

THE
OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



EIGHT ACRE FIELD,
RADLEY, OXON.
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
October 1990

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RADLEY, OXON.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT, SEPTEMBER 1990

In late September 1990 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an assessment of the archaeological deposits on Eight Acre Field, Lower Radley, Oxon. (OS grid reference SU 525980), in advance of the proposed extension of the Thrupp gravel extraction quarry of Tuckwell & Co. The site forms part of Goose Acre Farm S of Radley village and is a rough triangle, bounded on the E by the rail line, on the SW by Thrupp gravel quarry, on the W by a small pasture, and on the N by a larger ploughed field also attached to Goose Acre Farm (Fig. 1).

GEOLOGY, PEDOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies on the First Terrace of the Thames gravel deposits. Its northern boundary follows the bottom of the gentle escarpment which marks the edge of the Second Terrace. The usual soil profile consists of the modern dark clay loam ploughsoil above a band of paler silt clay loam, likely to be a former ploughsoil. Below this, in the greater part of the field, is a band of gravelly clay subsoil over gravel. The layer of gravelly clay shallows as the surface of the gravel rises gradually to the S, and then is replaced by a thick deposit of medium silty clay (Fig. 2).

Previous excavations in Thrupp gravel works in the field adjacent to the SW have produced considerable numbers of prehistoric features, including Neolithic habitation, an early Bronze Age cremation, and late Bronze Age pits. Barrow Hills, a line of prehistoric burial mounds, lay along a ridge NW of the site in upper Radley (Fig. 1). Iron Age houses and a Romano-British farmstead have also been found in Thrupp gravel works. A known Romano-British village on the edge of the Second Terrace in the field immediately N has been given legislative protection as Scheduled Monument OX 241. The abandoned system of fields associated with this village is likely to have extended for some distance around the Scheduled Monument site. Medieval ploughing has produced a pattern of ridges and furrows in the two pastures immediately W of the site.

STRATEGY

Approximately 2% of the field was excavated by a machine equipped with a 5 ft ditching bucket as a series of trenches 30 m x 1.6 m aligned with the Ordnance Survey grid (Fig. 2). A large proportion of the archaeological features revealed by this machine excavation were further investigated by hand to discern their function and size, and to recover dating evidence. Further trenches were machine excavated to determine the extent or orientation of features revealed by the initial trenching.

RESULTS (Fig. 3)

Treeholes and animal activity

Each of the trenches revealed large irregular features usually filled with a dark silt clay under the paler subsoil. These deposits are interpreted as the results of the uprooting of trees or more rarely of animal burrowing. Excavation of a number of these deposits produced no datable material, and it cannot be determined if clearance of the field for agriculture at a specific time occurred.

Ditches (Trenches 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13)

Many of the trenches contained small or medium-sized ditches, generally similar in profile (with sides sloping at 50 - 70° to a flat base) and in fill (dark brown clay loam or dark silt clay). Few of these ditches produced dating evidence, but their similarity of form and the fact that they form a reasonably coherent pattern leads to the conclusion that these features are broadly contemporary. Those ditches which contained artefacts are specified in Fig. 3. These artefacts were sherds of Romano-British pottery manufactured in the late 1st or 2nd century AD, with an occasional fragment of earlier (Iron Age) date.

All these ditches are overlain by the layer of pale subsoil and are cut into the gravelly clay and gravel; they do not appear to occur on the heavy clay zone in the S of the site. They seem to form the boundaries of roughly rectangular fields arranged in a pattern broadly parallel to the Thames, with the NW boundary to this pattern of fields being formed by the set of ditches passing through Trenches 2, 3 and 13. One of the ditches in Trench 9 (Fig. 4) is unusual in that it seems its last recut has been intentionally backfilled with clay.

Pits and postholes (Trenches 2, 7, 14)

Trench 2 contained a small post hole [2/5] in its W end, and a substantial pit [2/4] in its E end. Trench 7 and Trench 14 contained broad shallow pits [7/4] and [14/6]. All these features were filled with dark grey clays; none of these features produced any artefacts. Their fills are broadly similar to those found in the ditches, and these features are therefore likely to form part of the field system of the Roman period.

Gullies (Trenches 6, 10, 12)

In the S half of the site, but not entirely confined to the heavy clay zone, are a number of small shallow features with a pale blue-grey clay content in their fill. The number of finds in these gullies is low, but the gully in Trench 6 [6/4] and in Trench 10 [10/4] each contained a worked flint flake. Like the field ditches, these gullies are sealed by the layer of pale subsoil, but unlike the ditches they do not form a pattern across

the site, but curve round, apparently to enclose small isolated areas (Fig. 5). The size and shape of these features, the nature of their fills and the prehistoric artefacts contained in them argue for these gullies being the traces of Bronze Age or earlier activity. The small number of artefacts recovered from them does not allow accurate dating of these features, and may indicate that they are not in the vicinity of intensively used areas.

Environmental evidence

Most of the features which contained potsherds also produced slightly eroded pieces of large animal bone bearing butchering marks. The finer structures of these bones showed traces of mineralisation, so preservation of small bones and seeds by this process may have occurred. Small amounts of fine charcoal were noted in the darker fills of some of the features, indicating that carbonised seeds may be recovered in some instances. Sizeable pieces of wood charcoal (up to 2 cc.) were found in one of the gullies [12/5]. Although the site is low-lying, no waterlogged deposits were found in even the deepest features excavated.

CONCLUSIONS

This assessment has recovered the broad pattern of a system of fields on the First Terrace, likely to be agricultural, in use in the early Roman period (late 1st and 2nd century AD). This field system is likely to have been associated with the known Romano-British village E of Goose Acre Farm (Scheduled Monument OX 241). Several small gently curving gullies in the S half of the site probably mark earlier enclosures, perhaps of the Bronze Age. The low number of artefacts contained in these features may indicate that areas of intensive use are unlikely to be present on this site.

APPENDIX 1: FEATURES

Feature	Type	Shape	Width	Depth	Findings	Date
2/4	pit	round	1.70	0.90		
2/5	posth.	round	0.20	0.18		
2/6	ditch	linear	1.30	0.36		
2/7	ditch	linear	0.60	0.26		
2/8	ditch	linear	1.80	0.90	5 pot	Roman
3/4	ditch	linear	1.60	0.86	1 pot	Roman
3/5	ditch	linear	1.40	0.50		
4/4	gully	linear	0.60	0.24		
4/5	pit	round	1.40	0.30		
4/6	gully	curved	0.40	0.15		
4/7	posth.	round	0.30	0.08		
5/4	ditch	linear	0.76	0.48		
6/4	gully	curved	0.80	0.50	1 flake	prehist
6/5	ditch	linear	0.95	0.35		
7/4	pit	round	1.10	0.10		
8/4	ditch	linear	1.33	0.80	1 pot	Roman
8/5	ditch	linear	0.60	0.40		
8/6	ditch	linear	0.60	0.46		
8/7	ditch	linear	0.80	0.33		
9/4	ditch	linear	0.50	0.18		
9/5	ditch	linear	2.30	0.90		
9/6	ditch	linear	2.90	0.58		
10/4	gully	curved	0.45	0.30	1 flake	prehist
11/4	ditch	angled	0.50	0.43		
11/5	ditch	angled	0.70	0.40		
12/5	gully	curved	0.31	0.53		
12/6	gully	curved	0.38	0.45		
13/4	ditch	linear	1.70	-		
13/5	ditch	linear	1.20	-		
14/5	gully	curved	0.43	0.13		
14/6	pit	square	1.10	0.24		

Location plan RGAF 90

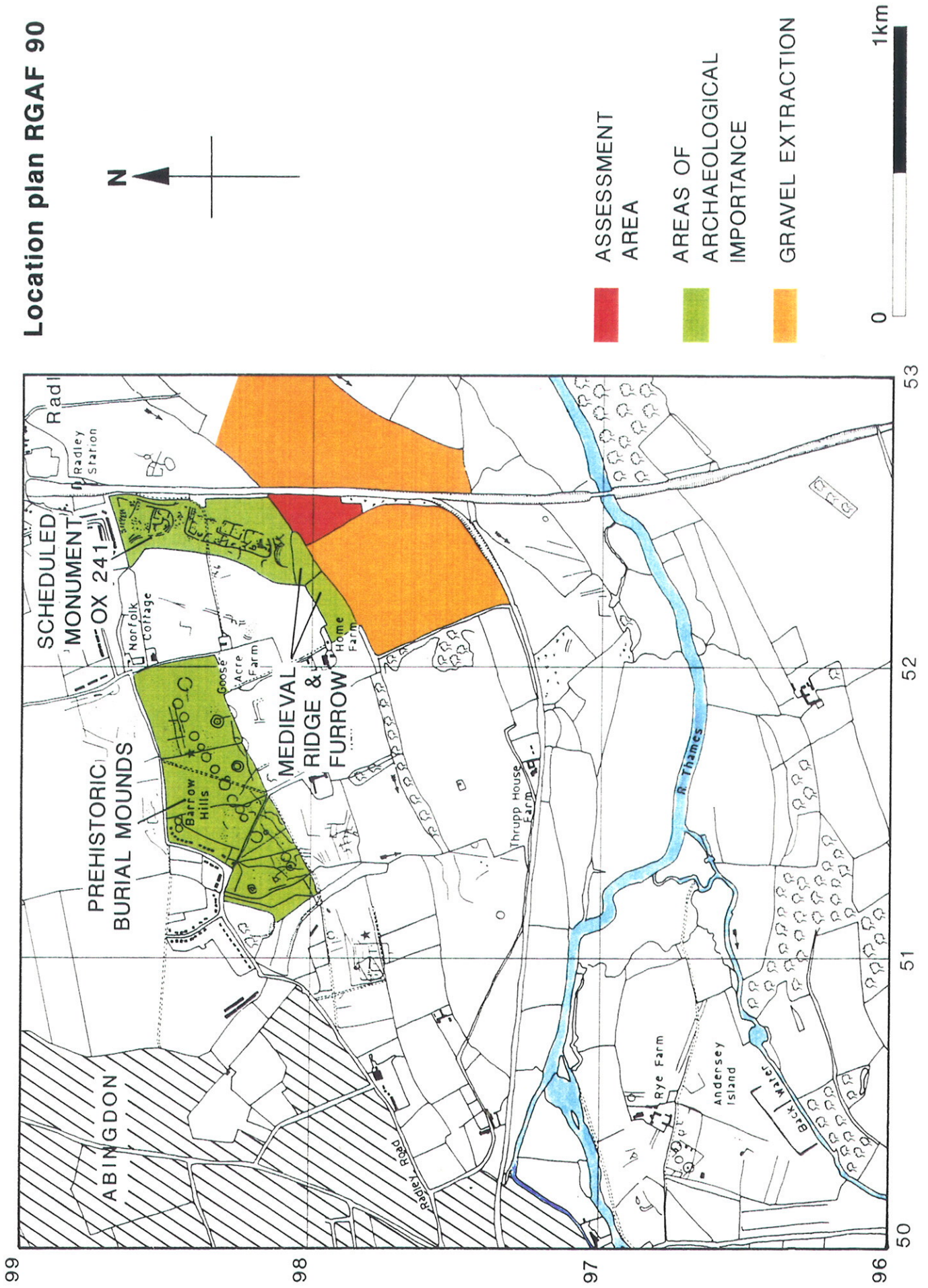
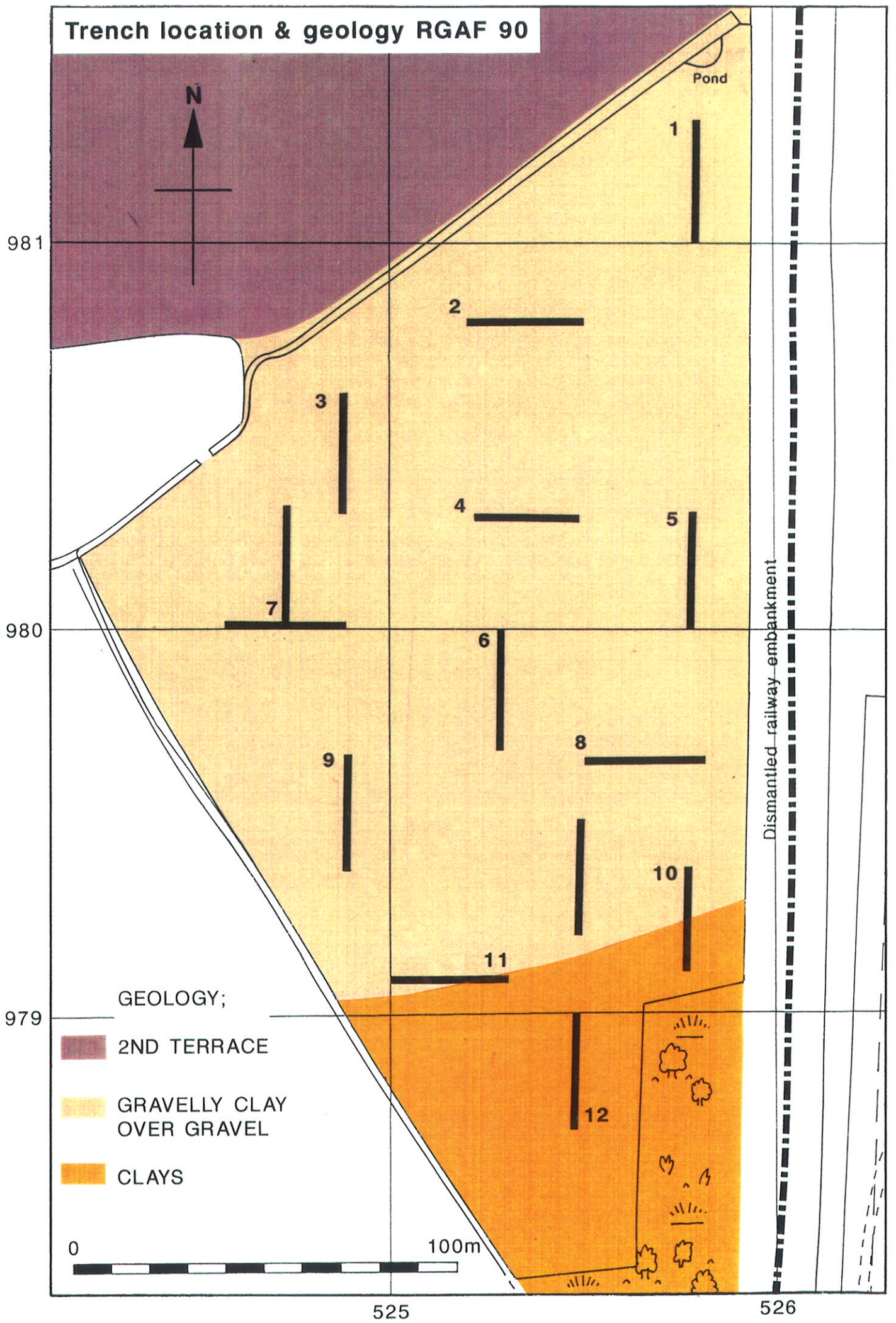


Fig. 1



Archaeological features RGAF 90

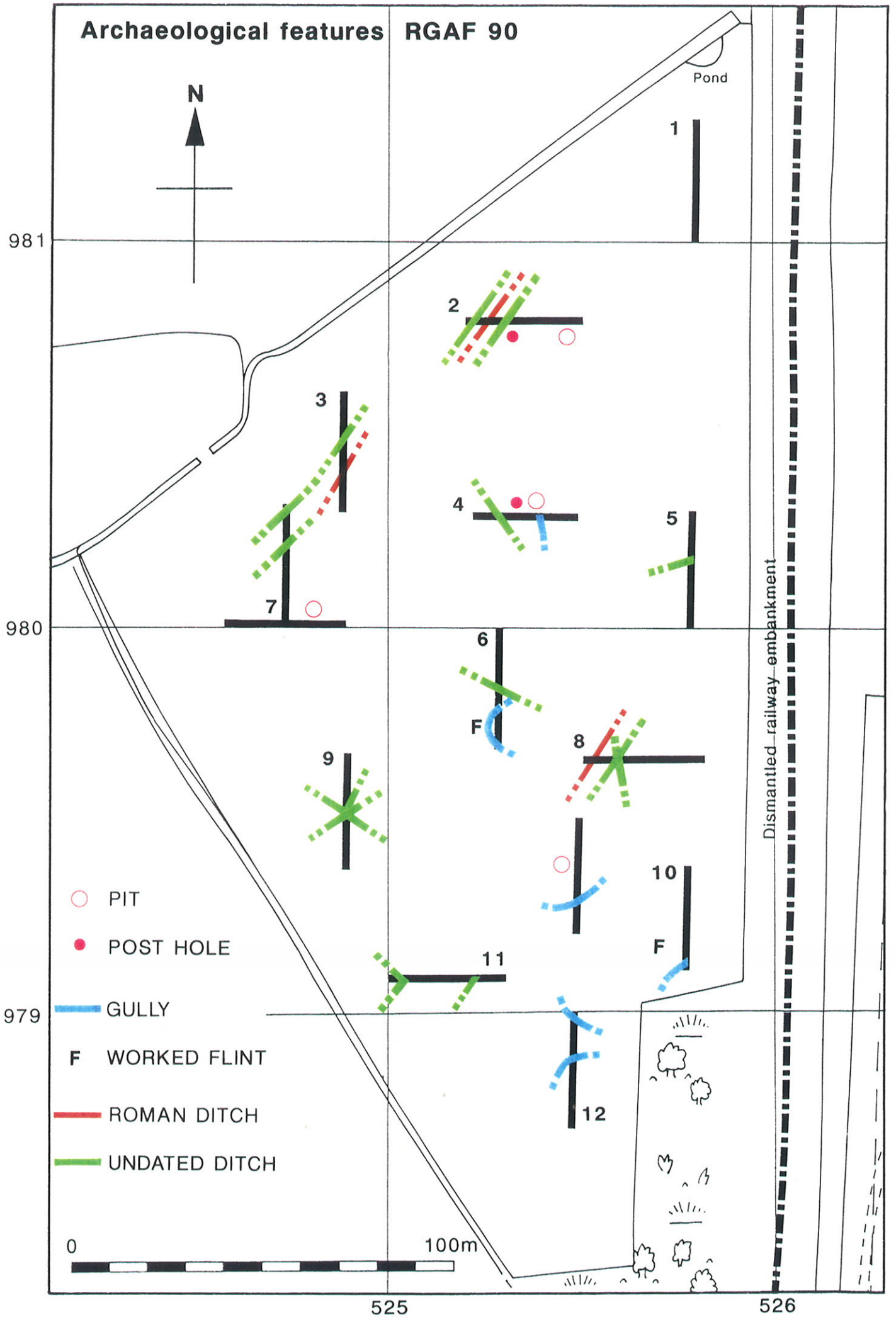
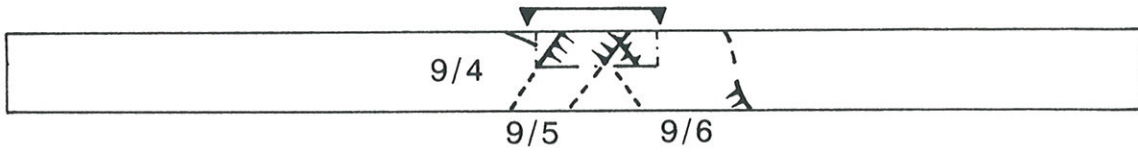


Fig. 3

Trench 9

RGAF 90

Plan **N** 



Section

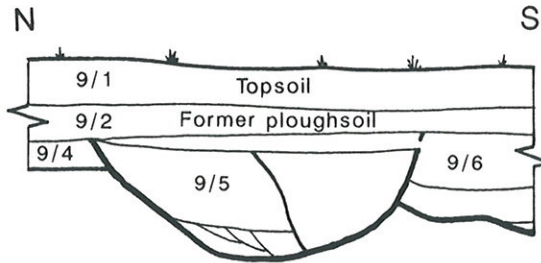
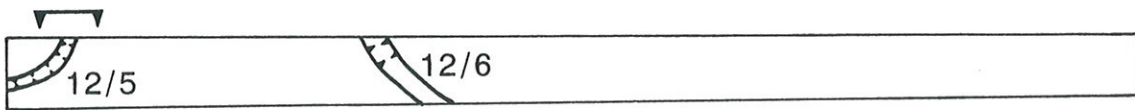


Fig. 4

Trench 12

Plan **N** 



Section

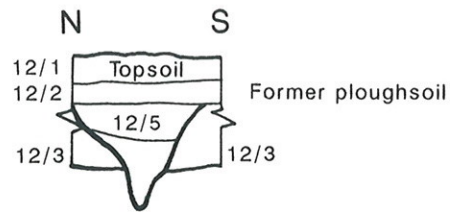
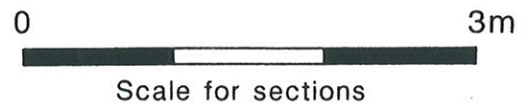
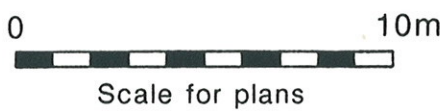


Fig. 5





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