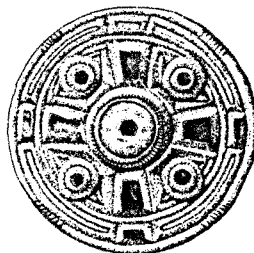


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Archaeological Field Unit

Earthwork Platforms at Manor Farm, Stow Longa

Paul Spoerry & Jonathan Last

1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report A96

Commissioned by Mr C.M. Convine

**Earthwork Platforms at Manor Farm, Spaldwick Road, Stow Longa,
Huntingdonshire**

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1996

Report No A96

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SUMMARY

In January 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation by means of limited linear trenching in a plot of land off Spaldwick Road, Stow Longa, Huntingdonshire (TL 511/271). Earthworks visible on the site were demonstrated to be mainly the result of 19th and 20th century dumping and make-up, with the exception of a probable house platform by the road frontage which was associated with finds of late medieval and early modern pottery.

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EARTHWORK PLATFORMS AT MANOR FARM, SPALDWICK ROAD, STOW LONGA, HUNTINGDONSHIRE (TL 511/271)

1 INTRODUCTION

Evaluation trenching on two proposed house plots adjacent to Manor Farm, Spaldwick Road, Stow Longa was carried out in the first week of January 1995. The work was commissioned by Mr Convine of Jessamine House Farm in response to a brief provided by the Archaeology Section Development Control Office at Cambridgeshire County Council.

Only two of the four plots covered by the brief were examined. Plot 1 had yet to be bought, but was covered by an earlier permission, and Plot 2 had already been built on under the earlier permission. Thus only Plots 3 and 4 (the south-western half of the area) were evaluated.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Stow Longa lies some 12km to the west of Huntingdon, approximately equidistant between Spaldwick and Kimbolton (Fig. 1). The evaluation area consisted of 0.28ha of pasture land north-east of the village centre. It lies at a height of about 68m OD, on Boulder Clay which caps the top of the ridge on which Stow Longa is situated. This ridge lies between the River Kym and Alconbury Brook systems, both tributaries of the River Great Ouse, and it provided a favourable position for the siting of several villages in the post-Roman period. However, the north-west/south-east alignment of this and other ridges and small valleys, which provide the most obvious choices for routeways linking settlements in the area, is at odds with the current road system, which exhibits a pronounced north-east/south-west orientation. It has been suggested that earlier trackways may have exhibited the former, more natural alignment but that they were replaced by north-east/south-west routes linking the major roads which eventually became the A14 and A45 (C. Taylor, pers. comm.). At Stow this reorientation may be evidenced by the medieval church lying on what is now a minor route running north-west out of the village.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The evaluation area fronts onto the south side of Spaldwick Road at the north-east end of the modern village. The road represents the main thoroughfare in the later phase of village alignment, and thus it is likely that this area does *not* contain remains from the earliest phases of the settlement.

The origins of the village can be traced back at least as far as the late Saxon period. A piece of pre-conquest stonework inside the church (RCHME 1926: 260) hints at an early foundation, whilst the village/parish name and relationships with other parishes and manors in the immediate area suggest that a large pre-conquest estate may have been centred on Stow, before it was transferred to Spaldwick (Taylor 1990: 74). The village formed a hamlet

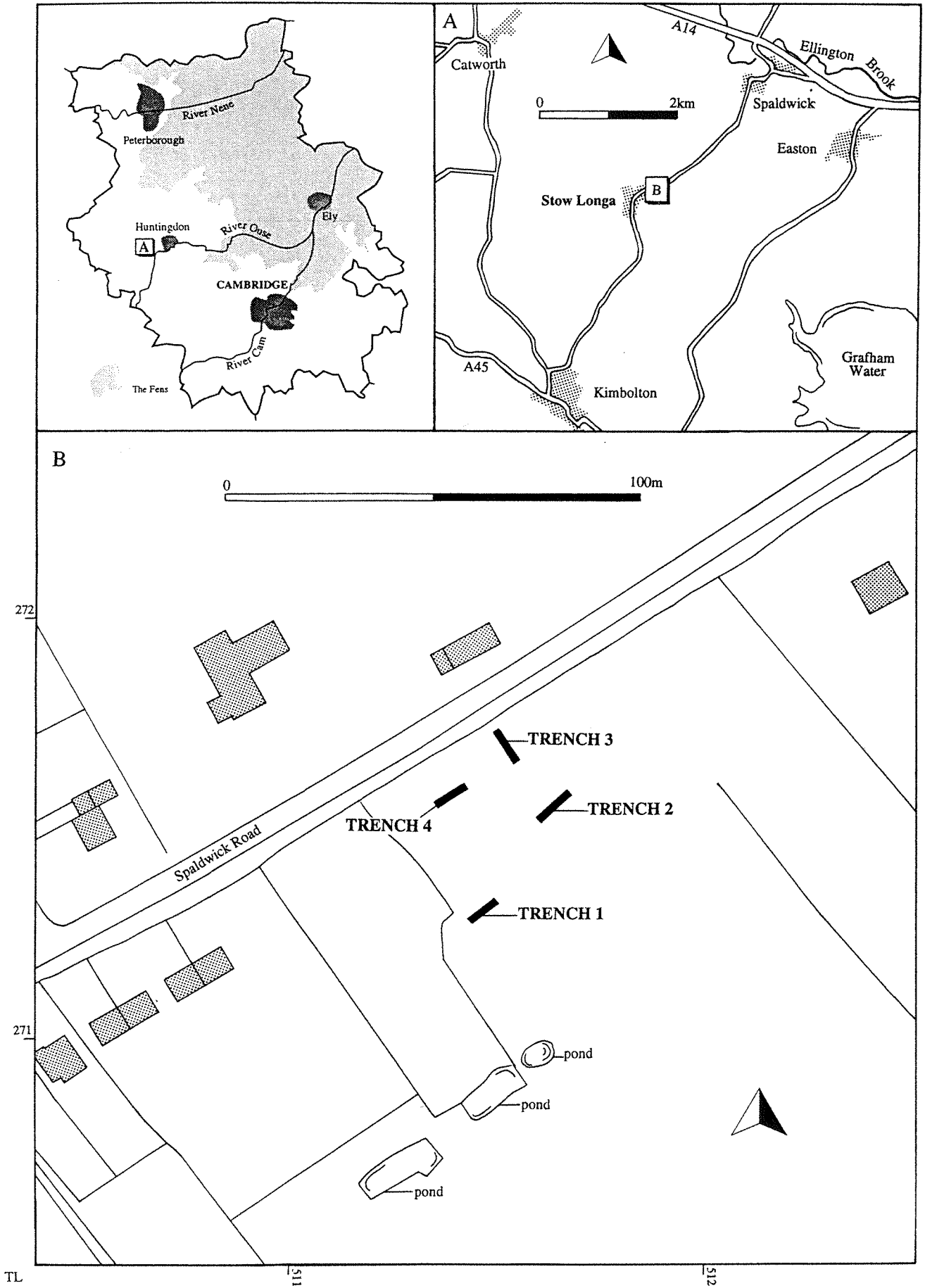


Figure 1 Site Location Map and Trench Plan

within the soke of Spaldwick and passed with the latter to the Bishops of Lincoln in the early 12th century. The estate remained the property of Lincoln until 1547 (*ibid.*: 72)

The present site was identified as particularly significant because of its proximity to Manor Farm, its position on the Spaldwick Road frontage and the presence of ridge and furrow earthworks immediately to the rear of the site (SMR 9973). On an initial visit it was confirmed that there were also earthworks within the site, probably relating to occupation on the street frontage, and perhaps representing platforms and quarrying.

The Manor farmhouse demolished in 1904 is believed to have been constructed in 1622 (VCH III: 101). Before that there may have been a manorial centre in this area; certainly earthworks suggest that part of a moat lies to the north of the Spaldwick road (SMR 703), although this identification is not absolutely certain. The early 17th century date of the Manor construction and the 15th century village cross (RCHME 1926: 262) suggest, at the earliest, a late medieval date for the realignment of the village onto the present Spaldwick Road.

4 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation involved the excavation of four trenches, totalling about 35m in length, using a JCB equipped with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket. The trench locations are shown on Figure 1.

After turf, topsoil and some overburden were removed by machine, the trenches were cleaned, archaeological features and layers were photographed, and some features were excavated by hand. Recording conformed to the standard Archaeology Field Unit methodology, with planning and section drawing at appropriate scales, as well as a full photographic and written record.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

This trench, 7.6m long, was positioned in order to study the origins and nature of a south-east to north-west aligned scarp or platform edge (Fig. 2). The platform was found to be originally a rise in the level of natural boulder clay deposits, at most 0.5m high. The hollow above and behind the rise, to the south-west, was filled in with flints and building rubble, perhaps in three phases (102-104) of which the last two at least are relatively recent (19th to early 20th century). Below and to the north-east of the scarp, the lower part of the field also experienced some dumping of stone make-up (106), but with much less building rubble. This activity is probably as recent as those deposits to the west of the scarp. The landowner stated that in the early part of this century the field was regularly used for the dumping of stones removed from arable land. These served to fill in wet hollows and provide rough yard surfaces. It would seem that this sort of action is the origin of the lower make-up layers seen in Trench 1, with the hollow above the scarp being filled in with building rubble at a later date. It is therefore suggested that this

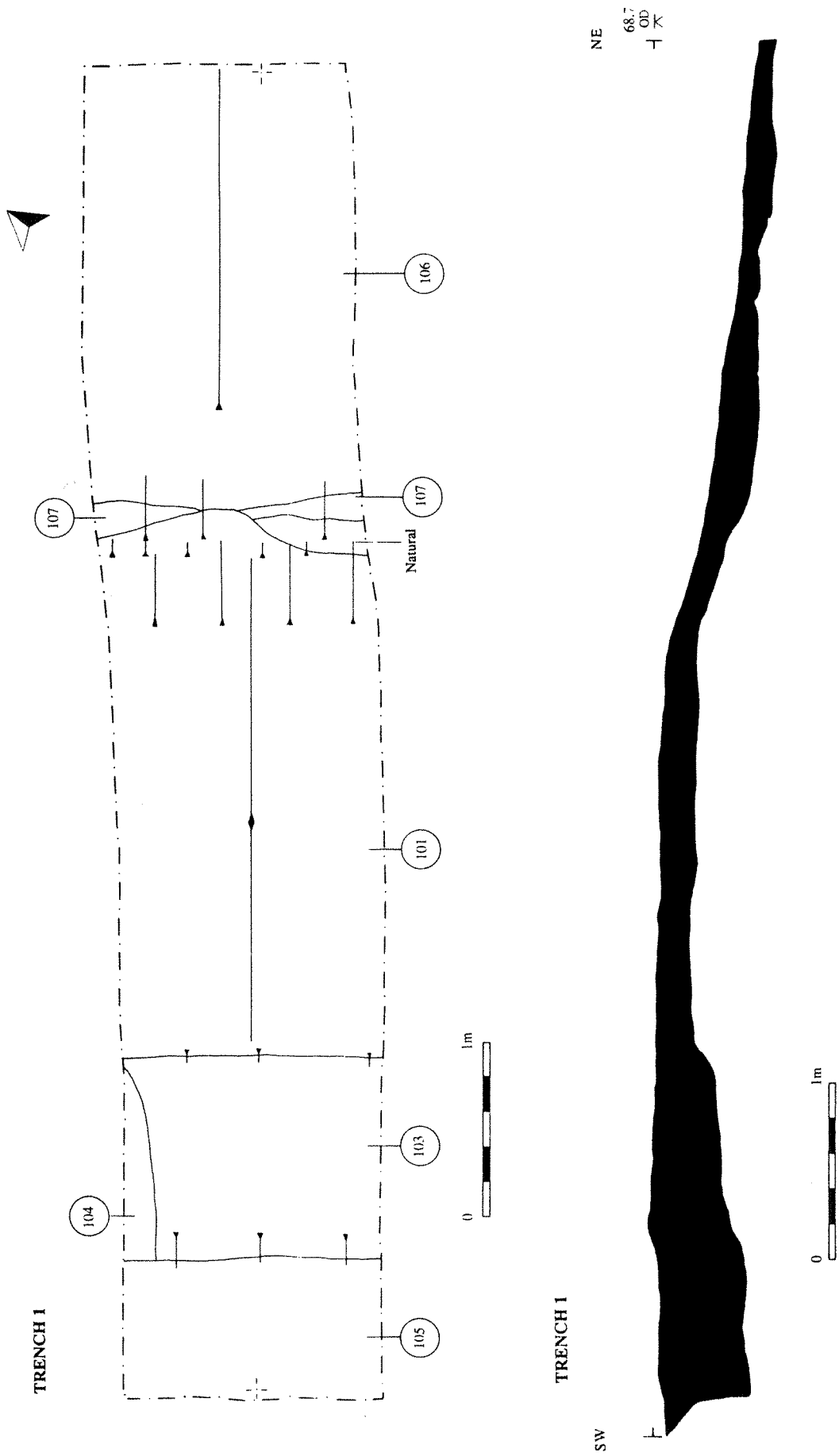


Figure 2 Plan of Trench 1 and Profile of Ground Make-up over Trench

'platform' does not derive from occupation or the construction of other buildings.

5.2 Trench 2

This trench, 9.5m long, was positioned in order to study a relatively flat area behind the frontage earthworks (see 5.3 below), which had the appearance of a yard or the base for a structure (Fig. 3). On removal of the turf, topsoil and a thin subsoil (up to 0.2m in total) a number of stony layers (204-207) were observed across the trench. These were very similar to layers seen in Trench 1 and are likely to be rough yard surfaces created through the dumping of field stones.

A ditch (210), 1.6m wide and running roughly north-north-east to south-south-west, was cut through these rough surfaces. Although not bottomed due to flooding, it seemed to be straight-sided and the fill contained post-medieval building rubble and pottery (Fig 3). Later it had a slightly narrower recut on the same alignment, but displaced slightly to the east (201). This again produced building material and pottery, the latter dating to the 19th or early 20th centuries.

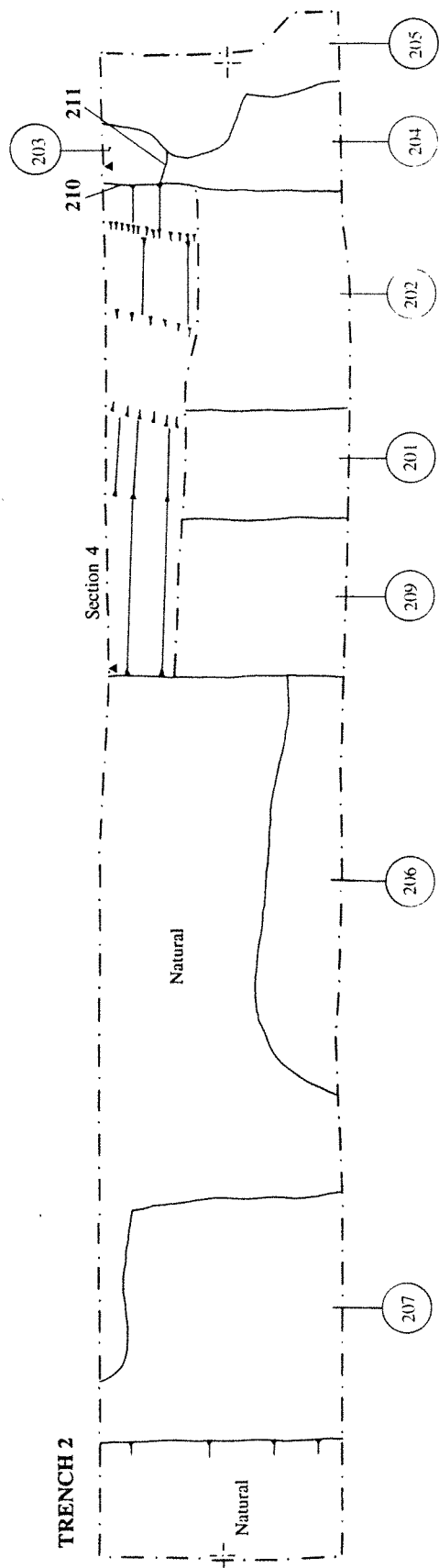
One earlier feature (211) was noted, visible in section on the west side of the ditch and sealed beneath the rough cobbled surface (205). This may have been a circular pit, but it was not excavated and no finds were recovered from its fill.

The ditch represents a drainage feature, a boundary, or both, although there has been no boundary in this area within living memory. Its alignment is roughly perpendicular to the Spaldwick Road frontage, but this may be coincidental. A number of drainage gullies are visible in the rest of the field linking the permanent ponds and low-lying seasonally wet areas. The ditch is perhaps more likely to be an element in this system than a true field boundary.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was located to test for occupation on the main frontage 'platform'. It was just under 9m long, and was cut approximately perpendicular to the road and platform edge, starting 1.4m south-east of the hedge line at the road boundary and running over the platform and into a slightly lower area behind.

Below the turf and topsoil (about 0.15m deep), the majority of the trench was covered by a mixed deposit of building rubble (302). This was very variable in character, containing lenses of clay and burning, chalk fragments, brick, stones, daub (mostly burnt) and charcoal. In one area a possible relict of a cobbled surface was identified; however, this may have been purely a dump of stones which were accidentally pressed into the rubble beneath. The rubble deposit mostly appeared to be no more than 0.15m deep, and in some areas rather less. It lay on top of the main 'body' of the platform, formed of yellow-green clay which may have been *in situ* boulder clay but had undoubtedly experienced some landscaping to form the platform itself (Fig. 4). The front (north-west) face of the platform was steeply scarped down towards the road, starting about 2m from the hedge and dipping at least 0.6m (it was not bottomed). The only dateable artefacts from this trench were two pieces of late medieval pottery (1350-1550), and one piece of early post-medieval whiteware (1550-1750), all recovered from the rubble layer. The implications



SECTION 4



Figure 3 Plan of Features in Trench 2 and Section of Ditch 210

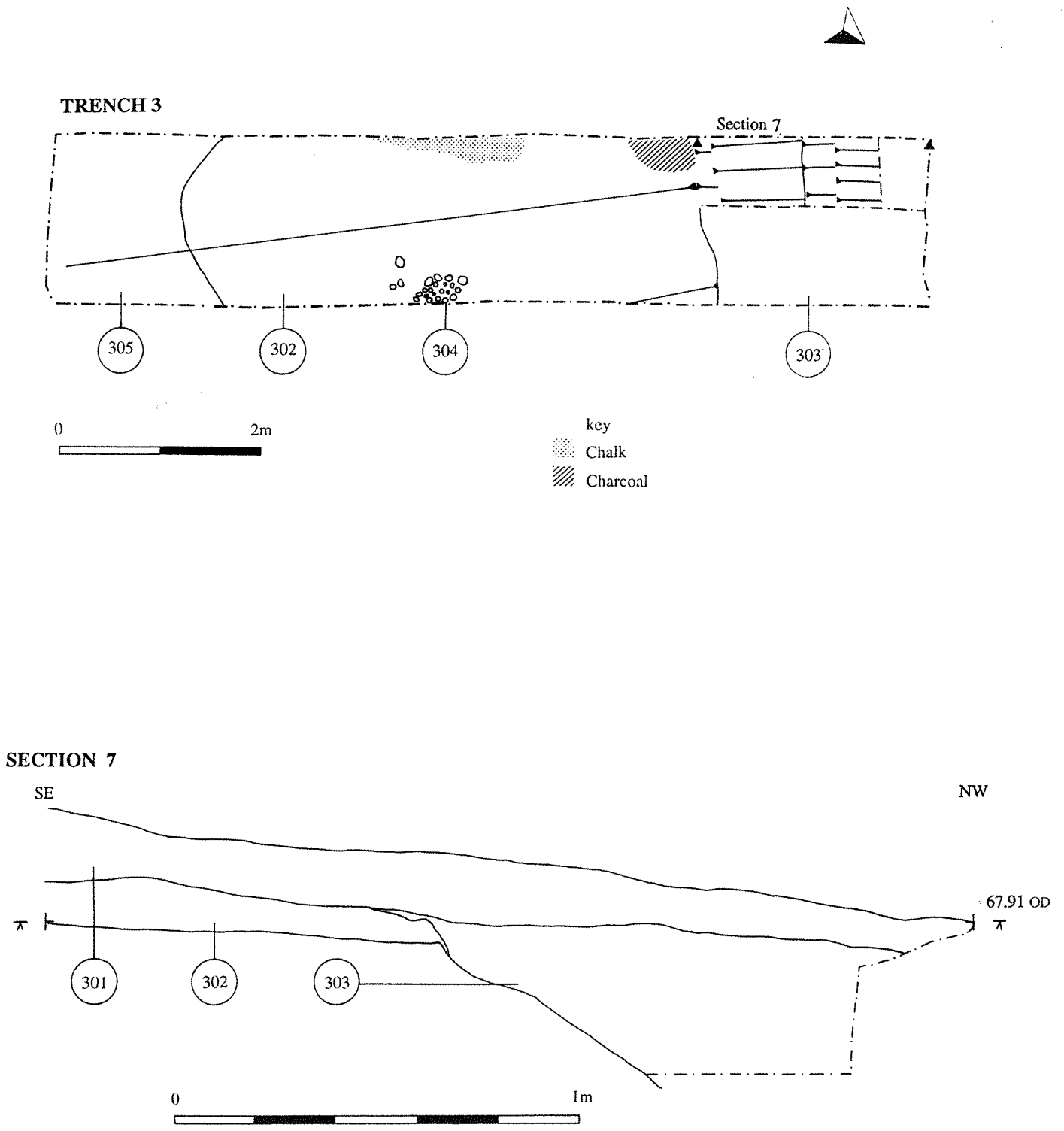


Figure 4 Plan and Section of Platform in Trench 3

are that this deposit derives from a building, possibly with late medieval origins, that was demolished sometime after 1550, and probably before the modern period. Although it is likely the building was indeed located here, no structural evidence to tie it to this location was recovered, and it remains possible that the rubble was imported to the site in order to level up the platform.

5.4 Trench 4

This trench was located parallel with the road line, but set back several metres, and to the south west of Trench 3. It measured 8.5m in length and was placed in a low-lying area where it was hoped yard surfaces or occupation features might be found. The south-western part of the trench lay over a slightly raised piece of ground, less than 5m across. A spread of stones (including many flints) within a subsoil-like matrix lay beneath the topsoil in the raised area. This deposit also contained some brick and tile and early modern pottery. Another spread of stones, this time almost all flints, was found below the topsoil at the eastern end of the trench. Again the brick and pottery suggest a date in the last two centuries.

The area seems to have been used as rough-surfaced yards. This is in keeping with the evidence from Trenches 1 and 2 and with the recent verbal history of the site.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation work has demonstrated that the earthworks on the part of the site studied are of variable quality and origin, although all archaeological activity seen in Trenches 1, 2 and 4 seems to relate to landscaping and field enhancement over the last two hundred years or so. The exception is Trench 3, where a structure may have been built on the (specially created) platform in the late medieval period. This probably lasted for two centuries at most, and once the building was demolished the platform was soon incorporated into the field as a whole. Thus significant sub-surface deposits appear to be very limited on this site, probably being confined to the frontage platform itself.

This frontage platform appears to be the surviving southern end of a longer platform, or a group of two or three, that survived until building works started on Plot 2 to the north-east in late 1994. Evidence from the other trenches in the present area suggests that this group of structures is not accompanied at the south-west end by dense occupation-related archaeology; it may well be that the structures themselves were not domestic. Nevertheless the value of the frontage earthworks before construction on Plot 2 would have been quite significant, in an area of mostly arable land-use where well-preserved earthwork features are not common. The context of the surviving platform has either been mostly lost, now that over 50% of the activity zone has been removed by the development, or is ephemeral and difficult to recover from small evaluation trenches. The true nature of activity on the surviving platform has therefore not been determined by evaluation, but this is in part due to the circumstances in which the project was carried out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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