

GREENWICH (GR)

ELTHAMWB
4/60/98

English Heritage

Eltham Palace, Greenwich

NGR TQ 424741

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

PROJECT CODE: ELTHAM WB

Oxford Archaeological Unit

September / October 1998

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

September / October 1998

Summary

In September and October 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Eltham Palace, Greenwich, NGR TQ 424741 (Figure 1). The area observed consisted of made ground, previous excavation backfill and modern landscaping deposits. No archaeological remains or finds were found.

1 Introduction

The buildings which currently stand on the site of Eltham Palace are undergoing renovation. As a consequence of this certain services are being laid or repaired. The proposed work comprised the excavation and repair of a damaged section of drainage to the north west of the palace which ran from the moat to the cottages (Figure 2). This work was observed on the 17 September 1998. The installation of two electricity ducts in a trench across the central area enclosed by the existing buildings within the moat was also monitored. This trench ran from the boiler room to the squash courts (Figure 3) and the work was undertaken over a period of five days commencing 19 October 1998. The site forms part of a scheduled ancient monument, national monument number 26336. Class consents for the work were given on 9 September 1998 (drain) and 7 October 1998 (ducts) by Dr Michael Turner of English Heritage.

A watching brief was required on the drain repair because although work would generally follow the line of the existing drain, undisturbed deposits might be encountered. The electricity service trench would cross an area which had been previously excavated but where the depth of the archaeology which was discovered is unclear and might also uncover previously unrecorded remains.

The watching brief was commissioned by Hornagold & Hills, management consultants, on behalf of English Heritage. It was undertaken to a brief set by Dr Michael Turner of English Heritage.

2 Background

The archaeological background to this watching brief has been the subject of a separate desktop study and archaeological evaluation carried out in February 1996 (OAU 1996) in response to proposals by English Heritage to provide improved visitor facilities, car-parking and vehicle access. The results of this investigation are summarised below.

The site lies on a prominent hilltop at a height of 60 m OD on Claygate Beds.

The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record indicates no recorded pre-medieval archaeology in the immediate vicinity of the site. However the Eltham area does have a possible Roman farmstead 900 m north east beyond Eltham High Street and chance finds of Roman burial urns to the north and east.

Settlement on the site can be demonstrated from at least the 11th century onwards by archaeological and historical sources. The earliest recorded structure on the site, identified by Woods' excavations between 1975 and 1979 (Woods 1982) was a timber building dated to the late 11th century with two further phases of wooden building,

dating to the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The first substantial stone-built remains on the site belong to the late 13th century palace of Anthony Bek, the Bishop of Durham.

Little now remains of Bek's stone-built manorial complex although excavations in the 1950s revealed the western perimeter wall and two towers at its north-west and south-west corners. Woods' 1970s investigations revealed remains of possible chapel and hall structures. Bek passed the manor house to Edward II in 1311 and it was used extensively as a royal palace for the next 200 years with various additions and episodes of rebuilding particularly in the 14th century. During this period much of the surrounding area consisted of royal parkland. The focus of medieval settlement seems to have been to the north.

From the middle of the 16th century the importance of the palace declined and it fell into disrepair, becoming little more than a hunting lodge. During the Commonwealth, Colonel Nathaniel Rich appears to have demolished most of the buildings with the exception of the great hall. At this time the parks were also heavily plundered to provide timber for Cromwell's shipyards.

After the site had become little more than a picturesque ruin, in the 19th and 20th centuries a series of developments and new building took place culminating in 1933 with the acquisition of the lease of Eltham Palace from the crown by Stephen Courtauld. He completed the restoration of the Great Hall, demolished the 19th century tenements and constructed the new Eltham Hall, also undertaking extensive landscaping of the grounds.

The field evaluation by the OAU (OAU 1996) was carried out on land to the east and south-east of the moated site. A number of post-medieval features which were interpreted as field boundaries were noted as well as a possible prehistoric ditch, although no evidence for associated settlement was seen.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to excavate and record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), and in accordance with the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service Guidelines, in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

The excavation of the existing drainage pipe was observed on a single day and consisted of two hand dug test pits, Trench 1 and Trench 2 (Figure 2). The excavation of the service trench for the electricity ducts, Trench 3 (Figure 3) was carried out over a five day period during which an archaeologist was constantly present on site. This trench was partly dug by a Kubota mechanical excavator, the remainder being dug by hand.

The location of trenches was recorded. No significant archaeological features or finds were encountered so written descriptions of the trenches and the deposits present were

made using proforma sheets. Trenches 1 and 2 only disturbed modern backfill of the pipe trench so context numbers were not allocated. However, because of the variations encountered, the deposits in Trench 3 were recorded with individual context numbers. Four sample sections were drawn (Figure 4). A colour slide and black and white print photographic record was also taken.

5 Results

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 2 x 1.5 m and was excavated to a depth of 1 m. No natural deposits were revealed. 0.85 m of friable mid-brown silty clay with modern inclusions of metal, slate, brick, tile and glass formed the backfill to the 1930s pipe trench. This was overlain by 0.15 m of friable mid-brown silty clay topsoil and covered with turf. No archaeological deposits were seen.

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 1.5 x 1 m and was excavated to a depth of 0.5 m. No natural deposits were revealed. 0.3 m of friable mid-brown silty clay with modern inclusions of metal, slate, brick, tile and glass formed the backfill to the 1930s pipe trench. This was overlain by 0.2 m of topsoil. No archaeological deposits were seen.

Trench 3

Trench 3 ran for a total length of 67 m, was 0.6 m in width and was excavated to a depth of 0.8 m. The trench was 1m in width for the first 1.5 m at the north-eastern end to allow ducts to be fed out from the boiler room and it became shallower in the last 4 m approaching the squash courts at the south-western end due to the falling away of the present ground surface.

Trench 3 can be divided into four parts which coincide with current ground use (Figure 3), each of which was recorded by means of a sample section (Figure 4). Starting at the north-eastern end and working towards the south-west these are:

1) The area of roadway from the boiler house to the central grassed area, a distance of 20.5 m. A general make up deposit (3) of 0.5 m observed thickness, comprising brick, slate and other building materials of modern origin in a matrix of sand and gravel, was overlain by a foundation deposit (2) for the road which was of virtually identical character but had been compacted to form a more stable layer. This foundation was overlain by a reddish brown and then a greyish black tarmac road surface (1) of 0.1 m thickness. This area had a number of service pipes and cables running across it but in most cases construction cuts for these were not seen indicating that the make up deposits were laid down more recently and around the services.

2) The central grassed area enclosed by the turning circle, a distance of 22.5 m. A 0.6 m thick, friable mid-brown silty clay (5) containing brick and chalk chips and small flints (<20mm diameter) changing to light brown sand at the south-western end was seen. It is probably an imported deposit used to backfill the area of the 1970s

excavations and for general landscaping. This was overlain by 0.2 m of friable mid-greyish brown sandy clay topsoil (4).

3) The south-western arc of the turning circle, a distance of 6.5 m. A 0.5 m thick, friable mid-greyish brown silty clay (7), the base of which was not seen in the excavation was noted. Although it coincided with the area of the road above and its relationship with adjoining deposits was not fully clear, it seems that this layer was overlain or abutted by them and had been left *in situ* under the line of the road while deposits either side were removed. It could therefore be the earliest deposit seen but no positive dating evidence for it could be found. Layer 7 was overlain by a 0.2 m thick foundation deposit (6) for the road which comprised brick, slate and other building materials of modern origin in a matrix of sand and gravel. This foundation was overlain by a reddish brown and then a greyish black tarmac road surface (1) of 0.1 m thickness.

4) The grassed area sloping down to the squash courts at the south-western end of the trench, a distance of 17.5 m. A friable mid-brown silty clay (9) containing brick chips, charcoal, small flints (<20mm) and pieces of metal and string, was seen to a maximum depth of 0.6 m above the base of the trench. This layer was of modern origin and appears to be a landscaping deposit. This was overlain by 0.2 m of friable mid-greyish brown sandy clay topsoil (8).

In each of these four areas the natural was not seen, no archaeological features were observed and no pre-modern finds were present.

6 Discussion

In Trenches 1 and 2 the excavation to uncover and repair the drainage pipes only disturbed backfilling deposits associated with their installation, which is thought to have taken place in the 1930s.

The 1970s excavations demonstrated the presence of archaeological remains in the area of Trench 3, and indeed these were exposed and on display for some period of time. They were not uncovered by the present works and presumably lie beneath the impact of the service trench. The backfill of this excavated area was observed under the central grassed area and it is understood that the excavation was covered over as part of a general landscaping of the site when it was taken over by the Ministry of Defence. The similar nature of the layers to the south-west would appear to confirm this. A gardener involved at the time implied that a large quantity of topsoil had been imported to Eltham Palace from elsewhere during this process.

The area under the road to the north-east lies inside the moat adjacent to the entrance to the Palace across the medieval bridge. This area has been extensively dug away in recent times and also has numerous services laid through it. These modern make up deposits could well be part of the same landscaping process referred to above.

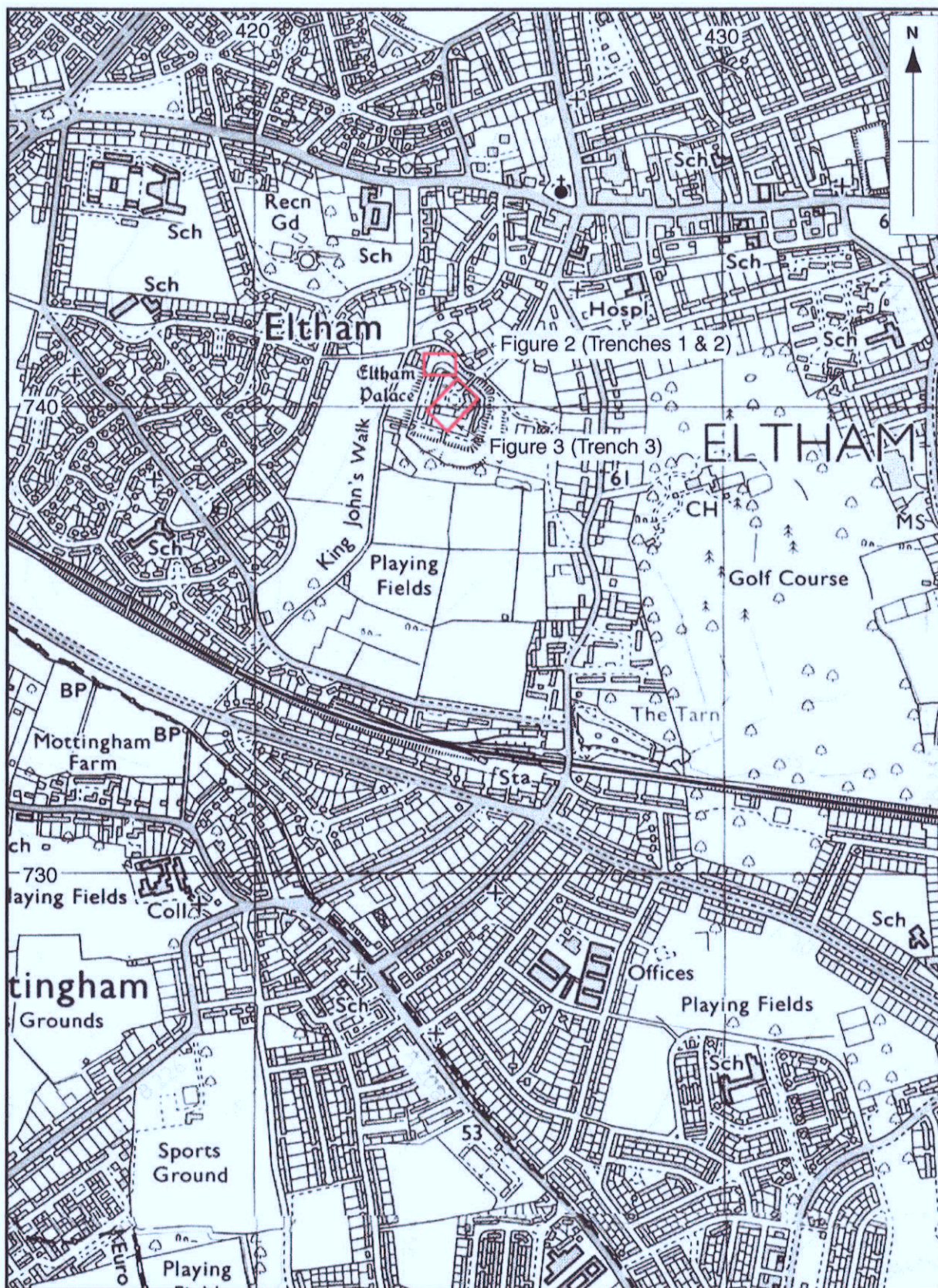
With the possible exception of the silty clay deposit of uncertain date under the road to the south west, all the deposits appear to be of 20th century origin and relate to fairly recent activity on the site. No archaeological finds or features were revealed although it is probable that these might survive at lower levels.

References.

Oxford Archaeological Unit 1996, *Eltham Palace, London Borough of Greenwich, Archaeological Evaluation*, (unpublished client report).

Wilkinson D (ed) 1992, *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).

Woods H 1982, Excavations at Eltham Palace, 1975-9 *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 33, 215-65.



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0 0.5 1 km
scale 1:12,500

Figure 1: Site Location

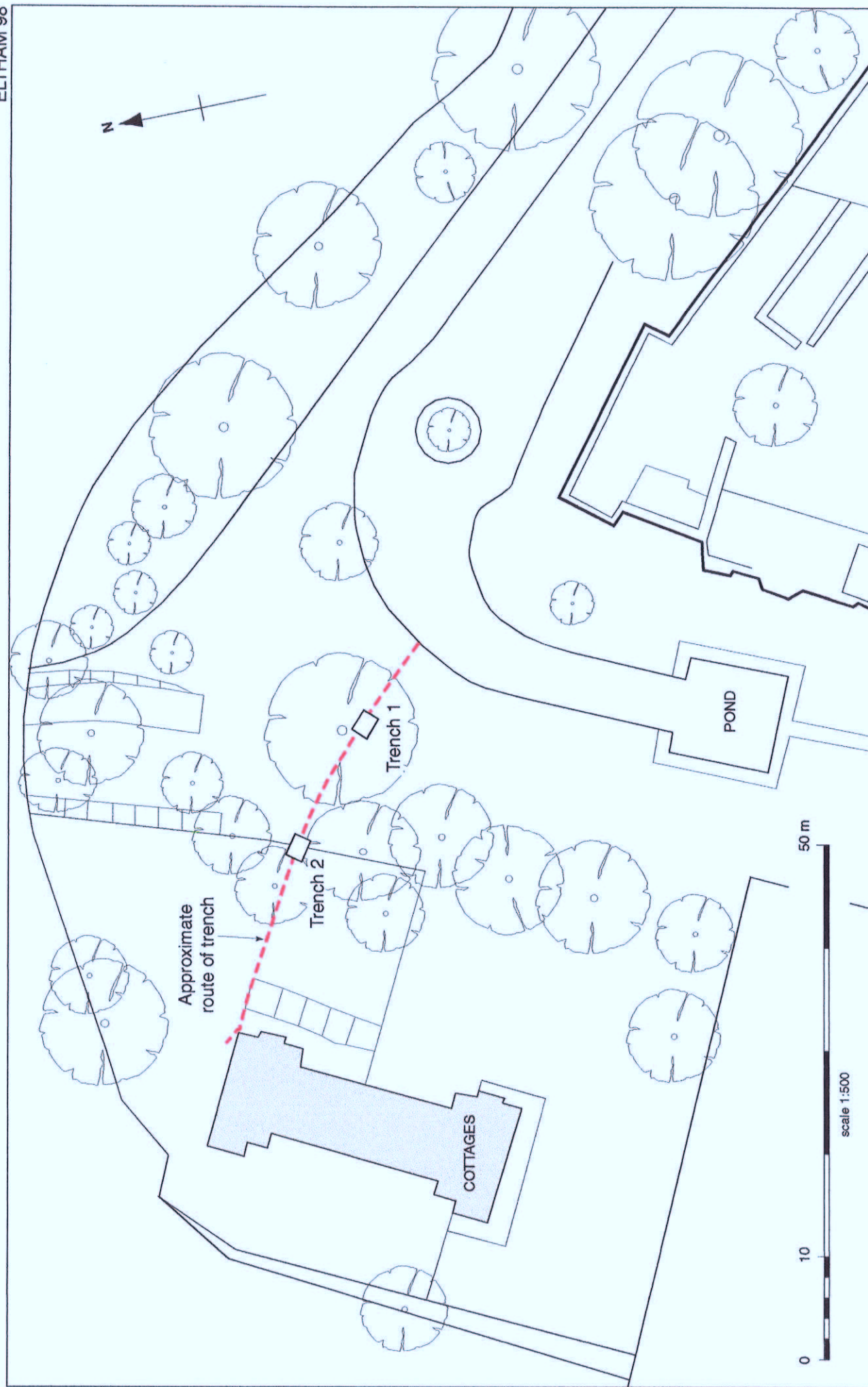


Figure 2: Location plan of Trenches 1 and 2

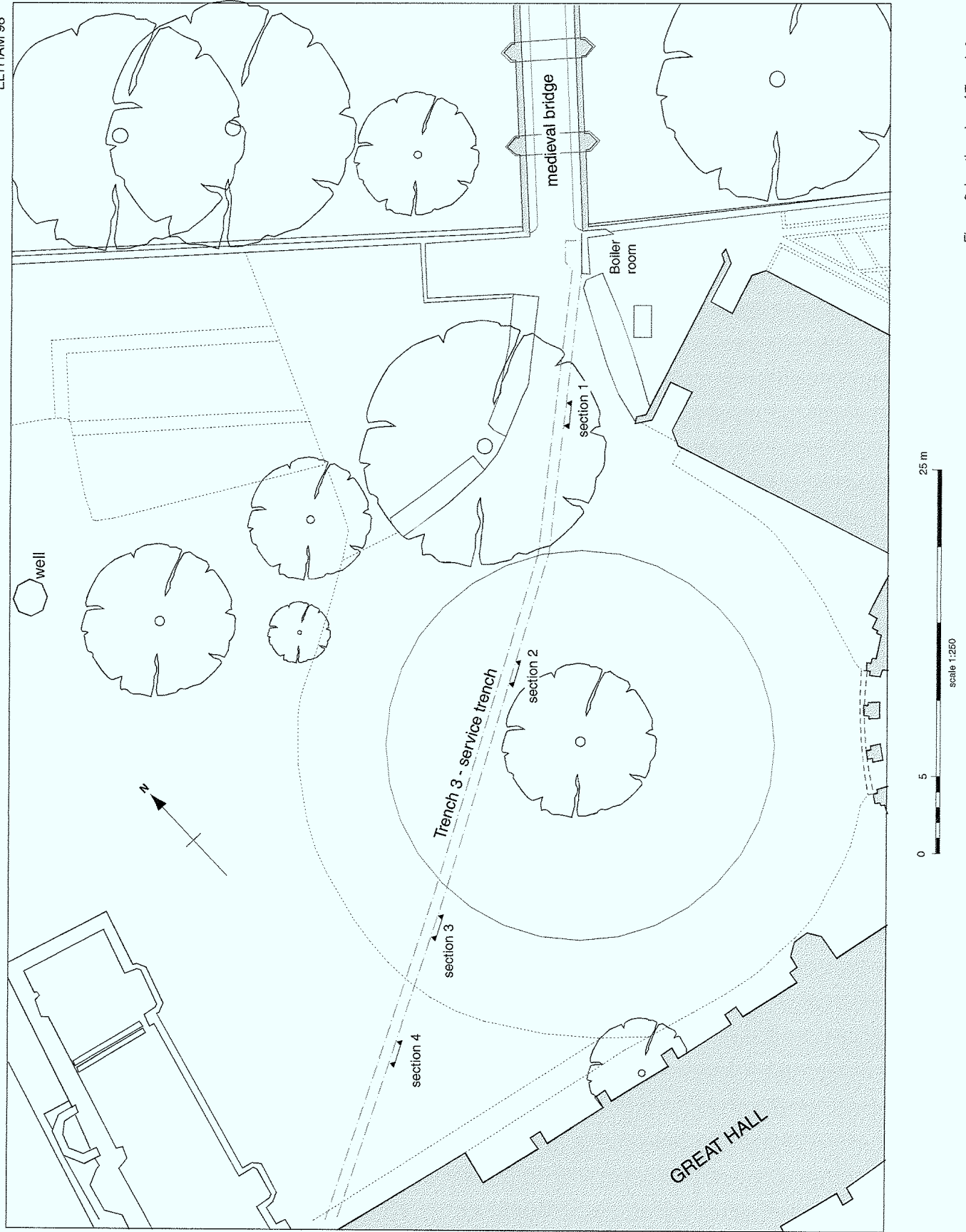
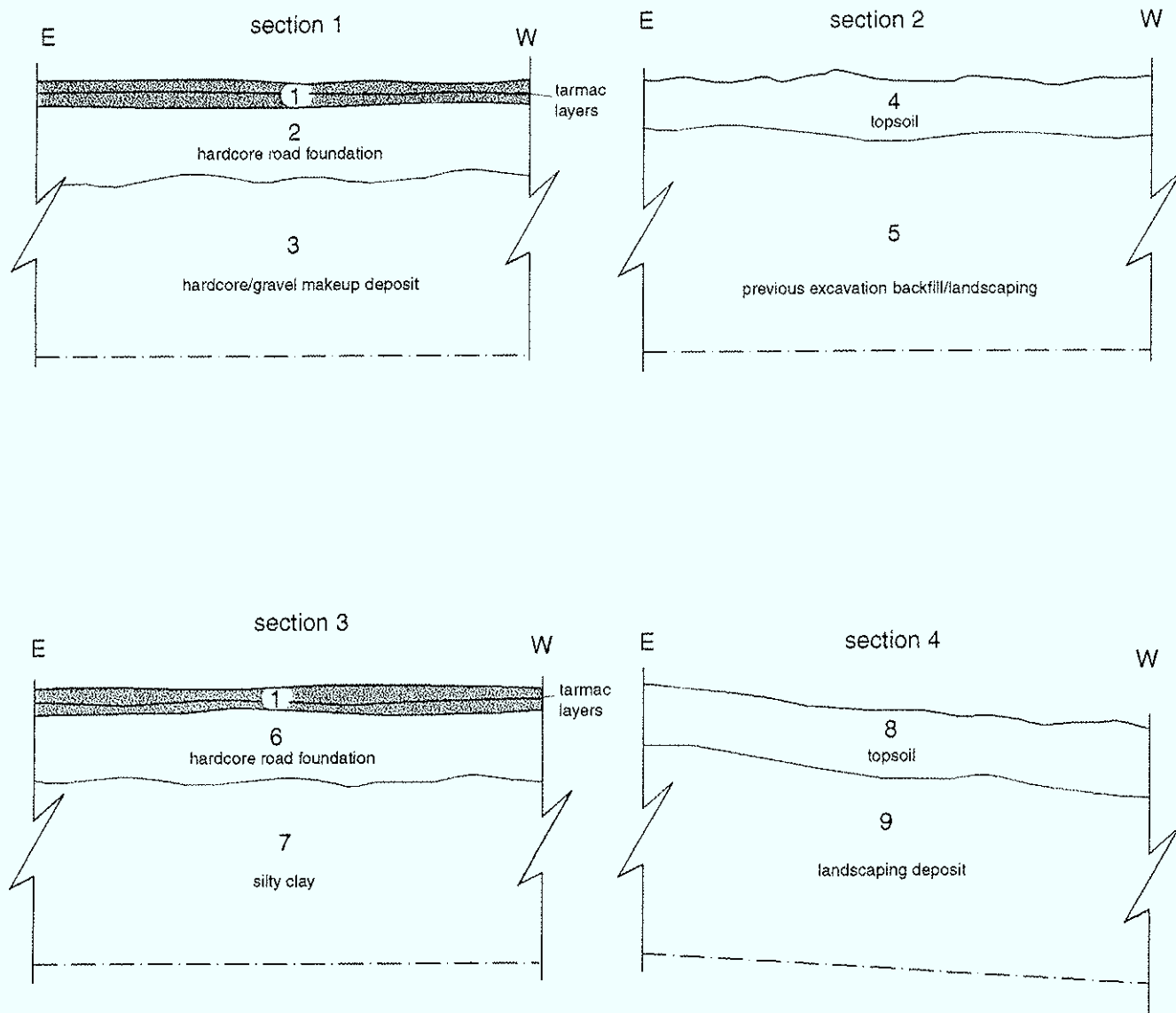


Figure 3: location plan of Trench 3



Sections drawn from current ground surface

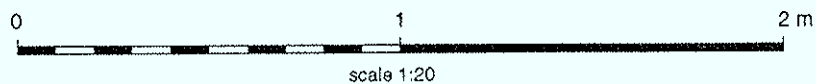


Figure 4: Sample section drawings of Trench 3 excavation



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