

Environment Agency

**Markyate Flood Storage Reservoir
Markyate Cell Park
Markyate, Hertfordshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR: TL 059 171



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Checked by: J Hiller Date: 14th June 2001
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SUMMARY

In May 2001 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a 4 trench field evaluation at Markyate Cell Park, Markyate, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 059 171), on behalf of the Environment Agency. The evaluation revealed an extensive area of made ground in the south-west part of the site. A small pit of Roman date was identified in Trench 3, cut through a layer of redeposited gravel and clay that by definition dates to this period or earlier. A ditch extending adjacent to the Markyate Cell mansion at the bottom of the embankment in Trench 1 is likely to be of medieval or later date. Make-up layers in Trench 4 contained post-medieval material, suggesting that there has been landscaping activity on the site at different periods. A modern land drain and a water service pipe were also identified with in the evaluation trenches.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In late May, 2001 the OAU carried out a field evaluation at Markyate Cell Park, Hertfordshire, on behalf of the Environment Agency (EA), in advance of construction of a flood storage reservoir.
- 1.1.2 The Environment Agency's Archaeological Consultant set a brief (Environment Agency, 2001) and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was agreed with both the EA and with Hertfordshire County Council, through its Archaeological Officer.
- 1.1.3 The development site is situated at a general level of 130 m OD and the evaluation covered an area of 56 m².

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The underlying geology is chalk with overlying drift geology of clay with gravel.
- 1.2.2 The evaluation was situated on gradual sloping ground to the north-west of the site and flat land in the south-west part of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Markyate Cell Park lies beside the present A5 9 (Fig. 1), north-east of the line of Watling Street Roman Road, just about midway between Dunstable (Durocobrivis) and St. Albans (Verulamium).
- 1.3.2 The area lies within the boundary of a 12th century nunnery, which became the house of Thomas Bouchier during the Dissolution. The house is known to have burnt down on several occasions. There was no known archaeology present in the proposed development area at the time of the evaluation. Most of the attested remains associated with the nunnery lie on the other side of the present house to the north-east.

- 1.3.3 The previous magnetometer survey undertaken by the EA of the development area showed evidence of a possible bank and ditch and other anomalies which could relate to geological or archaeological remains.
- 1.3.4 St. John the Baptist's Church is located in the south-east corner of the grounds of Markyate Cell. This has a red brick tower with a blue-brick chequer design and has a nave dating to 1734 (Pevsner, 1953, 166).
- 1.3.5 Markyate Cell itself is a large Neo-Elizabethan mansion house constructed in 1825, designed by Robert Lugar. This building incorporated the remains of the mansion built by Humphrey Bouchier in 1539, after he had taken over the buildings of a nunnery founded in the 12th century (Pevsner, *ibid*).

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised four trenches each measuring 7 m in length by 1.65 m in width (Fig 2). Trenches 1-3 were targetted at anomalies identified by magnetometer survey undertaken previously by the Environment Agency (their Survey 3). This area forms the site of the proposed lake. Trench 4 was located within an area proposed for a flood bund; previous survey by magnetometer had not revealed significant deposits here.
- 3.1.2 The turf was cut and removed carefully for later reinstatement and the overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a JCB fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Hand excavation of archaeological deposits was then undertaken.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and, if appropriate, environmental samples.
- 3.2.2 All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales 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 **Finds**

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and generally bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

3.4 **Palaeo-environmental evidence**

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were found.

3.5 **Presentation of results**

3.5.1 The general results are followed by a description of individual trenches. A brief description of the finds and a discussion of the results follow this. A separate table detailing individual contexts is given in Appendix 1.

4 **RESULTS: GENERAL**

4.1 **Soils and ground conditions**

4.1.1 The site is located on drift geology consisting of clay with gravel overlying chalk. Ground conditions were dry during the evaluation, and the trenches were excavated through grass vegetation into the underlying soils.

4.1.2 The trench location base plan used in this document was supplied by the Environment Agency and contains up to date survey information on the ground conditions and layout of the site.

4.2 **Distribution of archaeological deposits**

4.2.1 The site consisted mainly of 'made-ground', comprising redeposited natural gravels to the south and west. An isolated small pit was found cutting the redeposited gravel material in Trench 3. In the north-east area of the site alluvial deposits were identified (Trench 1) sealed beneath make-up layers, and a large ditch was observed cutting these deposits.

5 **RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS**

5.1 **Description of deposits (Figs 2 and 3)**

5.2 *Trench 1*

5.2.1 Trench 1 was aligned north-south and measured 7 m long by 1.65 m wide (Fig. 3). At the base of the trench was a brown silty clay alluvium (16) that was overlain by a layer of orange-brown clay silt (11).

5.2.2 This was cut by a north-west - south-east aligned ditch (14) that was over 1.6 m deep and 3.25 m wide. The base of the ditch was filled by a grey-brown silty clay with manganese flecking (15) that was 0.36 m deep. This was overlain by a dark grey-brown silty clay (13), 0.23 m in depth. Four pieces of medieval/post-medieval building tile were recovered from this deposit. A further piece was interpreted as post-medieval in date, though its form was similar to Roman types. Fill 13 was overlain by a grey-brown friable silty clay (12) that was 0.98 m deep and filled the top of the ditch cut.

5.2.3 Fill 12 extended over layer 11 to the south-east and was sealed by a grey-brown clay silt topsoil (10) measuring 0.17 m in depth.

5.3 *Trench 2*

5.3.1 Trench 2 was aligned north-east - south-west and measured 7 m in length by 1.65 m in width. At the trench base was a yellow-grey clay with gravel (23), interpreted as the natural.

5.3.2 This was overlain by a grey-brown loosely compacted silty clay and gravel layer (22) that was 0.42 m deep and extended throughout the trench. Overlying this layer was an orange-brown friable clay silt (21) up to 0.23 m deep. This was then sealed by a 0.2 m deep grey-brown clay silt topsoil (20).

5.4 *Trench 3*

5.4.1 Trench 3 was aligned northeast-southwest and was 7 m long and 1.65 m wide. At the base of the trench a grey brown clay with gravel (33) was identified. This was interpreted as the natural.

5.4.2 The natural was overlain by a grey-brown loosely compacted silty clay and gravel (32) that was 0.38 m deep. Deposit (32) was cut to the southern end of the trench by a shallow flat based pit (36) that was 0.5 m in diameter by 0.14 m in depth. The pit was filled by a single dark grey charcoal rich clay (36) to a depth of 0.14 m. The fill of the pit contained a small group of Roman pottery (see finds, below)

5.4.3 Deposits (36) and (32) were sealed beneath a layer (31) of orange-brown clay silt that was 0.39 m deep. This lay beneath a grey-brown friable clay silt topsoil (30) to a depth of 0.3 m.

5.5 *Trench 4*

5.5.1 Trench 4 was aligned north-south and was 7 m long by 1.65 m wide. The natural at the base of the trench was a yellow brown silty gravel (42).

5.5.2 The natural was overlain by a grey brown silty clay and gravel layer (41) up to 0.52 m in depth. Ceramic building material was recovered from the interface between layers 41 and 42, presumably originally incorporated into layer 41. These finds are

dated to the post-medieval period. Layer 41 was sealed by a grey brown topsoil (40) some 0.18 m deep.

5.6 Finds

5.6.1 The Pottery by *Paul Booth, OAU*

Nine sherds of pottery weighing 63 g were recovered from a single context (36), the fill of a small pit. The sherds were recorded using codes in the Oxford Archaeological Unit's Roman pottery recording system.

The material consisted entirely of coarse ware body sherds. In all but one case fabric was defined in terms of broad ware groups rather than specifically identified products. They are defined as follows:

- W21. Verulamium sandy white ware (VER WH in the national Roman fabric reference collection, Tomber and Dore 1998, 154-5). 1 sherd, 9 g.
- E80. Oxidised grog-tempered 'Belgic type' ware. 1 sherd, 20 g.
- O20. Oxidised coarse ware with abundant quartz sand inclusions. 1 sherd, 3 g.
- R20. Coarse sandy reduced coarse ware. 1 sherd, 5 g.
- R30. Moderately sandy reduced coarse ware. 5 sherds, 26 g.

Sources of all fabrics except W21 are not known, though it is possible that the fragment of fabric O20 was also a Verulamium product. All are likely to have been locally derived, however. The firing of three of the R30 sherds was irregular. There was little indication of the vessel forms from which the sherds derived. The W21 sherd was from the lower wall of a closed form, perhaps a flagon, and the E80 sherd was thick walled and thus probably from a large jar. The absence of diagnostic characteristics makes close dating impossible, but a 1st-2nd century AD date for the group seems likely.

5.6.2 Ceramic Building Material by *Leigh Allen*

A total of 1.051 g of ceramic building material was recovered from two contexts. Three pieces were recovered from Context 42, including a fragment of a plain tile of post-medieval date weighing 32g, and two fragments of miscellaneous material weighing 65g.

Material from Context 13 included three fragments of plain tile, one with a width of 194mm. A further fragment from a peg tile with a circular hole (dia. 14mm) in one corner. These four pieces are all medieval or post-medieval in date. The final fragment from this context is curved with a thickness of 20mm. This piece may be Roman, though it was found with later material. The piece may be part of a part of a ridge tile, which were used in the post-medieval period, though were smaller in size than Roman types.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The site is located on grass land, which was previously subject to a pastoral regime. There appeared to have been little or no truncation of archaeological deposits as a result of ploughing. Where areas of redeposited natural gravels had been used to raise ground level it is unlikely that any potential archaeological remains would have been impacted upon.
- 6.1.2 The trenches were sited over features located by a ground surveying magnetometer and they appear to have confirmed the presence here of probable archaeological activity.

6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 The evaluation revealed evidence of ground raising/landscaping in the form of layer(s) of mixed gravels and clay. This process was observed in all four trenches overlying the natural and appears to have been the result of filling areas of uneven ground through the deposition of gravel deposits. Absolute dating of this activity and its circumstance is unclear.
- 6.2.2 The make-up deposit in Trench 3 was certainly cut by a charcoal rich pit of Roman date, possibly cut in the 1st-2nd century AD. This suggests that the make-up deposits in this area of the site date to the early Roman period or earlier. The landscaping could be the result of activity associated with the nearby Roman road, which by definition must pass close to the site. Of the pottery in the pit, the relatively low average sherd weight (7 g) and the slightly abraded condition of some of the sherds suggests that the material does not derive from an immediately adjacent focus of intensive activity.
- 6.2.3 The alluvial deposits in Trench 1 suggest natural silting caused by the river Ver over the drift geology. The alluvium predates the dumping layer in this trench, which was itself cut by a ditch containing medieval/post-medieval tile in its fills, so presumably the make-up layer could date to any time up to this period. Whether the ditch was associated with the nunnery nearby remains unclear, though presumably it acted as a boundary feature at some time.
- 6.2.4 The recovery of tile from layer 41/42 (Trench 4) suggests that the make-up layer here was formed in the medieval/post medieval period, suggesting that there has been more than one phase of landscaping in this part of the site.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>ctx No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1							
	10	Deposit	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
	11	Deposit	-	0.5	Subsoil	-	-
	12	Fill	3.18	0.98	Ditch fill	Tile	
	13	Fill	2.8	1.2	Ditch fill	Tile	
	14	Cut	3.25	1.6	E/W ditch	-	
	15	Fill	1.2	0.32	Ditch fill	-	-
	16	Deposit	-	1.8	Silty clay alluvium	-	-
2							
	20	Deposit	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
	21	Deposit	-	0.23	Subsoil	-	-
	22	Deposit	-	0.42	Gravel make up	-	-
	23	Deposit	-	-	Clay & gravel natural	-	-
3							
	30	Deposit	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
	31	Deposit	-	0.39	Subsoil	-	-
	32	Deposit	-	0.38	Gravel make up	-	-
	33	Deposit	-	-	Clay & gravel natural	-	-
	34	Void	-	-	-	-	-
	35	Cut	0.5	0.14	Pit	-	
	36	Fill	0.5	0.14	Pit fill	Pottery	Roman
4							
	40	Deposit	-	0.18	Topsoil	-	-
	41	Deposit	-	0.52	Subsoil	-	-
	42	Deposit	-	-	Gravel natural	Brick/tile	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Environment Agency, 2001 *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation on Land at Markyate Cell, Markyate, Hertfordshire*

Pevsner, N 1953 *The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire* Penguin Books

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Markyate Cell Park

Site code: MYCELL01

Grid reference: NGR TL 059 171

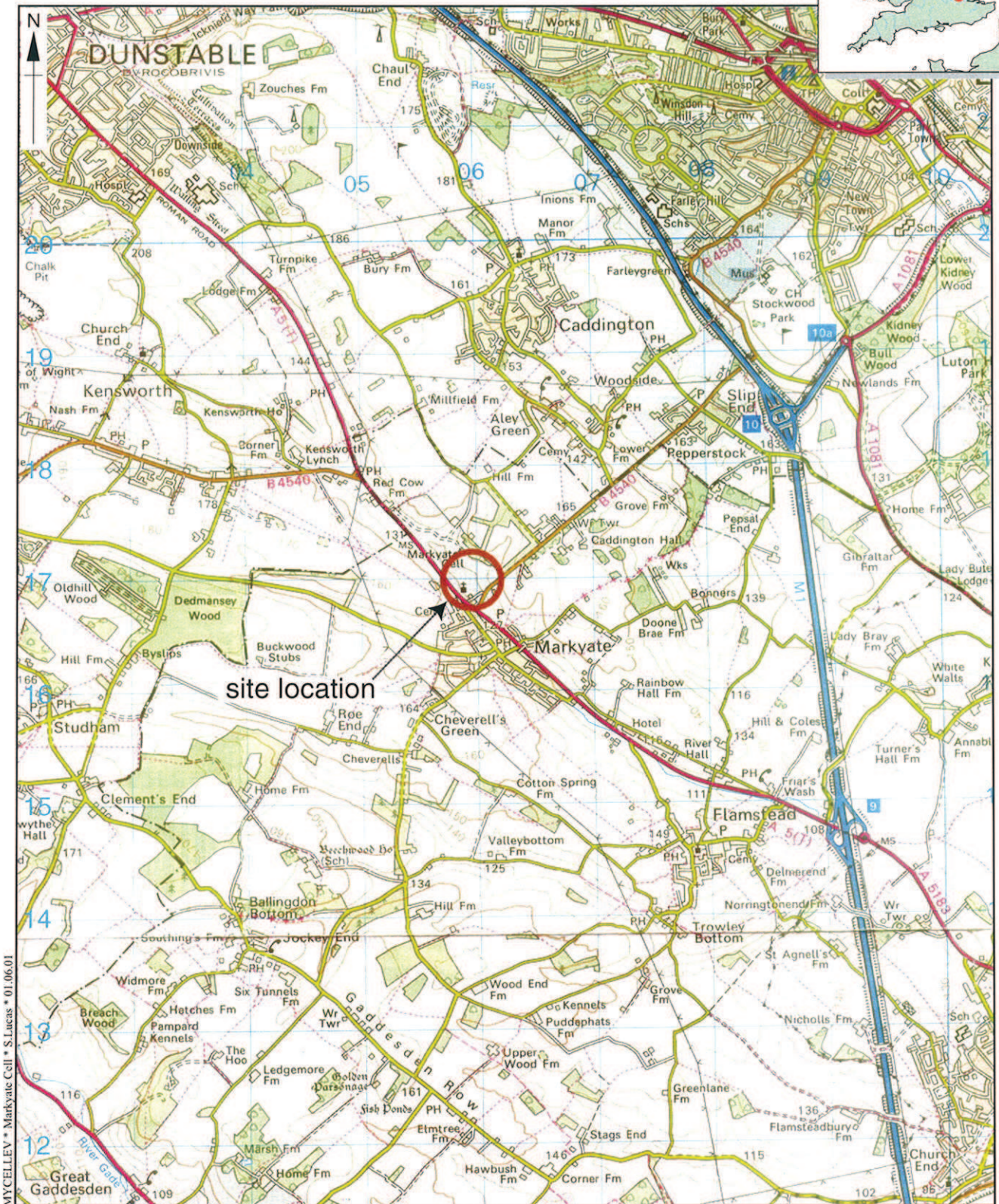
Type of evaluation: Four trial 7 m trenches

Date and duration of project: 29th-30th May

Area of site: 2 hectares

Summary of results: Single pit of Roman date and ditch found; evidence of alluviation and landscaping deposits

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the local museum, via the Environment Agency



MYCELLEY * Markyate Cell * S.Lucas * 01.06.01

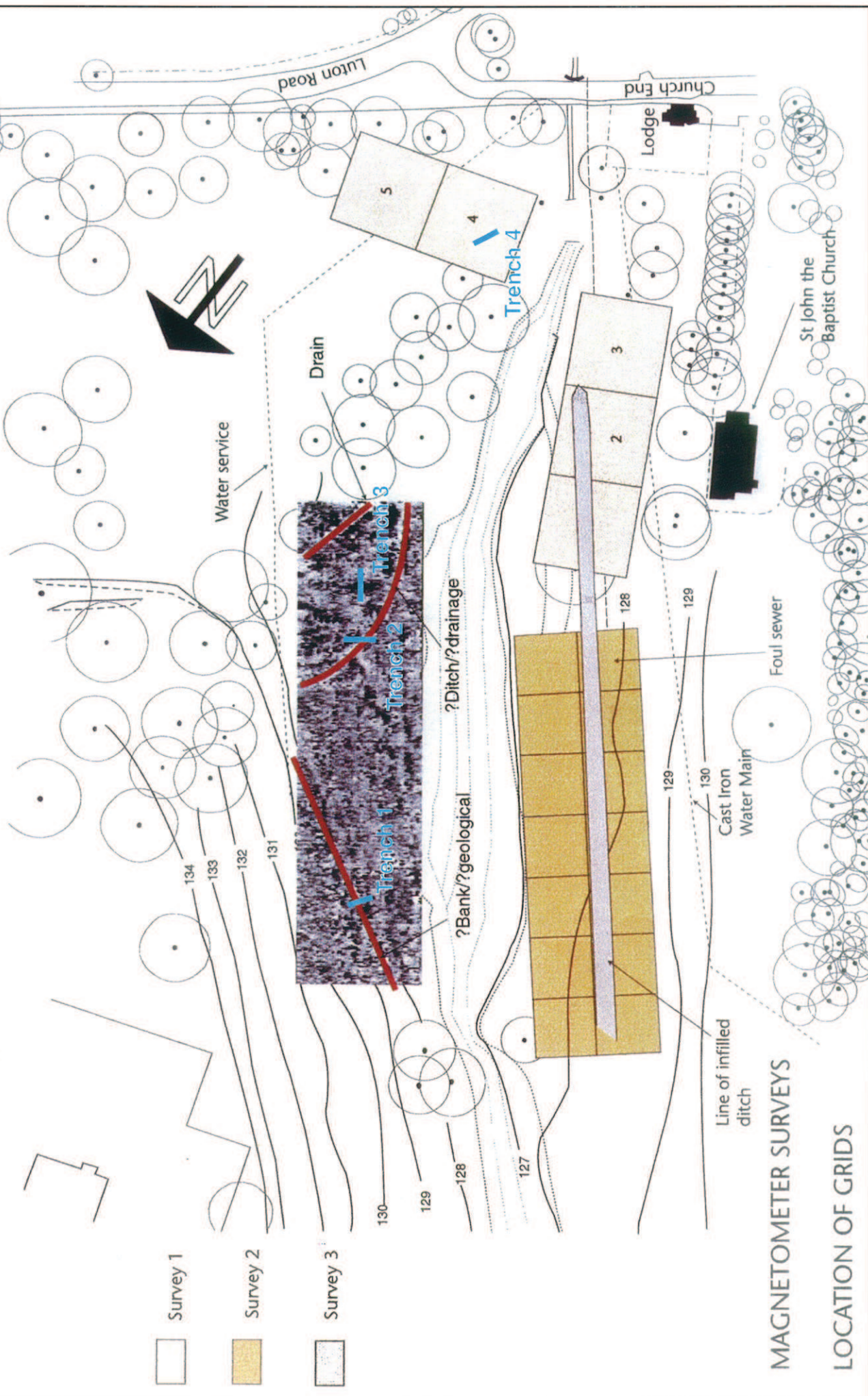
Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:25,000 map of 1990 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Licence No. 854166

Figure 1: Site location map.



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Markyate Flood Storage Reservoir



- Survey 1
- Survey 2
- Survey 3

MAGNETOMETER SURVEYS

LOCATION OF GRIDS

Figure 2: Trench Location plan.

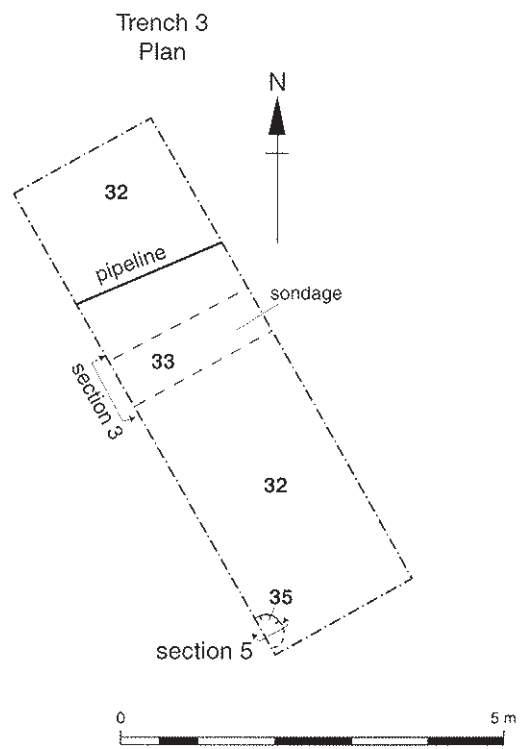
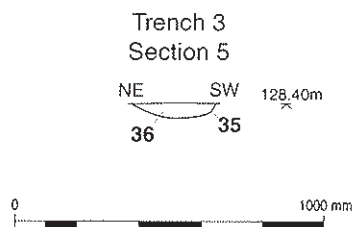
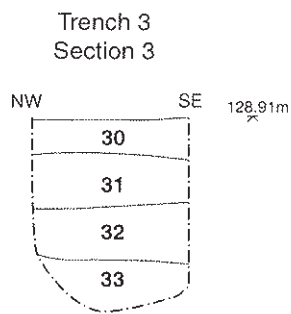
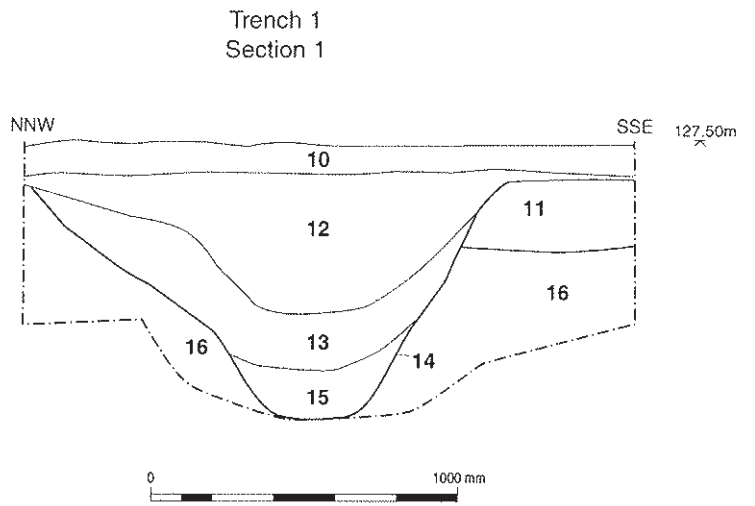
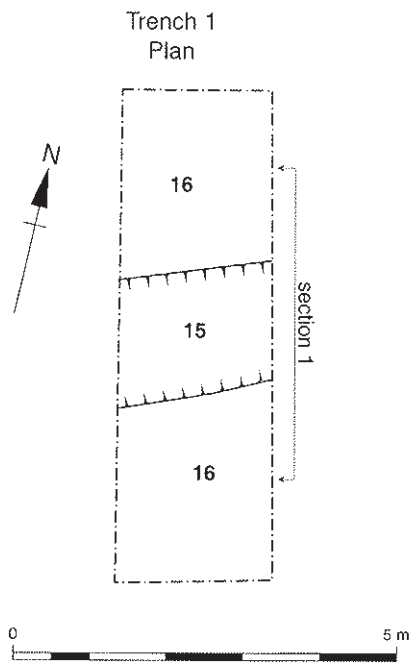


Figure 3: Trenches 1 and 3, plans and sections.



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