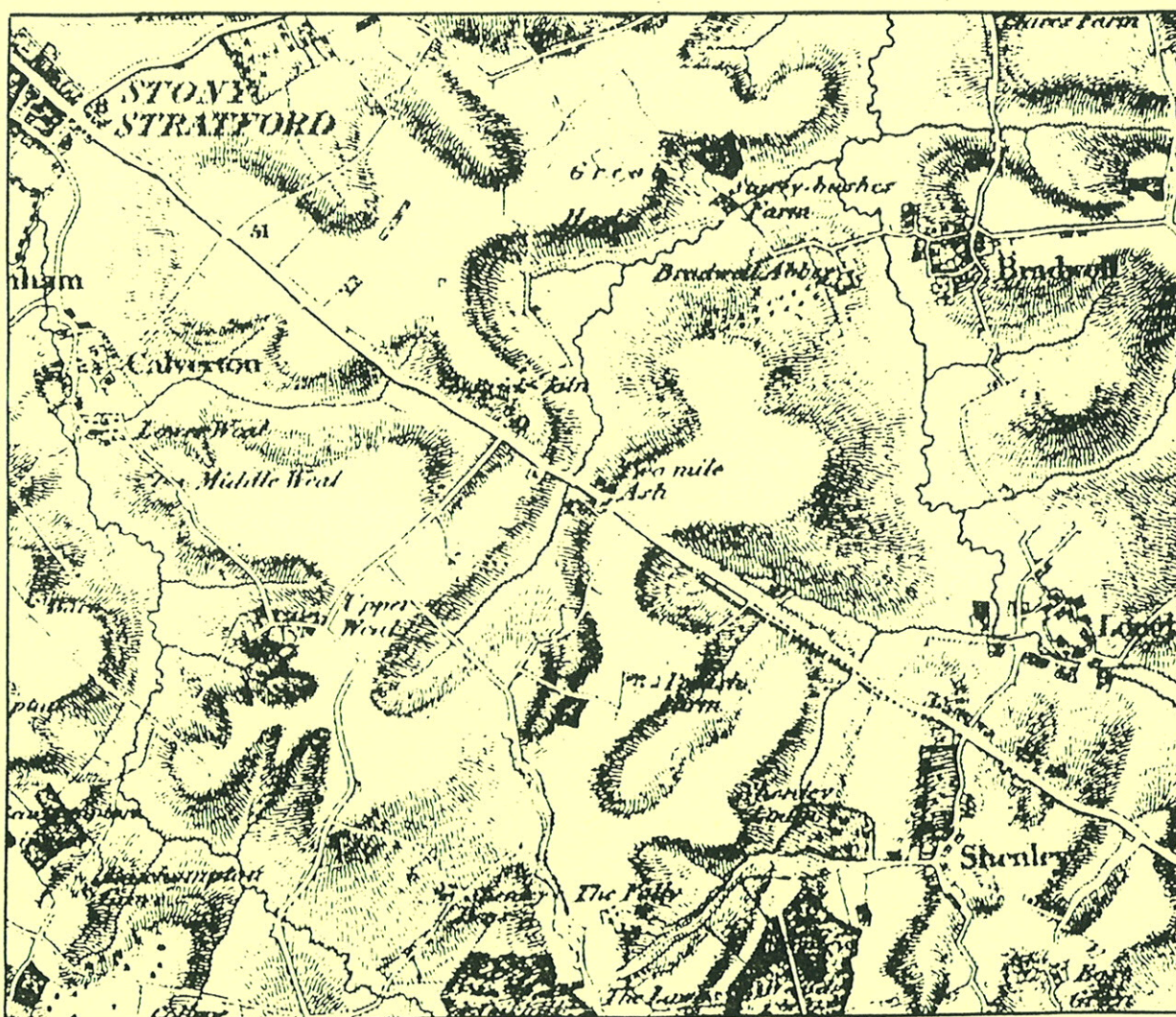


# St. Mary's Church, Shenley Church End, Buckinghamshire

NGR SP 8318 3670

## Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 1997

P. J. WARD

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, SHENLEY CHURCH END,  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION*

NGR SP 8318 3670

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# ST MARY'S CHURCH, SHENLEY CHURCH END, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

## 1. Summary

- 1.1. *Two trenches were excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on the north side of the churchyard. The upper levels of a number of graves were revealed, but as these were at the maximum depth of the building foundations, they were not excavated. A small assemblage of medieval pottery was recovered which indicates activity of that date within the vicinity. The material occurred in later deposits, and was probably disturbed by post-medieval gravedigging.*

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1. It has been proposed to construct an extension to the north side of Shenley St. Mary's church to facilitate a meeting room, kitchen and services. The Diocesan Archaeological Advisor has requested an evaluation to determine the impact of the proposed works, particularly on human remains in the churchyard. An Archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1997.

## 3. Location (Fig. 1)

- 3.1. Shenley Church End, once a village, is now situated on the western edge of the city of Milton Keynes, Bucks. The Church itself is situated off Dudley Hill.

## 4. Geology and Topography

- 4.1. The underlying geology comprises Boulder and Oxford Clays with small areas of sand and gravel. St. Mary's church is located on such an outcrop in the village centre, at 92m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

## 5. Archaeological Background

- 5.1. There is little evidence for prehistoric occupation in the Shenleys; although Neolithic struck flints were found during the excavation of later sites. Occasional Bronze Age artefacts have occurred, but not in significant enough amounts to indicate settlement. A substantial Iron Age site was excavated at North Furzton (MK 158), (Ivens 1993).
- 5.2. Roman Watling Street (now city grid road V4, formerly the A5), forms the north-eastern parish boundary and continues to the town of *Magiovinium*, the main Roman centre for the area, situated on the south-eastern limits of modern Milton Keynes. Three coins of Claudius and Constantine III (with a date range of 1st-4th

centuries AD) and an intaglio were found just to the west of the Church ( NGR SP 8236 3560, MK79), and Roman remains occur throughout the Shenleys. In Shenley Church End a concentration of finds to the southeast of Lawn Farm indicate a settlement site (MK160). In the neighbouring Shenley Brook End a tessellated pavement which may indicate a villa was reported from Dovecote Farm in 1901 (MK74). A coin of Valentinian I recently found nearby dates to 367-75AD (Mynard 1987).

- 5.3. Saxon material has been discovered in the vicinity. This seems concentrated around Shenley Church End, the deserted medieval village of Westbury and to the south of Shenley Brook. A small late 7th century burial group is known from Westbury (Croft 1993).
- 5.4. The village of Shenley Church End has also been known as 'Over Shenley' and 'Magna Shenley'.
- 5.5. The church is a cruciform Norman building (*c.* AD 1150) with a late 12th-century chancel (AD 1180), a southern arcade dating to *c.* AD 1200 . Also of note is a 13th-century sedilia, along with a 14th-century arcade and clerestory. The tower fell down and was rebuilt in the 15th century. The height of the chancel and nave was increased in the 16th century and the aisles raised and reroofed in the 17th century.
- 5.6. Domesday records two properties in Shenley Church End held by Hugh Earl of Chester. The Saxon finds and the entry in Domesday imply Saxon occupation in the vicinity of the village.
- 5.7. There are no surviving records for Shenley Church End between 1086 and the middle of the 12th century (Ivens *et al.* 1995). The earliest recorded monastic holding in Shenley dates to *c.* 1190, when William Maunsell granted Woburn Abbey a messuage in Shenley.
- 5.8. Thomas Maunsell had his lands seized following his support for de Montefort against the king. The lands were given into the hands of William de Aette and in 1267-8 demised the lands to Isabelle Countess of Arundel. Isabelle granted the land along with the custody of Maunsell's heirs (Mabel and Alice) to Richard de la Vache. Mabel married Richard, son of Richard de la Vache and Alice married Robert Verdon. In 1283-4 Robert de Verdon and his wife Alice claimed a moiety of Shenley and Richard de la Vache and his wife Mabel seemed to have claimed the other moiety which led to the division which created the Vaches Manor (1285-6) and Verdons Manor (1283-4) (Ivens *et al.* 1995).
- 5.9. The Church occupies a raised position on the west side of the north-south road through Shenley Church End and was probably the focus of settlement. Shenley Toot, the Earl of Chester's motte and bailey castle (MK639) lies 400 m to the south-west of the church (see fig. 1). The embanked enclosure of the bailey is roughly rectangular and measures some 200m across from north to south. The motte, which stands 3.95m in height, is located in the south-western corner of this and is surrounded by a wet moat. There are five or six platforms in the western

bailey. During the post-medieval period, a manor stood on the site. It was demolished in 1774 (Ivens *et al.* 1995).

- 5.10. The village and its environs has some of the best-preserved earthworks in Milton Keynes. They include ridge-and-furrow, which surrounds the village, irregular quarry holes and the motte-and-bailey noted above (Ivens 1993).

## **6. Aims of the Investigation**

- 6.1. To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 6.2. To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 6.3. To establish the location and depth of any burials which may be affected by the development. The proposed building would be a mini-piled construction with a slab-depth of 0.60 m, which would be the maximum depth of the archaeological investigation.
- 6.4. To make available the results of the investigation.

## **7. Strategy**

- 7.1. The evaluation comprised machine-excavated trenches. The archaeological deposits were excavated by hand.
- 7.2. Two 5 m trenches forming a 6% sample of the area were excavated. Trench 1 was orientated east-west and Trench 2 ran north-south, stopping just short of the boundary fence (Fig. 2).
- 7.3. The trenches, 1.5 m wide and a maximum of 0.63 m deep, were excavated by mini-excavator.
- 7.4. The site archive will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire Museum Service

## 8. Results

### 8.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

- 8.1.1. Trench 1 was orientated east-west and situated five metres to the north of the church. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.63m (92.59m above OD). The bottom of the trench consisted of a fairly homogenous silty deposit (112). Four graves were identified, (105, 107, 109, 111), although only the outlines of two of these, 105 and 107, were clearly identifiable. A redeposited late 13th to 14th century medieval pot sherd was recovered from grave 107.
- 8.1.2. Every grave except one appeared to be cut from the level identified at the bottom of the trench. The exception, 105, was probably more recent as it was identified just beneath the modern topsoil.
- 8.1.3. A uniform sandy silt layer, 103, was identified throughout the trench. It was cut at the western end by grave 105.
- 8.1.4. A layer of limestone, 102, extended across all of the trench, and was cut by grave 105. The material was concentrated in the northern half of the trench, with fewer, smaller pieces in the southern area. There was no signs of wear on the limestone and no obvious indication that this was the remnants of a path or surface.

### 8.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

- 8.2.1. Trench 2 was orientated north-south, with its northern end located just to the south of the churchyard boundary fence. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.63m (92.40 m above OD).
- 8.2.2. The earliest layers in the trench were each allocated a different context number (203, 212, 213, and 214), although it is likely they all represent the same deposit. They were truncated by four graves. Two of these, 203 and 214, produced pottery, with the former assemblage having a *terminus post quem* of the late 11th century, and the latter, the late 13th (see table 1).
- 8.2.3. Four graves (204, 205, 206, and 207) were revealed in the trench, and in contrast to those in Trench 1, they were all clear and well defined. Two graves, 205 and 206, had been backfilled with a 'clean' redeposited natural, an orange- brown mix of sand and clay.

## 9. The Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

- 9.1. The pottery assemblage from St. Mary's Church, Shenley Church End, comprised 104 sherds weighing 1106g. All the pottery was medieval or later in date, with the exception of two sherds of Romano-British (18g) and two sherds

of early/middle Saxon (7g). Those sherds were all abraded to a greater or lesser degree.

- 9.2. The ware occurrence per context is shown in table 1. The codes and chronologies used are the same as those for the medieval pottery from the nearby deserted medieval settlements of Tattenhoe and Westbury (Ivens *et. al.* 1995). There were, however, a few medieval fabrics which did not occur at the type-sites, as follows:
- 9.3. LYVB: Lyveden/Stanion 'B' ware (McCarthy and Brooks 1988). Coil built, oolitic limestone ware, usually glazed jugs. Early 13th - late 14th century.
- 9.4. NUN: Nuneaton 'A' ware (Mayes and Scott 1984). Hard, sandy glazed ware, late 12th - 13th century.
- 9.5. T1(2): St. Neot's ware type T1(2) (Denham 1985). Saxo-Norman shelly ware dated AD1000-1200 at Northampton
- 9.6. All the medieval pottery is unabraded, indicating that it has been subject to very little disturbance after its initial deposition. The range of ware-types present suggest that there was little activity at the site until after the Norman conquest, and that domestic occupation was limited after the 13th century, as sites of the period in the area inevitably yield large quantities of Potterspury ware (Ivens and Hurman 1995, 257).

**Table 1: Pottery Occurrence per context by number and weight (in grammes) of sherds per fabric type**

Context	No	Wt	Fabric	Ware date	Assemblage Date	Comments
101	1	6	MS3	M/L11th-E15thC	19thC	
101	1	7	MS8	L13th-14thC	19thC	
101	1	8	MSC1	L11th-M13thC	19thC	
101	1	1	19thC	19thC	19thC	
102	8	54	MS8	L13th-14thC	L13thC+	
102	1	6	MSC1	L11th-M13thC	L13thC+	
102	1	5	T1(2)	1000-1200	L13thC+	
102	1	11	MC1	11th-L13thC	L13thC+	
102	1	5	MS6	1250-1600	L13thC+	Potterspury ware
102	1	5	NUN	L12th-13thC	L13thC+	Nuneaton 'A' ware
106	1	23	MS8	L13th-14thC	L13thC+	
113	1	4	SNC1	850-1100	L13thC+	
113	2	7	E/MS	5th-8thC	L13thC+	Early/middle Saxon
113	1	2	RB	Romano-British	L13thC+	
113	4	20	MS3	M/L11th-E15thC	L13thC+	
113	2	16	MSC3	12th-13thC	L13thC+	
113	21	149	MS8	L13th-14thC	L13thC+	
113	13	170	MSC1	L11th-M13thC	L13thC+	
113	1	2	LYVB	E13th-L14thC	L13thC+	Lyveden/Stanion 'B' ware
200	2	30	MSC1	L11th-M13thC	L11thC+	



Context	No	Wt	Fabric	Ware date	Assemblage Date	Comments
200	3	20	MC1	11th-L13thC	L11thC+	
202	8	57	MS3	M/L11th-E15thC	L11thC+	
202	1	8	MC1	11th-L13thC	L11thC+	
203	3	17	MS3	M/L11th-E15thC	L11thC+	
203	2	86	MSC1	L11th-M13thC	L11thC+	
203	3	21	MC1	11th-L13thC	L11thC+	
208	2	64	MC1	11th-L13thC	L11thC+	
208	11	176	MS3	M/L11th-E15thC	L11thC+	
208	1	16	RB	Romano-British	L11thC+	
209	2	26	MS8	L13th-14thC	L13thC+	
209	1	4	MS6	1250-1600	L13thC+	Potterspury ware
211	1	22	MS8	L13th-14thC	L13thC+	
214	1	58	MS8	L13th-14thC	L13thC+	
<b>Total</b>	104	1106				

## 10. Conclusions

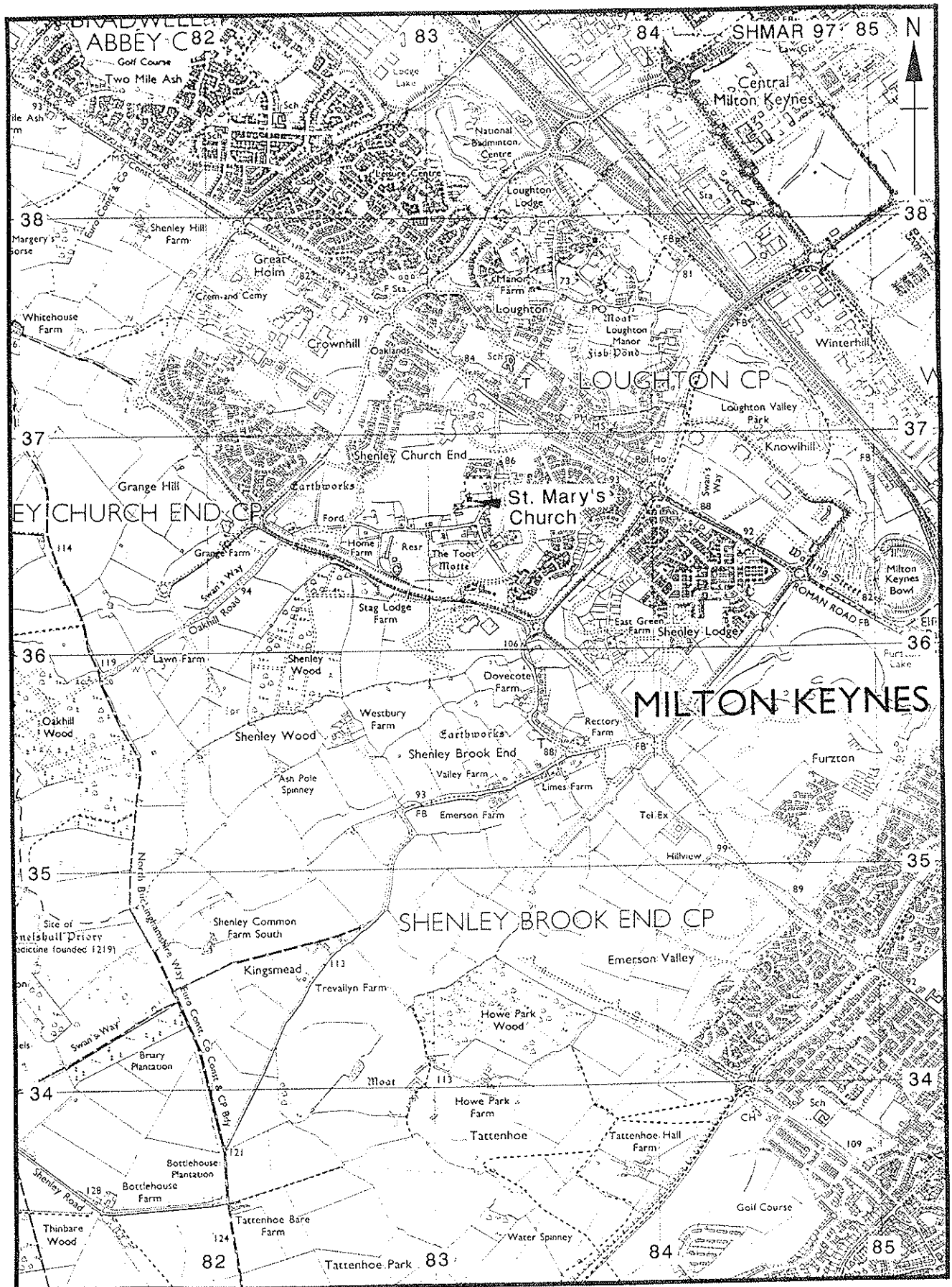
- 10.1. The evaluation recovered a small but useful assemblage of pottery. The chronology and degree of preservation of the material would suggest that there had been medieval activity in the immediate vicinity of the excavated area, much of it originates from occupation in the 13th century. A medieval site adjacent to the church may indicate a site of some status which would have been occupied during the later period when the Maunsell family held land in Shenley (see section 5, 5.8). The pottery assemblage indicate limited occupation after the 13th century which may reflect the site was abandoned or relocated away from the church site.
- 10.2. Excavations nearby at the deserted medieval village of Westbury have also shown the major period of occupation to have been in the 13th and 14th centuries (Ivens *et al.* 1995).
- 10.3. Two early/middle Saxon pottery sherds and two Romano-British sherds were also recovered from the evaluation. The number of sherds are too few to determine their significance, however similar indications of earlier activity were identified in the excavations at Westbury.
- 10.4. A small quantity of redeposited human bone was noted but not retained, although there was generally less than might have been expected. This may indicate that the north side of the churchyard has not been intensively utilised, and is free of intercutting burials. However, due to the limited scope of the excavation it is difficult to form any firm conclusions.
- 10.5. Despite the disturbance by later graves, it is possible that small areas of earlier deposits may be preserved between them.
- 10.6. None of the graves are likely to date from the medieval period and all the pottery is likely to be redeposited.
- 10.7. The uniform layer (103) in Trench 1 which appeared to seal all but one of the graves may be the spoil from the Victorian excavation for drainage. It seems to have lowered the area surrounding the church by c.0.70m. It is also likely that the stone spread (102) in Trench 1 also resulted from fairly recent activity, possibly the construction of the boiler house.

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## APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF CONTEXTS AND FINDS						
Shenley Church End, St. Mary's Church, Bucks. (SHMAR 97)						
Trench 1						
Context	Type	Depth (m)	Length (m)	Width (m)	Comments	Finds
100	Layer	0.06			Turf	
101	Layer	0.10			Topsoil	4 pot 3 tile 1 flint 1 bone
102	Layer	0.06			Limestone spread	13 Pot 1 earthenware roof tile
103	Layer	0.36			?Redeposited soil	
104	Grave Fill	0.43+			Fill of Grave 105	
105	Grave	0.43+	1.04	0.18		
106	Grave Fill	-			Fill of Grave 107	1 pot
107	Grave	-	2.10	0.64		
108	Grave Fill	-			Fill of Grave 109	
109	Grave	-	2.14	0.67		
110	Grave Fill	-			Fill of Grave 111	
111	Grave	-	1.64+	0.76		
112	Layer	-			Deposit in base of trench	
113	Finds				Unstratified finds	45 pot
Trench 2						
200	Layer	0.10			Topsoil	5 pot 1 frag. of grave railing or cross
201	Layer	0.15			Earlier soil	6 Frags. brick/tile 3 iron nails
202	Layer	0.30			Limestone layer	9 pot
203	Layer	0.20+			Earliest layer cut by graves	8 pot 1 bone
204	Grave	0.30+	1.44+	0.66		
205	Grave	0.38+	1.44+	0.66		
206	Grave	0.38+	1.44+	0.64		
207	Grave	0.44+	1.44+	0.50+		
208	Grave Fill	0.44+			Fill of Grave 207	14 pot
209	Grave Fill	0.38+			Fill of Grave 206	3 pot
210	Grave Fill	0.38+			Fill of Grave 205	
211	Grave Fill	0.30+			Fill of Grave 204	1 pot 1 tile
212	Layer	0.25+			Earliest layer cut by graves	
213	Layer	0.18+			Earliest layer cut by graves	
214	Layer	0.41+			Earliest layer cut by graves	1 pot
215	Grave Fill	0.08			Fill of Grave 204	
216	Grave Fill	0.25			Fill of Grave 205	
217	Grave Fill	0.18			Fill of Grave 206	

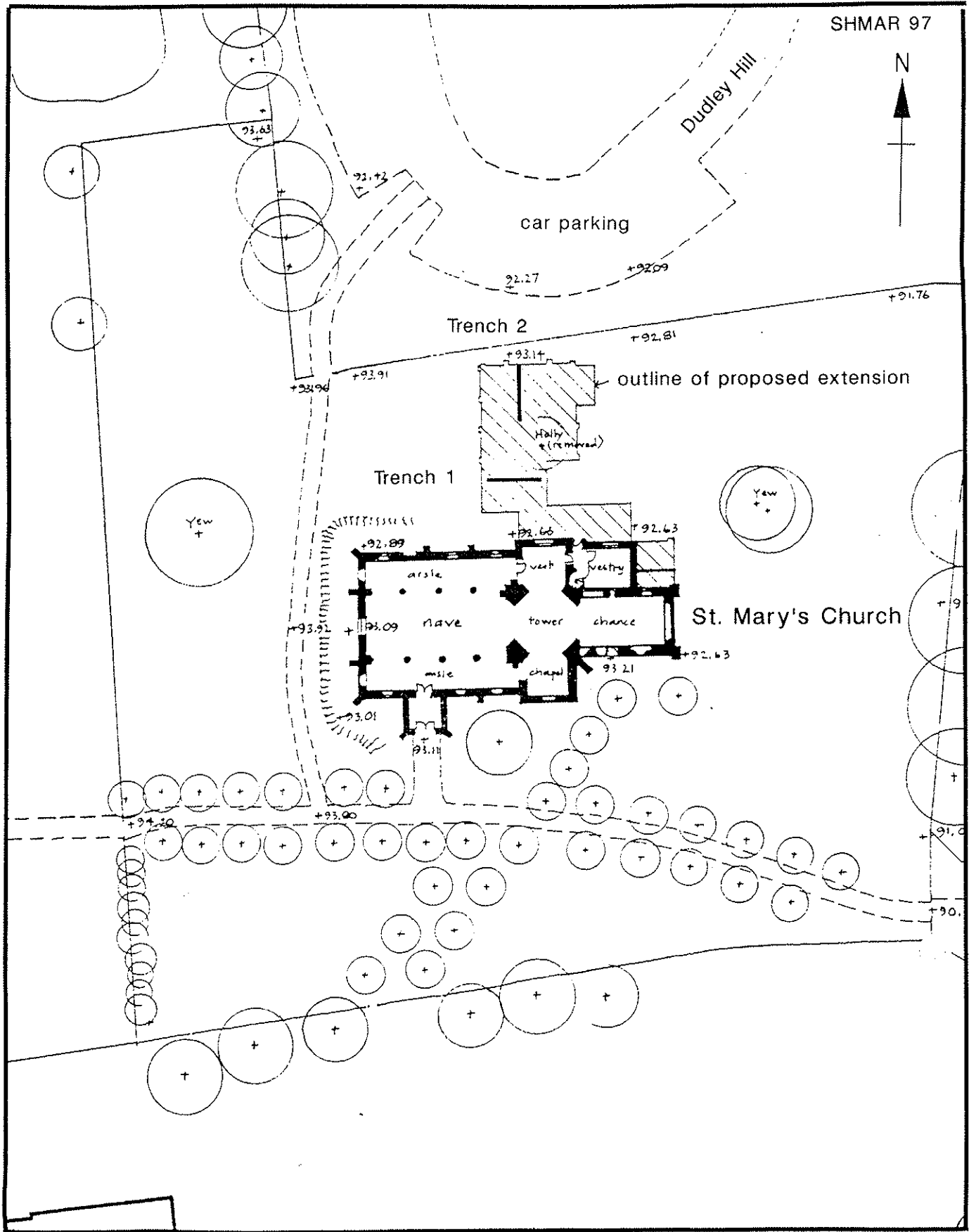


1:25,000

Site location

Figure 1

Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:25000 map of 1992 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. Licence No. AL 854166

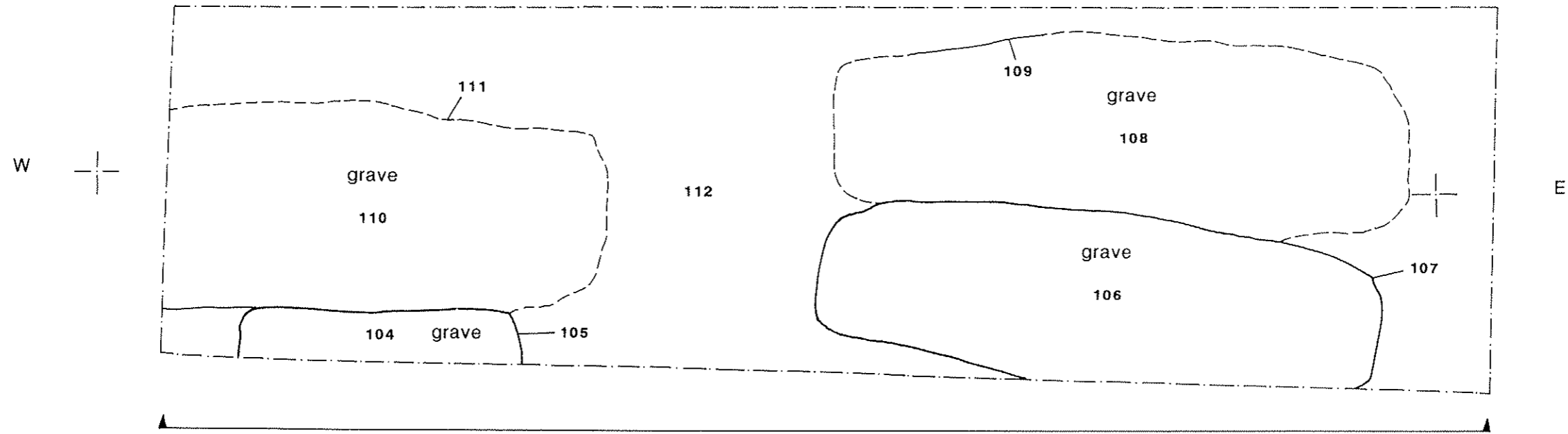


Scale 1:500

Trench location

Figure 2

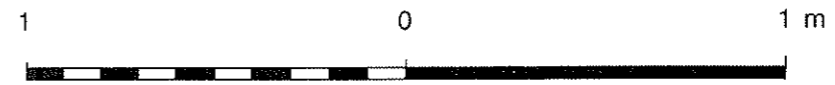
Trench 1 plan



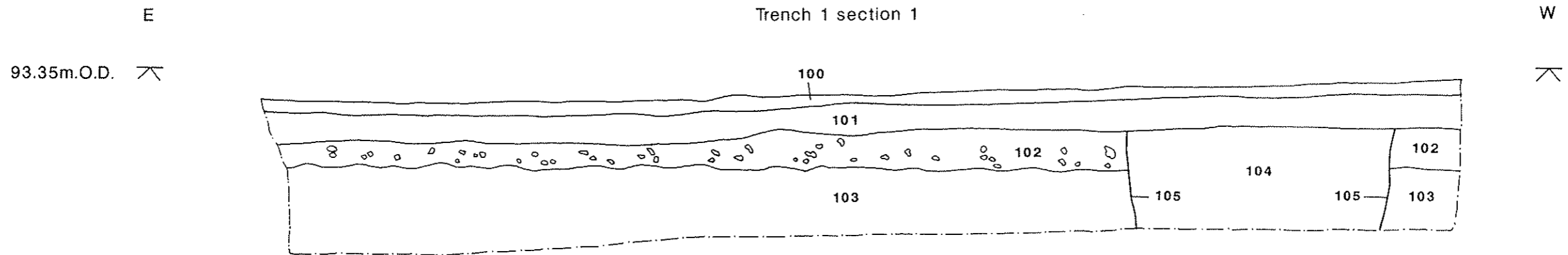
section 1

Scale 1:20

○ limestone



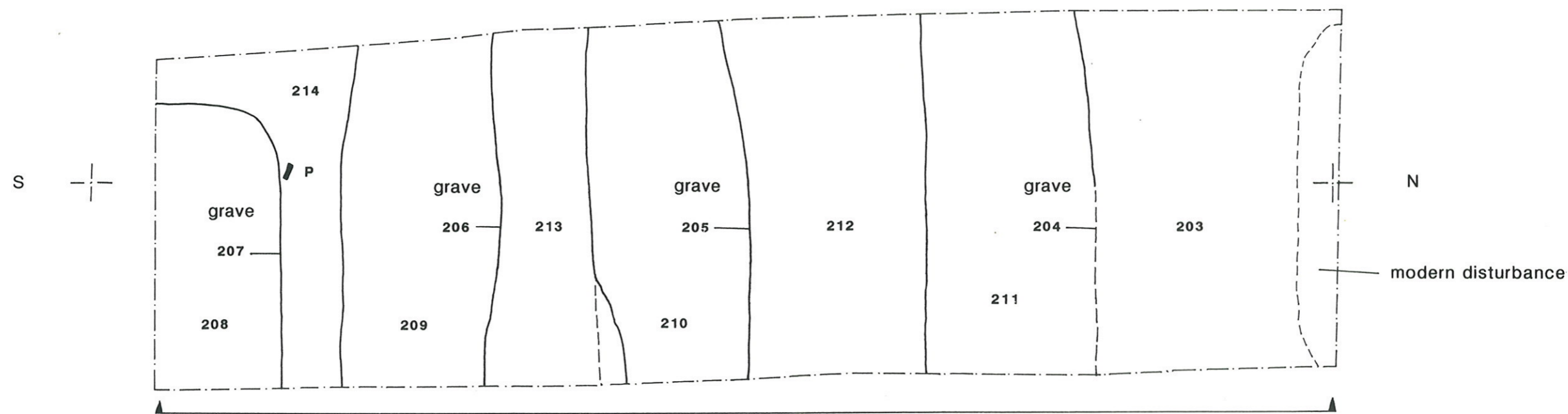
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Scale 1:20

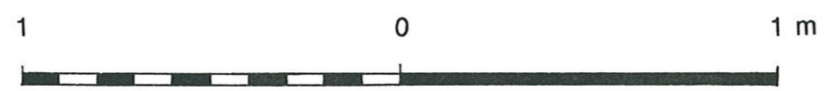
Figure 3

Trench 2 plan



section 2

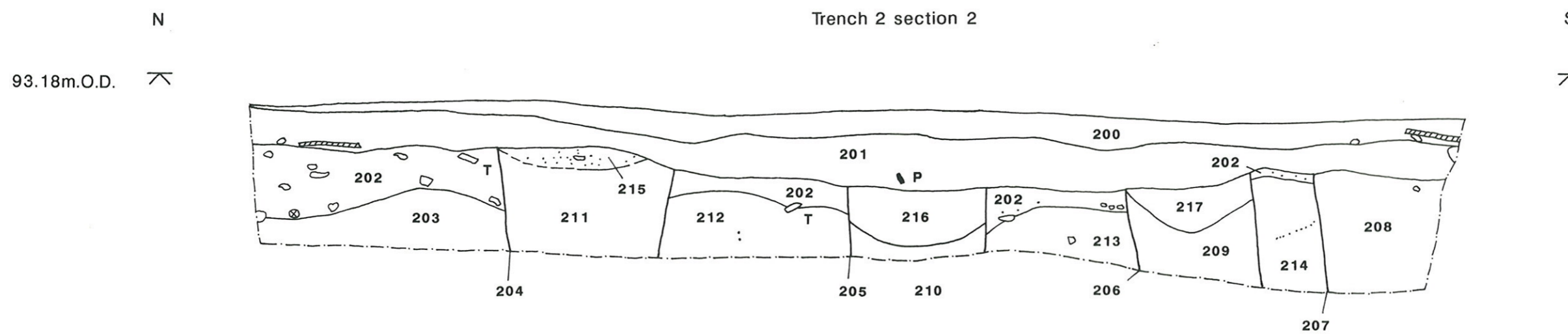
Scale 1:20



Scale 1:20

- limestone
- ▨ wood/roots
- ⊙ charcoal flecks
- T tile
- P pot

Trench 2 section 2



Scale 1:20

Figure 4





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