

WGH (HL)
825/93

ALLOTMENT SITE WYRE GROVE HAYES

Archaeological evaluation

September 1993

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

ALLOTMENT SITE, WYRE GROVE, HAYES ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Abstract

A trial trench evaluation conducted by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at Wyre Grove, Hayes in the London Borough of Hillingdon recovered traces of probable prehistoric and early Saxon occupation. However, no definite features were found and the site is considered to have been peripheral to nearby foci of settlement in those periods.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of GHM Project Management Ltd on the site of recent allotments, Wyre Grove, Hayes (NGR TQ101787). It was carried out in fulfilment of a condition put upon planning permission by the London Borough of Hillingdon in relation to a proposal for housing development (Ref. 42131A/92/2146). The site covered about 0.84 ha.

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with a brief set by English Heritage London Region, and to the standards recommended by them (Archaeological Guidance Paper 2: Model Brief for Archaeological Evaluation, November 1992).

The purpose of the evaluation was to gain information concerning the nature, location, extent, depth and quality of any archaeological deposits, with a view to mitigating any effects which the proposed development might have on them.

The evaluation took the form of 6 machine excavated trenches, each 1.5 m wide and about 15 m long. At the request of the client, these were located in the areas of proposed gardens, rather than where buildings were to be sited. Areas of standing trees were also avoided. In consultation with the client and English Heritage London Region, two further trenches were later excavated in the site of proposed building plots in the SE area of the site in order to better define the archaeological deposits encountered in that area.

The total area examined (about 180 sq. m.) represented a sample of 2.14% of the development site.

Geographical Background

The site lies on a low terrace about 250 m west of Yeading brook which drains into the Thames to the south. The land is fairly flat, with a slight drop from around 30 m OD in the NW area of the site, to about 29 m in the SE (see Fig. 2).

The natural geology of river gravels is overlain across most of the site by a superficial deposit of 'Brickearth' silt of varying depth.

Land Use

The site was in an open block of land with suburban housing on all four sides. The land had recently been used for garden allotments which, at the time of the evaluation, had been abandoned and apparently used as an informal rubbish dump.

Archaeological Background

No archaeological sites were known from the development area. However, traces of prehistoric settlement are frequently encountered on the gravel terraces of the lower Thames and the site was considered to have some archaeological potential.

Archaeological Method

The 8 trial trenches were excavated using a 180° JCB excavator equipped with a 5 ft ditching bucket. The trenches were excavated in spits down to undisturbed gravel/brickearth since only relatively modern features were observed cutting from the higher levels. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and archaeological features sampled to examine their nature, function and date.

Conditions of work

The work took place over 3 days in September under reasonable, showery weather conditions. While Brickearth is a notoriously difficult sediment in which to recognise cut features, the trenches were extensively hand-cleaned under not unfavourable conditions and the observations are considered to be reasonably reliable.

Results

This section deals selectively with the archaeological deposits and features encountered. Table 1 presents a more exhaustive trench summary, but does not include the context numbers ascribed to individual fills within features.

General Stratigraphy

The superficial deposits in all 8 trenches consisted of a modern layer of dark garden soil and dumping (Context 1) overlying a lighter greyish brown silty soil (not differentiated from the above in Trs. 3, 5, 7 and 8). This also contained modern brick in some trenches (eg. 1/2, 2/2, 6/2) and had clearly been disturbed relatively recently. Large amounts of building debris, ash and slag in the trenches towards the northern end of the site suggested some 19th? century disturbance through industrial or domestic waste dumping. Everywhere the recent overburden was between 300 mm and 500 mm thick.

Under these deposits, in all trenches except 3 and 4 and most of 6, was a layer of quite compact orange-brown silt with some greyish mottling. It contained few

finds, but did yield small quantities of struck and burnt flint, prehistoric and/or early historic pottery, Roman tile and small fragments of fired clay of unknown original form and purpose. An absence of securely more recent material suggests that this soil had not been disturbed recently and is referred to in this report as an 'early soil' layer. It was up to 300 mm thick and overlay a more clayey and compact undisturbed Brickearth.

Archaeological Features

Features of archaeological interest were restricted to Tr. 5. (see Fig. 4). Here several shallow pits and gullies yielded fragments of Roman tile, probable early Anglo-Saxon pottery and burnt flints (see Ceramic Finds Report, Appendix 1).

Some burnt and knapped flint, pottery and fired clay was recovered from the early soil layer in this trench and elsewhere (5/2, 1/3 and 8/2), but no features were encountered in the other trenches.

Several relatively modern ditches and a chalk filled pit or building foundation were also recorded and are shown on figure 2.

Trench 5 (Fig. 4)

This trench was extended to 17.5 m to examine the features found at the W end. The 'early soil' horizon (5/2) was relatively thin, but covered the entire trench sealing all the archaeological features. The features were all very shallow and had similar brown silty upper fills, so it was difficult to establish their stratigraphic relationships. Their lower fills were lighter and more compact.

Two further trenches, 7 and 8 were excavated to the N to establish the limits of archaeological activity in that direction. Both contained a similar sequence of soil layers but no further features were found.

Feature 5/7 (Fills 5 & 11)

A linear feature running NE from an apparent terminal. It had straight parallel edges gently sloping to a rounded base. Its maximum depth was 190 mm shallowing towards the N trench edge (see Section 1, Fig. 4). This suggested that it might not have extended much further in that direction. The upper fill (5/5) yielded some burnt and knapped flints, pottery, and fired clay.

Feature 5/9 (Fills 3 & 6)

A possible sub-rectangular pit of uncertain dimensions but no more than 2.0 m wide. It was cut by 5/7 to the W and possibly cut 5/13 to the E. It was about 100 mm deep with moderately steep sides and a flattish base. Its upper fill (5/3) contained a sherd of probable Anglo-Saxon date and some Roman tile.

Feature 5/13 (Fill 12)

A possible linear feature running NW-SE. It was very shallow (140 mm) and it is uncertain whether or not it had a SE terminal.

Feature 5/10 (Fills 4 & 11)

A possible shallow, irregular pit containing some wood charcoal and Roman tile.

Several other possible features of irregular plan were also recorded in this trench but not excavated.

Discussion

The archaeological deposits and features present some problems of interpretation. The pottery from them cannot be reliably dated (see Ceramic Finds Report Appendix 1), and might not belong to a contemporaneous assemblage of material which includes tile (some of it undoubtedly Roman), knapped flint (prehistoric) and burnt flint (uncertain date). A range of occupation from the later Bronze Age to the early Saxon period might be represented.

Early soil horizon

A layer of weathered Brickearth soil extended over the site and was present in most trenches. It yielded no modern finds and seems not to have been disturbed since prehistoric/early historic times.

In Tr. 1 (see Fig. 3) the layer (1/3) contained a small concentration of knapped and burnt flints and 6 sherds of flint-tempered pottery which might be prehistoric. These finds were distributed throughout the depth of the soil, but it is uncertain whether they were distributed through later soil disturbance such as ploughing, or whether they might have migrated from a surviving early land surface through, for example, worm sorting. It is uncertain, therefore whether or not 1/3 represents an undisturbed prehistoric soil.

In Tr. 5 concentrations of Roman and probable Saxon material throughout this layer (5/2) suggest some disturbance in the early historic period. It seems possible that there was subsequent ploughing, which might account for the extreme shallowness of the features, but this is unlikely to have been recent.

Archaeological features

All the features encountered in Tr. 5 were very shallow and it is uncertain whether they genuinely represent human activity or whether they were natural undulations in the Brickearth in which archaeological material accumulated.

The finds themselves do not help to resolve this question since they are not necessarily a chronologically associated assemblage. However, the preferred interpretation would give an early Saxon date to the pottery from Tr. 5. One sherd in particular (from feature 5/9) was quite large and unabraded, suggesting occupation in the immediate vicinity, if not actually in the evaluation site.

The burnt flint and fired clay might belong with this occupation, although small amounts of residual prehistoric knapped flint can be noted.

The absence of Roman pottery, which is normally common and easily recognisable on Roman period sites, suggests that there was no Romano-British occupation in the immediate vicinity. Given the frequent re-use by the early Saxons of Roman material, it is thought that the Roman tile might have been deliberately selected from a nearby site.

Conclusion

Most of the trenches yielded no features of archaeological interest and few finds. However, material of some archaeological interest was recovered from Trenches 1 and 5.

In Trench 1 a small concentration of knapped flints and pottery of probable prehistoric date (? Late Bronze Age) were recovered from a buried soil during machine stripping. No contemporaneous features were discovered cutting or sealed beneath this layer. The sherds recovered were all small and abraded, and it uncertain how significant this concentration might be. It is likely that a prehistoric site lay near the area of the evaluation and the absence of finds from Trenches 1 and 6 suggests a focus of occupation to the north.

In Trench 5 a small concentration of Roman tile and early Saxon pottery suggests an early Saxon occupation in this area. However, the nature of the shallow features encountered remains ambiguous. It is likely that early Saxon settlement was located in the immediate vicinity. The absence of features and the paucity of finds from Trenches 7 and 8 indicate that this would have lain to the south, on the southern edge of, and outside, the development site.

ANDY MUDD/OAU/SEPT 1993

Appendix 1. Ceramic Finds Report

Pottery

There were only 35 sherds of pottery of all periods from the evaluation, of which 9 were of post-medieval (18th-20th century) date. Only trenches 1, 5, 6 and 8 produced pottery, with 8, 17, 2 and 8 sherds respectively.

Most of the sherds were small and there were very few diagnostic formal elements, only one rim and two base sherds. Discounting the post-medieval material, the assemblage consisted principally of flint-tempered sherds (19), with mixed quartz sand and quartz/organic tempered fabrics (with very occasional flint) accounting for most of the rest of the assemblage. There was a single sherd in a distinctive vesicular fabric which indicated the former presence of rounded inclusions of uncertain type.

There are major problems in trying to date this material. Flint tempering is a persistent tradition in ceramics in this region and could be encountered, for example, in the late Bronze Age-early Iron Age, late Iron Age-early Roman and in the early Anglo-Saxon periods. The small size of the sherds and the lack of feature sherds therefore makes certainty about their date impossible.

The sherds with mixed tempering included a large base in a quartz/organic fabric which is almost certain to be of early Saxon date. If other comparable organic and coarse quartz tempered sherds (all from trench 5) can be considered to be of similar date 5 sherds (in at least 4 fabrics) can be assigned to the early Saxon period. Two fine quartz/sparse organic tempered sherds also from trench 5 might additionally be Saxon. The date of the vesicular fabric sherd mentioned above is uncertain.

The date of the flint tempered sherds also remains uncertain. Five sherds in flint tempered fabrics in context 5/3, associated with 3 sherds of probable Saxon date (and with Roman tile), included the only rim from the site, a curving everted rim which could belong to a number of periods. This and other sherds in these fabrics could by association be of early Saxon date, but this need not necessarily be the case. On balance the likelihood that some of the flint tempered sherds are Saxon is preferred, but it is also thought possible that some of the sherds are genuinely of prehistoric date. In particular, a group of 6 small sherds from context 1/3 may be of late Bronze Age date, though it is admitted that this is a subjective conclusion.

The post-medieval sherds included 7 pieces of an 18th-19th century bread crock from context 8/5. Many of these sherds had traces of glue adhering. The character of the glue was consistent with modern adhesives and presumably represents a relatively recent attempt to repair the vessel before it was finally disposed of.

Tile

Fourteen brick and tile fragments were recovered. These included post-medieval/modern material from 1/2 and 6/2 (5 pieces). The rest of the material was from trench 5, and consisted of 4 pieces of certain Roman date (on the basis of fabric and thickness) and a further 5 indeterminate fragments which could have been Roman. The Roman material included a single piece with combed decoration. This was presumably from a box flue tile, though the piece in question was unusually thick for such a type.

The absence of Roman pottery in association with the tile, and the appearance of the latter in contexts containing Saxon pottery, might suggest that the tile was selectively gathered and imported to the site after the Roman period.

Fired Clay

Twelve very small fired clay fragments were found, all but one in trench 5. These could have been of prehistoric or Saxon date, their concentration in trench 5, which produced the majority of the Saxon material, might suggest the latter.

Paul Booth 29.9.93

Table 1: Context Summary

TR = trench no.

CXT = context no.

NC = not collected

NK = not known

P-M = post-medieval

CBM = ceramic building material

bt.ft = burnt flint

TR/CXT	TYPE	WIDTH M.	DEPTH MM.	FINDS (NO.)	COMMENTS
1/1	layer		300-400	NC	mod. dumping
1/2	layer		200-250	CBM (3), glass (1) pot (2) bt.ft (1) flint core (1)	P-M ploughsoil?
1/3	layer		200-250	pot (6) flint (7) bt.ft (7)	?prehistoric soil
1/4	ditch	0.5	400+	none	modern, cutting 1/2
1/6	gully	0.4	500+	none	land drain
2/1	layer		150-200	NC	mod. garden soil
2/2	layer		50-300	NC	mod. soil
2/3	layer		100-300	none	early soil
2/4	ditch	0.45	450	coal (1) slag (3)	modern, cutting 2/2
3/1	layer		300	NC	mod. garden soil
3/2	layer		300 max.	none	P-M plough-soil?
3/4	pit	2.2+	NK	none	modern, cuts 3/2
4/1	layer		340	NC	mod. garden soil
4/2	layer		260	none	P-M? plough-soil
5/1	layer		400	NC	mod. garden-soil
5/2	layer		180	pot (1), CBM (5) bt.ft (2)	early plough-soil
5/7	linear feature	0.76	190 max.	pot (5), flint (2) bt.ft (2) fired clay (8)	ditch or hollow

5/9	pit?	2.0+	100	pot (8) CBM (2) flint (1) bt.ft (17)	
5/10	pit	0.6	80	CBM (2) charcoal	
5/13	linear feature	0.66	140	pot (1) flint (1) fired clay (2)	ditch?
5/15	pit?	0.96	NK	pot (2) flint (1) fired clay (1)	
5/17	pit?	0.44	NK	none	
5/19	ditch?	0.85	NK	none	
6/1	layer		150	NC	mod. garden soil
6/2	layer		350 max.	slag (1) CBM (2) coal (1)	disturbed soil/dump
6/3	layer		100	pot (1)	early soil?
7/1	layer		300	NC	mod. garden soil/dump
7/2	layer		140	none	early soil
8/1	layer		300	NC	mod. garden soil/dump
8/2	layer		150-200	pot (1) bt.ft (3) fired clay (1)	early soil
8/4	ditch	0.5	NK	pot (7)	P-M

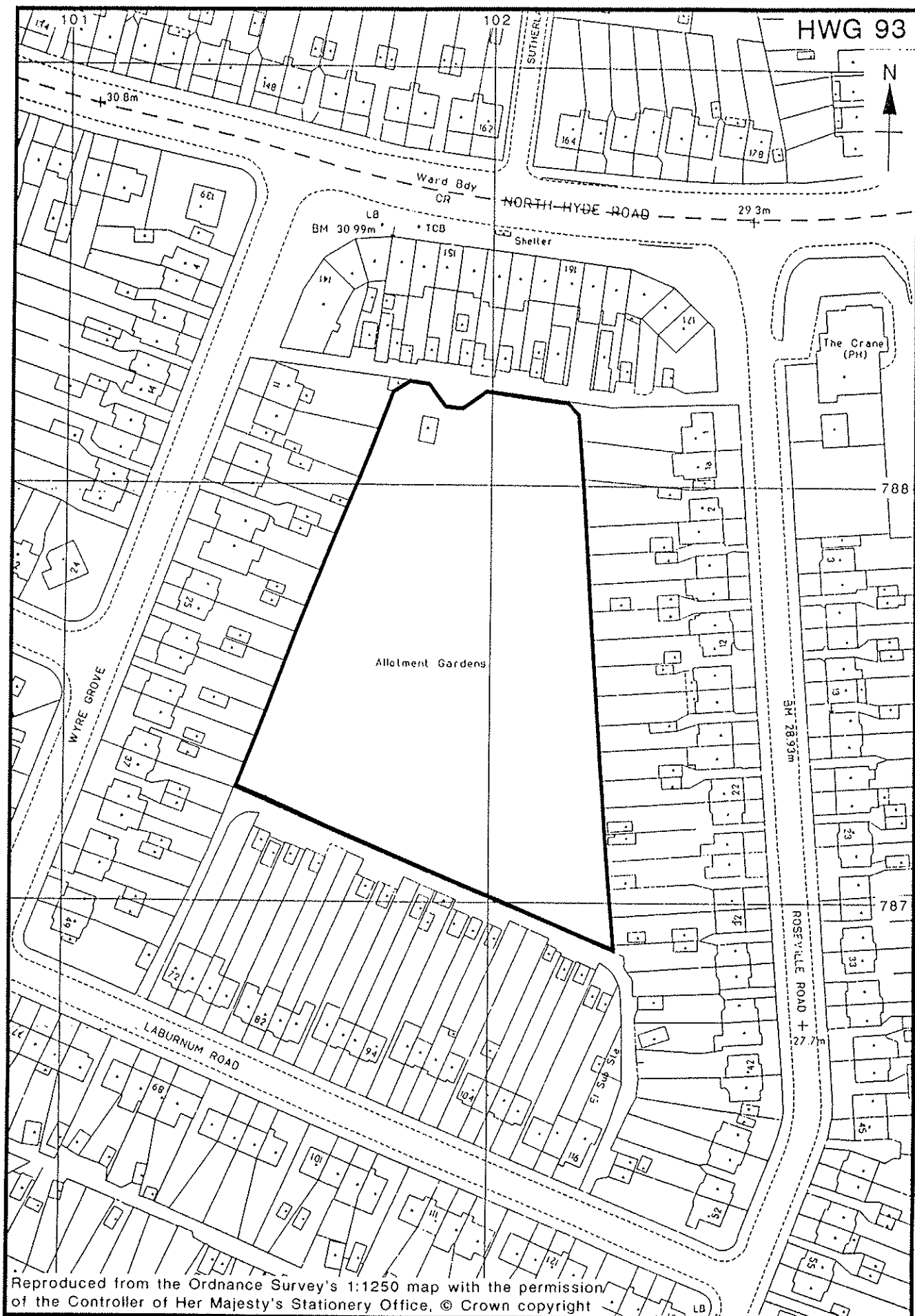


Figure 1 Site location

HWG 93

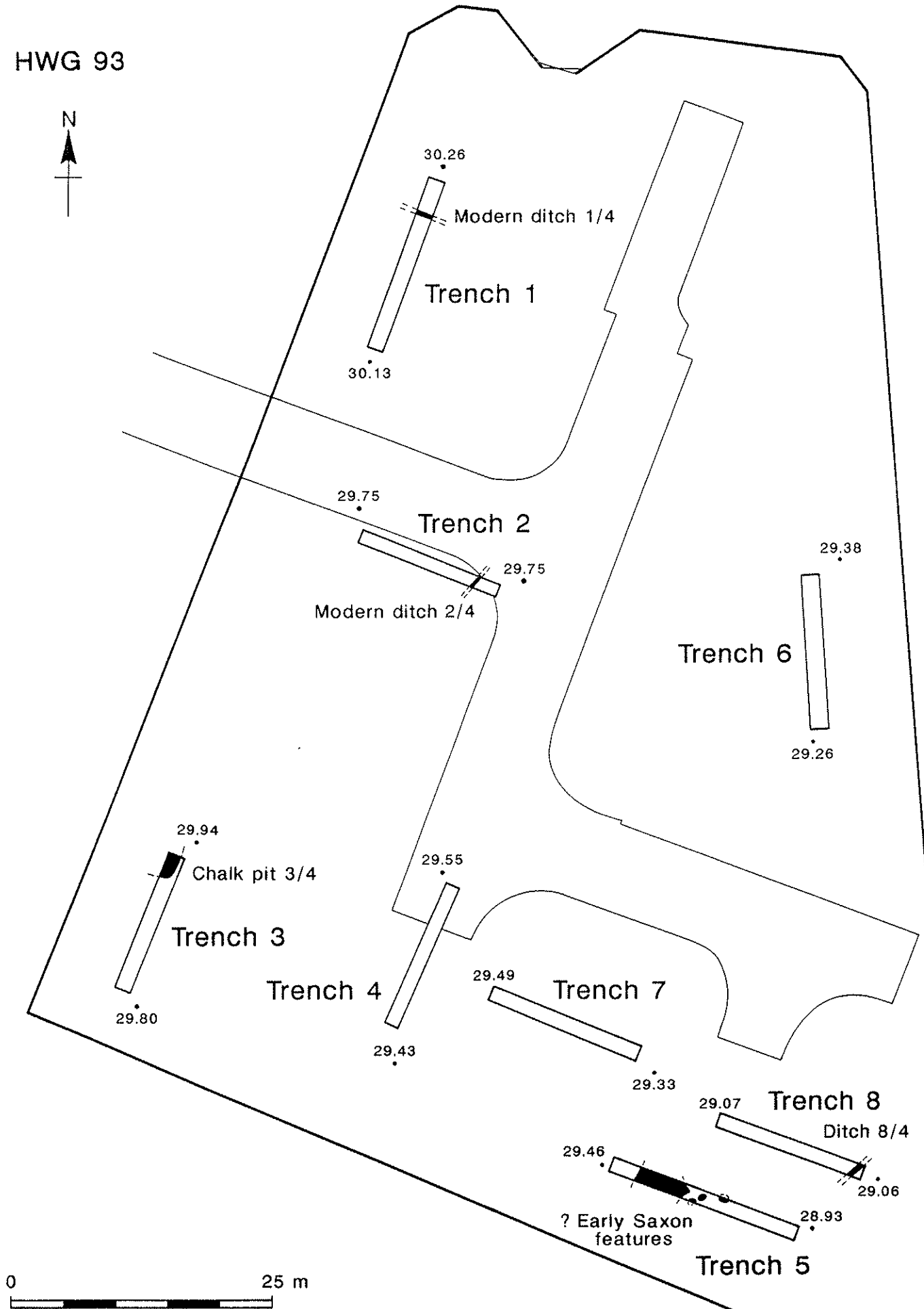


Figure 2

Trench 1 section

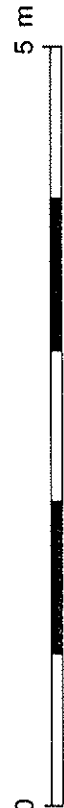
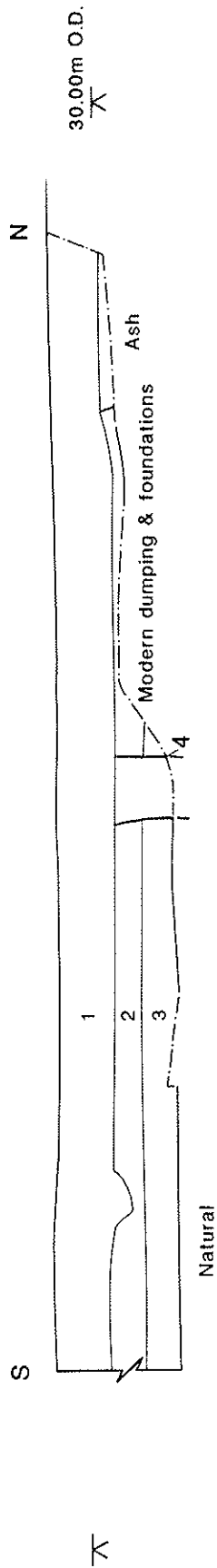
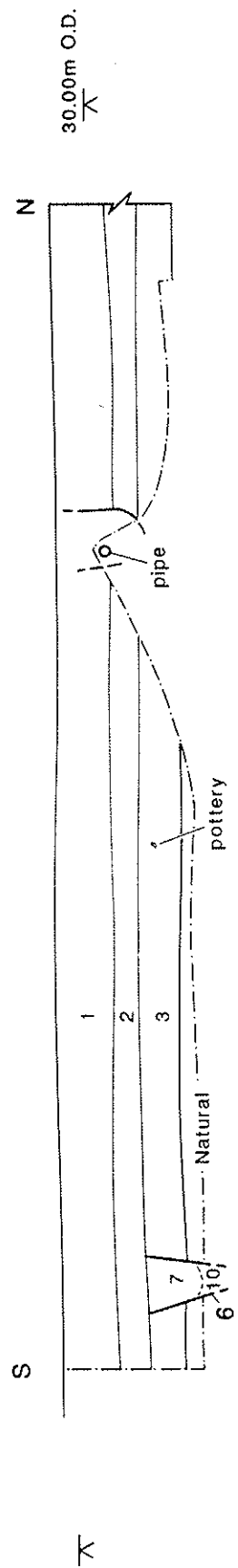
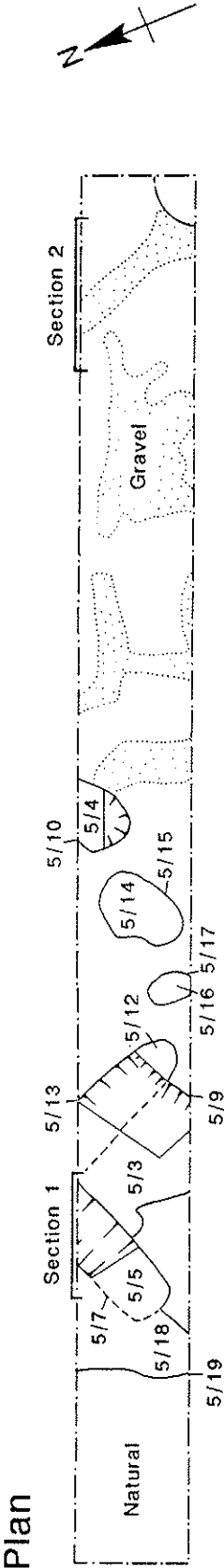
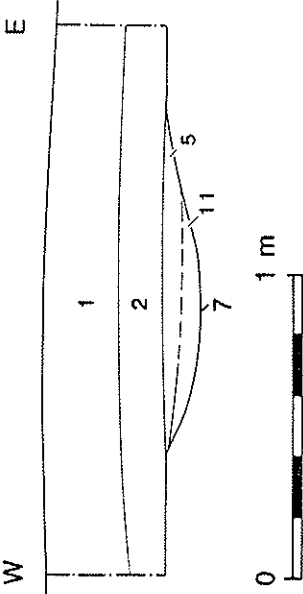


Figure 3

Trench 5



Section 1



Section 2

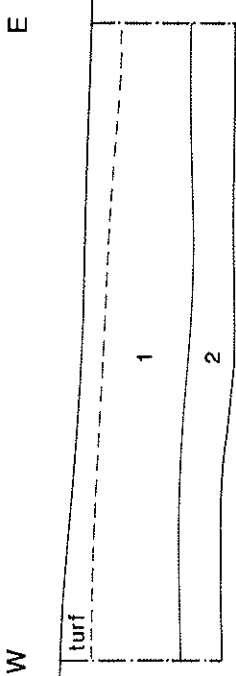


Figure 4

Oxford Archaeological Unit
46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP



Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

Registered Charity No. 285627
Private Limited Company No. 1618597