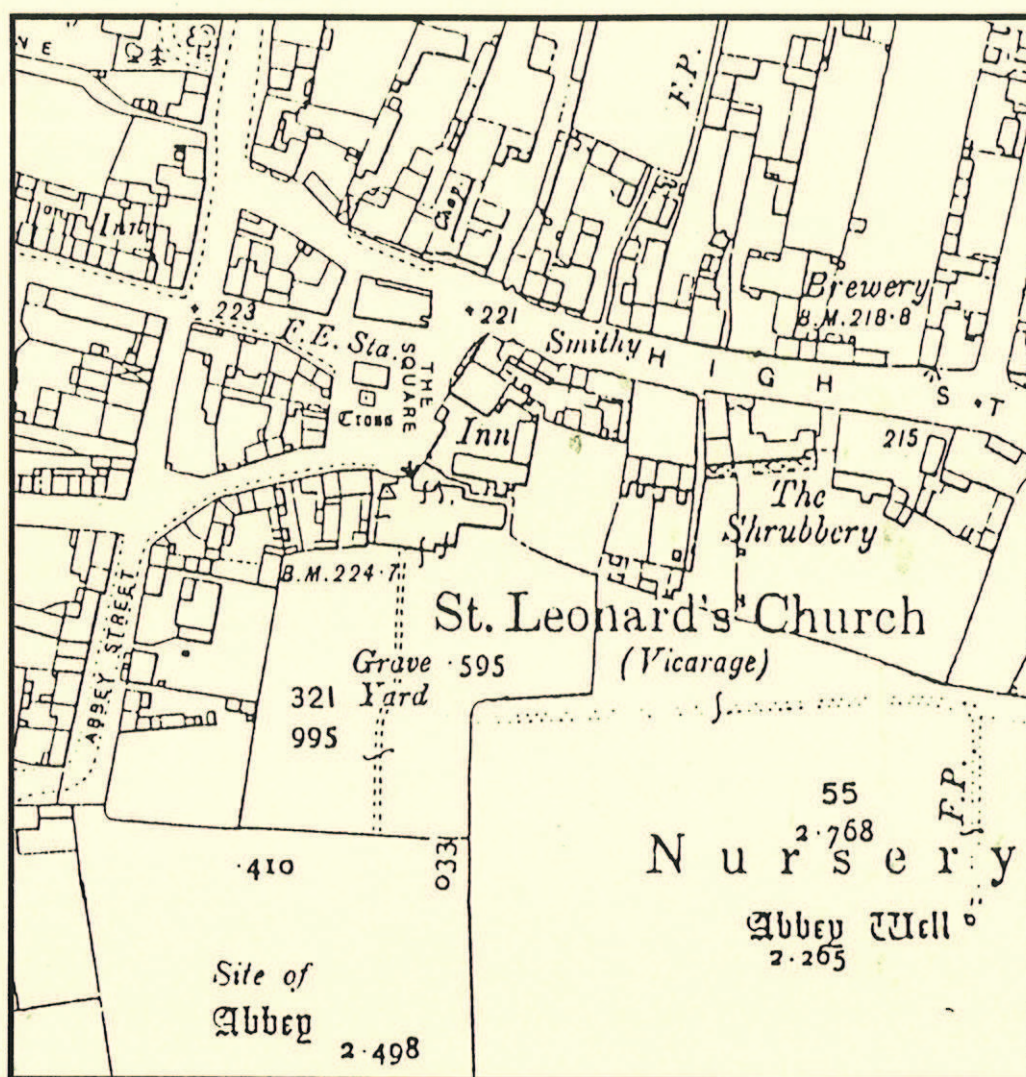


EYNHAM

THE SHRUBBERY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



**THE SHRUBBERY, EYNHAM, OXFORDSHIRE
SP 43459021**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

JULY 1992

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at The Shrubbery, High Street, Eynsham (Fig. 1). A subsoil of prehistoric date was cut by several early Saxon features. Late Iron Age and Roman pottery was also recovered, hinting at activity in the area during these periods. Two gullies in Trench 3 could be of Roman or early Saxon date. A thick medieval ploughsoil covered all earlier features and layers, and was in turn cut by a late or post-medieval ditch (3/6) and a Victorian pit (2/5).

1 INTRODUCTION

The Shrubbery lies at the NE corner of Oxfordshire County Scheduled Ancient Monument 118, within the precinct of Eynsham Abbey. This was a Benedictine house founded in AD 1005 by the ealdorman Aethelmaer. The Abbey was refounded by King Henry I at the beginning of the 12th century, after a period of uncertainty in the decades following the Norman Conquest.

A planning application has been made by Mrs Y Bolsover for the construction of a new house within the property of the Shrubbery. This required Scheduled Monument Consent from the Secretary of State for the Environment. An archaeological evaluation was required before Consent would be granted. Scheduled Monument Consent for the evaluation was granted on 2 June 1992 (Reference HSD/9/2/1988 Pt 7). This was undertaken on 22-23 June 1992 by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies on flat ground typical of the gravel terrace on which Eynsham sits. The area is rich in archaeological remains, especially of the Bronze Age, early Saxon and medieval periods. There have been numerous excavations in the area, and in recent years the OAU has been involved in a major programme of excavation and survey within the precinct of Eynsham Abbey. The principal component of this work has been the total excavation during 1990-2 of a large area to the E of St Peter's Roman Catholic Church in advance of cemetery extensions. These excavations produced an extensive sequence of activity commencing in the Bronze Age, and continuing unbroken throughout the Saxon and medieval periods (Chambers and Keevill 1991; Keevill 1992).

Evidence for early Saxon activity has already been found at The Shrubbery. A swimming pool was built immediately to the SW of the current evaluation area in 1975. The work was observed by R A Chambers of the OAU. Stake and postholes and a possible sunken featured building (SFB) were noted. Finds included late Roman and early Saxon pottery, and a 'doughnut' loomweight characteristic of the early Saxon period (Chambers 1976).

3 EVALUATION STRATEGY

Three trenches were excavated within the footprint of the proposed building (see Fig. 2); each trench was 1.6 m wide. Trench 1 (8.6 m long) was parallel to the E boundary of the property; Trench 2 (9.8 m long) was perpendicular to 1 to its W; Trench 3 (8 m long) was immediately to the W of 2. The trenches were constricted by existing shrubs, trees and hedges. Archaeological features were noted in all three trenches. Thick layers of overburden covered all but the most modern features. It was not possible to trench the proposed new service line to the development due to access problems. This was accepted in the Scheduled Monument Consent.

Topsoil and overburden layers were removed by mechanical excavator. All features were cleaned by hand, and sections were manually excavated in most contexts in order to determine their character and date. The Victorian pit, 2/5, was sectioned mechanically. All contexts were drawn in plan and section, photographed, and recorded in writing. Finds were recovered from most contexts. No soil samples were taken, as no potential for environmental material was evident. The finds have been examined by members of the Eynsham Abbey post-excavation team. Throughout this report context numbers are preceded by the relevant trench number; ie 1/2 = Trench 1 layer 2, and 3/6 = trench 3 ditch 6.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Soils (Fig. 3)

The sequence of soils was identical in each trench, although soil depths varied slightly. The dark grey-brown topsoil (1/1, 2/1, 3/1) was 0.58-0.68 m deep. It overlay a light/medium grey-brown ploughsoil (1/2, 2/2, 3/2), 0.2-0.3 m thick, of medieval date. This sealed a light orange-brown cultivation horizon (1/3, 2/3, 3/3), 0.2-0.34 m thick; this is probably of late prehistoric or Roman date, as all features cut this horizon. It represented disturbed material from a prehistoric subsoil (1/4, 2/4, 3/4), bright orange-brown in colour, of which 0.2 m survived undisturbed. Natural gravel was reached at the base of this sequence.

4.2 Archaeology (Appendix 1; Figs 2 and 3)

Two features were present in Trench 1. A broad V-profiled gully ran obliquely along the W side of the trench. Its W edge lay beyond the trench. Romano-British and early Saxon potsherds were recovered. The gully cut layer 1/3, and its fill was sealed by layer 1/2. Pit 1/6 cut layer 1/2 at the S end of the trench. Residual sherds of late Iron Age pottery were found in this feature.

Trench 2 contained four features. A V-profiled ditch, 2/6, ran obliquely along the full length of the trench, terminating at its E end in a posthole, 2/8. The relationship between the two features was unclear.

Ditch 2/6 continued through into Trench 3 (context 3/8). A possible posthole, 2/7, lay immediately to the S of 2/6 at the W end of the trench. Romano-British and early Saxon potsherds were recovered from 2/6. All three features cut layer 2/3 and were sealed by layer 2/2.

Layer 2/2 was cut by a Victorian rubbish pit. Large quantities of pottery, glass, and brick were recovered. Two complete and one broken bone toothbrushes and an ivory ring were also found in the pit. The pit continued beyond the N and S edges of the trench.

Trench 3 contained five ditches, a gully, a posthole, and an unidentified feature. Ditch 3/9 ran N-S across the trench and was cut by ditches 3/7 and 3/8. 3/8 represented the continuation of 2/6. 3/8 contained sherds of Roman pottery, but this must be residual as early Saxon material was recovered from 3/9. Ditch 3/11 lay immediately to the W of ditch 3/7. All four ditches had V profiles with slightly rounded bases. Curving gully 3/5 lay to the W of 3/11 and contained a single Roman potsherd. The feature had a U profile. Posthole 3/10 lay on the E edge of ditch 3/8, and contained a small sherd of early Saxon pottery. Feature 3/12 was partially revealed at the N end of the trench and was not excavated. All of the above features cut layer 3/3 and were sealed by layer 3/2.

Ditch 3/11 was recut along its length by ditch 3/6. The latter, however, was cut through layer 3/2 and is therefore of medieval or later date. All finds from the feature were residual; they included animal bone, and Roman, early Saxon and late Saxon pottery. It is likely that most of the assemblage was derived from 3/11.

4.3 Finds

Six flint flakes and one flaked flint lump were recovered. One of these was from layer 2/3 and the remainder were from Saxon and later contexts. None of the pieces is technologically diagnostic.

The Victorian pit, 2/5, contained numerous fragments of bottle glass, at least two wine or sherry glass stems, and a small glass perfume/ointment jar. One of the three toothbrushes was inscribed OVERTON BRIGHTON on the upper surface.

A total of 271 potsherds (total weight 5.2 kg) was recovered from eleven contexts. The majority of the assemblage consisted of late post-medieval and 19th century fine wares including: bone china teacups with scrolled handles; lids to serving plates, platters and large bowls in willow pattern and blue-patterned ware; large vases and rosebud vases in cream ware and other post-medieval white wares. Red

earthenware kitchen vessels with orange glaze and occasional rouletted and impressed decoration were also present. All of this material was from pit 2/5. This also contained residual early medieval cooking pot rims in a sand and limestone tempered fabric which may be a derivation of the 11-12th century OXAC fabric from the Oxford type series. An oolitic fabric in 2/5 is similar to Oxford fabric type OXCT, made in the Cirencester area.

The remainder of the material is Saxon or earlier. Late Iron Age pottery was present in context 1/6, consisting of shelly limestone and dense shelly wares. Roman grey, coarse sandy, and burnished wares were present in many contexts, often in conjunction with early Saxon fabrics. The latter were present in contexts 2/6, 3/6, 3/9, and 3/10. These fabrics consist of organic tempered wares in 3/6, and limestone tempered wares in 3/9. The sequences from other sites in the Upper Thames valley suggest that limestone tempering is earlier than organic tempering, the latter perhaps dating from the 6th century onwards. A late Saxon shelly handmade fabric, OXH, is present in ditch 3/6.

5 DISCUSSION

The evidence for prehistoric activity is nebulous. None of the few flint flakes was in an undisturbed context, and the flakes are undiagnostic. Three sherds of late Iron Age pottery were found in Trench 1, but again in a late or post-medieval context. There is more evidence for Roman activity, with potsherds present in all trenches. None of the features need be of Roman date, however, and the pottery could be derived from manuring scatters. This is certainly the case on the main Abbey excavations, where there is very little Roman material present. In contrast evidence for a substantial Roman site has recently been found off the gravel terrace, in the floodplain of the Chilbrook. It would appear, therefore, that the gravel terrace was not extensively occupied at this time.

Most of the features are of early or perhaps early-mid Saxon date. The discovery of a possible SFB in 1975 with organic tempered pottery is suggestive of an early Saxon date, and ditch 3/9 might be contemporary with this. It can be suggested that the site was then divided into a series of plots by the cutting of further ditches oriented E-W. Ditch 1/5 cannot be assigned to either phase with confidence. Ditches 3/7, 3/8 and 3/11 are unlikely to have been in use at the same time. Indeed they would converge immediately beyond the N side of the trench. This suggests that they were dug in sequence, but this need not have any substantial implications in terms of date range.

This broad sequence of activity was also apparent on the more extensive Abbey excavations. Here at least six SFBs were constructed in the

early Saxon period. They were replaced by timber halls set within small enclosures defined by ditches and gullies. These ditches were not continuous. Numerous causeways were left between them. The same pattern was apparent at the Shrubbery, where only one feature, ditch 2/6-3/8, could be followed across more than one trench; even this ditch terminated within Trench 2.

The site appears to have been an open field throughout the period of the Abbey's existence. Burials have been found in the Nursery Field, immediately S of the Shrubbery, but no human remains were found during the evaluation. Medieval ridge-and-furrow fields still survive at the E end of the Abbey precinct, and it seems likely that The Shrubbery formed part of such a system, providing the abbey community with food crops. The late or post-medieval ditch, 3/6, may reflect late subdivision of the open fields.

The Abbey precinct was split up and sold into private hands in the post-Dissolution period. Most of the land became known as The Parks and remains substantially undeveloped to this day. The notable exception is the S frontage of the High Street (previously Thames Street), which had been substantially developed by the third quarter of the 18th century. The Shrubbery tenement may have been in existence in the late medieval period, and the house 'was probably rebuilt in the later 16th century' (Crossley 1990, 111). The building appears to incorporate much masonry taken from the recently-Dissolved abbey; several architectural fragments and ashlar blocks were noted in the garden during the evaluation. The house was occupied by one of Eynsham's doctors from the late 19th century onwards. Little development took place behind the street frontage, as can be seen on the Ordnance Survey map of c. 1910 reproduced on the cover of this report. Some rubbish pits were dug, but the excavated example (2/5) at least did not impinge into the underlying Saxon archaeology.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation demonstrated that early Anglo-Saxon features exist on the site. Some of these at least are associated with the finds made on the same site in 1975. The character of activity was virtually identical to that found on the Abbey excavations. It was notable, however, that the Saxon features were covered by 0.65-0.8 m of overburden.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 1 TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

TRENCH	CXT	TYPE	LENGTH	WIDTH	DIAM	DEPTH	COMMENTS
1	1	Layer	8.60	1.60		0.58	Topsoil
	2	Layer	8.60	1.60		0.20	Medieval
	3	Layer	8.60	1.60		0.30	Ploughing
	4	Layer	8.60	1.60		0.20	Subsoil
	5	Ditch	1.75+	0.65+		0.44	EAS
	6	Pit			1.00	0.60	Post-medieval
2	1	Layer	9.80	1.60		0.68	= 1/1
	2	Layer	9.80	1.60		0.30	= 1/2
	3	Layer	9.80	1.60		0.34	= 1/3
	4	Layer	9.80	1.60		0.22	= 1/4
	5	Pit	1.60+	1.60+		0.40	Victorian
	6	Ditch	9.50	1.10		0.40	EAS
	7	P-hole			0.38	0.07	EAS?
	8	P-hole			0.45	0.37	EAS?
3	1	Layer	8.00	1.60		0.64	= 1/1
	2	Layer	8.00	1.60		0.26	= 1/2
	3	Layer	8.00	1.60		0.20	= 1/3
	4	Layer	8.00	1.60		0.22	= 1/4
	5	Gully	1.60+	0.42		0.30	Roman?EAS?
	6	Ditch	1.60+	3.05		0.90	Late/post-medieval
	7	Ditch	1.60+	0.70		0.54	EAS
	8	Ditch	1.60+	1.50		0.52	EAS
	9	Ditch	3.00+	0.60		0.54	EAS = 2/5
	10	P-hole			0.17	0.08	EAS
	11	Ditch	1.60+	0.80+		0.80	EAS
	12	?	1.60+	0.50+		-	Not excavated

NB All measurement are maxima, in metres; p-hole = posthole; where a + follows a measurement the feature either has not been fully revealed (width) or continues beyond both sides of the trench (length). Layers 1-4 in each trench can be considered to be ubiquitous. EAS = early Anglo-Saxon.

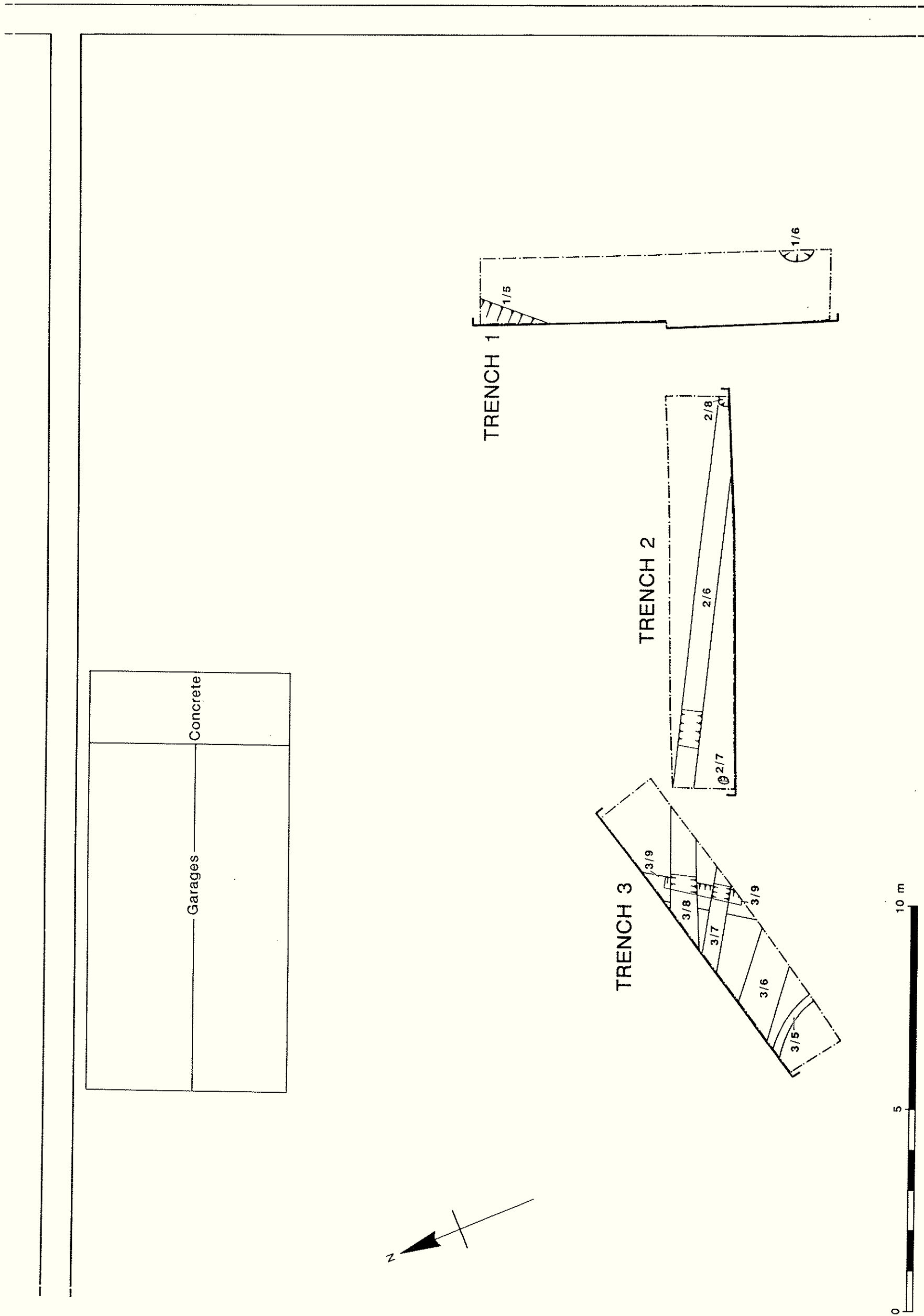
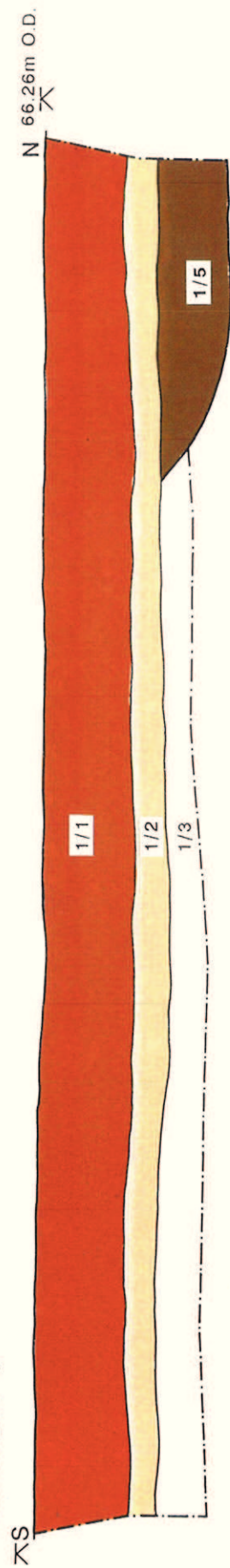
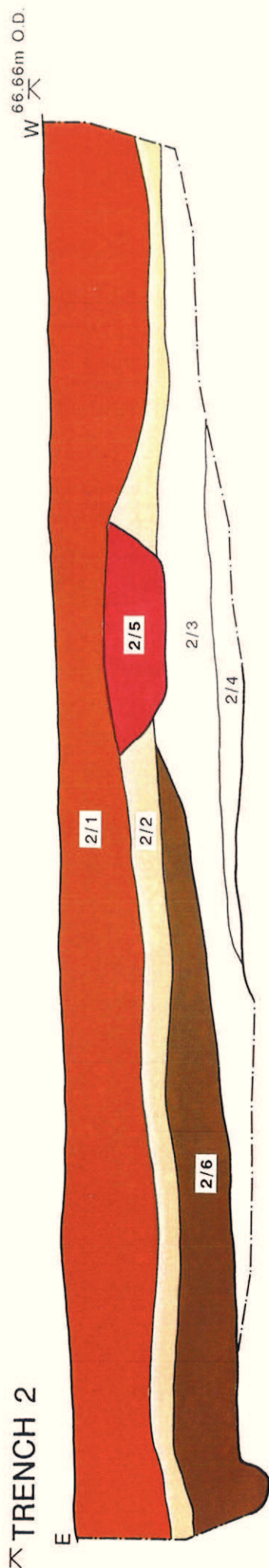


Fig. 2

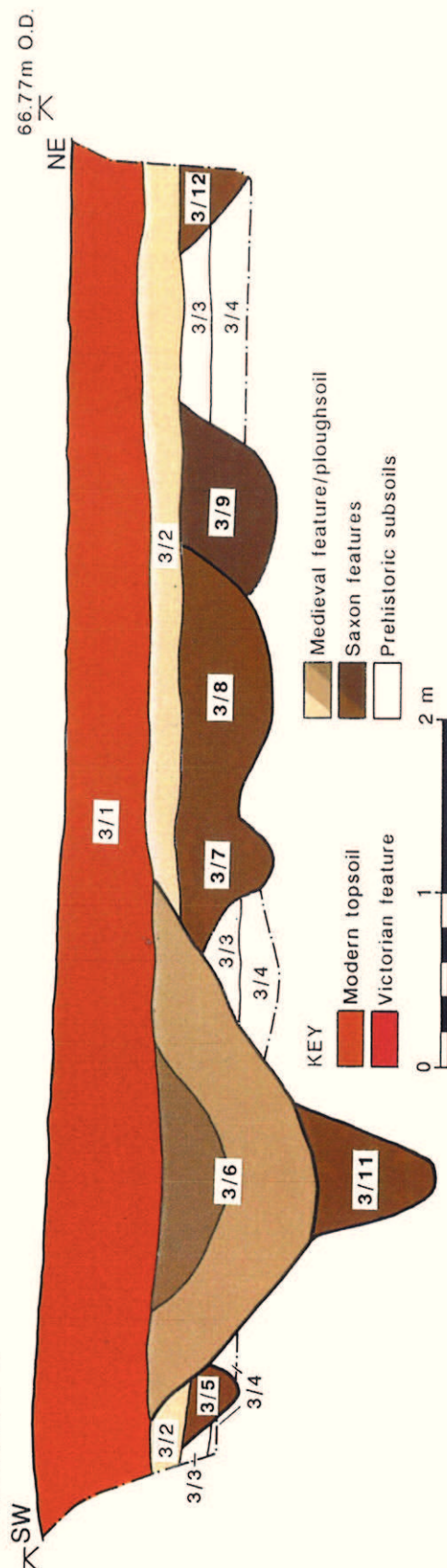
TRENCH 1



TRENCH 2



TRENCH 3



- KEY
- Modern topsoil
 - Medieval feature/ploughsoil
 - Victorian feature
 - Saxon features
 - Prehistoric subsoils





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