

CERNEY WICK (GL)



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



---

CERNEY WICK, GLOS

INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

---



**LAND SOUTH OF CERNEY WICK, GLOUCESTERSHIRE  
PROPOSED SAND & GRAVEL EXTRACTION**



**INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 A desk-based archaeological assessment of an area of c. 50 hectares in the parish of South Cerney, Gloucestershire, has been carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU April 1993) on behalf of Hills Aggregates Ltd. This report did not establish the presence of any ancient archaeological features. However, aerial photographs and fieldwalking show the existence of trackways and enclosures predating the enclosed field system of 1814 but of uncertain date.
- 1.2 A Brief for Stage 2 Archaeological Evaluation was supplied by the County Archaeological Officer in June 1993. Further discussion took place between the County Planning Authority, Hills Aggregates and their consultants on September 2nd 1993. As a result the most important elements of the County's Brief were established and the logistical difficulties of access clarified. This specification is designed in response to the conclusions of that meeting.
- 1.3 Limited evaluation trenching was undertaken between 13th and 15th October but due to ground water only three trenches were opened and recorded. It is unclear when further trenching can be undertaken; a lengthy dry spell is required to allow ground water to subside.

**THE RESULTS**

**Summary**

- 2.1 The stratigraphic sequence of deposits overlying the gravel has been clarified. Deposits of alluvium of at least 0.20 metres underlie the modern topsoil. One ditch of the trackway feature PRN 3043 clearly post-date these alluvial deposit. However conditions for recording were so poor that the cuts of the opposing ditch and modern land drains were not readily discernable.
- 2.2 Three trenches were opened using a JCB and in each case the natural gravel was exposed. Trench 1 which was placed in order to section the trackway feature PRN 3043 was generally 0.60 m deep to the top of the natural. Trench 2 was cut a depth of c.0.70 m and trench 3 to a depth of 0.41 m. All three trenches filled up with water immediately so that inspection was only possible after they had been pumped.

**TRENCH 1**

- 2.3 Topsoil sealed a dark brown clay with frequent snail shell inclusions. This layer (102) was clearly seen to be cut by the trackway ditch (107). The fills of this feature were silty clay in nature and also contained frequent snail shell inclusions. The parallel trackway feature observed in the aerial

photographs was not identified in the section, however a linear deposit of grey silty clay observed in plan and initially felt to be a tree hole may have been the feature in question.

- 2.4 Beneath 102 lay a light grey clay with 10 % gravel inclusions and also some snail shell (103). This could either be interpreted as a deposit of alluvium or a sealed subsoil layer. This layer was seen to be cut(?) by a linear feature (109). However, owing to the presence of some 10 cm of standing water in the trench at the time of recording, the exact limits of the cut could not be identified. It is equally possible that the fill of this 'cut' was in fact a layer in its own right rather than a part of a cut feature. Several possible tree holes as in trench 2 were identified cutting the gravel beneath the alluvium.

## TRENCH 2

- 2.5 Beneath topsoil lay a layer of yellowish brown silty clay with frequent snail shell inclusions which in turn overlay a light grey clayey silt with up to 20% shell inclusions. Both of these deposits were felt to be alluvial. Several possible tree throw features characterised by irregular patches of dark grey clay with gravel inclusions were seen to be sealed by the lower layer of alluvium.

## TRENCH 3

- 2.6 Beneath the current topsoil lay a deposit of mid-dark greyish-brown clay with frequent snail shell inclusions and was interpreted as alluvium. This directly sealed the natural gravel. No features were observed in plan or in the section.

## INTERPRETATION AND RELIABILITY OF RESULTS

- 2.7 Extremely wet conditions hampered recording. Despite the use of a pump, several cms of standing water prohibited the examination and excavation of the recorded features. Interpretation of the standing section was also seriously handicapped by the conditions with expected cut lines of even recent land drains not discernable. Careful monitoring of the spoil heaps produced no finds.
- 2.8 The depth of alluvium was deeper than expected. Ditch 107 in trench 1 certainly post-dates the phase of alluviation. The 'trackway' itself appears to be represented by two parallel ditches surviving as hollows. There was no evidence for any surfacing or metalling between them.
- 2.9 The desktop study has noted that all recorded archaeological features are represented by earthworks in the form of linear hollows. It should also be noted that non-extant field boundaries of the 1814 enclosure are represented as earthworks/hollows and are no different from the other archaeological features illustrated on fig 2 of the desktop assessment.
- 2.10 It is reasonable, therefore, to extrapolate the results of this limited assessment across the rest of the site particularly with reference to the relationship of alluviation and these surviving hollows. The evidence would indicate that all archaeological features as recorded in the desktop study post-date the alluvial deposits.

## DATING OF THE ALLUVIUM

- 3.1 The dating of alluviation in the Thames valley has had a lot of study in the last twenty



years. A synthesis has recently been published by Mark Robinson (Robinson M, 1992) which define two main phases of alluviation: a late Iron Age/Roman phase and a late Saxon/Medieval phase. Excavations and observations in the Upper Thames valley (ie the Cotswold Water Park area) indicate that only the latter phase occurs here. Excavations at Claydon Pike has securely dated deposits of early Medieval alluvium with no evidence of late prehistoric or Roman deposition of flood silts. At other sites namely Thornhill Farm, Whelford Bowmoor, Somerford Keynes and Cleveland Farm evidence of alluviation is only present in stratigraphically late contexts. It usually occurs in the tops of the latest phase of Roman ditches on these sites.

- 3.2 Cleveland Farm adjacent to Cerney Wick has stratigraphically late deposits of snailly alluvium. There was evidence of flooding in the Iron Age and Roman periods but not associated with any soil deposition ie alluviation (M Allen, Wessex Archaeology, pers comm).
- 3.3 The characteristics of this late Saxon/Medieval alluvium is also fairly diagnostic having frequent inclusions of snail shell (pers comm M Robinson) and Cerney Wick alluvium certainly falls within this category.

#### **POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGY**

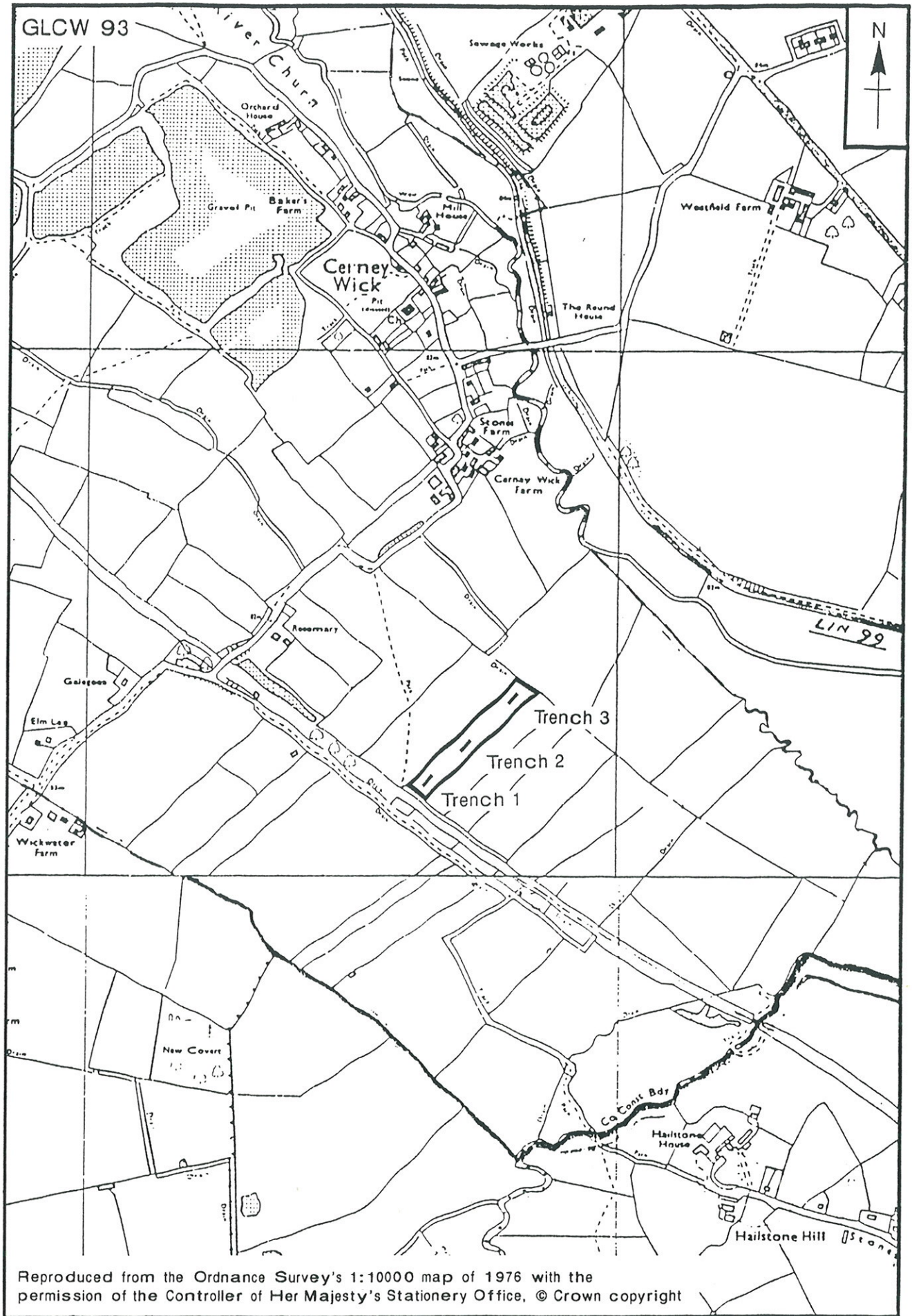
- 4.1 The evidence of the initial trenching shows clearly that the site has a relatively thick band of alluvium sealing the gravel. The stratigraphic relationship and dating of alluvial deposits indicates that all features noted in the desktop study are Medieval or later.
- 4.2 Although the presence of sealed archaeology beneath the alluvium cannot be discounted the likelihood of significant archaeological remains being present is reduced by the sites topographic location. The desktop study noted that the area appears peripheral to two large Roman settlements and is thus likely to be in an area of fields or meadows.
- 4.3 Excavations elsewhere within the Cotswold Water Park have show that on the lower gravel terraces later prehistoric settlement tends to focus on gravel "islands" or "knolls" as at Claydon Pike and Cleveland Farm (M Allen, pers comm). The site at Cerney Wick is significantly lower than the areas of Iron Age settlement at Cleveland Farm and would seem therefore not to have been suitable for permanent settlement.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Needham S & Macklin M G, 1992. Alluvial Archaeology in Britain.

Robinson M, 1992. Environment, archaeology and alluvium on the river gravels of the South Midlands, in Alluvial Archaeological in Britain ed. Needham S & Macklin M G.

18 October 1993

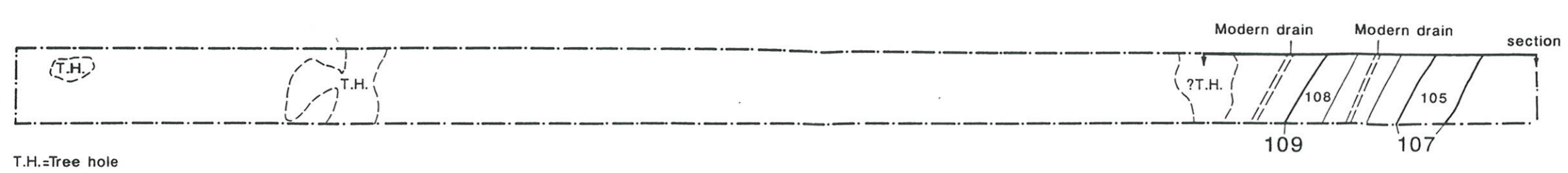


Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:10000 map of 1976 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright

Figure 1



### Trench 1 plan



### Trench 1 section

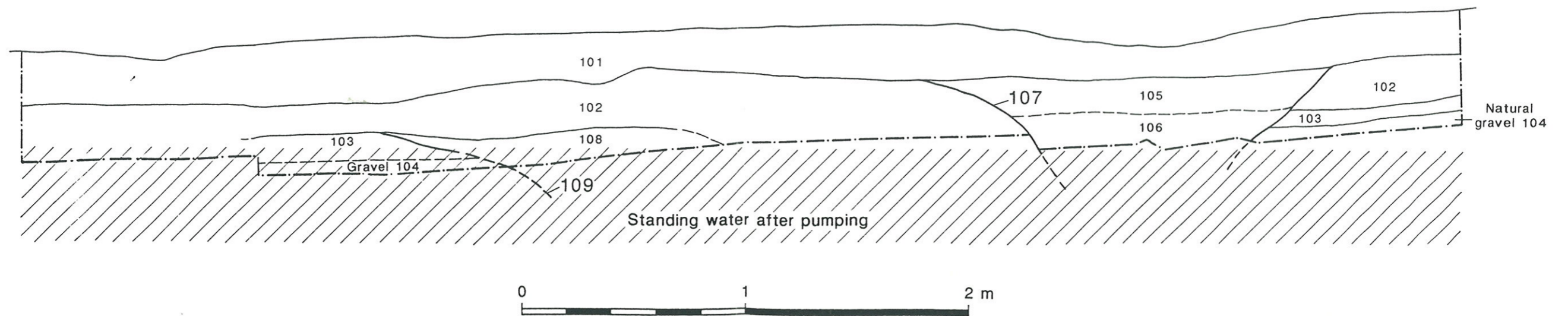


Figure 2

