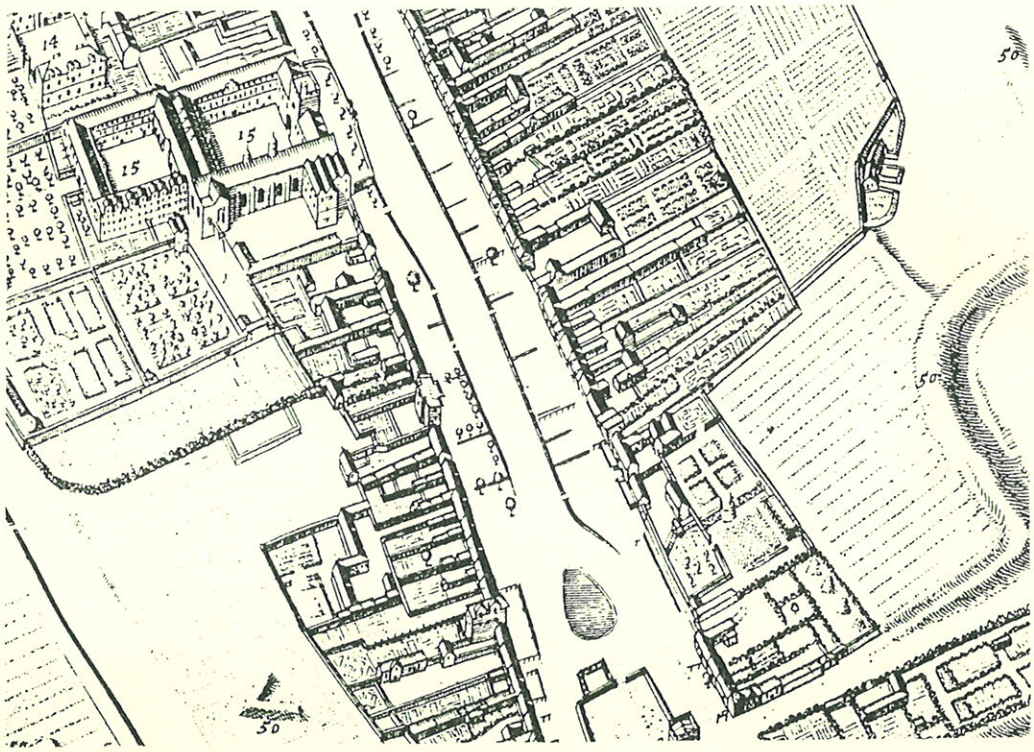
Oxford University Press

37a St Giles, Oxford.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 5107 0680

97/1157/NFH



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1998

Oxford University Press

37a St Giles Oxford

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NGR SP 5107 0680

97/1157/NFH

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Approved by: R. Williams HEAD OF FIELDWORK	Date: 23/2/1998

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1998

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at 37a, *St Giles, Oxford on behalf of Oxford University Press. The evaluation revealed a series of medieval pits, a medieval linear feature, and a large feature interpreted as a gravel extraction pit. The small pottery assemblage, in combination with stratigraphic evidence, suggests that some of the medieval features could date from as early as the 11th century, but most are likely to be of 13th century or later date. The range of medieval finds and features is similar to that found at other sites in the vicinity and is typical of the range of features expected to the rear of medieval suburban burgage plots.*

The medieval features were sealed beneath a series of medieval and post-medieval cultivation soils, indicating that this part of the site was primarily occupied by fields or gardens during those periods.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location

In January 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at 37a St Giles, Oxford (Fig 1) on behalf of Oxford University Press in respect of a planning application for new offices and a sunken garden, (97/1157/NFH). A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was agreed with OAAS on behalf of the Planning Authority. The area to be developed is in the back garden of 37a St Giles.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies on the second gravel terrace of the River Thames at 64 m above OD, and is currently occupied by a 1940's pre-fabricated building used as offices by the Oxford University Press.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background.

1.3.1 *Historical background*

The site is located on the west side of St Giles, in a block of tenements established in the 12th and 13th centuries. The site occupies a tenement fronting onto St Giles, within a medieval suburban burgage plot documented from at least 1279 (Salter 1969, 208). Medieval development in this area probably took the form of ribbon development along the road, becoming increasingly rural to the north, as the houses would also have functioned as farm houses associated with the nearby open fields of north Oxford.

The later medieval history of the area can be traced through historic maps. On Agas's map of 1578, houses can be seen along the frontage of St Giles. Loggan's map of 1675 (Fig. 7) shows a slightly greater degree of development of the street frontage, but the evaluation area appears to lie in a comparatively open area with no buildings, possibly a garden attached to the large house to the south. A row of probable out-buildings are shown against the back boundary of the tenement. The 1769 map of St Giles parish shows a large plot with no further details. The houses on the site today date from the 18th and 19th century. Part of this redevelopment was facilitated by the enclosure of St Giles Field in 1832.

The development site lies to the east of the Workhouse, built 1772, on Rats and Mice Hill, now redeveloped and known as Wellington Square. Later landscaping of Rewley House revealed the workhouse cemetery, marked 'burial ground' on W. Faden's map of 1789.

1.3.2 *Archaeological background*

The site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence, but some sites with archaeological finds are recorded on the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record adjacent to the development area.

During landscaping works at Rewley House, the workhouse cemetery was uncovered in an area marked 'burial ground' on W. Faden's map of 1789. Other archaeological sites in the area include a medieval/ post-medieval well (SMR 6173) and a post medieval gravel pit (SMR 6665) to the south-west of the development area, and a Roman coin (SMR 3514) and late medieval pits (SMR 6436) discovered to the north of the site.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

- To establish the location, extent, date, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains on the site which could represent a significant constraint on the development, or which might need to be taken into account in the detailed engineering design of the development.

- To provide sufficient information to allow informed decisions to be made on any mitigation measures.

- To make available the results of the excavation and to create an ordered archive.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised a single trench (Fig 2), excavated from ENE to WSW across the site, which investigated the survival of deposits located beneath the western end of a prefabricated 1940's building. The trench, which was stepped, measured 7.0m by 1.6m. The concrete and hard-core covering the site was removed by the Oxford University Press. A geotechnical test-pit, located outside the building to the north (Fig 2), excavated by A&R Peedell was also recorded. The evaluation trench and test together comprised *c.*4% of the development area.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The trenches were excavated and cleaned by hand. The revealed features were excavated 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 a scale 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).

3.3 Finds

All finds from features and archaeological deposits were retained for dating purposes.

3.4 Environmental data

No waterlogged deposits were located. Samples were collected from various deposits, although only one sample was analysed. This was collected from Pit 88, in Test-pit 1.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The general soil type was a sandy loam, with good preservation of bone and ceramics, overlying natural gravel. Ground conditions were dry and well drained.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

The deposits were similar in both the evaluation and the excavated geological test-pit, revealing a sequence of cultivation horizons, small pits and two large pits, interpreted as gravel extraction pits. The majority of these pits only survived at the base of the archaeological sequence, probably as a result of truncation by ploughing and/or gardening activity.

4.3 Presentation of Results

Each deposit and feature has been assigned a unique context number. The contexts are described by trench in chronological order, from earliest to latest.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits (Appendix 1)

5.1.1 *Trench 1* (Figs 3, 4 and 5)

The natural gravel (105) was encountered in this trench at a fairly uniform level (62.51m OD). The natural gravel was cut by a furrow or shallow N-S aligned ditch (139) and a sequence of pits of variable dimensions (113, 119, 121, 141, 123, 115). Pit 115 (Fig 3) was a straight-sided feature *c.*0.90m in diameter. It could be a large post hole or a planting hole. One sherd of late 11th century pottery was recovered from the fill (116).

Pit 113 was a large straight-sided feature located at the eastern end of the trench and dated to the 13th century or later by associated pottery. The full extent of this feature is unknown, as it continued outside the trench. A sample section was excavated to depth of 0.20m (fill 114) to retrieve datable artefacts (Section 7).

A further series of small, shallow pits (130, 132, 134 and 136), were cut through the upper fills of Pit 113 (Fig 4, section 9).

The fill (112) of a small pit (111), produced late 11th century pottery. This must be residual however, since the pit is stratigraphically later than Pit 113, which is dated to the 13th century or later.

These cuts may perhaps be explained as garden features, such as planting holes and bedding trenches.

All of the above pits were sealed by a continuous cultivation soil (104), at 62.63m OD, and have presumably been truncated by horticultural activity. This fairly homogenous sandy loam soil was dated by pottery to the 13th century or later.

A shallow linear feature (106, Fig 5), filled with a similar fill to the overlying darker soils was cut through Layer 104. The size and profile of the feature indicate that it could be a shallow ditch or a garden feature. A single sherd of 11th century or later pottery was found in the upper fill (108).

Overlying Layer 104 was another cultivation soil (103), at 62.95m OD. The pottery evidence suggests a date in the 15th century or later. Cutting this deposit was a solitary post-hole. (109, Fig.4, Section 9). This was filled with material similar in composition to Layer 103 and sealed by a brown/grey sandy silt (129). No finds were recovered from the fill.

Overlying Layer 103 is another cultivation soil (128), at 63.02m OD. This homogenous soil is also dated by pottery to the 15th century or later. Cultivation ridges and furrows were visble in Layer 128, (Fig.4 Sections 9 and 10.) Above this layer and deposited between the ridges in 128 is a rubble and mortar layer (102) at 63.06m OD. No pottery was retrieved from this deposit, which may have been laid as a drainage layer for the overlying garden soil (101). This garden soil, at 63.45m OD, is the latest in the sequence of cultivation deposits. A large modern pit (125), containing a larger quantity of charcoal, was cut through the garden soil layer. The charcoal deposit may represent burnt garden or household waste, indicating that until the construction of the existing building in the 1940's, the back of 37a St Giles was used as a

garden. The floor of the 1940s pre-fabricated building was recorded in section (Fig.4, Section 9, Layer 100).

5.1.2 *Test-Pit 1* (Fig. 6)

This geotechnical test-pit was recorded by the OAU in the course of the evaluation. The sections were cleaned, photographed and drawn. Where possible pottery was recovered and samples taken.

The natural gravel (90) was recorded at a level of 62.60m OD at its highest point. Cutting the natural gravel is a large pit (89), which is interpreted as a deep gravel extraction pit. The deposit (88) filling this pit contained medieval finds and a single piece of residual Romano-British pottery. Sealing this pit was a sandy loam cultivation soil (87), at 63.11m OD. Above Layer 87 was another cultivation soil (92), at 63.21m OD. This was disturbed by two garden features, possibly bedding trenches or planting holes (94 and 95), which were themselves cut by a modern, rubble-filled feature (86). The latter feature probably dates from the construction of the existing building in the 1940s.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 *The Pottery* by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 84 sherds with a total weight of 1,024g. The occurrence per context by number and weight of sherds per fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. All of the material was Saxo-Norman or later, with the exception of a single residual sherd of Romano-British greyware from Fill 88 of a medieval pit (89). The fabrics present are typical of sites of the period in Oxford, and the codes used are those of the Oxford Type-Series (Mellor 1994). The exception is a single sherd from the base of a large bowl in a Shelly ware which appears to be of a type commonly found on excavations in Northamptonshire (Northamptonshire County Type-Series fabric 330) such as St. Peters St., Northampton (cf. Williams 1979, fig.99, no. 582). The evidence from West Cotton, Northants. suggests that such vessels were made in a range of tightly-controlled capacities, and were used for the measurement of flour and meal in bakehouses (Blinkhorn, in print a), although such vessels probably had other functions.

In terms of chronology, the ceramic assemblage suggests that, with the exception of the Romano-British sherd, activity at the site dates from the latter part of the 11th century, with contexts 88, 108, and 116 producing pottery assemblages of that date. The rest of the material suggests that there was then virtually continuous activity at the site from that time to the present day.

The medieval pottery forms are typical of domestic assemblages of the period, comprising mainly jugs, jars and bowls, although a fragment of a Brill/Boarstall (fabric OXAM) pottery 'sauce bottle' also occurred. Such vessels are rare finds, although a large group occurred in a single Dissolution-period context at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire (Blinkhorn, in print b), suggesting that the later medieval pottery from this site may have been consumed at a place with a similar social status.

5.3 Environmental data

5.3.1 *Carbonised plant remains and charcoal* by Greg Campbell

In order to assess the preservation of charred remains at the site, a single sample (22 litres of medieval pit fill 88) was floated in a modified Siraf flotation machine, the sample supported on a 0.5 mm mesh and the flot collected on a 0.25 mm mesh. The resulting flot was air-dried and scanned under a binocular microscope at x10 magnification, and the remains characterised. This scanning consistently underestimates the number and range of items present, so the results presented here are not precise.

The charred remains are dominated by wood charcoal, but the great majority of this is too small to be identified. The sample was surprisingly rich in traces of food, including one fragment of nut-shell of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and approximately 130 grains. The grain was dominated by free-threshing wheat (*Triticum*), with a small component of oat (*Avena*) and barley (*Hordeum*). The remains were poorly-preserved due to heavy charring. Charred seeds of weeds and other herbaceous plants were very sparse, and seemed to be limited to small leguminous plants, such as vetches or tares (*Vicia/Lathyrus*). Chaff was not observed.

Modern contamination was present as very small coal fragments, dried roots, insect remains and possible fungal fruiting bodies, but was not a large portion of the remains.

In conclusion, charred remains are preserved sufficiently well to be identifiable, and in concentrations high enough to produce interpretable assemblages. Should the opportunity arise the remains retrieved from the single sample processed are rich enough to merit analysis. Charred remains recovery and analysis would therefore form a useful component of any further work on the site.

5.3.2 *The Snails* by Greg Campbell

In order to assess the preservation of snails at the site, the flot produced by the processing of the single soil sample for charred remains (medieval pit fill 88) was scanned under binocular microscope at x10 magnification. A very small number of snails (approx. 15 identifiable individuals) in poor preservation indicates that snails are not well-preserved at the site. On this evidence, sampling and analysing deposits specifically for snails seems unlikely to be productive.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

Trench 1 and Test Pit 1 together represent *c.*4% of the development area. However, both trenches are located towards the rear of the tenement, suggesting that the remains discovered may not be representative of the Street Frontage area, where medieval building remains are most likely to be found.

The evidence for residuality in the pottery assemblage, and modern contaminants in the environmental samples, suggests that the features of early medieval date may have been disturbed by subsequent medieval and later horticultural activity.

Some features were not recorded to their full extent, as they fell outside the evaluation trench, therefore their exact nature could not be determined. No structures were confirmed within the trenches.

Natural was reached in both the evaluation trench and the geological test pit.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 *Summary of Results*

The presence of a possible gravel pit, several smaller pits and cultivation soils is typical of the range of features and deposits expected to the rear of medieval burgage plots. No structural evidence was detected in the evaluation.

Maps from the 16th and 17th century indicate that, although the site lay within the post-medieval tenement plots on the western side of St. Giles, the site itself was comparatively open, perhaps being cultivated as gardens. The features and soil sequence encountered were consistent with the use of this part of the site as gardens in the post-medieval period.

6.2.2 *Significance*

The range of medieval finds and features discovered is similar to that found on sites of similar date in the immediate vicinity (SMR 6436 and SMR 15945), and provides little new information of significance. However, the sequence of intact cultivation horizons observed towards rear of the property, suggests that more significant remains may be equally well preserved close to the street frontage.

The evaluation confirms the impression from cartographic sources that the site was largely given over to horticulture and/or agriculture in the post-medieval period.

6.2.3 *Impact of development*

Based on the evidence of this evaluation, the proposed development will result in the removal of all archaeological deposits in the area of the sunken garden. Any archaeological deposits located within the footprint of the new building are also likely to be affected.

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Appendix 1: Archaeological Context Inventory

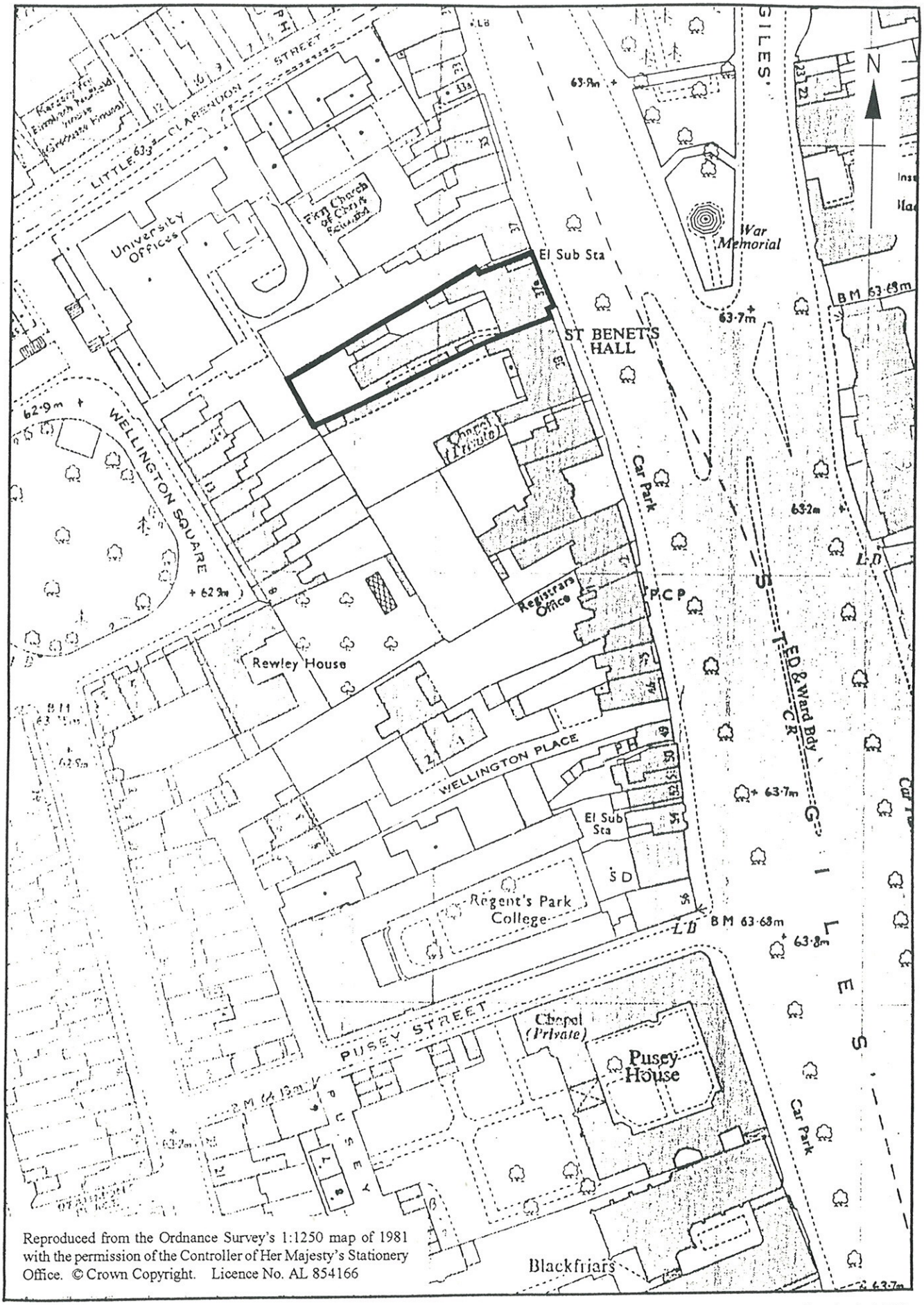
TEST PIT	CONTEXT	TYPE	LENGTH	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENT	FINDS	DATE
1	81	LAYER	2	1	0.05	MODERN CONCRETE SURFACE		
1	82	LAYER	2	1	0.15	HARDCORE FOR 81		
1	83	FILL	1.0+	0.2+	0.28	UPPER FILL OF 86		
1	84	FILL	0.75		0.1	FILL OF 86		
1	85	FILL	0.3+	0.3+	0.25+	FILL OF 86		
1	86	CUT	1.0+	0.3+	0.45	CUT OF MODERN FEATURE		
1	87	LAYER	2.0+	1.0+	0.45	CULTIVATION SOIL		
1	88	FILL	2.0+	1.0+	1.4	FILL OF 89	CERAMIC	L11thC+
1	89	CUT	2.0+	1.0+	1.4	CUT OF GRAVEL PIT		
1	90	LAYER	2.0+	1.0+		NATURAL GRAVELS		
1	91	FILL	2.0+	0.15	0.22	FILL OF 94		
1	92	LAYER	1.8	1	0.3	CULTIVATION SOIL		
1	93	FILL	1.5+	0.5+	0.15	FILL OF 95		
1	94	CUT	2.00+	0.2	0.2	GARDEN FEATURE		
1	95	CUT	1.5+	0.5+	0.3	GARDEN FEATURE		

TRENCH	CONTEXT	TYPE	LENGTH	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENT	FINDS	DATE
1	100	LAYER	7	1.6	0.2	CONCRETE FLOOR /HARDCORE		
1	101	LAYER	7	1.6	0.4	MODERN GARDEN SOIL	CERAMIC	20thC
1	102	LAYER	7	1.6	0.09 - 0.19	MORTAR/RUBBLE DUMP LAYER		
1	103	LAYER	7	1.6	0.18	CULTIVATION LAYER	CERAMIC	15thC+
1	104	LAYER	7	1.6	0.2	CULTIVATION LAYER	CERAMIC	13thC+
1	105	LAYER	7	1.6	0.40+	NATURAL GRAVEL		
1	106	CUT	1.5+	0.8	0.16	CUT OF FEATURE		
1	107	FILL	1.5+	0.8	0.1	UPPER FILL OF 106		
1	108	FILL	1.15	0.6	0.06	LOWER FILL OF 106	CERAMIC	L11thC+
1	109	CUT	0.1	0.1	0.62	POST-HOLE CUT		
1	110	FILL	0.1	0.1	0.62	FILL OF POST-HOLE 109		
1	111	CUT	1	0.75	0.3	PIT		
1	112	FILL	1	0.75	0.3	FILL OF PIT 111	CERAMIC	12thC+
1	113	CUT	2.7+	1.4+	0.2+	GRAVEL EXTRACTION PIT		
1	114	FILL	2.7+	1.4+	0.2+	FILL OF 113	CERAMIC	13thC+
1	115	CUT	0.7	0.7	0.6	SMALL PIT		
1	116	FILL	0.7	0.7	0.6	FILL OF 115	CERAMIC	L11thC+
1	117	CUT	0.55	0.55	0.6	SMALL PIT/LARGE POST-HOLE		
1	118	FILL	0.55	0.55	0.6	FILL OF 117		
1	119	CUT	0.7	0.7	0.2	CUT OF SMALL PIT		
1	120	FILL	0.7	0.7	0.2	FILL OF 119		
1	121	CUT	0.8	0.3	0.2	CUT OF A SMALL PIT		
1	122	FILL	0.8	0.3	0.2	FILL OF 121		
1	123	CUT	0.5	0.5	0.18	CUT FOR A SMALL PIT		
1	124	FILL	0.5	0.5	0.18	FILL OF 123		
1	125	CUT	-	1.15	0.95	CUT OF RECENT LARGE PIT		
1	126	FILL	-	0.85	0.26	LOWER FILL OF 125		
1	127	FILL	-	1.15	0.75	PRIMARY FILL OF 125		
1	128	LAYER	7	1.6	0.25	DISTURBED CULTIVATION SOIL		
1	129	DEPOSIT	-	0.24	0.07	FILL OF 109		
1	130	CUT	-	0.3	0.12	CULTIVATION MARK		
1	131	FILL	-	0.3	0.12	FILL OF 130		

TRENCH	CONTEXT	TYPE	LENGTH	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENT	FINDS	DATE
1	132	CUT	-	0.5	0.16	CULTIVATION MARK		
1	133	FILL	-	0.5	0.16	FILL OF 132		
1	134	CUT	-	0.17	0.1	CULTIVATION MARK		
1	135	FILL	-	0.17	0.1	FILL OF 134		
1	136	CUT	-	0.2	0.15	CULTIVATION MARK		
1	137	FILL	-	0.2	0.15	FILL OF 136		
1	138	FILL	-	0.48	0.12	FILL 0F 113		
1	139	CUT	1.45 +	0.6	0.1	POSSIBLE FURROW		
1	140	FILL	1.45+	0.6	0.1	FILL OF 139		
1	141	CUT	1.2	0.7	0.2	CUT OF PIT		
1	142	FILL	1.2	0.7	0.2	FILL OF 141		
1	143	FILL	0.46	-	0.1	FILL OF 113		
1	144	FILL	0.46	-	0.1	FILL OF 113		

Appendix 2: Pottery occurrence per context by number and weight of sherds (in g.) per fabric type

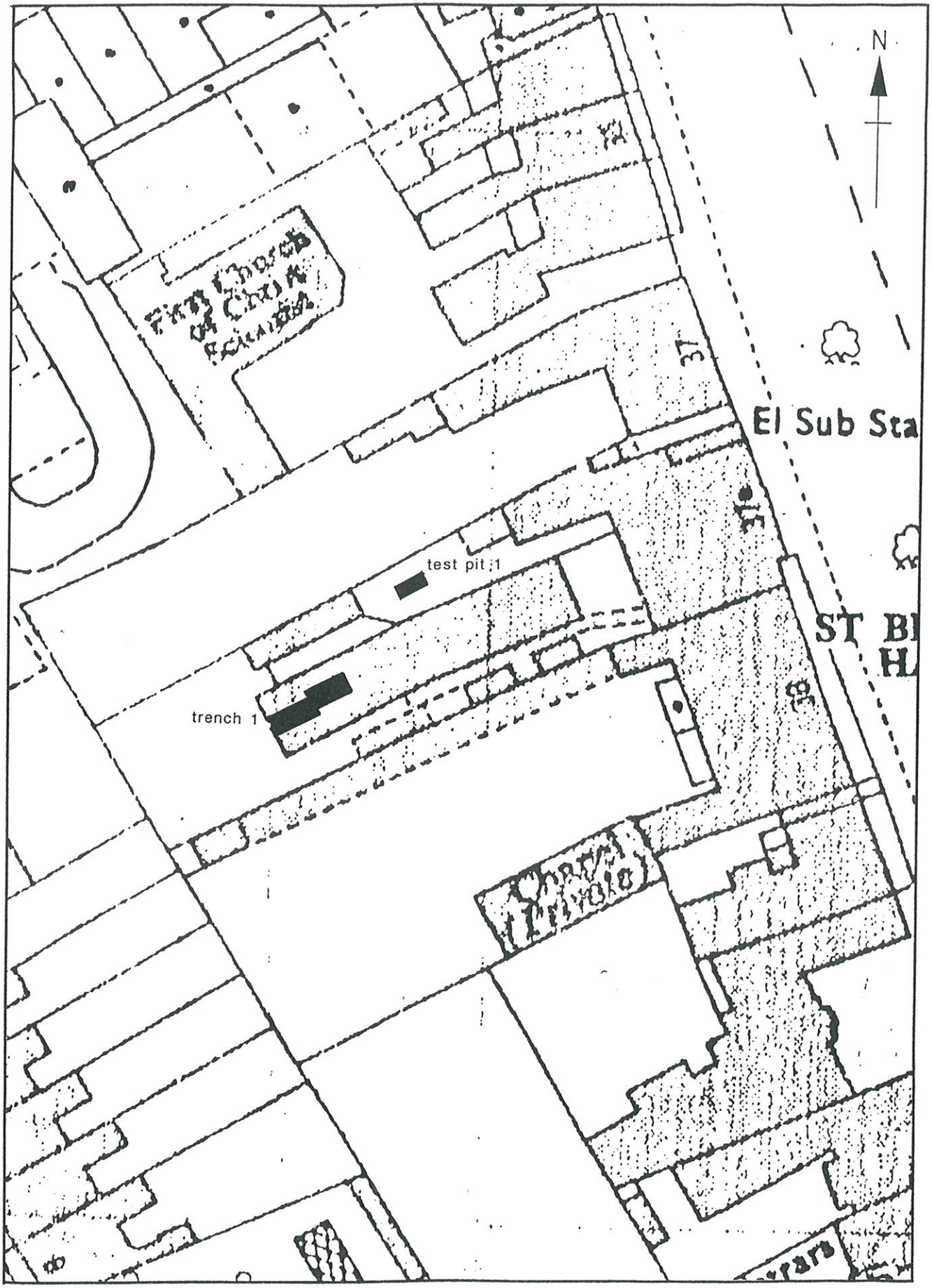
Context	Romano-British	OXAC	OXAQ	Med. Shelly Ware	OXY	OXAM	Tudor Green	Cistercian ware	German Stone-wares	Red Earthen-wares	Misc. 19th/20thC	TPQ	Comments
88	1 (12)	2 (33)			2 (11)							L11thC+?	
101		1 (7)	1 (5)		1 (4)	3 (29)			2 (37)	6 (123)	10 (121)	20thC	
103		1 (8)			3 (56)	12 (208)	1 (1)	1 (4)			1 (12)*	15thC+	*Contamination
104		2 (13)	2 (16)		12 (92)*	6 (103)						13thC+	*Incl. 13thC types
108			1 (14)									L11thC+	
112				1 (30)	1 (11)							12thC+?	
114					4 (23)	6 (42)						13thC+?	
116					1 (10)							L11thC+	
Total	1(12)	6 (61)	4 (35)	1 (30)	24 (207)	27 (382)	1 (1)	1 (4)	2 (37)	6 (123)	11 (133)		



LOCATION OF SITE

FIGURE 1

Scale 1:1250



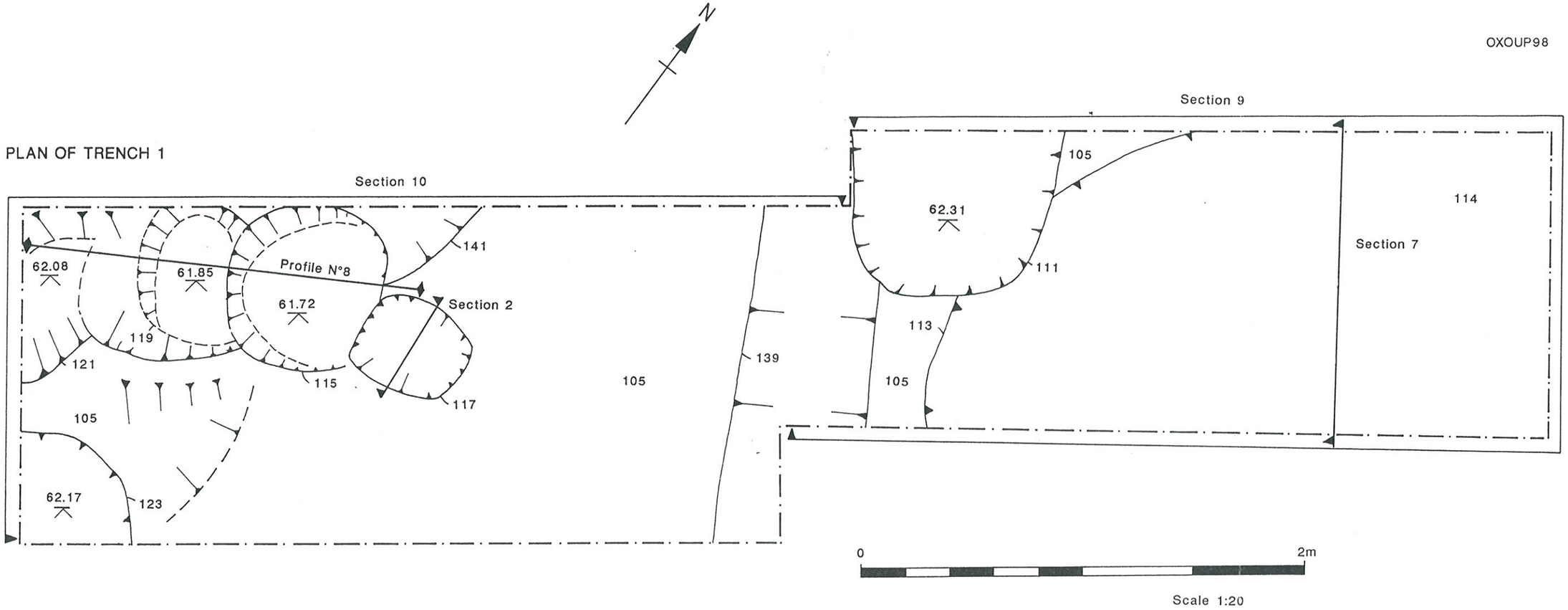
LOCATION OF TRENCHES

FIGURE 2

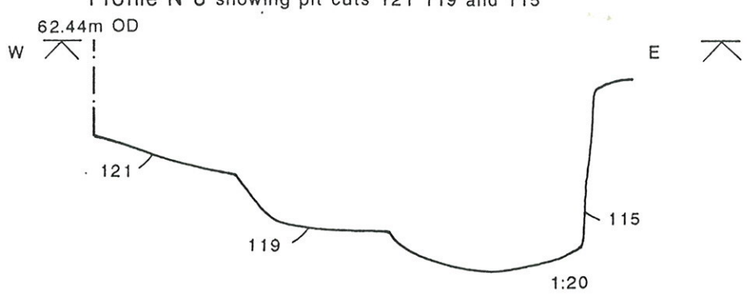
Scale 1:500

OXOUP98

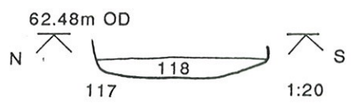
PLAN OF TRENCH 1



Profile N°8 showing pit cuts 121 119 and 115



Section N°2 showing possible posthole 117



Section N°7 pit cut 113

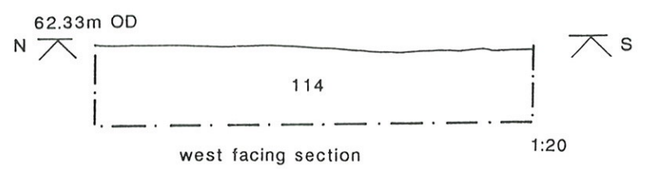


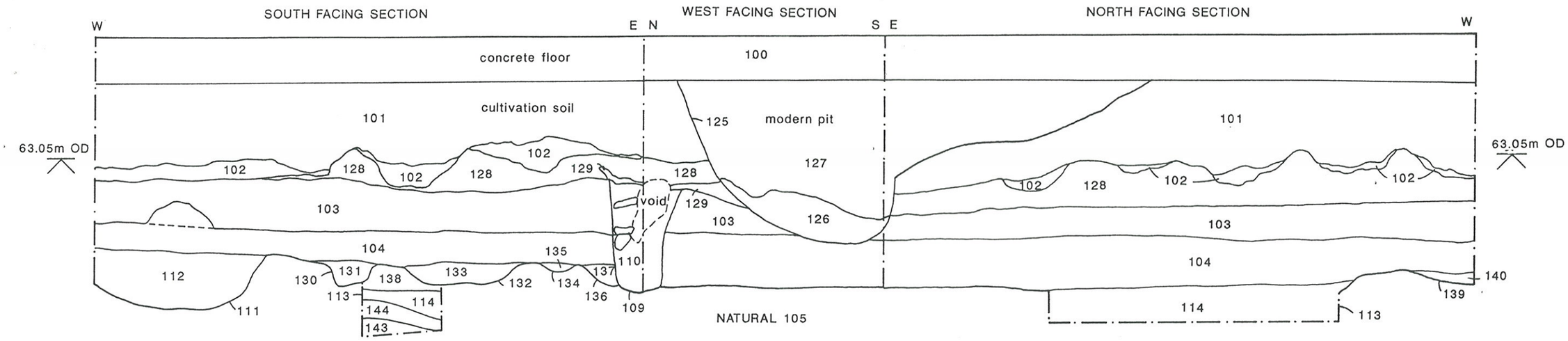
FIGURE 3

0 2m

Scale 1:20

OXOUP 98

TRENCH 1 - Section 9



TRENCH 1 - Section 10

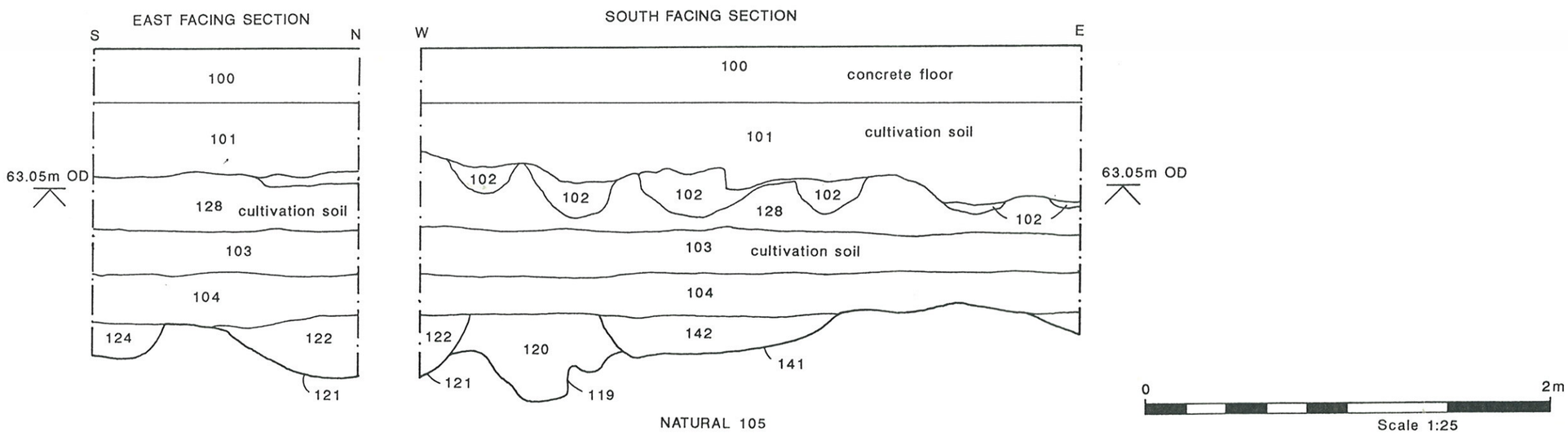


FIGURE 4

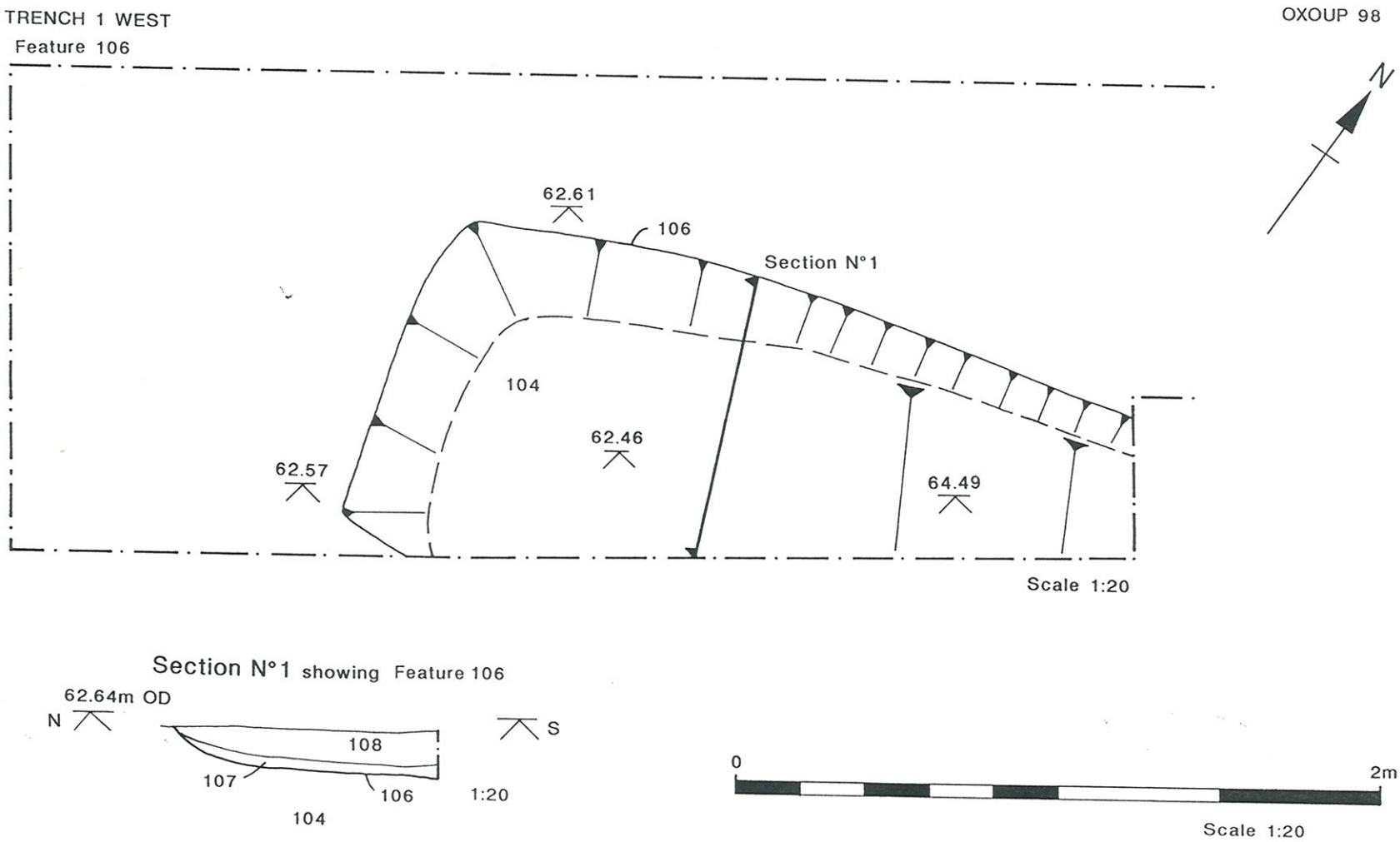
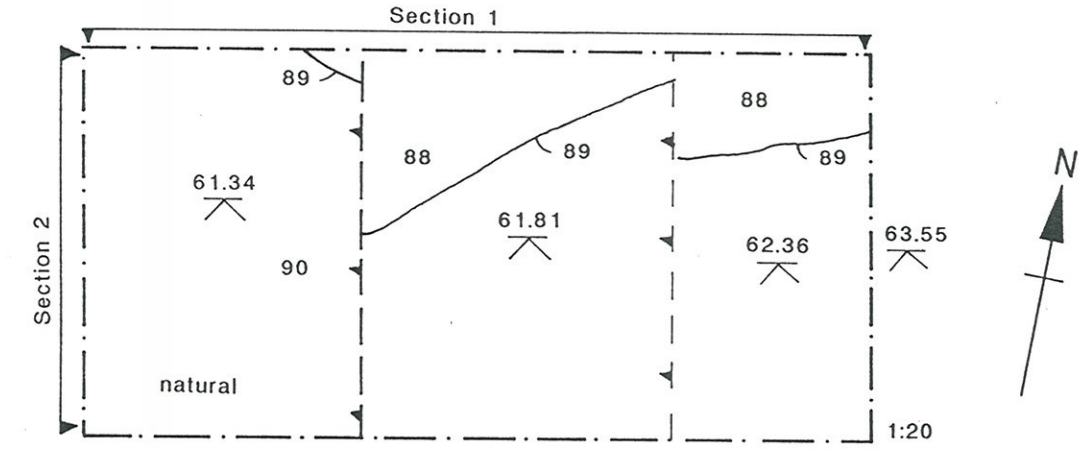
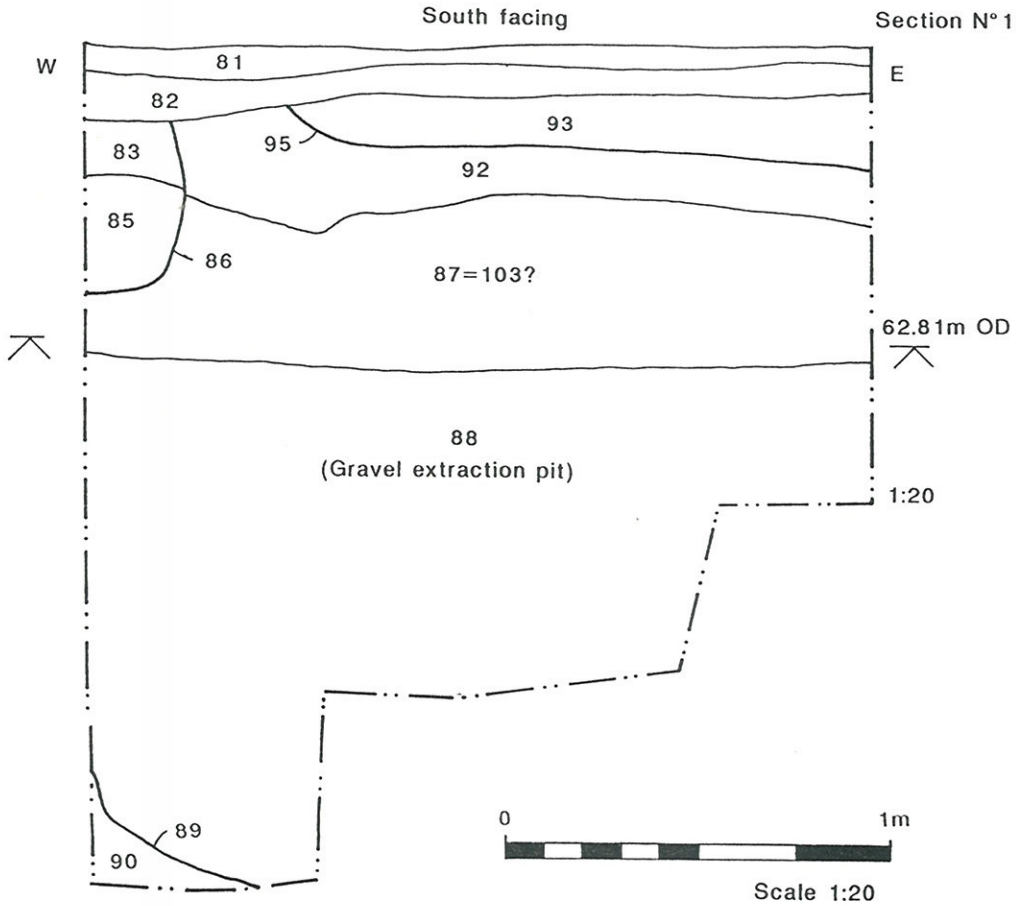

TRENCH 1 WEST
Feature 106
OXOUP 98
N
62.61
106
Section N°1
104
62.46
62.57
64.49
Scale 1:20
Section N°1 showing Feature 106
62.64m OD
N
S
108
107
106
104
1:20
0
2m
Scale 1:20

FIGURE 5

TEST-PIT 1
PLAN OF GRAVEL EXTRACTION PIT 89 AND SECTIONS





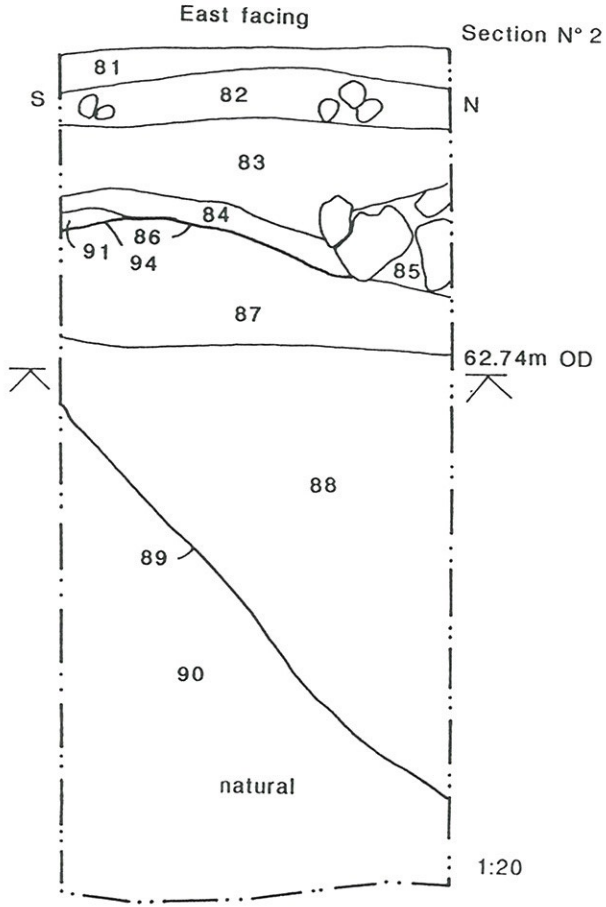


FIGURE 6

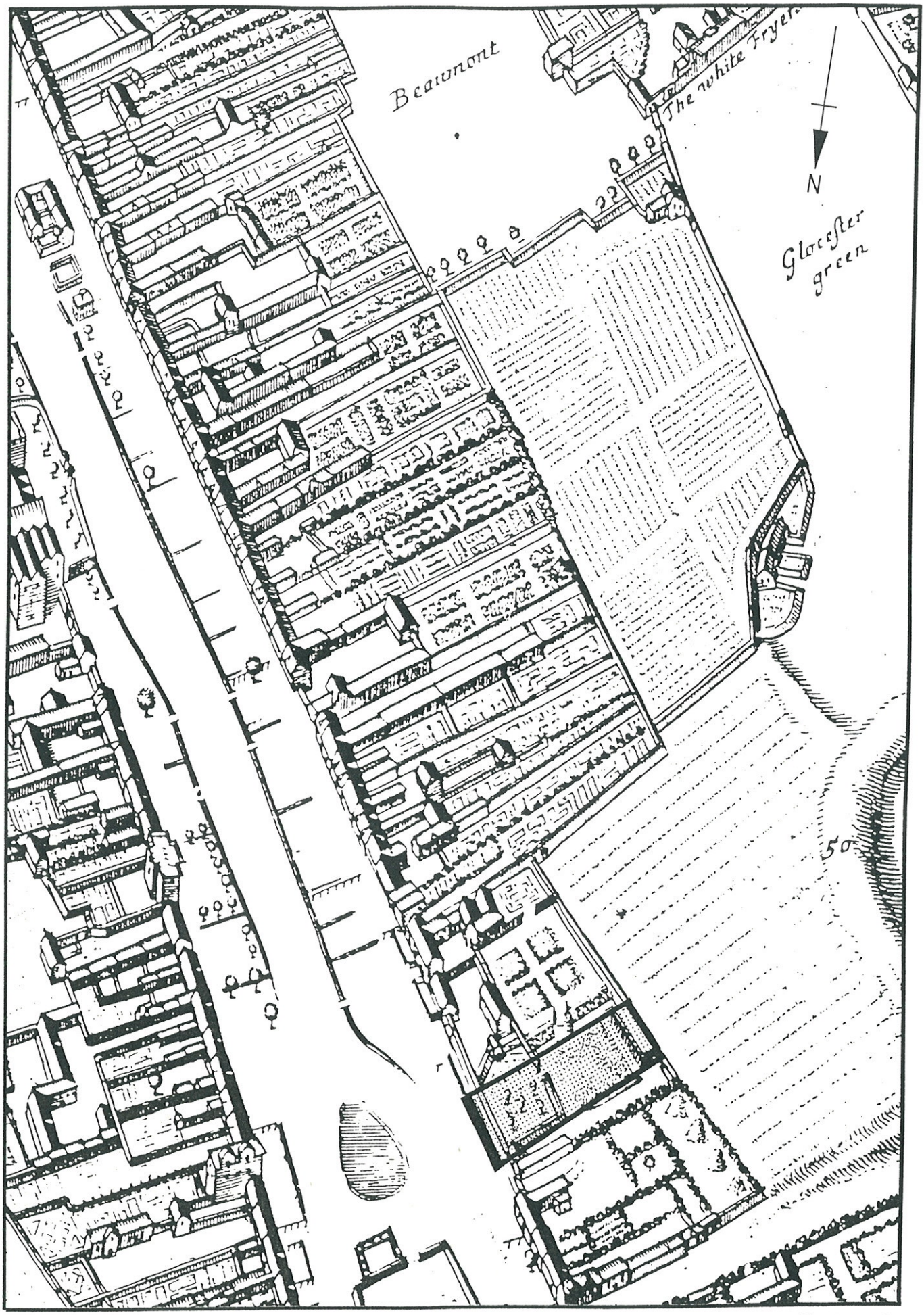


FIGURE 7 LOGGAN'S MAP (dated 1675) Not to scale

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