

**RED LION STREET, ALVECHURCH  
HEREFORD AND WORCESTER**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**SP 0275 7270**

**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

**May 1996**

## LIST OF CONTENTS

1	Summary of results
2	Introduction
3	Topography and geology
4	Archaeological and historical background
5	Summary of evaluation
6	Watching brief phase 1
7	Watching brief phase 2
8	The artefacts
9	Discussion and conclusions

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Summary of stratigraphy: phase 1
Table 2	Summary of stratigraphy: phase 2

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1	Location map,
Fig. 2	Location of pipe trench and tanning pit
Fig. 3	Detailed plan of tanning pit

## **1 Summary**

The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a field evaluation at Red Lion Street Alvechurch, on behalf of Beazer Homes (Mercia) Ltd in December 1994. The results of the evaluation are detailed elsewhere (OAU 1994). A watching brief was carried out in April and June of 1995. A sequence of medieval garden soils, a post-medieval cess pit and a Victorian tanning pit were identified.

## **2 Introduction**

The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a field evaluation at Red Lion Street Alvechurch, on behalf of Beazer Homes (Mercia) Ltd in December 1994. The results of the evaluation are detailed elsewhere (OAU 1994). The evaluation was followed by a watching brief which took place in two phases during April and June of 1995. This report summarises the results of the watching brief.

During April 1995 a watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a brief for salvage recording set by the County Archaeologist. A sequence of medieval garden soils and a possible Victorian cess pit were observed. On the 9th June 1995 a further site visit was made in response to a request from the contractors. During groundwork at the site the remains of a late post-medieval tanning pit were exposed. A full record of the features was made prior to destruction necessitated by the current building programme.

The site is part of a proposed low rise residential development of 17 dwellings together with access road and drainage (Planning Ref: 94/0836). During the first stage the excavation of a sewer pipe trench and foundation trenches was observed. The route of the pipe trench is indicated on figure 2. The trench measured 2.5 m in width and up to 3.5 m in depth. The foundation trenches were located 7 m to the south-west of Red Lion Street and measured 1.2 m in width and up to 0.9 m in depth. During stripping of an area located 20 m to the south-west of Red Lion Street a rectangular structure (20) was observed (see figure 2).

## **3 Topography and geology**

The development site is situated at NGR SP 0275 7270 and comprises an irregular area of approximately 0.4 hectares. Red Lion Street defines the eastern limit of the site along which buildings dating to the 15th century are located. Garden fence lines related to adjacent residential properties define the southern and western boundaries and the eastern half of the northern site boundary. The western half of the northern site margin is defined by a wooden fence beyond which lies a car park. The site slopes at a shallow angle eastward down towards Red Lion Street. At present the site is in use as a pedestrian way and two asphalt footpaths pass through it, connecting the residential development behind the car park to the north-west, to Red Lion Street and Bear Hill Road. The site is grassed over and bordered by occasional mature shrubs and trees.

The natural geology is Mercia Mudstone which is a red silty mudstone with thin beds of grey siltstone or fine sandstone. This has a superficial covering of periglacial flood gravel or alluvial fan.

#### 4 Historical and archaeological background

The principal source of historic documentation for the site is the archaeological assessment of Alvechurch in the Central Marches Historic Town Survey (Dalwood and Buteux unpublished). Useful cartographic sources include an 18th-century estate map (Fish 1701), a late 18th-century map (Godson and Godson 1792) and the Ordnance Survey 25-inch first edition (1884). Alvechurch formed part of an eighth century estate given by Offa to St Peter's church, Bredon, and held by St Mary's, Worcester, from AD 934. The bishop of Worcester held residence in Alvechurch, and records indicate that the bishop had a deer park by the late 12th century (VCH Worcs 3, 253), the probable date of construction of the moated bishop's palace. The town was granted a weekly market and annual fair in 1239.

The town remained in the possession of the bishops of Worcester throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. A noticeable decline in the town's status occurred in the 17th century, when the deer park and moated site became farm land. At the end of the 17th century the market ceased to function.

There is no evidence of occupation at Alvechurch predating the late Saxon period. The church of St Lawrence which may be pre-11th century, has been tentatively ascribed as the focus of late Saxon occupation at Alvechurch (Dalwood and Buteux unpublished). If this was the case, it is likely that the settlement shifted in the 12th century to the planned borough, following the construction of the bishop's palace.

The site under investigation (HWCM 17716) lies within the urban area of Alvechurch. An 18th century estate map (Fish 1701) denotes the area of the site to be 'The Town's Backsides'. Two houses fronting Red Lion Street and within the development area are grade II listed buildings (HWCM 16077 and 16078), dated to the 15th century. It is probable that the town's layout, typical of small medieval towns, would not have varied significantly after the advent of Alvechurch's market town status in the 13th century. Therefore, structural evidence as early as the 13th century could exist adjacent to Red Lion Street within the site's boundary. The possible boundary between tenement plots behind Bear Hill Road and those behind Red Lion Street lies within the proposed development site.

Previous archaeological investigations in the Alvechurch area produced evidence of medieval occupation adjacent to the bishop's palace (HWCM 1829, Oswald 1954; HWCM 1932-33). A small scale salvage excavation within the moated area (Bond 1970) revealed that the moat had been cleaned out in the post-medieval period. Excavations, particularly adjacent to the bishop's palace, demonstrate that sequences of buried deposits dating back to the 13th century survive intact.

The modern settlement of Alvechurch comprises the historic settlement focus and the 20th-century housing development to the west. The market place is identified as the Square and Red Lion Street (HWCM 17715). The northern part of the market place narrows to the north where it crosses a minor watercourse. The earliest documentary evidence for a market is in 1239, when Bishop Walter of Worcester obtained a grant for a weekly market (VCH 3, 252).

#### 5 Summary of the evaluation results

Six trenches were excavated and their location is indicated on figure 2. Their location was constrained by the existing layout of the site which incorporated a pedestrian way and by the positioning of services. Trenches 1 and 2 were positioned to examine the Red Lion Street frontage, trenches 3 and 6 lay in tenement plots behind Red Lion Street while trenches 4 and 5 were positioned with the aim of identifying a boundary between Red Lion Street and the Bear Hill tenements. A possible surface dating between the 15th and 17th century, and two later wall foundations were found in trench 2. Two circular pits and a posthole were identified in trench 3 and an irregular north-south aligned linear feature in trench 6. These features were dated between the 12th and 14th century. No boundary was identified between the Red Lion Street and Bear Hill Road tenements. A layer dated between the 12th and 14th century lay above natural geology in trench 4 and was overlain by a sequence of post-medieval garden soil and dumped deposits. This sequence was similar to that observed in trench 5.

## 6 Watching brief phase 1

### 6.1 *Aims of the watching brief*

Following the completion of the evaluation the County Archaeological Service recommended that salvage recording should be carried out during construction. The aims of the watching briefs were to record any archaeological remains exposed on the site during the course of the groundworks and to make available the results of the investigation.

The area furthest from Red Lion Street was investigated by evaluation trenches 4 and 5 and a soil horizon of possible medieval date was identified. It is likely that this land was formerly the rear of plots fronting on to Bear Hill, and, as such, it is likely to have been gardens and/or orchards; for this reason salvage recording was deemed inappropriate. However, salvage recording was required along the main line for the services (along the road) where they would cross the suspected boundary between the Red Lion Street and Bear Hill tenements.

A proposed deep service trench in the area adjacent to Red Lion Street was to be monitored to record any archaeological features in order to determine the type of activity occurring there in the medieval period.

Although the density of archaeology in the central part of the site merited further work the depth of the medieval horizon (0.95 m) and the narrowness of the proposed foundation and service trenches were likely to prevent more than a basic recording of the archaeology with only partial features being exposed. The results of the evaluation indicated that archaeological potential in the vicinity of the Red Lion Street frontage was low and it was hoped that it would be possible through the observation of the first service or foundation trenches to establish that no significant remains existed in the area.

### 6.2 *Pipe trench*

#### Section 1

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by the make-up for a path (4). Both were cut through by the cut for either a robbed wall or a possible disused service trench (3) which appears to have been deliberately backfilled by a dark grey brown compact clay (2). All were

overlaid by a modern tarmac path (1). All deposits were modern.

#### Section 2

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by a garden soil (18) which in turn was overlaid by a dark grey silt loam (16). Deposit (16) was overlaid by a deposit of dark grey clay loam (9). All were cut by a large modern feature (8) which was probably a soakaway and was filled by a dark grey brown clay containing frequent ceramic building material and glass (7). All were overlaid by the make-up for a path (4) which was also seen in section 1.

#### Section 4

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by a series of successive garden soils (18, 17, 16). Deposit (18) was a mid grey brown silty loam overlaid by a mid brown silty loam (17) which in turn was overlaid by a dark grey silt loam (16) which produced pottery dated from the late 14th to the late 15th century. Deposit (16) was overlaid by a dark grey clay loam (9) which contained modern glass and building material and it was overlaid by a mid orange brown sandy silt (4) which was the make-up for a path (4). This was cut through by a modern pipe-trench (19).

#### Section 5

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by a friable light brown silty sand (12=30) interpreted as a natural subsoil which was cut by a modern brick surface (13) and a modern sewer pipe (15). All were overlaid by rubble produced by the on-going work.

#### Section 9

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlain by a friable light brown silty sand (30) which was interpreted as a natural subsoil and had a maximum thickness of 0.25 m. Overlying this was a light grey brown silt loam (29) which was truncated by a modern demolition layer (28).

#### Section 10

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by natural subsoil (30). Overlying this was a mid brown clay silt (31) which produced one sherd of pottery dated between the 13th and 14th century. It was overlain by a mid grey brown clay silt (32) which contained one sherd of pottery dating between the 14th and 15th centuries. A post-medieval deposit of dark grey clay silt (33) overlaid this. Deposit (33) was overlaid by a dark grey silt loam (34) garden soil. This in turn was overlaid by a modern tarmac path (1).

#### Section 11

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by natural subsoil (30) which extended for 30 m in a south-west direction before gradually becoming just a thin lens. Overlying this was a mid brown clay silt (31) which produced one sherd of pottery dated between the 13th and 14th century. It was overlain by a mid grey brown clay silt (32) which contained one sherd of pottery dating between the 14th and 15th centuries. A post-medieval deposit of dark grey clay silt (33) overlaid this. Deposits (32) and (33) extended for 7 m in a south-west direction before being truncated by a dark grey silt loam (34) garden soil.

#### Section 12

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlain by natural subsoil (30) which in turn was overlaid by (31) and (34). These were cut by a north-east to south-west aligned post-medieval ditch

(35) which was filled by (36) and in turn was cut by a Victorian rubbish pit (37), filled by (38). All were overlaid by a modern tarmac path (1).

## 6.2 *Foundation trenches*

### Section 3

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by a layer of natural subsoil (12=30). Layer (12=30) was cut by a modern pit (10) which was filled by a mid-grey brown clay (11). This was overlaid by a layer of modern garden soil (14).

### Section 6

The natural boulder clay (5) was overlaid by a layer of natural subsoil (30=12) which in turn was overlaid by a light brown clay silt (27) in turn overlaid by a grey brown sandy loam (26). Deposit (26) was overlaid by a grey brown silt loam (25). The latter was overlaid by modern garden soil (14) as seen in section 3.

### Section 7

Deposit (27) was a light brown clay silt which was overlaid by a grey brown sandy loam (26) which in turn was overlain by a grey brown silt loam (25). Deposit (27) produced one sherd of 12th century date while deposit (26) produced two sherds of pottery dated between the late 11th to early 14th and 13th to 14th respectively. A dark grey silt loam (14) interpreted as a modern garden soil overlay (25).

## 6.3 *Rectangular structure*

### Section 8

During stripping of garden soil (14) in an area 7 m south-west of Red Lion Street a rectangular sandstone structure was uncovered (20). This was built in random courses from roughly hewn sandstone blocks which measured up to 0.30 m. To the south-west the structure cuts a deposit of dark grey brown clay silt (24), containing three sherds of pottery dated between the late 11th to 13th/early 14th centuries. To the north-west it cuts a similar deposit (22), which is probably the same as (17), seen in the pipe trench section 5 m to the north-west. The structure measured 5.5 m in length and 2 m in width and was aligned north-east to south-west. The structure was deliberately filled in by a red brown sandy silt (21) which contained modern building rubble. It was excavated to a depth of 0.90 m from ground surface which was 115.86 m OD. This feature may have been a Victorian cess pit.

## 7 **Watching brief phase 2**

### 7.1 *The post-medieval tanning pit*

A wooden structure was identified in a contractor's trench on the frontage of Red Lion Street during the excavation of foundation trenches in June 1995. The structure appeared to extend under the pavement of Red Lion Street. One side of the wooden feature was exposed along the length of the trench which was located adjacent to a listed building.

Upon cleaning, part of the base and two sides (north-east and south-east) of the structure were exposed. The narrow width of the excavated foundation trench unfortunately precluded the

recording of a measured section. Machine excavation proceeded under archaeological supervision and served to expose the full extent of the feature. A measured plan (figure 3) and a full photographic record of the exposed timbers was made. The timber structure is described in detail below.

The timber structure was dug into the natural boulder clay which was a red/orange gritty silty clay (61). The primary fill of the feature (65) was a mid grey sandy silt with brown sandy lenses and extensive green staining particularly at the base resulting in discolouration of some of the planking boards. Two samples were initially taken for analysis though due to Health and Safety considerations they were not processed.

The base of the structure comprised four horizontal planks (50, 51, 68, 69) on a north-east to south-west alignment and measuring up to 3.25 m in length which were laid upon a maximum of five sleeper joists (0.1 m x 0.1 m x 1.2 m) aligned north-west to south-east. The timber of the planks was fairly well preserved though cracking and breaks were evident in the areas of the underlying sleeper joists. The sides of the structure were constructed of substantial timber uprights (four approximately evenly spaced posts per side) supporting timber planking which survived to a maximum height of 0.25 m after full excavation.

The overall dimensions of the exposed structure were 1.3 m x 3.5 m and the top of the planking base was at a level of 114.36 m OD. The narrow width of the foundation trench did not allow for full and accurate interpretation of the section and so a level for the cutting of the pit was not determined. During machining the planking sides of the pit first became visible at a depth of 114.60 m OD.

## 8 The artefacts

### 8.1 The pottery by Lucy Whittingham

A small assemblage of 17 sherds (0.2 kg) were recovered from 10 contexts (see table 1). The majority of sherds are from medieval cooking pots and decorated jugs, with a smaller percentage of late medieval and post-medieval wares present. An assemblage of mixed date derived from layer 9.

Within the medieval assemblage four cooking pots are represented by sherds in various quartz-gritted fabric types. The earliest appears to be a soft fired, crudely tempered micaceous ware, possibly a 12th-century Malvernian ware, found in context 27. The remaining 3 sherds, in a variety of hard fired quartz-gritted fabrics, could be late 11th- to 13th-/early 14th-century products from Worcester. These are found in contexts 9, 24 and 26.

Three sherds from highly decorated jugs are present in two fabric types. The coarser quartz-gritted example is possibly a Worcester product of the 13th to 14th century, found in context 24, and is decorated with a splashed lead glaze and vertical band of white slip. The second fabric, in which two sherds are found in context 26 and 31, is a much finer, soft fired red/orange fabric type and possible product of the 14th- to 15th- century Chilvers Coton industry. These types of 'Orange Wares' are very common throughout South Staffordshire in the 14th to 15th centuries, with many of unknown provenance. The two vessels at Alvechurch, however, are more characteristic of mid 13th- to early 14th-century highly



decorated jugs, one with copper glaze and the other lead glaze and white slip decoration.

Two late 14th- to 15th-century wares are represented by a more typical late medieval Orange Ware sherd in context 16 and a sherd of overfired Midlands Purple-type in context 32.

Eight sherds of late 18th- to 19th-century post-medieval wares include Transfer Printed Wares, English Stoneware, Staffordshire Brown Slipped Ware and Blackware. These are found in contexts 7, 9, 33 and 38.

### 8.2 *The tanning pit*

A small assemblage of finds were retrieved from the fill of the pit during machine excavation. This assemblage comprised a total of 10 sherds of ?mid 19th century pottery, three large iron nails, two small iron nails, two fragments of glass, one strip of leather and two fragments of decorated metal strip.

## 9 Discussion and Conclusions

No archaeological features were seen in the length of sewer pipe trench closest to the Red Lion Street frontage. The area had been levelled for a pedestrian footpath and a large modern cut feature (8) which may have been a soakaway was present (sections 1 and 2).

A sequence of medieval garden soils (18, 17, 16) were observed in sections 2 and 4 close to the Red Lion Street frontage. Further medieval garden soils were identified in sections 9 (29), 10, 11 and 12 (31, 32). Layers (27, 26, 25) observed in section 6 through the foundation trench may also have been medieval garden soils.

The rectangular structure observed in section 8 has been interpreted as a probable Victorian cess pit. It was seen to cut two possible medieval soils (22, 24).

The exposed structure with its accompanying paddle would appear to represent the remains of a tanning or handling pit. The adjacent building to the north-west was a butcher's shop and slaughterhouse which could be traced at least as far back as the turn of the 20th century which would seem to lend weight to this interpretation, as would the evidence of the road name "Tanyard Lane" to the north-west of the site. The finds from the lower fills of the pit indicate a date in the ?mid 19th century for the disuse of the pit.

## Bibliography

- Bond, J 1970 Alvechurch Bishop's Palace, Worcs *West Midlands Archaeol* 13, 51
- Dalwood, H and Buteax, V 1990 Archaeological assessment of Alvechurch, Hereford and Worcester in *Central Marches Historic Towns Survey* unpublished
- Fish, J 1701 *Map of the lands of James Booth* (HWRO 4437 S899: 53)
- Godson and Godson 1792 *Plan of the borough and parish of Alvechurch* (HWRO BA 1042 f989:9.110)
- Gould, J. 1971-2 The medieval burgesses of Tamworth; their liberties, court and market. *South Staffordshire Archaeol and Hist Soc* 13, 17-42
- OAU 1994 *Red Lion Street, Alvechurch, Hereford and Worcester* Archaeological Field Evaluation
- Ordnance Survey 1884 *Worcestershire sheet XVI.II* First Edition (1:25, 000)
- Oswald, A 1954 Excavation at Alvechurch, Worcestershire, 1951-2, *Trans Birmingham Archaeol Soc* 72, 5-9

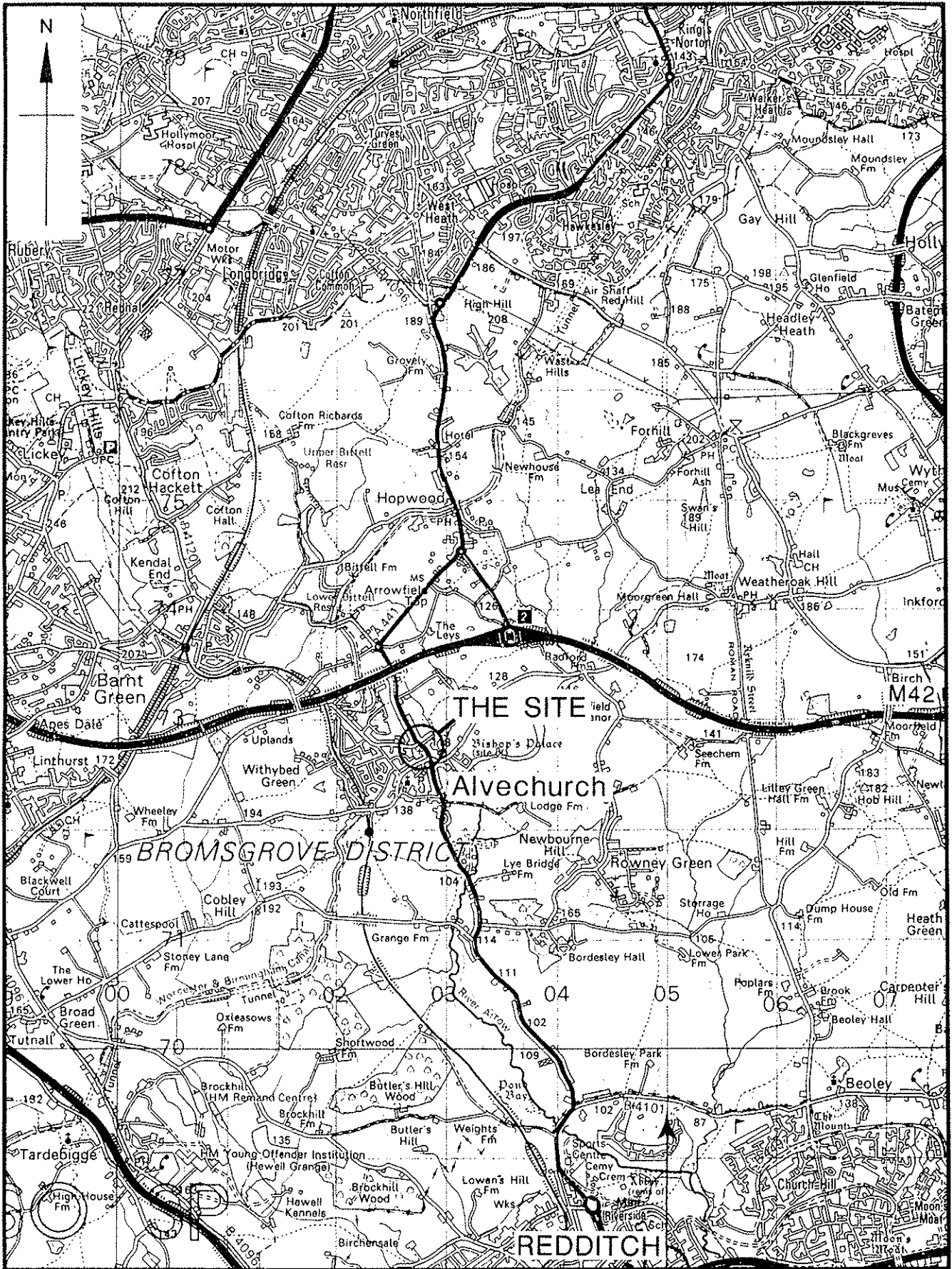
**Table 1: phase 1 contexts**

Context	Type	Depth	Date	Comments
1	deposit	0.10 m		path
2	fill	0.80 m		fill of (3)
3	cut			service trench
4	deposit	0.25 m		
5	deposit			natural
6	deposit			natural
7	fill	1.25 m	late 18th-19th	fill of (8)
8	cut			cut
9	deposit	0.90 m	late 11th-13th/14th? 18th	
10	cut			pit
11	fill	0.75 m		fill of (10)
12	deposit	0.30 m		subsoil
13	structure			modern floor
14	deposit	0.30 m		garden soil.
15	cut			sewer pipe
16	deposit	0.40 m	late 14th-15th	garden soil
17	deposit	0.35 m		garden soil
18	deposit	0.20 m		garden soil
19	cut			sewer pipe
20	structure			
21	fill	0.90 m		fill of (20)
22	deposit			garden soil?
23	cut			cut for (20)
24	deposit		late 11th-13th/early 14th?	garden soil
25	deposit	0.35 m		rubble layer
26	deposit	0.35 m	late 11th-early 14th? 13th-14th	garden soil
27	deposit	0.25 m	12th	garden soil
28	deposit	0.60 m		demolition
29	deposit	0.25 m		garden soil
30	deposit	0.15 m		subsoil
31	deposit	0.30 m	13th-14th	garden soil

Context	Type	Depth	Date	Comments
32	deposit	0.15 m	late 14th-15th	garden soil
33	deposit	0.15 m	late 18th-19th	garden soil
34	deposit	0.30 m		garden soil
35	cut			ditch
36	fill	0.70 m		fill of (35)
37	cut			cut for pit
38	fill	0.35 m	18th	fill of (35)

**Table 2: phase 2 contexts**

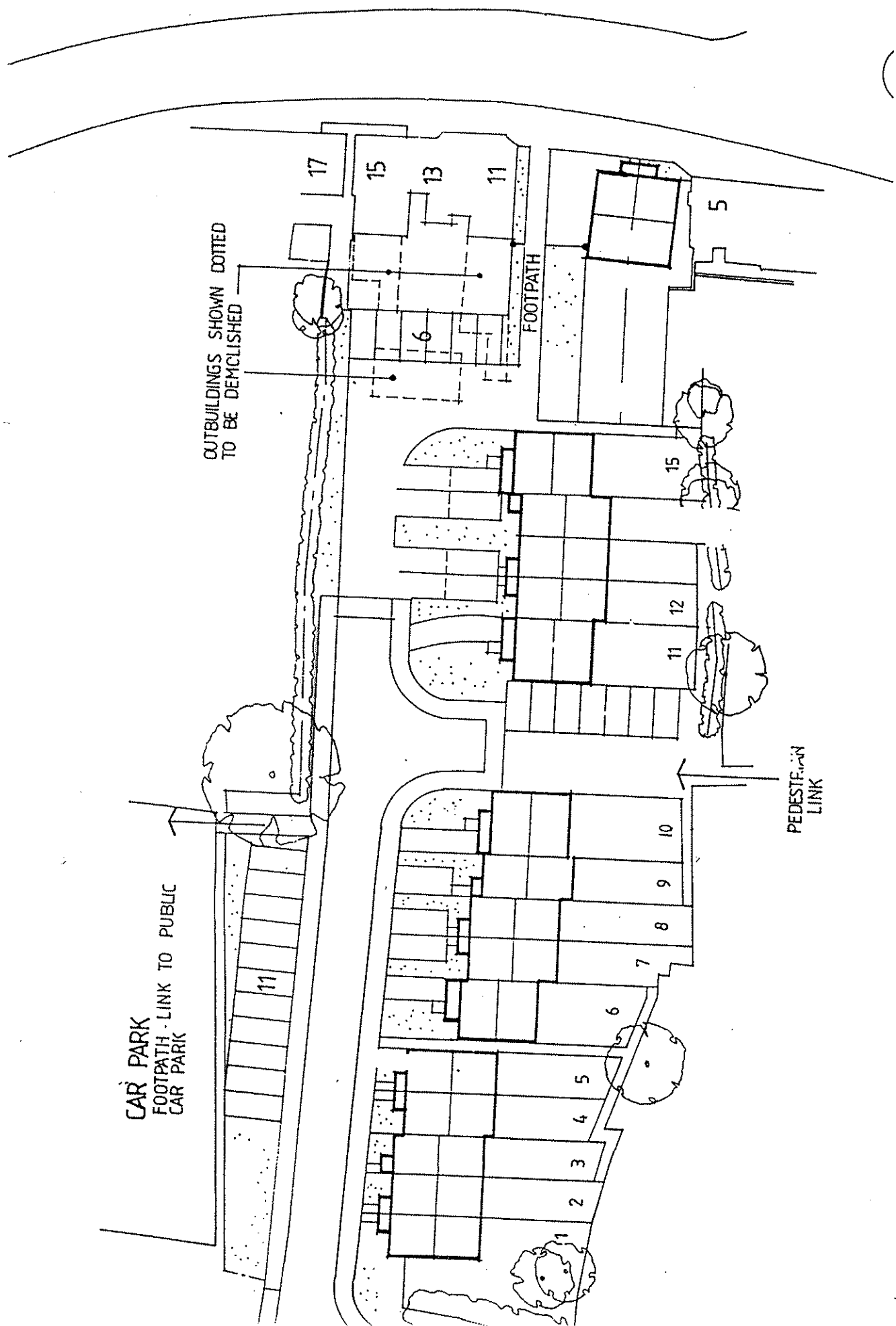
Context	Type	Comments
50	timber	planking, base to pit
51	timber	planking, base to pit
52	timber	timber upright
53	timber	timber plank
54	timber	planking, side of pit
55	timber	timber upright
56	timber	planking, side of pit
57	timber	planking, side of pit
58	timber	timber upright
59	fill	primary fill of pit
60	modern drain	modern ceramic drain
61	natural	natural boulder clay
62	timber	timber upright
63	timber	timber planking
64	timber	timber planking fragment
65	fill	primary fill of pit
66	timber	timber upright
67	timber	timber sleeper joist
68	timber	timber planking, base of pit
69	timber	timber planking, base of pit
70	timber	timber planking fragment
71	timber	timber upright
72	timber	timber upright
73	timber	timber upright
74	timber	timber planking, side of pit
75	timber	timber joist
76	timber	timber joist
77	fill	general fill of pit as removed by machine



Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:50 000 map of 1990 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright

scale 1:50 000

figure 1



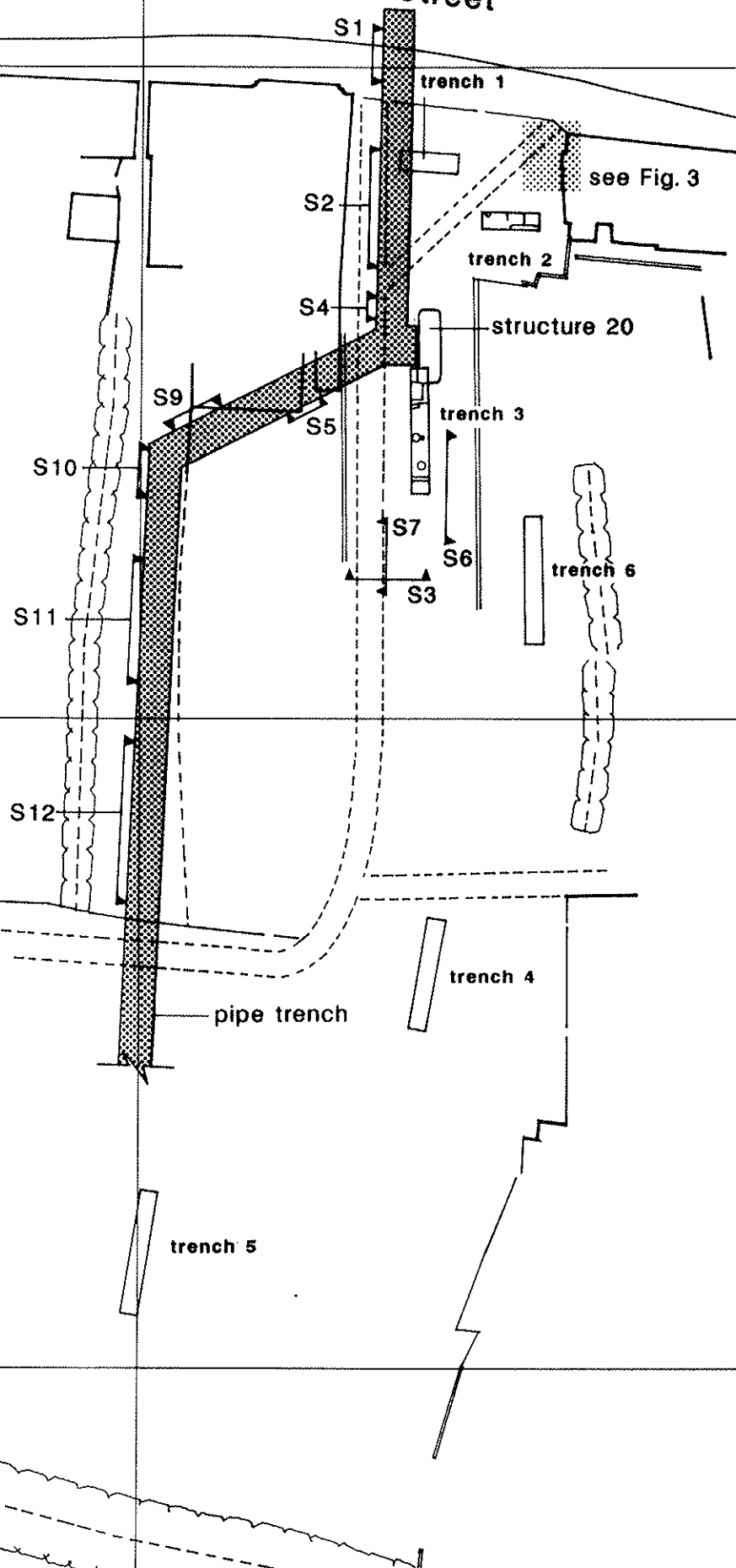
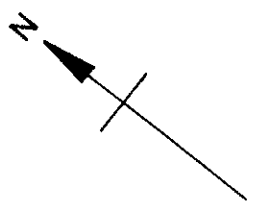
CAR PARK  
FOOTPATH - LINK TO PUBLIC  
CAR PARK

OUTBUILDINGS SHOWN DOTTED  
TO BE DEMOLISHED

FOOTPATH

PEDESTRIAN  
LINK

# Red Lion Street



scale 1:500

trench location

figure 2



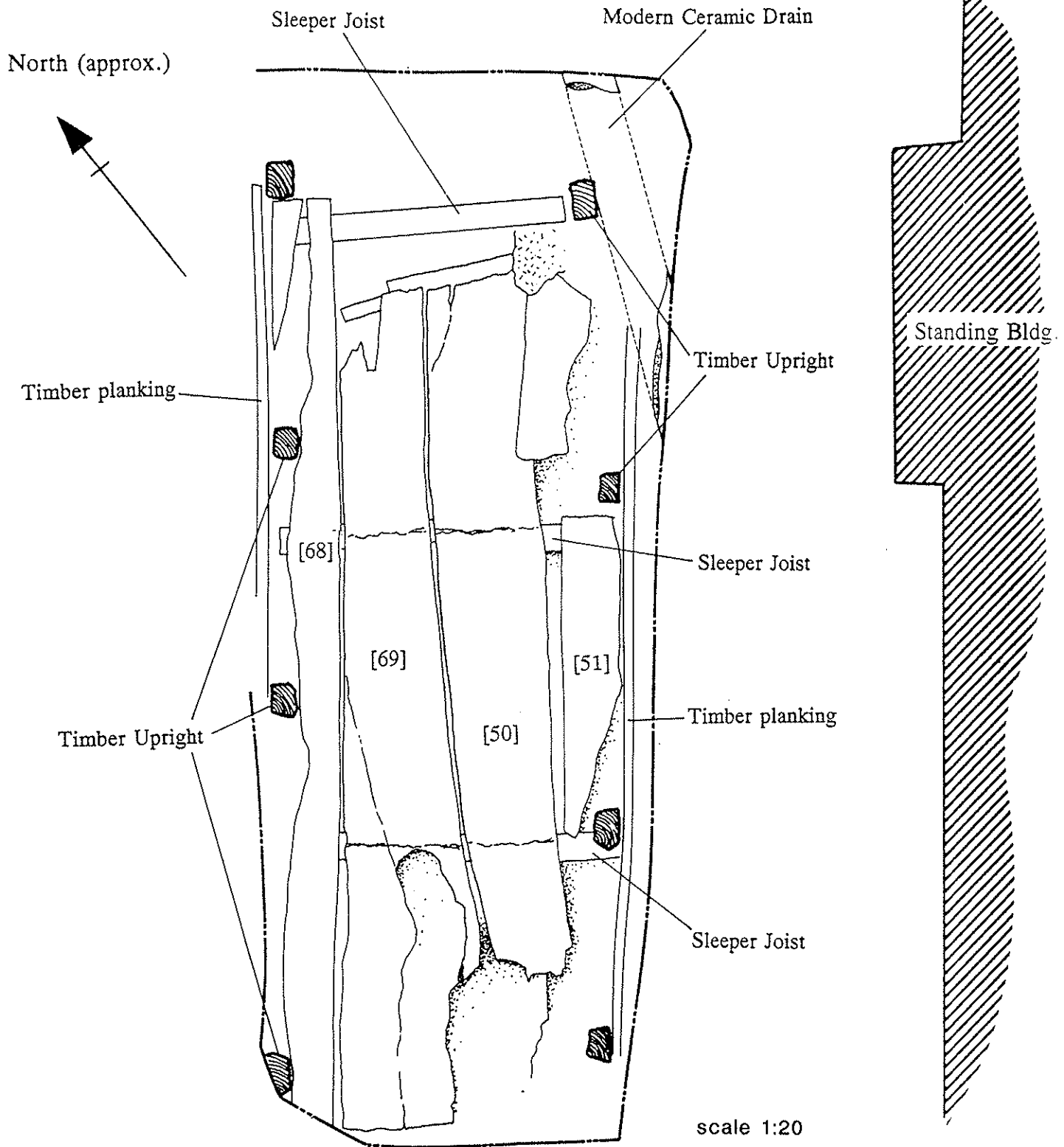


Figure 3: Red Lion Street, Alvechurch: Tanning Pit plan as fully exposed.



## OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, OX1 2EP  
Head Office Tel: 01865 243888 Fax: 01865 793496  
Post-Excavation Tel: 01865 204642 Fax: 01865 204637



---

Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited. Registered Charity Number: 285627  
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Office: 46 Hythe Bridge Street