

BUCKLEBURY (BR)



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EP · telephone (0865) 243888

BUCKLEBURY, HARTSHILL COPSE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Director: Dr. I.C.G. Burrow F.S.A., M.I.F.A.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited Registered Charity Number 285627 Private Limited Company Number 1618597
Registered Office 46 Hythe Bridge Street Oxford OX1 2EP

HARTSHILL COPSE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

1. Summary

In September 1986 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an archaeological assessment of the Hartshill Copse site on behalf of the Amey Roadstone Corporation.

A late Bronze Age (about 1000 BC) settlement was located in the south, central area of the field, covering approximately 200m x 100m of the summit of the ridge. Several possible cremations were found on the western edge of the ridge. The pottery cremation vessels may be contemporary with the settlement or possibly of the Middle Bronze Age. Prehistoric features were also located further north but in discrete areas.

A small area of Romano-British activity was found in the south-west part of the field.

In view of the damage previously suffered from ploughing it is not suggested that the Hartshill Copse site merits preservation. However, it provides an opportunity for the first complete excavation of a Late Bronze Age settlement in the Thames Valley. The value of the settlement is greatly enhanced by the presence of the cemetery. An excavation programme would last approximately three months followed by a watching brief during topsoil stripping.

2. Geography

The Hartshill Copse site consists of approximately 15 ha of plateau gravel on a ridge 131m AOD with wide views to the south and west over the Kennet Valley, some 50m below.

The field itself is generally flat but a series of ridges and valleys drop away quite steeply to the west.

3. Previous Work

The archaeological evidence previously recovered from this area is scanty. Some prehistoric flints were found during fieldwalking in 1977. Two 'Roman Urns' were found in 1888 in a small gravel pit immediately south of Hartshill Road. From the field around the site Romano-British and medieval pottery has been recovered.

No archaeologically flown oblique photographs of the site exist. Inspection of the vertical photographs in the Berkshire Planning Department before the assessment revealed nothing that might be considered indisputably archaeological.

4. Strategy

4.1 It was decided that non-excavation exploratory techniques (geophysical survey, gridded fieldwalking and phosphate analysis) were unlikely to be conclusive and not cost effective on this site. Therefore a pattern of slit trenches was laid out to cover the whole area of the field. Secondary trenches were added to investigate areas of interest revealed by the primary

trenches and to attempt to define the limits of archaeological features.

The trenches were dug using a JCB with toothless ditching bucket to remove all the ploughsoils down to the gravel surface. The overburden varied in depth from 0.40m on the plateau to 0.90m in hollows and on the slope where plough-wash had built up. The spoil removed was watched for finds. The trenches were shovel-scraped; archaeological features were then clearly visible, cut into the gravel.

4.2 A total of 39 trenches was excavated, all 1.5m wide, varying in length between 18m and 95m. The total area sampled was approximately 1.5% of the total field area.

All archaeological features were recorded; several were partially excavated to recover dating evidence and to investigate the nature of features. Samples of carbonised material were taken from several features for environmental evidence.

4.3 Access to Burden's Heath Plantation proved impossible.

4.4 The usefulness of fieldwalking was limited as stubble remained on the field at the time of the assessment. The surface of the field, thick with natural flint revealed little archaeological material. However, the results of fieldwalking undertaken in 1977, in more satisfactory conditions, by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit are incorporated in the assessment.

5. Results

5.1 Almost 50% of the trenches contained archaeological features. Seven trenches (marked green on Plan 1) contained only scattered features of no density, mainly ditches or gulleys of uncertain date.

5.2 In ten trenches (marked red on Plan 1) were notable concentrations of archaeological features which may be summarised as follows (see Plan 1 for trench numbers).

Trench I - Mostly ditches and gulleys; a few small pits and post-holes. Roman pottery was recovered from two of the features and from the ploughsoil. Late Bronze Age pottery was found in one of the post-holes.

Trench V - Small pits and post-holes, one curvilinear gully.

Trench IX - The densest concentration of features; more than fifty features were identified. Five were partially excavation, producing Late Bronze Age pottery. The majority of features in the trench were post-holes, approximately 0.30m in diameter, many filled with very humic loam or carbonised material. Several gulleys were recorded but no dating material was recovered from them.

Trench X - Features very similar in nature to trench IX, ie. post-holes and small pits, which produced Late Bronze Age pottery.

Trench XV - A short trench containing a single post-hole and a cremation in a small pit.

Trench XVII - Small pits and post-holes. One feature was half-sectioned, probably a hearth-pit which produced sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery.

Trench XXI - Groups of post-holes, gulleys and ditches.

Trench XXVIII - A few small pits and post-holes; a line of 22 stake holes running north-west south-east.

Trench XXXV - A distinct group of seven pits, approximately 0.75m in diameter, mostly containing carbonised material. One was partially excavated producing Bronze Age pottery.

Trench XXXIX - Two cremations were found. One was set in a Middle or Late Bronze Age pot, the other, similar to the Trench XV cremation was simply in a small pit.

The rest of the trenches contained post-holes and pits, three of which had Bronze Age pottery on their surface.

6. Interpretation

6.1 In general terms, archaeological features were confined to a broad band approximately 200m wide, extending east from the edge of the plateau and running the length of the field.

Within that area, distinct concentrations of features and finds are noticeable. Trenches IX, X and V produced a density of post-holes, pits and gulleys, with associated finds, to suggest a Late Bronze Age settlement dating to approximately 1000 BC.

6.2 The cremations in trenches XXXIX and XV possibly represent part of a cremation cemetery positioned on the edge of the plateau overlooking the valley to the south and west. The pot in which one of the cremations was placed may be Late Bronze Age in date, and thus the cremations may be contemporary with the settlement to the south-east.

6.3 The other scattered features of Late Bronze Age date found elsewhere in the field may well represent peripheral activities associated with the settlement.

The flints recovered in fieldwalking in 1977 reinforce the existence of a prehistoric site in the area.

6.4 Late Bronze Age settlement sites are rare in the Thames Basin. There is however a notable concentration in the Kennet Valley. Most of these are in the lower parts of the valley and have only been partially excavated (Aldermaston, Knights Farm, Ballast Hole, Theale, Brimpton) prior to destruction by gravel quarrying. Hartshill Copse is unique in lying on the upland plateau gravel and in also having been located prior to the start of quarrying operations.

6.5 The Romano-British pottery dates to the 3rd and 4th century AD; however it appears that Roman occupation in the field was on a small scale and confined to the southern edge.

6.6 The stratified deposits of hillwash on the western slopes could provide useful evidence for the history of arable farming on the site.

Conclusions

1. The Hartshill Copse site contains a complete Late Bronze Age settlement. A possibly contemporary cremation cemetery lies to the west. The main settlement area covers approximately 2ha but there are outlying features. There are traces of Roman occupation in the south-west corner of the field.

2. The archaeological remains have been truncated by ploughing but the surviving features are rich in artefacts (mainly pottery) and carbonised plant remains. Bone is not well preserved.

3. In view of the land use history of the site and its effect on the archaeological features the site does not necessarily merit long-term preservation. However it provides a unique opportunity for the total excavation of a Late Bronze Age settlement complex, which has not previously been damaged by quarrying.

4. If planning permission is granted for gravel extraction it would be necessary to phase the archaeological excavation into the programme.

5. The archaeological investigation need not include detailed surface analysis and excavation of the topsoil. The flint assemblage is likely to be of only slight interest and the prehistoric pottery does not survive well.

Over the main areas of interest the topsoil should be carefully removed with a JCB or 360° digger. The excavation of these areas would take approximately 3 months. The topsoil over the rest of the field could be removed with more powerful machinery. This process should be observed in order to record outlying features.

6. Provision would need to be made for the analysis and publication of the archaeological record.

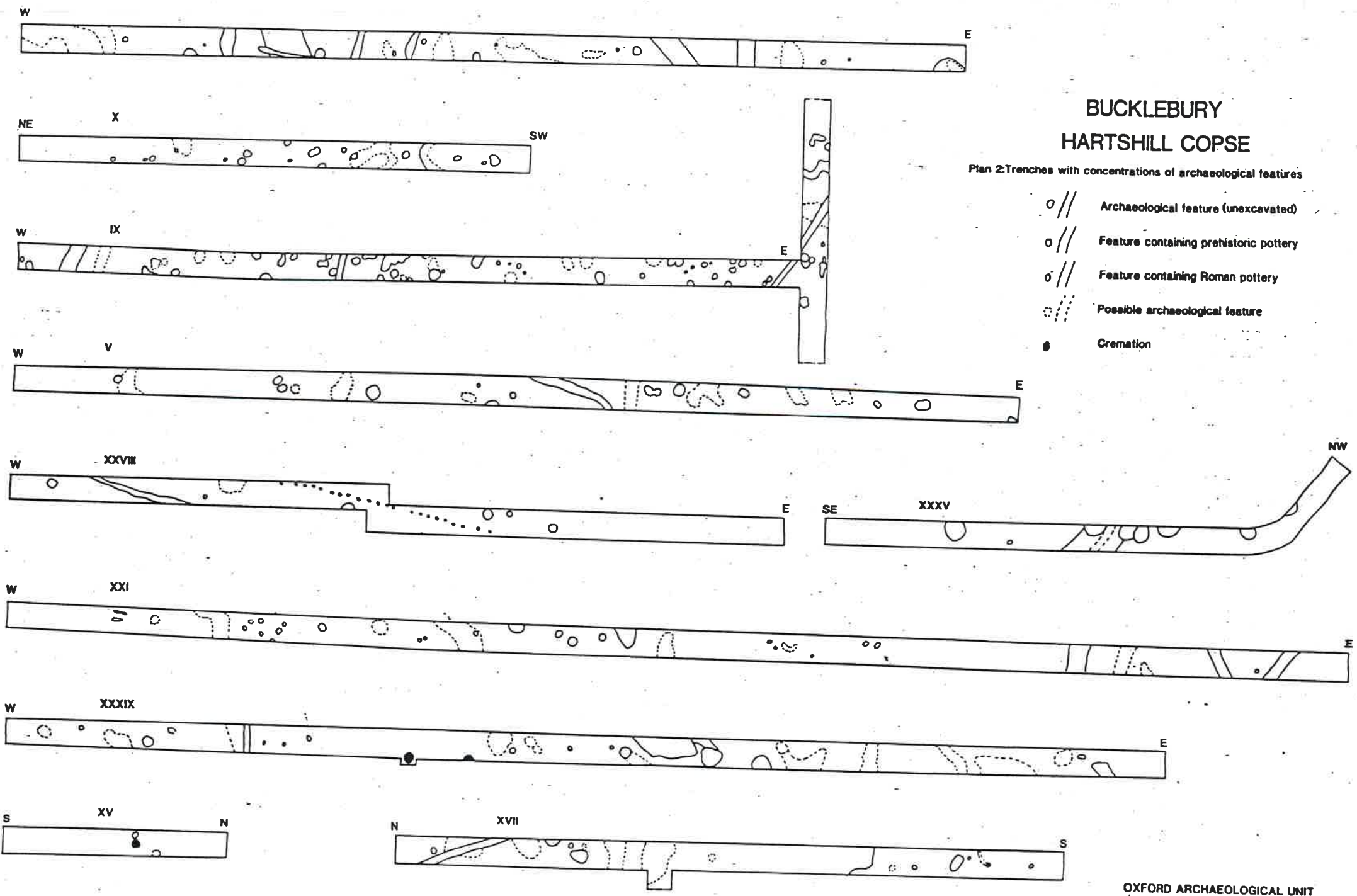
7. Finds (of non-precious metal) belong to the landowner (ARC). Ideally these should be deposited with an appropriate museum for long term storage.

David Miles and Mark Collard
Oxford Archaeological Unit
31 October 1986

BUCKLEBURY HARTSHILL COPSE

Plan 2: Trenches with concentrations of archaeological features

- // Archaeological feature (unexcavated)
- // Feature containing prehistoric pottery
- // Feature containing Roman pottery
- // Possible archaeological feature
- Cremation



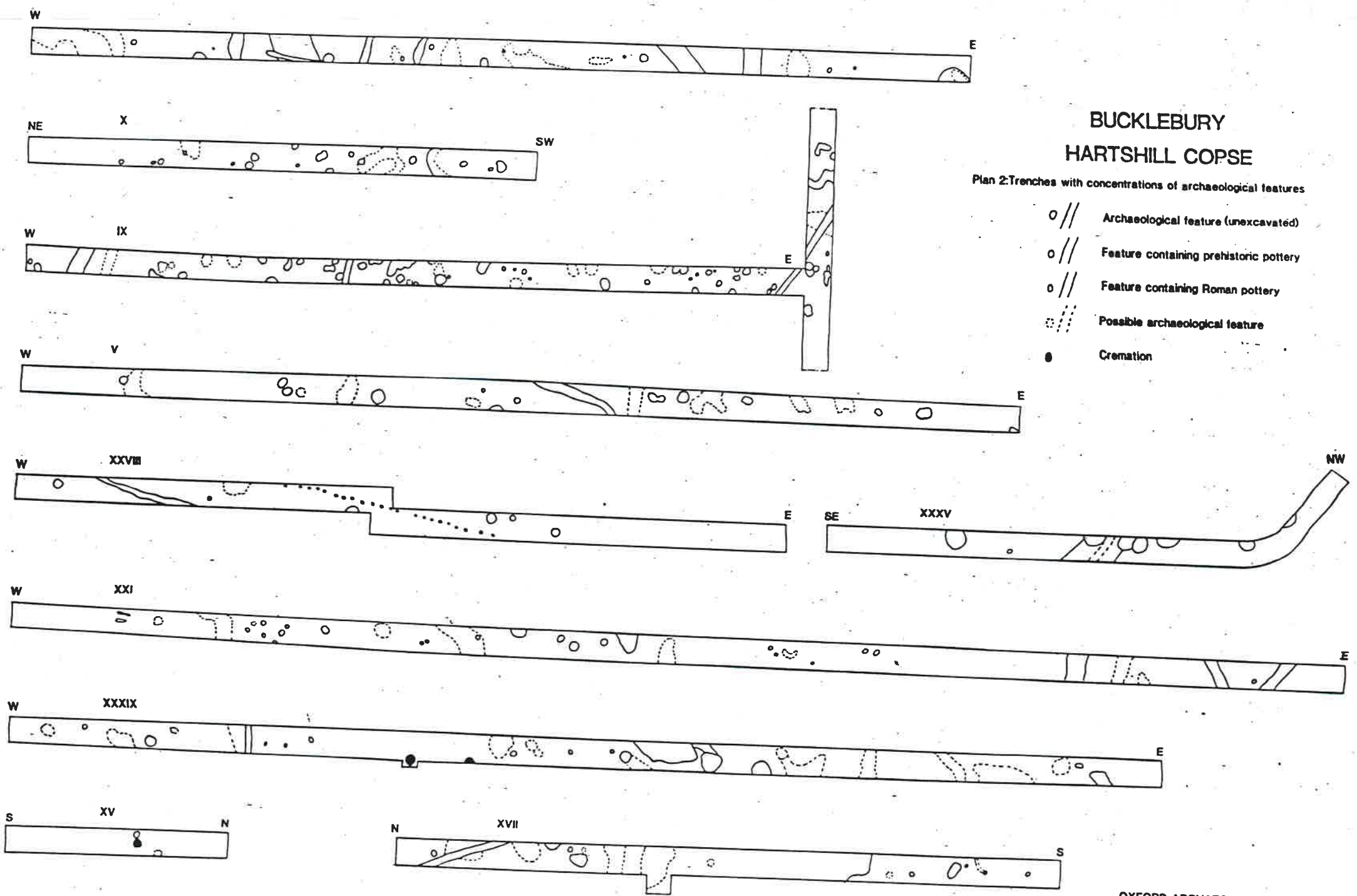
OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
OCTOBER 1986



BUCKLEBURY HARTSHILL COPSE

Plan 2: Trenches with concentrations of archaeological features

- // Archaeological feature (unexcavated)
- // Feature containing prehistoric pottery
- // Feature containing Roman pottery
- // Possible archaeological feature
- Cremation

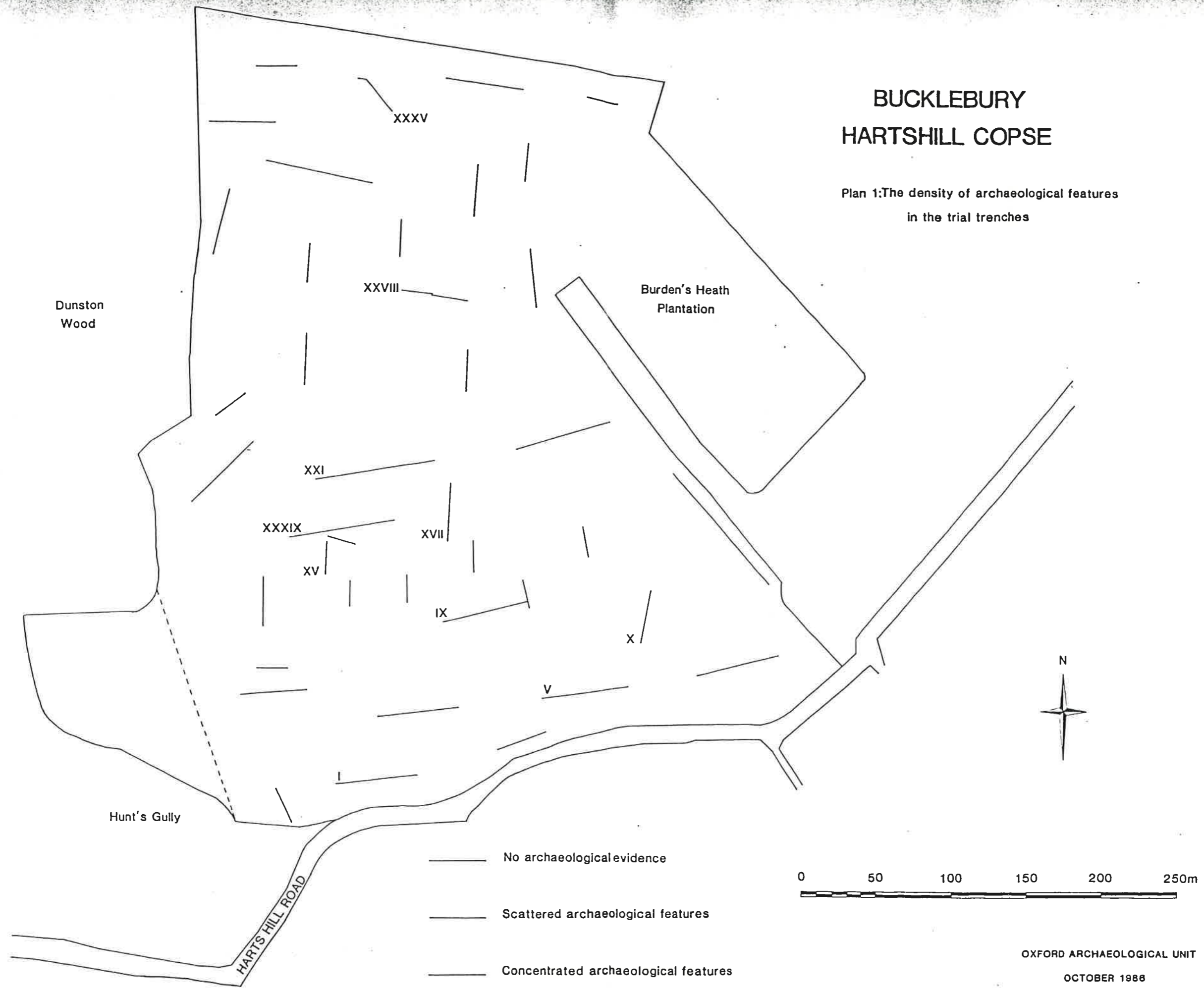


OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
OCTOBER 1986



BUCKLEBURY HARTSHILL COPSE

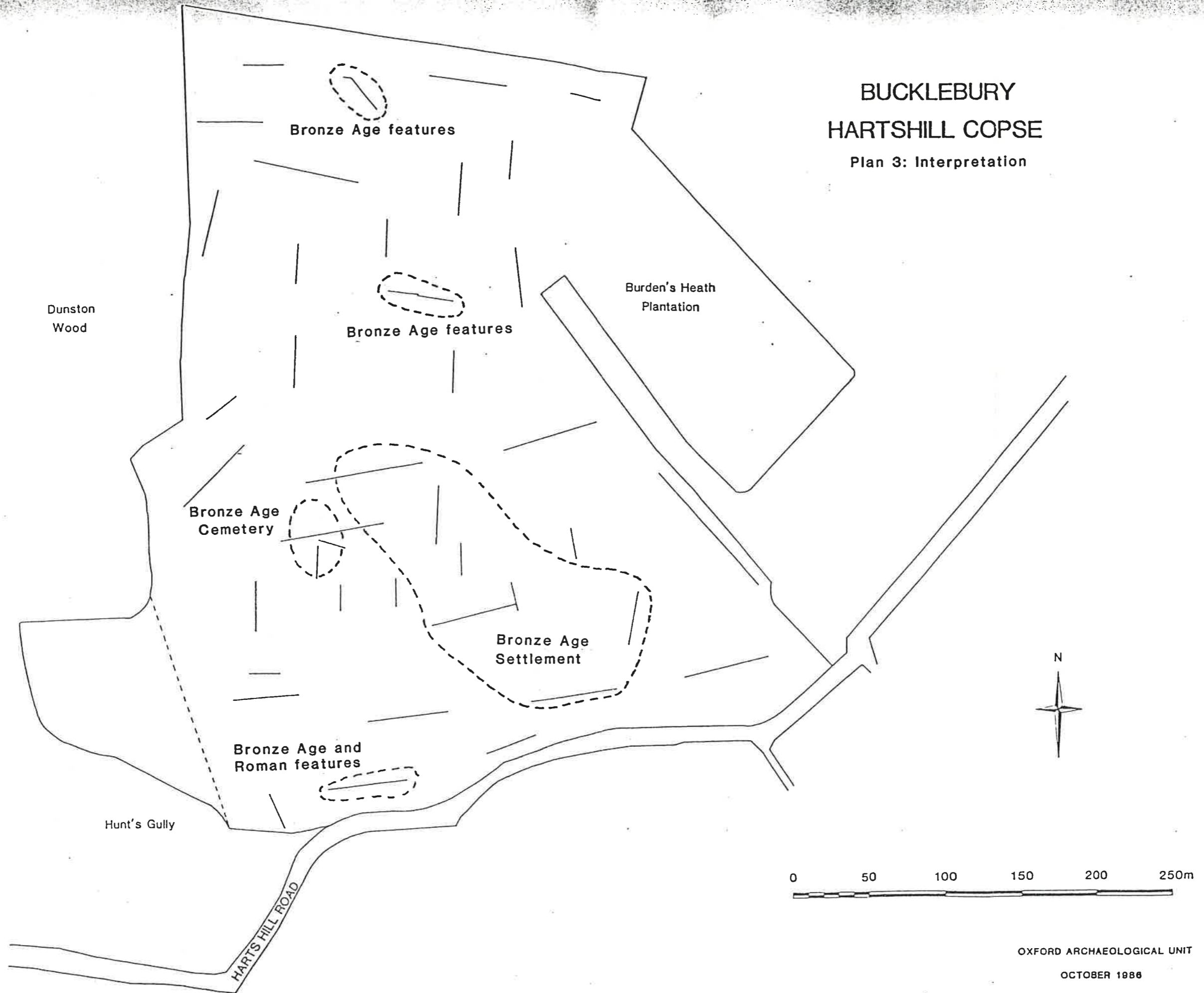
Plan 1: The density of archaeological features
in the trial trenches



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
OCTOBER 1986

**BUCKLEBURY
HARTSHILL COPSE**

Plan 3: Interpretation



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

OCTOBER 1986



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, OX1 2EP

Head Office Tel: 01865 243888 Fax: 01865 793496

Post-Excavation Tel: 01865 204642 Fax: 01865 204637



Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited. Registered Charity Number: 285627
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Office: 46 Hythe Bridge Street