

WANTAGE (OX)

WAMWEV
505/95

Land adjacent to Mably Way, Wantage

NGR SU 3964 8905

Archaeological Evaluation Report

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

January 1996

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation has been commissioned by Crest Homes (Eastern) Ltd in support of an application for planning permission for residential use. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) in response to a brief set by Oxfordshire County Archaeologist.

Archaeological features were located in all of the trenches. Most of these features were ditches which represent enclosures. Many of the ditches were undated but they probably represent a long-lived system of enclosures, likely to be paddocks etc., adjacent to a settlement. Although only one feature was dated by Roman pottery it is likely that most if not all of the features are Roman. Gullies and postholes were found and these may indicate Roman settlement activity although the few finds from the excavated features suggests that this activity was not dense or long-lived.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies N of Wantage (Fig.1) in an area of archaeological potential. Significant and extensive Romano-British features were revealed during construction immediately to the S of the site. Roman burials were found with ditches and a possible road.

The Roman road from Frilford to Wantage runs to the E of the site and links the extensive settlement at Frilford with the recently discovered Roman settlement/villa estate S of Mill Street. It seems likely that Romano-British settlement developed along the lines of the Letcombe Brook and the road leading to Frilford.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The aims of the investigation were:

- i) To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- ii) To determine the extent condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains.
- iii) To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- iv) To make available the results of the investigation.

Five trenches were excavated (Fig.2). The total surface area of the site which was investigated was 225 square metres, this is 2% of the site. The trenches were machined in spits down to the top of the natural subsoil. The machine excavation was monitored and the trenches were hand cleaned. No archaeological features were found at a higher level than the top of the subsoil. The features encountered were hand dug to determine their nature and date. Small sections were excavated

in the archaeological features in order to minimise damage to the site at this phase of investigation. However, due to the large sequence of features in Trench 5 machine dug sections were excavated in order to define the depth and nature of the features.

There is reason to believe that the site has been disturbed by modern activity. The current surface of the site is covered by grooves and irregularities which suggest topsoil movement by heavy plant. However, an old ploughsoil was present suggesting that the modern activity has not damaged the soil sequence. Field drains were found in all of the trenches.

No environmental samples were taken. There were no archaeological features which were deemed to be able to provide meaningful environmental information for evaluation purposes.

DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

(also see Table of contexts and Pottery comments in appendices and Figs. 2 and 3)

Roman features

Only one of the 17 features located was dated as Roman by pottery (see Pottery comments). This was a gully in Trench 2 (207). One other feature, ditch 406 in Trench 4, contained one sherd of possibly Roman pottery and the later pottery may be intrusive from the adjacent field drain. Two pieces of lead were recovered by metal detector from the excavated topsoil of Trench 4. Small fragments of lead are commonly found in Roman enclosures.

Medieval and modern features

Four other ditches contained medieval or modern pottery (105, 202, 304 and 308) but these sherds may also be intrusive due to the presence of modern field drains.

Undated features

These features generally had similar fills to those which were tentatively dated and which may mean that, despite the recent pottery, all the ditches may be Romano-British.

Discussion

The ditch in Trench 1 was dated as modern and may be related to the later field drain. The ditches in Trench 2 may be Roman, the gullies and possible postholes are likely to be Roman (although only one gully was dated) and may represent settlement activity. However, the general paucity of finds may indicate that this settlement activity was neither dense nor long-lived. Trench 3 contained several ditches two of which were dated as modern but these finds may be intrusive from field drains. One gully, 310, contained a fragment of burnt flint which is generally indicative of earlier prehistoric domestic occupation but in this case may suggest Roman activity as burnt flint is known from Roman contexts. One of the ditches

in Trench 4 contained ?Roman pottery with intrusive later material from the field drain. The other ditches may also be Roman. The ditches in Trench 5 were undated but were similar to the other features.

The complex of ditches was not closely dated but is likely to be Roman given the location of the site next to known Roman occupation and a major Roman road.

DEPOSIT SURVEY

The site is roughly flat apart from the irregularities probably caused by heavy plant.

As the surviving archaeology may be from a long-lived Romano-British enclosure system it is almost impossible to predict where other archaeological features may survive. However, the gullies in Trenches 2 and 3 may suggest slight settlement activity and the concentration of ditches in Trenches 4 and 5 may indicate an increase in activity to the E of the site.

Foundations for buildings and driveways may badly affect areas of archaeology (see Fig.2). The impact of the children's play area, although slighter, may also be significant on the archaeology present.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Following the Secretary of State for the Environment's published criteria for the scheduling of Ancient Monuments.

- i) **Period** The features revealed in the evaluation trenches indicate Roman activity on the site with some medieval activity. As Roman activity is known to the S the features on the site may relate to a large area of activity. Certainly the remains may shed light on the pattern of land use associated with the Roman settlement around the town of Wantage. The medieval pottery may be from ploughing.
- ii) **Rarity** Common along the line of the Roman road.
- iii) **Documentation** None
- iv) **Group value** Potential for showing the extent of Roman landscape activity along the Letcombe Brook and the Roman road.
- v) **Survival/condition** Negative features survive. Areas could be only slightly truncated by ?medieval and post-medieval ploughing.
- vi) **Vulnerability** Threat from development.
- vii) **Diversity** see group value
- viii) **Potential** Excavation would reveal enclosures and perhaps settlement to fit in with the site to the S.

Table of Contexts

TR	CTX	description	type	width (m)	depth (m)	Date of pottery and number of sherds
1	100	layer of dark grey clay loam	topsoil		0.21	
1	101	layer of mid-grey clay loam	old ploughsoil ?		0.3	
1	102	layer of light grey clay	natural		-	
1	103	layer of light grey clay	natural		-	
1	104	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 105	ditch fill	2.1	0.15	medieval (1) and post-medieval (1)
1	105	cut	ditch cut	2.1	0.15	
2	200	layer of dark grey clay loam	gully fill			
2	201	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 202	ditch fill	0.7	0.22	medieval [stabbed handle] (1), post-medieval (1) and 3 tile/brick
2	202	cut	ditch cut	0.9	0.2	
2	203	layer of mid-grey clay loam	fill of posthole	0.4	-	
2	204	cut	ditch cut	2.3	0.98	
2	205	layer of grey-brown clay loam, fill of 204	ditch cut			
2	206	layer of dark brown clay loam	?fill of posthole		0.35	

TR	CTX	description	type	width (m)	depth (m)	Date of pottery and number of sherds
2	207	cut	gully	0.3	0.12	Roman [oxidised flagon neck] (1) ?2nd century
2	208	layer of dark grey-brown clay loam, fill of 207	gully fill			
2	209	cut	gully cut	0.32	0.08	
2	210	layer of dark grey-brown clay loam, fill of 209	gully fill		0.08	
2	211	layer of mid-grey clay loam	?fill of posthole		0.23	
2	212	layer of mid-grey clay loam	fill of posthole	1		
2	213	layer of dark grey clay loam	topsoil		0.25	
2	214	layer of light grey clay loam	natural		-	
2	215	layer of grey-green clay and limestone	natural		-	
3	300	layer of dark grey clay loam	topsoil		0.21	
3	301	layer of mid-grey clay loam	old ploughsoil		0.13	
3	302	layer of light grey clay	natural		-	
3	303	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 304	ditch fill	1.5	0.12	late medieval/post-medieval (1)
3	304	cut	ditch cut	1.5	0.12	

TR	CTX	description	type	width (m)	depth (m)	Date of pottery and number of sherds
3	305	layer of dark grey clay loam, fill of 306	ditch fill	1	0.3	
3	306	cut	ditch cut	1	0.3	
3	307	layer of dark grey clay loam, fill of 308	ditch fill	?	0.1	medieval (1) and post-medieval (1) with 1 undated brick/tile
3	308	cut	ditch cut		0.1	
3	309	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 310	gully fill	0.7	0.22	1 burnt flint
3	310	cut	gully cut	0.7	0.22	
3	311	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexcavated ditch fill	1.4		
3	312	layer of dark grey clay loam	root disturbance	0.2	0.03	
4	401	layer of dark grey silty clay	topsoil		0.3	
4	402	layer of mid-grey clay loam	old ploughsoil		0.1	1 bone
4	403	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 404	ditch fill		0.3	
4	404	cut	ditch cut	1.2	0.35	
4	405	layer of light grey clay	natural		-	
4	406	layer of pale grey silt clay	not fully excavated		0.25	?Roman (1), medieval (1) and 1 brick
4	407	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexc			

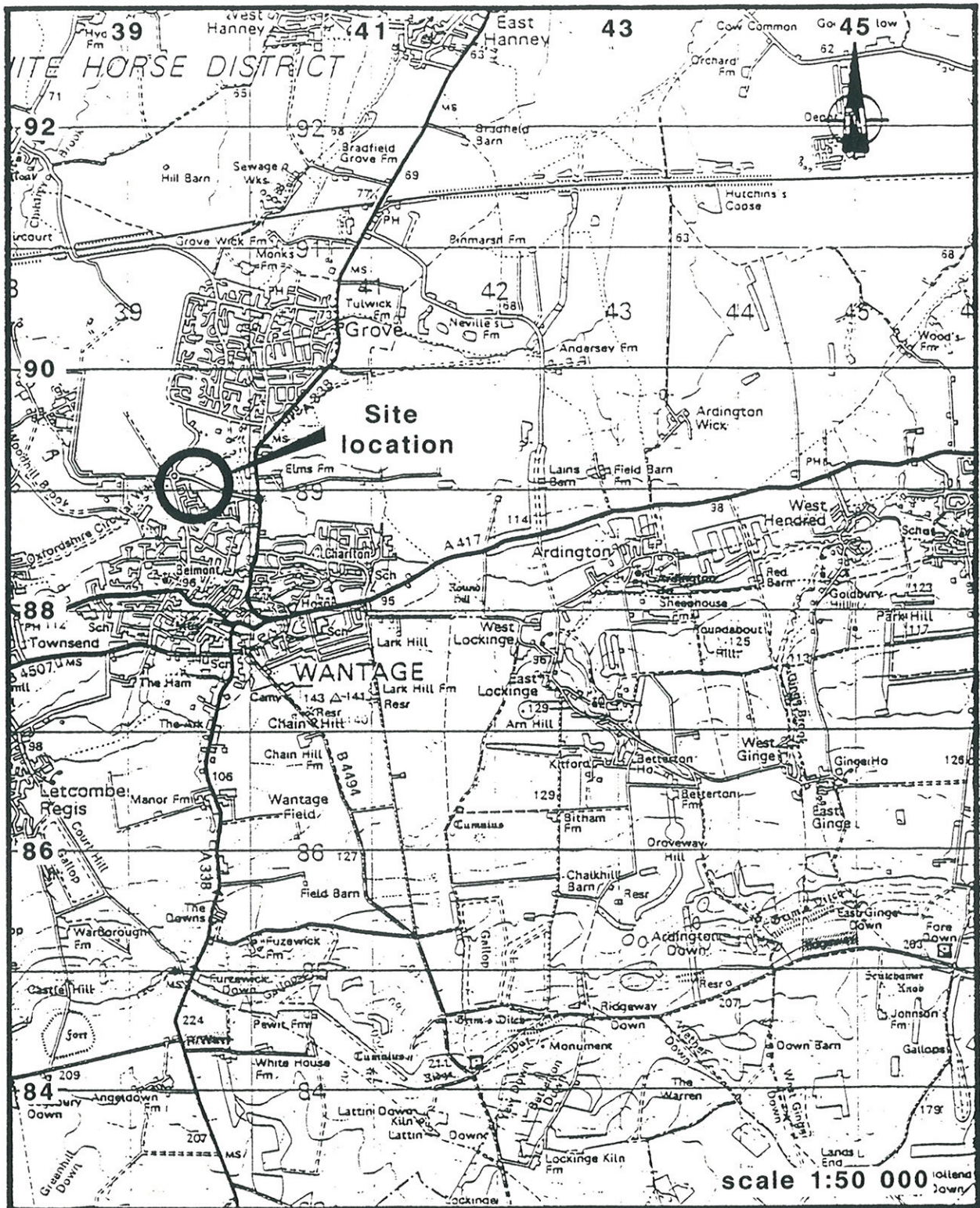
TR	CTX	description	type	width (m)	depth (m)	Date of pottery and number of sherds
4	408	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexc			
5	500	layer of dark grey clay loam	topsoil		0.2	
5	501	layer of mid-grey clay loam	old ploughsoil		0.18	
5	502	layer of blue\grey clay	natural		-	
5	503	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexc ditch fill	1.5	-	
5	504	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 505	ditch fill	5	0.2+	
5	505	cut	ditch cut	5	0.2+	
5	506	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexc ditch fill	5.5	-	
5	507	layer of mid-grey clay loam, fill of 506	ditch fill	1.5	0.51	1 bone
5	508	cut	ditch cut	1.5	0.5	
5	509	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexc ditch fill	1.7	-	
5	510	layer of mid-grey clay loam	unexc ditch fill	4.5+	-	

Pottery comments by P Booth

Fourteen sherds were recovered. One post-medieval sherd was recovered from context 104, the ditch fill in Trench 1. It was initially thought to be Roman from the fabric but the glaze indicates a post-medieval date.

The 2nd-century sherd from context 207, a gully, is in a fine oxidised fabric. One of the two sherds from context 406 was possibly early Roman. The grog-tempered fabric is not inconsistent with this date but the firing (with a reduced interior and oxidised exterior) and the form (a weak carination angle) are not typical of Roman grog-tempered wares and so this sherd could be medieval. The other sherd is in an off-white fabric which could be Roman but is more likely to be of medieval date.

All of the brick and tile is post-medieval.



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Figure 1

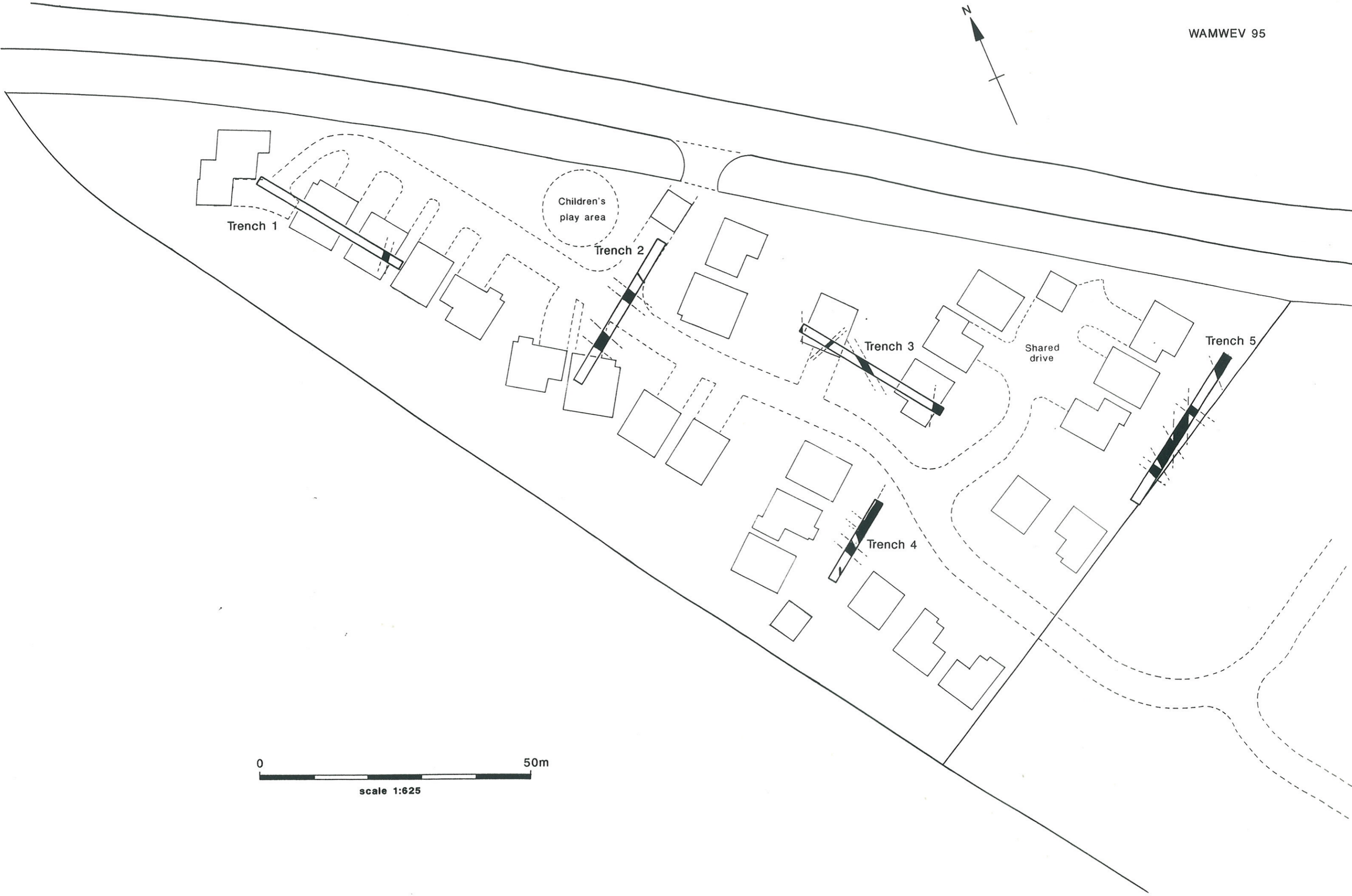
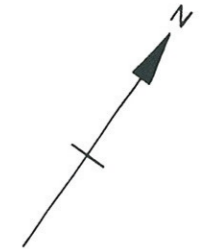
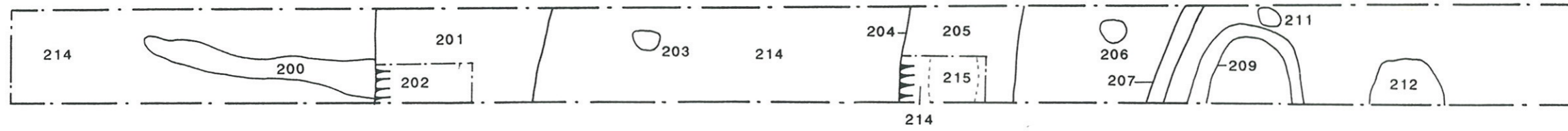
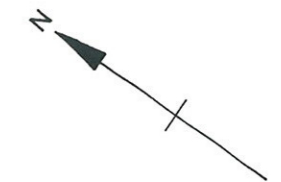
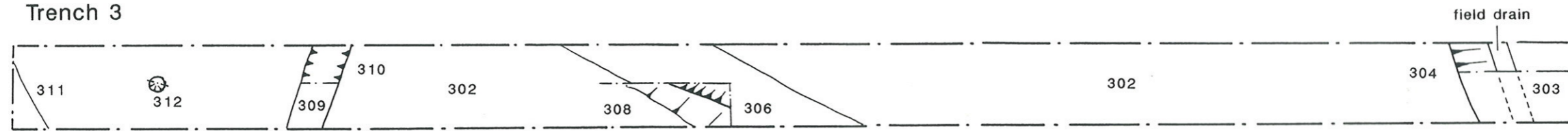


Figure 2

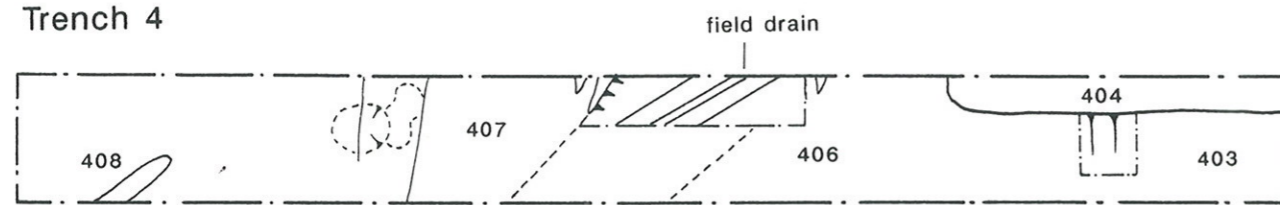
Trench 2



Trench 3



Trench 4



Trench 5

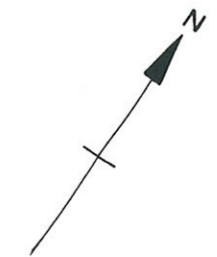
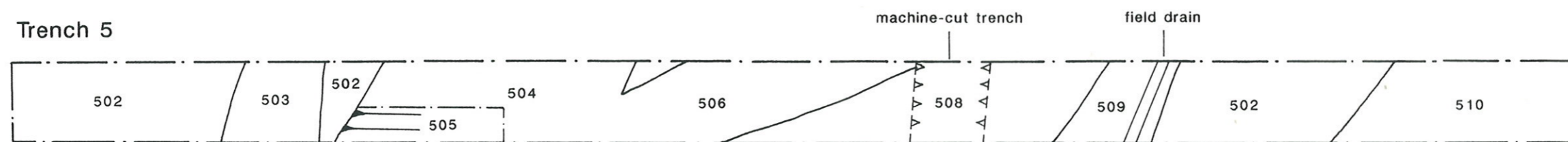


Figure 3



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