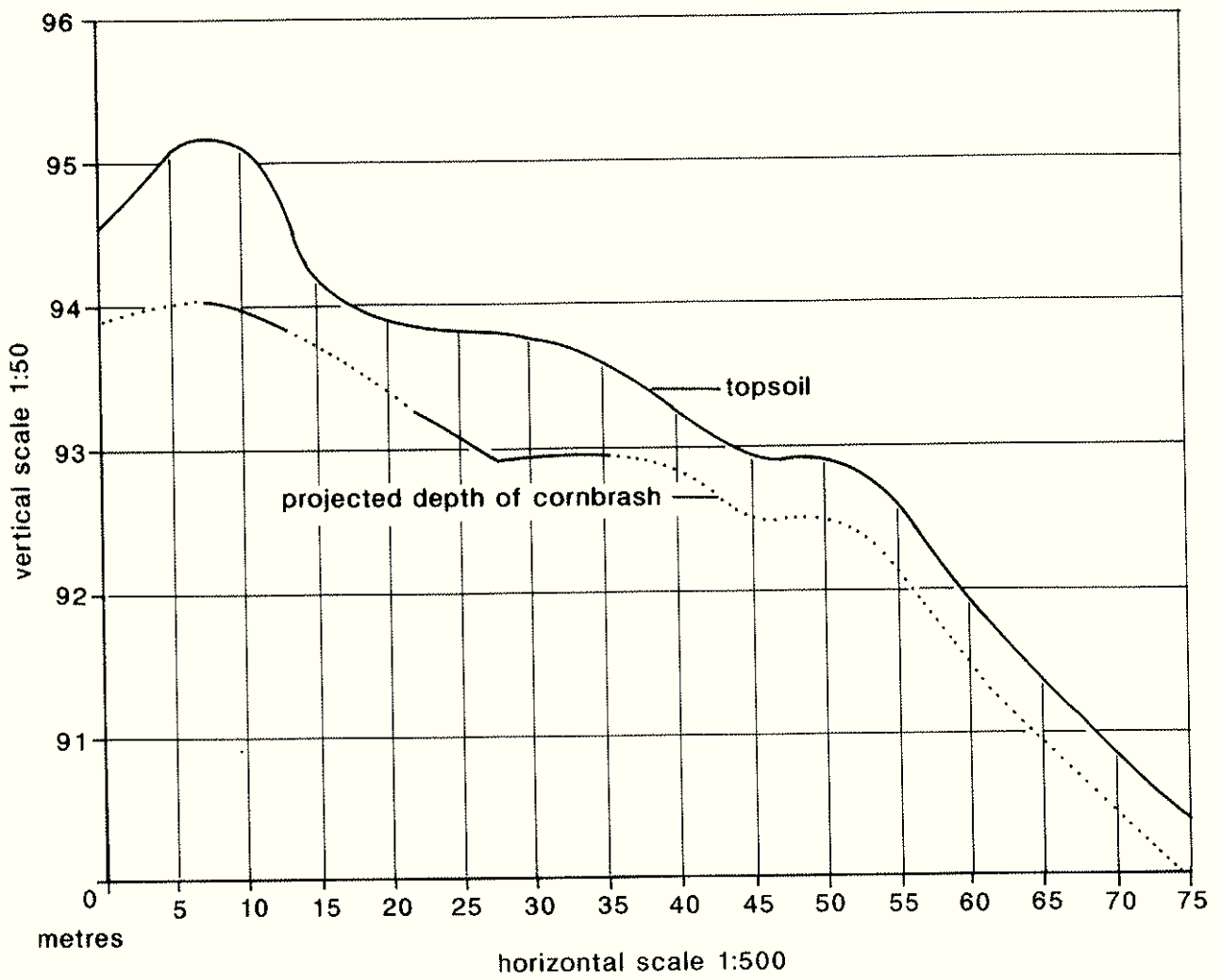


figure 3



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