

Spencer's Farm, Maidenhead

NGR SU 889 826

Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 1998

SUMMERLEAZE LTD

**SPENCERS FARM / ELINTONE MANOR, NORTH
MAIDENHEAD CRICKET CLUB, BERKSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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**PLANNING APPLICATION NOs
32020 & 31767**

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Prepared by: JEFF MUIR

Date: 03.2.98

Checked by: *Angela Boyle*

Date: *4/2/98*

Approved by: *Q L Paul*

Date: *4/2/98*

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation in January 1998 at Spencers Farm, North Maidenhead Cricket Club on behalf of Summerleaze Ltd in advance of a proposed new access road and machine store. The evaluation revealed evidence of a double moat and possible bank thought to belong to the Norman manor house of Elintone.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

In January 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at Spencers Farm, North Maidenhead Cricket Club on behalf of Summerleaze Ltd in respect of a planning application for a new access road and machine store (Planning Application Nos 32020 & 31767). The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief set by Babtie and a WSI (written scheme of investigation) written by the Oxford Archaeological Unit and agreed with Babtie. The development site was located within a narrow strip of land which runs north-south between a modern housing development and the cricket club (Fig. 1).

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies approximately 1.5 km to the west of the river Thames (SU 889 826) on a gentle south-facing slope situated over alluvium and river terrace gravel. It is currently maintained as an area of rough ground to the north and west of the main cricket pitch.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The moated site at Spencers Farm is thought to be the Norman manor house of Elintone mentioned in the Domesday Book. Excavation of the central platform undertaken by Dr Slade of Reading University in the late 1960s revealed the remains of a large medieval house. The OAU has contacted Dr Slade who has passed on the following information. "The manor dated from c. AD 1100 and was abandoned around AD 1500. There were buildings in the interior of which flint foundations survived. The finds included a copper bowl found near the entrance. It should be noted that the foundations were robbed by the local inhabitants while the excavations were in progress mostly to build rockeries" (pers. comm.). Dr Slade also excavated small sections through the moat to the south and east (information supplied by Babtie). Nettles immediately to the north were thought to indicate the sites of former buildings. The exact results of Dr Slade's excavations remain unclear, however, as they are yet to be published.

Aberg (1978) counts 50 known moated sites in Berkshire, several of which are in the vicinity of Maidenhead.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

The evaluation aims as set out in the WSI were as follows:

- i) To establish the presence / absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

- ii) To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- iii) To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- iv) To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

The evaluation consisted of three trenches totalling *c.* 77 m in length (Fig. 2). Each trench measured 1.60 m in width and was excavated to a depth of between 0.30 m and 0.50 m by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. The relatively shallow depth of the trenches was due to the shallow impact of the proposed development. Trenches 1 and 3 were positioned longitudinally within the road corridor. Trench 2 was positioned to evaluate both the area of the proposed new machine store and the line of the road corridor.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

All trenches were cleaned by hand, planned and photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. It did not prove necessary to excavate any features of archaeological interest as all were below the 0.30 m impact level of the proposed new development. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson 1992).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Trench descriptions

4.1.1 TRENCH 1 (Fig. 3)

Orientation: north-north-west - south-south-east

Length: 20 m Width 1.6 m

Trench 1 was positioned within the road corridor directly over the southern arm of the manor moat. Machine stripping of the trench revealed a thick deposit of alluvial silt 3. Three linear marks 8 scored into the silt were probably the result of deep ploughing. Overlying the alluvium was a thin brown ploughsoil 2 (Fig. 4) which covered the trench and moat deposits except in the centre where it was overlain by a dark stony deposit 6. This layer proved to be the uppermost fill of the manor moat 9, deposited in modern times as part of levelling and general ground improvement. It was clear that the moat 9 cut the alluvium 3. Either side of 6, earlier moat deposits 5 and 7 were visible but were not excavated due to the shallow impact of the proposed development. The whole trench was sealed by a thin, dark deposit of modern topsoil, 1.

4.1.2 TRENCH 2 (Fig. 3)

Orientation: north-east - south-west

Length: 23 m with a side arm (to the west) of 4 m Width 1.6 m

Trench 2 was positioned to evaluate the site of the proposed new machine store and part of the road corridor. Machine stripping revealed an alluvial deposit 11 similar to that found in Trench 1 (context 3). A narrow gully 15 was cut into the alluvium at the northern end of the trench on a north-west - south-east orientation. The gully was well below impact level and therefore its fill 14 was not sampled. Sealing 15 was a thick, uniform deposit of silty clay 10. It is conceivable that 10 was created by the build up of ploughsoil against the adjacent headland though it is also possible that the deposit was the remains of a bank associated with the manor moat 9. Overlying 10 were a series of moat deposits (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 19). The moat revealed in Trench 2 could not have been the same moat seen in Trench 1 and must represent an inner moat (Fig. 2). Little pottery was recovered but three of the moat deposits contained red roof tile. It seems likely that the upper layers were backfilled quite recently.

In the northern half of the trench were a series of shallow scoops 2 which were visible in both sections (Fig. 4). These have been interpreted as ridge and furrow. The upper portion of the furrows appear to have been deliberately backfilled and levelled. A modern trench 17 which ran at right angles across the moat fills may be one of the sections excavated by Dr Slade in the 1960s. Layer 18 (Fig. 4) was clearly a modern deposit and likely either to be a continuation of trench 17 at a higher level or upcast from its excavation. The whole of trench 2 was sealed by a thin, dark layer of modern topsoil 1.

4.1.3 TRENCH 3

Orientation: north-north-west - south-south-east

Length: 30 m Width 1.6 m

Trench 3 was positioned within the road corridor to the north of the moated site (Fig. 2) in order to locate any activity on the periphery of the manor. Machine stripping of the trench revealed a thick deposit of alluvium 3 disturbed in a number of places by tree-throw pits. All of these natural features lay beneath the impact level of the proposed development, therefore none were excavated. The alluvium was sealed by a thin ploughsoil 2 which was similar in nature to that revealed in Trench 1 (context 2). Both the ploughsoil and alluvium were marked in places by a modern disturbance 4. There were no other deposits of archaeological interest. Trench 3 was sealed by a thin, dark layer of modern topsoil 1.

4.2 Finds

4.2.1 *Flint*

Three pieces of heavily burnt flint were recovered from the alluvium 3 in Trench 1. The flint was unworked and would seem to pre-date the moat.

4.2.2 *Animal Bone by Bethan Charles*

Thirty seven fragments of bone were retrieved by hand, though only five were identifiable. Most of the unidentified bones were small fragments from long bones, probably those of cattle. The majority showed signs of butchery and excavation damage. The identified bone comprised cattle (80%) and sheep (20%). Three of the four bones identified as cattle had clear butchery marks.

	Context	Sheep	Cattle	Unidentified
Trench 1	2	-	1	-
	3	-	-	6
Trench 2	3	-	1	-
	7	1	-	-
	11	-	2	24

Table 1 Inventory of animal bone fragments

4.2.3 Medieval pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

Two fragments of medieval pottery were recovered from moat deposit 7 in Trench 2. The smaller sherd was undiagnostic. The larger sherd was part of a jug and had a sage green exterior glaze with slash decoration.

4.2.4 Post-medieval pottery by Nigel Jeffries

A single sherd of post medieval red earthenware was recovered from the ploughsoil 2 in Trench 1. The internal brown glaze is typical of the 17th century.

4.2.5 Tile by Nick Mitchell

There are 22 flat, plain roof-tile fragments from 4 contexts, 12 from Trench 1 (405 g), and 10 from Trench 2 (315 g). They are all of the same very sandy fabric with occasional silt-stone, varying from mid bluish-grey when reduced to mid pinkish-orange when oxidized. Only one tile, from context 2 in Trench 1, has a peg-hole suggesting that probably all these tiles may have been secured to a roof by wooden pegs. Another tile from context 7 in Trench 2 has a soft white lime mortar attached to one edge showing that some of them may also have been secured by mortar. It is not possible to provide more than a broad date range from the 12th to the 20th century for these tiles.

	Context	No. of Fragments	Weight (g)
Trench 1	5	2	125
	2	10	280
Trench 2	5	3	50
	7	2	65
	3	5	200

Table 2 Summary of tile assemblage

4.2.6 *Metalwork*

A single rectangular nail shank of unknown date was recovered from the uppermost moat fill 6 in Trench 1.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Summary of Results

The plan of the earthworks (Fig. 2) suggests that three moats once existed. The moat deposits revealed in Trench 1 correspond with the central moat (Fig. 2). Trench 2 revealed similar deposits which must have belonged to the inner moat which surrounded the central platform. In both cases the moat deposits were found to be quite well preserved beneath a layer of modern backfill. Although little remains of the earthworks as shown on early Ordnance Survey maps, it is likely that the third (outer) moat still exists beneath the present cricket pitch just to the east of the proposed development. No features of archaeological interest were found to the north of the moated site. Roof tile found in Trench 1 and 2 may be from the manor or ancillary buildings.

The impact of the proposed development on any surviving buildings has been minimised by moving the line of the road to the east of the central platform. Similarly the relatively shallow depth of the development means that only the very top of the moat deposits will be disturbed. The great bulk of those deposits being modern backfill.

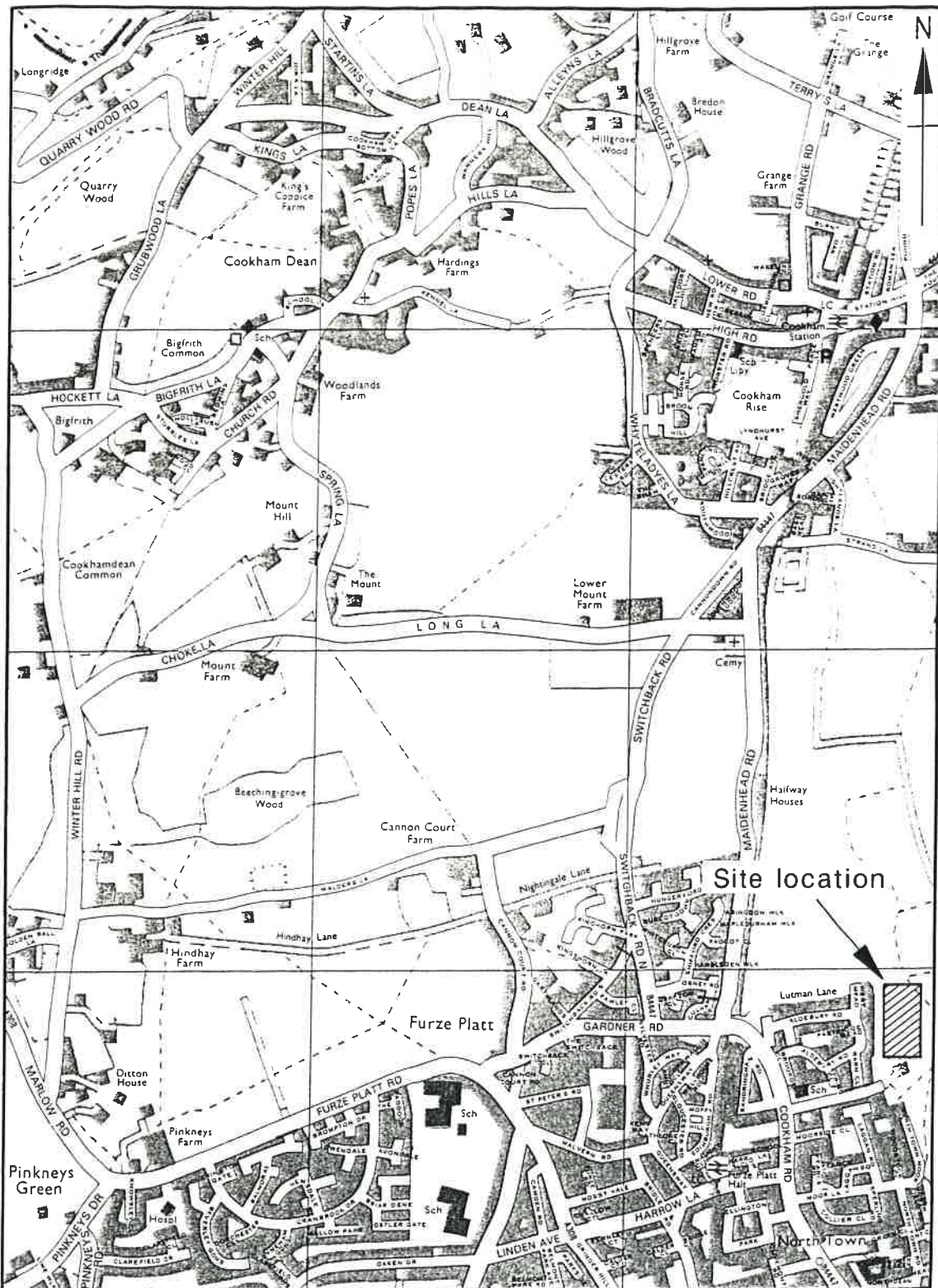
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- Aberg, F.A (ed.) 1978 *Medieval Moated Sites, CBA Research Report No. 17*
Wilkinson, D (ed.) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No	Date
1	1	layer	whole trench	0.15	topsoil	-	-	modern
	2	layer	whole trench	0.20	ploughsoil ?	pot tile bone	1 10 1	post-med. ?
	3	layer	whole trench	0.25 +	alluvial silt	burnt flint bone	3 6	-
	4	interface (cut ?)	4.50	0.35 +	moat	-	-	-
	5	fill	3.00	0.12 +	moat fill	tile	2	?
	6	fill	3.75	0.32	moat fill	nail	1	modern
	7	fill	4.65	0.20 +	moat fill	-	-	-
	8	fill	0.10	unexcavated	drainage features ?	-	-	-
2	1	layer	whole trench	0.16	topsoil	-	-	modern
	2	deposit	1.40	0.20	series of ridge and furrow	-	-	medieval ?
	3	fill	2.80	0.30	moat fill	tile tooth	5 1	? -
	4	fill	1.00	0.20	moat fill	-	-	-
	5	fill	2.40	0.16	moat fill	tile	3	?
	6	fill	0.60	0.30	moat fill	-	-	-
	7	fill	5.00	0.40 +	moat fill	bone pot tile	1 2 2	- late med. ? ?
	8	fill	8.00	0.40 +	moat fill	-	-	-
	9	interface (cut ?)	5.00 +	0.50 +		-	-	-
	10	layer	11.00 +	0.40 +	possible bank material	-	-	-
	11	layer	18.00 +	unexcavated	alluvial silt	bone	26	-
	12	fill	0.30	unexcavated	pipe trench backfill	-	-	modern
	13	cut	0.30	unexcavated	pipe trench	-	-	modern
	14	fill	0.25	unexcavated	gully fill	-	-	-

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
	15	cut	0.25	unexcavated	gully	-	-	-
	16	fill	1.30	unexcavated	trench backfill	-	-	modern
	17	cut	1.30	unexcavated	trench	-	-	modern
	18	fill	1.50	0.15	trench upcast ?	-	-	modern
	19	fill	0.50	0.30	moat fill	-	-	-
3	1	layer	whole trench	0.20	topsoil	-	-	modern
	2	layer	whole trench	0.10 - 0.20	ploughsoil ?	-	-	-
	3	layer	whole trench	0.30 +	alluvial silt	-	-	-
	4	layer	2.30	0.50	modern disturbance	-	-	modern



Based on the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office,
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scale 1:20,000

Figure 1

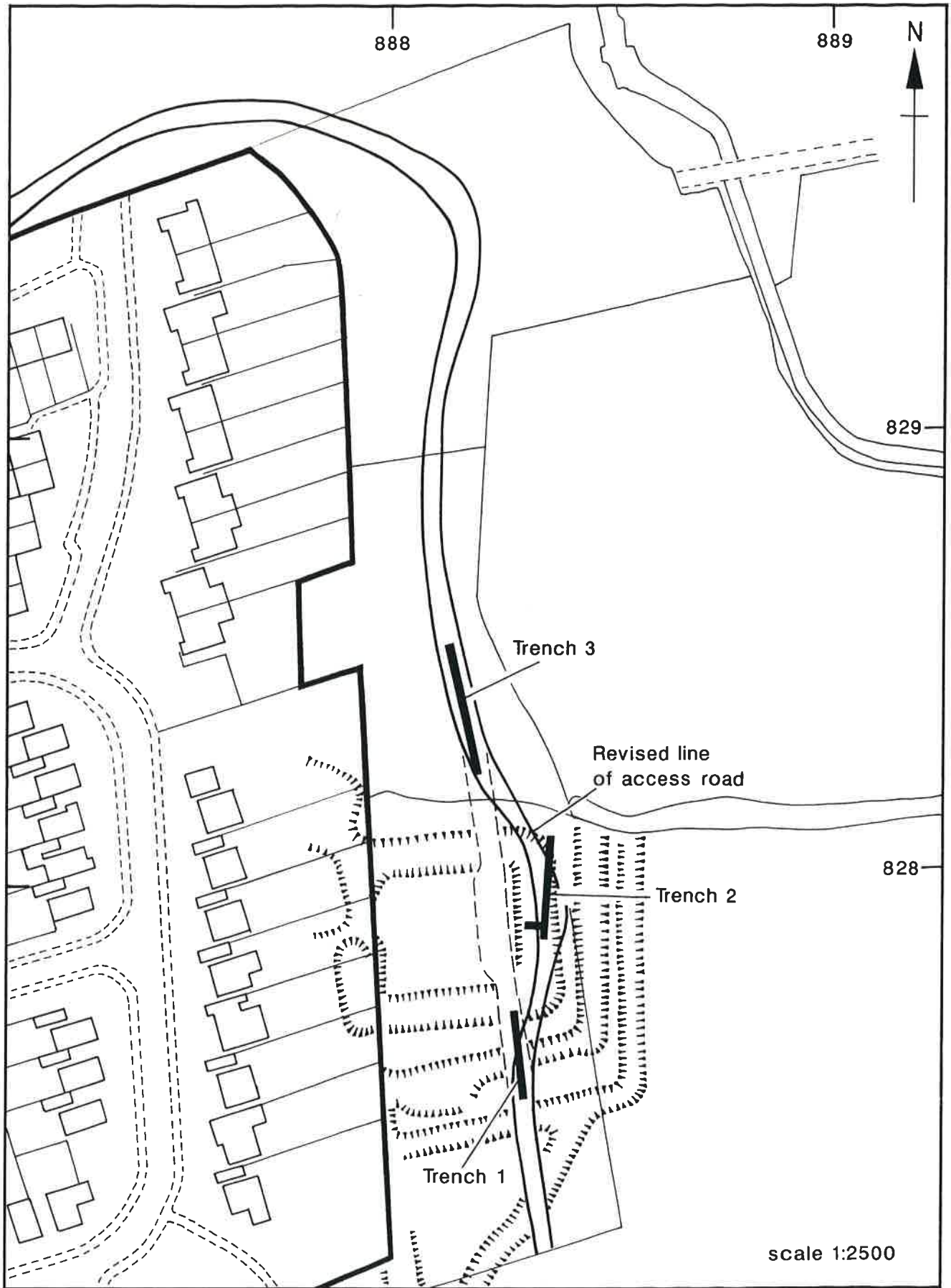


Figure 2

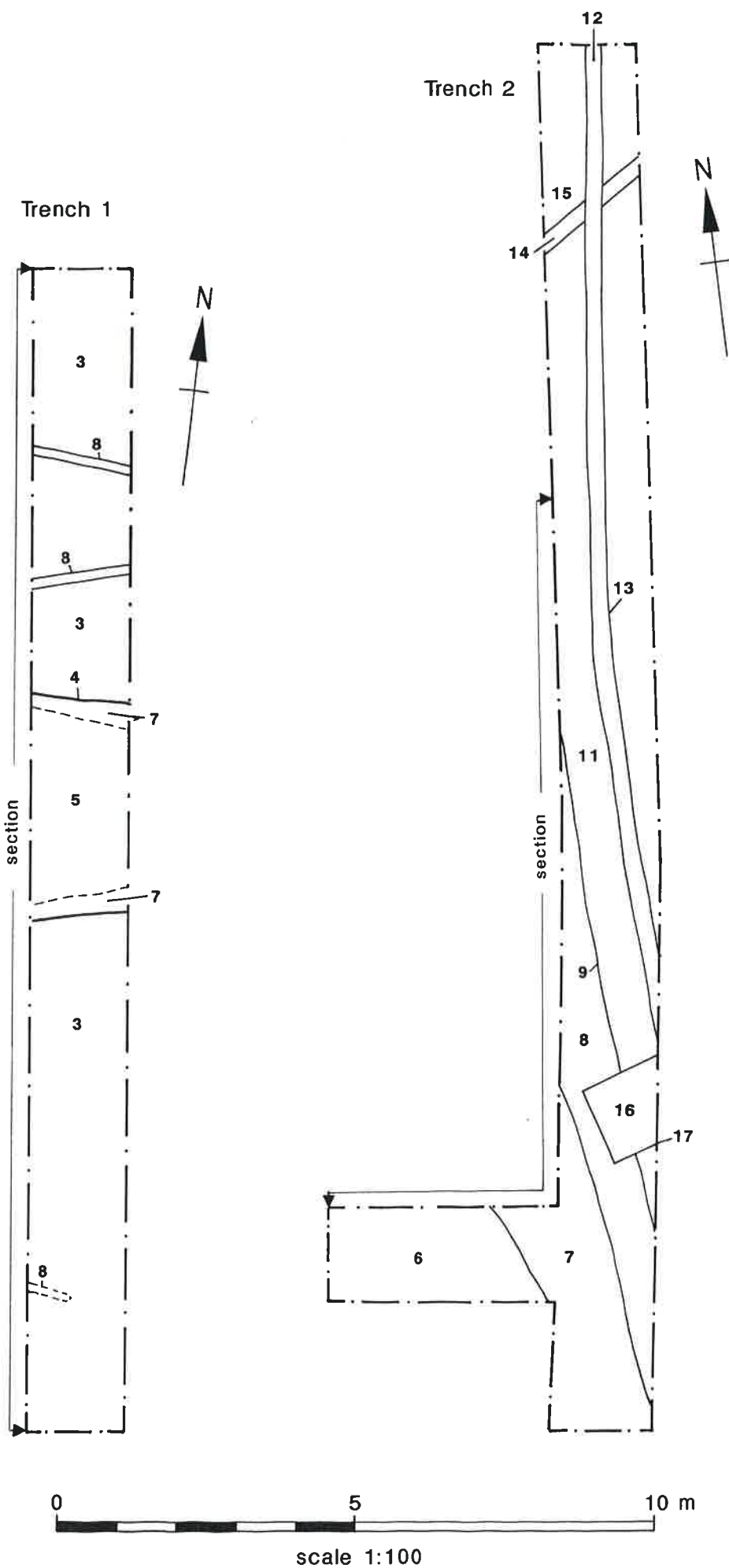


Figure 3

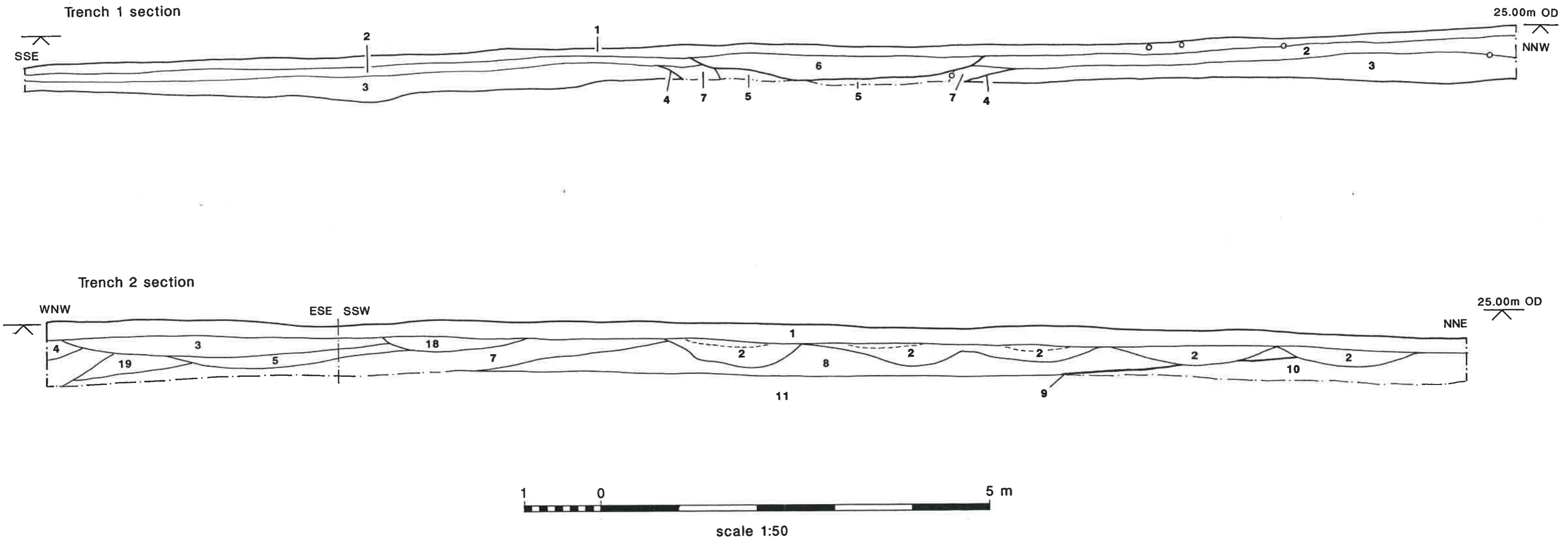


Figure 4



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: oau-oxford.demon.co.uk

