

THE
OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



Archaeological Assessment
Tamworth Park,
Mitcham
1990

TAMWORTH PARK, MITCHAM

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Introduction

An archaeological assessment of the above site was undertaken between 9/7/90 and 12/7/90 by the Oxford Archaeological Unit. The work was done on behalf of Trident Group PLC who propose to redevelop the area as housing. The site is in SW London, in the London Borough of Merton; it occupies land at 54-56 and to the rear of 2-52 Tamworth Park (Fig.1).

allotments, while the northern third is the site of several buildings, still used as garage workshops and dwellings. Only the southern two thirds were assessed.

Archaeological background

The site lies on the Beddington Gravels, in the valley of the River Wandle. While no archaeology was previously known from the site itself, excavations 1.3 km to the NW at Durham House, and at 29, Upper Green (both Mitcham) produced Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery. Waste and worked flints were also recovered, and some of these were Mesolithic. Part of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery has been excavated at various times since 1848 from an area centred on the corner of London Rd and Morden Rd, 1.8 km SE of Tamworth Park. A putative Bronze Age burial mound (corner of Croydon Rd and Beddington Lane, no longer extant) is far more likely to have been the mound left after destruction of a windmill. The windmill is marked at this spot on the 1876 Ordnance Survey map of the area.

Spot finds from the area comprise a Roman coin (NW corner of Mitcham Common), an Iron Age gold stater (Mitcham Common), and a Bronze Age hoard including at least one axe (Cranmer Rd, Mitcham).

With regard to the post-medieval period, Rocque's map of 1768 shows little development, though the site of Tamworth Lodge appears to be shown to the east. This was a large house, built about 1740, whose ornamental grounds are shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1867 and 1895. Comparison of these maps with those of the present day makes it clear that the lodge and its grounds lay outside the area under discussion here.

The general picture is one of houses gradually building up along the N edge of Mitcham Common during the 18th-19th centuries, though these did not normally extend very far back from the common.

Methodology

The assessment of the site was carried out by cutting four trenches 1.8 m wide and totalling 80 m in length. The positioning of the trenches (see Fig.1) was designed to give reasonable coverage of the site, while occupying positions later to be excavated as building foundations. The latter strategy was adopted in order to minimise destruction of any archaeology.

The trenches were dug by a combination of machine (JCB-type excavator loader with 5 foot ditching bucket) and hand excavation. In general, the allotment soil and subsoil were machined off in shallow spits while a constant watch was kept for any cut features. Machining normally stopped at the top of the natural gravel, but in some cases the gravel was slightly truncated to make sure that no features were being missed. The gravel surface was then cleaned by hand. In addition to the machine work, two areas of ploughsoil and subsoil were investigated by hand, the ploughsoil being first removed and the subsoil surface beneath then trowelled to check for features. These two areas represented a 12.5% sample of the assessment trenches.

With the exception of those which were clearly 19th century or later, all features were completely excavated within the trench boundaries; they were then described, photographed, and planned at 1:20. One long side of each trench was drawn in section at 1:20.

Summary and discussion of the archaeology

The trenches were found to contain either two (Trenches 1 and 4) or three (Trenches 2 and 3) layers. The lowest (and earliest) layer in all trenches was a gravel of shattered flint and water-rolled pebbles in a matrix of yellow-brown clayey sand (Figs 2, 3; Contexts 2, 22, 32, 41). This was clearly the natural gravel, and occurred at depths of 0.3 - 0.85 m from the ground surface. In Trenches 1 and 4 this layer had a lower stone content at the surface, growing progressively denser at greater depth.

Above the gravel in Trenches 2 and 3 was a yellow-brown very sandy loam with sparse shattered flint and water rolled pebbles (Figs 2, 3; Contexts 21, 31). This occurred at depths of 0.1 - 0.50 m from the surface, and varied in thickness from 0.14 m to 0.44 m. In all four trenches the uppermost layer was a mid grey-brown loam covered with turf (Figs 2, 3; Contexts 1, 20, 30, 40). This varied from 0.18 to 0.60 m in depth. The only (possibly) pre-19th century finds from this layer were 2 fragments of burnt flint (p 5).

The last two layers described can both be interpreted as cultivated soils. The lower of the two (21, 31) is likely to be medieval or later (it covers Context 27, see below) but an earlier date cannot be ruled out. The upper soil (2, 22, 32, 41) is evidently the result of later cultivation, including the

working of the ground for allotments. The presence of two layers at the N and S ends of the site, with three layers in the central area, can be accounted for by variation in the depth and intensity of the later cultivation.

Four features were found which had been cut into the natural gravel. Three of these were covered by the allotment soil, while one (Fig.2, Context 26) was covered by the lower ploughsoil (21). Context 26 was a wide, shallow linear cut running E-W (see Fig.2) with a fill of compact sand (27). It contained a single sherd of medieval pottery and a flint flake (see p 5). In Trench 1, another linear cut ran N-S (Fig.2, Context 5) and was filled with compact clayey sand (6) from which a brick fragment and two flint flakes were recovered. The brick fragment is probably post-medieval, although there is a possibility that it could be Roman (see p 5). Trench 4 revealed two linear cuts (Fig.3, Contexts 43, 45). Context 43 ran NNW-SSE and had a similar fill (44) to those described above. No finds were recovered from this fill. Lastly in this group, Context 45 ran approximately N-S but was very irregular. Its upper fill (46) was again as described above, while its lower fill (42) was a yellow-grey friable sand. No finds were recovered from either fill.

In Trench 2 a single E-W linear feature (Fig.2, Context 23) was cut from the level of the subsoil 21. Its fill of compact, very sandy loam (24) contained a single sherd of medieval pottery dating to the 12th or 13th centuries (p 5).

All the features described above can be broadly interpreted as ditches. There is no conclusive dating evidence, although the compact nature of the fills suggests that all are post-medieval or earlier. The three finds are worthy of note, but even after further analysis, they will provide only a broad terminus post quem for the filling, rather than the digging of the ditches. On balance, Context 26 offers the best evidence. There is a strong possibility that it was medieval in that it both contained medieval pottery, and lay below the older ploughsoil.

Aside from these ditches, three other features can be briefly mentioned. Two large pits at either end of Trench 1 were examined. At the E end was a rubbish pit (Fig.2, Context 7) containing material dating to 1820 and later (see p 5), while at the W end another rubbish pit contained Victorian and later bottle-glass (Fig.2, Context 3). One other feature investigated in Trench 2 proved to be a recent rabbit burrow (Fig.2, Context 28).

Conclusion

The archaeology revealed by the assessment is sparse, consisting of five linear features - all probably ditches - spread widely across the site. These features are likely to have been dug in the post-medieval period or earlier, and can be plausibly interpreted as field boundary ditches. Residual finds - three late Neolithic or later flint flakes and some burnt flint (see p 5) - suggest some prehistoric activity in the area but no more can be said on such slender evidence.

A logical conclusion from this would be that the assessed area lay in open ground by the post-medieval period. In all probability the ground was cleared of forest well before this, but we cannot say exactly when. This interpretation would certainly accord well with the site's position on the edge of Mitcham Common, likely to have been an open, partially cultivated area by the medieval period, and possibly before.

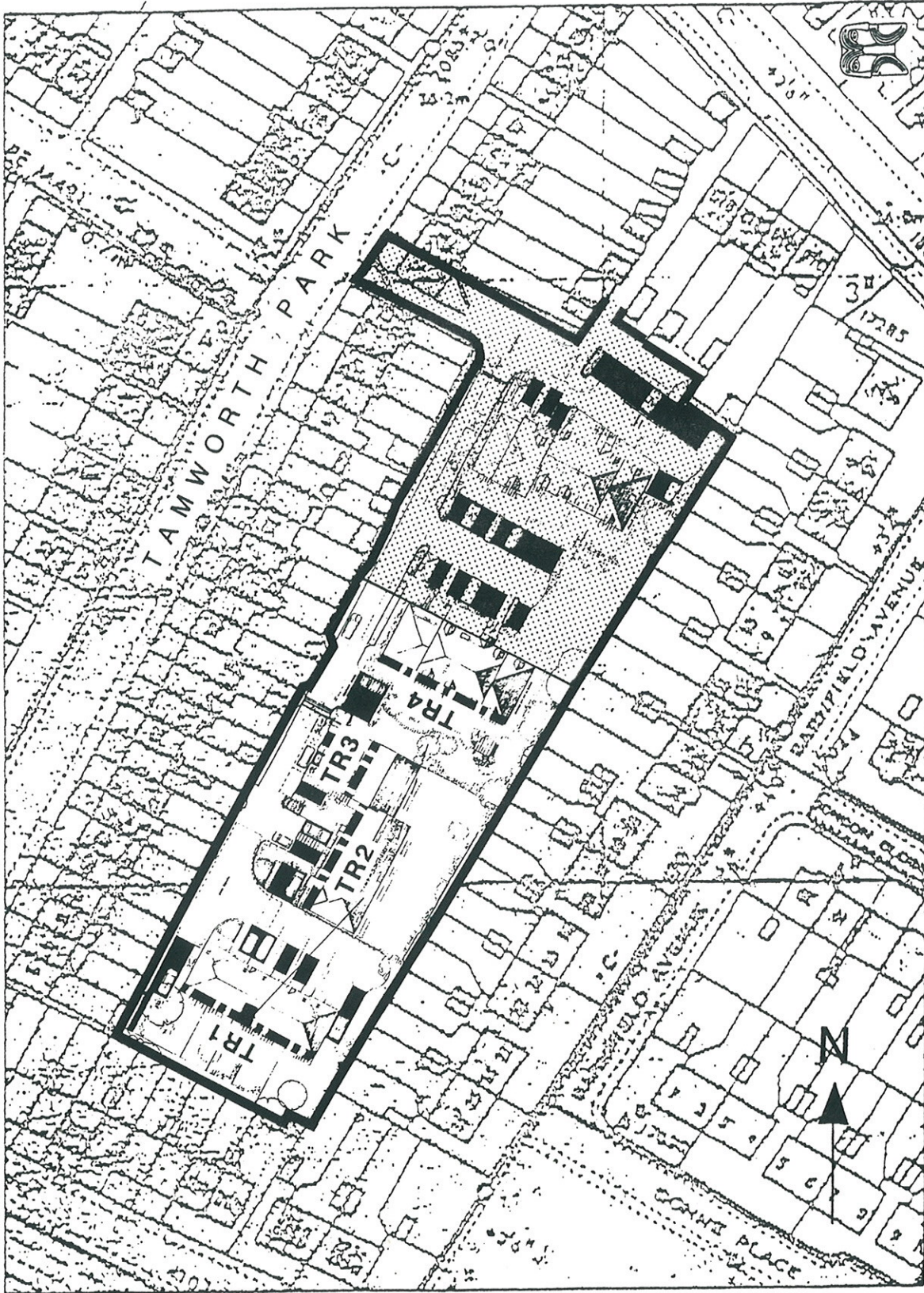
The assessment produced no evidence that the site was inhabited before the 19th century, and on present evidence any habitation is likely to lie further to the NW, and closer to the historic centre of Mitcham (see p 1).

Given the evidence presented above, we would not consider more detailed archaeological investigation of the assessed area to be a worthwhile exercise. In our experience, further work would be unlikely to alter the picture already drawn from the assessment in a way which would be either significant, or commensurate with the time and resources expended.

It remains the case that the northern third of the site has not been assessed, but the following factors should be considered:

- 1 The assessment here presented has given no reason to believe that the concentration of archaeology would be different in the northern third.
- 2 Lying to the north, the area is further away from any possible settlement on the edge of Mitcham Common.

David Wilkinson
Senior Archaeologist, Oxford Archaeological Unit

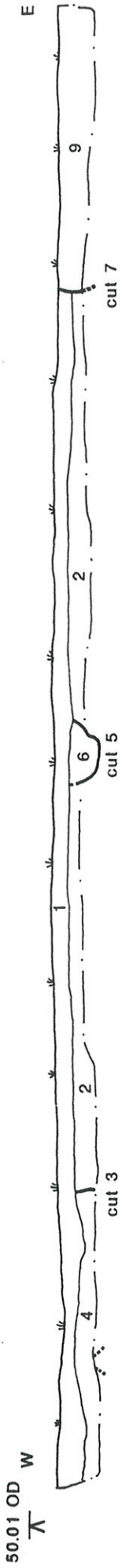


Location plan, proposed development and position of trenches.

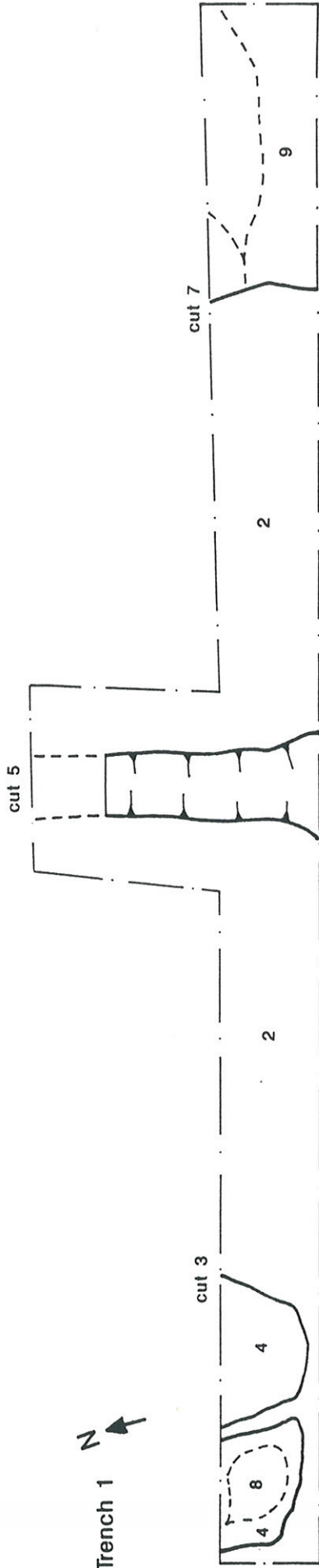
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Fig 1

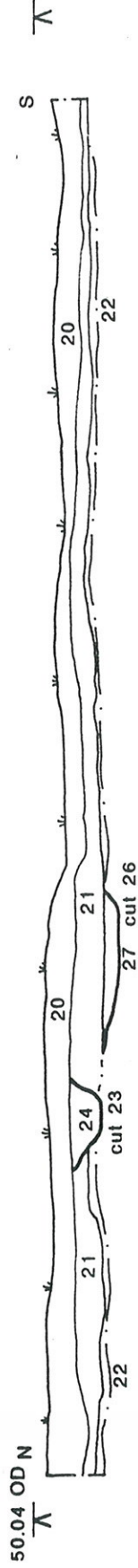
Trench 1, North Section



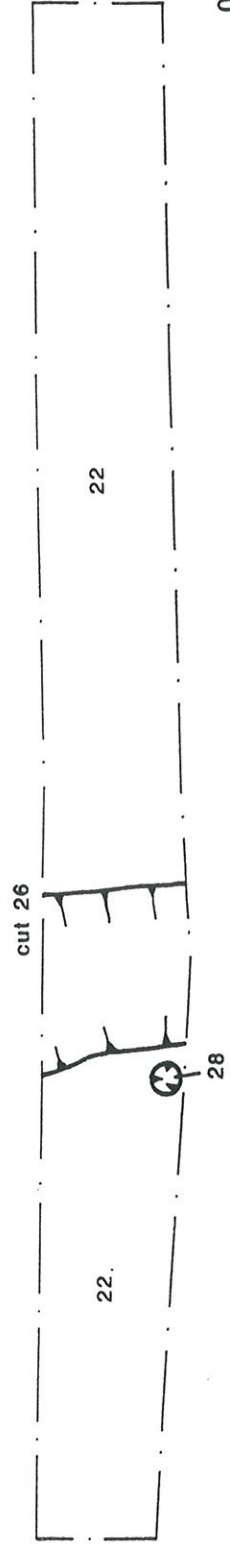
Trench 1



Trench 2, East Section



Trench 2

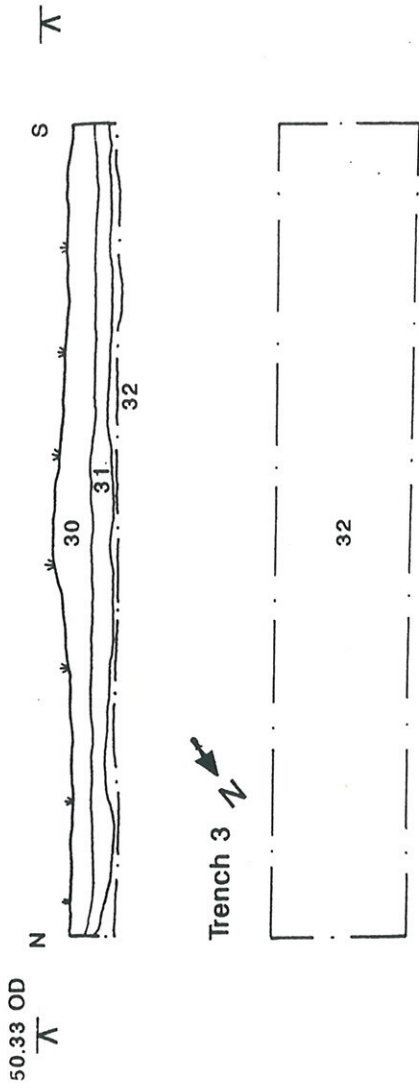


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Fig 2

Trench 3, East Section



KEY (FIGS 2 & 3)

-  TURF
-  LIMIT OF EXCAVATION
-  LIMIT OF CONTEXT (CLEARLY DEFINED)
-  " " (NOT CLEARLY DEFINED)
-  CONTEXT CONTINUES (UNEXCAVATED)



Trench 4, South Section

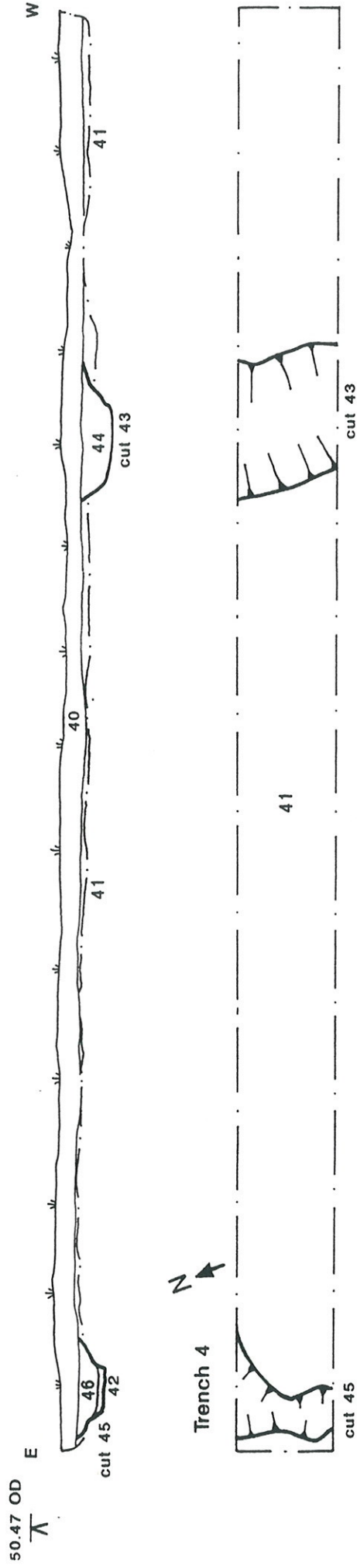


Fig 3

APPENDIX 1 DESCRIPTION OF THE FINDS

NB Context numbers were allotted as follows: 1-19, Trench 1;
20-29, Trench 2; 30-39, Trench 3; 40-49, Trench 4

Trench 1

Context 6 (fill of cut 5): Fragment of brick in medium orange red fabric. Medium coarse. Dark red grog inclusions. Flat on one side, other sides broken and abraded. Probably post-medieval, but ?Roman.

Cortical flake, utilised on one side. Wear scars and possible small amount of retouch. Chalk flint.

Cortical flake, wear on both edges, ?retouch on dorsal edge. Chalk flint.

- 9 (fill of cut 7): Various sherds of pot and glass. 1820s or later.

Trench 2

Context 24 (fill of cut ²³~~24~~): Body sherd in an orange-red medium coarse fabric, with dark red grog inclusions. Shows traces of white slip and glaze. 12th to 13th century.

- 27 (fill of cut 26): Body sherd. Red pimply surfaces, with coarse, hackly grey core. Inclusions of black iron ore and quartz. Medieval.

Cortical flake struck from mottled pebble flint, characteristic of the middle and lower Thames. Re-touched at distal end, utilisation flaking on long sides. Probably hard hammer struck. Late Neolithic or later.

Animal bone.

Trench 3

Context 30 (Allotment soil): Two fragments of burnt flint.

Various fragments of pottery and glass. 19th to 20th century.

Trench 4

No finds

APPENDIX 2 - MONITORING

The work was monitored by the Museum of London on behalf of Merton Borough Council. During site visits the Museum representative expressed his general satisfaction with the manner in which the work was being carried out, and also made the following suggestions:

- 1 That the fill (6) of Context 5 be completely excavated instead of half-sectioned.
- 2 That Trench 1 be extended to a width of 3 m in the area occupied by Context 5, and that the fill of the context should be excavated within the extension.
- 3 That water should be sprayed on the surfaces to try and bring out any soil differences.

Suggestions 1 and 2 were carried out, and spraying with water was tried in some areas, though it was not found to be helpful.



The Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street

Oxford OX1 2EP

tel. (0865) 243888 fax. (0865) 793496