

Trinity Care

Aylesbury, Ardenham Hill House

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 817 142

Planning ref. A/99/0920/APP

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

November 1999



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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Ardenham Hill House, Aylesbury on behalf of Trinity Care. The evaluation was commissioned in advance of the proposed construction of a two-storey nursing home and apartments. Four trenches were investigated with Trench 1 containing several Post-Medieval ditches and gullies and Trench 2 a very large Post-Medieval pit. Trench 3 contained one Post-medieval ditch, two possible late Iron Age ditches and an earlier trackway. Trench 4 revealed a very large post-medieval feature, possibly being a Civil War defence ditch, and a series of tree throw holes. The natural soils were encountered at a depth of no more than 0.60 m below ground level.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

In November 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Ardenham Hill House, Aylesbury on behalf of Trinity Care in respect of a planning application for the proposed construction of a two-storey nursing home and apartments (Planning Application No. A/99/0920/APP) in accordance with a brief set by and a WSI agreed with Buckinghamshire County Council. The development site lay beside the Bicester Road and is 60000 m² in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies on Kimmeridge Clay at 85.5 m above OD. The site lies beside the Bicester Road (Fig. 1) which follows the line of the Roman Akeman Street. It is also just outside the projected line of a defensive enclosure first established in the Iron Age, and which conditions the plan of the modern historic centre of Aylesbury. The coincidence of the town and historic road could mean there are later fortifications in the area, perhaps for the English Civil War in which Aylesbury played a part.

1.3 Historical and archaeological background

The site itself has produced no archaeological evidence but there are several known sites and locations with archaeological finds adjacent to the development site. During excavations in the grounds of Prebendal House in the mid 1980s an Iron Age Hill Fort was discovered and a 20 m long ditch was excavated, 3 m deep and dating to the seventh-fifth centuries BC. The complete circuit of this defence has not been determined, but this fortified location seems to have been used to establish the alignment of the Roman Road Akeman Street which passes immediately to the north. The remains of an Anglo-Saxon ditch, possibly part of a town fortification, have been found at the Prebendal House, Temple and Bourbon Streets, Kingbury and at the County Museum. A watching brief was carried out on the Royal Bucks Hospital site on the opposite side of the Roman road but no significant archaeology was reported.

1.4 Acknowledgements

The evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Trinity Care and monitored by Julia Wise of Buckinghamshire County Council.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

To gather sufficient archaeological information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation, depth of burial and palaeoenvironmental potential of any significant remains within the area of study.

To make available the significant results.

Establish whether any Iron Age remains associated with the hill-fort extend into the development site, with particular reference to ritual or structural deposits.

Identify any Roman settlement flanking the presumed line of Akeman Street.

Identify any late Saxon or medieval domestic or industrial deposits associated with the town.

Consider any evidence for later settlement, agriculture or other land use, in association with available topographical sources.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation was based upon a 2.5% sample of the development area, and consisted of four trenches measuring 25 m long and 1.6 m wide (Fig. 2), with an additional contingency to investigate any significant findings. The overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator (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 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).

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The general soil type was a silty clay of varying degrees of grey and brown and was neutral, with good preservation of remains. Ground conditions were generally dry, with areas of trapped ground water within the clay colluvium.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

All trenches contained post-medieval archaeology, only Trench 3 contained any features of a possible earlier date (late Iron Age).

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was aligned in a north-south orientation and measured 25 m by 1.6 m. It was excavated to 82.00 m OD, 0.46 m below the ground level of the south end of the trench and 0.94m below the ground level of the north end of the trench. Colluvium was reached at the deepest depth of 82.08 m OD.

Two modern services were observed and three post-medieval ditches (103, 107 and 109), all filled with greyish green brown or greyish brown clays and silty clays. Ditch 103 was of U-shaped profile, 0.20 m deep and 1.10 m wide, aligned east-west. Ditch 107 was U shaped, 0.80 m wide and 0.25 m deep, aligned north-south and terminating to the south. It truncated the east-west aligned ditch 109, 0.20 m deep and 1.20 m wide with pottery dated to 17th-19th centuries, and a possible post hole (111) 0.22 m deep and 0.09 m deep. Overlying these features was a layer of clay (101) which in turn was overlain by hardcore and concrete (100) forming the surface of the car park.

5.1.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

Trench 2 was 25 m by 1.6 m and was excavated to 81.92 m OD, 0.70 m below ground level. The trench was aligned in an east-west orientation and colluvium was reached at the deepest depth of 82.06 m.

Only one feature was present in this trench, a large probable pit (205) 0.30 m deep and over 3.2 m wide at the western end of the trench. The pit was filled with two layers of re-deposited mottled yellow clay colluvium 204 and 202, sandwiching a dark reddy brown clayey loam 203. The pottery from the latest of these was 19th century. Only a small portion of this pit was hand excavated due to the fact that the clay make-up layer (which sealed the archaeology) for the tarmac tennis court (200) was sealing a sewage like water deposit which flooded the trench within a day.

5.1.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 5)

Trench 3 was aligned north-east to south-west in the east of the site. It measured 25 m by 1.6 m, with a widened strip 8.0 m by 1.6 m extended along its western edge at the request of Julia Wise. The trench was excavated to a depth of 82.80 m OD 1.20 m below the ground level at the centre of the trench. The clay colluvium was seen at the deepest depth of 83.11 m OD in a natural hollow to the south-west of the trench.

The latest feature was a linear ditch 302 aligned north-west to south-east, 2 m wide and 0.40 m deep. This was backfilled with a greeny grey brown slightly silty clay 310, this also filled a 1 m wide and over 0.20 m deep pit (315) dug through the base of the ditch (302), presumably as a soakaway. Three other features were seen, two ditches (300 and 303) and a trackway (301). All the features were filled with a browny orange clay, but the trackway fill, 312, was darker and contained more chalk flecks. This fill was also raised in a mound over the trackway. Ditch 303 was almost square in profile, 0.80 m wide and 0.60 m deep, a single sherd of late Iron Age pot was retrieved. Ditch 300 was V-shaped, 0.75 m wide and 0.45 m deep, again containing a single sherd of late Iron Age pot. Ditch 300 truncated the trackway 301, of which was 1.80 m width was exposed in this trench, 0.45m deep in the centre. Two rut marks were seen in the centre, either

side of a small mound, 0.50 m apart. The only finds from 301 were a lump of slag and a sherd of post-medieval pottery (17th -19th centuries), but these may be intrusive. Overlying the archaeological features were a B-horizon and a sub-soil (306 and 307), and then the top soil (304).

5.1.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 6)

Trench 4 ran parallel to the Bicester Road measuring 25 m by 1.6 m and excavated to a depth of 83.60 m OD, 2.10 m below ground level. The clay colluvium was seen at 84.09 m OD in the centre of the trench and 84.36 m OD in the west of the trench.

The trench revealed a series of tree root holes along the northern trench edge suggesting an old tree line. A post hole (408) 0.12 m deep and 0.47 m wide was backfilled with a mid brown clay silt and was undated, although the nature of the fill suggested a fairly modern date. In the east end of the trench was a linear ditch (411) over 8 m wide and over 1.50 m deep. The feature was machine excavated due to its depth; the lowest fill was a mid-dark blue grey clay resembling a primary weather-borne deposit. The other fills were orange brown and grey chalky clays, containing finds of a post-medieval date. This could be a defence ditch from the Civil War. Overlying the archaeological deposits were the B-horizon 401 and then the tarmac surface 400.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 *Late Iron Age Pottery*

Two late Iron Age pottery sherds were retrieved from ditch 300 and ditch 303 (fills 311 and 308 respectively), both were grog -tempered 'Belgic Type'.

5.2.2 *Post-medieval pottery*

Small groups of pottery included the base of an 18th-century Staffordshire buff-ware tankard and a Keiller Dundee marmalade jar, both from 202. There was no diagnostic pottery from the presumed Civil War ditch in Trench 4, but the ceramic building material (CBM) could be consistent with this interpretation. A rim sherd of Post-medieval earthenware from the fill of trackway 301 was possibly intrusive (ctx. 312)

5.2.3 *Metalwork*

Three post medieval nails were retrieved from fills 310, 407 and 409 with the broken end of a nail also coming from 407, and a post-medieval clog iron from fill 204.

5.2.4 *Bone*

Five fragments of bone were observed; a bovine rib from fill 310, the distal end of a bovine ulna from fill 203 and a fragment of bovine long bone from fill 407. Two unidentifiable fragments was also retrieved from fills 108 and 407.

5.2.5 *Slag*

One slag piece was from fill 312, probably intrusive and post-medieval.

5.2.6 *Glass*

Two sherds of post-medieval glass were retrieved; that from the fill 204 is of 18th to 19th century date, whilst the sherd from 407 is of the 16th to 17th centuries.

5.3 Environmental data

5.3.1 *Carbonized plant remains*

On site evaluation by OAU with the County Archaeological Service identified no significant palaeo-environmental potential.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The most recent truncation of the site arises from the construction of the car park and tennis courts, this has not directly truncated the archaeology, whilst earlier possible ploughing and landscaping have truncated all the features. The pottery dating is reliable except where only two, or less, sherds were found as there is the possibility of later intrusions.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 *Summary of Results*

The earliest features seen are in the south of the site perpendicular to Ardenham Hill Cottage (Trench 3). These consist of two ditches (303 and 300) and a small trackway (301). The two sherds of pot from the ditches are late Iron Age but a post-medieval sherd was found in the fill of the trackway. All three features contain an orangey fill, different from the much browner fills of the definite post medieval features in the rest of the site. No other late Iron Age pottery was seen in any of the other features, so it is possible, on the basis of fill type and pottery, that even though ditch 300 truncates the trackway all three features could be late Iron Age, and the post-medieval pottery therefore intrusive. Alternatively all three features could be post medieval and the Iron Age pottery residual, ie from late Iron Age activity in this area of the site. The two ditches are 6 m apart and on the same alignment (east-west); ditch 300 truncates the trackway and so the mound of soil (312) over the trackway could be upcast from its construction. The trackway is on more of a south-east to north-west alignment and may be earlier than the late Iron age. With the rut marks at the base being only 0.60 m apart, the trackway was not used for any major traffic but perhaps more domestic purposes.

The other feature seen in Trench 3 was a linear ditch (302) with soakaway (315). This was most likely used as part of a drainage system within the area during the post-medieval period.

Trench 4 contained a very large possibly linear feature (411), the latest fill of which has been dated as post-medieval, and so may be backfilling into a large Civil War defence ditch. This feature is not seen in any other trenches and was too deep to investigate fully.

The intercutting ditches in Trench 1 are of 17th- 19th-century date; they may, like ditch 302 in Trench 3, be part of a drainage system in the area.

The only feature in Trench 2 is the latest feature on the site, dated to the 19th or 20th centuries, a large presumed rubbish pit (205) which may be associated with building of the houses in the area.

6.2.2 *Significance*

The significant archaeology is that in the south east of the site parallel to Ardenham Hill House, the possible Late Iron Age ditches and trackway and the possible Civil War ditch. The previously recorded Iron Age defences are not known to have reached Ardenham Hill so these may prove to be of some importance, but if the ditches are in fact post medieval then they would be of little importance. If the feature in Trench 4 is a Civil War defence ditch it would hold some significance due to the fact that no archaeology has been seen in this area before, and may suggest a double defensive line.

6.2.3 *Impact of development*

Of the significant archaeology only the possible Civil War ditch in Trench 4 would be affected greatly, being directly within the footings for a proposed building. The archaeology in Trench 3 is just outside the proposed development but the access road may slightly affect the area to the north-east of Trench 3 (no archaeology was seen in this area).

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November 1999

Bibliography and references

OAU (November 1999) *Aylesbury, Ardenham Hill House. Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation.* (Oxford Archaeological Unit)

Wilkinson, D (ed.) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

Appendices: Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
001	100	Layer		0.25	Tarmac and hardcore			
	101	Layer		0.20	Sub-soil			
	102	Layer		-	Colluvium			
	103	Cut	1.10	0.20	Ditch			
	104	Fill		0.20	Ditch fill	CBM	7	
	105	Cut	0.80	0.18	Tree bole			
	106	Fill		0.18	Tree bole fill	BM	2	
	107	Cut	0.80	0.25	Ditch			
	108	Fill		0.25	Ditch fill	BM/Bone	3/1	
	109	Cut	1.20	0.20	Ditch			
	110	Fill		0.20	Ditch fill	Pot/CBM	1/7	17 th -19 th C
	111	Cut	0.22	0.09	Post hole			
	112	Fill		0.09	Post hole fill			
002	200	Layer		0.20	Topsoil and tarmac			
	201	Layer		0.10	Make-up layer			
	202	Fill		0.05	Tertiary pit fill of pit	Marmalade jar + . tankard	2	19 th C
	203	Fill		0.18	Secondary pit fill of pit	BM/bone	1/1	
	204	Fill		0.12	Primary pit fill of pit	Fe/BM	1/1	
	205	Cut		8.00	Pit			
	206	Layer			Colluvium			
003	300	Cut	0.75	0.45	Ditch			
	301	Cut	1.80	0.45	Trackway			
	302	Cut	2.40	0.30	Ditch			
	303	Cut	0.80	0.60	Ditch			
	304	Layer		0.40	Topsoil			
	305	Layer	0.40	0.05	Rubble dump			
	306	Layer		0.30	Sub-soil			
	307	Layer		0.25	Sub-soil			
	308	Fill		0.55	Secondary fill of ditch	Pot	1	LIA
	309	Fill		0.10	Primary fill of ditch			
	310	Fill		0.60	Ditch and pit fill	Bone/BM/Fe	1/4/1	

Trench	Ctx	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Findings	No.	Date
003	311	Fill		0.45	Ditch fill	Pot	1	LIA
	312	Fill		0.40	Backfill of trackway	Pot/Slag	1/1	19 th C
	313	Fill		0.05	Backfill of trackway			
	314	Layer			Colluvium			
	315	Cut	0.80	0.20	Soakaway			
004	400	Layer		0.05	Tarmac			
	401	Layer		0.20	Sub-soil			
	402	Layer		0.15	Sub-soil			
	403	Layer			Colluvium			
	404	Cut	3.00	0.20	Tree boles			
	405	Fill		0.20	Tree bole fill			
	406	Cut		0.20	Tree bole			
	407	Fill		0.20	Tree bole fill	Pot/BM /bone/Fe	2/18/ 2/2	17 th -19 th C
	408	Cut	0.47	0.12	Post hole			
	409	Fill		0.12	Post hole fill	Fe	1	
	410	Layer		0.20	Hardcore for tarmac			
	411	Cut	8.00	1.60	Ditch			
	412	Fill		1.60	Ditch fill	CBM	3	
	413	Fill		1.10	Ditch fill			
	414	Fill		0.35	Ditch fill			

Illustrations

- Fig 1 Site Location
- Fig 2 Site Plan showing trench locations
- Fig 3 Plan and sections of Trench 1
- Fig 4 Plan and sections of Trench 2
- Fig 5 Plan and section of Trench 3..
- Fig 6 Plan and section of Trench 4

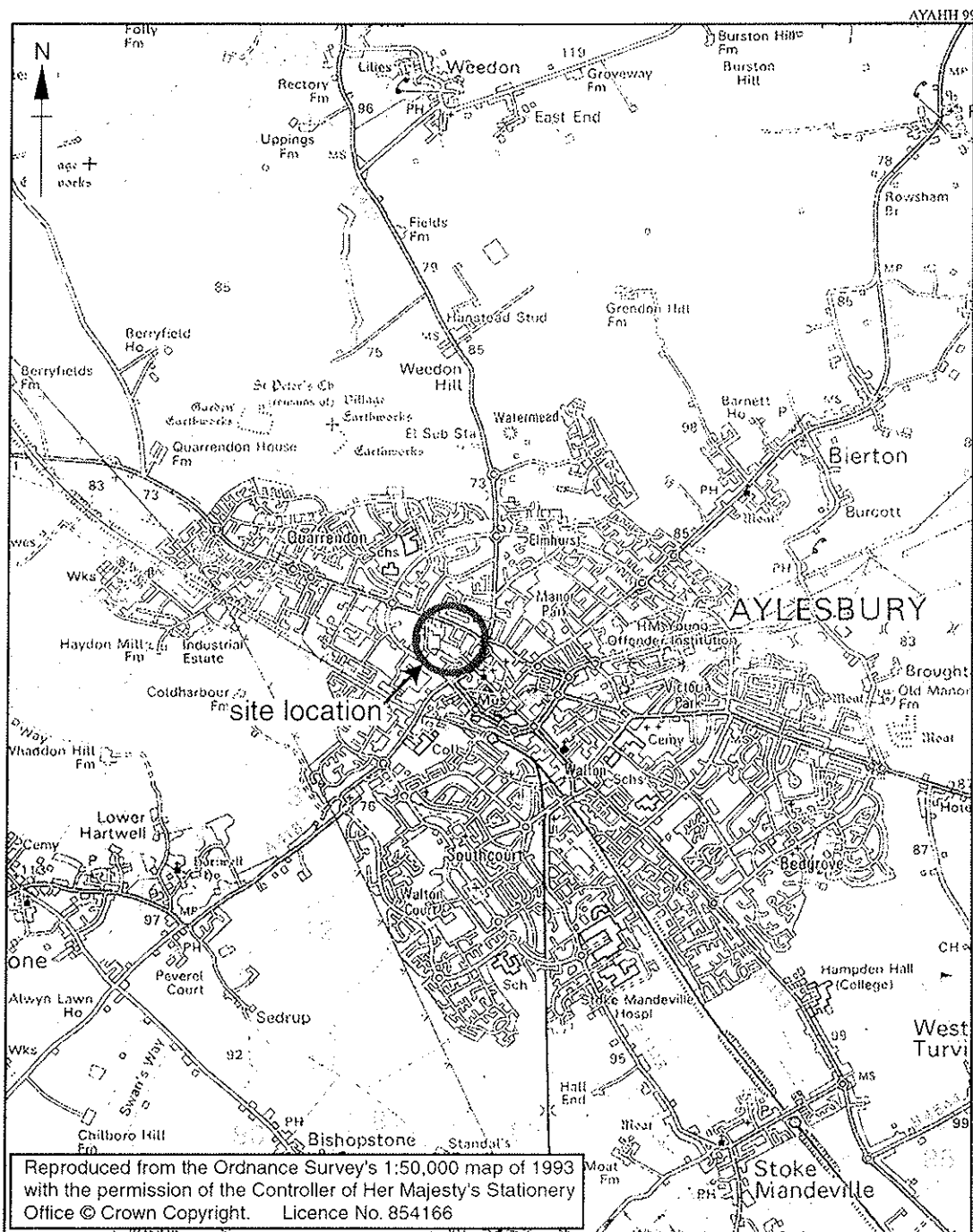


Figure 1: Site location

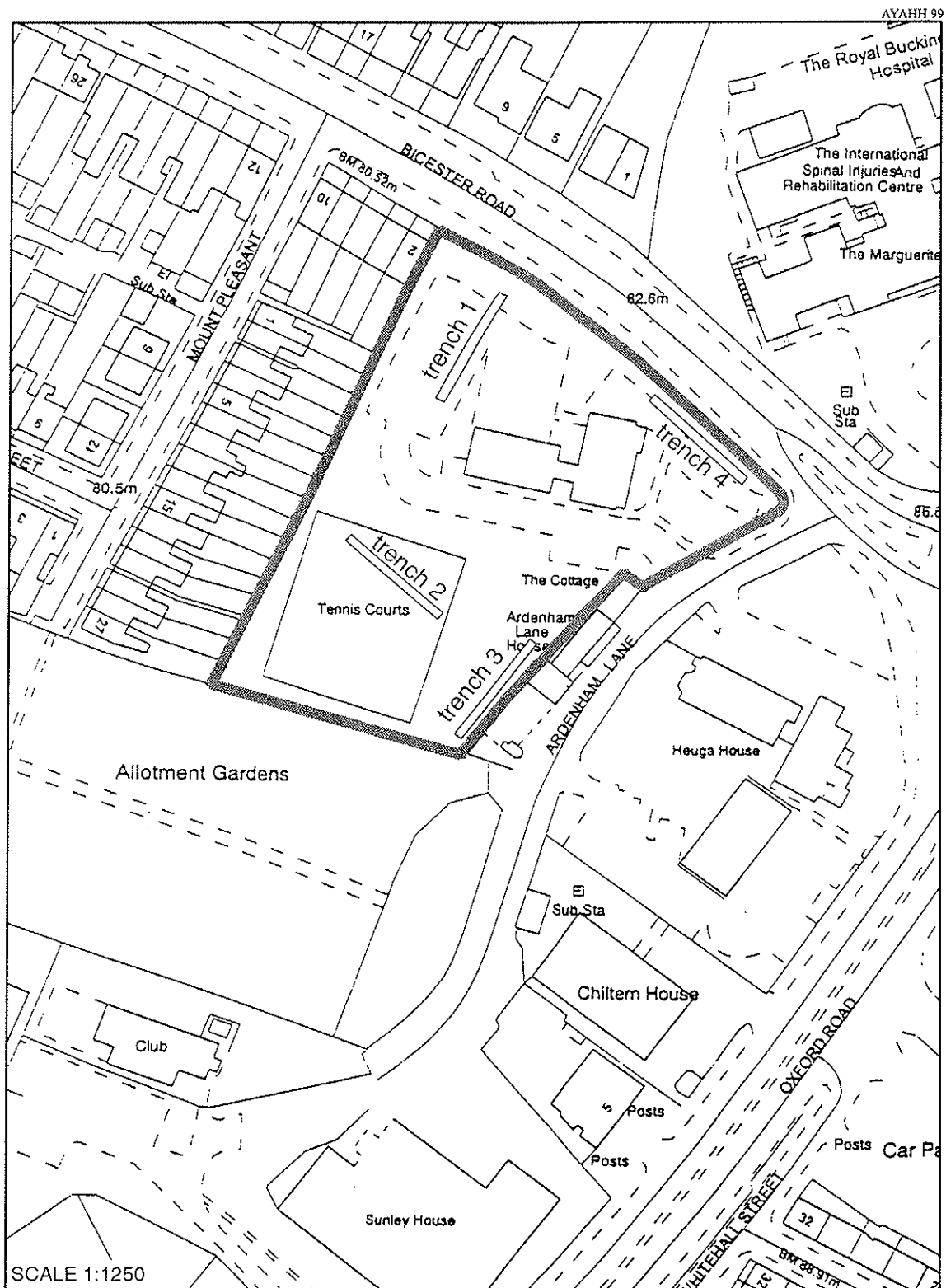


Figure 2: Evaluation trench location plan

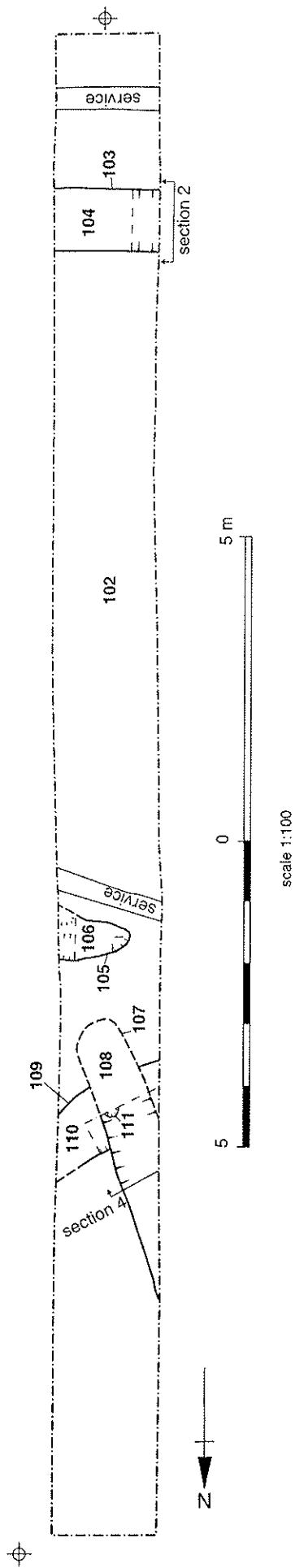
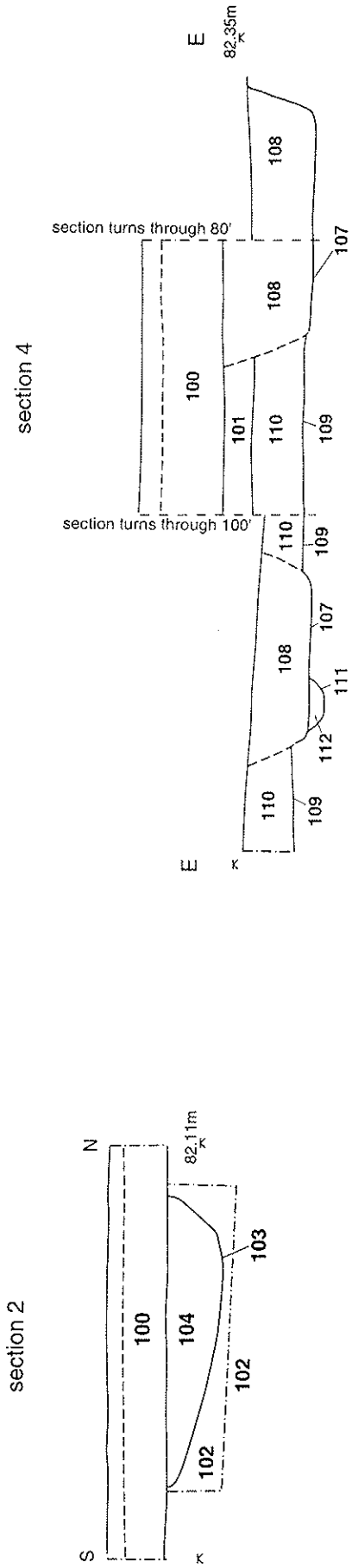


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and sections

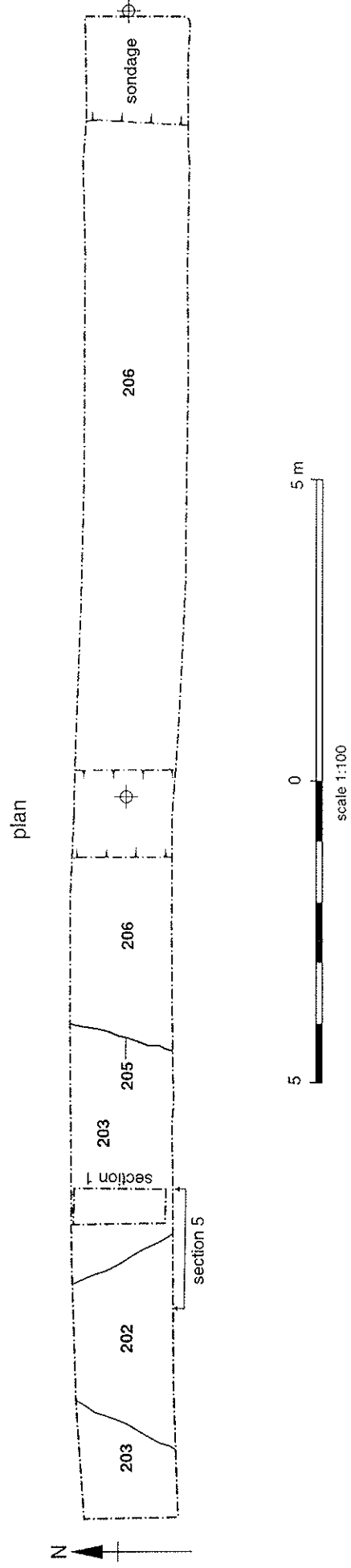
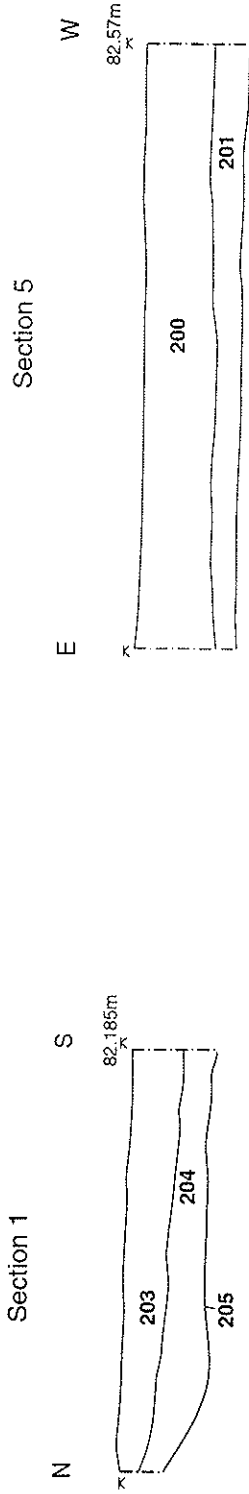
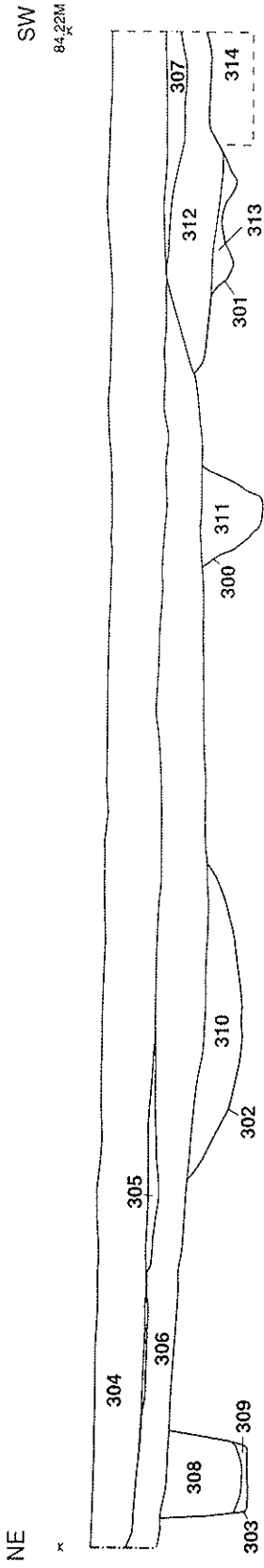


Figure 4: Trench 2, plan and sections

section 10



plan

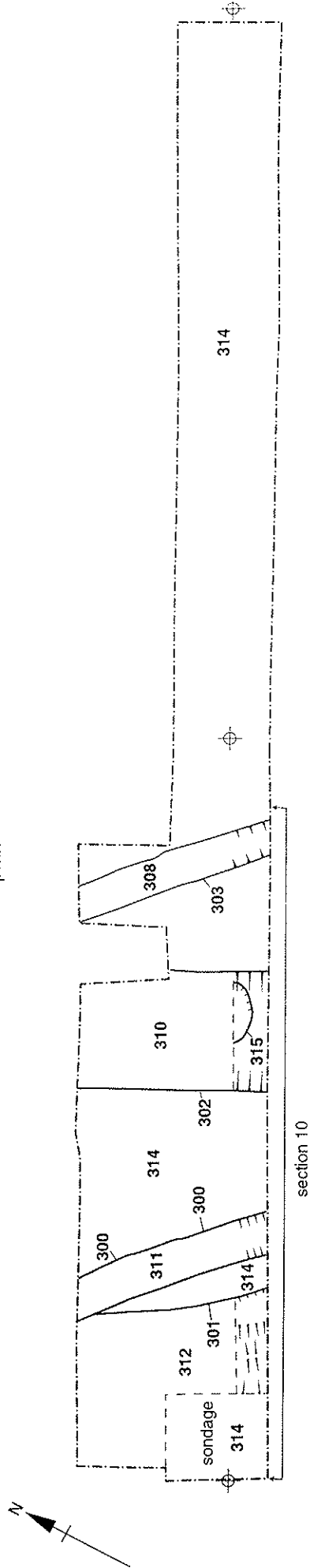


Figure 5: Trench 3, plan and section

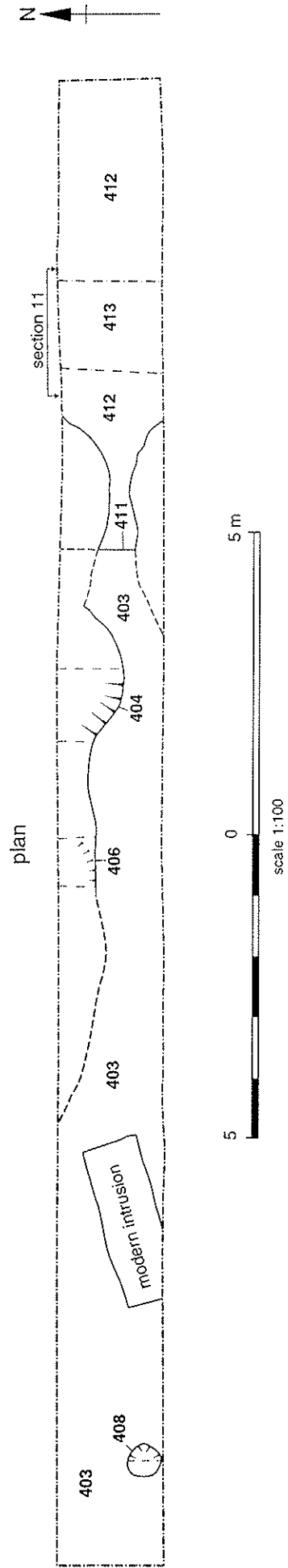
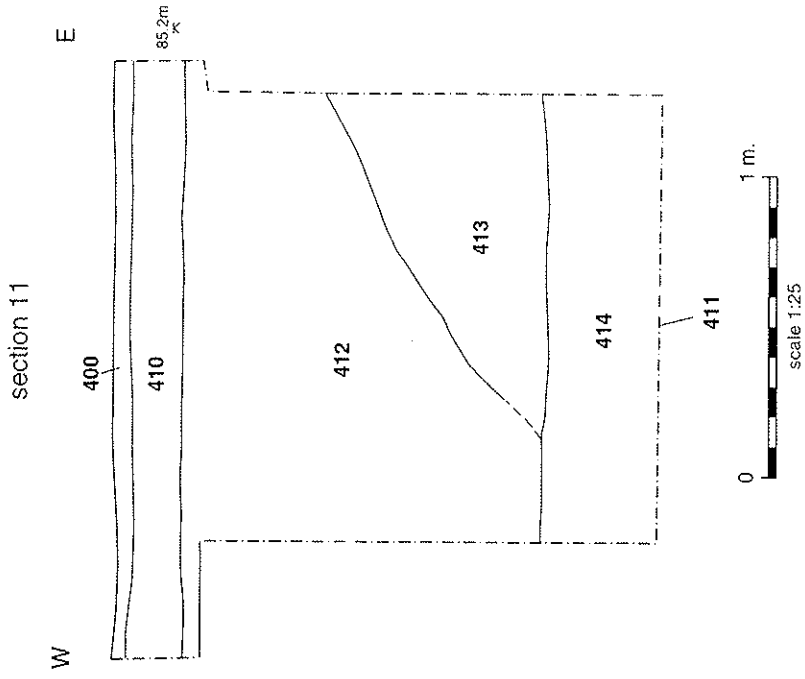


Figure 6: Trench 4, plan and section



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