

Land south of Lock Crescent,
Kidlington, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 493 126

Archaeological Evaluation Report

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Kidlington, Oxfordshire
NGR SP 493126**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) at the above named site. A small number of features, mostly of linear character and undated, were concentrated mainly in the eastern part of the site. The only artefacts recovered were flints, probably of Neolithic date.

INTRODUCTION

An application (CHS 371/93) has been submitted to Cherwell District Council, for development of 95 residential dwelling units together with roads and landscaping. The evaluation was carried out on behalf of the Oxford Citizens Housing association. The site is located at SP 493126 on the southern outskirts of Kidlington (Garden City Estate) some 2 kilometres north of Oxford (Fig 1). The site lies almost equidistant from the River Evenlode to the west and River Cherwell on the east. The Oxford Canal forms the western boundary of the site.

The proposal area lies at the interface of the River Terrace Drift and Drift over gault clay at an elevation of about 60-61 m OD. At present the 3.39 hectare site is overgrown with large clumps of dense undergrowth, hawthorn thickets and mature trees.

While no known sites of archaeological interest were located within the development site prior to the commencement of work substantial and important archaeological remains have been documented in and around the Kidlington/Yarnton area. Approximately 1 km to the northwest are extensive areas of flint and pottery spreads which cropmarks of enclosures and field systems appear to span the Mesolithic, Neolithic and later prehistoric periods. Medieval and later medieval sites are also documented in the area (County Archaeological services brief). Less than 3 km to the southwest extensive excavations by the OAU on the floodplain and gravel terraces at Yarnton have demonstrated activity from the Neolithic through to the Saxon period, with major settlements in the Iron Age, Roman and Saxon periods.

In the light of the background information and the consequent likelihood of archaeological features and deposits occurring on the site, and in the light of the scale of the development, an archaeological evaluation was required under a negative condition of the planning consent (condition 15).

AIMS

The principal aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area. Aims consequent upon the establishment of the presence of archaeological deposits were to determine the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any remains and to determine the environmental/ecofactual potential of features and deposits.

METHODOLOGY

It was proposed to excavate 12 x 30 metre long trenches, covering some 2% of the development area. These were to be sited to avoid the exact locations of proposed structures (to limit the possible disturbance to foundations) and to avoid major trees which were to be retained within the development area.

Due to the thickness of shrubs and undergrowth several trenches were relocated from their proposed positions (Fig 2). In addition there had been considerable informal encroachment on the development area by adjacent gardens. These areas were not examined by trenching. The number of trenches was reduced to 10, with the agreement of Mr P Smith (the County Archaeologist).

The trenches were excavated with a JCB equipped with a 1.60 m toothless ditching bucket to an initial depth of c 0.50 m, except where archaeological features or deposits were encountered at a higher level. All archaeological features were manually cleaned, recorded in section and plan and photographed. Sufficient of each feature was excavated to determine its character, but most did not contain dating evidence. Context recording was by the standard OAU method (OAU Field Manual ed D Wilkinson 1992). The present character of the site, with rough pasture and many overgrown areas prevented the effective employment of other evaluation techniques.

RESULTS

Trenches 5, 7, 8 and 10 revealed no archaeological features although several probable tree throw pits were seen and recorded. A deposit of mid brown silt/clay on average 0.20 m thick was recorded in all trenches beneath the topsoil. This may have been a ploughsoil.

Trench 1 (Fig 3)

This trench was 18 m long and located at the eastern end of the proposed development area (Fig 2). It was excavated to a depth of 0.68 m below the existing ground level at the western end, and a 1.10 m deep sondage was excavated at the eastern end in order to examine the character of the subsoil.

The subsoil (1/5) was an orange/grey mottled clay, seen at c 60.80 m OD at the E end of the trench and at c 60.40 m OD to the W.

At the extreme W end of the trench was a pit (1/9). This was c 1.50 m in diameter and survived to a depth of 0.16 m. Its mid brown clay/silt fill (1/10) contained frequent flecks of charcoal and 13 struck flints, perhaps of Neolithic date (see below). The fill was partly truncated in the extreme NW corner of the trench by (1/8), a gully aligned NW-SE which terminated some 4 m from the W end of the trench. The gully was approx 0.65 m wide and 0.28 m deep. Its light brown silty clay fill (1/7) contained charcoal but no finds.

The fills of 1/9 and 1/8 were sealed by a light brown silty clay deposit (1/4), up to 0.40 m thick, in turn overlaid by 1/3, a possible ploughsoil of mid brown silty clay (seen across the whole proposed development area). Above 1/3 was a recent deposit (1/2) of grey-blue clay up to 0.14 m thick. This deposit, only present in this trench, was overlaid by topsoil (1/1) up to 0.30 m deep.

Trench 2 (Fig 4)

This trench, to the W of Trench 1, was 20 m long and aligned NE-SW. It was excavated to a average depth of 0.50 m.

The natural reddish/brown sandy clay was recorded at 59.90 m OD at the NE end of the trench and

Both these features were sealed by the possible ploughsoil (6/2). This layer was 0.20 m deep, of dark brown clayey silt.

Neither feature produced any finds. At the S end of the trench was an E-W aligned feature (6/4), 0.60 m wide and 0.54 m deep with near vertical sides and a concave bottom. It was filled with a sequence of grey and brown clayey silts and sandy silts (6/11-6/8 and 6/3). To the N was a further linear feature (6/6). This was 1.00 m wide and 0.13 m deep, with 45% sloping sides and a flat bottom. Its fill was of mid grey brown clayey silt (6/5).

This trench was 30 m long and aligned N-S. Natural sandy gravel was seen at 60.20 m OD at the southern end and 60.17 m OD at the N.

Trench 6 (Fig 7)

The possible ploughsoil (4/2) was 0.15 m deep across the trench and the overlying topsoil (4/1) ranged from 0.25-0.32 m in thickness.

Only two archaeological features were seen. These were a small pit (4/5) 0.65 m wide and 0.30 m deep was seen in the northern section, filled by a dark grey-brown silty clay (4/4), and a N-S aligned gully (4/7), 1.10 m wide and 0.30 m deep. 4/7 was filled with light grey sandy silt (4/6). Neither feature produced any finds.

This was the furthest north of the trenches excavated, 20 m long and aligned NW-SE. The natural subsil was seen at 59.46 m OD at the NW end and at 59.30 m OD at the SE end.

Trench 4 (Fig 6)

The possible ploughsoil (3/2) was 0.15 m thick in this trench. It relationship to two ceramic land drains and a limestone filled soakaway was uncertain. No cuts for these features were evident in the ploughsoil so they may have been sealed by this deposit, though it seems unlikely that this was the case. The overlying topsoil was 0.15 m thick.

Several alluvium filled tree throw pits were seen. A small gully, (3/5) aligned NE-SW was located in the western half of the trench. It was 0.65 m wide and 0.22 m deep. Its profile was the same as that of feature 2/5 some 30 m distant to the NW and on a parallel alignment. Again no dating was recovered from the fill (3/4), which was of light grey clayey silt. The northern edge of this feature was disturbed adjacent to the NE bank of the trench by a land drain pipe. The fill of the drain trench was appeared to be indistinguishable from that of the adjacent feature.

Trench 3 was 28 m long and aligned NW-SE. It was excavated to a depth of 0.50 m. The natural subsil was seen at 59.46 m OD at the NW end and at 59.47 m OD at the SE.

Trench 3 (Fig 5)

The features were overlaid by 2/2, the possible ploughsoil deposit, and then by topsoil (2/1).

A small gully (2/5) was located in the northern end of the trench, aligned NE-SW. It was 0.55 m wide and 0.10 m deep, with a U-shape profile. No finds were recovered from its fill of light grey clayey silt (2/4). A ditch (2/7) aligned NNE-SSW ran through the middle of the trench. It was 0.85 m wide and 0.40 m deep with a 'V' shaped profile. Its fill (2/6) was the same as 2/4. No finds were recovered from this feature, but one piece of struck flint found on the spoil heap adjacent to the trench could have come from the fill. It was not closely datable.

at 59.88 m OD at the SW.

There were two principal alignments of linear features. A number of gullies/ditches were all aligned roughly N-S. These were gullies 4/7 and 9/4 and the larger ditch 2/7. A further ditch 6/6 was on a similar but not exactly parallel alignment. These features all had the same light grey silt fill and may belong to a contemporary, but undated, phase of field division/enclosures. A second alignment, roughly NE-SW, was followed by gullies 2/5 and 3/4. A relationship between the N-S aligned 2/7 and the NE-SW aligned 2/5 fell beyond the confines of trench 2, so the relative dating of the two alignments was not established. There was no significant difference between their fills, however, though it is uncertain whether this indicates that most of the linear features were broadly contemporary despite their contrasting alignments or were of widely differing date. An anomalous alignment was followed by an approximately ENE-WSW aligned gully seen in the south end of trench 6 (6/4). The character of this feature was distinctive. It could conceivably have been a westward continuation of a similarly aligned hedge boundary still extant to the east. The only other unusual alignment was that of a further gully,

The distribution and density of archaeological features across the site indicates a relatively low level of activity in the eastern part of the development area, with no significant evidence for occupation in the western part of the site. The lack of finds makes it very difficult to establish a chronology for the activity on the site, though similarity of size and of the character of fills of several of the features can be tentatively used to suggest broadly contemporary dates for some of them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The pieces are of good quality flint and are mostly soft-hammer struck with punctiform or linear butts. Some of the blades have previous parallel blade scars, indicating controlled knapping. The core fragment shows several blade removals. The exact character of the retouched/serrated flake is unclear, its distal end may have been notched. The technological characteristics of the group indicate a date in the Mesolithic or Neolithic rather than later. Technologically it is not possible to distinguish between these two periods, but the apparent occurrence of these pieces in a pit suggests that, if not redeposited, the flints are more likely to be of Neolithic date. This is a tentative conclusion, however.

1 blade
1 blade-like flake
9 flakes
1 retouched/serrated flake
1 core fragment

One flint, a broken flake perhaps from context 2/6, was not assignable to a more precise date range than Neolithic-Bronze Age. The remainder of the material came from a single feature, a probable pit fill (1/10). The 13 pieces were:

The only finds from the site were 14 pieces of struck flint. There was no pottery or other material, except for very occasional fragments of modern material from the topsoil. These were not retained. The following notes on the flint are based on information provided by Pippa Bradley.

Finds

Only one feature was seen. This was a possible small N-S aligned gully (9/5), 0.50 m wide and 0.26 m deep with a V-shaped profile. No finds were recovered from the light grey sandy silt fill (9/4). The possible ploughsoil layer (9/2) was 0.15 m thick below a topsoil ranging from 0.12-0.20 m.

This trench was 29 m long, aligned E-W. Natural gravel was recorded at 60.10 m OD at both ends of the trench.

Trench 9 (Fig 8)

The only dated activity on the site was encountered in trench 1, where a pit contained flints most probably of Neolithic date. The occurrence of a gully (1/6) cutting the fill of the pit indicates a relative density of features not seen elsewhere on the site and suggests a focus of prehistoric activity, though the nature of this is unclear. Unfortunately the association of the flint was with a unique feature (in terms of its occurrence on this site) so the dating evidence cannot be extrapolated from this feature to features of other (particularly linear) character. It is likely, though unprovable on present evidence, that many of the features encountered were also of prehistoric date (on the basis of a broad similarity in the character of their fills) but sufficiently far from a settlement focus to contain no artefacts. The overall sequence of events on the site remains unclear. Possible tree throw holes located in trench 3 were filled with grey clay of alluvial character and similar features were observed in trenches 5-10, ie across the western two-thirds of the site. The origin of the alluvial material is uncertain, but alluvial deposits, which might have been expected widely across the site, were generally absent and did not occur filling features other than the tree holes. The most likely explanation is that any alluvial deposits which did occur accumulated after the identified features were filled and then were incorporated within a later phase of ploughing which seems to have extended across the site and overlaid or truncated the identified feature fills. The date of such an episode of ploughing is quite unknown.

Generalised models of alluviation in the Upper Thames Valley would indicate that such deposits could have been accumulating from the Late Bronze Age onwards, though the exact chronology will vary from site to site. The absence of alluvium predating the identified features would be consistent with their being of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, though a later date is not precluded. The trees identified in trench 3 were presumably felled, whether accidentally or deliberately, at a later date approximately contemporary with a phase of alluviation but before the ploughing episode.

Direct evidence for land drainage was confined to trench 3 and to a pipe in trench 10 roughly at right angles to the drainage alignments in trench 3. The relationship of the trench 3 drains to the apparently overlying ploughsoil is questionable. Taken at face value this would suggest that the ploughsoil postdated the insertion of drains, making the ploughing episode of relatively recent date. This is possible, but evidence from elsewhere in the region indicates that narrow cuts for the insertion of drains soon become invisible in section, so it is possible that the drains were cut through the general ploughing horizon, the date of which then remains uncertain.

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August 1994

TRENCH/ CONTEXT	TYPE	DEPTH (m)	WIDTH (m)	COMMENTS
1/1	Layer	0.30		Topsoil
1/2	Layer	0.35		Clay
1/3	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
1/4	Layer	0.31		Silty clay
1/5	Layer	0.25		Natural
1/6	Layer	0.11		Natural
1/7	Fill	0.28		Fill of 1/8
1/8	Cut	0.28	0.63	Gully
1/9	Cut	0.16	1.50	Pit
1/10	Fill	0.16		Fill of 1/9
2/1	Layer	0.17		Topsoil
2/2	Layer	0.30		Ploughsoil
2/3	Layer	0.40+		Natural
2/4	Fill	0.10		Fill of 2/5
2/5	Cut	0.10	0.55	Gully
2/6	Fill	0.40		Fill of 2/7
2/7	Cut	0.40	0.85	Ditch
3/1	Layer	0.15		Topsoil
3/2	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
3/3	Layer			Natural
3/4	Fill	0.22		Fill of 3/5
3/5	Cut	0.22	0.65	Gully
4/1	Layer	0.32		Topsoil
4/2	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
4/3	Layer			Natural
4/4	Fill	0.28		Fill of 4/5
4/5	Cut	0.25	0.45	Pit
4/6	Fill	0.32		Fill of 4/7
4/7	Cut	0.32	0.70	Ditch

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF FEATURES

5/1	Layer	0.15		Topsoil
5/2	Layer	0.18		Ploughsoil
5/3	Layer			Natural
6/1	Layer	0.22		Topsoil
6/2	Layer	0.20		Ploughsoil
6/3	Fill	0.26		Fill of 6/4
6/4	Cut	0.54	0.60	Gully
6/5	Fill	0.14		Fill of 6/6
6/6	Cut	0.14	0.96	Ditch
6/7	Layer			Natural
6/8	Fill	0.14		Fill of 6/4
6/9	Fill	0.16		Fill of 6/4
6/10	Fill	0.06		Fill of 6/4
6/11	Fill	0.06		Fill of 6/4
7/1	Layer	0.08		Topsoil
7/2	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
7/3	Layer	0.25+		Natural
8/1	Layer	0.18		Topsoil
8/2	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
8/3	Layer	0.10+		Natural
9/1	Layer	0.20		Topsoil
9/2	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
9/3	Layer	0.15+		Natural
9/4	Fill	0.26		Fill of 9/5
9/5	Cut	0.26	0.50	Gully
10/1	Layer	0.15		Topsoil
10/2	Layer	0.15		Ploughsoil
10/3	Layer	0.20+		Natural

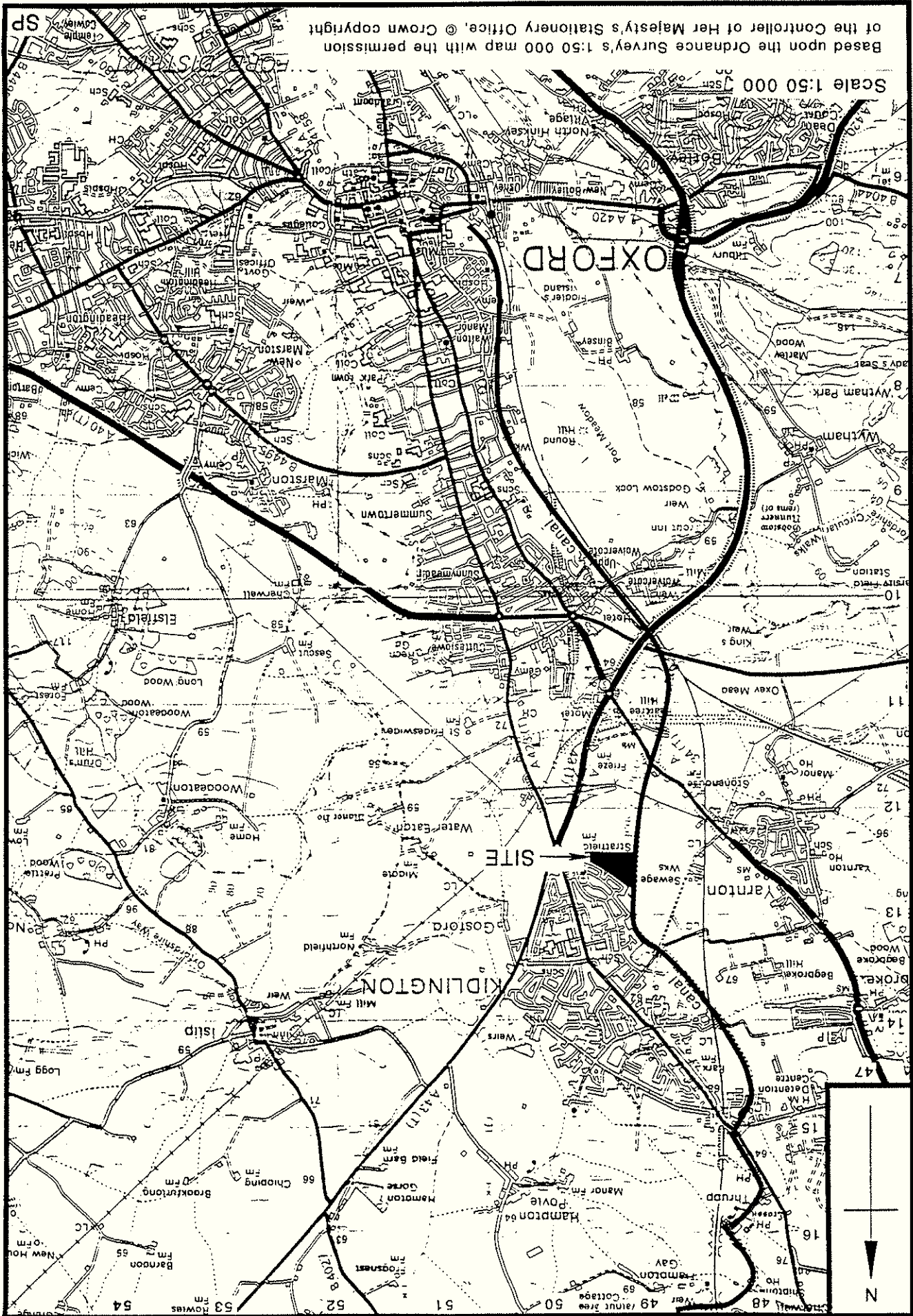


figure 1: Site location

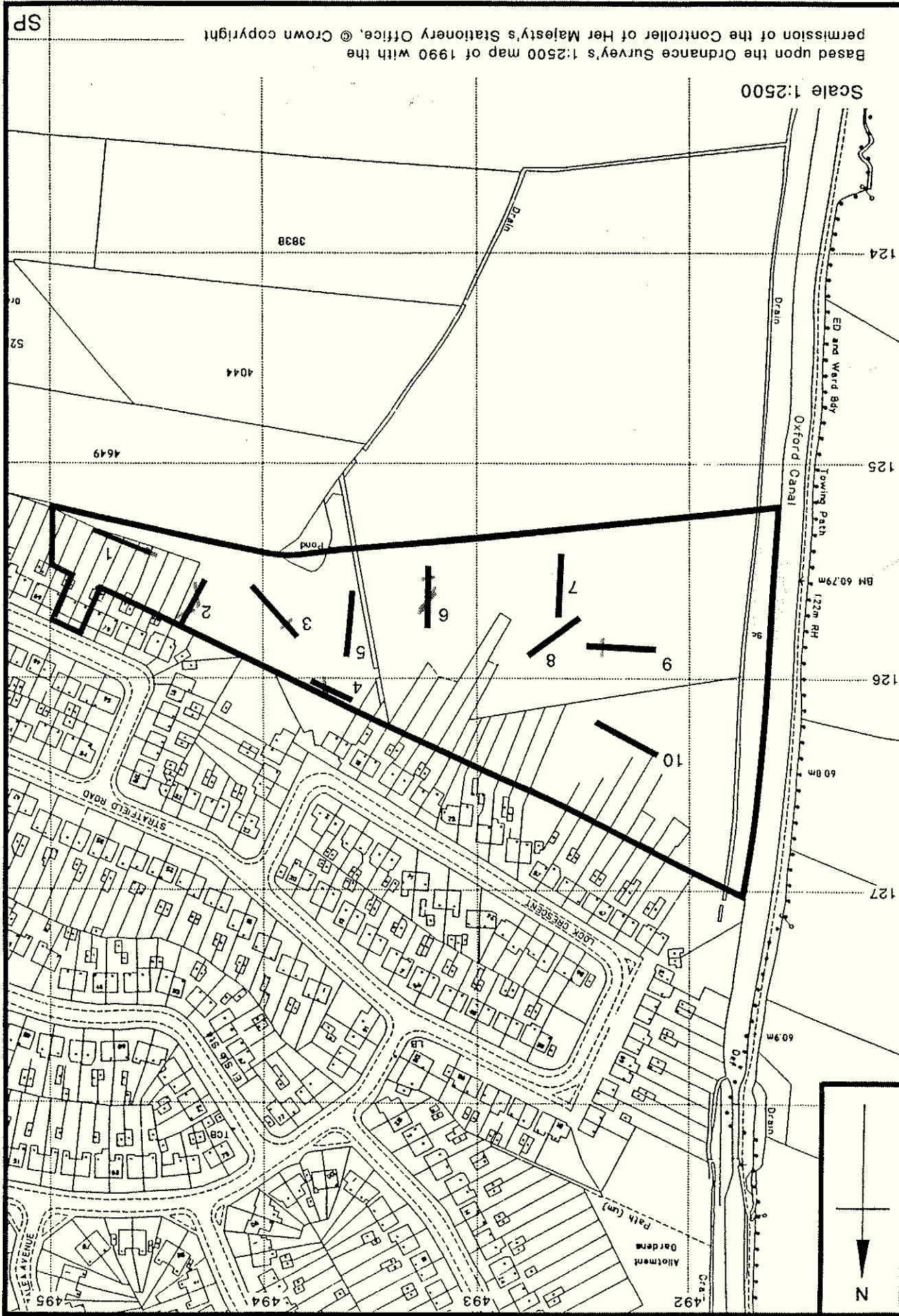
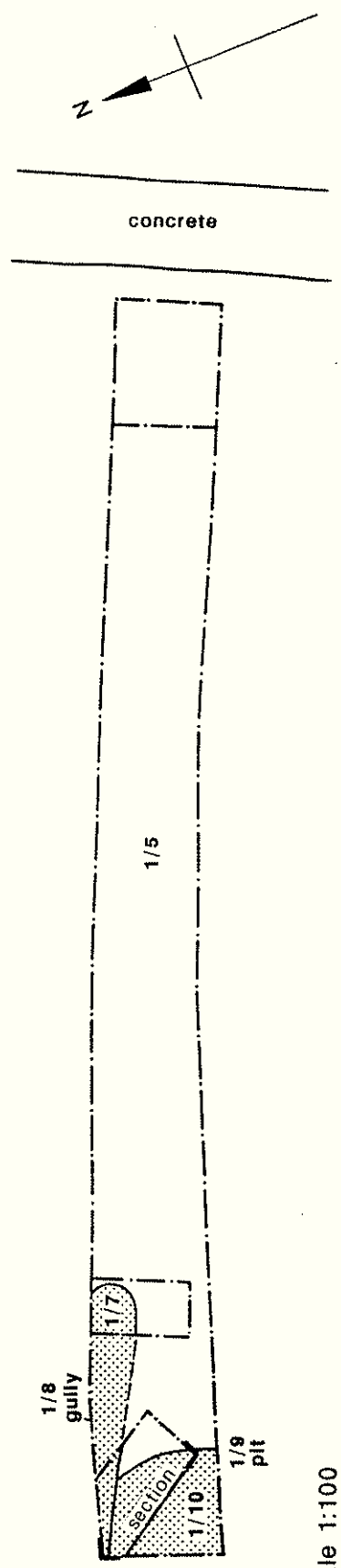


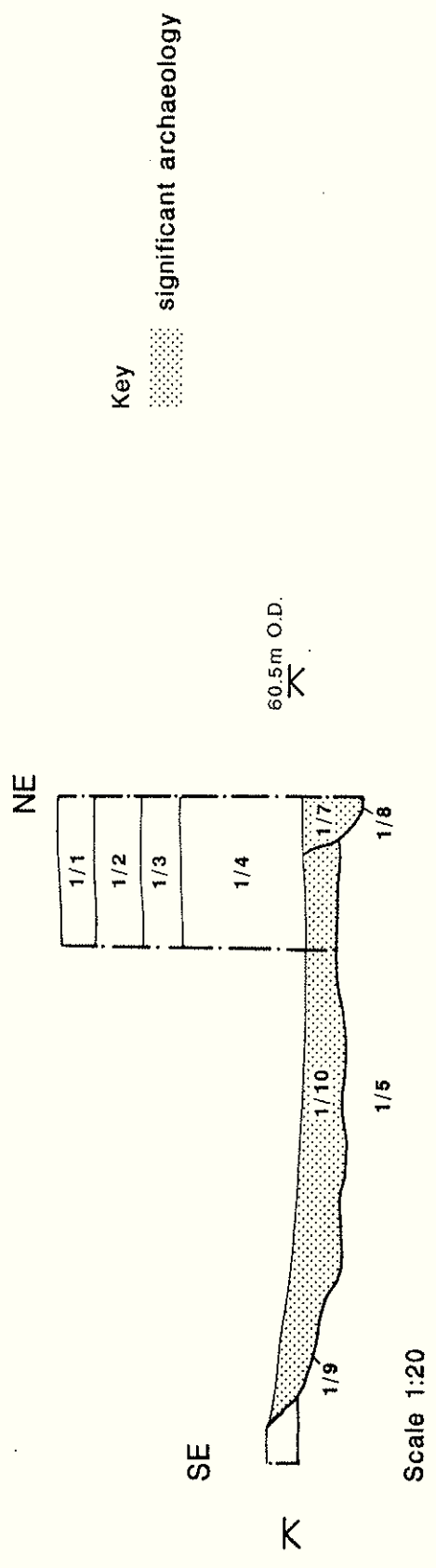
figure 2: Trench location

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Trench 1



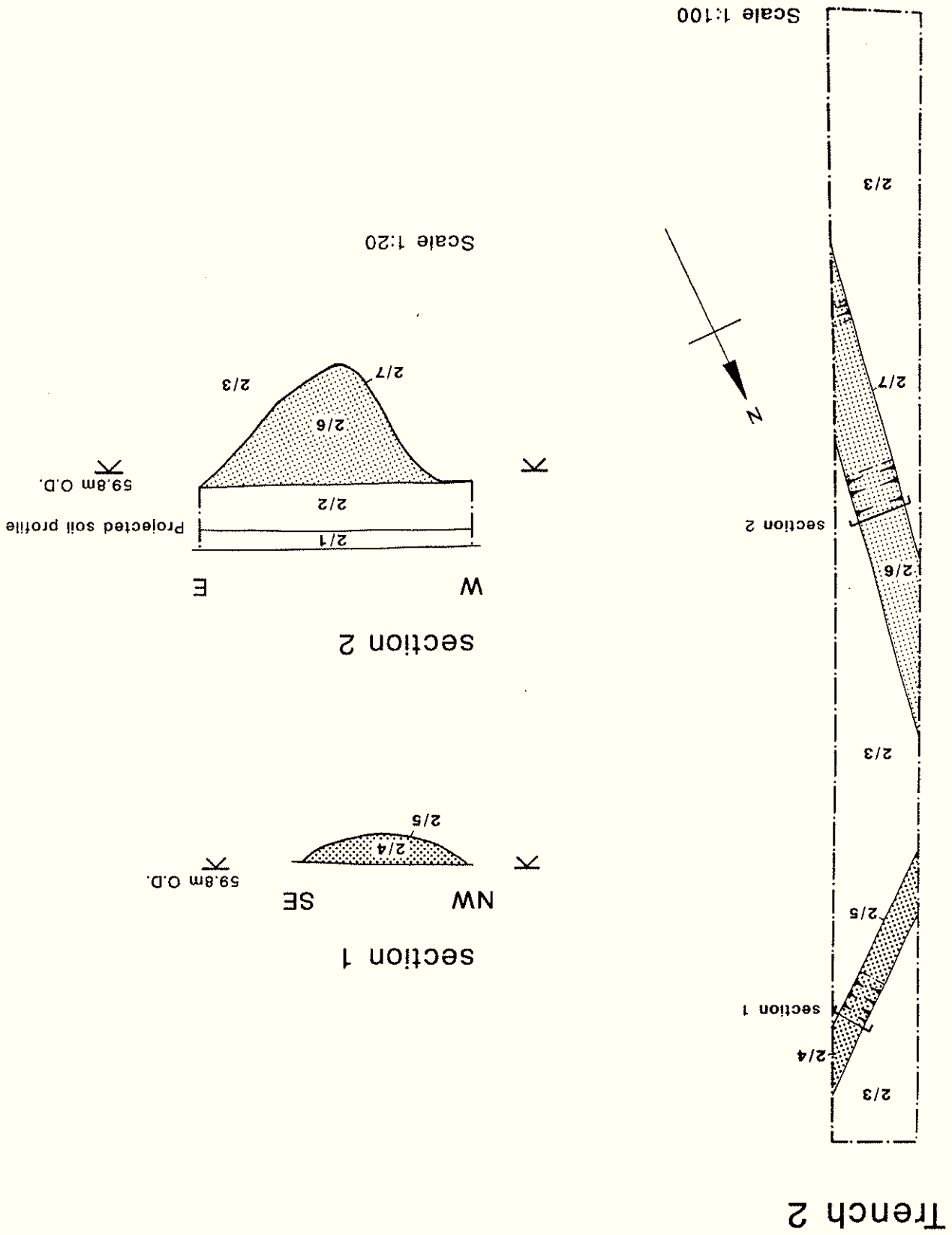
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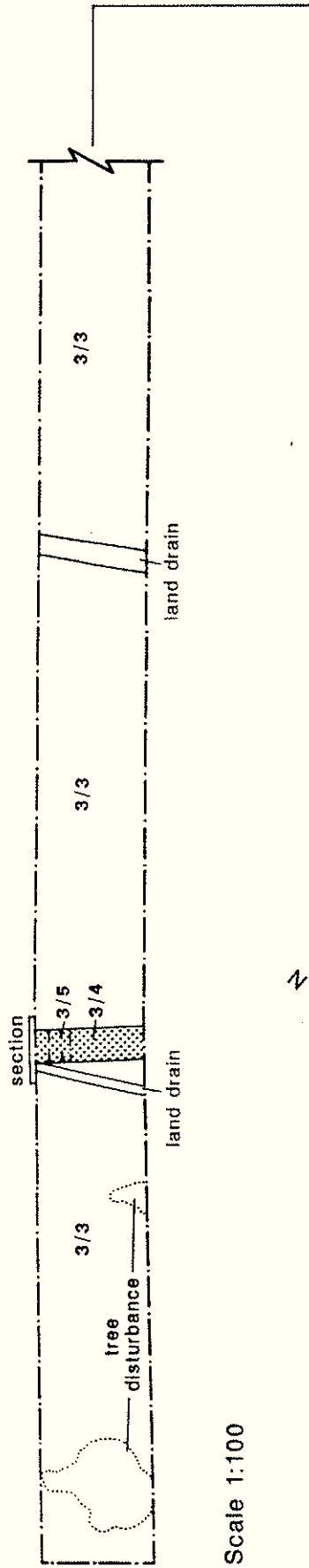
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figure 3: Trench 1 plan & section

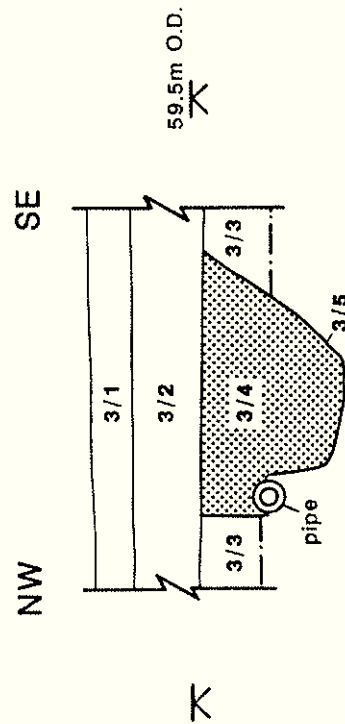
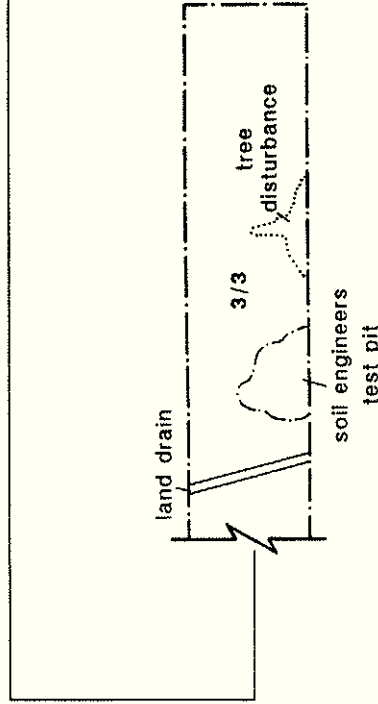
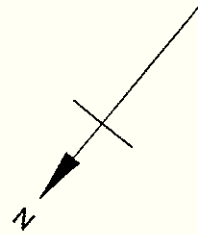
figure 4: Trench 2 plan & sections



Trench 3



Scale 1:100

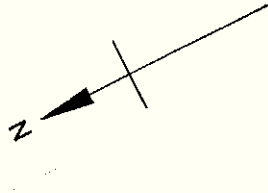


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figure 5: Trench 3 plan & section

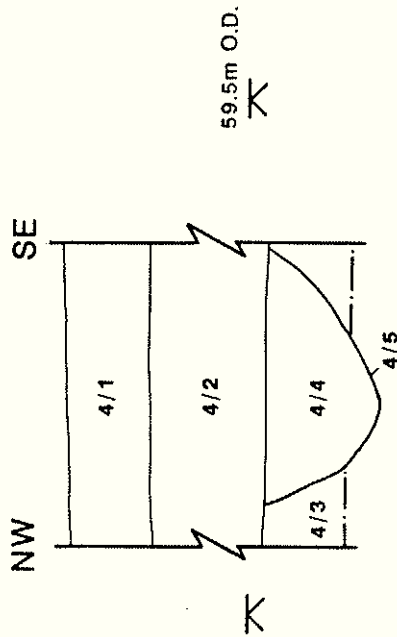
Trench 4

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Scale 1:100

section 1



Scale 1:20

section 2

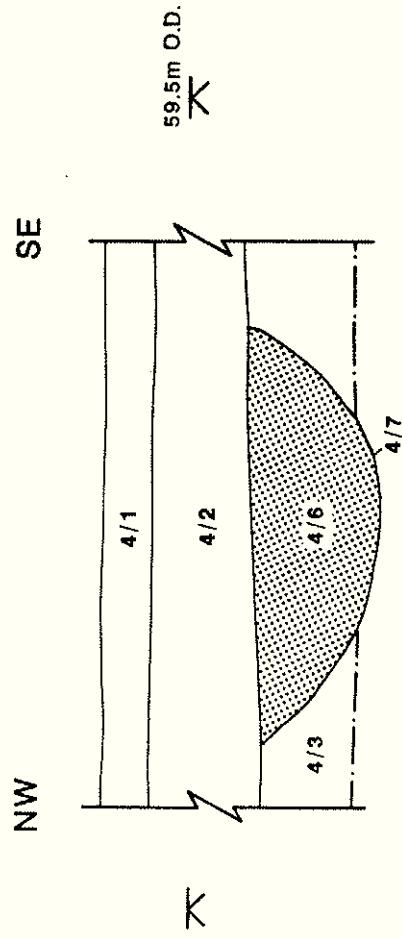


figure 6: Trench 4 plan & sections

Trench 6

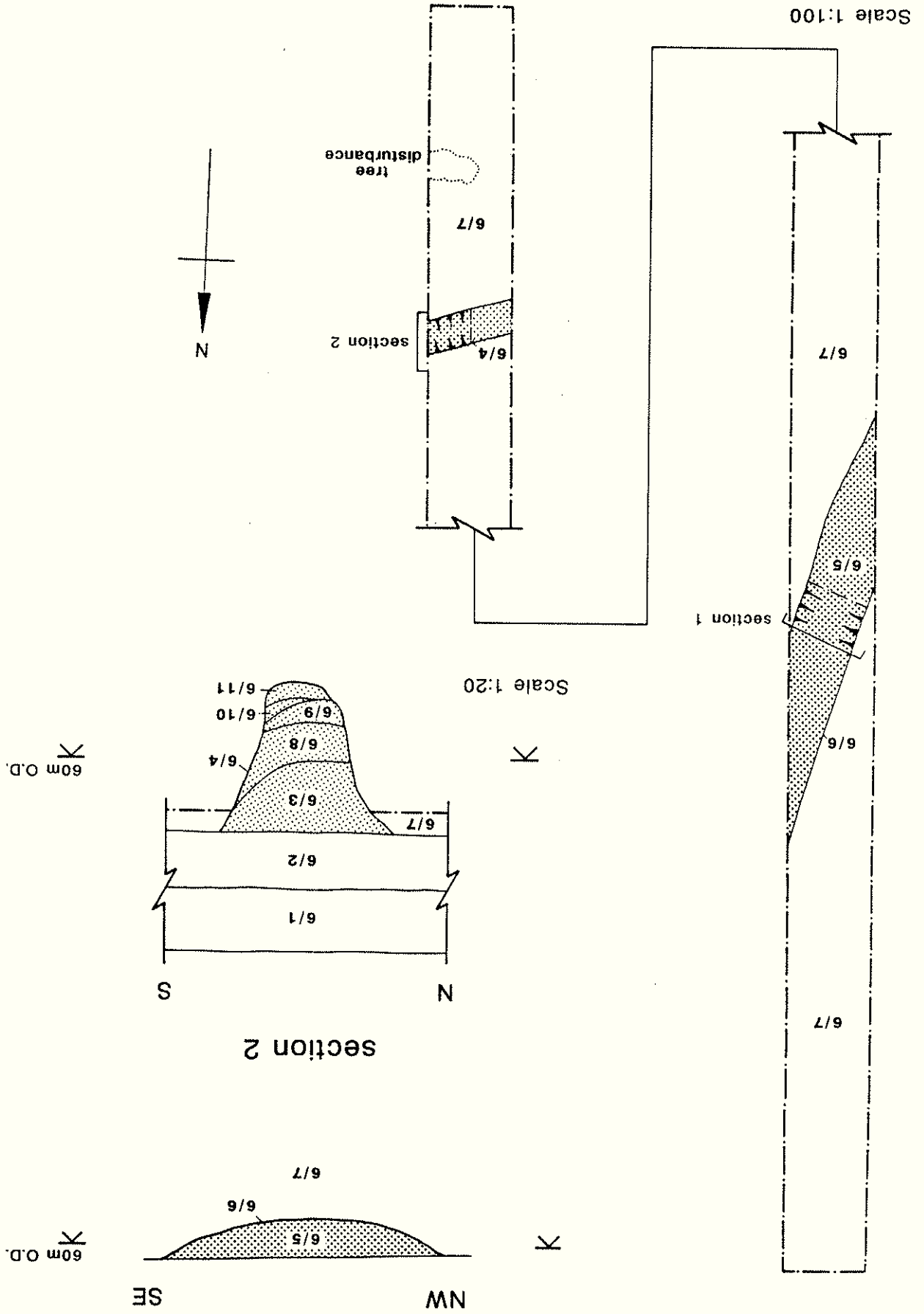
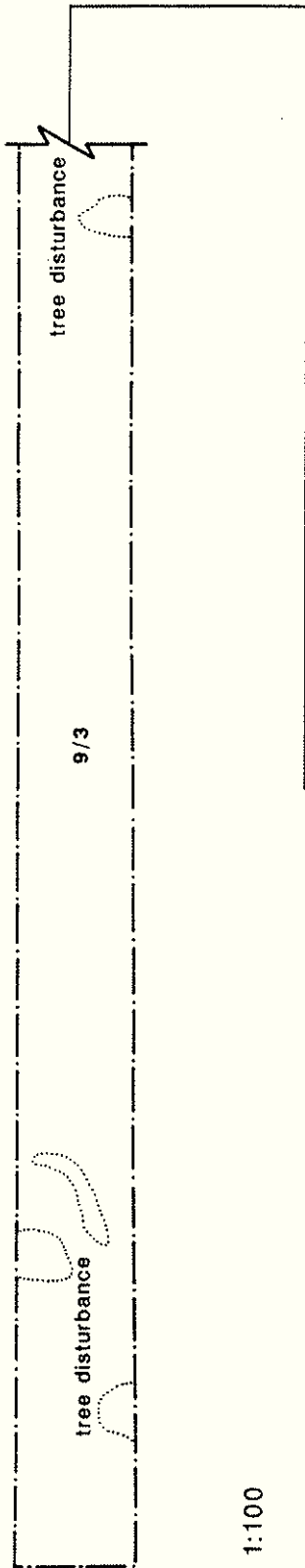
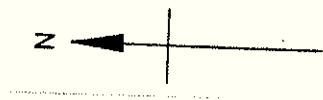
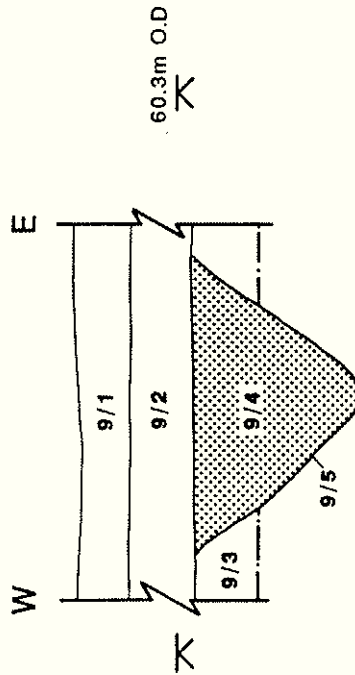


Figure 7: Trench 6 plan & sections

Trench 9



Scale 1:100



Scale 1:20

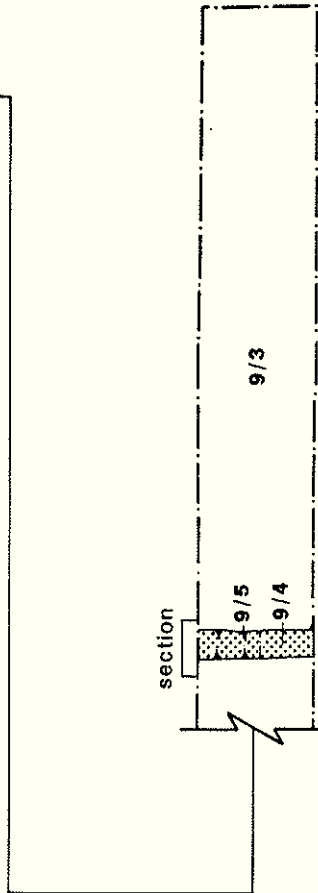


figure 8: Trench 9 plan & section

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