

# Land adjacent to Elwes Arms, Great Billing, Northamptonshire

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 8105 6290

Planning Application 96/0836



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT


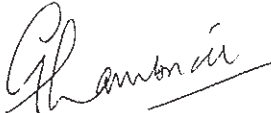
December 1997

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## SUMMARY

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Great Billing, Northamptonshire on land immediately north of the Elwes Arms public house on behalf of Mr J.M.Padbury. The evaluation was specifically aimed at locating Palaeolithic finds and examining any associated Pleistocene geological deposits. Two trenches were excavated, revealing a ditch which is probably a post-medieval plot boundary. A sherd of 13th century medieval pottery was recovered from a soil horizon, although this is likely to be residual. Pleistocene deposits were identified and recorded in both trenches, but no Palaeolithic finds were recovered from the deposits in spite of the fact that spoil from a hand excavated test-pit was dry sieved for finds.*

*The composition of the Pleistocene deposits suggests they were of local origin and deposited under cold climate conditions at the margins of the ice sheet. It is likely these deposits are of Anglian age and apart from some modification due to post-depositional freezing they have undergone little change. The hand-axe found just south of the site in 1955 had therefore probably lain upon this surface relatively undisturbed since its original deposition.*



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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work (Figs 1 and 2)

1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation on behalf of Mr J.M.Padbury between 1st and 4th December 1997, at a haulage yard situated at the junction of Church Walk and the High Street, to the north of the Elwes Arms public house, Great Billing (SP 8105 56290). The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief by Northamptonshire Heritage and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU), in response to a planning application (No. 96/0836) by Mr.Padbury to build five detached houses on the site.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The solid geology is Northampton Sand which is composed of ironstone and sandy limestone (see Geological Survey of Great Britain, Northampton Sheet No. 185).

1.2.2 The site, which is currently used as a haulage yard, is 0.25 hectares in extent, and lies at c. 84m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

#### 1.3 Archaeological background

1.3.1 The application site lies within Great Billing medieval village.

1.3.2 The most important aspect of the site, as highlighted in the brief, is the potential for discovering *in situ* Palaeolithic remains. A single Acheulian hand-axe was found in 'perfectly fresh' condition under a bowling green in a garden off Church walk in 1955 (SMR No. 2092). Palaeolithic artefacts are rare in Northamptonshire and this is one of the most accurately located findspots of such material in the county. It is unusual in being a fresh surface find rather than a rolled artefact recovered from river gravels, suggesting that it may not have moved far from its original point of deposition.

1.3.3 The site is of particular interest because of its position on a spur overlooking the Nene Valley, an area rich in Palaeolithic finds and important Pleistocene deposits (Wessex Archaeology 1996). Any Palaeolithic artefacts recovered during the evaluation are likely to be of county importance. *In situ* Palaeolithic remains, particularly if associated with Pleistocene environmental evidence, are likely to be of national importance.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1 The aims of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI were as follows:
- 2.2 To establish whether archaeological remains of Palaeolithic date are present on the site.
- 2.3 To determine the nature, condition and geological context of any artefacts discovered, taking particular care to establish whether or not the remains are *in situ*.
- 2.4 To determine the palaeo-environmental potential of the site.
- 2.5 To determine whether archaeological deposits of other periods are present, and provide an adequate record of them.
- 2.6 To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 The scope of the fieldwork (Fig. 2)

- 3.1.1 The evaluation was based upon a 2.6% sample of the development area, and consisted of two trenches: Trench 1 measured 16m long and Trench 2 measured 19m long. Both trenches were 1.90m wide (Fig. 2). The overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision.

### 3.2 Strategy

- 3.2.1 The strategy as stated in the WSI was to dig two trenches 20m in length. However, the presence of underground services crossing the eastern end of the site necessitated moving the position of Trench 2. The proximity of services also required a reduction in the length of Trench 2 to 16m and Trench 1 to 19m. The trenches were excavated by machine in level spits c.0.3m thick, to shattered bedrock. When significant archaeological deposits were encountered, machine excavation was stopped to allow investigation and recording work to be carried out. Excavation continued through made ground and undisturbed geological deposits to record sections through the Pleistocene deposits.
- 3.2.2 A 1m<sup>2</sup> block was excavated by hand from Trench 1 and sieved for Palaeolithic artefacts (see Figs 3 and 5). The deposits to be excavated in this way were selected following advice from Dr Martin Bates (Quaternary geologist), after an inspection of the trenches.
- 3.2.3 Spoil heaps from machine excavation were examined for artefacts.
- 3.2.4 Trench sections through the Pleistocene deposits were drawn at a scale of 1:20 by Dr Martin Bates.

3.2.5 No deposits with significant environmental potential were identified and no samples were taken.

### 3.3 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.3.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the features revealed were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve artefacts. All archaeological features were planned, and where excavated, their sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3.2 The site archive will be deposited in Northamptonshire County Museum.

## 4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 4.1 Description of Pleistocene deposits in Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig. 5), by Dr Martin Bates

4.1.1 The investigation of Trenches 1 and 2 indicated that three different sets of Pleistocene deposits were present (Table 1).

- i. An upper series of poorly sorted, structureless gravels dominated by ironstone clasts and a sandy matrix. These deposits were only well developed in Trench 2 (contexts 211, 217, 217/218) and were absent from Trench 1.
- ii. A sequence of sands, with occasional gravel clasts, showing remnant bedding in places and, locally in Trench 2, injection features from below. Contexts 106 and 108/109 from Trench 1 and 213/214 and 219 from Trench 2 fell into this group.
- iii. A basal sequence of matrix supported ironstone gravel clasts that coarsen downwards. Secondary reorientation of clasts was noted in places (e.g. Context 220).

*Table 1: Stratigraphic relationships and sediment types of contexts recorded in Trenches 1 and 2*

Trench 1		Trench 2		Inferred environment of deposition
				← Major palaeo-land surface
		211	217/218	Till
106	108/10	212/213	219	Fluvio-glacial meltout
				← Bedrock surface
107	110	214	220	Bedrock

- 4.1.2 The basal units in both trenches (107, 110, 214 and 220) are considered to be outcrops of the ironstone bedrock. In places this rock appears to have been shattered (perhaps by freeze/thaw process), and cold climate cryoturbation structures have been noted (Context 220). The overlying sediments, which are predominantly sandy in appearance (Contexts 106, 108/109, 212/213 and 219), are interpreted as fluviially deposited sands (the presence of small remnant laminae and the incised nature of the upper surface of the bedrock support this conclusion). Small gravel clasts within this unit must also have been moved by running water. The uppermost deposits (Contexts 211 and 217/218) have been described as diamict. These types of deposit are often associated with ice sheet till units. Rapid dumping of large amounts of gravel by ice sheets often produces sediments dominated by the type of angular gravel present in these diamicts (the angularity of these gravels also indicates that there was minimal movement of these clasts by running water during the depositional process).
- 4.1.3 The general character of the Pleistocene deposits was judged by Dr Martin Bates to have a low potential for containing artefacts. Following discussions with Mr.Sandy Kidd (Northamptonshire Heritage) it was agreed to reduce the hand-excavated and sieved sample to a one metre square block, taken from a test pit at the west end of Trench 1. The sieving was intended to recover bones and artefacts and identify any geological inclusions within the deposit which would indicate whether the deposits had been formed by local glacial conditions or imported from further afield by glacial processes. The test-pit was hand excavated in four 0.10m spits and dry sieved through a 0.01m mesh. The finer sieved material was also examined visually. No artefacts or geological inclusions were recovered.

## **4.2 Description of archaeological deposits in Trench 1 (Fig. 3)**

- 4.2.1 The only feature identified in Trench 1 was a ditch (104) with a U-shaped profile. The ditch, which was orientated north-west to south-east was 2.4m wide and 0.60m deep. The ditch fill (105) contained a piece of burnt stone and a small fragment of post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM, either tile or brick). The ditch cut an earlier soil (102) which only survived to the east of Ditch 104.
- 4.2.2 To the west of Ditch 104 a sequence of modern hardcore make-up layers, forming the haulage yard surface (101 and 111), directly overlay the natural sand ironstone. The yard make-up at the west end of Trench 1 was up to 0.90m in depth. No earlier deposits survived.

## **4.3 Description of archaeological deposits in Trench 2 (Fig. 4)**

- 4.3.1 Two features were identified in Trench 1:
- 4.3.2 An oval pit (205), 1.50m wide and 0.32m deep, was recorded at the eastern end of the trench. The single fill (206) produced a fragment of medieval tile, of probable 13th



century date (from the surface of this feature), and three pieces of animal bone from well down in the fill.

- 4.3.3 The ditch (207) had a rounded U-shape profile and measured c.0.90m wide and 0.38m deep. It produced no finds. The orientation of the ditch suggests that it is probably the same as Ditch 104 in Trench 1. A linear band of root disturbance (215) was aligned parallel to Ditch 207 on the west side and probably indicates a former hedge-line associated with the boundary. The ditch was cut into natural and was sealed by a soil horizon (203) which is probably a cultivation soil.
- 4.3.4 A single sherd of medieval (13th century) pottery was recovered from soil horizon 203.
- 4.3.5 An irregular feature (209), located at the west end of Trench 2 is probably the remains of a burrow complex.

#### **4.4 Finds: Medieval pottery** *by Paul Blinkhorn, Oxford Archaeological Unit*

- 4.4.1 A single medieval pottery sherd (4g) was recovered from soil horizon 203. This consisted of 13th century Pottersbury ware (CTS F329) with an internal green glaze datable to 1250/75+AD.
- 4.4.2 A fragment of tile (5g) from Pit 205 is of a similar fabric and probably also dates to the medieval period. A date in the 13th century is most likely.

#### **4.5 Environmental data.**

- 4.5.1 Five fragments of animal bone were recovered. The assemblage was too small and fragmentary to provide any useful information.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

### **5.1 Discussion of Pleistocene deposits** *by Dr. Martin Bates*

- 5.1.3 All sediments present in the sequences appeared to be of local origin and the angular nature of the clasts indicates a local source within the ironstone area. Deposition under cold climate conditions is indicated by the sedimentary facies of the deposits. It is likely that the deposition occurred in an ice margin melt-out situation adjacent to an ice sheet which was probably retreating. Oscillations of the ice front in such situations may have resulted in fluvial deposition of the sands in melt-water channels and dumping of diamict from decaying ice. Alternatively the sands may represent deposition of sediments in a sub-glacial situation beneath the ice sheet.
- 5.1.4 This interpretation suggests that the sediments are likely to be of Anglian age. A Devensian date for the deposits is unlikely as the site is located south of the Devensian ice margin (the last ice sheet in this region would be c. 26000-18000 years B.P.) but

within and well to the north of the boundary of the Anglian ice sheet (Jones and Keen, 1993).

- 5.1.5 Subsequent to the deposition of these units the sediments appear to have been frozen. Cryoturbation processes have modified the sediments causing the injection of elements of the bedrock into the fluvial sands, and causing the reorientation of the gravel clasts in Context 220.
- 5.1.6 This interpretation suggests that the upper surface of the diamict represents a non-depositional unconformity of considerable duration. This surface therefore represents a palaeo-land surface that may have remained open for *c.* 450,000 years. Palaeolithic artefacts may be expected to occur on such surfaces adjacent to later prehistoric and more recent material. This appears to be the most likely context for the hand-axe found near the evaluation site. Derivation of the artefact from the underlying bedrock surface or within the sand and gravel units may be discounted on the basis of the fresh appearance of the implement. Considerable damage, rolling and abrasion would be expected if the artefact derived from such situations.

## 5.2 Discussion of archaeological features and deposits

- 5.2.1 The ditch seen in Trenches 1 and 2 is probably post-medieval in date, although the brick/tile fragment is small enough to be intrusive and it is therefore not possible to date the ditch on this evidence alone. The ditch is orientated approximately at a right angle to Church Walk which suggests that it probably defined a tenement boundary or subdivision.
- 5.2.2 On the evidence of only two medieval sherds it is not possible to establish whether any of the deposits or Pit (205) in Trench 2 are medieval in date. The medieval tile from the pit was recovered from the surface of the feature and could well derive from the layer above (203). It is likely that all of the finds are residual.
- 5.2.3 The medieval pottery and tile from Trench 2 constitutes a very small assemblage of medieval finds. Some finds of this date are to be expected considering the location of the site within the medieval village. The lack of significant amounts of pottery or other finds might suggest there was no medieval occupation within the site. However, this is uncertain as construction of the haulage yard has removed the majority of the earlier soils, including any medieval deposits which may have been present.

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Oxford Archaeological Unit  
December 1997

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- Wessex Archaeology 1996 *The English Rivers Palaeolithic Project Report No. 2. 1995-1996. The Great Ouse Drainage and the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Wolds*
- Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

## Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

\* denotes Pleistocene deposit.

CBM = Ceramic Building Material (tile/brick)

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
Trench 1								
	101	Layer		40	Yard make up/hard-core			
	102	Layer			Soil horizon			
	103	Layer			'Natural'			
	104	Ditch	1.40	0.30	NNW/SSE Ditch			
	105	Fill	0.30		Fill of Pit 104	CBM	1	
						Bone	2	
						Burnt Stone	1	
*	106	Layer		0.50+	Fluvial mixed with diamict			
*	107	Layer		-	Bedrock (shattered)			
*	108	Layer		0.50	Fluvial sands and diamict-till			
*	109	Layer		0.27	Fluvial sands			
*	110	Layer		-	Bedrock (shattered)			
	111	Layer		0.60	Flint/pebble Gravel Make-up			
Trench 2								
	201	Layer		0.40	Yard make up			
	202	Layer		0.30	Soil horizon			
	203	Layer		0.30	Soil horizon	Pot	1	Medieval? 250/75+AD
	204	Layer			'Natural'			
	205	Pit	1.50	0.32	Oval 'pit'			
	206	Fill		0.32	Fill of Pit 205	Tile	1	Medieval?
						Bone	3	
	207	Ditch	0.60	0.25	NNW/SSE Ditch			
	208	Fill		0.25	Fill of Ditch 207			
	209	Cut	1.30	0.72	?Burrow			
	210	Fill		0.72	Fill of 209			

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
*	211	Layer		0.50	Diamict - possibly till			
*	212	Layer		0.33	Fluvial gravel			
*	213	Layer		0.30	Fluvial gravel			
*	214	Layer		-	Bedrock			
	215	Cut		0.18	Root disturbance			
	216	Fill		0.18	Fill of 215			
*	217	Layer		0.51	Diamict till			
*	218	Layer		0.39	Diamict till			
*	219	Layer		0.62+	Fluvial sand and gravel			
*	220	Layer		-	Bedrock			

December 1997

Land adjacent to Elwes Arms, Great Billing, Northants (GBH 97)

Evaluation Report



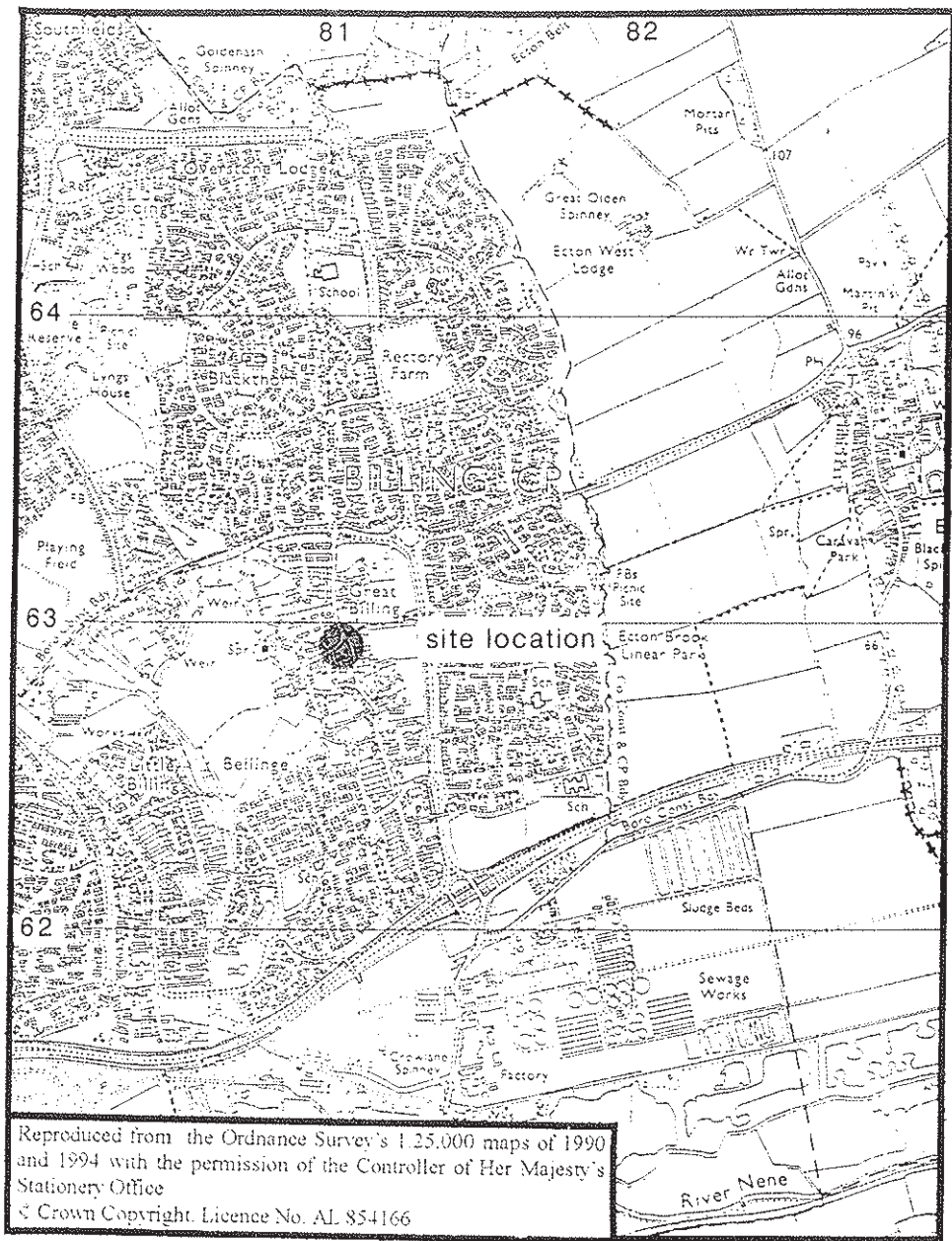
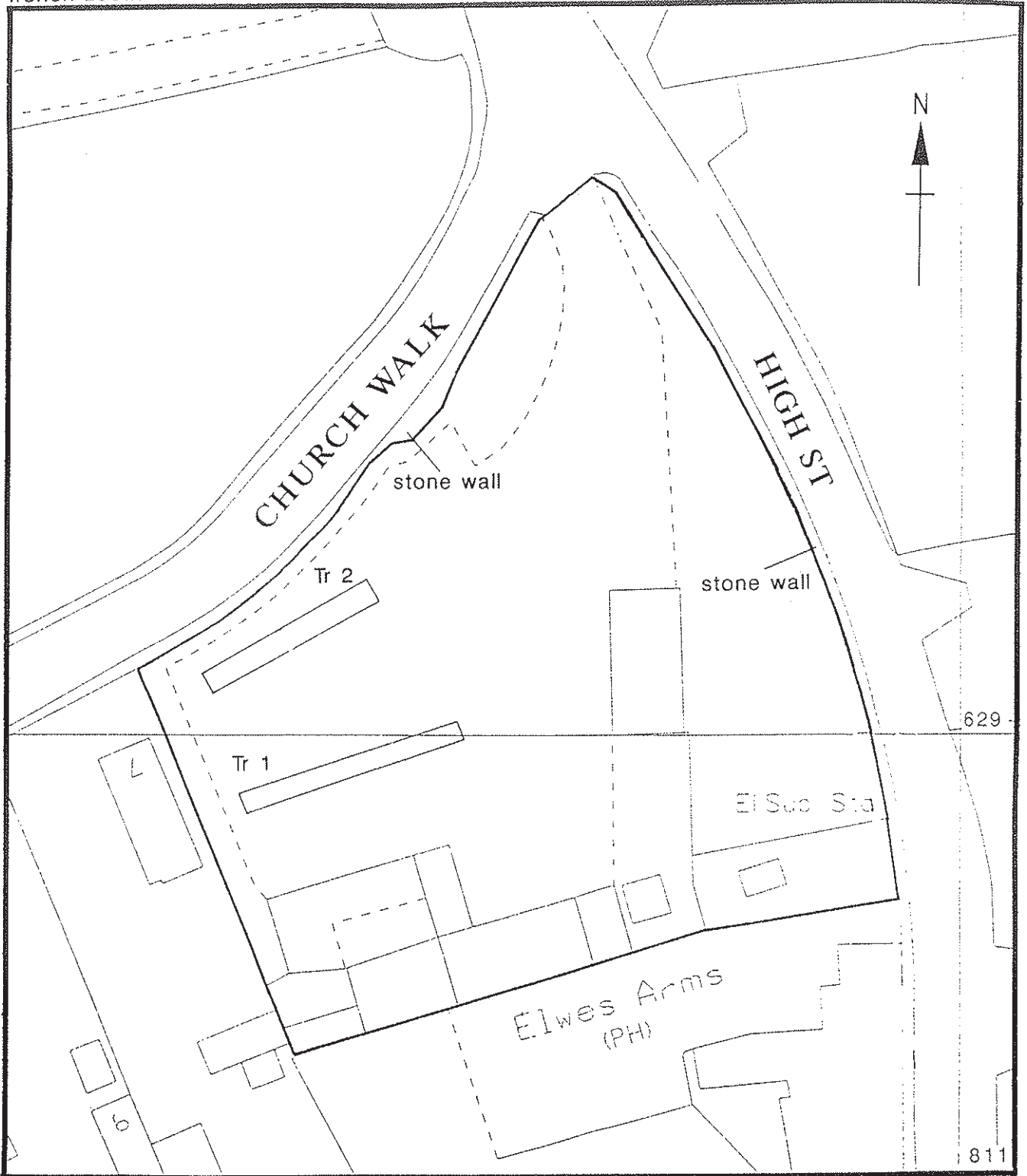


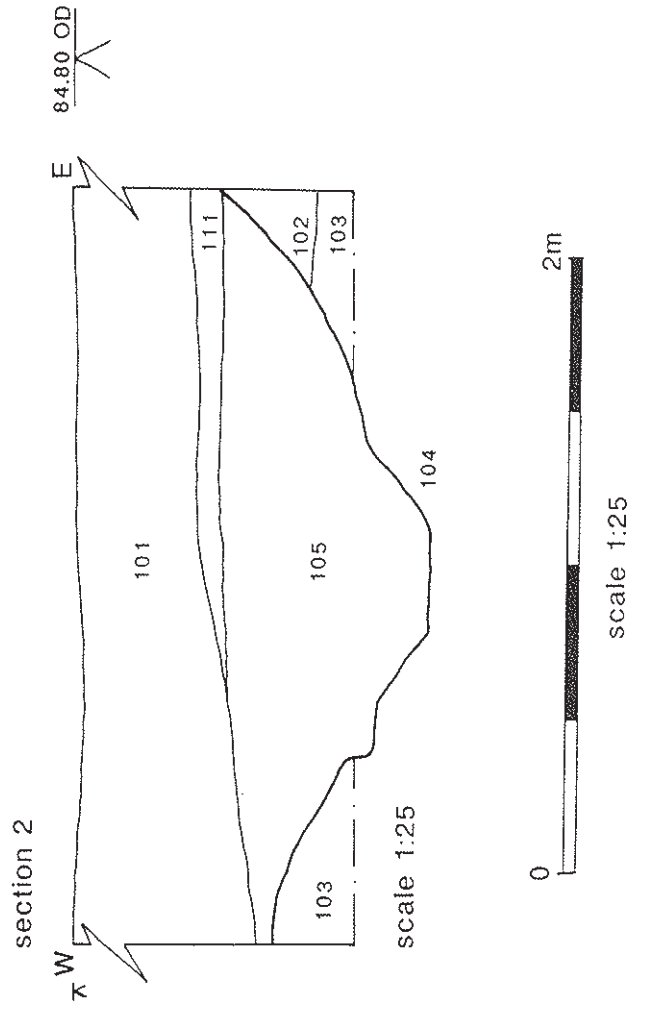
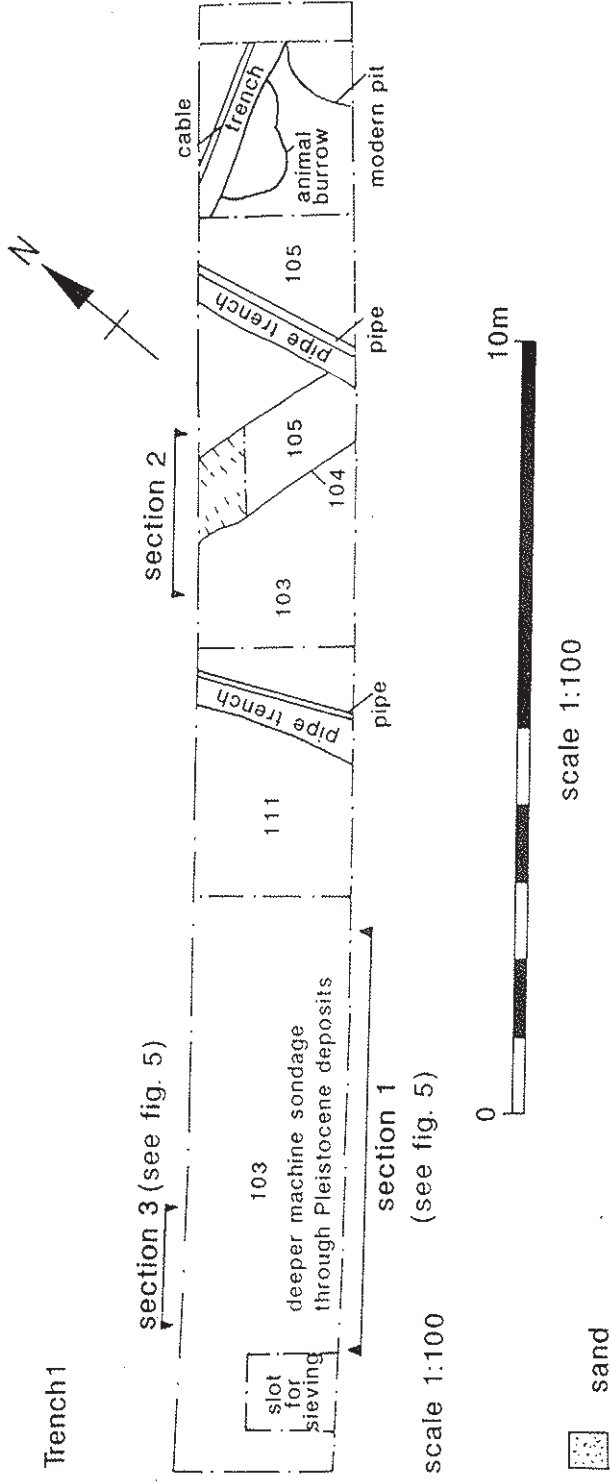
figure 1

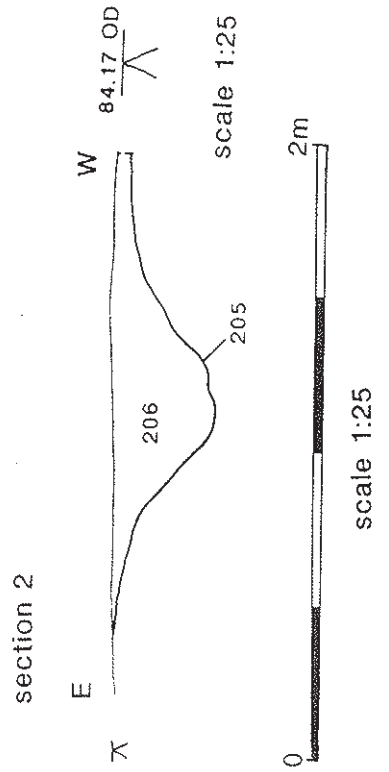
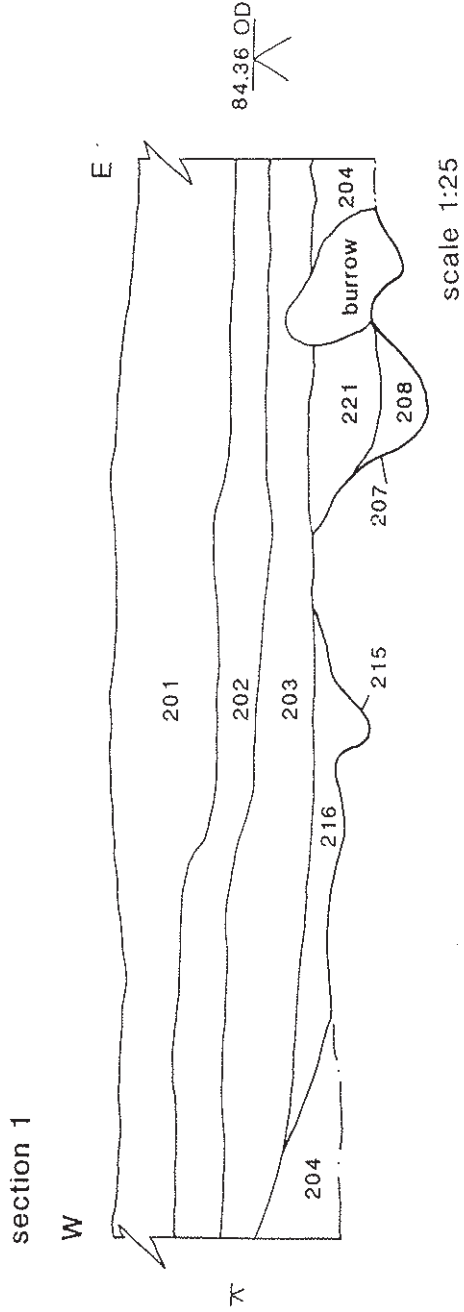
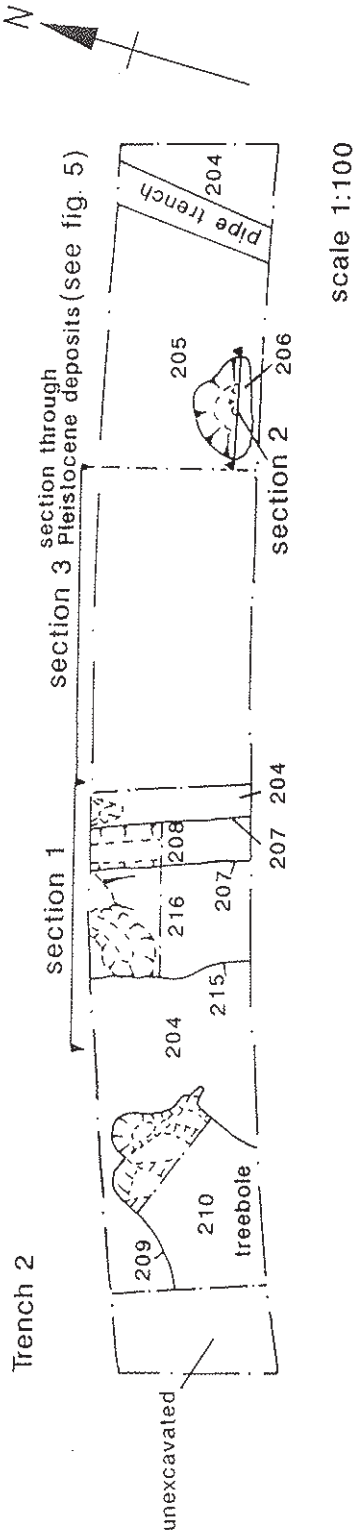


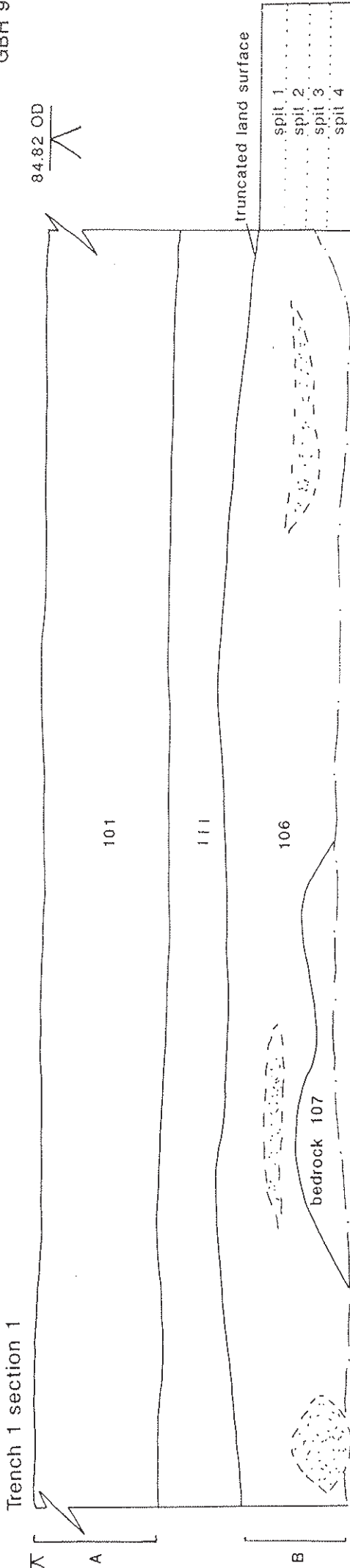
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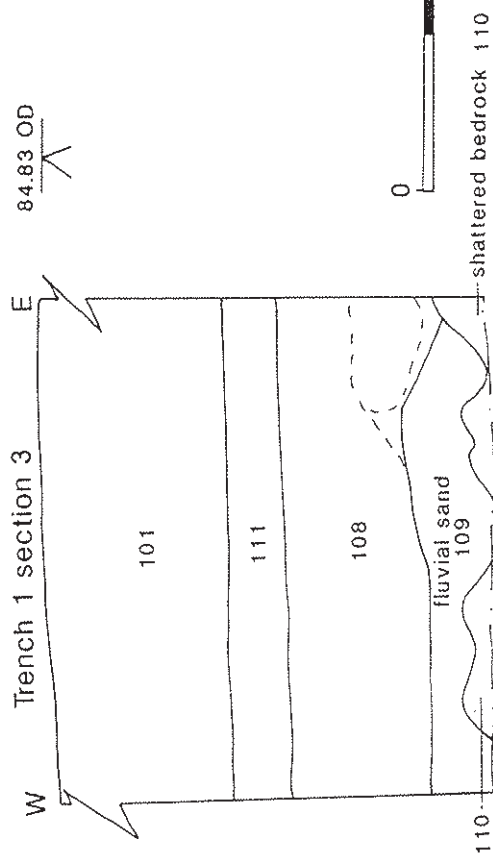
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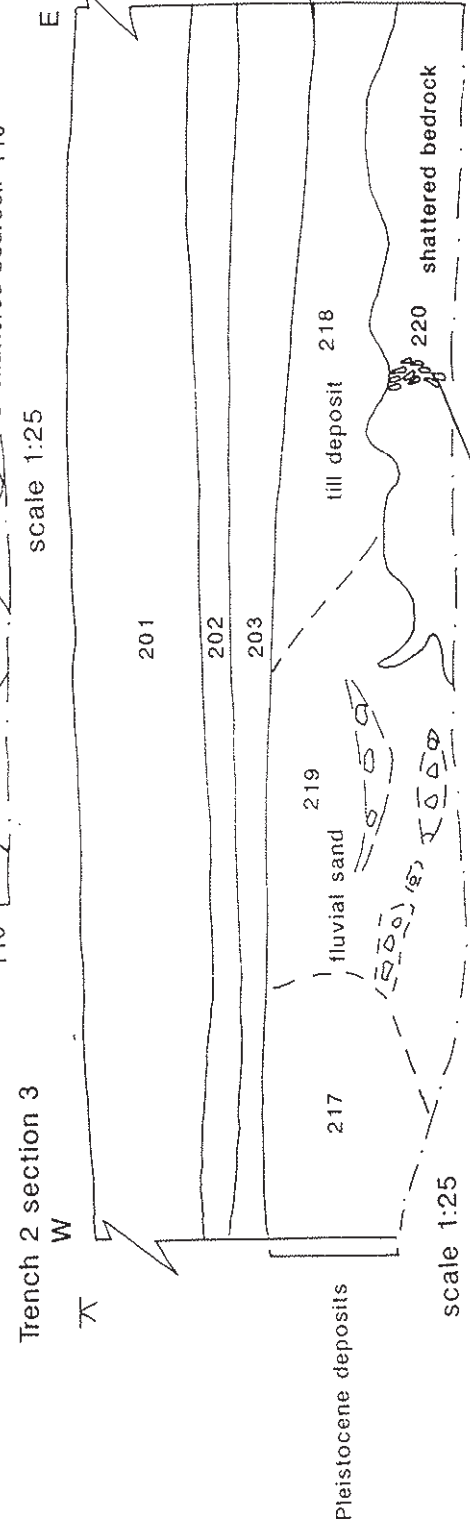
scale 1:25



scale 1:25



- A = hardcore make-up for yard
- B = Pleistocene deposits



scale 1:25





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