OLD WINDSOR (BR)

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Windsor Sewage Treatment Works
Old Windsor

SU 995 753

Archaeological Assessment

Oxford Archaeological Unit
June 1989

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WINDSOR SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS

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Background Information

An archaeological assessment of the site was undertaken by Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Thames Water Authority for a proposed planning application at Windsor Sewage Treatment Works.

The assessment area lies within the existing Sewage Treatment Works. The area to the south of the humus tanks consists of a gravel terrace, sloping down towards the river floodplain, which lies beneath the humus in the present storm water overflow area.

Archaeological Background

The application area is bordered on the west and south by a Scheduled Area (Fig 1), within which lies the known remains of the Royal residence of Edward the Confessor (Astill G, 1978 Historic Towns in Berkshire). Aerial photographs show field systems immediately to the west and south of the area, as cropmarks. Casual finds to the south (Berks SMR) indicate activity ranging from the mesolithic to the late medieval period.

Brian Hope Taylor carried out excavations of the Anglo Saxon Palace in 1954-5 and 1957-8 (Medieval Archaeology 1957).

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an assessment in 1987 at the Paddock, Church Road, Old Windsor.

Method

Five trenches were excavated by JCB using a five foot ditching bucket. Trenches 1-3 were cut (as specified in the Thames Water Brief) to establish the existence, extent and context of any archaeological deposits below the planned primary settlement tanks and humus tanks. Trench 5 was cut to investigate the possibility of features on, or below the "red-brown sandy clay", located in the west end of Trench 3. Trench 4 was cut, to establish the direction and profile of the "channel" located in Trench 1.

Hand excavation of all recognizable archaeological features was carried out.

Results

Trench 1

A river channel aligned north-south (1/4) Fig 2 was located in the west end of Trench 1, filled with a mid-brown sandy clay, on top of dirty gravel. The east bank of the river channel was steeper than the west bank. One flint flake was recovered from the river channel alluvium. Several alluvium filled natural hollows were located in the gravel along the rest of the trench.

Trench 2

This trench lies in the northern part of the assessment area, where a layer of made up ground was observed beneath the topsoil. At the northern end (16.85m OD), the made up ground contained stones, bricks, drain pipe and chromium plated metal. Towards the southern end of the trench, the made up ground appeared to get deeper i.e. the gravel starts to slope down towards the south of the site - 16.54m OD at the end of trench.

Two gullies were located at the southern end of the trench (2/1) and (2/2) Fig 2 with near vertical sides and rounded bottoms, filled with dark grey/brown sandy silt. No finds were recovered from either gully.

Trench 3

At the west end of the trench a layer of red/brown sandy clay lay beneath the made up ground and on top of the gravel (16.86m OD). There is no evidence of ploughing in this red/brown layer.

The above layer was not present at the eastern end of the trench. The soil profile at this end of the trench is the same as that observed in the northern end of Trench 2 - level of gravel = 16.72m OD.

The only archaeological features located in trench 3 was a linear ditch running east-west (3/1), Fig 2, with a flat bottom and moderately sloping sides, filled with sandy silt and gravel. A flint flake was recovered from the bottom of this feature. Natural features cutting shallow channels in the gravel, filled with yellow/brown sandy silt was observed.

Trench 4

The river channel located in Trench 1 was observed in this trench with similar alignment and profile (4/1), Fig 2, - lowest point = 15.47m OD. Bone and flint flakes were recovered from the river channel. A linear ditch similar to the profile of those seen in Trenches 2 and 3 was observed in the middle of the river channel (4/2), Fig 2. The ditch cuts into the red/brown sandy clay (4/1/2) Fig 3, but is sealed by dark grey sandy clay (4/1/1), Fig 3, (alluvium). The ditch was filled with a blue grey clay overlying a grey brown sandy clay primary silt (4/2/1), Fig 3.
Average height of gravel = c.16.00m OD.

Trench 5

The soil profile in this short trench was the same as that at the west end of Trench 3. No archaeological features were located.

Conclusions

From the above results, it appears that there is a gravel terrace in the north of the area, sloping down to the river floodplain in the south.

The river channel had a north-south alignment in both trenches 1 and 4, but the steeper bank on the eastern edge suggests it curves round from the west.

The appearance of the red/brown sandy clay, in the west of Trench 3, and in the bottom of the river channel, suggest that perhaps this layer was a late glacial or post glacial deposition which originally covered the whole area, but has been removed with construction of the sewage works lagoons.

The similarity in alignment of the ditches located may link them to the field system which has been observed from aerial photographs in the area immediately to the west. If this is so, it is interesting to note that the field system does not stop at the edge of the river terrace. The ditch located in the river channel was presumably dug into the natural hollow filled with sandy clay, before flooding and deposition of alluvium took place. Samples of the deposits were briefly analyzed by Mark Robinson, who reported that there were no organic remains or molluscs surviving in the fill of the ditch or river channel. The digging of the ditch would also be before the rise in water levels which has been reported elsewhere in the Thames Valley, which in this case would explain why only the later silting of the ditch was glayed.

Summary

About 300m of trenching on this site suggested that it includes a low gravel terrace forming the core of the Ham Field promontory, and that this had a single phase field system, as yet undated. The field system extended onto the flood plain, where in one hollow the field ditch became filled with alluvial silt soon after it was dug, apparently coinciding with a rise in the permanent water table. The date of this event might be in the 2nd millennium BC, as suggested by Mark Robinson for Runnymede, (pers comm), or it could be much later, even related to mill construction on the nearby high status settlement of Old Windsor. Despite the archaeological gravel surface having been truncated by ploughing and lagoon construction related to the sewage works, the site has nevertheless produced prime evidence for a major hydrological event in this part of the Thames Valley.

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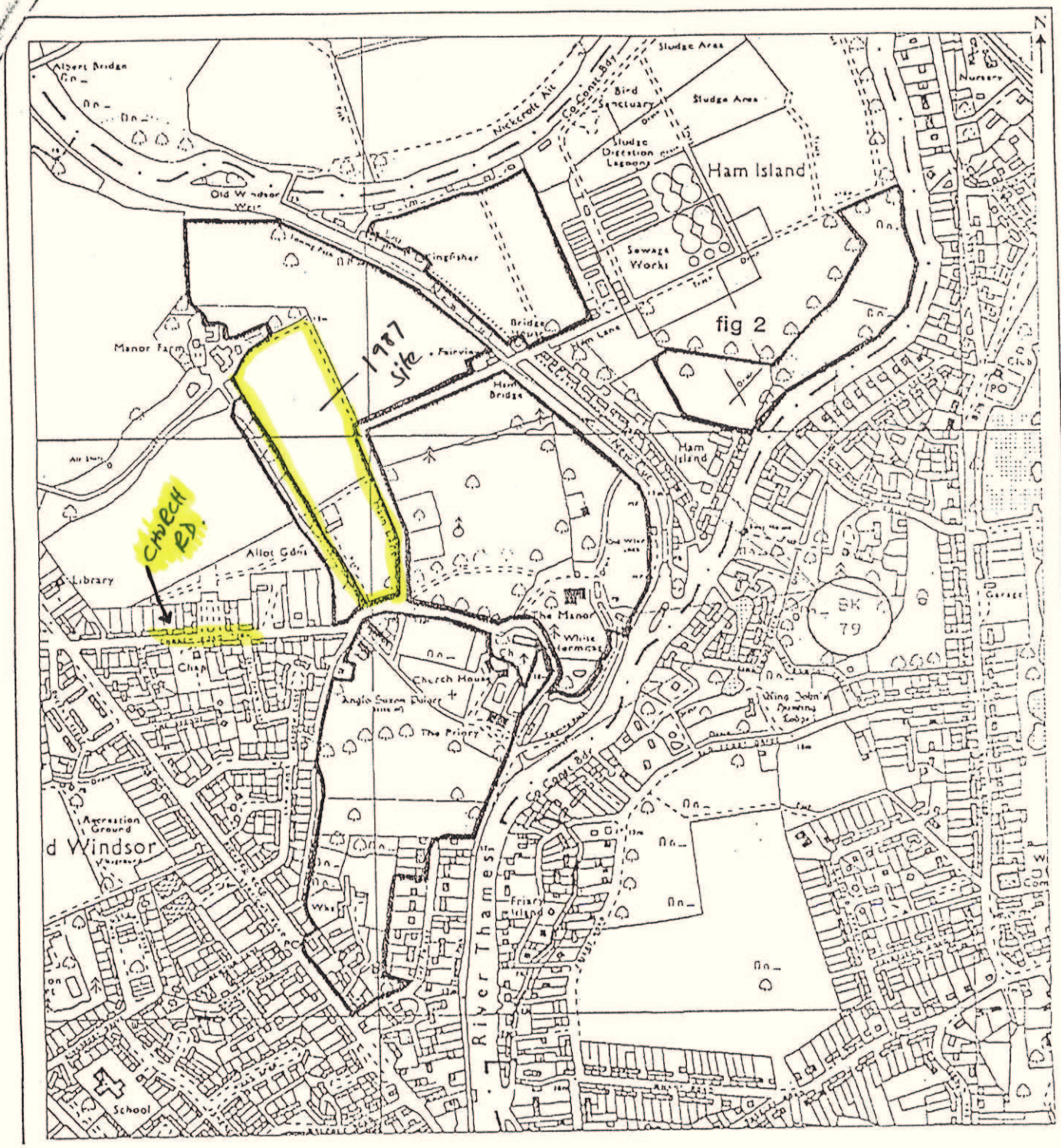
Brian Durham

Oxford Archaeological Unit
June 1989



Scale: 1:10000

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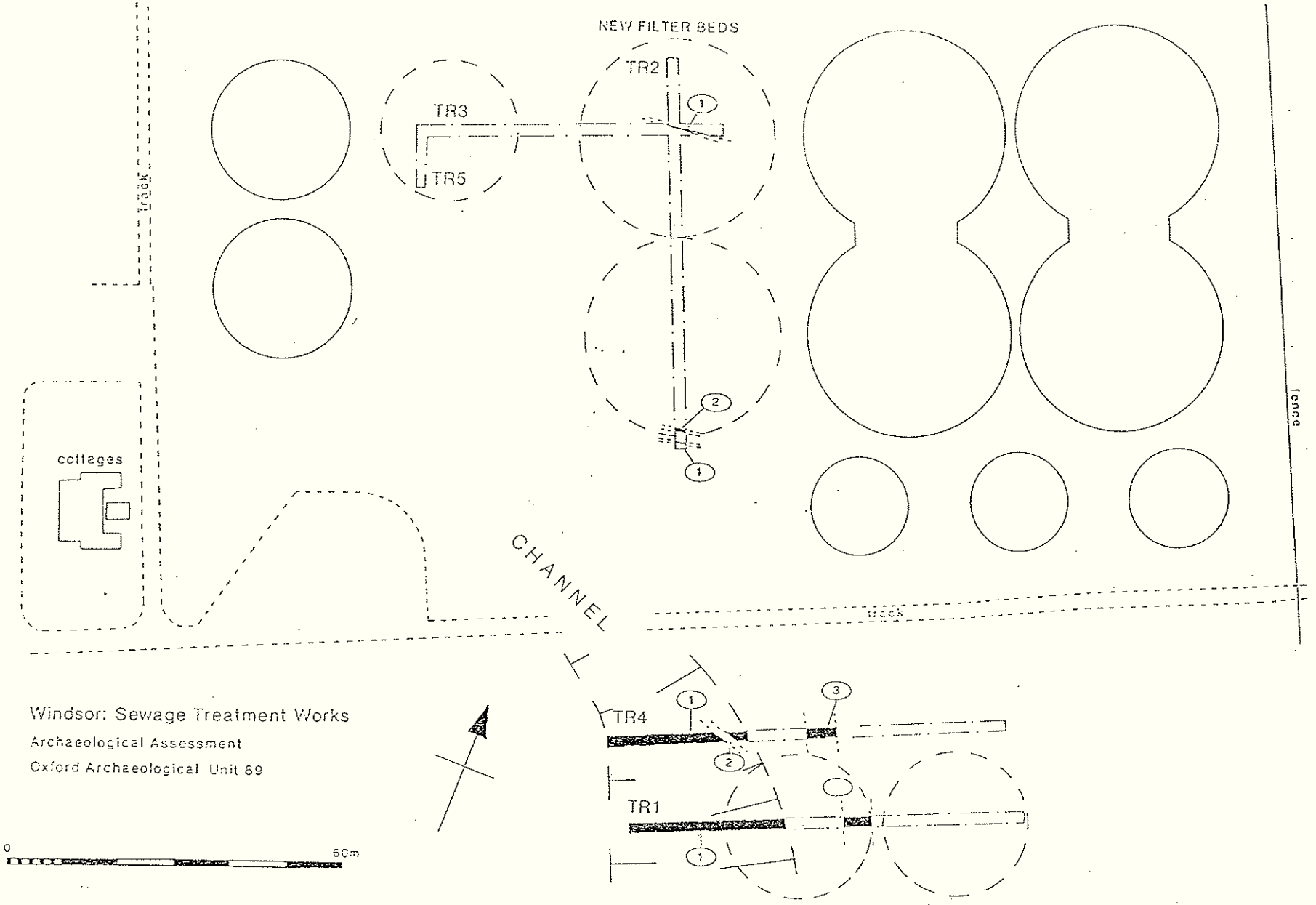
Fig. 1


NEW FILTER BEDS
TR2
TR3
TR5
track
cottages
CHANNEL
track
fence
TR4
TR1
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0
60m

Fig. 2

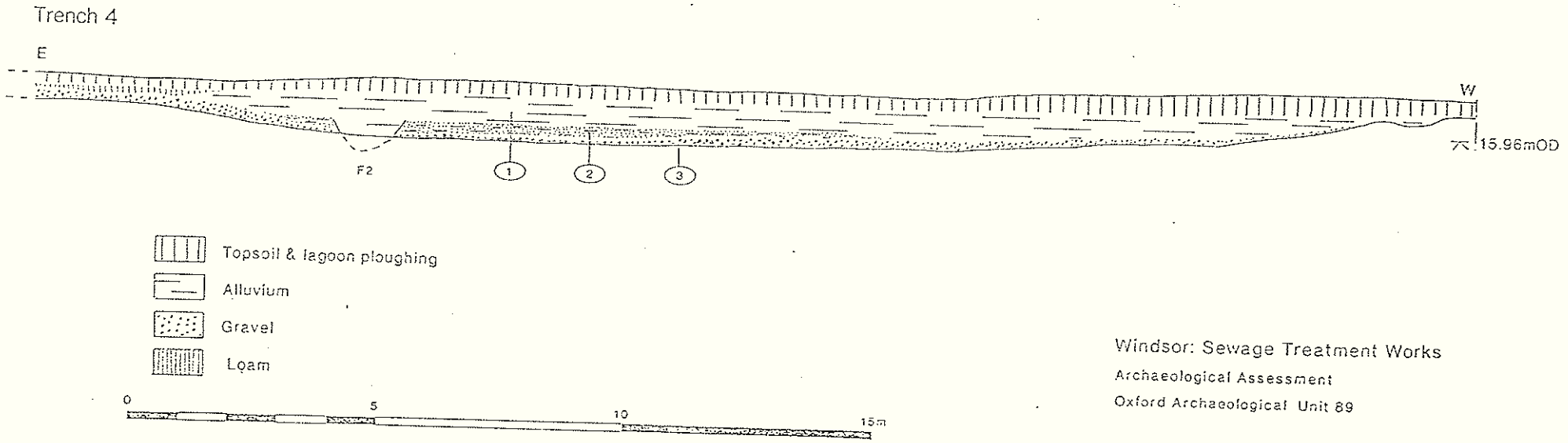
Trench 4
E
W
15.96mOD
F2
1
2
3
Topsoil & lagoon ploughing
Alluvium
Gravel
Loam
0
5
10
15m
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Fig.3