EYNSHAM (OX)

THE

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

WHARF FARM,
EYNSHAM, OXON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
October 1990

WHARF FARM

EYNSHAM, OXON

SP 095 449

INTRODUCTION

In October 1990 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an assessment of the archaeological deposits on five fields of Wharf Farm, Eynsham. The farm is situated on the Cassington Road to the east of Eynsham. The present landuse is pasture with one ploughed field in the south east.

GEOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located on the flood plain of the rivers Evenlode and Thames to the north west of their confluence. The usual soil profile consists of the modern dark brown loam ploughsoil above a red brown, slightly loamy clay. Below this are deposits of alluvium 0·4 m to 1·9 m thick overlying gravel. Several relict stream courses cross the area (Fig. 1).

The known archaeological sites in the area are situated on the Second Gravel Terrace on the east side of the Evenlode; the nearest is the late Iron Age enclosure of Big Rings, Cassington. There is also a dense scatter of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age material 500 m to the west of the present site. Archaeological finds on the Wharf Farm site consist of pre-industrial iron slag together with tile fragments and some undiagnostic abraded pot sherds.

STRATEGY

Approximately 1% of the fields were excavated, by a 360° excavator equipped with a 6ft ditching bucket, as a series of trenches 30 m x 1·9 m (Fig. 1). The archaeological features revealed were investigated by hand to discern their function, size, state of preservation and to recover dating evidence. A large number of tree throw holes were also excavated to recover dating evidence. Relict stream channels were excavated by machine and samples were taken from a majority of these to assess their potential for macroscopic plant preservation.

RESULTS

Gullies (Trenches 5,10)

In trench 5 a possible gully [5/7] was discovered. It was mostly destroyed by a later hollow way [5/6] and appeared to be later than the earliest alluviation (Fig. 2). This gully produced two flint flakes and a sherd of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age pottery.

Trench 10 revealed two possible gullies almost parallel. The top fill of these gullies was the brown alluvial clay which overlay a mottled brown and blue clay. No finds were recovered from these features.

Posthole (Trench 44)

Trench 44 contained a possible posthole cut into an area of root disturbance. It was filled with alluvium and produced no finds.

Hollow Ways (Trenches 3,5,7,11,17,43)

Trenches 3,5,7 and 43 contained wide features sealed only by top soil and filled with horizontal layers of mixed clay and dirty gravel [3/5,3/6,5//6,7/5], these were interpreted as hollow ways (Fig. 2). Trenches 11 and 17 revealed a shallow layer of clay compressed into the natural gravel with the alluvium above being darker than elsewhere in the trenches [11/10,17/5]. These were also interpreted as hollow ways. The hollow ways were visible as earthworks (Fig. 1) and were presumably farm trackways as they do not appear on any map from 1797 onwards. Finds from the hollow ways were four bones, one flint flake, one flint core and an unidentifiable iron object.

Tree Throw Holes and Natural Hollows

Over half of the trenches revealed large irregular features filled with alluvium and disturbed gravel. The deposits are interpreted as the result of the uprooting of trees. Five of the 94 tree throw holes contained artefacts of either flint or bone (Table 1). Several trenches revealed other irregular, shallow features filled with alluvium, which were interpreted as natural depressions in the gravel. One of these hollows produced a flint flake.

Palaeoenvironmental Evidence

Samples were taken of waterlogged deposits from the bottom of 16 relict stream courses. Only one seed case was observed in a sample from trench 11, so preservation of macroscopic plant remains is generally poor.

Conclusions

The sparseness of archaeological features suggests there was no settlement on the site. The 14 flint artefacts, however, indicate some prehistoric activity, possibly associated with the dense scatter of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age material to the west.

G. Hey

A.R. Whiteman

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Table 1

Context No	Type	Finds
Trench 3		
5	Hollow Way	2 Bones
		1 Flint Flake
6	Hollow Way	
Trench 5		
5	River Channel	
6	Hollow Way	
7	? Gully	2 Flint Flakes
		1 Sherd LBA/EIA Pot
Trench 10		
5	Tree Throw Hole	1 Flint Blade
6	Gully	
7	Gully	
8	Tree Throw Hole	6 Flint Flakes
9	Tree Throw Hole	
10	Modern Feature	
Trench 11		
5	Tree Throw Hole	
6	Tree Throw Hole	
7	Tree Throw Hole	
8	Root Hole	1 Bone
9	River Channel	
10	Hollow Way	1 Flint Core
11	Tree Throw Hole	
12	Tree Throw Hole	1 Cow Jaw Bone
13	River Channel	
Trench 17		
5	Hollow Way	2 Bones
		1 Iron Object
6	Tree Throw Hole	
7	Tree Throw Hole	
8	Tree Throw Hole	
Trench 24		
5	Tree Throw Hole	1 Flint Scaper
Trench 29		
5	Natural Hollow	1 Flint Flake
6	Tree Throw Hole	1 Flint Flake
		5 Bone Fragments
Trench 44		
5	Possible Posthole	
6	River Channel	
7	River Channel	

Trenches with features and/or finds

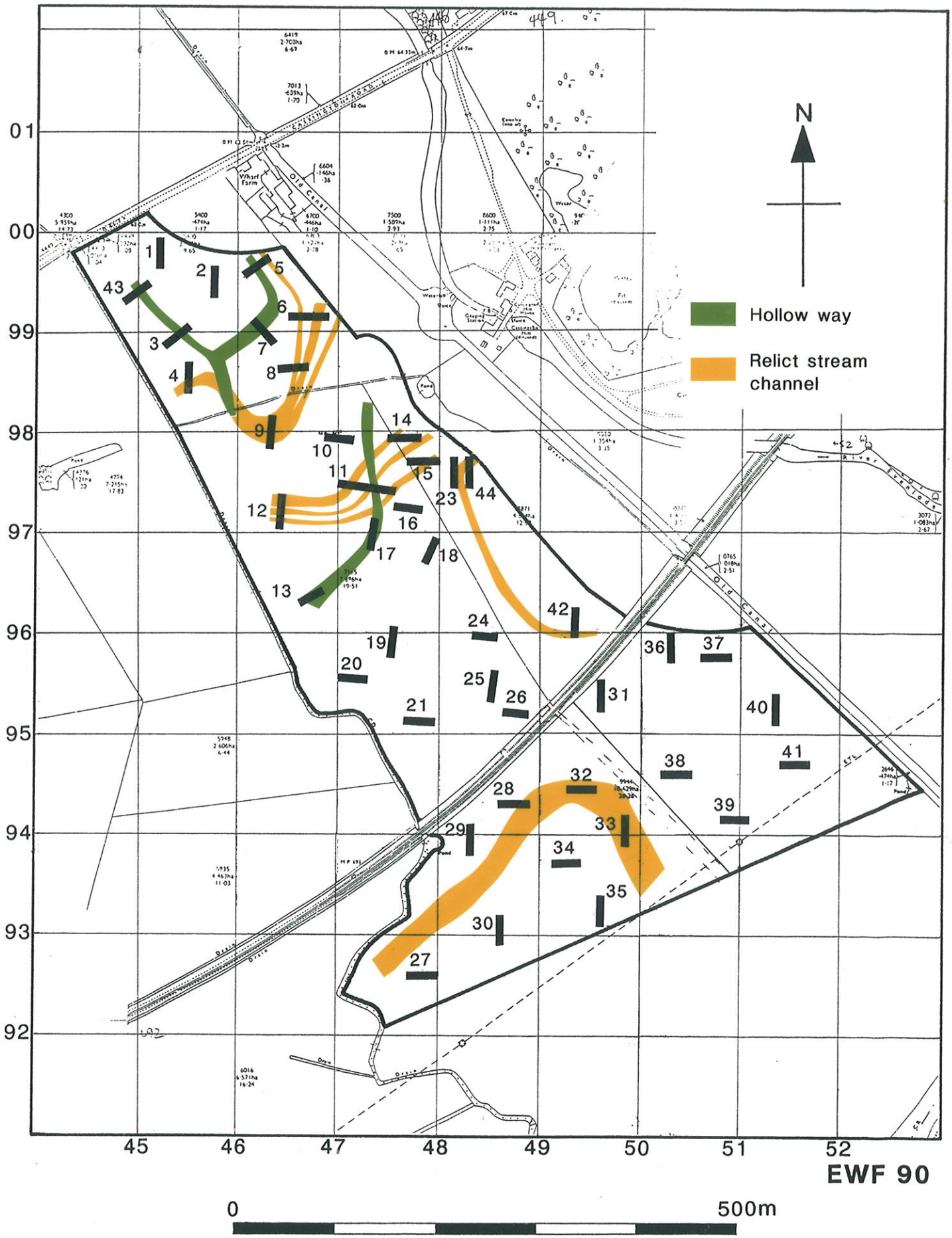
N
Hollow way
Relict stream channel
01
00
99
98
97
96
95
94
93
92
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
EWF 90
0
500m

fig 1