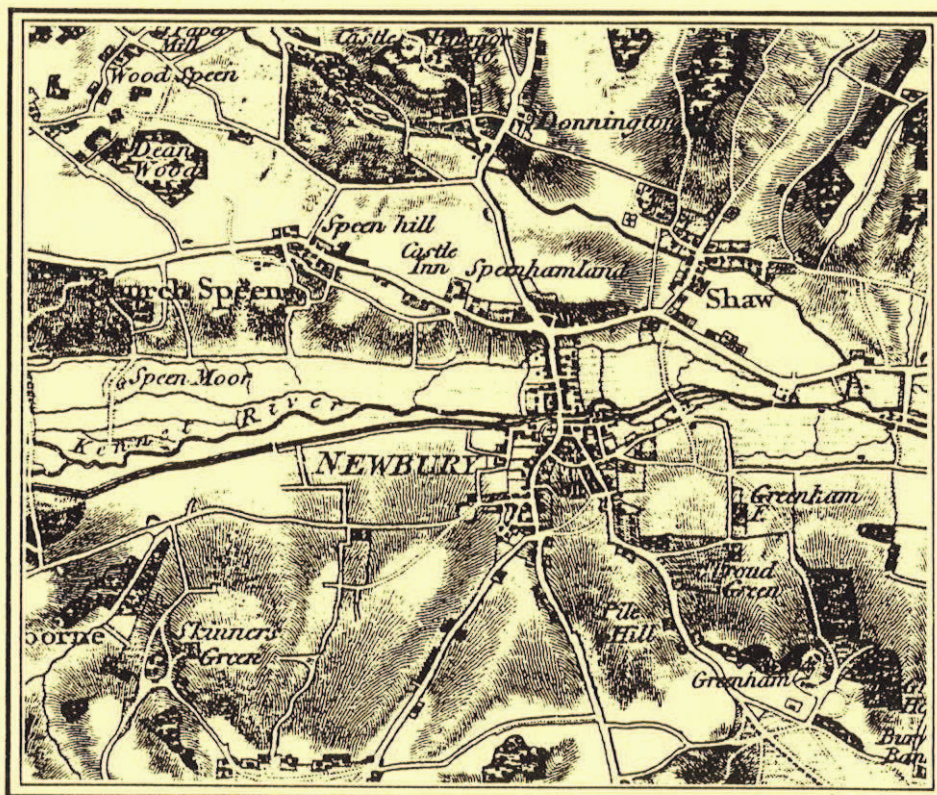


St. Michael's Road, Newbury

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR SU 4687 6676



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

September 1995

ST MICHAEL'S ROAD, NEWBURY
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SUMMARY

In August 1995 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on a vacant plot of land off St Michael's Road, Newbury on behalf of Sanctuary Housing Association, in advance of a planning application. The work was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by Babtie Public Services Division on behalf of Newbury District Council and a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by OAU. One trench and three test pits were excavated in place of the three proposed trenches because of difficult ground conditions. The evaluation established that, although the proposed development site had been extensively utilised during the 20th century, post-medieval (17th-19th century) cultivation of garden soils and pit digging was responsible for the truncation/disturbance of any earlier archaeological deposits which may have formerly existed on the site. No trace of the medieval road alignment of St Michael's road was found.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an evaluation on a vacant plot of land in Newbury (Fig. 1), extending to 0.14 ha off St Michael's Road to the south and bounded by St Nicholas' Road to the west, over a period of three days in August 1995 on behalf of Sanctuary Housing Association. The work was undertaken in advance of a planning application to be submitted to Newbury District Council, proposing the erection of three blocks of flats. Previous applications for the development of the site were subject to a legal agreement containing clauses in respect of the archaeological restraints.

The site lies within the historic core of medieval Newbury as defined by Astill (Historic Towns of Berkshire, 1978). The alignment of St Michael's Road suggests that it may originally have cut through the site and that evidence of this could have survived within the proposed development area.

The principal aim of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits, with particular reference to the possible alignment of the medieval road.

The evaluation was carried out where possible following the guidelines of a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by OAU and approved by Babtie Public Services Division on behalf of Newbury District Council, and in accordance with the brief prepared by Babtie. On-site amendments to the Written Scheme of Investigation were carried out with due consultation and approval.

2 METHODOLOGY

The Written Scheme of Investigation proposed that three trenches, measuring 16m, 12 and 8m long, would be excavated representing a 4% sample of the site area (Fig. 2). The 12m trench was to be situated in the south-east of the site with the intent of investigating the possible earlier alignment of St Michael's Road. The 8m and 16m trenches were positioned in the north and west parts of the site respectively.

An electrical supply cable and a water main restricted deep excavation in Trench 1 in the south east corner of site (Fig. 2).

To the north of the site a reinforced concrete floor impeded excavation (Fig. 2). This resulted in the 8m trench being reduced to a 3 x 2m test pit (Trench 2).

Concrete foundations to the west of the site (Fig. 2) prohibited the excavation of the 16m-long trench. Instead two test pits (Trenches 3 and 4) were excavated where it was possible between the foundations.

All modern deposits were excavated using a JCB and all archaeological deposits were hand excavated. Written recording was in accordance with the standard OAU Field Recording Manual.

3 TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The following is a summary and interpretation of the main features located within each of the four trenches. Further details of all contexts and artefacts appear in the Archaeological Context Inventory - Section 7.

3.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Description

A north-west to south-east orientated trench measuring 15 x 1.6 x 2.25m maximum depth. The centre and north-west end of the trench was widened to 3m to enable stepping down and safe access. An electrical supply cable and a water main prohibited deep excavation in the south-east end of the trench. The trench was located in the south-east corner of site (Fig. 2).

The "natural" gravel (Layer 132) was revealed at 75.96m OD (1.6m below the existing ground level).

Cutting Layer 132 to the north-west end of the trench was Context 122, a sub-circular (from portion visible) pit cut with concave sides. This pit measured 1.6m visible length, 0.50m visible width and 0.50m excavated depth. Pit 122 was filled with two sandy clays (Layers 121 and 120) overlaid by two clay loams (Layers 119 and 118).

Overlying the "natural" gravel 132 in the centre of the trench were two very clean sands (Layers 123 and 117) also thought to be of geological origin.

Cutting Layer 117 in the centre of the trench was Pit 102, a circular (from portion visible) cut with steeply sloping sides to a flat(ish) base. This pit measured 1m in diameter and 0.50m deep and was filled by Deposit 100, a friable dark brown loam.

Also cutting Layer 117 in the centre of the trench was Pit 113, a sub-circular (from portion visible) cut with almost vertical sides (base unexcavated). This pit measured 0.70m diameter x 0.55m excavated depth and was filled by a sequence of clay loams (Layers 116, 115, 114 and 101).

A third pit (112) cut Layer 117 in the centre of the trench. This pit was sub-rectangular (from portion visible) and measured 1.5m visible length x 1m width x 0.75m excavated depth. Pit 112 was filled by a sequence of clayey sands (Layers 111, 110, 109, 108, 107, 106, 105), overlaid by two clay loams (Layers 104 and 103).

Sealing the top fills of Features 102, 112, 113 and 122, in the centre and north-west end of the trench, was Layer 127, a dark brown friable loam with shell and charcoal inclusions. This layer was up to 0.45m thick and was seen through out the trench, except where it had been removed by modern intrusions.

Cutting Layer 127 in the north-west end of the trench was Pit 141, a sub-circular (from portion visible) cut with vertical sides measuring 1.75m diameter x 0.30m excavated depth. Pit 141 was filled by Deposit 140, a tenacious dark brown-grey clay silt.

Overlying the pit Fill 140, and only seen in the north-west end of the trench, was Layer 134 a friable 0.25m thick light yellow brown gravelly clay dump deposit.

Overlying Layer 140 in the north-west end of the trench and Layer 127 through out the rest of the trench was Layer 126. This layer was a dark brown friable sandy loam, containing occasional red brick fragments and poorly sorted gravel and stone, up to 1m thick.

Cutting Layer 126 in the centre of the trench was Pit 125, a vertical sided sub-circular feature measuring 0.60m diameter x 1.2m depth. This pit was filled by Deposit 124, a mixture of clays, concrete and loam.

Cut into Layer 126 in the centre and north-west end of the trench was Structure 129, consisting of partially demolished modern red brick wall and floor foundations.

In the centre of the trench Structure 129 had been cut by the construction of a red brick Soakaway 130/131. This structure collapsed on excavation and destabilised the lower and upper section in the centre of the trench.

Overlying Structure 129 and Fill 124 and extending through out the trench was Layer 133, a dark brown sandy loam with 40% demolition material. This deposit was cut to the south-east of the trench by electrical Cable 138/137 and water Main 136/135.

The trench was overlaid to the north-west by concrete floor and make-up 128 and to the south-east by tarmac surface and make-up 139.

Interpretation

Trench one revealed four pits (102, 112, 113 and 122) ranging from 17th to 19th century date. All had been cut into natural deposits and were overlain by garden soils, which in turn were overlaid by dumped deposits and cut by 20th century intrusions.

The presence of earlier pottery of 12th to 15th century date in some of the features (as well as 17th-18th) suggests that the 17th to 18th century activity may have removed earlier features.

3.2 Trench 2

Description

A 3 x 2 x 2.65m depth test pit excavated in the north of the site (Fig. 2).

The earliest deposit revealed in this test pit was Layer 202, a layer entirely composed of animal charnel, thought to be comparatively modern date. This deposit, which was not investigated further on Health and Safety grounds, was overlaid by 2.35m of modern demolition and refuse (Layer 201), which in turn was overlaid by a reinforced concrete floor (200).

Interpretation

Layer 202 was interpreted as a 20th century abattoir dump or something of a similar nature and as such was covered immediately due to possible health risks. Layer 201 is thought to be the infill of a basement, although no walls were visible in the section to confirm this supposition.

3.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 3)

Description

A 3 x 1.6 x 2.1m depth test pit excavated in the centre/south west of the site (Fig. 2).

The "natural" gravel (Layer 309) was revealed at 75.785m OD (2.1m below the existing ground level). This was overlaid by Deposit 308, a 0.20m thick friable light white brown slightly clayey "natural?" sand.

Overlying Deposit 308 was Layer 307, a friable dark brown sandy loam with occasional poorly sorted stone, charcoal and shell. This in turn was overlaid by Deposit 306, a friable dark brown sandy loam with 10% poorly sorted stones, charcoal shell and red tile fragments. Layer 306 was overlaid by Deposit 305, a loose dark brown-black sandy loam with 50% bottles, brick, tile, ceramics etc. This layer was removed to the west of the test pit by partially demolished concrete Foundation 304, 303, 302 and 301.

The test pit was overlaid through out its length by Deposit 300, a compact light yellow brown gravel/hardcore.

Interpretation

Trench 3 shows a loam build-up, characteristic of garden deposits, over naturally accumulated sand and disturbed by 20th century building foundations. The earliest garden deposit dates to the 18th-19th century, suggesting that the cultivation of this soil has contaminated earlier deposits.

3.4 Trench 4

Description

A 3 x 1.6 x 2.4m depth test pit excavated in the northern/central area of site (Fig. 2).

The "natural" sand (Layer 409) was revealed in this test pit at 75.295m OD (2.4m below the existing ground level). This was overlaid by Deposit 408, a friable light white brown clayey sand with occasional poorly sorted stone and gravel. Deposit 408 was overlaid by Layer 407, a friable dark brown sandy loam with occasional red tile fragments. This layer was in turn overlaid by Deposit 406, a loose black silty sand with 20% red brick and tile.

Overlying Deposit 406 was layer 405 a loose dark brown sandy loam with 40% brick and concrete rubble. Layer 405 was removed to the east of the trench by modern red brick foundations 404, 403 and 402.

The trench was overlaid throughout its length by concrete floor 401 and gravel/hardcore 400.

Interpretation

Trench four shows a build up of loams characteristic of garden deposits, over naturally accumulated sand and disturbed by modern intrusions. The earliest loam was not dated, but the strata is very similar to that in Trench 3 and has probably been subject to the same events.

4 THE FINDS

4.1 The Pottery by Lucy Bown

Only pottery from contexts not obviously post-19th century in date have been commented upon and are listed below.

Samples of post-19th century pottery were retained from contexts 126, 140, 305, 306, and 307.

<i>Cont.</i>	<i>Fabric Type</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Date From</i>	<i>Date To</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	OXAQ	2	112th	e15th	South Wiltshire type = Newbury type B
100	?	1	17th	18th	Early post-med flanged dish with raised line decoration
100	?	1	m13th	14th?	Medieval cooking pot sherd
116	TPW	1	19th		Transfer printed ware
116	GREW	1	18th	19th	Glazed red earthenware
120	OXAQ	1	112th	e15th	South Wiltshire type = Newbury type B
121	GREW	1	17th	18th	Glazed red earthenware, large pan/storage jar
121	Cistercian copy	1	17th	e18th	Cistercian type cup in local fabric- copy of Cistercian ware

4.2 Tile and Brick

Samples of post-medieval tile were taken from Contexts 140, 126, 120, 103, 100 and 306. Samples of post-medieval brick were taken from Contexts 116 and 140.

4.3 Glass

Samples of 18th-20th century glass were taken from Contexts 103, 140 and 305. All are fragments of wine or beer bottles

4.4 Animal Bone

A small quantity of animal bone was retrieved from Contexts 100, 103 and 140.

4.5 Clay pipe

One clay-pipe stem was found in Context 307.

4.6 Metalwork

A variety of post-18th century metal objects were retrieved from Contexts 116, 140, and 103. None are sufficiently identifiable or significant to merit further description.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The earliest features revealed by the evaluation appear to date to the 17th to 18th centuries. All had been cut into natural geological layers and sealed by a sequence of cultivated deposits characteristic of garden soils.

Only a very small amount of medieval pottery was retrieved from the site in the backfill of later features. This suggests that medieval activity may have occurred on the site but that most of the evidence for any earlier features has been removed or substantially disturbed by 17th to 19th century activity.

No evidence of an earlier alignment for St Michael's Road was seen during this investigation.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that the extensive modern intrusions, the cultivation and build up of a garden soil and the post-medieval pitting have all combined to significantly disturb any medieval deposits or features which may have previously existed on the site. The relative rarity of medieval finds, and the complete absence of any artefacts earlier than of 12th century date, further indicates that activity earlier than the post-medieval period was probably very limited on the site. Consequently it is the opinion of the OAU that any significant further archaeological work is not justified, beyond a possible watching brief during the excavation of any foundations. However, given the depth of post-medieval deposits recorded in both the geotechnical pits and the archaeological trenches, even a watching brief may be unnecessary if the foundations only penetrate the modern and post-medieval deposits.

7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

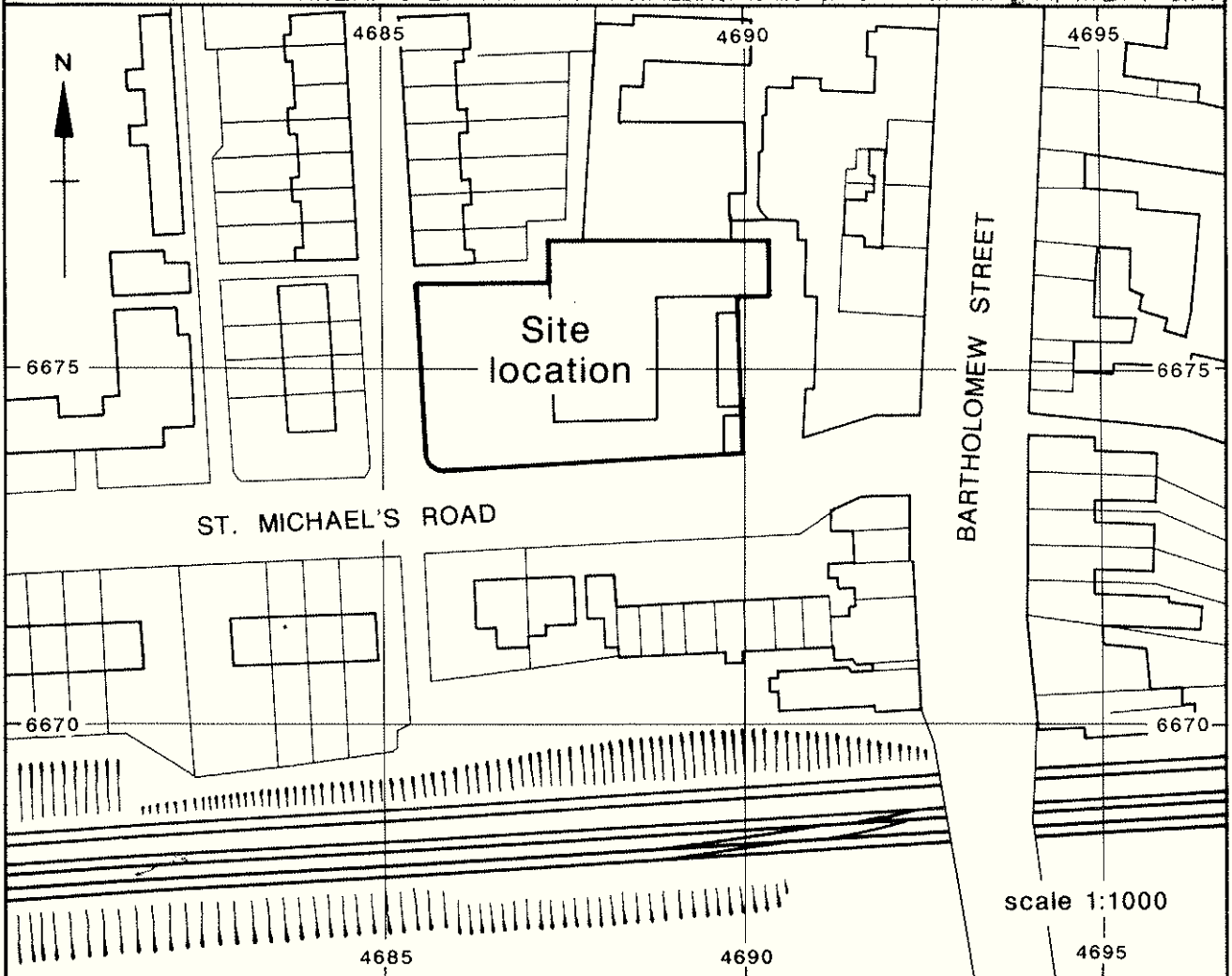
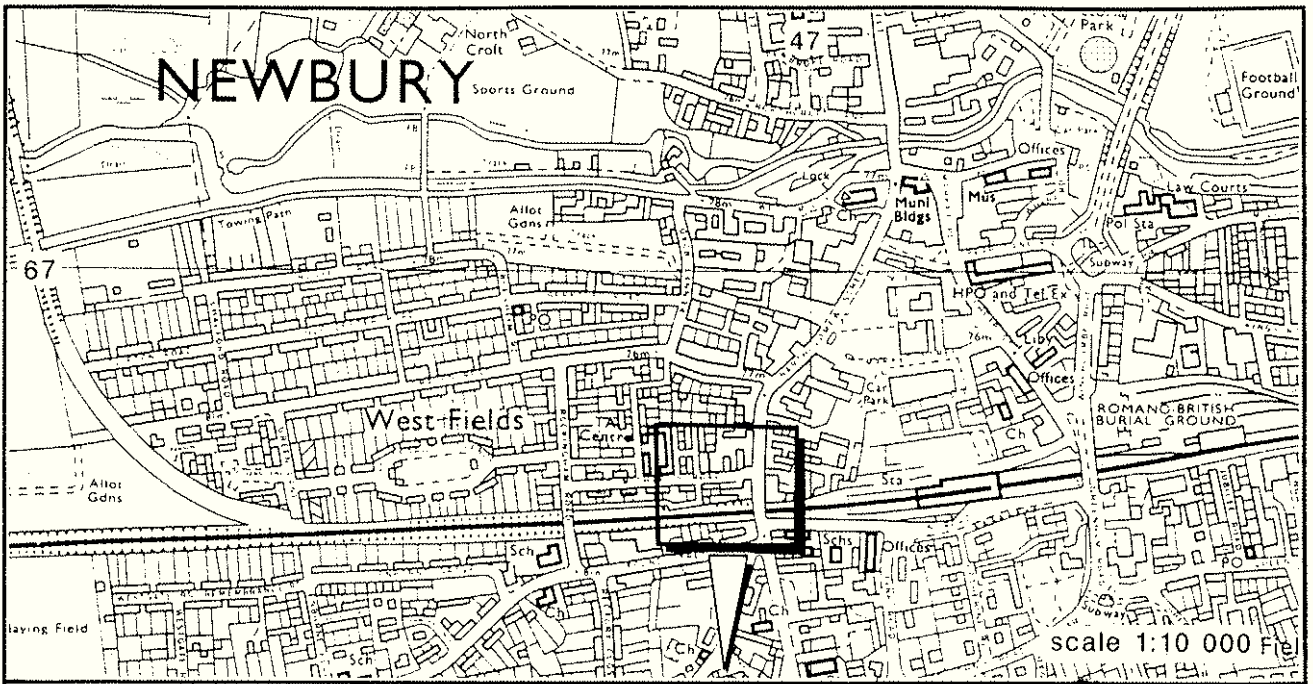
<i>Ctx</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Deposit	Pot, bone, CBM ¹	Fill of pit cut (102)
101	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (113)
102	Cut		Pit cut, possibly 17th-18th century
103	Deposit	Pot, bone, CBM, metal, glass	Fill of pit cut (112)
104	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
105	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
106	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
107	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
108	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
109	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
110	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)

<i>Ctx</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Comments</i>
111	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (112)
112	Cut		Pit cut, possibly 17th-18th century
113	Cut		Pit cut, possibly 19th century
114	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (113)
115	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (113)
116	Deposit	Pot,metal,CBM	Fill of pit cut (113)
117	Deposit		Clay-sand layer in centre of trench one
118	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (122)
119	Deposit		Fill of pit cut (119)
120	Deposit	Pot,CBM	Fill of pit cut (122)
121	Deposit	Pot	Fill of pit cut (122)
122	Cut		Pit cut possibly 18th century
123	Deposit		Naturally accumulated clay sand
124	Deposit		Fill of cut (125)
125	Cut		Modern cut possibly removal of piling or a borehole
126	Deposit	Pot,CBM	19th-20th century garden soil build-up
127	Deposit		18th-19th century garden soil build-up
128	Deposit		Concrete floor surface
129	Structure		Modern/partially demolished red brick foundations
130	Cut		Construction cut for modern soakaway
131	Structure		Modern/partially demolished red brick soakaway
132	Deposit		Natural gravel
133	Deposit		Redeposited garden soil mixed with demolition material
134	Deposit		Gravelly clay dump deposit in north end of trench one
135	Services		Ceramic water pipes
136	Cut		Cut for 135
137	Service		Electrical cables
138	Cut		Cut for 137
139	Deposit		Tarmac surface and make-up
140	Deposit	Pot,bone, metal,CBM,glass	Fill of pit cut 141
141	Cut		20th century pit cut

<i>Ctx</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Comments</i>
200	Deposit		Reinforced concrete floor surface
201	Deposit		Modern demolition and refuse/basement infill
202	Deposit		Dumped animal bone layer Abattoir dump?
300	Deposit		Gravel/hardcore surface
301	Deposit		Infill of foundation construction trench 304
302	Structure		20th century concrete foundation
303	Structure		20th century concrete foundation
304	Cut		Construction cut for structures 303 and 302
305	Deposit	Pot,glass	Dump layer 19th-20th century demolition and rubbish
306	Deposit	Pot,bone, CBM	19th(?) century garden soil
307	Deposit	Pot,clay-pipe	18th-19th century garden soil
308	Deposit		Naturally accumulated clay sand
309	Deposit		Natural gravel
400	Deposit		Gravel/hardcore surface
401	Deposit		Concrete floor of demolished building represented by 403
402	Deposit		Infill of construction cut 404
403	Structure		Partially demolished 20th century red brick foundation wall
404	Cut		Construction cut for 403
405	Deposit		Dump deposit possibly 20th century levelling for 403
406	Deposit		20th century dump deposit
407	Deposit		18th-19th (?) garden soil
408	Deposit		Naturally accumulated clay sand
409	Deposit		Natural sand

¹ CBM = Ceramic Building Material

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Oxford Archaeological Unit
September 1995



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Figure 1

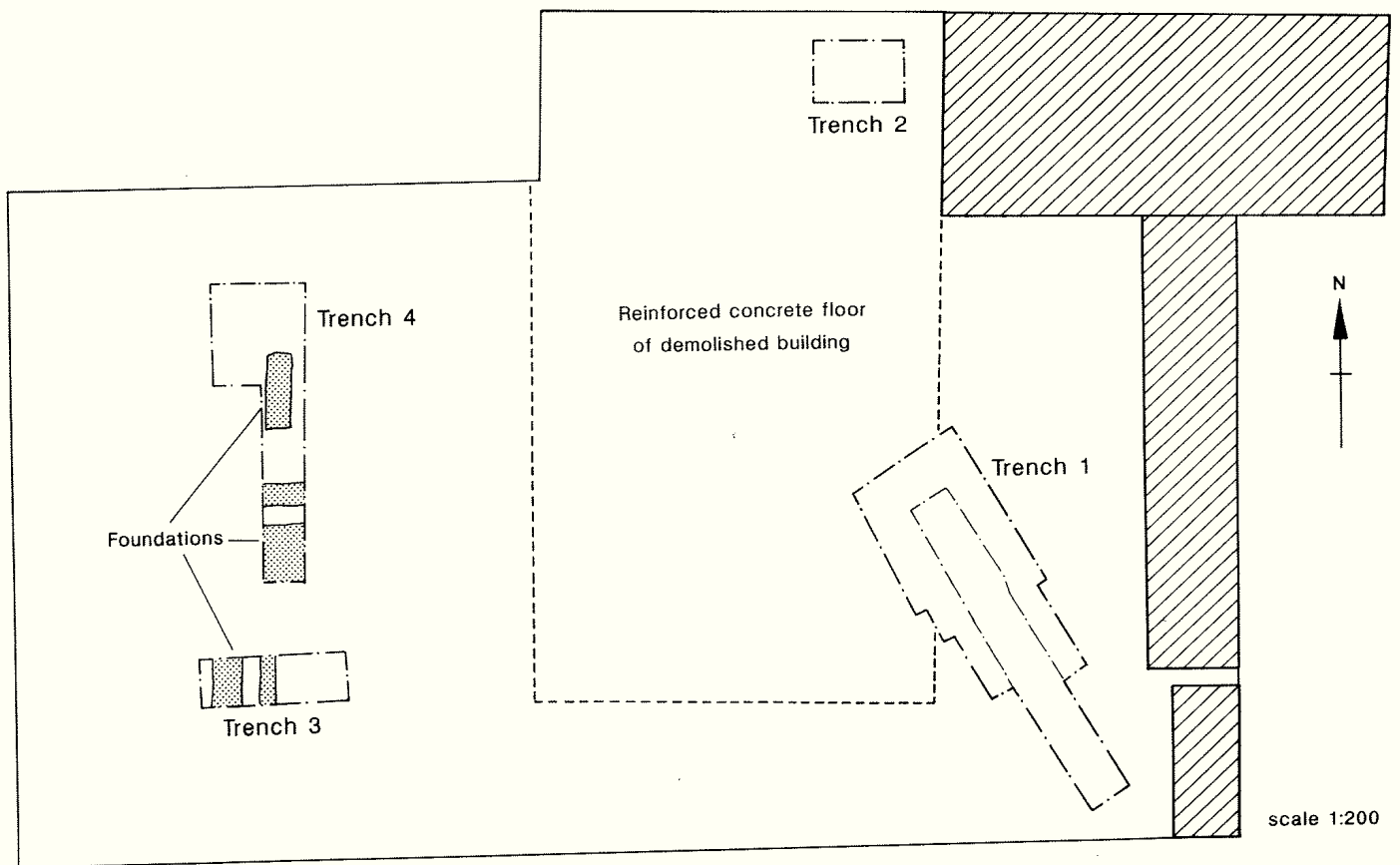
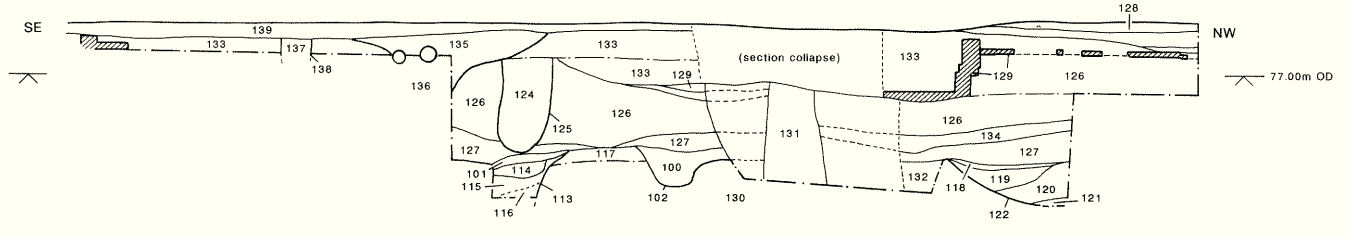
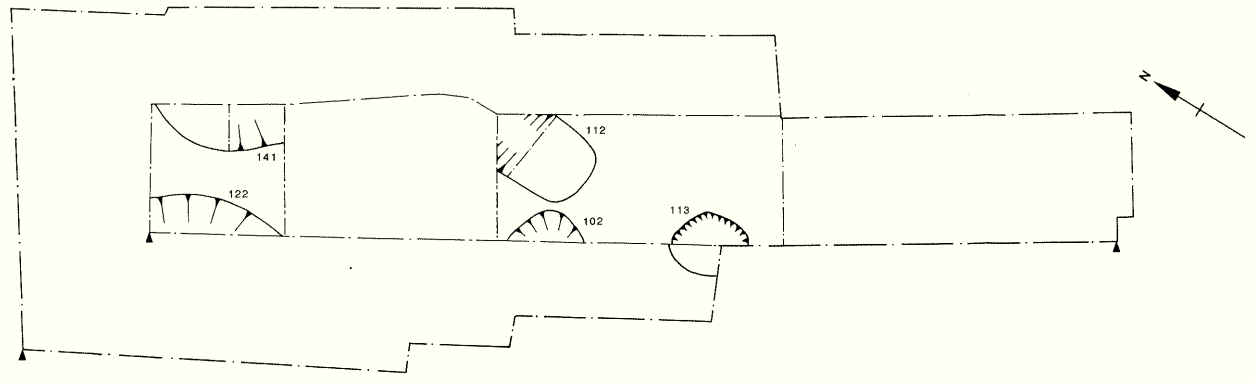


Figure 2

TRENCH 1

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TRENCH 3

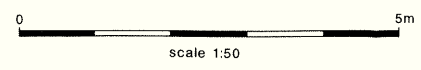
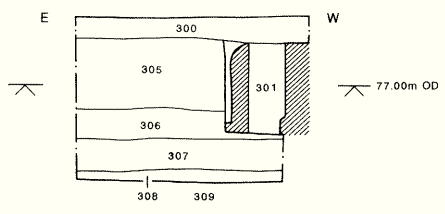


Figure 3



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