

13-13A MAGPIE LANE, BRACKLEY  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

January 1994

SP584366

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT.

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a field evaluation on behalf of P & M Contractors, on land beside Magpie Lane, Brackley, Northants. Evidence of boundary walls of medieval plots fronting Bridge Street was uncovered.

INTRODUCTION

P & M Contractors has applied to South Northamptonshire District Council for permission to build two dwellings on 0.45 ha of vacant land between 13 and 13a Magpie Lane, Brackley.

As a condition of permission being granted an archaeological evaluation was requested, the purpose being to determine the presence/absence, date, extent, character, preservation and vulnerability of the archaeological deposits.

A brief for the evaluation was provided by Northamptonshire County Council. The fieldwork took place between January 18th and 21st, 1994, and the site was visited by Mr S. Kidd, of Northamptonshire Heritage, on January 20th 1994.

In the 12th century Brackley began to expand considerably in size and wealth, entailing, by the 13th century, the laying out of many new streets and properties, especially in the Castle End, to the S of the market place. Magpie Lane was probably one of these streets. Records indicate that these areas were largely deserted by the 14th century, and not further developed until recent times. The site itself has been a garden in recent times. This suggests that the potential for the survival of medieval deposits in the area is high.

Topographically, the site lies on a N-S slope above Magpie Lane, which runs W-E.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation took the form of an initial 3.75% sample excavation of the site, consisting of two 5 m x 1.5 m trenches. These were machine excavated, using a tracked excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, down to the archaeological horizon. Archaeological features were then manually cleaned, photographed, and recorded in plan and section. Sufficient hand excavation of features was carried out to establish dating, sequence and

character.

All features and deposits were assigned unique context numbers, trench by trench. The trench number acts as a prefix to the context number (i.e. 2/4 = Trench 2 Context 4).

After consultation with Mr Kidd, during his visit, Trench 2 was extended approximately 5 m to the W, to clarify interpretation of features already partly exposed.

## RESULTS (Fig 1,2,3)

### General

The site was covered by a layer of dark grey-brown silty loam topsoil (/1) varying in depth from 0.25 m in Trench 2, to 0.40 m in Trench 1. This overlay a medium grey silty clay layer, (/2) from which sherds of Post Medieval pottery were recovered during machining.

### Environmental Potential

No visible evidence was found of organic preservation in the area excavated, but, given that the water table in the area is within 0.50 m of the apparent medieval ground surface, deposits in any deep features found could have a high potential for organic preservation.

### Trench Description

The following text summarises the results from both trenches. Further details are presented in Appendix 1.

#### Trench 1.

Beneath later 1/2 was a 0.20 m deep layer of small stone rubble in a matrix of medium grey silty clay (1/3). This overlay a slightly darker silty clay layer (1/4), which produced some 14th century pottery.

Layer 1/4 was removed over the central third of the trench, revealing a compact yellowish brown clay layer (1/5). This horizon marked the present water table, and it was concluded that it also represented the natural subsoil, although some pottery fragments were recovered from the top of the layer.

#### Trench 2.

This trench revealed a layer of rubble in a grey silty clay matrix (2/4), under layer 2/2, extending from the N end of the trench down the slope to within 1.4 m of the S end of the trench. The concentration of stone was particularly high in the N half of the trench. Sherds of 14th -15th century pottery were recovered from this layer.

Layer 2/4 overlay a W-E oriented wall (2/7), comprising rough

worked limestone blocks, unmortared, over a pitched or dumped stone footing. The surviving part of the wall measured up to 0.45 m wide and stood to a maximum height of 0.30 m.

To the N of this wall, under 2/4, was a dumped layer of sandy clay (2/3), over a silty clay layer containing some small stones (2/5). This sealed a rectangular area of large flat unworked stone slabs, (2/6) which extended approximately 0.95 m at right angles to the wall, and butted against it.

To the S of the wall 2/7, both layer 2/2 and 2/4 appeared to peter out, over a reddish brown silty loam layer (2/8) which contained some small rubble. This overlay 2/10, a silty clay matrix containing 40-50% rubble, which extended from wall 2/7 to within 1.0 m of the S edge of the trench. Its S end appeared to have been truncated by a pit 2/26, containing a mixed fill of decayed mortar and dark brown silt (2/11). A layer of similar material, 2/9 appeared to seal 2/11, but as the clarity of the N edge of the cut 2/26 had been disturbed by a modern posthole (2/25), it may well be that 2/9 is an upper fill of 2/26.

Layer 2/10 overlay 2/12 and 2/14, the tenacious clay fills of a shallow feature (2/13) partly revealed at the S end of the trench. Both 2/12 produced quantities of 13th and 14th century pottery, and four sherds of a late 11th century date were recovered from 2/14. In a small area of this part of the trench the layer 2/10 was removed to reveal the yellowish brown clay subsoil 2/30.

In the extension of the trench to the W, the wall 2/7 did not survive, but the footing 2/16 extended a further 3.40 m, and joined with a N-S oriented footing 2/20. These two footings appeared to be contemporary. To the S of 2/16 and E of 2/20 was a very thin layer of yellowish clay (2/29), overlying 2/10, although this was not visible in the original trench.

A small section was dug through the wall footing 2/16. It demonstrated that the footing was shallow, crudely dug, and gave no indication that it superseded an earlier structure. Fragments of 12th and 13th century pottery were recovered from 2/16.

#### INTERPRETATION

The lack of features in Trench 1 would appear to confirm that no buildings fronted onto Magpie Lane, at least on the E side of the site. The stony layer 1/3 is probably scattered demolition from further up the slope.

The wall and related footings in Trench 2 are very crudely built, suggesting that it is unlikely that they represent part of a structure, and are more likely to be parts of property boundaries.

Immediately to the N of the site there are two surviving medieval plots fronting E onto Bridge Street. It would appear that 2/7 represents a W-E plot boundary for the next plot down the hill.

Footing 2/20 presumably marks the W end of the same plot and conceivably the E side of a plot fronting onto Magpie Lane, the W boundary of which is the present W side of the site.

The shallow feature 2/13 displays a slight W-E linearity, which may suggest a terracing of the plot S of 2/7, just N of a further W-E boundary. The mortar content of the overlying feature 2/26 suggests the possibility of some building activity nearby, probably post-medieval.

The pottery from within the fabric of the footing 2/16 indicates that these walls were built during the expansion of Brackley during the 12th or 13th century. Layer 2/10 probably represents a contemporary topsoil. The recovery of five post medieval sherds (all from the same vessel) from this layer is probably due to them lying in a later pit cut into 2/10, which was not noticed during the machining.

With the contraction of the town in the 14th century many of the individual plots were cleared and incorporated into larger holdings.

A detail of a 1760 map of Brackley (ref.2985) indicates that the site lies immediately to the W of an area known as Widow Jerram's Garden, implying that the old plot boundaries had long since been removed. Furthermore the 1831 Enclosure Draft (Fig.4) appears to show the site's dimensions as they are today.

#### CONCLUSION

Given the limitations of a sample excavation, it would be reasonable to conclude that the site contains the W end of two plots fronting onto Bridge Street, and possibly one, on the W side of the site. Apart from the apparent boundary walls of these plots, no evidence was found of any medieval structures, or of any earlier activity. While it is theoretically possible that structural evidence lies beneath the SW corner of the site, the relative scarcity of finds and occupational debris from Trench 1 would argue against this. It is the conclusion of this report that the archaeology of the site should not be considered vulnerable.

Alan Hardy  
OAU  
January 1994

MAGPIE LANE. BRACKLEY. NORTHANTS. BRML 94.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE OF CONTEXTS.

CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH	DATE	COMMENTS	FINDS
Tr.1						
1/1	LAYER	-	<0.40	MOD	TOPSOIL	5 SHERDS P.MED
1/2	LAYER	-	<0.25	P.MED	GARDEN	1 SHERD MED
1/3	LAYER	-	<0.20	MED	DEMOLITION	
1/4	LAYER	-	<0.15	MED		8 SHERD MED
1/5	NAT.				SUBSOIL =2/30	1 SHERD MED
Tr.2						
2/1	LAYER	-	<0.25	MOD	TOPSOIL	7 SHERDS P.MED/MOD
2/2	LAYER	-	<0.10	P.MED	GARDEN =1/2	
2/3	LAYER	-	<0.10	P.MED	DEMOLITION	1 MED TILE
2/4	LAYER	-	<0.10	P.MED	DEMOLITION	1 SHERD P/MED 1 HORN CORE
2/5	LAYER	-	<0.10	MED		2 SHERDS MED 1 MED TILE
2/6	FOOTING	0.75 x 0.95	-	MED	BUTTRESS?	
2/7	WALL	>9.00 x <0.45	<0.35	MED	BOUNDARY WALL	
2/8	LAYER	-	<0.18	P.MED?		
2/9	LAYER	-	<0.16	P.MED?	GARDEN SOIL	
2/10	LAYER	-	<0.28	MED	MED SURFACE	3 SHERDS MED 5 SHERDS P.MED
2/11	FILL	-	<0.28	MED	OF 2/26	
2/12	FILL	-	<0.30	MED	OF 2/13	10 SHERDS MED
2/13	FEATURE	>1.40	<0.22	MED	BOUNDARY?/TERRACE?	
2/14	FILL	-	<0.07	MED	OF 2/13	8 SHERDS MED
2/15	CUT	<0.70	<0.30	MED	TRENCH FOR WALL 2/7	
2/16	FILL	<0.70	<0.30	MED	OF 2/15.FOOTING	4 SHERDS MED
2/17	PIT	0.60	-	MOD	NOT EX.	3 SHERDS P.MED
2/18	FILL	0.60	-	MOD	OF 2/17	
2/19	CUT	0.90	-	MED	FOOTING TRENCH	
2/20	FILL	0.90	-	MED	WALL FOOTING	

2/21	LAYER	-	<0.15	MED		
2/22	FILL	0.30	-	MOD	OF 2/23	
2/23	P/HOLE	0.30	-	MOD		
2/24	FILL	-	0.14	MOD	OF 2/25	
2/25	P/HOLE	-	0.14	MOD		
2/26	CUT	>1.45	<0.30	P.MED	FILLED BY 2/11	
2/27	SURFACE	-	0.08	MED	STONE	
2/28	LAYER	-	0.20	MED	PRE-WALL	
2/29	LAYER	-	<0.06	MED	CLAY FLOOR?	
2/30	NATURAL				=1/5	

APPENDIX 2

POTTERY ASSESSMENT

A total of 55 sherds (0.9Kg) divide into 34 Medieval and 21 Post Medieval types ranging in date from late 11th century to 16/18th century.

The majority of sherds are of one type which is a coarsely gritted sand tempered fabric with the occasional limestone inclusion. 18 sherds in this ware are from well fired, wheel thrown cooking pots. Limestone tempered wares are common from the 12th to 14th century in this area. These sherds are found in contexts 1/4, 2/12, 2/14 and 2/16.

Two types of sand tempered fabrics are present. One fabric type can be paralleled at Oxford (Fabric Y) where it occurs from the late 11th to mid 13th century. 7 cooking pot sherds of this type are found in context 1/5, 2/14 and 2/16.

The second sand tempered fabric has coarse ill sorted inclusions occurring in an iron rich fabric which is poorly fired. This is similar in character to a fabric found at Witney (fabric 35). Four sherds occur in this fabric, one of which is a wide strap handle with thumbled edges from a pitcher which is probably late 12th to 15th century in date. These sherds are found in contexts 2/5 and 2/10.

A single finely thrown, finely tempered sherd from context 1/4, is the product of the Potterspury kilns dating from 13th to 15th century. This sherd is unglazed and therefore probably from a cooking pot.

Two glazed sherds from contexts 2/5 and 2/12 are typical products of the Brill pottery industry dating from 13th to 15th century.

One large base sherd glazed with copper green is a Tudor green product dating from late 14th to late 16th century. This is found in context 2/4.

Five sherds of unglazed red earthenware occur in context 2/10. Four are of the same vessel which appears to be a costrel or flask and could be the product of the early post medieval pottery industry at Brill dating from the 16th to 18th century.

Fifteen sherds of 17th and 18th century wares include Pearlware, Creamware, Transfer Printed Ware and English Stoneware. These are found in contexts 1/1, 2/1 and 2/18.

This assemblage constitutes a very small domestic collection of locally produced early medieval wares including sand and limestone tempered cooking pots and pitchers, later medieval glazed jugs from Brill and early Post Medieval Tudor Green and coarse red earthenwares. The later Post Medieval wares of 18th century date originate from a broader range of sources.



MAGPIE LANE, BRACKLEY, BRML94

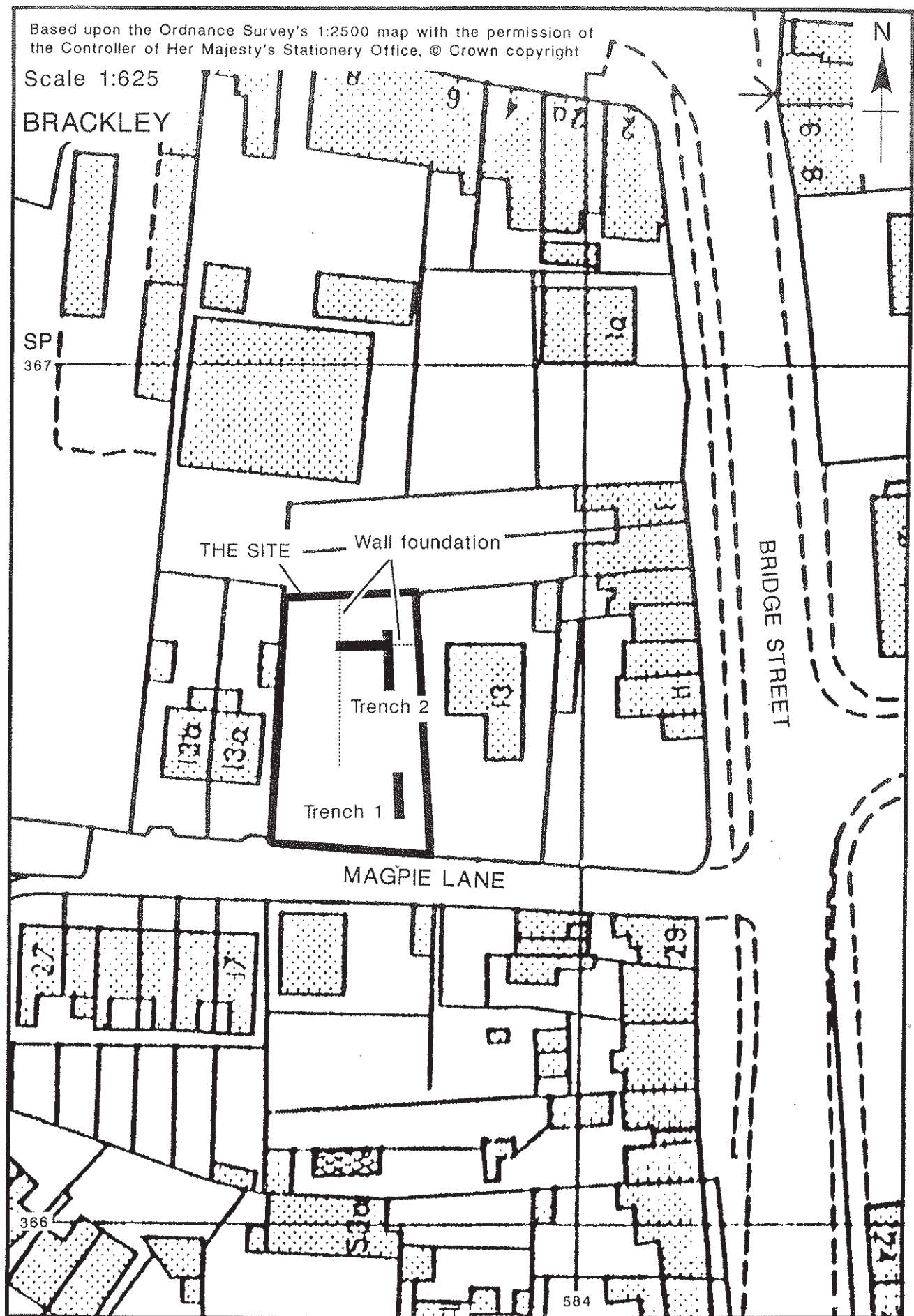
Context	No	Period	Date Range
1/1	5	PM	1600 - 1800 1770 - 1900 1800 - 1900
1/2	1	MED	12 - 14?
1/4	3	MED	12 - 14
	1	MED	13 - 15
	4	MED TILE	
1/5	1	MED	L11 - M13
2/1	7	PM	1600 - 1800 1670 - 1900 1800 - 1900
2/3		MED TILE	
2/4	1	PM	1380 - 1550
2/5	1	MED	L12 - 15?
	1	MED	13 - 15
		MED TILE	
2/10	3	MED	L12 - 15?
	5	PM	16 - 18
2/12	9	MED	12 - 14
	1	MED	13 - 15
2/14	4	MED	L11 - M13
	4	MED	12 - 14
2/16	4	MED	L11 - M13 12 - 14
2/18	3	PM	1800 - 1900

LUCY BOWN

Based upon the Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright

Scale 1:625

BRACKLEY



Site and trench location plan

Figure 1

Trench 1, section

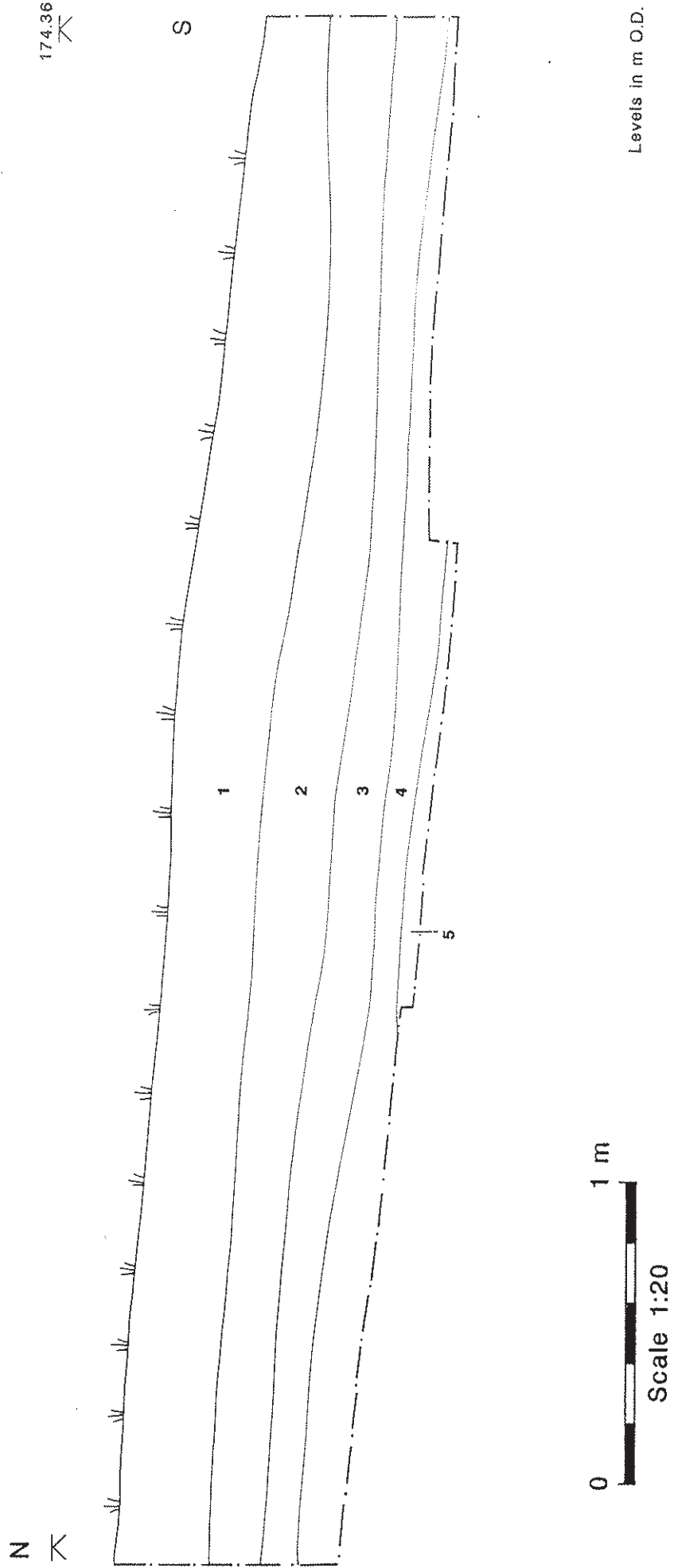
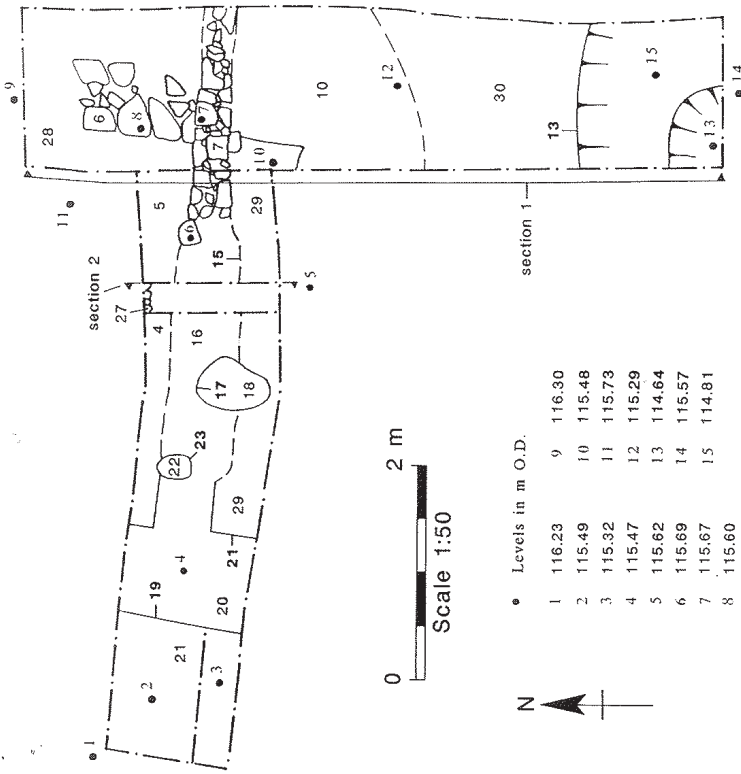


Figure 2

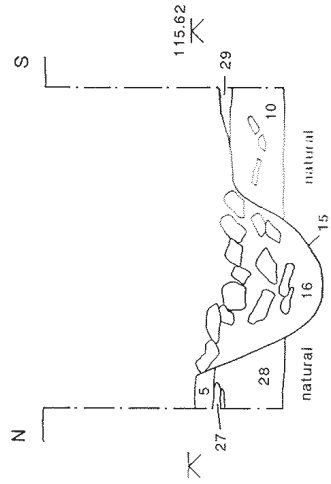
Trench 2, plan



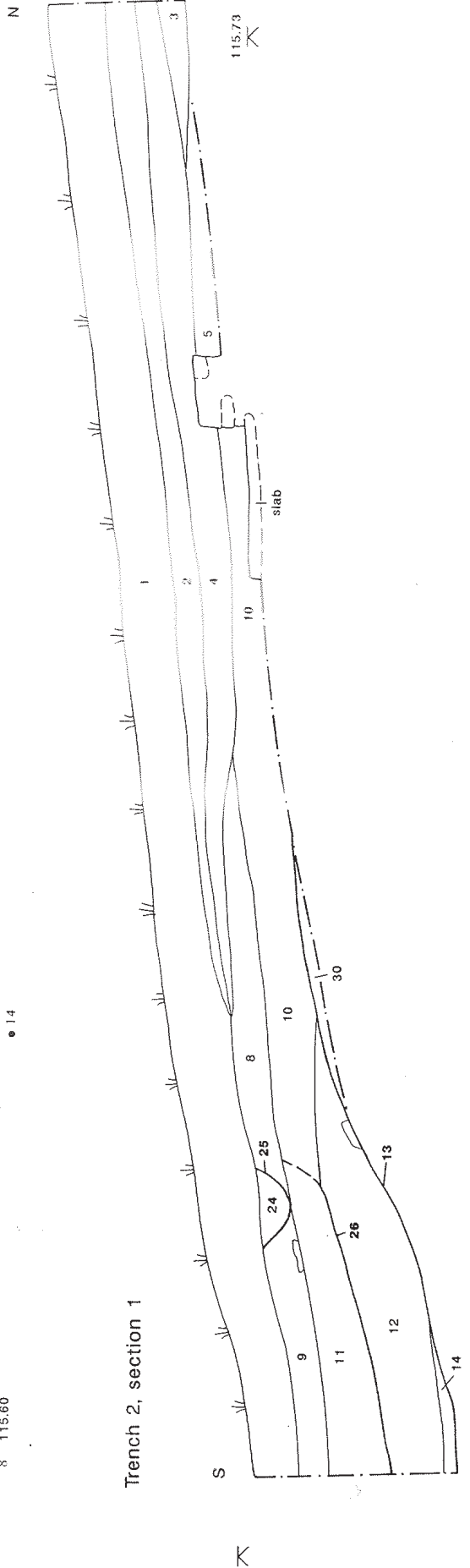
• Levels in m O.D.

1	116.23	9	116.30
2	115.49	10	115.48
3	115.32	11	115.73
4	115.47	12	115.29
5	115.62	13	114.64
6	115.69	14	115.57
7	115.67	15	114.81
8	115.60		

Section 2



Trench 2, section 1



Copy of Brackley's 1830 Enclosure Draft  
Scale 1:2500  
Ref map 841

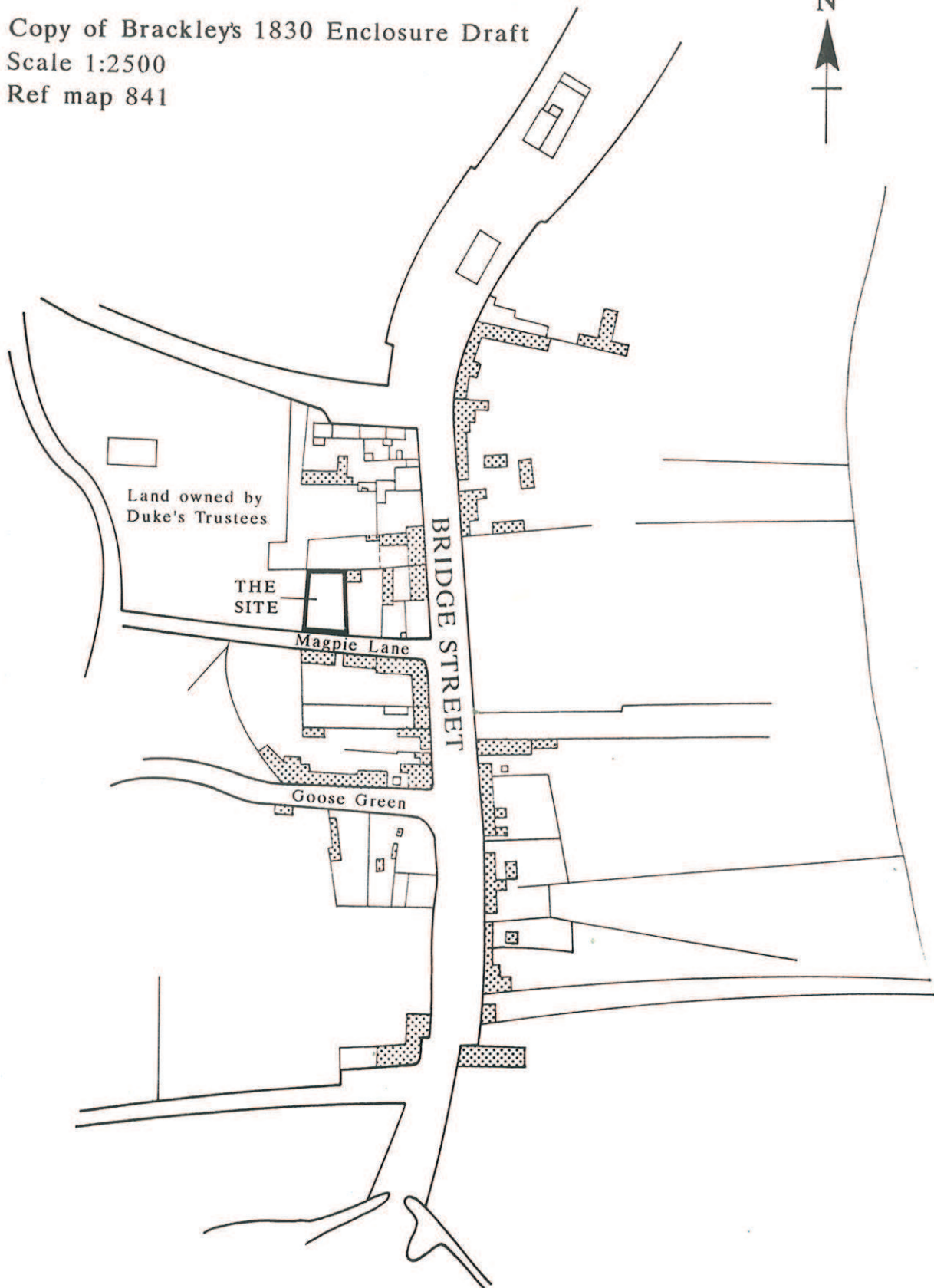


Figure 4



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