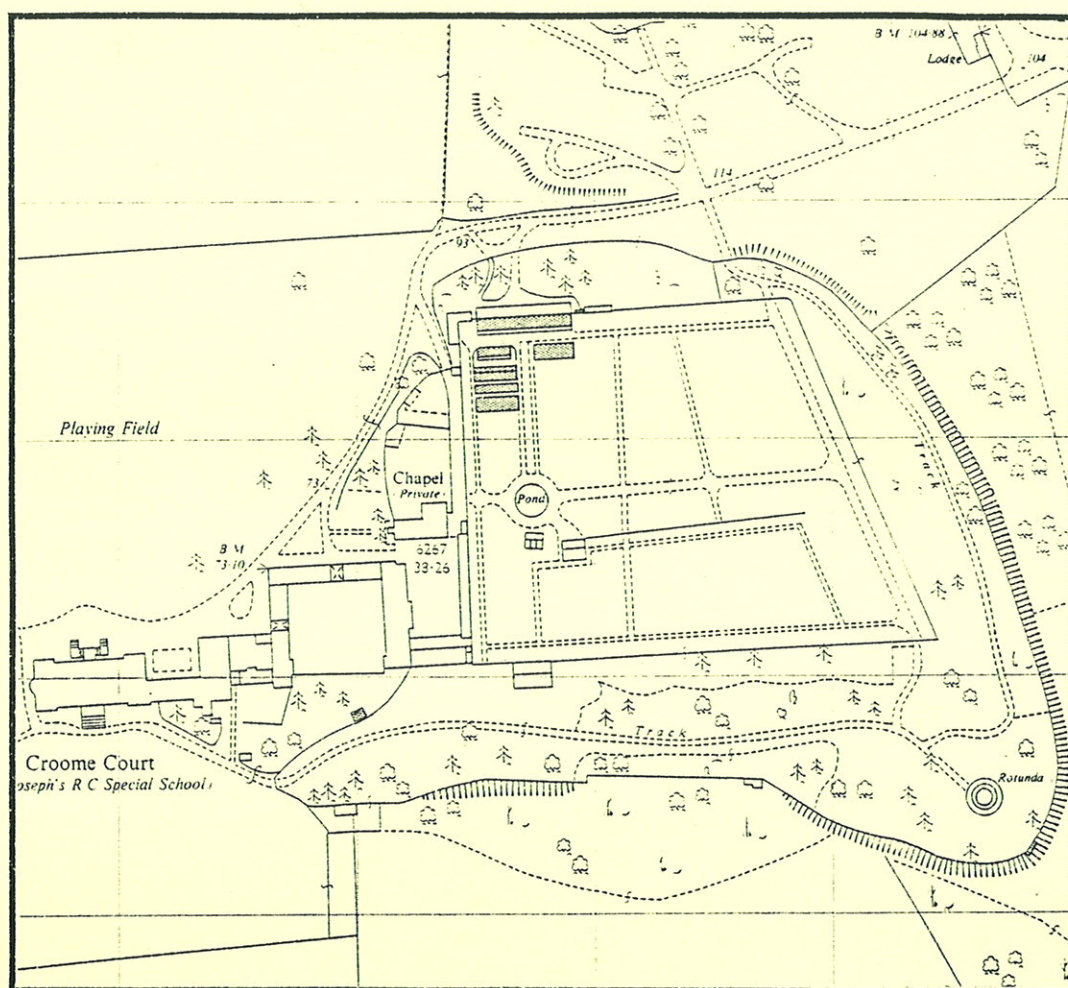


Croome Court, Croome D'Abitot, Worcestershire.

Archaeological Evaluation
on behalf of Clews Architects Partnership.



Oxford Archaeological Unit



CROOME COURT, CROOME D'ABITOT, WORCESTERSHIRE
PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER 92/1390 AND MH/92/1475
NGR SO 88654460

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
ON BEHALF OF CLEWS ARCHITECTS PARTNERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

It is proposed to convert the Mansion House, Red Brick Wing and stables to a Hotel, together with the erection of an extension within the kitchen garden and the conversion and extension of the chapel to form a leisure centre. In addition, it is proposed to form a car park within the kitchen garden and restore the landscape.

As part of the consideration for planning application for this work the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an archaeological evaluation during two days in March 1993. The aim of this evaluation was to establish the location, character and extent of any archaeological remains that exist and to define their quality and state of preservation. A particular concern was to confirm the presents/absence of the medieval church and associated burials.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Croome Court (County SMR No HWCN 488) dates to the eighteenth century with the gardens began in 1748 by the Earl of Coventry. The building of the house, stables and a walled kitchen garden commenced in 1751. Both the gardens and the exterior of the house were designed by Capability Brown, with interiors by Robert Adam. Brown and Adam continued work on the gardens throughout the 1750's and 60's, adding a lake and architectural features such as a Rotunda, a grotto and a summer house with Corinthian columns. From 1794 to 1801 James Wyatt carried out further alterations to the gardens and added many more buildings including gateways, bridges and towers, several of which still survive. At its most extensive the gardens and landscape park covered an area of some c.500ha.

There is also evidence that there was an earlier house on the same site, including a painting dated 1750, though very little is known about the house and no records could be found.

When the present church was built in 1763, the medieval church was demolished. The exact location of the earlier church is uncertain, though Laird, in his description of the county of Worcester in 1820, mentions that the former parish church formerly stood on what is now the lawn, scarcely one hundred yards from the mansion house.

About 3/4 km to the south of the house a large scatter of Romano-British pottery has been recorded (county SMR No. HWCM 7836). This probably indicates an area of settlement or occupation.

TOPOGRAPHY

The area of the proposed hotel extension which lies within the kitchen garden covers some 5000 square metres, the E half of which slopes down 20 to 30 degrees from E to W. The land is at present recently grassed over garden cultivation and has a small outbuilding in the NW corner.

The site of the proposed leisure centre covers some 900 square metres to the N of the Chapel and is at present covered in agricultural outbuildings with an open area of tarmac in the middle.

The underlying geology of the area is Lower Lias and the local soils are a clay loam.

The main site of the house is based around the Ordnance datum of 73 m.o.d. with the land rising quite sharply to the N and more gradually to the E.

STRATEGY

In the area of the Kitchen garden five 1.5 m wide trenches of varying length (representing a 2% sample of the total area) were excavated down to the top of archaeological deposits or in their absence to the top of the natural subsoil using a JCB mechanical excavator fig 2. The deposits were then sampled by hand to retrieve any datable finds. Archaeological features were described and photographed. Trenches containing archaeological deposits were planned at 1:100 and structural features were planned at 1:20.

In the area to the N of the Chapel one 15 m x 1.5 m trench was excavated and recorded using the same method as above.

Spoil heaps from all of the trenches were monitored to allow analysis of spatial distribution of artefacts.

SUMMARY

There is no evidence in any of the trenches to indicate the existence of the church or burials and no medieval pottery was retrieved from any of the spoil heaps. There was however deep stratified deposits of uncertain date in all but one of the trenches in the area of the Kitchen garden.

The lack of datable finds from these deposits (only pieces of poorly fired brick and tile) is something of a problem, however their size and character would almost certainly seem to indicate them to be related to an earlier garden layout. It is possible that these deposits represent a more complicated (original ?) layout of the Kitchen garden, or a previous garden relating to an earlier house and, not impossibly a combination of the two. On the Ordnance survey map a series of paths relating to the Kitchen garden (which no longer exist) are clearly shown. It is possible that the features in trenches 1, 2, and 5 represent the remains of these paths, though some of the deposits (especially in trench 2) show something much more complicated and elaborate.

The other factor questioning the date of some of the deposits is the depth of overburden overlying them. The top of the archaeological deposits in trenches 1 and 2 is 0.40 metres below the present ground surface, but in trenches 3 and 5 the overburden is up to 0.80 m. This is a considerable depth to accumulate in only just over 200 years, if they are related to the Kitchen garden. It is possible that major landscaping has since taken place, but there is no record of this.

There is also some evidence of Roman activity in the way of residual finds (one piece of Roman tile and one sherd of pottery).

THE EXCAVATION

TRENCH 1 (fig 3)

Trench 1 (20 m by 1.55 m with a 2.8 m by 1.3 m extension on N side) was aligned east - west in the south-west corner of the Kitchen garden. The trench was excavated to an average depth of 0.40 m, removing the modern topsoil (1/1) and a modern build-up/dump layer (1/5). Below this level archaeological deposits existed throughout the trench and at no point was the natural subsoil located. The deposits consisted of an E - W aligned stone capped drain (1/3) which ran along next to the north edge of excavation in the western two thirds of the trench and then turned a corner and ran off to the north (towards the pond ?) and two buried soils 1/2 and 1/4. The latest of these buried soils 1/2 (which also partially overlies the drain) has a clearly visible edge marking its northern limit which runs through the east half of the trench and is possibly defining a feature (such as a bed). A small sondage was excavated at the east end of the trench and showed layer 1/2 to be 0.38 m deep, below which layer 1/4 existed throughout the width of the trench.

TRENCH 2 (fig 4)

Trench 2 (15 m by 1.55 m with small extensions at either end) was aligned east - west some 30 m to the east (on the same line) of trench 1. The trench was excavated to an average depth of 0.45 m, removing the modern topsoil (2/1), a modern build-up/ dump layer (2/2) (same as 1/5) and an earlier buried soil (2/3). Below this level was a complicated sequence of layers and intercutting features, all appearing to be aligned east - west. A small sondage was hand excavated at the east end of the trench to a depth of 1 m to try and locate the natural subsoil, but the deposits (at this point 2/9) clearly continued down below this level.

TRENCH 3 (fig 5)

Trench 3 (10 m by 1.55 m) was aligned east - west 35 m to the north of trench 2. The trench was excavated to an average depth of 0.80 m, removing the same layers as in trench 2, topsoil 3/1, dump 3/2 and buried soil 3/3) though all three being much thicker. Below this level was a deep deposit of buried soil (3/5) containing tile and bone, partially overlaid by a layer of clay silt (3/4) possibly defining a feature. A sondage was excavated 1.5 m wide, 2 m from the east end of the trench to a total depth of 1.3 m from the present ground surface at which point the natural subsoil was finally reached.

TRENCH 4

Trench 4 (10 m by 1.55 m) was aligned north - south, at right angles, 25 m from the west end of trench 2. The trench was excavated to an average depth of 0.80 m, removing the topsoil (4/1), dump layer (4/2) and a buried soil 4/3. Below this level was what appeared to be the natural subsoil. No other archaeological deposits or features were located in this trench.

TRENCH 5 (fig 5)

Trench 5 (15 m by 1.55 m) was aligned east - west in the north-west corner of the Kitchen garden. The trench was excavated to the top of the natural subsoil which was reached at an average depth of 0.90 m below the present ground surface. The upper deposits removed by machine were the same as in all the other trenches, topsoil (5/1) and a modern build-up/dump layer (5/2), but the buried soil (5/3) below the dump in this trench was more organic than was seen anywhere else. Cut into the top of the natural and sealed by the buried soil were two N - S aligned features. A small ditch (5/5) and a wide but shallow feature (5/6) (possibly a plough furrow ?).

TRENCH 6

Trench 6 (15 m by 1.55 m) was aligned north - south in the area to the north of the Chapel. The trench was excavated down to the top of the natural sub-soil which was only 0.20 m below the present ground surface. The trench contained only a thin layer of topsoil (6/1) overlying a hardcore surface (6/2) and no archaeological features were located.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no evidence to suggest that the medieval church or burials lie within the site of the proposed development and there is no surviving archaeological deposits in the area to the north of the Chapel.

It would appear however from trenches 1 to 5 that in the area of the Kitchen garden archaeological deposits, almost certainly relating to an earlier layout of the present garden or of a previous garden survive relatively undisturbed.

C Bell
OAU
March 1993

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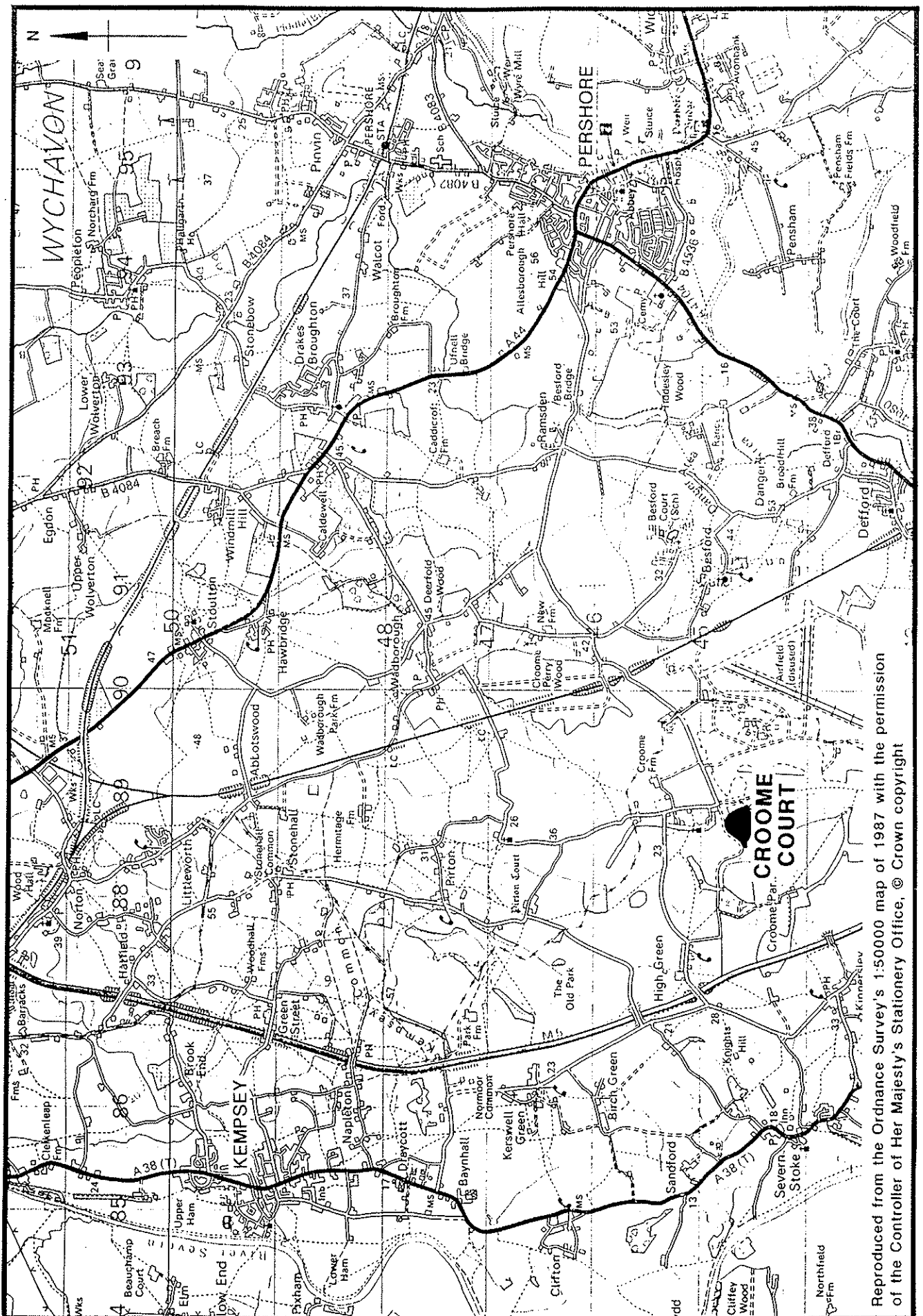
APPENDIX

Trench	Cxt	Type	Length	Width	Diam	Depth	Comments
1	1	Layer				0.30 ^M	Topsoil
	2	Layer					Buried Soil
	3	Structure	11 ^M	0.80 ^M		0.70 ^M	Stone Capped drain
	4	Feature?					
	5	Layer					Modern Build-up/dump
2	1	Layer				0.21 ^M	Top Soil = 1/1
	2	Layer				0.26 ^M	Modern Build-up/dumping = 1/2
	3	Layer				0.36 ^M	Burial Soil
	4	Layer				0.44 ^M	
	5	Feature	6 ^M	0.90		0.20 ^M	Post Med
	6	Layer				0.10 ^M	
	7	Layer				0.44 ^M	
	8	Layer				0.30 ^M	
	9	Layer				0.50 ^M	Not excavated
	10	Layer					same as 2/7 Not excavated
	11	Layer				0.30 ^M	
3	1	Layer				0.30 ^M	Top Soil = 1/1
	2	Layer				0.25 ^M	Modern Build-up/dump = 1/2
	3	Layer				0.55 ^M	Buried Soil Horizon
	4	Feature?				0.16 ^M	
	5	Layer				0.60 ^M	Buried Soil
4	1	Layer				0.16 ^M	Top Soil = 1/1
	2	Layer				0.23 ^M	Modern Build-up/dump = 1/2
	3	Layer				0.30 ^M	Buried Soil Horizon
5	1	Layer				0.36 ^M	Top Soil = 1/1
	2	Layer				0.27 ^M	Modern Build-up/dump = 1/2
	3	Layer				0.28 ^M	Buried Soil Horizon
	4	Deposit				-	Natural Sub Soil
	5	Ditch		0.76 ^M		0.31 ^M	
	6	Feature		2.20 ^M		0.05 ^M	Plough Farrow?
6	1	Layer				0.20 ^M	Top Soil = 1/1
	2	Layer					Hardcore Surface

Pottery and tile identified by Paul Booth.

Trench 1	Pottery	Glass	Tile/Brick	Bone	other
1/1	14 sherds of Post Med and 1 sherd Roman	2 frags modern bottle glass 5 frags of window glass	2 pieces	1 (burnt)	1 piece of slag 1 piece of clay
1/2					
1/3	8 sherds of Post Med.				
1/4					
1/5					
Trench 2					
2/1	4 sherds 1 Post Med		2 Brick (pieces) 4 Tile (Post Med)		
2/2					
2/3					
2/4					
2/5					
2/6					
2/7					
2/8					
2/9					
2/10					
2/11					
Trench 3					
3/1					
3/2					
3/3					
3/4					
3/5					
Trench 4					
4/1					
4/2					
4/3					
Trench 5					
5/1					
5/2					
5/3					
5/4					
5/5			1 piece of roof tile		

Trench 6					
6/1					
6/2					



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Figure 1

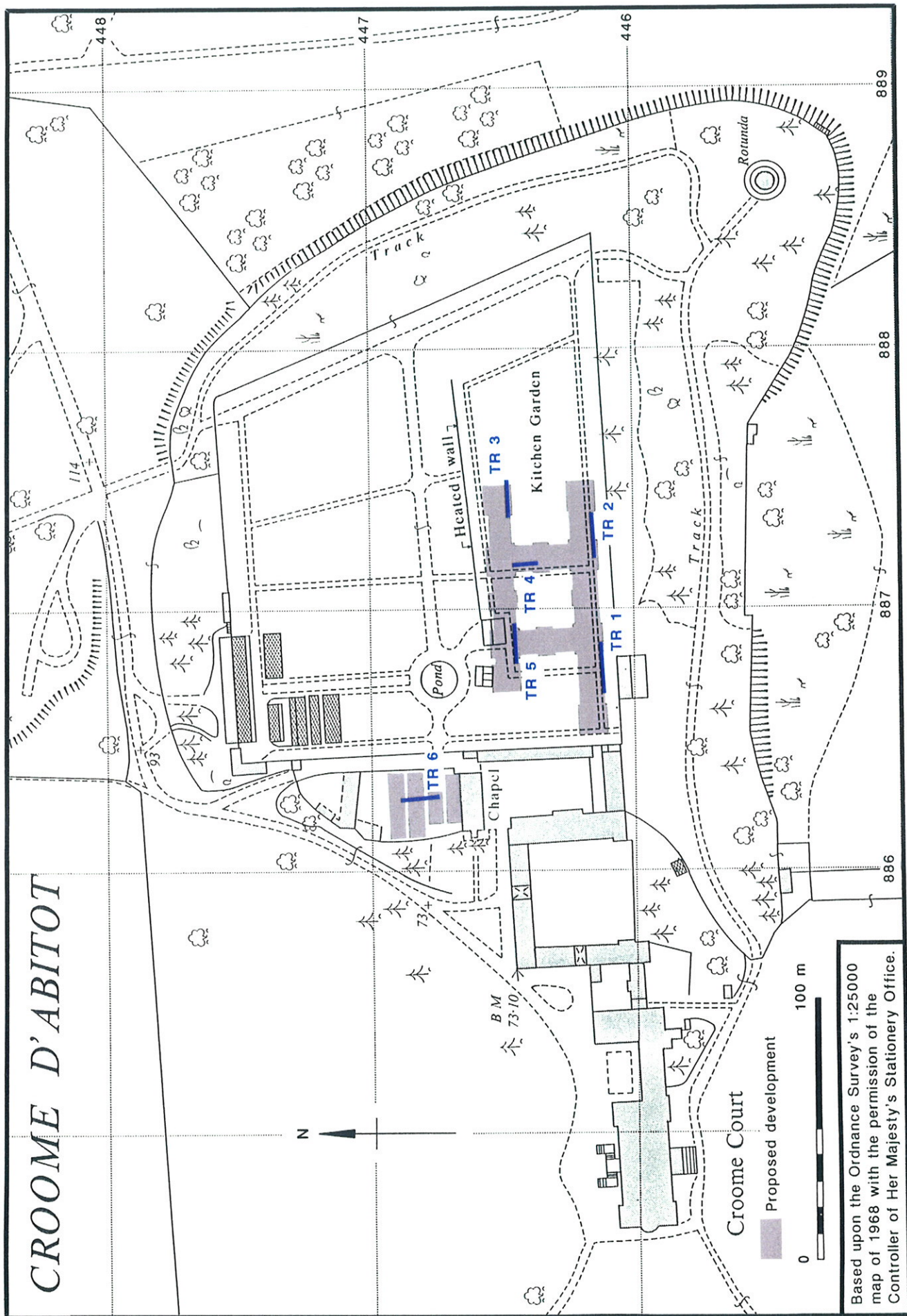


Figure 2

Trench 1

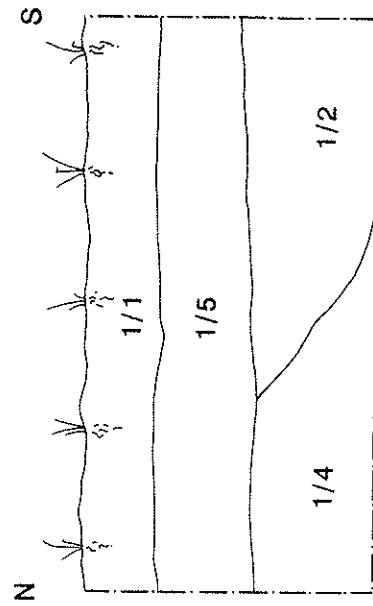
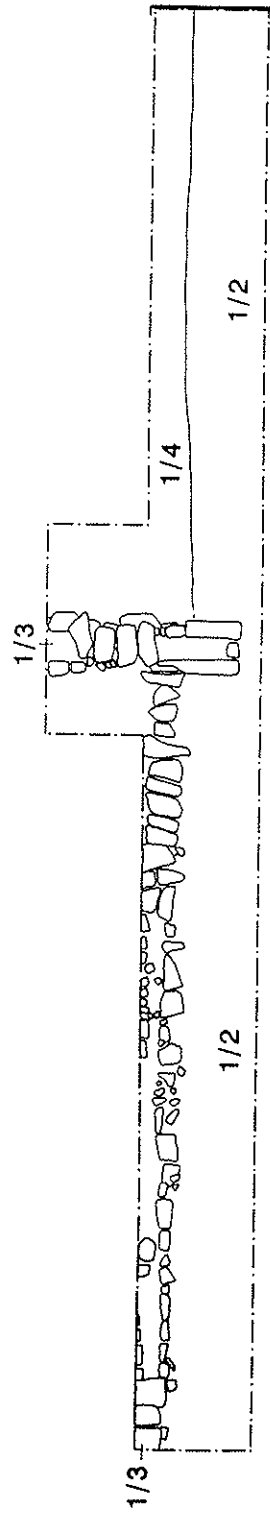


Figure 3

Trench 2

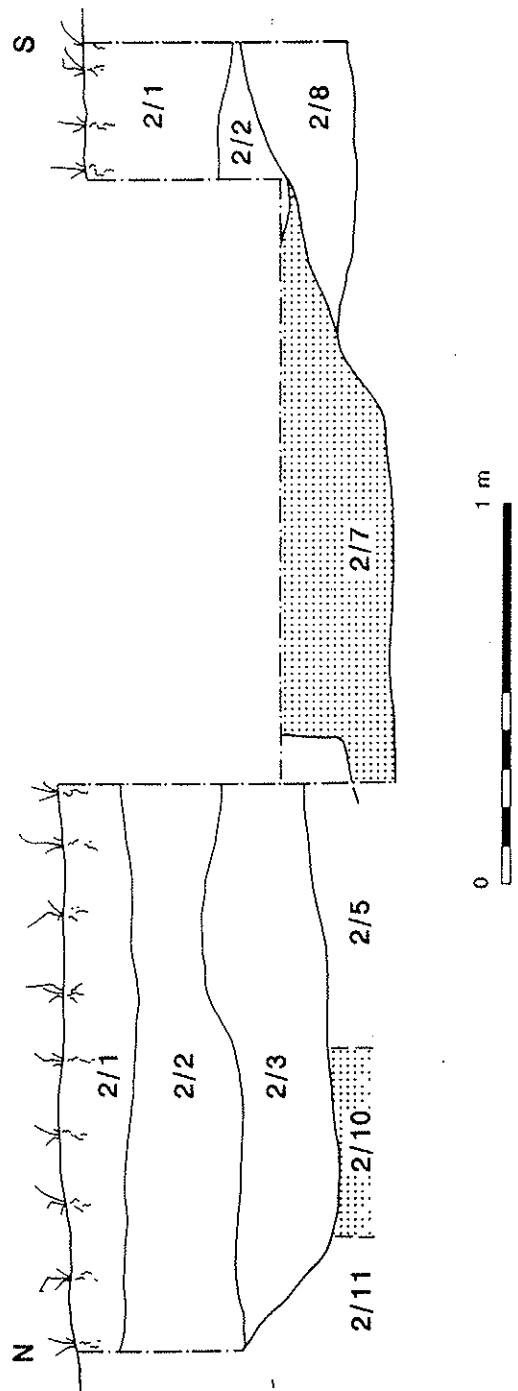
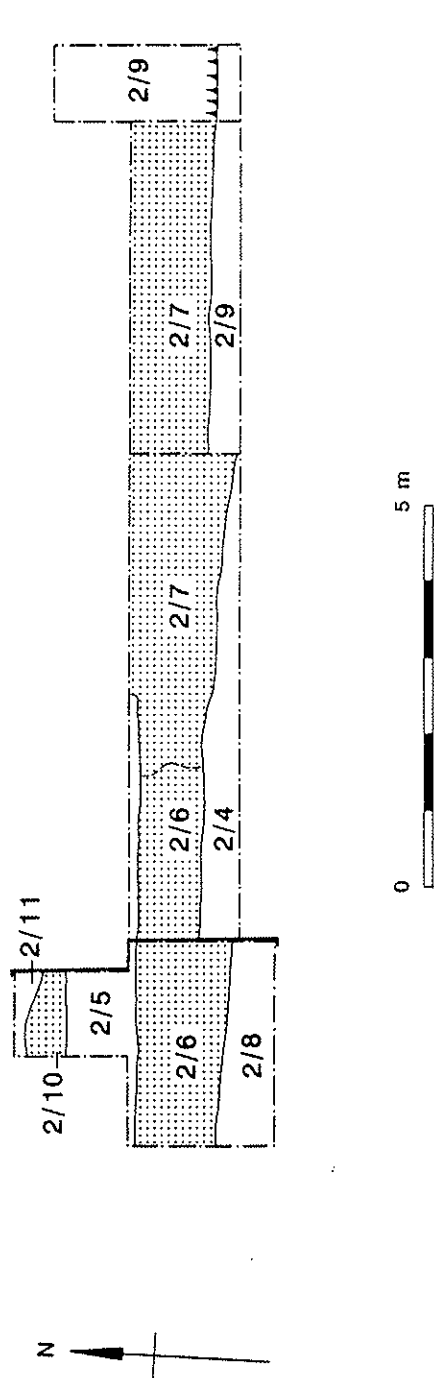
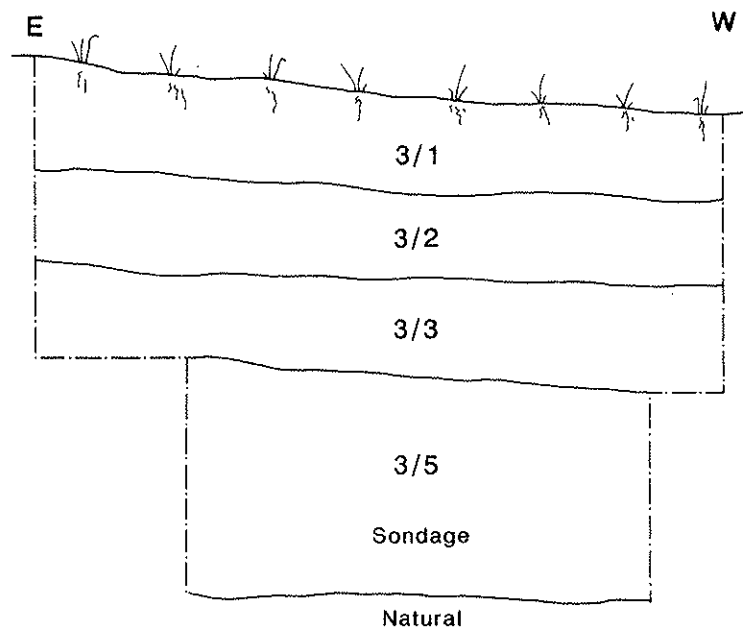
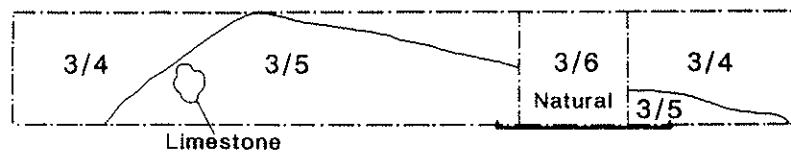


Figure 4

Trench 3



Trench 5

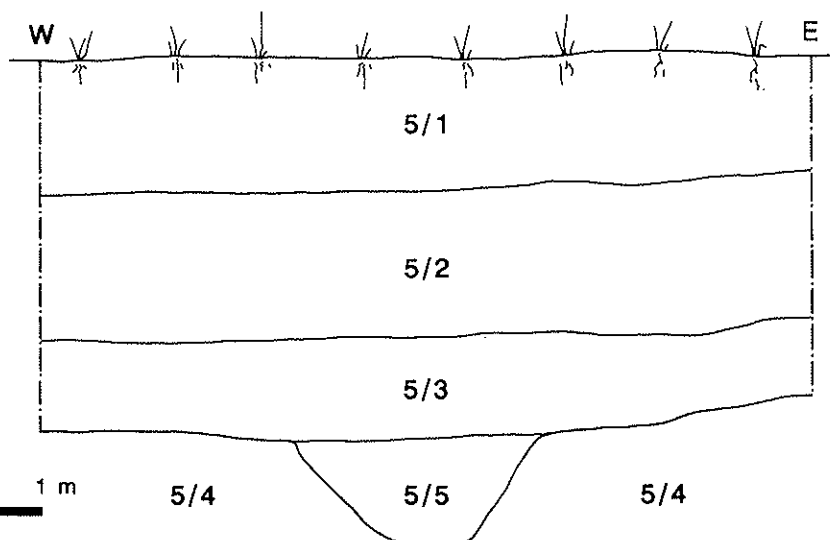
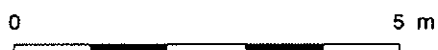
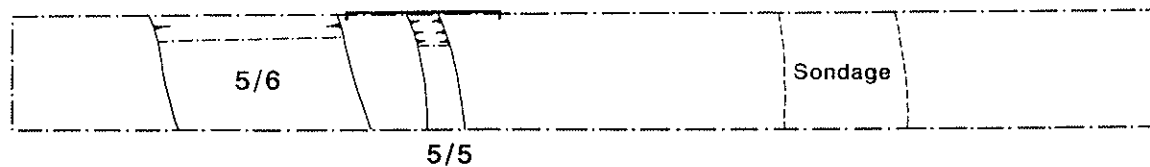


Figure 5



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