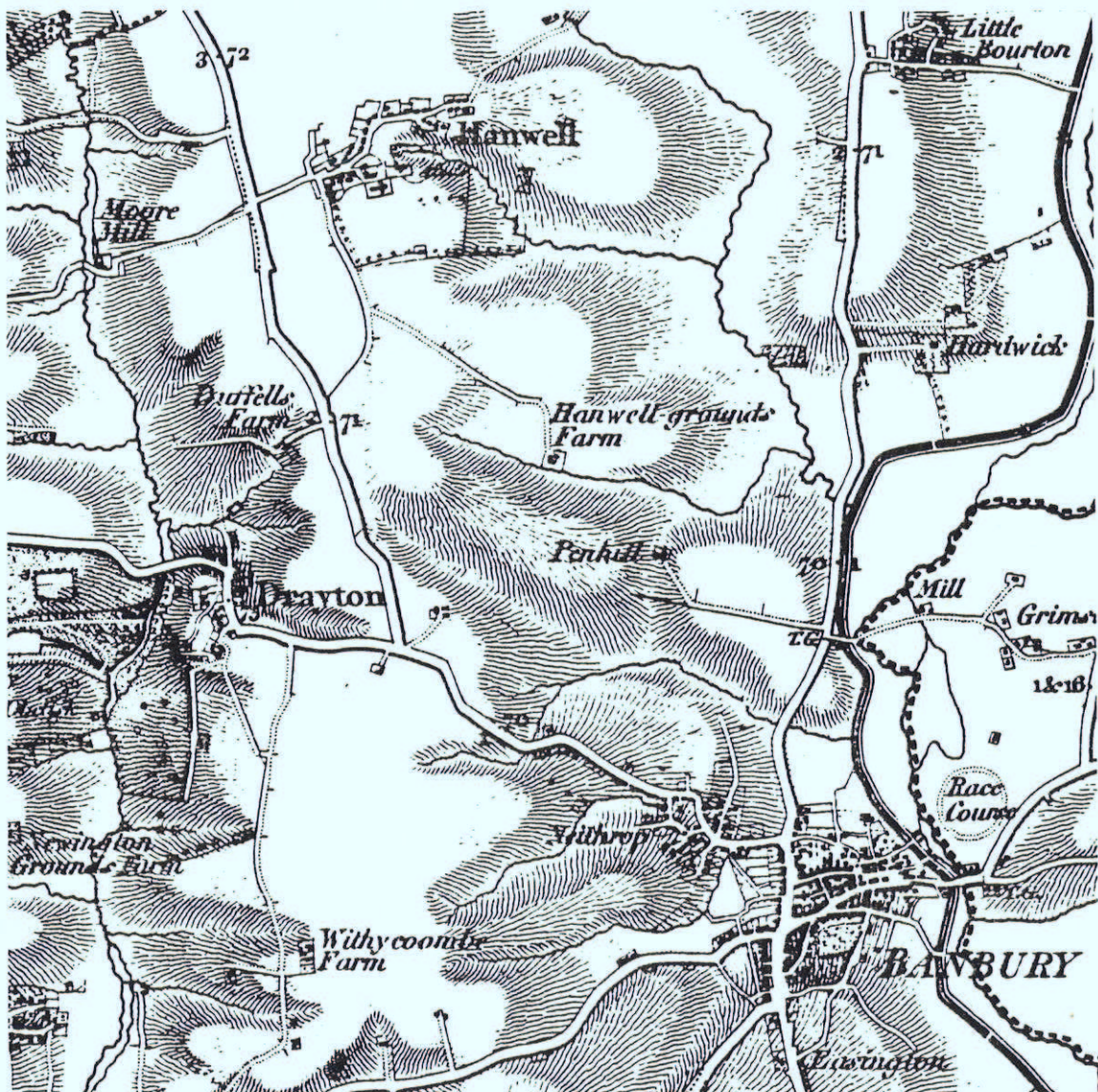


Spring Farm, Main Street Hanwell, Oxon

SP 4358 4386

Ref: CHN. 391/93

Archaeological Evaluation



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

May 1995

SPRING FARM, MAIN STREET, HANWELL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

1 Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Shutford Properties Ltd on 0.35 ha of land at Spring Farm, Hanwell, Oxfordshire (NGR SP43584386 - Fig. 1). The work was carried out in fulfilment of a condition placed upon planning permission for residential development (Application CHN.391/93) and was conducted according to a specification agreed by the County Archaeological Officer, Mr Paul Smith, acting for the Local Planning Authority. The fieldwork took place on 2nd-3rd May 1995.

2 Geology and Topography

The site lies on the north side of Main Street to the east of the farm buildings at Spring Farm. It lies at about 136 m OD and occupies a south-facing slope whose steepness is accentuated by a build up of made ground in the central area. The underlying geology consists of clays and silts of the Middle Lias series. (Figure 2 illustrates the approximate area of made ground and shows spot-heights on the geological surface). Rough grassland covered the site at the time of the evaluation.

3 Archaeological Background

No archaeological remains were known from the development area itself, although the site lies not far from the historic core of Hanwell which contains Hanwell Castle, medieval fishponds and associated remains. The site of a Roman building lies about 600 m to the west of the farm and a Roman or Saxo-Norman pottery kiln was found in the field to the north. Excavations in 1974 on the south side of Main Street, about 200 m east of the current site, revealed several medieval buildings. Late Saxon pottery was also recovered suggesting nearby occupation.

Ordnance Survey maps going back to 1882 show a pair of cottages in the SW corner of the development site. These were apparently demolished in the early 1980's.

4 Aims

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the extent, nature, date, and quality of any archaeological deposits within the development area. An appraisal of the evidence was to be of sufficient detail to enable the formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy, if required.

5 Methods

The evaluation took the form of 3 trenches excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator equipped with a 5-foot toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were surveyed in by the client and positioned centrally along the three main blocks of housing as proposed in the development plan (see Fig. 2). Trench 1 was 25 m long, Trench 2 was 20 m long and Trench 3 initially 30 m long, shortened to 21.5 m in the light of subsequent discoveries. All the trenches were 1.5 m wide. The area examined represents a 2.85% sample of the development site.

Excavation and recording were conducted according to standard OAU practice (see 'Spring Farm, Main Street, Hanwell; Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation': Appendix 2). Blocks of numbers were allotted to each trench, the 100's to Trench 1, 200's to Trench 2 etc.

6 Results: General

All three trenches revealed some degree of modern dumping. In Trench 3 this reached a depth of 1.3-1.6 m over the entire excavated length of the trench. It was not possible to examine deposits below the made ground, particularly in view of the unconsolidated nature of the deposit, without recourse to shoring or widening the trench. Given that the proposed design of the development would not have required the penetration of the subsoil to a significant degree in this area, the trench was abandoned with the advice of the County Archaeological Officer.

In Trench 2 modern dumping and disturbed soil penetrated as far as solid geology. The depth of the modern deposits ranged from 300 mm at the N end, to 900 mm at the extreme S end. There was no surviving 'in situ' soil.

Trench 1 showed modern dumping and disturbance in the northern 5 m or so. This appears to have truncated archaeological features here, but further south archaeological deposits were sealed by a medieval/post-medieval accumulation (layer 106).

There follows a summary description of each of the trenches. A complete list of excavated contexts is presented in Table 1. The pottery was examined by Lucy Bown, freelance pottery specialist.

7 Trench Descriptions

Trench 1 (figure 3)

25 m long, orientated N-S on the line of the proposed eastern block of buildings. The modern dumping (100) was limited to the northern 5 m. Under this was a modern/recent topsoil (101). At the N end these deposits directly overlay and impinged upon two shallow gullies (103 & 105) running NE-SW.

Both gullies were flat based and filled with a dark greyish brown soil. Gully 103 contained a few sherds of very fragile late Saxon pottery (St Neots type ware). 105 was without finds. They cut a compact reddish brown silt (115).

Further down the slope 115 was overlain by a similar deposit containing frequent lumps of sandstone and mottles of decayed sandstone (106). It was initially unclear whether this was undisturbed or not and the layer was not entirely removed. However, some medieval and post-medieval pottery was retrieved during machine-excavation, and it soon became apparent that a large feature filled with a softer soil underlay this layer and the trench was deepened. Layer 106 was a quite compact and uniform deposit, though becoming more soily at the S end of the trench. It may well have been a natural accumulation on the hillslope, although the possibility that it was the result of dumping over a relatively short period cannot be dismissed.

Ditch 110 underlay 106 and was aligned just E of N. It was partly excavated by machine as its edge was very indistinct. Its lower section was examined by hand excavation when the feature was better defined. The full width of the feature at the top was not recoverable within the confines of the trench, but projecting the excavated edges suggests that it would have been about 2 m wide and 1.3 m deep. It had a 45° upper slope, a steeper lower slope and a flattish, narrow base. The main fill of the ditch (108) was a greyish clayey silt with some charcoal. Animal bone was recovered during machining, and pottery and animal bone were found in the hand-dug section. The pottery is late Saxon St Neots type ware of the later 10th-11th centuries. The upper and lower fills (107 & 109) were lighter brown clay silts.

The edges of Ditch 110 proved difficult to trace, both in plan and by excavation. It became clear that the soil on the E side (111), which was a compact orange-brown silt with iron mottling, was the fill of an earlier feature (112). This was impossible to define in the excavated trench but it seems likely that it was an earlier version of 110. It was without finds.

On the W side of 110, deposit 113 was a compact orange-brown clayey silt. Occasional flecks of charcoal and burnt clay suggested that was either anthropogenic or disturbed by worms. There was no other indication of a feature here and, on balance, it seems likely that the deposit was natural.

The only other feature in this trench was a group of unbonded stones (117) located in the W section. The group included an almost complete rotary quernstone which was pulled out during machining (SF1). It was unclear what these stones represented but they may have formed a rudimentary wall base or the lining and capping of a well. Associated brick indicated a post-medieval date. The rotary quern was presumably reused. The feature was not examined by excavation.

Trench 2 (figure 4)

20 m long orientated N-S along the line of proposed buildings nearest the road. The trench dropped steeply southward. Modern dumping and disturbed soil (200, 201 & 204) directly penetrated into the solid geology (206) and resulted in a disturbed interface at the S end of the trench (205). At the N end of the trench the overburden included large quantities brick and stone rubble. This was partially left in situ at the extreme N end of the trench (202) where it occupied an apparent feature (203). However, the rubble was unbonded and extremely loose suggesting that it was a spread of demolition debris rather than the remains of a wall foundation.

Trench 3 (figure 4)

Excavated length 21.5 m, orientated E-W. It was located through an area of deep modern dumping (300, 301 & 302) and archaeological levels were not reached. A buried topsoil (303) and a light brown subsoil (304) were exposed at the E end of the trench. 19th century pottery was recovered from the buried topsoil.

8 Interpretation and Discussion

In Trench 1 two parallel gullies 203 and 205 are considered likely to be Saxon features. Gully 203 yielded 2 sherds of late Saxon pottery. This material is very fragile and it seems unlikely to be redeposited although some penetration by modern material indicated that the feature had been disturbed. The features are of unknown purpose. Their extreme shallowness may partly be due to truncation by modern disturbances.

The large ditch 110 yielded late Saxon pottery in small quantities throughout its fill, and it is likely that it was backfilled, probably quite rapidly, in this period. It may have been dug along the line of an earlier ditch 112, but this is uncertain. It was quite substantial and was traced for 9 m in the evaluation trench running N-S. It probably functioned as a boundary/property marker. The quantity of finds may not suggest occupation immediately adjacent but it presumably relates to settlement nearby.

Trench 2 was located just to the E of the cottages shown on the OS maps. The extensive spread of building debris can presumably be attributed to their demolition. There was no trace of the late Saxon occupation on this side of the development site and, given the degree of later disturbance it seems unlikely that remains would have survived had they existed.

It remains uncertain whether or not archaeological deposits are present in the area of Trench 3. Apparently undisturbed soil was recorded under the modern made ground and it is possible that any remains would have survived here. The area of Trench 3 is naturally, as well as artificially, the highest area of the development site and it would not be unreasonable for occupation associated with the ditch and gullies in Trench 1 to have been located in this area.

9 Conclusions and Comment

The only features of archaeological interest were two shallow gullies (103 and 105) and a large ditch (110) in the eastern part of the site (Trench 1). These are datable by small quantities of St Neots type ware to the later 10th to 11th centuries. The large ditch ran north-south (perpendicular to Main Street) and is likely to be a boundary feature. It is unclear what the gullies represent. They need not be directly related to settlement, and the small number of late Saxon finds may indicate that settlement was not immediately adjacent to this trench.

It is possible that late Saxon activity was present further west, up slope, in the central part of the site. However, deep and extensive modern dumping made the investigation of this area impossible within the limitations of the evaluation trench (Trench 3). The western area of the site, towards the modern farm buildings, was extensively disturbed by recent earth-moving and the potential for the survival of any archaeological remains would appear to be limited.

In general terms the evaluation has enhanced the suggestion of late Saxon occupation in the northern part of the village of Hanwell, although its focus and nature remain unclear.

The evaluation was undertaken in good conditions and the results as presented are considered to be reliable.

Table 1: Context Summary

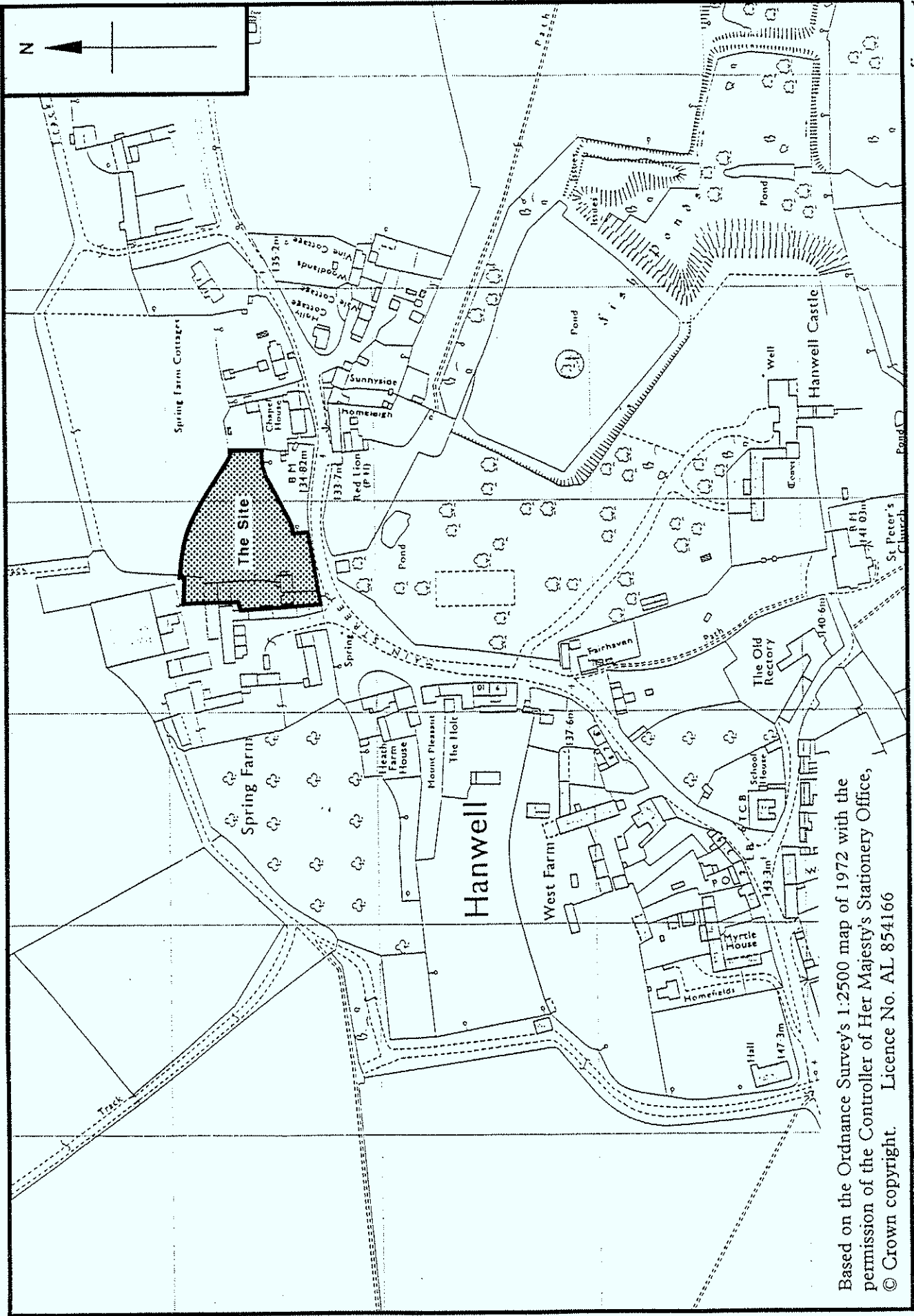
Sax. = Saxon; Med. = Medieval

Context No.	Type	Width m	Depth mm	Finds (No.)	Comment
100	dumping		up to 700		modern
101	topsoil		up to 300	asbestos (1)	modern
102	fill of 103	0.8	150	late Sax. pot (2) brick (1)	
103	gully	0.8	150		Saxon feature?
104	fill of 105	0.5	80		
105	gully	0.5	80		Saxon feature?
106	layer		250-300	early Med. pot (1) post-Med. pot (1)	med./P-M deposit
107	fill of 110		150	late Sax. pot (2)	upper fill
108	fill of 110		600	late Sax. pot (2) animal bone (32)	middle fill
109	fill of 110		400		lowest fill
110	ditch	c. 2.0	1.3		Saxon feature
111	fill of 112	?	500		
112	ditch?	?	1.0+?		cut by 110
113	deposit		?		natural?/colluvium
114	deposit		?		natural
115	deposit		?		natural
116	cut	?	?		construction cut for 117
117	stone structure	?	?	brick (5) quernstone (1)	dry wall foundation?
200	topsoil		120		modern
201	dumping		230	19th cent. pot (7)	modern
202	fill of 203				rubble foundation? modern
203	cut				foundation cut?
204	layer		440		modern disturbed soil

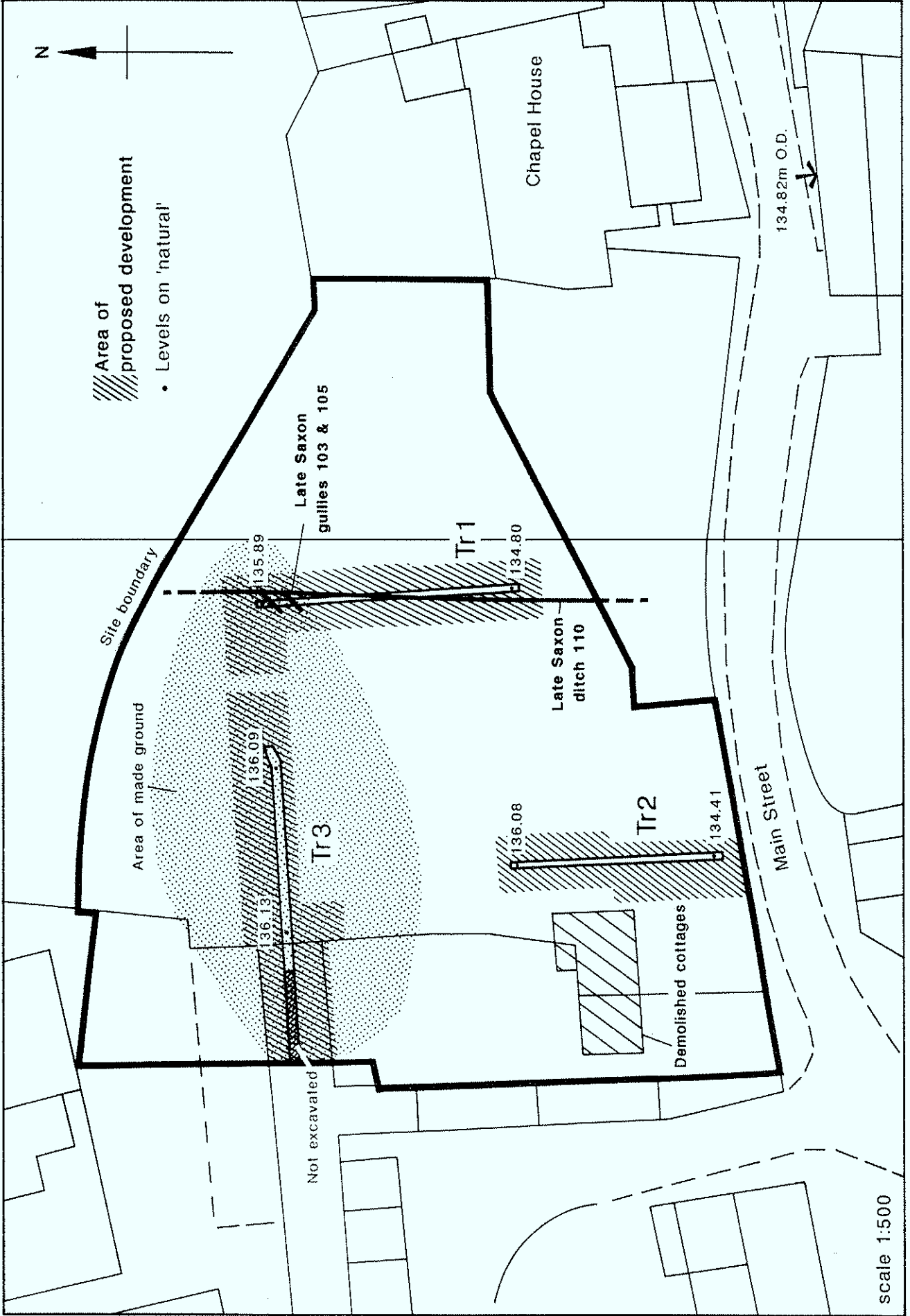
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Context No.	Type	Width m	Depth mm	Finds (No.)	Comment
205	layer		270		disturbed natural
206	deposit				natural
300	topsoil		120-150		modern
301	dumping		620		modern
302	dumping		160		modern
303	buried topsoil		150	19th cent. pot (1)	modern
304	buried subsoil		?		not excavated
305	service cable				

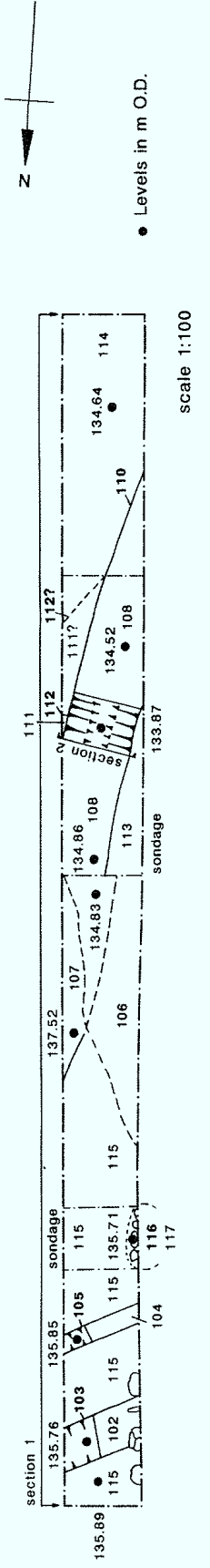
ANDY MUDD/OAU/MAY 95



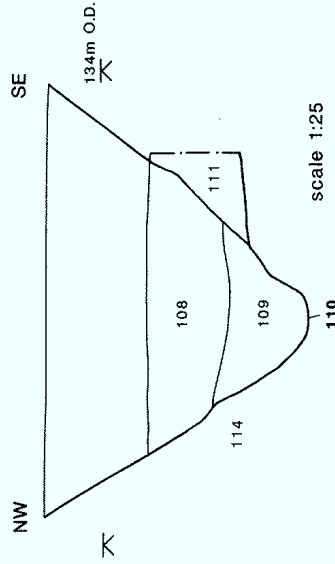
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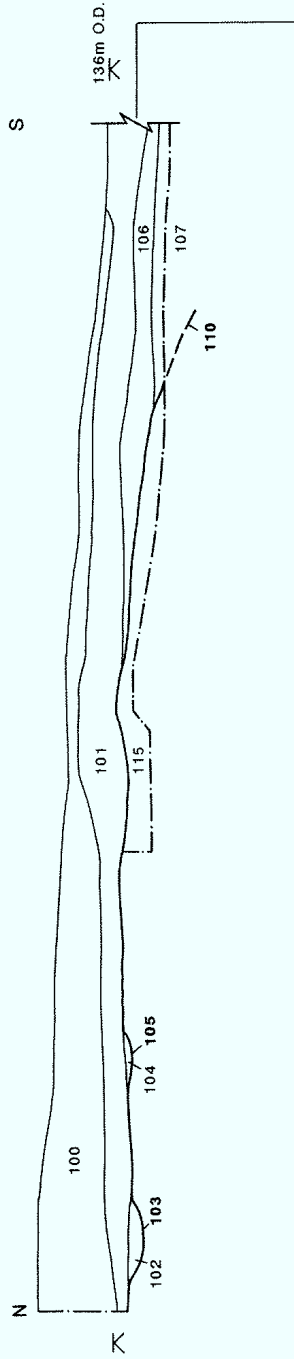
Trench 1



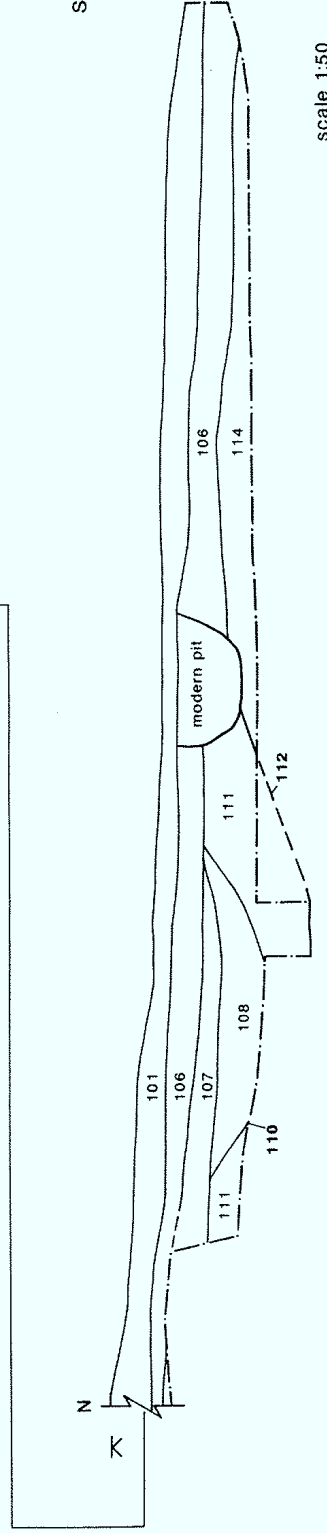
section 2



section 1



S 136m O.D.



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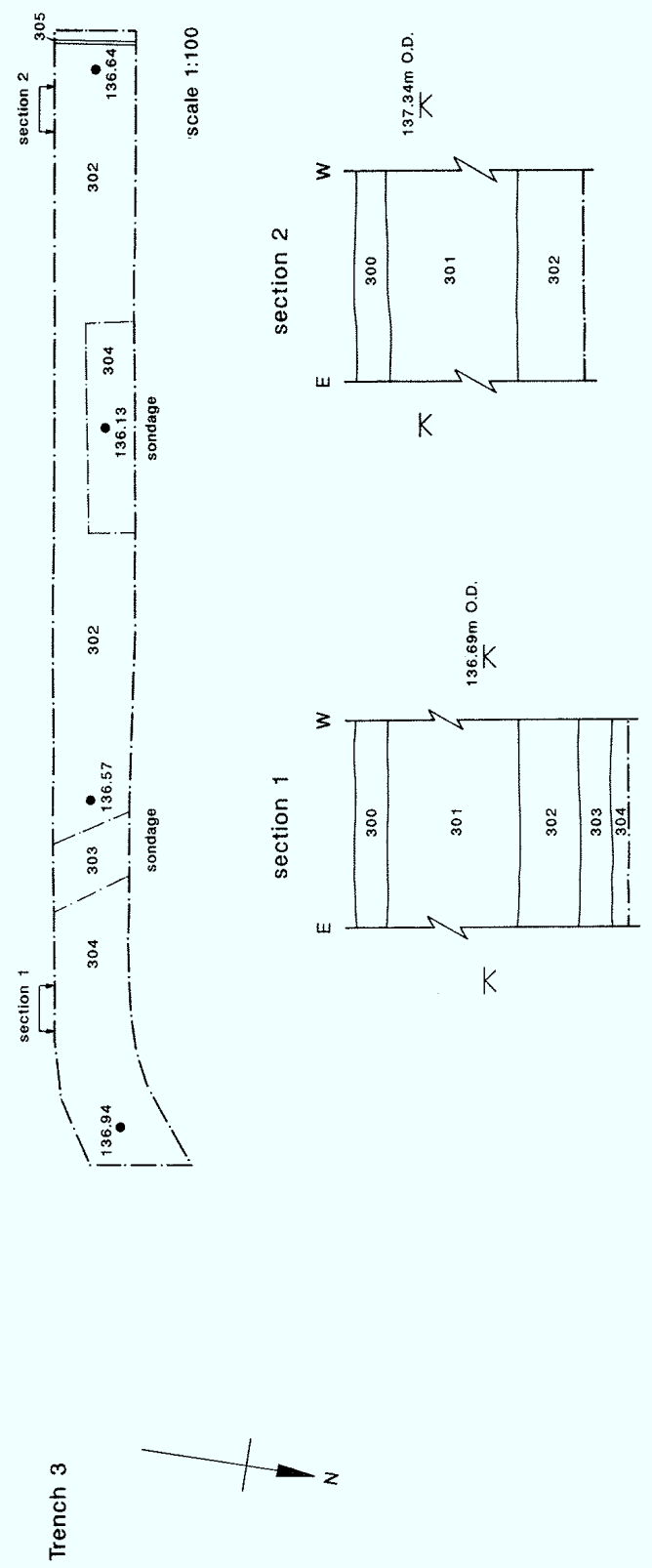
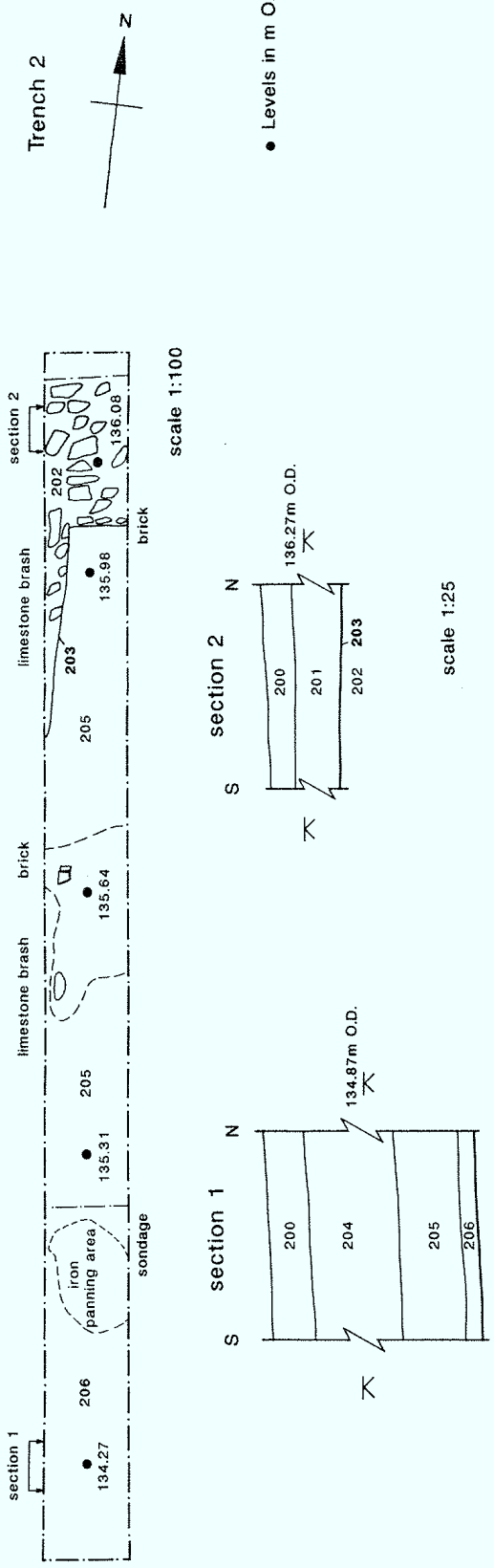


figure 4

scale 1:25



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