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Laing Homes

Littlemore Hospital, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 5306 0205

Planning Reference 97/1142/NS

Dan Hicks

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1998

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Littlemore Hospital, Oxford

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Littlemore Hospital on behalf of Laing Homes. The evaluation revealed that the site was relatively undisturbed by the construction of Littlemore Hospital in 1843 and its subsequent extension and use. No significant archaeological remains were recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work (Fig 1)

In February 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at Littlemore Hospital on behalf of Laing Homes in respect of planning approval for the construction of 17 town houses (Planning Reference No. 97/1142/NS), and a brief set by and a WSI (OAU 1998) agreed with Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service. The development site lay at the NW corner of the Littlemore Hospital grounds, immediately to the E of Sandford Road, and is 0.38 hectares in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

Littlemore Hospital lies on subsoil of sand and Jurassic calcareous grit, overlaid by drift deposits of brickearth, on a SE slope which descends to Littlemore Brook, a tributary stream of the River Thames, at around 55m OD. The development site is relatively flat, lying at around 70m above OD. Until recently, the site has been in use as a car-park, and previously as gardens and tennis courts.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a desk study, the results of which are presented below. The site itself has produced very limited archaeological evidence. There are several known sites with archaeological finds adjacent to the development site:

1.3.1 Prehistoric

There is limited evidence for prehistoric activity in the area. Two Palaeolithic hand-axes (PRN 12905) and a flint arrowhead (PRN 3658) have been found to the N of the site. Further worked flint has been recovered in the grounds of the Ashurst Clinic, and from the W of the Oxford-Henley road (PRN 3843). However none of these finds were associated with archaeological features.

1.3.2 Romano-British

There is significant evidence for Romano-British activity in the area. The site lies within an area to the SE of modern Oxford known to have been a focus of production sites of the Oxfordshire Roman pottery industry of the 2nd to 4th centuries (Young 1977; Lisk 1992). The Roman road between Alchester and Dorchester ran through the centre of this production area (Margary 1954). The majority of archaeological investigation of these sites has been under rescue conditions, often limited to 'keyhole' excavations. The more ephemeral rural settlement pattern which forms a context for understanding these sites is not clearly understood.

A Roman kiln was exposed in 1954 at the front of Littlemore Hospital (PRN 8017). Two other kilns have been identified in the immediate vicinity, including that at the Ashurst Clinic on the W side of Sandford Road. (PRNs 3656 and 6191).

A group of Roman find-spots has been recorded at Heyford's Heath (PRN 3843). More than ten pieces of Roman pottery, dated to the late 2nd-3rd century have recently been recovered from a narrow strip of land on the W side of Sandford Road (OAAS 1995, 1).

1.3.3 Medieval

Several residual sherds of St Neots ware were found in later features immediately to the N of Sandford Road during a recent evaluation (RPS Clouston 1996a). This has suggested the possible existence of early medieval archaeological features in the vicinity. The same evaluation revealed three pits, possibly medieval in date, sealed by a buried plough-soil.

To the E, a recent evaluation has identified limited archaeological evidence of medieval activity associated with the known house of Benedictine nuns at Minchery Farm (PRN 1434) (RPS Clouston 1996b). To the W, a medieval centre of activity is known at Temple Farm, Sandford.

A preceptory of the Knights Templars was sited here, and some of the earthworks survive today.

1.3.4 Post-Medieval

Littlemore Hospital was built in 1843 and has grown considerably in size since that date. The site is currently undergoing redevelopment.

1.3.5 Recent archaeological investigation at Littlemore Hospital

Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an evaluation for the Yamanouchi Site Redevelopment of Littlemore Hospital during August 1995 (OAU 1995). Seventeen trenches were dug. A stream course possibly prehistoric in date, a small quantity of Roman pottery and a quantity of medieval pottery were recovered. A single Roman pit was identified. No medieval features were identified, but it was suggested that layers in four trenches possibly represented a medieval plough-soil. Other similar plough-soil horizons were identified elsewhere and were post-medieval in date.

OAU undertook an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new road in the grounds of Littlemore Hospital in August 1996 (OAU 1996). A probable medieval plough-soil was identified, and several unstratified sherds of medieval pottery were recovered, but no archaeological features were observed.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

As required by the brief provided by Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service, the aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area. Additionally, the evaluation aimed to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present, to establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features, and to make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size (Fig 2)

The evaluation was based upon a 3% sample of the development area, and consisted of 3 trenches measuring 25m in length and 1.55m wide. The trenches were located so as to sample at regular intervals the footprint of the proposed development. The overburden was removed by a JCB under close archaeological supervision.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned. 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

Hand sorting was employed to recover any finds. Spoil heaps were carefully monitored for finds during and after mechanical removal of the overburden.

3.4 Environmental data

In the absence of suitable archaeological deposits, no soil samples were taken.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The general soil type was silty sand. The underlying subsoil was sand overlying calcareous limestone bedrock and sand. Ground conditions were dry.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

Tarmac covered the southern and central part of the site, whilst turf lay across the rest of site. In all three trenches recently disturbed soils overlay substantial layers of yellowish-brown silty sand. Yellow sand and calcareous limestone bedrock was identified as natural subsoil in all three trenches. Two pits of post-medieval date were identified in Trenches 2 and 3. Six modern service trenches were identified.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits (Figs 3 and 4)

5.1.1 Trench 1: E-W; 25m long

A layer of yellow sand (104), interpreted as the natural subsoil, overlying calcareous limestone bedrock, was revealed at a depth of 0.85m below the present ground surface, or 69.20m OD. At the western end of the trench, two related modern service trenches (102 and 105: aligned N-E and N-S respectively) were exposed, preventing excavation below 0.80m.

Along the whole length of the trench, a layer of friable clean yellowish-brown silty sand (103) lay above natural and was overlain by the topsoil. During the removal of the turf and topsoil (100), the presence of a grassed-over brick surface, 1.80m in width, was noted but not recorded in detail. It was clearly part of other recent garden features visible above-ground, most probably a path aligned N-S.

5.1.2 Trench 2: N-S; 25m long

A layer of yellow sand (209), interpreted as the natural subsoil, overlying calcareous limestone bedrock, was revealed at a depth of around 0.90m below the present ground surface, or 69.25m OD. Above natural was a clean orange-brown silty sand (208) with regular root-disturbance. Above this layer was a sandy loam layer with regular charcoal flecks (207) of irregular depth (averaging 0.25m).

Above 207, a mixed sand with regular slag and brick inclusions (206) was interpreted as part of the 20th century levelling of the area, possibly for the laying out of the car-park. This layer was cut by the trenches for a plastic water pipe (201) and for an electric cable for a security floodlight (211). Both these services were aligned E/W. Layer 206 was also cut by post-medieval pit (202), which was 0.60m wide E-W, 0.40m N-S, and 0.60m deep. The southern 17.5m of the trench was covered with modern car-park tarmac and hardcore (205), whilst turf and topsoil (200) lay across the rest of the trench.,

5.1.3 Trench 3: E-W; 25m long

A layer of yellow sand (308), interpreted as the natural subsoil, overlying calcareous limestone bedrock, was revealed at a depth of around 0.80m below the present ground surface, or 69.15m OD. Above natural was a homogenous layer (307) of light yellowish brown clean silty sand with regular root-disturbance. This was overlain to the east by a light brown sandy loam (306) which was 0.45m thick, and across the central and western part of the trench by an orange-brown silty sand with occasional charcoal flecks (305).

The easternmost 2.20m of the trench was covered by car-park tarmac (309; equivalent to 205 in Trench 2). Across the rest of the trench, topsoil and turf (200) sealed a root-disturbed post-medieval pit (302). Pit 302 was 1.2m wide E-W, more than 1.00m N-S and 0.20m deep.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 The Pottery by Nigel Jeffries (Appendix 2)

The pottery assemblage comprised nineteen sherds with a total weight of 732 grammes. The fabrics were recorded using the Oxford type-series to ensure consistency with other published works from the county (Mellor 1994). The late post-medieval ceramics are largely unremarkable and represent a fairly typical group of the period from the region (c.f. Mellor, 1984). The ceramic evidence suggests that post-Roman activity at the site and its immediate environs started in the late post-medieval period. Context 305 produced only a single sherd of very abraded residual Romano-British pottery. The pottery occurrence per context by number and weight of sherds per fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. The late post-medieval wares encompassed local red earthenwares which included flower-pot forms. The 18th- and 19th-

century wares consisted of blue, and the later black, transfer-printed wares and Ironstone China.

5.2.2 Other Finds (Appendix 1)

Seventeen pieces of animal bone were recovered, of which fifteen came from the fill of the post-medieval pit in Trench 3 (302). Eight pieces of post-medieval tile were recovered. One piece of slate and one piece of brick were also recovered.

5.3 Environmental data

No environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The area sampled by trenching, represents 3% of the whole development area, and was concentrated within the footprint of the planned building. The trenches have shown that the area has been relatively undisturbed by the construction and use of the Hospital. However due to the limited quantity of pottery, the dating of the layers of silty sand overlying natural subsoil in all three trenches is uncertain (see 6.2.1). Given the lack of modern disturbance it would be possible that deep discrete archaeological features could survive outside the area sampled by these trenches.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 *Summary of Results*

No archaeologically significant features were recorded. Almost no pottery from the known Roman and medieval activity in the vicinity was recovered (Appendix 2). No early medieval material was recovered. However, disturbance from the period of construction and use of the Hospital was not extensive.

It is likely that the layers of silty sand identified in all three trenches (103, 208 and 307) were derived from the natural sand through medieval or earlier ploughing of the area. No pottery was recovered from these deposits, so this agricultural activity is undated.

6.2.2 *Significance*

The results of the investigation suggest that no archaeologically significant deposits survive within the area of the development. It remains possible that, given the limited modern truncation of the area, substantial discrete features pre-dating the agricultural use could survive outside the sampled area. However, given the lack of pottery recovered, this is very unlikely.

6.2.3 *Impact of development*

Any archaeological features surviving below the undated ploughsoil would lie between 69.40 and 69.20m OD, and would be destroyed by this development; but any such features are not likely to be archaeologically significant.

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February 1998

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Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

TRENCH	CTXT	TYPE	WIDTH (M)	DEPTH (M)	COMMENT	FINDS	NO.	DATE
001								
	100	layer	-	0.36-0.70	topsoil/ turf	slate tile	1 1	Post-med.
	101	fill	-	0.40	cable/ fill of 102			
	102	cut	0.40	0.40	modern service trench (electric)			
	103	layer	-	0.50	silty sand			
	104	layer	-		natural sand and calcareous bedrock			
	105	cut	0.40	0.40	modern service trench (electric)			
	106	fill	-	0.40	cable/ fill of 105			
002								
	200	layer	-	0.12	topsoil/ turf	brick		Post-med.
	201	cut	0.40	0.70	modern service trench (water)			
	202	cut	0.60 x 0.40	0.60	post-medieval pit			
	203	fill	-	0.70	fill of 201			
	204	fill	-	0.60	fill of 202			
	205	layer	-	0.18	tarmac car-park surface			
	206	layer	-	0.10	mixed sand			
	207	layer	-	0.25	sandy loam	tile	3	Post-med.
	208	layer	-	0.40	silty sand	tile animal bone	2 1	Post-med.
	209	layer	-	-	natural sand and calcareous bedrock			
	210	fill	-	0.60	cable/ fill of 211			
	211	cut	0.35	0.60	modern service trench (electric)			

003								
	300	layer	-	0.15	turf/ topsoil	tile animal bone	2 1	Post-med.
	301	fill	-	0.20	fill of 302	animal bone	15	
	302	cut	1.00 x 1.20	0.20	modern pit/ tree root disturbance			
	303	cut	0.45	>0.60	modern service trench (water)			
	304	fill	-	>0.60	pipe/ fill of 303			
	305	layer	-	0.55	silty sand			
	306	layer	-	0.45	sandy loam			
	307	layer	-	0.55	clean silty sand; some root disturbance			
	308	layer	-	-	natural sand and calcareous bedrock			
	309	layer	-	0.18	tarmac surface of car-park			

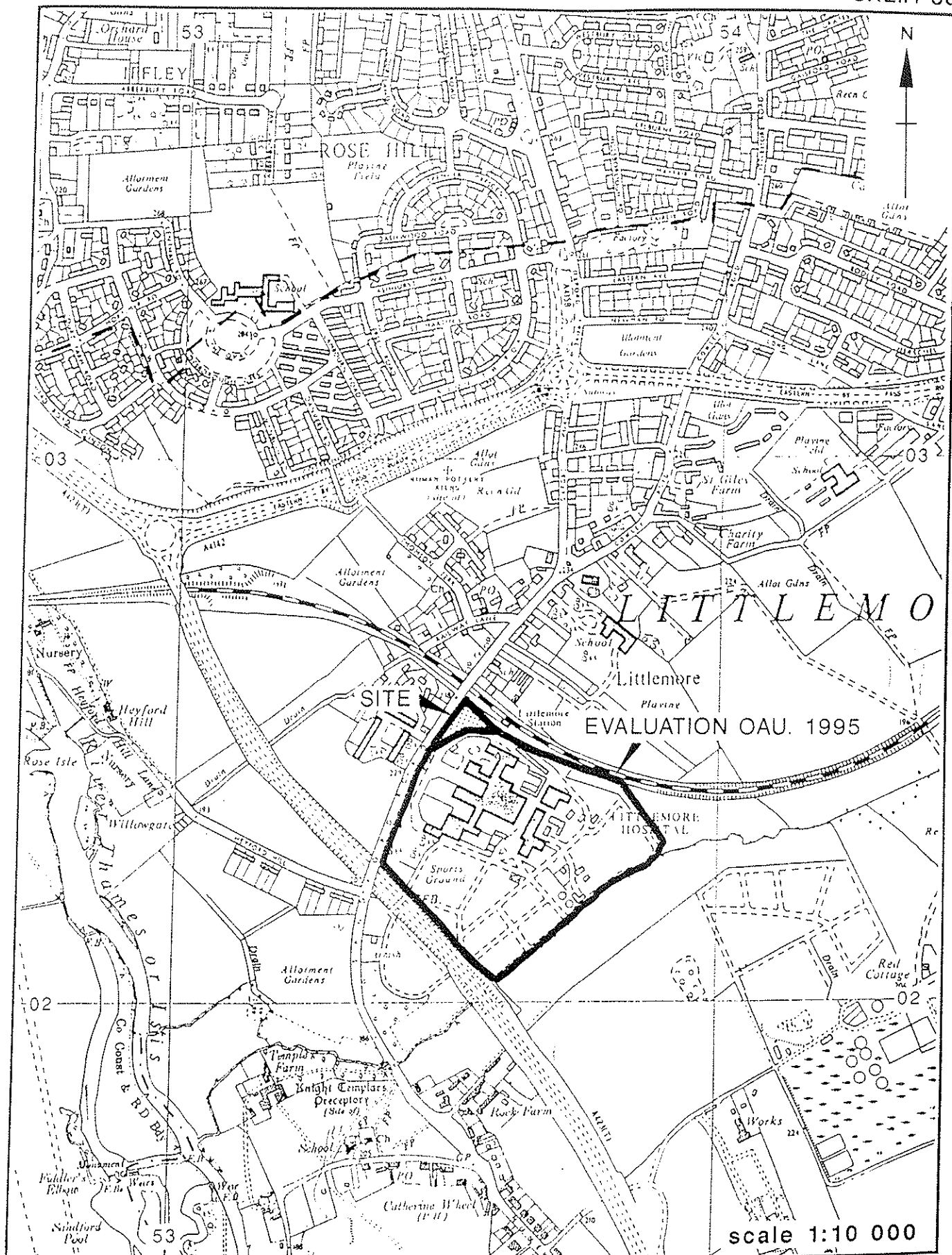
Appendix 2 Pottery assessment/ spot-dating by Nigel Jeffries

FABRIC	ROMAN	MEDIEVAL WARES (OXAM)	RED EARTHEN- WARES (OXREW)	STONE- WARES OXEST	19TH WARES (OXWHEW)	T.P.Q
Ware date	c. 1-4th	c. 1200-1500	c. 1540-1800	c. 1680- 1800	c. 1800- 1900	
100		1 (1)			3 (79)	c. 1800 +
200				4 (487)		c. 1680 +
204					1 (2)	c. 1680 +
207			2 (17)			c. 1540 +
301			1 (6)		6 (124)	c. 1800 +
305	1 (15)					R-B ?
Total	1 (15)	1 (1)	3 (23)	4 (487)	10 (205)	

Pottery occurrence per context by number and weight of sherds per fabric type

Illustrations

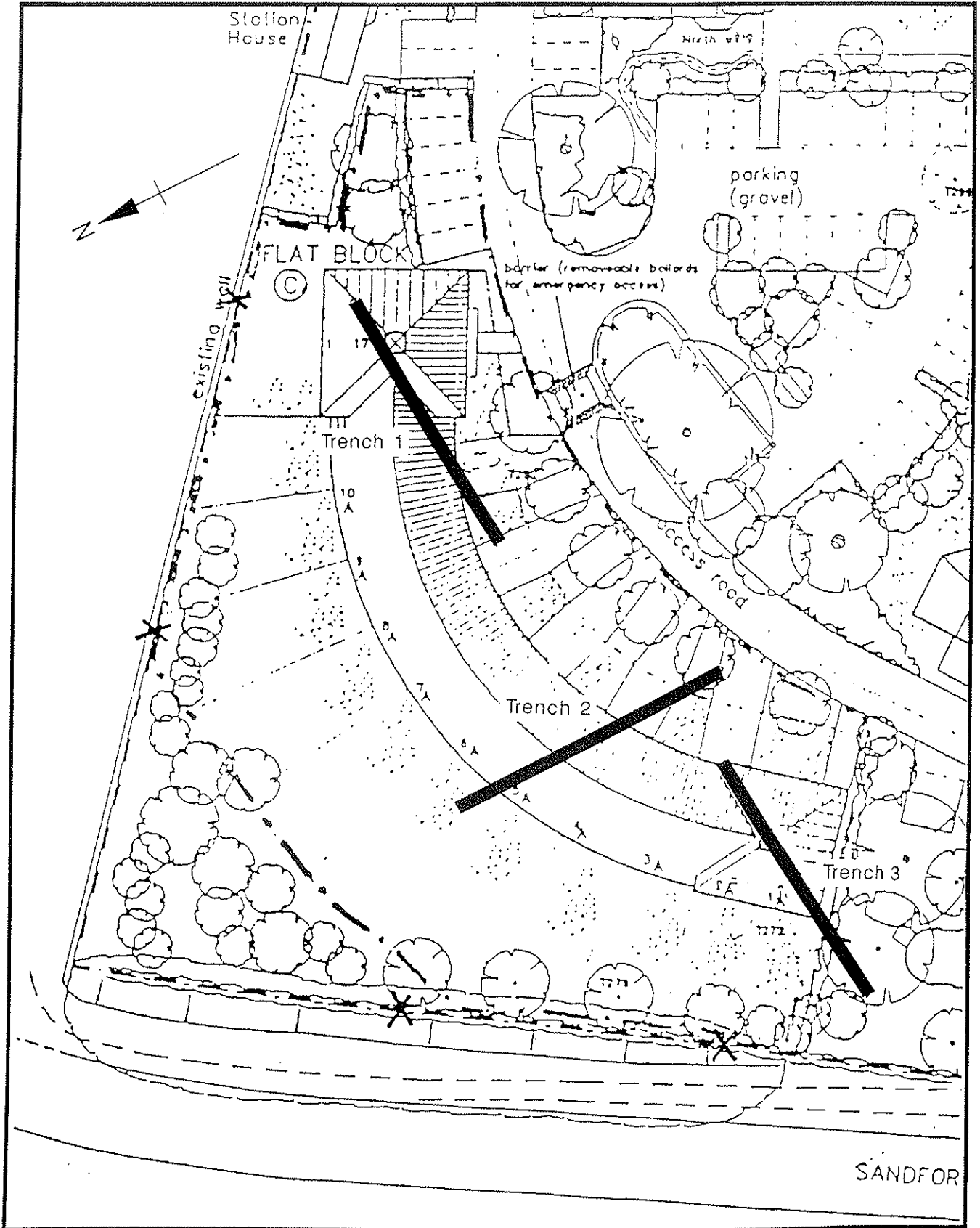
- Fig 1 Site Location
- Fig 2 Site Plan showing trench locations
- Fig 3 Plans of Trenches 1, 2 and 3.
- Fig 4 Representative samples of sections from Trenches 1, 2 and 3



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Site location

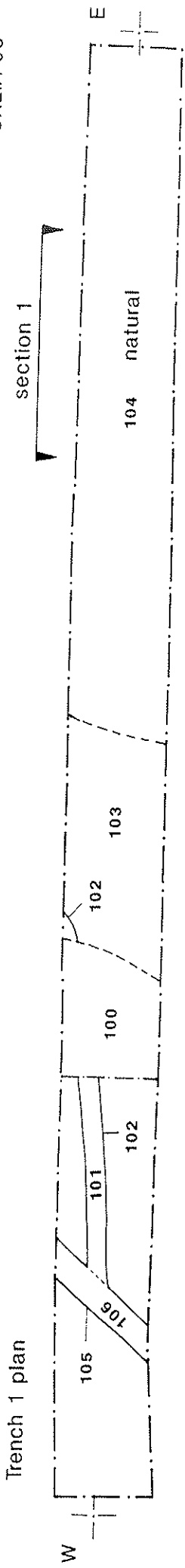
Figure 1



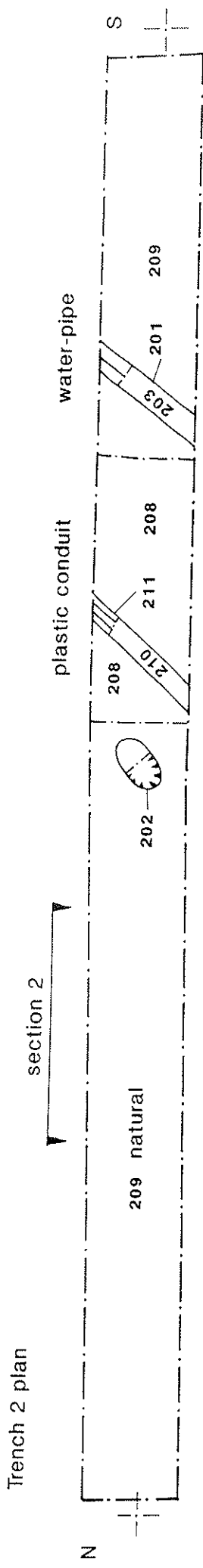
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Trench location

Figure 2



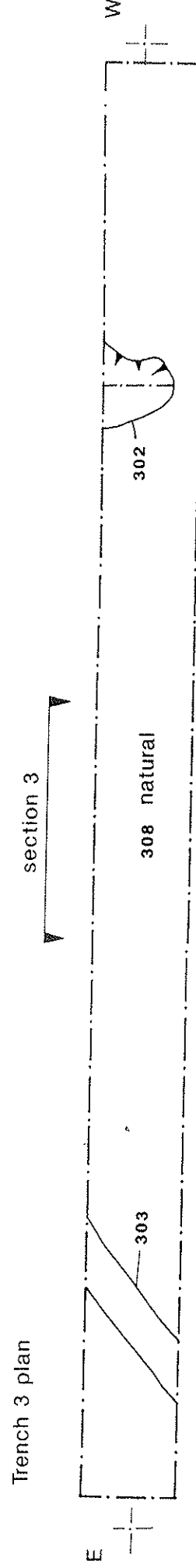
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scale 1:100



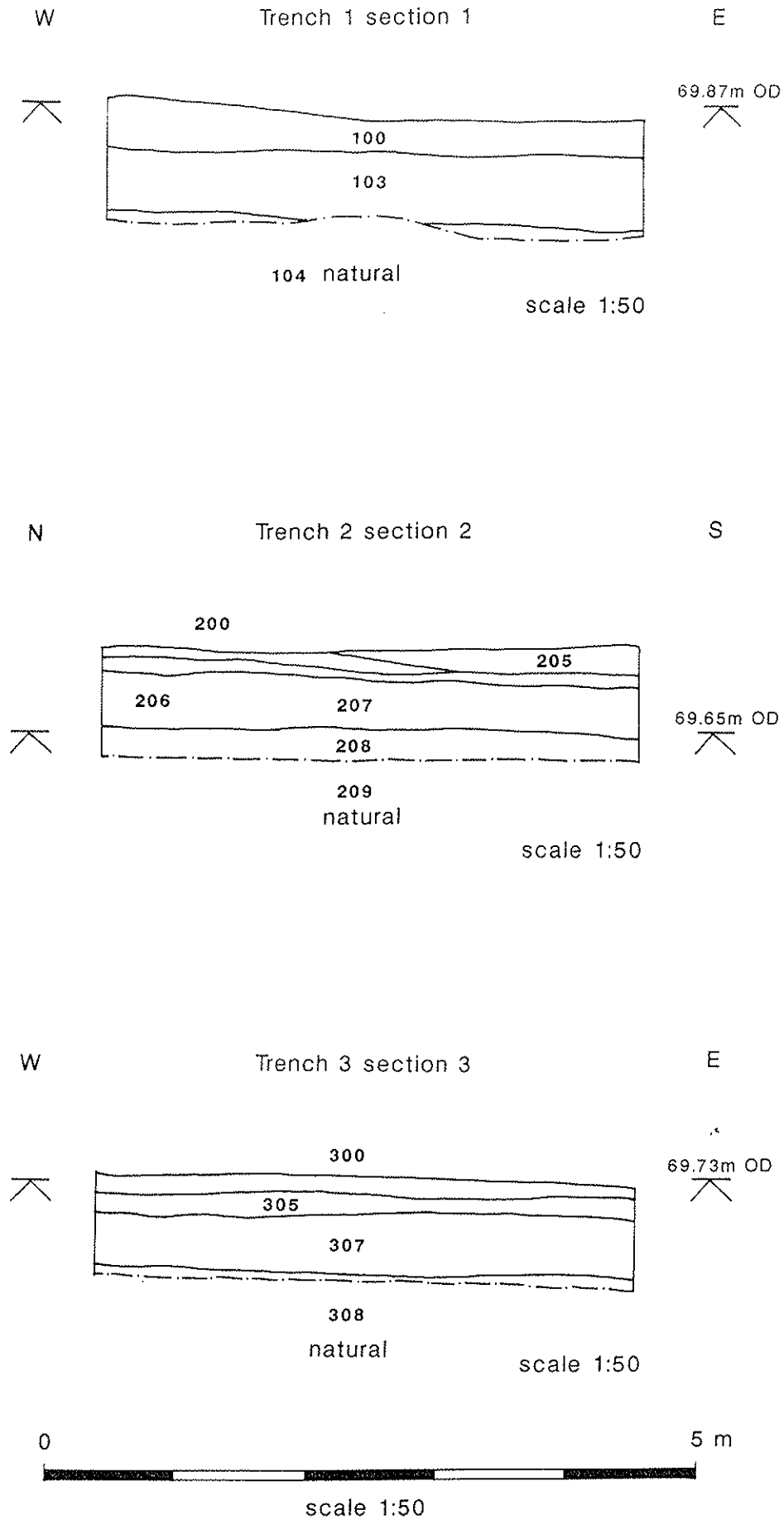
scale 1:100



scale 1:100

Trenches 1, 2 and 3 plans

Figure 3



Trenches 1, 2 and 3 sample sections

Figure 4



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