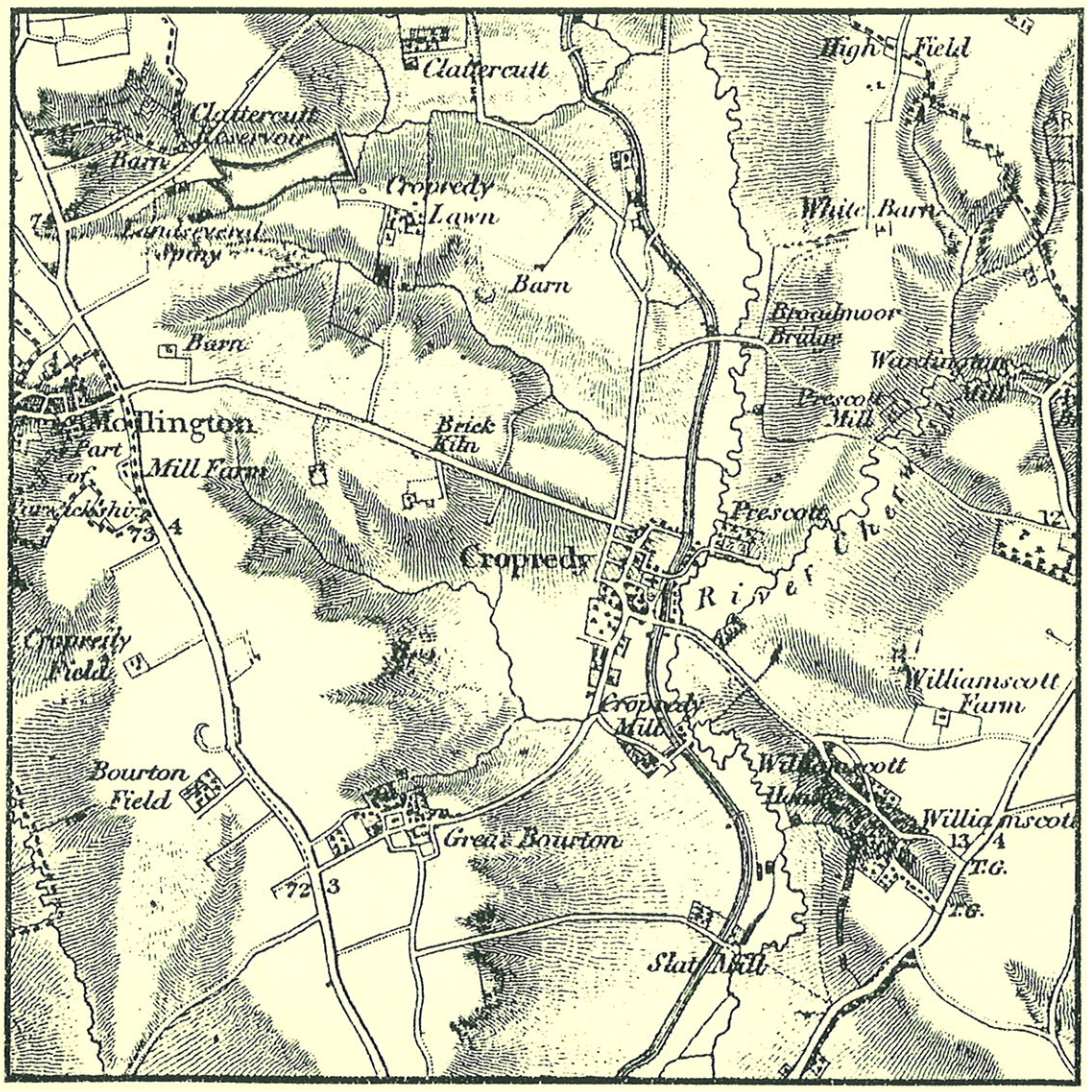
# POPLARS FARM,

# CROPREDY, OXON.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION




OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

# POPLARS FARM, CROPREDY
# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

APRIL 1993

## SUMMARY

A field evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) at Poplars Farm, Cropredy on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Midlands) Limited between 29/3/93 and 1/4/93. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with Cherwell District Council requirements, and in agreement with a brief set by the Oxfordshire County archaeological officer, in advance of an application for planning approval regarding the development of the site for residential purposes. The evaluation revealed a series of features which indicate that the extant earthworks are a redefinition of an earlier boundary system. Mid/late Anglo-Saxon pottery from three of the trenches implies pre-conquest activity in the area and, as such, supports etymological evidence for the ancient origins of the village.


## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The archaeological background

The ancient parish of Cropredy is located in the extreme N of the county, lying between Warwickshire to the W and Northamptonshire to the E. The village of Cropredy itself stands on slightly rising ground on the W bank of the river Cherwell. The area of proposed development (which comprises an area of approximately 1.1 ha) is located within the historic core of Cropredy village. The northern and western boundaries of the site are delineated by a bank and external ditch which have been attributed to the medieval period (SMR PRN 11270). Along the eastern limit of the development area, running parallel to Claydon Road, is a *c* 170m stretch of bank which turns at the N-E corner of the site to run eastwards towards Creampot Lane (see fig.1). This earthwork has been interpreted as a medieval village or manorial boundary. Aerial photographs taken in 1961 show ridge and furrow external to the bank.

The medieval history of Cropredy is well recorded, The Domesday book enumerated eight knightly tenants, 147 villeins and bordars, and 23 serfs within Cropredy and its hamlets. Fragments of a medieval cross (known locally as 'the cup and saucer') survive in the SW of the village (see fig.1), and the eccentric location of this cross coupled with the signs of former buildings nearby imply that the village formerly extended much further to the W. Place name evidence suggests the village has its roots in the pre-conquest period, although no archaeological evidence for the Anglo-Saxon settlement of the area is known. It should be stressed, however, that little or no archaeological excavation has occurred in Cropredy.

### 1.2 Reasons for the evaluation

The evaluation at Poplars Farm was commissioned by Berkeley Homes (Midlands) Limited in advance of a proposed development of the site for a residential scheme comprising 25 houses. The extant bank is of known archaeological significance, but it was felt that the area enclosed by the earthwork may also be of interest in its potential to yield below ground deposits such as property boundaries, rubbish pits, or possibly the remains of more substantial structures of both agricultural and domestic type.

### 1.3 Evaluation strategy

The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

(1) to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the area of proposed development

(2) to determine the extent, condition, character and date of any archaeological remains

(3) to establish the potential of archaeological features for environmental data

(4) to appraise the likely impact of the development proposals on any archaeological remains

Evaluation was undertaken by machine excavation of nine trenches (see fig.2), which together formed a *c* 3% sample of the development area. Topsoil and overburden were removed mechanically down to archaeological horizons or to natural subsoil using a JCB with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket. Difficulty of access with the mechanical digger was encountered with two of the trenches (3 and 7) which resulted in these trenches differing slightly from the layout originally specified in the project design (see trench descriptions 2.2, below). Subsequent excavation of archaeological features was undertaken by hand. All trenches were planned at a scale of 1:100, and relevant sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. Written recording was in accordance with the standard OAU method. Inclement weather conditions during the period of the evaluation restricted the amount of hand excavation of archaeological features, particularly in trench 4, but sufficient information was recovered to date these features if not to fully interpret their nature.

## 2 RESULTS

### 2.1 Soils

The general soil type over the whole site was a clayey loam. In all but trench 3, which was dug through a modern tarmac surface, the modern topsoil directly overlay natural silty clay subsoils. The natural soils into which archaeological features were cut varied considerably both within trenches and from trench to trench, but in general consisted of silty and sandy clays with occasional outcrops of natural marlestone.

### 2.2 Trench descriptions

TRENCH 1 (see fig.3)

14m, aligned E-W, located at the NW corner of the evaluation area.

The trench was machined down to the top of archaeological deposits, removing 0.15m of topsoil (1/1) and c 0.2m-0.3m of silty clay subsoil (1/2). Three archaeological features were identified and each was investigated by hand excavation. A substantial ditch (1/5) aligned approximately NW-SE ran across the E end of the trench extending beyond both balk sections. Another substantial ditch (1/3) cut across the W end of the trench, and was aligned N-S. This feature appears to represent a ditch earlier than, and running parallel to, the extant earthwork bank, and is probably the same feature as 2/4 and 2a/4. In the central area of the trench was located a rather ambiguous feature (1/4) which was interpreted as either a discrete pit or the terminal of a ditch extending beyond the southern limit of the trench. None of the dug sections produced datable artefacts. All of the features were sealed by the subsoil 1/2.

TRENCH 2 (see fig.3)

27.50m, aligned N-S, located at the N end of the evaluation area.

The trench was excavated by machine to the top of archaeological deposits. A substantial ditch 2/4 ran E-W across the N end of the trench, on a similar alignment to the extant earthwork bank.

Analysis of the section showed that this feature was sealed by upcast bank material from the external ditch, and is probably an earlier boundary of which the standing earthwork is a subsequent redefinition (see also trench 2a). An outcrop of natural marlestone formed the southern edge of ditch 2/4, which cut feature 2/7 at this point. 2/7 represents either a discrete pit or a ditch terminus. In the central area of the trench was a complex of intercutting features. The earliest of these features was a small linear gully (2/10) running approximately E-W across the trench and extending beyond the trench in both directions. 2/10 is cut by a large pit 2/9, which contained one sherd of pottery datable to the 6th - 8th century, to the E. Pit 2/9 was in turn cut by a linear feature (2/8) which ran along the trench for a distance of 9.5m, appearing to terminate at both N and S ends within the area of the evaluation trench; it is possible, however, that the gully turns to run westwards at its southern end. 2/8 also cuts a series of E-W aligned linear features to the S of 2/9. 2/14 was a deep E-W feature, recut in a much shallower form as 2/15. Ditch 2/13, just to the S of 2/15, was also cut by 2/8. A small stretch of a narrow gully (2/12) aligned ESE-WSW emerges from the E balk section S of 2/13 and terminates within the trench. Ditch 2/11, aligned approximately E-W, was located at the extreme S end of the trench. Due to the high concentration of features within trench 2, overall interpretation of features was only tentative.

TRENCH 2a (see figs.3 and 5)

7m, aligned N-S, located 4m E of the N end of trench 2.

An extra trench was excavated by machine 4m to the E of trench 2 to obtain a complete section across the bank and ditch and hence gain a fuller understanding of the series of ditches seen in trench 2, and their relationship to the extant earthwork. The trench was dug out mechanically to natural subsoil/marlestone. The eastern balk section was then carefully cleaned down and drawn at a scale of 1:20 (see fig.5). The earliest features are a series of linear cuts (2a/7, 2a/8, 2a/9) running E-W across the trench and cutting a buried subsoil layer 2a/10. Gully 2a/8 was lined on its N and S edges by fire reddened stones. This feature was on a slightly different alignment to 2a/7 and 2a/9 and was not related to the boundary ditch system. It probably represents a flue for an oven. These features were sealed by layer 2a/6, which was in turn cut through to the south by the substantial ditch 2a/4 (this feature corresponds to 2/4 to the W). Ditch 2a/4 had silted up naturally by the time of the digging of the external boundary ditch 2a/11, and the upcast bank material (2a/5) seals 2a/4 on its northern edge. Weathering of the bank was represented by the layers 2a/3 to the S and 2a/12 to the N. Apparent truncation of the upper fills of 2a/11 may represent some form of terracing related to the gradual erosion of the bank. 2a/13 and 2a/14 also represent continued erosion of bank material. A late cut (2a/15) at the far N of the trench was sealed by subsoil 2a/2 and topsoil 2a/1 and may be unrelated to the boundary ditch complex.

TRENCH 3 (see fig.3)

29m, aligned E-W, located at the N end of the evaluation area

The trench was machine excavated to the top of archaeological deposits. The central 4m of the trench were left unexcavated due to obstructions caused by a tree immediately S of the trench and because of the possibility of encountering a sunken petrol storage tank. 0.26m of topsoil (3/3) and 0.38m of clayey silt subsoils (3/4) were removed by machine in the eastern section of the trench. The upper layers were much disturbed at the western end of this section by two modern pipe trenches (see fig.3), probably related to the sunken petrol storage tank to the S of the trench. The upper layers were also disturbed by the construction of a modern rubble trackway to the E of this section. The topsoil and

subsoil layers had been substantially truncated in the western section of the trench by the construction of a modern tarmac surface (3/1) and its associated make up layers (3/2). The archaeological features were dug into patchy natural silty and sandy/silty clays. One feature was encountered in each section of the trench. In the eastern section, a substantial ditch (3/7) ran SW-NE across the trench. A narrower linear gully (3/6) ran approximately N-S across the W half of the trench. Neither of the features produced datable artefacts.

TRENCH 4 (see fig.4)

29.2m, aligned N-S, located in paddock field.

0.15m of topsoil (4/1) and between 0.20m and 0.35m of clayey silt subsoils (4/2 and 4/3) were removed by machine. A post-medieval trackway (4/4) was located at the N end of the trench immediately below layer 4/2. Finds from the surface of the trackway included post-medieval pottery, glass and a number of iron objects. A sondage dug through the trackway showed it to overlie undisturbed natural. Three parallel, evenly spaced features (4/6, 4/7, 4/8) were located at the S end of the trench. All proved to be very shallow. Only 4/7 yielded finds: a single sherd of late Saxon pottery. The regularity of spacing of these features (approximately 3.5m) was noted, though this is rather too small for these features to represent the remains of ridge and furrow. Gully 4/9 was located mid-way between 4/6 and 4/7, running across the trench on an E-W alignment. A hand excavated slot across this feature produced three sherds of diagnostic late Saxon or Saxo-Norman pottery (see 2.3 and appendix 2). An amorphous feature (4/5) in the central area of the trench also produced quantities of diagnostic late Saxon or Saxo-Norman pottery. Difficulty was experienced in the interpretation of this feature due to inclement weather conditions (see 3.1) and its precise nature was not deduced.

TRENCH 5

15m, aligned E-W, located in paddock field.

The trench was machine excavated down to natural undisturbed subsoil. 0.17m of topsoil (5/1) and 0.30m subsoil (5/2) were stripped revealing a pale yellow-brown silty clay natural. No archaeological features were encountered.

TRENCH 6

30m, aligned E-W, located in paddock field.

0.15m of topsoil (6/1) was removed by machine. To the W of the trench 6/1 overlay silty clay subsoils 6/2 and 6/3. One architectural fragment was recovered in topsoil stripping at this end of the trench (see 2.3). Towards the middle and to the E of the trench, topsoil 6/1 directly overlay two apparently distinct post-medieval metalled surfaces (6/4 and 6/5) which contained considerable quantities of stone, brick and tile in addition to post-medieval glass. Excavation ceased at this level. It appeared in section that 6/4 and 6/5 overlay undisturbed natural subsoil.

TRENCH 7 (see fig.4)

13.5m, aligned N-S, located in garden area at the S end of site

Difficulty of access with the machine resulted in trench 7 being dug 1.5m short at its northern end.

0.25m of topsoil (7/1) and up to 0.55m of silty clay subsoils (7/2 and 7/3) were removed by machine. Three archaeological features were identified and each was investigated by hand excavation. A shallow gully 7/6 ran E-W across the N of the trench. A more substantial ditch (7/4) aligned NNE-SSW ran obliquely across the S end of the trench. A small post-hole (7/5) was located on the NW edge of ditch 7/4. All features were sealed by 7/3.

TRENCH 8

15m, aligned E-W, located in garden area at S end of site

0.13m of topsoil (8/1) and silty clay subsoils (8/2 and 8/3) were removed by machine revealing an undisturbed layer of mid orange clayey silt. An outcrop of natural marlestone was encountered at the western limit of the trench. No archaeological features were identified.

2.3 The finds

The small assemblage of pottery was examined by Cathy Underwood-Keevill and the results are summarised in tabulated form in appendix 2. Pottery was retrieved from dug features in only 3 of the excavated trenches (trenches 2, 4, and 7) amounting to 27 sherds with a total weight of 0.109kg. Most of the pottery is of mid/late 10th century to mid 11th century. However, the presence of a small sherd of possible 6th to 8th century date within the fill of 2/9 indicates that earlier activity on the site cannot be discounted. The majority of the pottery is of fabric OXR, St. Neots type ware dating from the 10th - early 11th century. Some examples have vesicular surfaces and are extremely worn and degraded. This pottery can continue later into the 11th century or even the 12th in Northamptonshire, but the diagnostic rimsherds at Poplars Farm indicate a mid-late 10th century dating, with short everted cooking pot forms (Oxford Castle types: Hassall 1976, 256 figs 12/3 , 12/4). One sherd of 10th - 12th century OXAE fabric was also noted in context 4/5. A single sherd of mid-12th century pottery was recovered from topsoil in trench 4.

Other finds from the evaluation included a small assemblage of animal bone, and a number of iron objects (including a knife blade - SF 1) recovered from the surface of the post-medieval trackway 4/4. One pieced of dressed building stone (0.28m x 0.30m x 0.17m) was retrieved in stripping topsoil from trench 6.

2.4 Environmental

One 10 litre soil sample was taken from context 7/4/2. Sieving of this sample produced only a small number of charred seeds, but no trace of small bones. The site seems to have limited potential for environmental archaeology.

## 3 DISCUSSION

3.1 Reconsideration of methodology

As noted above (1.3), difficulty of access was encountered in two of the trenches due to the presence of trees and potential buried services. Weather conditions were not favourable, and hand excavation of archaeological features was limited to an extent by the effects of heavy rain upon clayey soils. However, the sample size was sufficient to define and interpret the archaeology adequately, apart perhaps from trench 2, where the density of features within the narrow width of the trench made interpretation a little problematical.

3.2 Significance of the results

The results of the evaluation, summarised above (2.2), indicate that the extant earthworks which have been attributed to the medieval period are, in fact, a redefinition of an earlier manorial or village boundary system. The occurrence of early-mid and late Saxon pottery indicates that the area was occupied in the pre-Conquest period. This supports the place name evidence that Cropredy has its origins in the Anglo-Saxon period. The areas of archaeological potential within the proposed site, however, appear to be confined largely to the areas around trenches 1-2 and 4. There was little clear evidence for post-Conquest activity, although the small quantity of datable artefacts should be taken into account. Post-medieval and modern activity was also evident, but this has little or no archaeological significance.

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Oxford Archaeological Unit
April 1993

APPENDIX 1: Table of contexts

| Trench No. | Context No. | Context Type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1/1 | layer | | 0.15 | topsoil |
| | 1/2 | layer | | 0.20 - 0.30 | subsoil |
| | 1/3 | ditch | 2.70 | 0.90 | ? same as 2/4, 2a/4 |
| | 1/4 | ditch/pit? | 1.70 | 0.36 | |
| | 1/5 | ditch | 1.70 | 0.60 | |
| | | | | | |
| 2 | 2/1 | layer | | 0.16 | topsoil |
| | 2/2 | layer | | 0.10 - 0.20 | subsoil |
| | 2/3 | layer | | 0.25 | |
| | 2/4 | ditch | 2.80 | not bottomed | ? same as ditch 1/3, 2a/4 |
| | 2/5 | layer | | 0.30 | |
| | 2/6 | layer | | 0.18 | |
| | 2/7 | ditch terminal/pit | 1.10 | 0.30 | |
| | 2/8 | ditch | 0.60 | 0.30 | |
| | 2/9 | pit | 3.70 | >0.70 | |
| | 2/10 | gully | 0.50 | 0.18 | |
| | 2/11 | ditch | 0.93 | 0.30 | |
| | 2/12 | gully | 0.20 | 0.11 | |
| | 2/13 | ditch | 0.90 | 0.22 | |
| | 2/14 | ditch | 0.90 | 0.45 | |
| | 2/15 | ditch | 1.30 | 0.30 | recut of ditch 2/14 |
| | | | | | |
| 2a | 2a/1 | layer | | 0.10 | topsoil |
| | 2a/2 | layer | | 0.10 - 0.25 | subsoil |
| | 2a/3 | layer | | 0.20 - 0.30 | |
| | 2a/4 | ditch | 2.00 | 1.10 | ? same as ditch 1/3, 2/4 |
| | 2a/5 | layer | | 0.20 - 0.40 | |
| | 2a/6 | layer | | 0.18 | |
| | 2a/7 | ditch | >0.80 | 0.40 | ? same as 2/7 |

| Trench No. | Context No. | Context Type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2a/8 | ? flue | 0.30 | 0.20 | |
| | 2a/9 | gully | 0.10 | 0.20 | |
| | 2a/10 | layer | | 0.08 | |
| 2a | 2a/11 | ditch | 1.60 | 0.80 | |
| | 2a/12 | ditch | 2.00 | >0.20 | recut of 2a/11 |
| | 2a/13 | layer | | 0.40 | buried soil |
| | 2a/14 | layer/fill | | 0.50 | |
| | 2a/15 | ditch | > 0.50 | > O.50 | recut of 2a/11 |
| | | | | | |
| 3 | 3/1 | layer | | 0.07 | modern tarmac surface (W end of trench only) |
| | 3/2 | layer | | 0.37 | make up layers for 2/1 |
| | 3/3 | layer | | 0.26 | topsoil (in E end of trench only) |
| | 3/4 | layer | | 0.20 | |
| | 3/5 | layer | | 0.18 | |
| | 3/6 | ditch | 0.65 | 0.18 | |
| | 3/7 | ditch | 1.70 | 0.50 | |
| | | | | | |
| 4 | 4/1 | layer | | 0.15 | topsoil |
| | 4/2 | layer | | 0.16 | subsoil |
| | 4/3 | layer | | 0.19 | subsoil |
| | 4/4 | surface | | | post medieval metalled trackway |
| | 4/5 | ? | | 0.20 | produced pottery of 10th century date |
| | 4/6 | linear feature | 0.90 | | ? furrow |
| | 4/7 | linear feature | 1.20 | | ? furrow |
| | 4/8 | linear feature | 0.80 | | ? furrow |
| | 4/9 | gully | 0.40 | not bottomed | |
| | | | | | |
| 5 | 5/1 | layer | | 0.17 | topsoil |
| | 5/2 | layer | | 0.30 | subsoil |

| Trench No. | Context No. | Context Type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 6/1 | layer | | 0.15 | topsoil |
| | 6/2 | layer | | 0.07 | subsoil |
| | 6/3 | layer | | 0.20 | subsoil |
| 6 | 6/4 | surface | | | post medieval metalled trackway |
| | 6/5 | surface | | | post medieval trackway |
| | | | | | |
| 7 | 7/1 | layer | | 0.25 | topsoil |
| | 7/2 | layer | | 0.25 | subsoil |
| | 7/3 | layer | | 0.30 | subsoil |
| | 7/4 | ditch | 1.00 | 0.30 | |
| | 7/5 | post hole | 0.30 | 0.15 | |
| | 7/6 | gully | 0.35 | 0.09 | |
| | | | | | |
| 8 | 8/1 | layer | | 0.13 | topsoil |
| | 8/2 | layer | | 0.27 | subsoil |
| | 8/3 | layer | | 0.08 | subsoil |

**APPENDIX 2: Table of pottery**

| ctx. | fabric | sherd | number | wt.(g) | vessel | date: from | date: to | comment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2/9/2 | OXCS | W | 1 | 1 | ? | C6 | C8 | v. small |
| 4/5 | OXR | R | 1 | 5 | cp | C10 | C11 | evert rim |
| 4/5 | OXR | B | 1 | 14 | cp | C10 | C11 | sag base |
| 4/5 | OXR | W | 5 | 19 | cp? | C10 | C11 | |
| 4/5 | OXR | W | 5 | 32 | cp? | C10 | C11 | thin wall vesic. |
| 4/5 | OXAE | W | 1 | 11 | cp? | C10 | C11 | |
| 4/7 | OXR? | W | 1 | 3 | | C10 | C11 | v. worn, degraded |
| 4/9 | OXR | W | 5 | 12 | cp? | C10 | C11 | |
| 4/9 | OXR | R | 1 | 1 | cp? | C10 | C11 | Oxf. Cas. 12,7 |
| 4/9 | OXR | R | 1 | 3 | cp | C10 | C11 | mid C10 Oxf. Cas. 12,4 |
| 4/1 | OXR | R | 1 | 7 | cp | C12 | 1150 | St. Aldates 19, 4 |
| 7/4/2 | OXCX | W | 4 | 1 | | | | |
| | | Total | 27 | 109 | | | | |


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figure 1

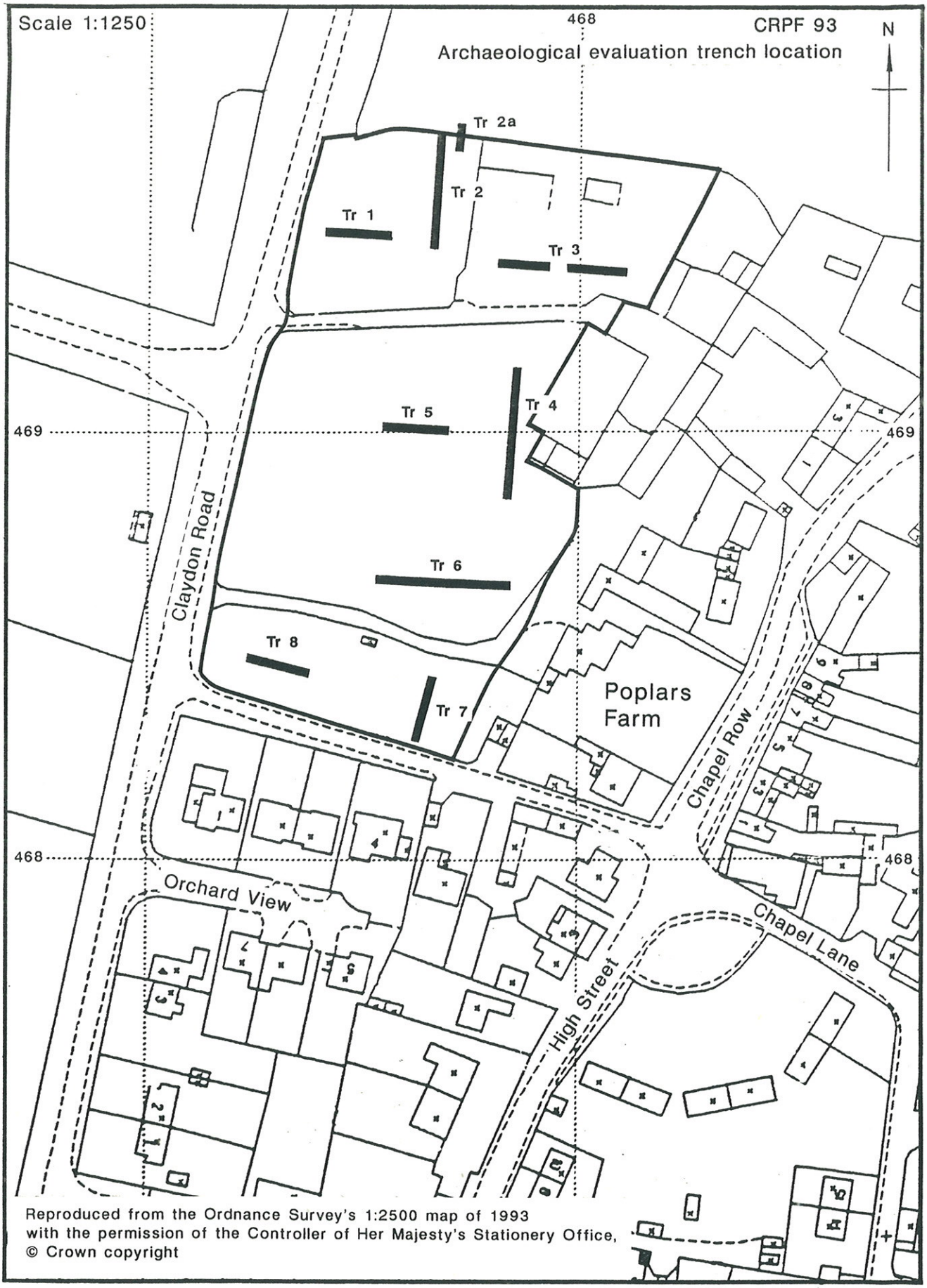
Scale 1:1250
468
CRPF 93
Archaeological evaluation trench location
N
Tr 2a
Tr 2
Tr 1
Tr 3
Tr 5
Tr 4
469
469
Claydon Road
Tr 6
Tr 8
Tr 7
Poplars Farm
Chapel Row
468
468
Orchard View
Chapel Lane
High Street
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figure 2

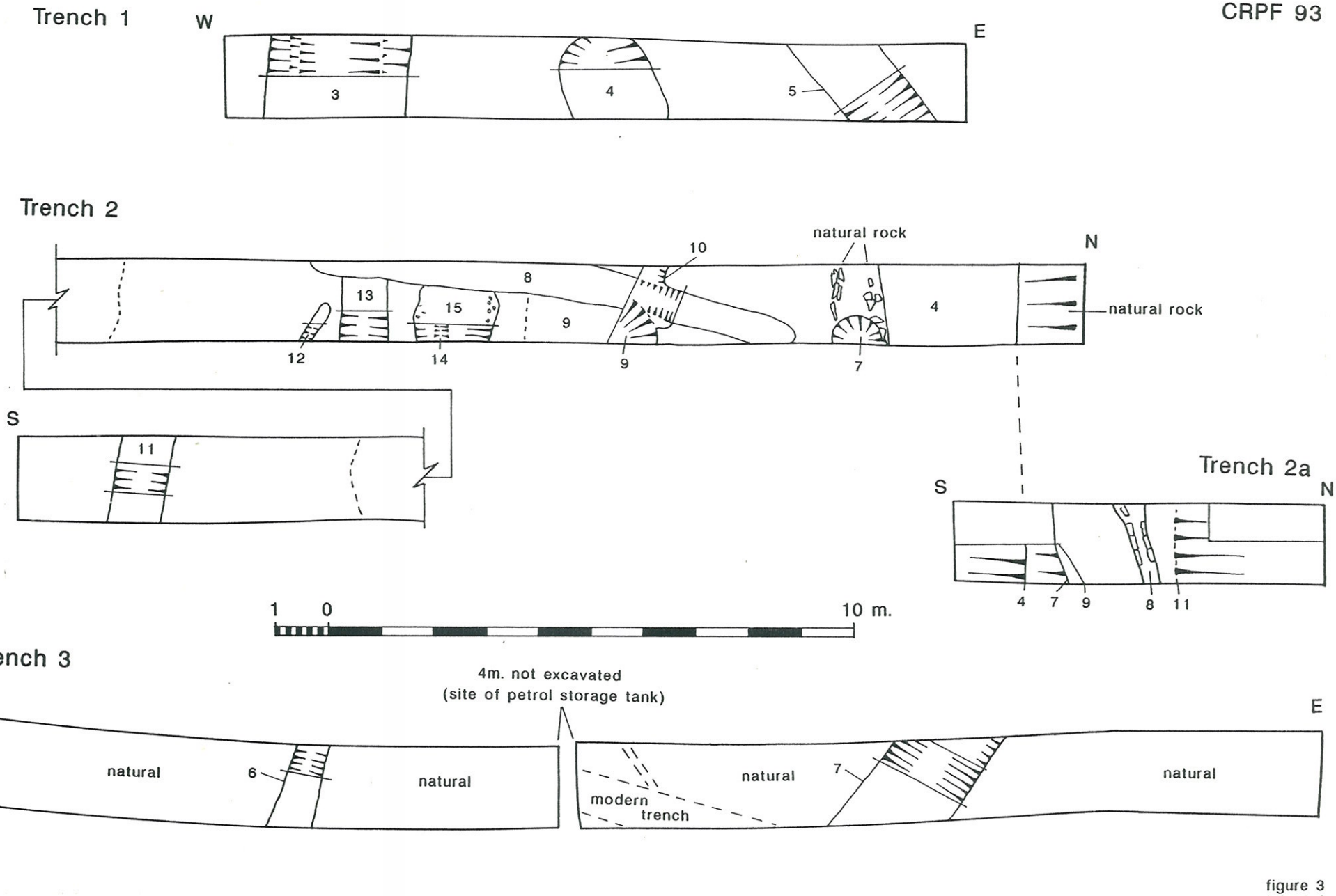
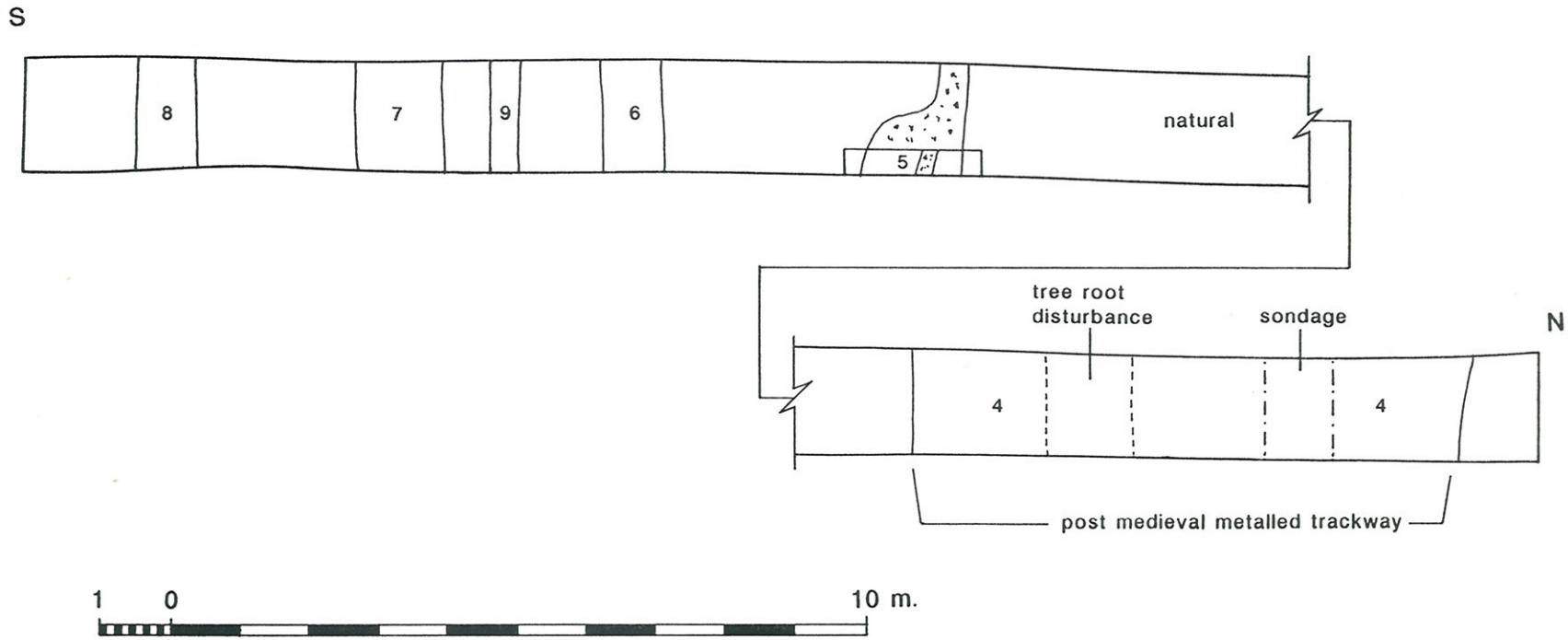

Trench 1
W
E
3
4
5
Trench 2
natural rock
N
10
8
13
15
9
4
natural rock
12
14
9
7
S
11
Trench 2a
S
N
4
7
9
8
11
1 0
10 m.
Trench 3
W
4m. not excavated
(site of petrol storage tank)
E
natural
6
natural
natural
7
natural
modern
trench

figure 3

## Trench 4




## Trench 7

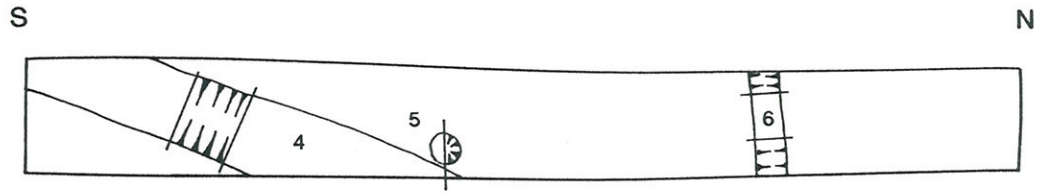



figure 4

Trench 2a

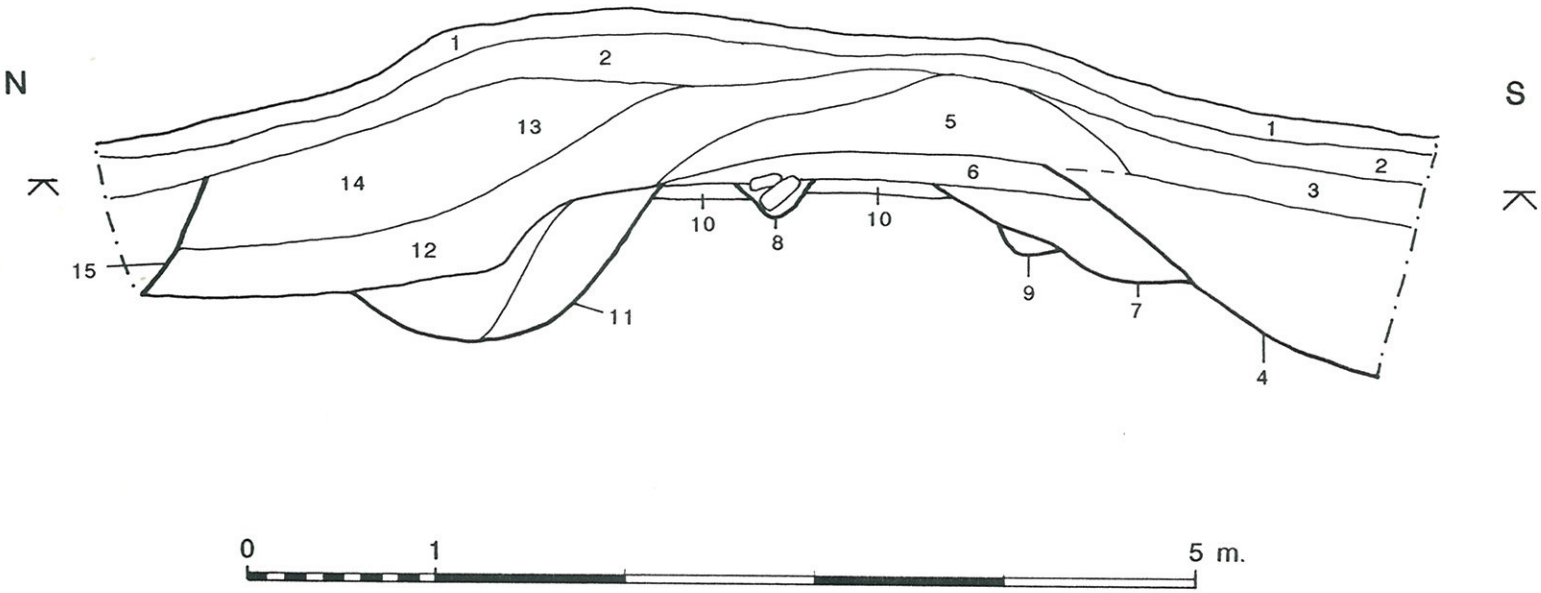



figure 5

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