

Rochford Nurseries Stansted Mountfitchet Essex



Archaeological Evaluation Report



July 2006

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Illustrated by Lucy Martin

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**Phase II Evaluation
Rochford Nurseries,
Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex**

NGR TL 5145 2415

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

In November 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out the second phase of a field evaluation at Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex (TL 5145 2415) on behalf of CgMs Consulting. This phase of works consisted of 13 trenches placed to the north and east of the Phase I evaluation trenches. No archaeological features were found, although extensive modern disturbance associated with the Nursery formerly occupying the site was evident.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In November 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out the second phase of a field evaluation at Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex, on behalf of CgMs Consulting (Fig. 1). Trenches 34-46 were excavated between the 6th and 15th of November 2006 (OA 2006), following the previous phase of evaluation (Trenches 1-33) which had been undertaken in August 2006. The work was undertaken in respect of an Outline Planning Application for development of the site (Planning Ref: UTT/0443/98/OP).
- 1.1.2 The development proposal comprises 315 new dwellings, access, public open space, a play area, a school and a health centre and shop. The planning permission includes a condition requiring a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), submitted by the applicant and approved by the planning authority.
- 1.1.3 In connection with the planning application, a desk-based assessment of the site was undertaken by CgMs (Chadwick 2002) and supplied to the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management Team (HEM), acting as specialist archaeological advisors to Uttlesford District Council.
- 1.1.4 In response to a Brief for a evaluation of the site issued by HEM, CgMs prepared a Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how the requirements of the Brief would be met (Chadwick 2004).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The 3 hectare site lies on glacial sand and gravels over London Clay outcrops with other outcrops of Woolwich Beds and Chalk (IGS 1979; BGS Sheet 222) and at c 85 m OD.
- 1.2.2 The site comprises a broad, flat, east-west ridge to the south of Stansted Mountfitchet. Immediately north of the site is a valley, occupied by Manor Road and Stoney Common. The south and centre of the site are essentially level and to the south - beyond Foresthall Road - levels decrease to the west and the south.

1.2.3 Historic maps show that a pond once lay near the east boundary of the site and a stream drained north and then west down the valley occupied by Manor Road and Stoney Common; two further ponds are shown south of Foresthall Road. Stansted Brook passes c 150 m west of the site leading to a confluence with the River Stort, about 1 km SW of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate desk-based study completed in 2002 by CgMs (Chadwick, 2002). The results of this document were summarised in the Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation, and are only briefly repeated here.

1.3.2 The nearest Scheduled Ancient Monument is Stansted Mountfitchet Castle, some 800 m north of the site. No archaeological sites or finds are known on the site: although a number are recorded nearby (CgMs 2004, Fig. 3).

Prehistoric

1.3.3 Excavations by Framework Archaeology at nearby Stansted Airport have confirmed the generally held view that Lower Palaeolithic occupation on areas of London Clay is rare. Neolithic finds are also likewise scarce, though north-west of this site a flint chisel has been found in Stansted Mountfitchet (HER 4632; CgMs 2004, Fig. 3 No. 1). A Middle Bronze Age cremation burial has been located on the north side of the valley occupied by Manor Road and Stoney Common, some 300 m north of the site (CgMs 2004, HER 4662; Fig 3 No. 2). Little (if any) evidence of Iron Age activity is known in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Roman, Saxon and medieval

1.3.4 East of Stansted Mountfitchet Church there is evidence of a Roman building, possibly a high status villa (HER 4558; CgMs 2004, Fig. 3, No. 3). Further Roman artefactual evidence is known on the opposite side of the Stansted Brook from the development site near Ash Plantation (HER 4629/4713; CgMs 2004, Fig. 3, No. 4). No Saxon evidence is reported on or near the site. It is suggested that the site was largely agricultural in the medieval period; no finds of this date are reported.

Post-medieval

1.3.5 By the time of Chapman and Andre's map of 1777, the main local settlement was at Stansted Street to the north-west and at the church and Stansted Hall to the east. Tithe maps dated to the mid-1830s show the development site partly enclosed and partly open landscape and part of Stoney Field Common. By 1860, all open fields in the vicinity had been enclosed. By 1898, Stansted Park had been enlarged, partly falling within the east end of the development site. Newman's Plantation was established here. To the west, greenhouses of Rochford's Nursery are evident with a tramway connecting the greenhouses to Stoney Common Road and the GER at Rochford's siding. Up to 1923 the nursery complex and the tramway extended further into the

development site. The greenhouses stood on the site until the 1970s, together with a water tower.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 Paul Chadwick monitored the work on behalf of the developers as did Richard Havis for Essex County Council.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence/absence, location, extent, date, character, condition and depth of any archaeological remains within the development area.
- 2.1.2 The evaluation sought to clarify the impact of 19th and 20th century ploughing and thereby assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits, in particular the presence and character of any later prehistoric and Romano-British occupation.
- 2.1.3 The field evaluation was conducted within the general parameters of PPG16, the Essex County Structure Plan and the Uttlesford District Local Plan.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised the second phase of a large field evaluation of the site. The original Specification for the project methodology was revised in the light of changes to the development programme on the site, and the phasing of the evaluation reflects the need for ecological measures including the trapping and relocation of newts and reptiles.
- 3.1.2 A total of thirteen trenches were opened in this phase of works, ten of these were placed within the south-east of the site, with a further three trenches located west of the centre of the development. Trench locations are shown in Figure 2.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Trenches measured 25 m in length by 2 m in width.
- 3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand, as appropriate, and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature and to retrieve finds. All trenches and features were planned and sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 The only finds identified during this phase of evaluation were obviously modern and are presumably associated with the former nurseries. They typically consisted of modern pottery and debris, plant pots, electrical wiring and modern bricks. These finds were noted but not retained.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of deposits: General

4.1.1 The underlying natural comprised flint gravels in a matrix of orange-brown clay silt which overlay a patchy brickearth silty clay. It was noticeable that the gravels were predominantly on the top of the ridge and the underlying silty clays are more in evidence within trenches where the ground slopes down away from the ridge. In places spreads of glacial flint nodules were also observed and recorded. The natural was typically overlain by between 0.05 -0.3 m of orange brown silty clay which represents either a ploughsoil horizon or a former topsoil layer, which was in turn overlain by 0.2- 0.3 m of the present clay loam topsoil

4.2 Trench descriptions

Trenches 37 - 43 south-eastern part of site (Fig. 2)

- 4.2.1 The majority of these trenches exhibited the same soil sequence of natural gravels capped by ploughsoil /subsoil and the present topsoil.
- 4.2.2 Trenches 39 and 42 lay just to the west of what are presumed to be former Nursery buildings, where overgrown wall footings and substantial quantities of demolished asbestos roofing are still evident. Within the eastern end of Trench 42 and the whole of Trench 39, a 0.18 m thick deposit of modern brick and stone overlay the subsoil and was in turn overlain by a thin skim of topsoil. This seems to be a levelling up/hard standing area immediately to the east of the former buildings.
- 4.2.3 Within the northern end of Trench 40 the underlying gravel natural changes to a patchy pale orange brown silty clay. Here, a series of shallow stake or root holes (4004) were seen running NE -SW across the trench. These were investigated and found to be both shallow and irregular. Their cut(s) appears to slope down through the overlying subsoil and were filled by a loose dark brown loam (4005), similar to the overlying topsoil. No finds were recovered but it is thought that this feature was caused by the removal of a former picket fence and/or root disturbance in an area that had become over-grown.
- 4.2.4 No other features were identified within this area.

Trenches 34, 35 and 36 -south-eastern edge of site (Figs 2 and 3)

- 4.2.5 The ground falls off slightly towards the east, and this is reflected by a change in the underlying natural at the eastern end of Trenches 34 and 35, with the underlying gravel (3403/3503) sloping away to areas of pale orange brown clayey silt (3404/3504). Here these deposits are also overlain by a thicker layer pale brown silty loam subsoil and/or colluvial (3402/3502) than elsewhere, and in places this deposit was up to 0.54 m thick.
- 4.2.6 Within the western ends of Trenches 35 and 36 and throughout Trench 36 the general sequence is similar to elsewhere, with gravely orange brown silty clay and a patchy orange brown silty clay natural, overlain by between 0.1 - 0.25 m of orange brown silty loam subsoil and the present topsoil.
- 4.2.7 A possible pit (3406) was identified within the western end of Trench 34. This feature cut from the level of the underlying natural and ran beneath the southern baulk of the trench. As seen, it was sub-rounded in plan and measured 1.8 m from ENE - WSW by 0.8 m from NNW - SSE and was 0.25 m deep. The eastern side of its cut was a fairly even 45° slope but its northern side became irregular and undercut the surrounding natural. It was filled by a pinkish brown silty clay which contained frequent banded black flecking and mottles. The northern side of this feature was largely defined by a concentration of this black flecking. No finds were recovered. The nature of this fill and irregularity of its cut suggests that this is a natural feature and possibly one caused by mineral leeching or staining. It was immediately adjacent to a small rectangular area of disturbed ground and an associated near-by-modern water monitoring bore hole. No other features were seen.

Trenches 44, 45 and 46 - western side of site (Figs 2, 4 and 5).

- 4.2.8 These three trenches revealed a similar sequence as elsewhere, with a gravely natural overlain by a thin subsoil/ former ploughsoil and the present topsoil. Trench 44 was empty, whereas Trenches 45 and 46 revealed modern features.
- 4.2.9 Within the western end of Trench 45, a north-south aligned ditch (4504) was seen cutting from beneath the present topsoil. The ditch had evenly sloping 40° sides and a broad rounded base. It measured 2.5 m wide by 0.75 m deep and contained two fills; a orange brown gritty sandy silt primary fill (4506) and a secondary pale brown stoney silt loam(4505). The top of the upper fill contained modern bricks and CBM fragments. As it cuts from beneath the topsoil, this is a relatively modern feature and may be the result of a recent hedgerow removal, such as that commented on by the Phase I report.
- 4.2.10 Within the middle of Trench 45 a large area of orange brown silty clay (4503) was investigated by machining a large sondage across it. This revealed that the spread gradually changed shape to a depth of 1.1m beneath the present ground level. It was investigated for finds but appeared to be archaeologically clean and is presumed to be a variation in the underlying natural.

- 4.2.11 Two modern pits were seen cutting from beneath the topsoil within Trench 46. The largest of these (4606) was adjacent to a cement capped metal pipe that ran east-west across the northern end of the trench. This pit was investigated by machining a large sondage across it. The pit was in excess of 3 m wide and was not bottomed at a depth of 1.1 m beneath the present ground level. Its lower fill (4608) was a mixture of orange brown silty clay and silty clay loam with patches of brown loam, similar to the present topsoil. Its upper fill (4607) was a brown loam, which contained very occasional CBM fragments.
- 4.2.12 Within the south of the trench a smaller pit (4604) was also seen. Its fill, a dark brown silt loam (4605), contained modern brick and coal fragments. The pit measured 1.8 m in diameter. It was not excavated.
- 4.2.13 No other features were seen, although modern debris was noted within the overlying topsoil.

4.3 Finds

- 4.3.1 Only modern finds were observed. These were noted, but not retained (see section 3.3.1. above).

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 5.1.1 The results of this phase of the evaluation largely confirm the results of the first phase. Several modern features were identified, particularly within the west of the site. These consisted of a probable robbed out hedgeline or modern ditch, modern pipe-work, nursery structures and associated modern pits. No archaeological finds or features were identified.
- 5.1.2 Weather conditions were fair, with occasional rain, and did not adversely affect the evaluation.
- 5.1.3 The stratigraphic sequence is consistent throughout. Natural gravel, including areas of large flint cobbles thought to be glacial in origin, was exposed at the base of all of the trenches, with no masking deposits other than the ploughsoil/former topsoil.
- 5.1.4 The trench sample is therefore felt to be an accurate reflection of the archaeological potential of this part of the site.

5.2 Overall interpretation

- 5.2.1 Although a number of features were investigated, none proved to be archaeologically significant. The majority of the features proved to be of modern origin, including two modern pits and drainpipe within Trench 46, a north-south aligned ditch which cuts from beneath the present topsoil within Trench 45, and a probable fenceline disturbance within the northern end of Trench 40.

- 5.2.2 A possible pit was also investigated within the south western end of Trench 34, but proved to be of irregular shape, with under-cutting sides. Its fill, a pinkish brown silty clay, contained frequent banded black flecking and mottles. This patterning is thought to be the result of manganese staining or possibly the mineralisation of stone inclusions. No finds were recovered and it is thought that this feature not archaeological in nature. It is noted that this feature was immediately adjacent to a small area of probable machine disturbance associated with a geo-technical bore-hole, so it is also possibly caused by localised water extraction or spillage.
- 5.2.3 Within Trenches 39 and 42 modern made-ground deposits were recorded overlying the subsoil, just to the west of former nursery buildings.
- 5.2.4 Elsewhere the general sequence follows that found during the Phase I evaluation with natural silty clay deposits appearing on sloping ground and gravels at the top of the ridge. These natural deposits were overlain by a thin subsoil or former ploughsoil, and the present topsoil.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 34						
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Finds	Date
3400	Layer	Topsoil	0.2			
3401	Layer	Subsoil	0.2			
3402	Layer	Silty gravel				
3403	Layer	Gravel				
3404	Layer	Silty clay natural				
3405	Fill	Fill of feature 3406	0.25	1.8		
3406	Cut	Probable natural feature	0.25	1.8		
Trench 35						
3500	Layer	Topsoil	0.2			
3501	Layer	Subsoil	0.15			
3502	Layer	Silty loam colluvium				
3503	Layer	Gravel and loamy silt				
3504	Layer	Clay-silt upper natural				
Trench 36						
3600	Layer	Topsoil	0.2			
3601	Layer	Subsoil	0.25			
3602	Layer	Coarse gravels				
3603	Layer	Silty clay natural				
Trench 37						
3700	Layer	Topsoil	0.1			
3701	Layer	Made ground	0.2			
3702	Layer	Silty gravel natural				
Trench 38						
3800	Layer	Topsoil	0.1		Pottery/ CBM	Modern
3801	Layer	Made ground	0.2			
3802	Layer	Subsoil	0.2			
3803	Layer	Gravelly silty clay				
Trench 39						
3900	Layer	Topsoil	0.1			Modern
3901	Layer	Made ground	0.08			Modern
3902	Layer	Subsoil	0.2			
3903	Layer	Coarse gravels				
3904	Layer	Made ground	0.1			Modern
Trench 40						
4000	Layer	Topsoil	0.2		Pottery/CBM	Modern
4001	Layer	Subsoil	0.3			
4002	Layer	Gravel and silty clay natural				
4003	Layer	Silty clay with gravel patches				
4004	Fill	Topsoil filling 4005	0.05-0.35			
4005	Cut	Former hedge or fenceline	0.05-0.35			
Trench 41						
4100	Layer	Topsoil	0.1			
4101	Layer	Subsoil	0.23			
4102	Layer	Natural gravels				

Trench 42						
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Finds	Date
4200	Layer	Topsoil	0.15			
4201	Layer	Subsoil	0.1			
4202	Layer	Natural sandy silt				
4203	Layer	Made-ground	0.05			Modern
Trench 43						
4300	Layer	Topsoil	0.2			
4301	Layer	Subsoil	0.2			
4302	Layer	Natural sandy silt and gravel				
Trench 44						
4400	Layer	Topsoil	0.22			
4401	Layer	Subsoil	0.15			
4402	Layer	Natural sandy silt and gravel				
Trench 45						
4500	Layer	Topsoil	0.3			
4501	Layer	Subsoil	0.1			
4502	Layer	Natural sandy silt and gravel				
4503	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	0.7+			
4504	Cut	Ditch	0.75	2.5		Modern
4505	Fill	Upper ditch fill	0.56		Brick, CBM	Modern
4506	Fill	Primary ditch fill	0.12			
Trench 46						
4600	Layer	Topsoil	0.3			
4601	Layer	Subsoil	0.1			
4602	Layer	Natural sandy silt and gravel				
4604	Cut	Modern Pit		1.8		Modern
4605	Fill	Fill of Pit 4604		1.8		Modern
4606	Cut	Large Pit	0.7 +	3.00 +		Modern
4607	Fill	Upper fill of Pit 4606	0.45		CBM	Modern
4608	Fill	Lower fill of Pit 4606	0.34 +			Modern

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

British Geological Survey Sheet 222; Great Dunmow

Chadwick 2002 *Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. Desk-based assessment. CgMs Consulting, 2002*

Chadwick 2004 *Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation. Land at Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. CgMs Consulting, August 2004.*

Institute of Geological Sciences, 1979

OA 2006 *Rochford Nurseries, Stanstead Mountfitchett, Essex; (Phase I) Evaluation Report.*

OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition, ed. D. Wilkinson, August 1992)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex

Site code: STMRON06

Grid reference: TL5145 2415

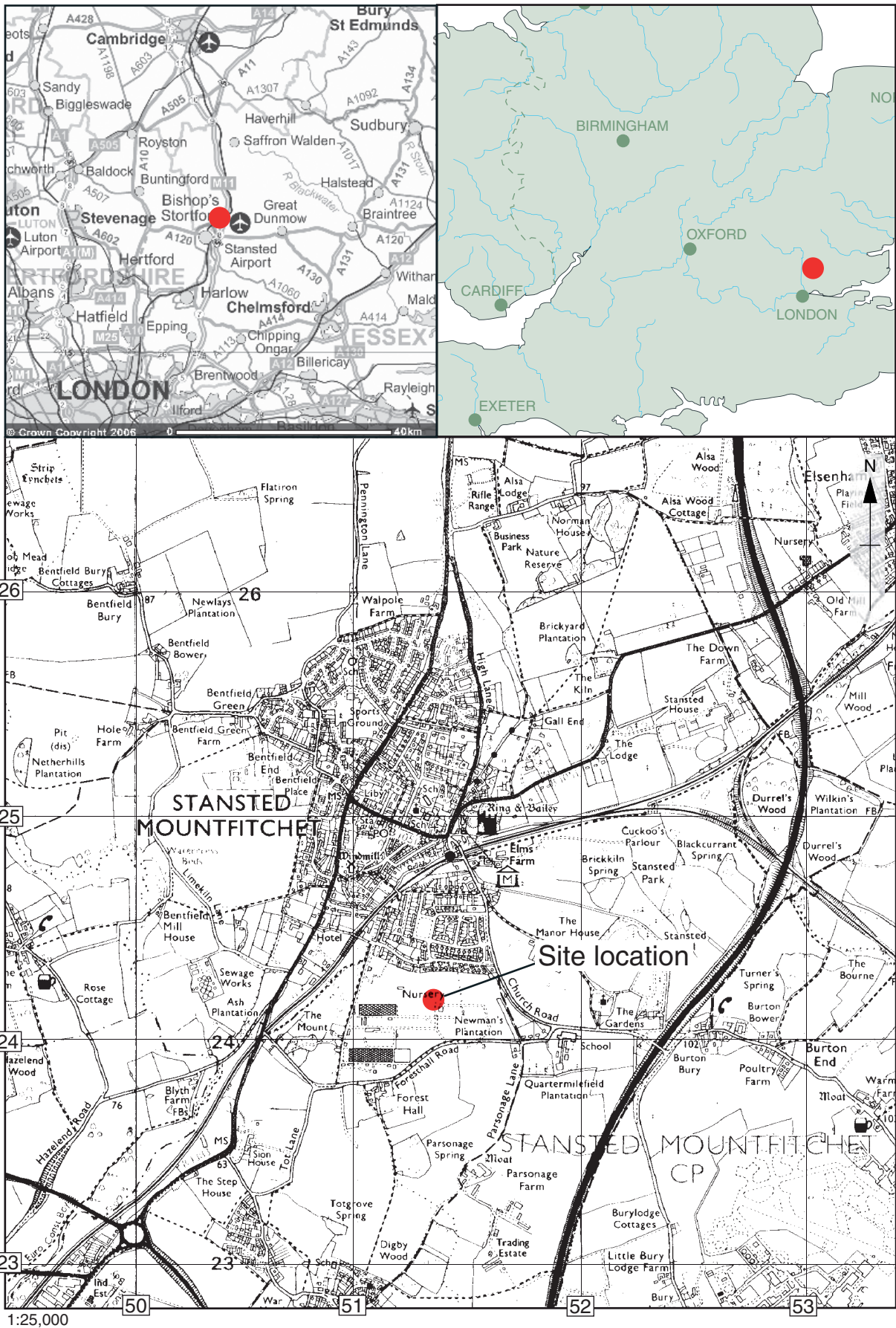
Type of evaluation: 13-Trench evaluation - Phase II of investigation

Date and duration of project: November 6th- 15th 2006

Area of site: 3 ha.

Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features except those relating to modern remains of the nursery buildings.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Saffron Walden Museum in due course, under the following accession number: SAFWM: 2006.36



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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Trench location plan

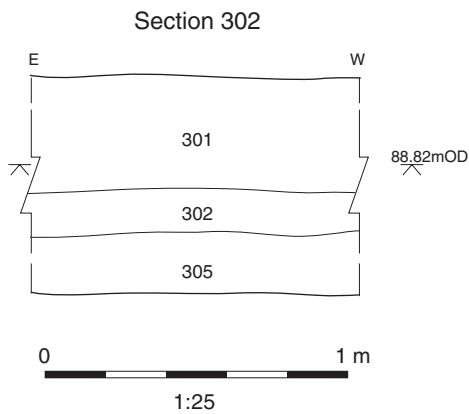
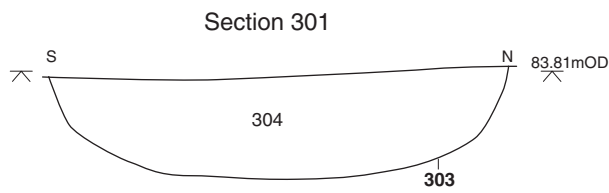
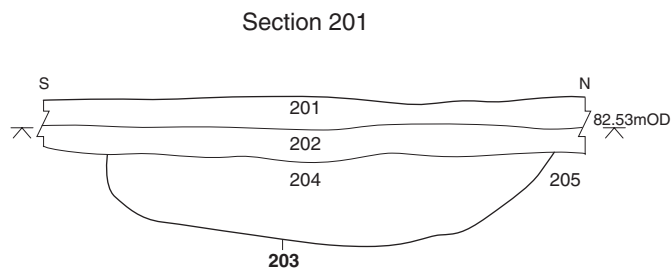
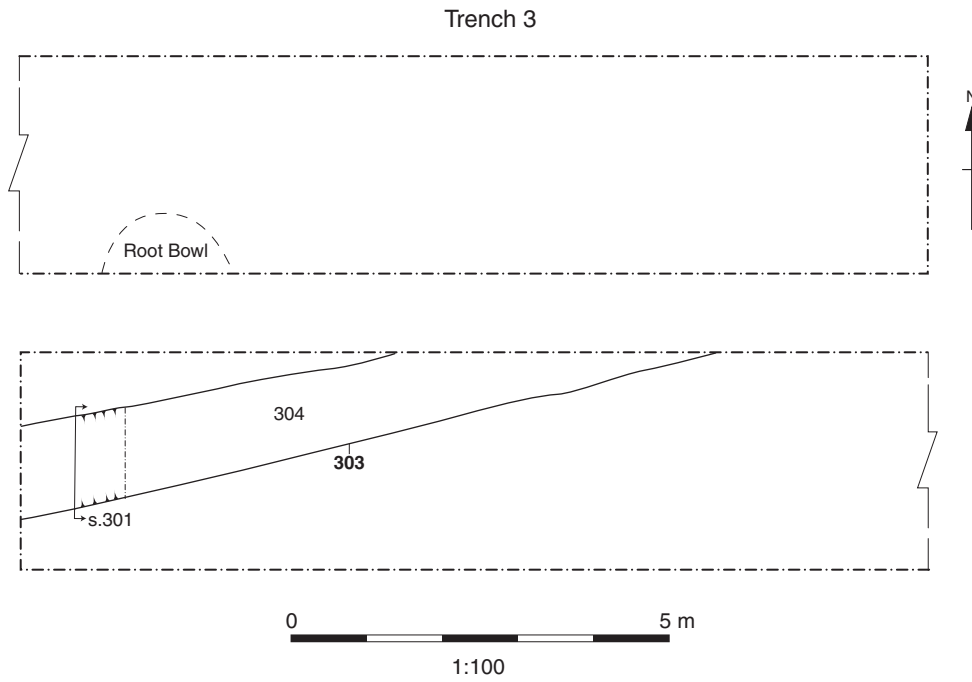


Figure 3: Trench 3, sections 201, 301 and 302

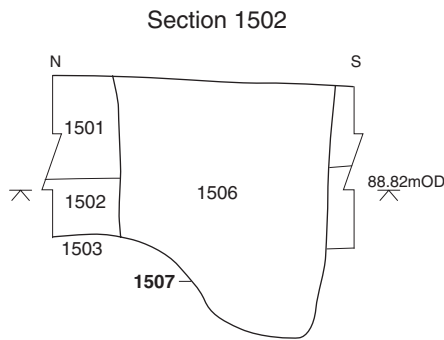
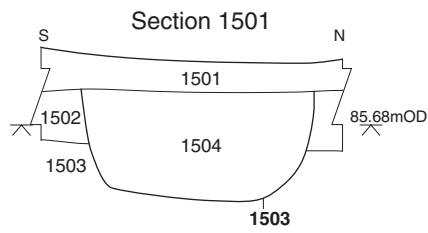
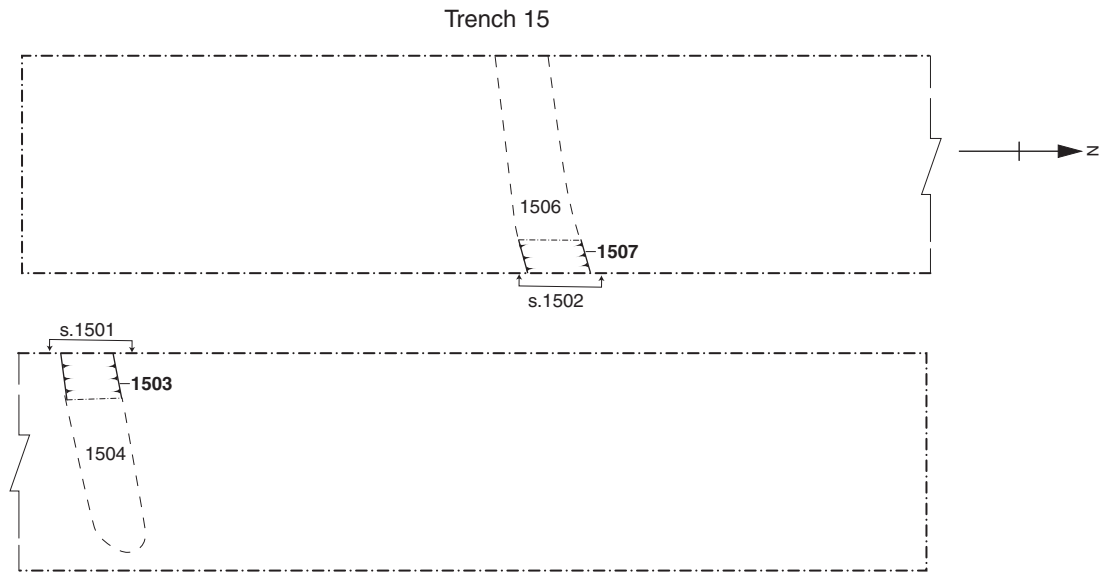


Figure 4: Trench 15, sections 1501 and 1502

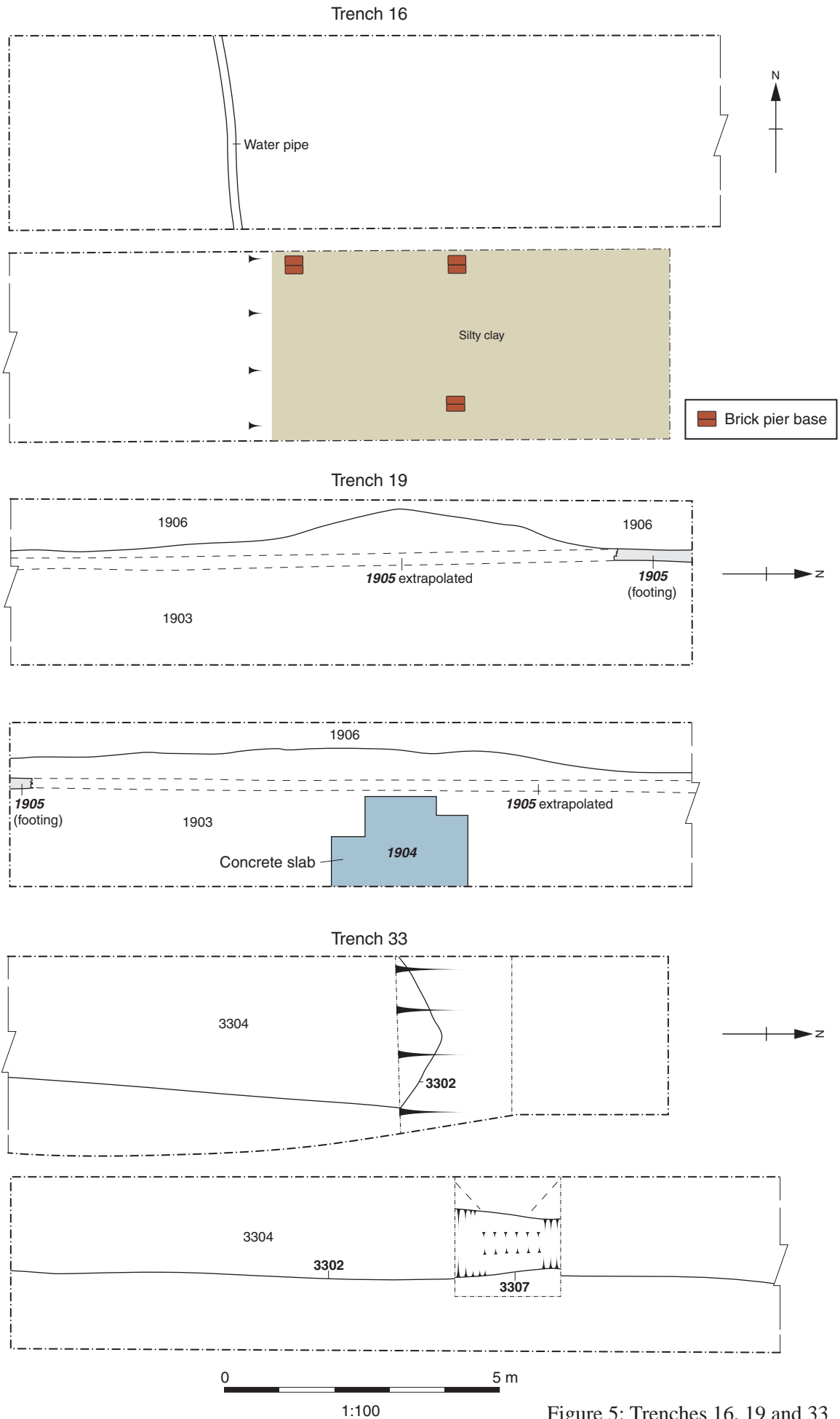






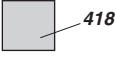








Figure 5: Trenches 16, 19 and 33

	Section line and number
	Section through feature not illustrated with section drawing
	Limit of excavation
	Sondage / Interior limit of excavation
	Fill line and number
	Cut line and number
	Structure number
	Unclear boundary
	Stones
	Hachures indicate inclination of slope inside excavated feature
	Levels
	Grid point
	Continuation line (trench edge continues)



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