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# Land Adjacent to Kingsfield Crescent Witney, Oxon

Archaeological Evaluation

Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1994

# LAND ADJACENT TO KINGSFIELD CRESCENT, NEWLANDS, WITNEY

## LIST OF CONTENTS

### *Summary*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Background
- 1.2 Topography and Geology
- 1.3 Archaeological Background
- 1.4 Purpose of the Evaluation
- 1.5 Evaluation Methodology

#### 2. RESULTS

- 2.1 Soils
- 2.2 Trench Descriptions
- 2.3 Finds

#### 3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 Reliability of Methodology
- 3.2 Overall Interpretation
- 3.3 Archaeological Potential

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### *List of Figures*

- Fig. 1 Site location plan (1:25,000)
- Fig. 2 Trench location plan (1:2,500)
- Fig. 3 Trench 3 - detailed plan (1:100) and section (1:20)

### *Appendix 1* Archaeological Context Inventory

# LAND ADJACENT TO KINGSFIELD CRESCENT, NEWLANDS, WITNEY

## *Summary*

*A field evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on the site of the former allotment, bounding the recreation ground to the north-west, at Newlands, Witney on 16th June 1994. The work was carried out on behalf of Ruddy Developments in advance of the construction of twelve residential dwellings and in accordance with the brief set by the County Archaeologist. Four, machine-dug 20m long, trenches were excavated where the greatest ground disturbance was anticipated. With the exception of one possible prehistoric ditch/pit no other archaeological features were located, indicating that the medieval "New Town" did not extend as far as this part of Witney.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Following the granting of outline planning permission in 1991, detailed permission was sought in March 1994 for twelve residential dwellings, garages and associated infrastructure. Since the principle of development had been approved, a condition was attached to the permission requiring a degree of archaeological investigation. The Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Ruddy Developments to undertake the field evaluation to meet the brief set by the County Archaeological Service.

### **1.2 Topography and Geology**

The development site is located in the Newlands area on the south-east side of Witney (Fig. 1). It lies on the north side of Newlands Road (B4022) and adjacent to Kingsfield Crescent (NGR SP3645 1014), recently built over a former caravan site (Fig. 2). The site was previously a narrow allotment garden bounded on its north-west and north-east sides by a drystone wall and on its south-east side by a mature hedgerow. The ground is level at approximately 85m OD. The underlying geology is cornbrash mixed with superficial clay head deposits.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The development area is thought to be on the site of the medieval "New Town" founded by Robert Arsic in 1212-13 AD (Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record PRN 5933). It appears from the evidence to have been a suburban extension to or an imitation of Witney itself. The 1279 Hundred Rolls do not mention it and it has been assumed that the "New Town" had a very short period of occupation (Beresford 1967, 476). Medieval new towns are relatively uncommon and are considered to be important at both national and regional level. Given the comparatively short period of occupancy of the Witney "New Town" any work ought to provide a valuable insight into the concept of medieval town planning, building construction and the environment within a well-defined time period.

## **1.4 Purpose of the Evaluation**

The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

- i.* To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development.
- ii.* To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- iii.* To establish the ecofactual/environmental potential of archaeological features.
- iv.* To appraise the likely impact of the development proposals on any archaeology located.

## **1.5 Evaluation Methodology**

The evaluation was undertaken by the machine (JCB 3cx) excavation of four, 20m-long and 1.60m-wide, trenches. The trench locations were originally positioned to coincide with the areas to be disturbed by the main building blocks. After discussion with the developers, and with the approval of the Assistant County Archaeologist, the trenches were relocated to avoid the house and garage foundations. The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:100 and sample sections of the stratigraphy of each trench were drawn at a scale of 1:20. Written recording was in accordance with the standard OAU method (Wilkinson 1992).

## **2. RESULTS**

### **2.1 Soils**

The use of the area as an allotment had resulted in a 0.35m thick layer of very dark rich loam. This contained frequent fragments of post-medieval pottery and glass. A browner clayey secondary loam, containing frequent small stones derived from the cornbrash beneath, was found between the topsoil and the solid geology. This layer averaged 0.15m thick towards the south-west end of the site but was up to 0.32m thick towards the north-east end. This difference in depth may have resulted from the change in geology across the site. At the south-west end, where the soil was shallower, the geology was solid cornbrash, whereas towards the north-east end this gave way to a more clayey head deposit, more easily disturbed by agricultural activities. While no artefacts were recovered from this horizon it is likely to have resulted from medieval and later ploughing.

## **2.2 Trench Descriptions**

### *Trenches 1, 2 and 4 (Fig. 2)*

With the exception of a very small depression towards the north-east end of Trench 2, these three trenches were devoid of archaeological features.

### *Trench 3 (Fig. 3)*

The south-western part of the trench consisted of weathered cornbrash (309) which changed to a more mixed clay (308) and cornbrash geology towards the north-east end. A 1.20 m wide 'ditch' (304), on a north-west to south-east alignment, had been cut through the orangey-yellow clay (Fig. 3). The feature, which was sealed beneath the secondary soil (302), was up to 0.30m deep with a flat base. It contained a greyish-yellow sandy silt primary silt (307) and a brownish-red silty clay secondary silt (306). Both layers contained a substantial proportion of cornbrash fragments. A possible recut, located on the south-west side of the feature, was also filled with a reddish-brown silty clay (305) but contained an even greater proportion of cornbrash fragments. A single small fragment of burnt unworked flint was found in Layer 305.

Reddish-brown soils on subsoils of or containing limestone have been recorded from Neolithic and Bronze Age sites (Cornwall 1958) and are usually considered to have derived from the warmer and drier conditions of the Sub-Boreal period.

## **2.3 Finds**

Apart from the piece of unworked burnt flint the only other artefacts were frequent post-medieval pottery sherds and glass fragments in the topsoil, most of which were of 19th and 20th century date.

## **3. DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Reliability of methodology**

No problems were encountered with any of the trenches and the weather conditions were very good. Although the trench positions were relocated to avoid the house blocks the pattern and sample size is considered sufficient to have both located and defined any major archaeological features which may exist on the site.

### **3.2 Overall Interpretation**

The results of the evaluation indicate that if the medieval "New Town" had existed on the site it had left no trace. Alternatively it seems more probable that the documentary evidence has been incorrectly interpreted and that the "New Town" was either not as extensive as suggested or is located elsewhere in Witney.

Although it is possible that Feature 307 in Trench 3 is of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, it is equally possible that the feature is of periglacial natural origin. The discovery of a burnt flint cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of human activity since natural forest fires were commonplace in the post-glacial period.

### **3.3 Archaeological Potential**

Given the almost total absence of any archaeological features in the development area there seems little likelihood that the area was ever settled. The site has undoubtedly been intensively farmed and more recently was used as an allotment

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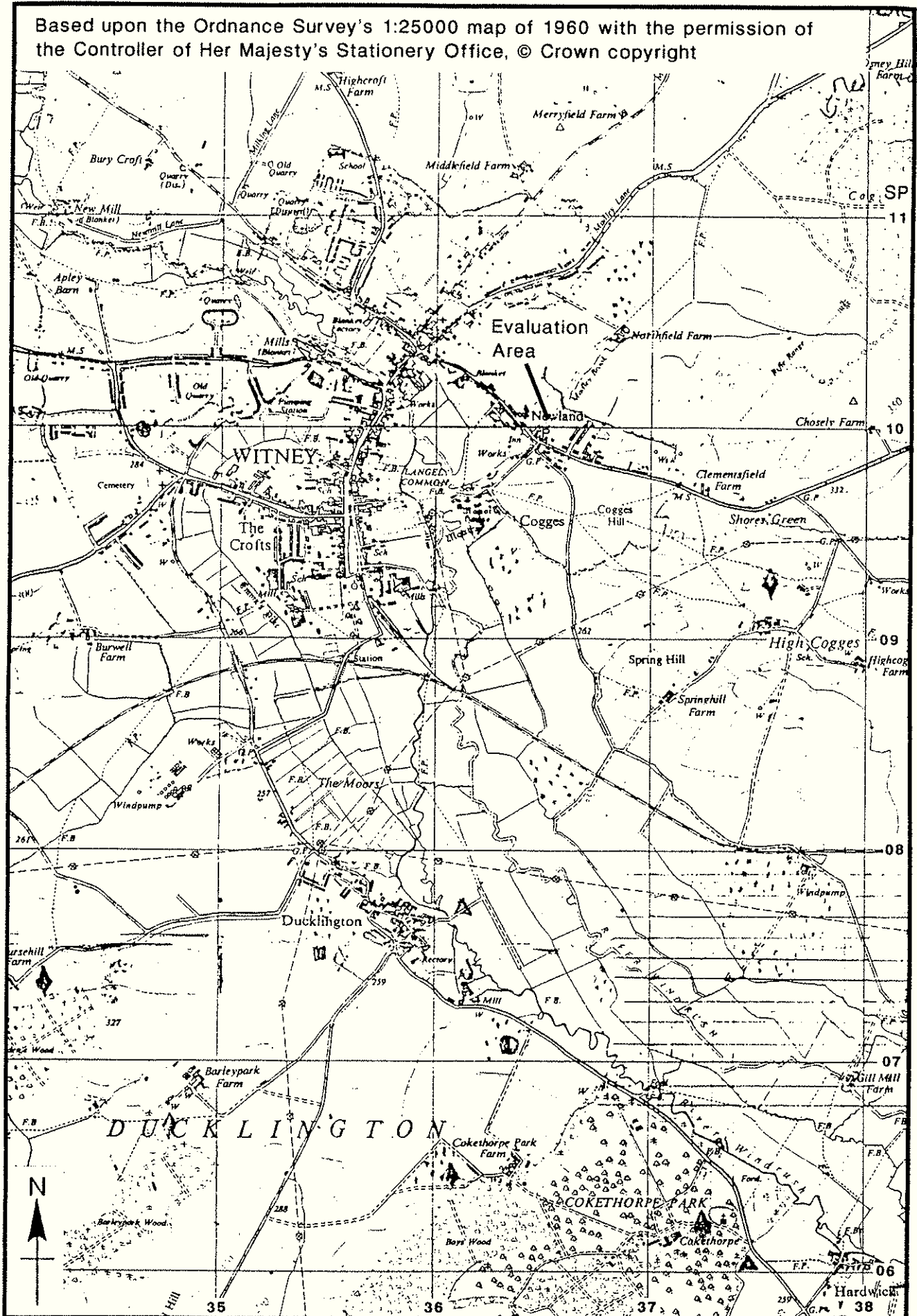
## APPENDIX 1

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

*Trenches 1, 2 and 4 contained no archaeological deposits and have consequently not been listed in the following table.*

<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Context type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
3	3/301	layer		0.30	topsoil
	3/302	layer		0.18	secondary ploughsoil
	3/303	layer			natural clay (same as 308)
	3/304	cut	1.20	0.30	ditch ?
	3/305	fill	0.64	0.22	fill of recut ?
	3/306	fill	0.65	0.22	secondary fill
	3/307	fill	0.80	0.08	primary fill
	3/308	layer			natural clay
	3/309	layer			natural cornbrash

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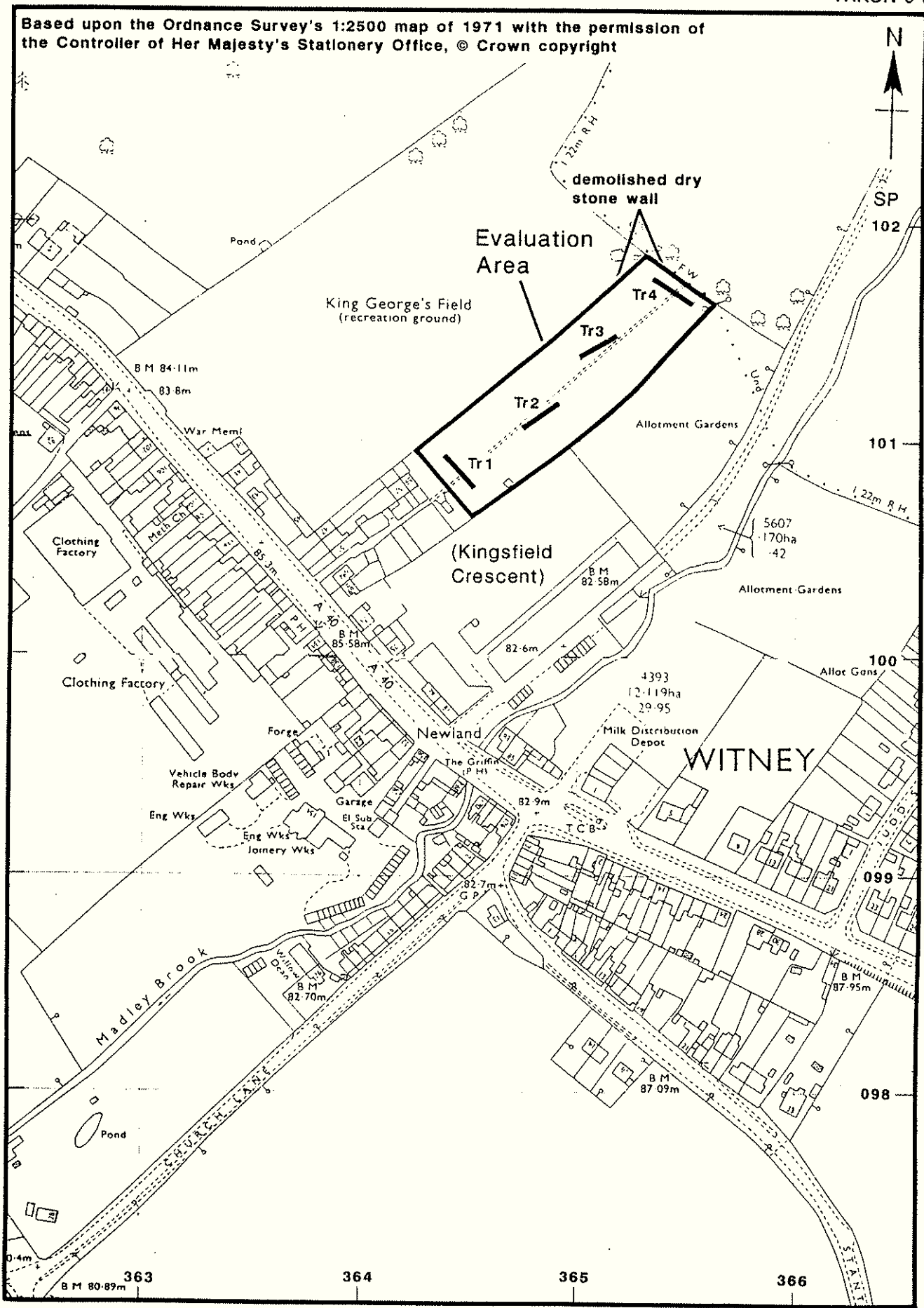


Location plan of site in relation to Witney and surrounding area

Figure 1



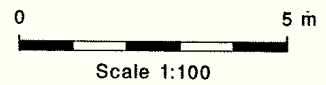
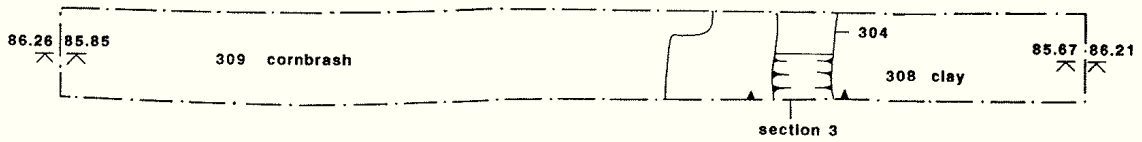
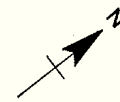
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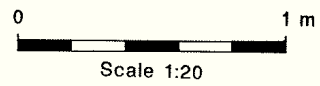
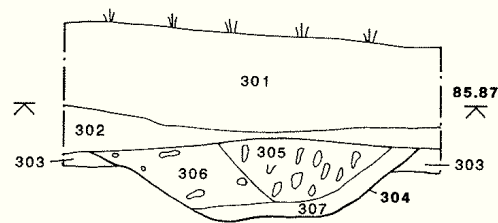
Trench location plan

Figure 2

Trench 3



Section 3



Levels in metres O.D.

Figure 3