

SMR ✓

Fyfield + Tubney parish

ⓔ OX1239
Ⓢ OX122

NEW PLANTATION, TUBNEY, OXFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

MAY 1988

R A Chambers
Senior Field Officer

D Miles BA, FSA
Director

Oxford Archaeological Unit
30th June 1988

NEW PLANTATION, TUBNEY, OXFORDSHIRE

PRN 4694

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

MAY 1988

Summary

There is a prehistoric occupation site at the west end of New Plantation but later settlement appears to have skirted the area. Although the tumulus recorded by the Ordnance Survey was not detected there is a strong possibility that prehistoric burials may be present in the area. If planning permission was granted limited area excavation of the prehistoric occupation site and subsequent archaeological surveillance during site clearance in advance of sand extraction would be desirable.

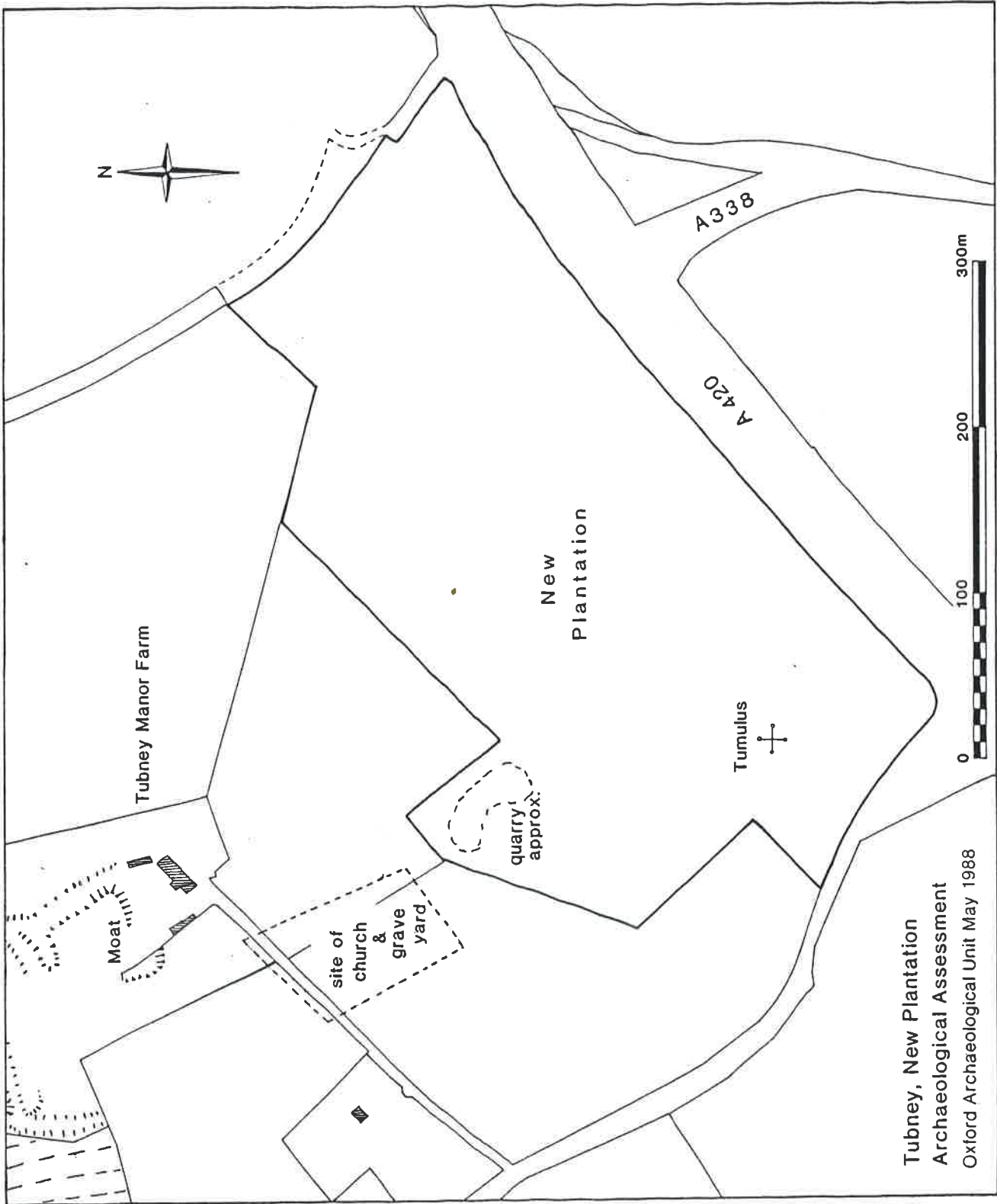
Location

New Plantation lies on a deep deposit of Corallian sand and until the last quarter of the 19th century the area formed part of a tract of sandy heath. The plantation forms an almost rectangular block bounded by the Oxford-Faringdon road to the south-east and the Appleton road to the south-west. An irregular peninsular of woodland on the north-west side encloses a small, partly infilled quarry. The land rises gently from 92 m. O.D. at the Appleton road to -- m. O.D. at the north-eastern end of the plantation. For the first 80 m. north-east of the Appleton road the rise is more pronounced with a low tongue of level land extending south-westwards to the point where the Ordnance Survey recorded the site of a prehistoric burial mound (Fig. 1). There is now no surface evidence for a mound at this point.

History and Known Archaeology

Prehistoric activity was first recognised in this area during the latter part of the last century. While the Ordnance Survey recorded the site of a tumulus in the 1880s, a second barrow is believed to have been destroyed a little earlier in or about 1872 (V.C.H. iv, 379). There is no record of anything having been found during the levelling of the barrows although this is not unusual in the 19th century and we can only guess that the barrows originated in the Bronze Age. However prehistoric flint tools were found on open ground to the west of the barrows (Grinsell; V.C.H. iv, 379; PRN 2349).

Two Romano-British 'vases' dating from a period at least 2000 years later than the prehistoric barrows were discovered

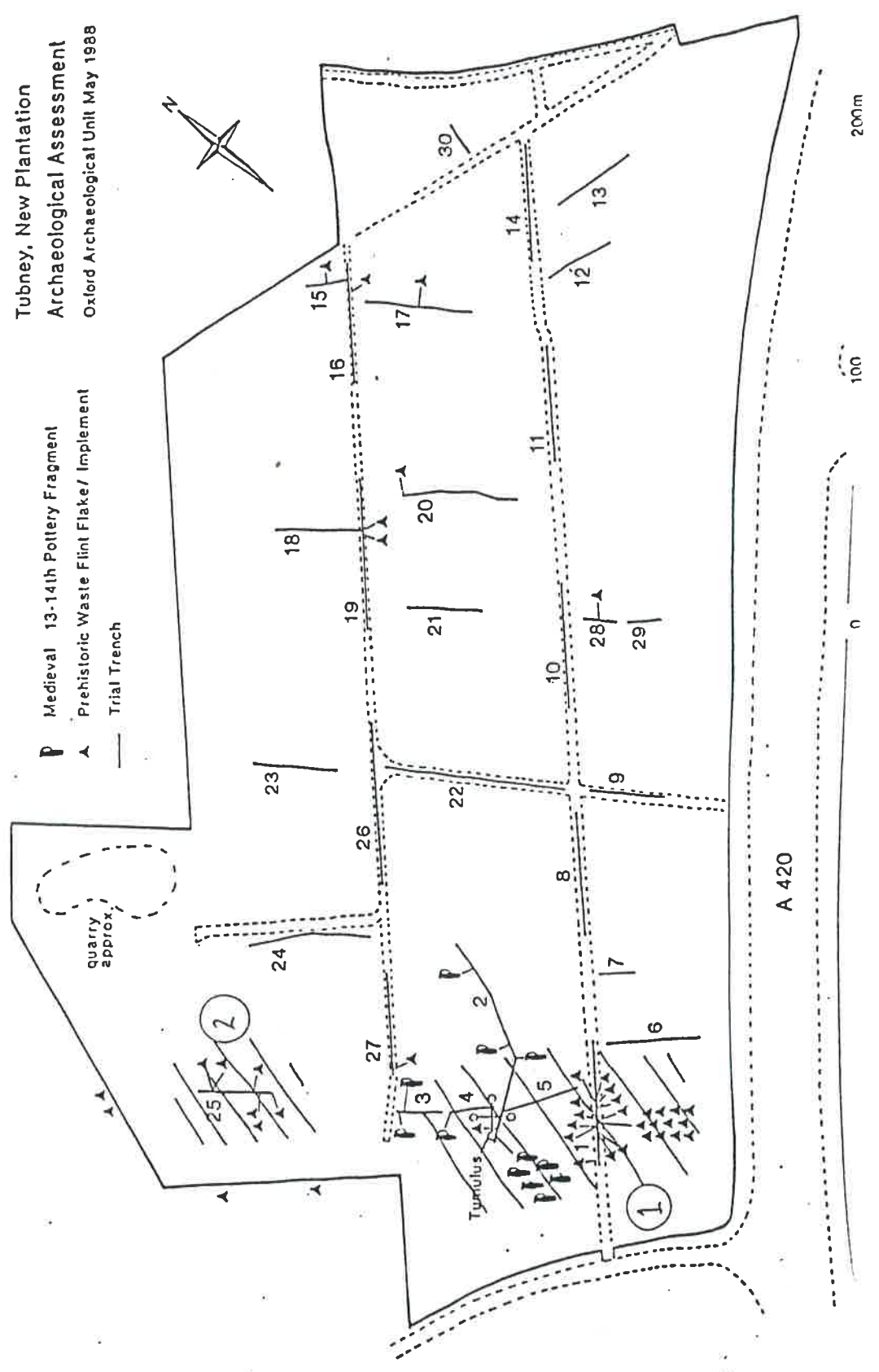


Tubney, New Plantation
 Archaeological Assessment
 Oxford Archaeological Unit May 1988

Fig 1

Tubney, New Plantation
 Archaeological Assessment
 Oxford Archaeological Unit May 1988

- P Medieval 13-14th Pottery Fragment
- ▲ Prehistoric Waste Flint Flake/ Implement
- Trial Trench



close to one of the barrows near the 'old church' at Tubney. Again recorded in the 19th. century the vases, which probably represent two cremation burials, are now in the British Museum. Whether these pots were found within the area occupied by New Plantation or in the field to the north is not known.

Built nearly a thousand years after the Roman period, the 'old church' belonged to the now deserted medieval village of Tubney (the present village is a relatively modern development 1.5 miles to the south). Tubney began as an Anglo-Saxon settlement and is first mentioned in 965 AD. (Brooks, 123). The later medieval settlement was never large and probably lay around the church and Manor Farm immediately to the north of New Plantation. Earthworks recorded in 1980 to the north of Manor Farm may represent a major part of the village. Desertion may have begun in the 14th. century and was complete by the 16th. century when Leyland recorded that "the church or chapell yet remayneth, and ther by in a wood was a manor place now cleane down. It (be)longeth now as a ferme to Magdalen College in Oxford". The chapel was said to have been 'long down' by the 19th. century (V.C.H. iv. 379) but the grave yard still existed in 1841 (Brooks, 129).

Assessment Strategy

The Trench Pattern

New Plantation covers 10.96 ha. and was subjected to 30 machine dug trial trenches totalling 1132 m (Fig. 2). Trenches were placed along the trackways with the exception of the public pathway at the north-eastern end of the wood. Side trenches were placed where tree spacing permitted but closely planted trees dictated that some areas had to be omitted from the trenching programme. Seven trenches were cut to a width of 1.5 m. using a JCB3c and 5 ft. toothless ditching bucket and a further 9 trenches were restricted to a width of 1 m. in deference to the spacing of the trees. Elsewhere access between the trees was only possible using a Kubota KH60 which cut the remaining trenches to a width of 1.2 m. (4 ft.). Although this woodland is now nearing maturity, tree roots were generally not a problem as the top soil was very shallow.

Following the mechanical removal of the topsoil, the sand subsoil was cleaned by hand. Any subsequent surface finds were recorded and any archaeological features planned. Possible archaeological features were sectioned and the sections purposely overcut. This ensured that primary silts were not missed and allowed further examination of the subsoil structure. This revealed the disturbed nature of the apparently undisturbed subsoil in trench 1. Throughout the wood short sections of the assessment trenches were

excavated to a depth of 0.6 m. to ensure that there was no superficial covering of sand concealing archaeological features.

Topsoil

The topsoil was rarely more than 4 - 8 cm. deep over the Corallian sand and in places comprised chiefly pine needle litter. Although mainly well drained, a silty sand bed running north-west/south-east across the centre of the plantation gave rise to a wetter soil with some iron panning. The soil was slightly acid in places and supported rhododendron at the centre of the plantation.

Subsoil

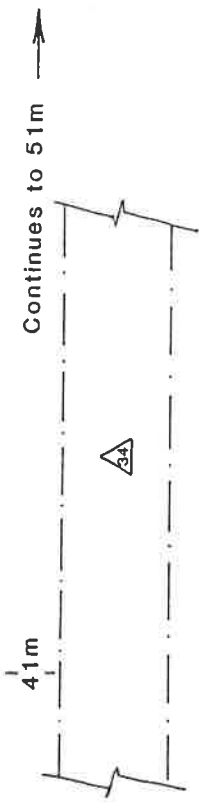
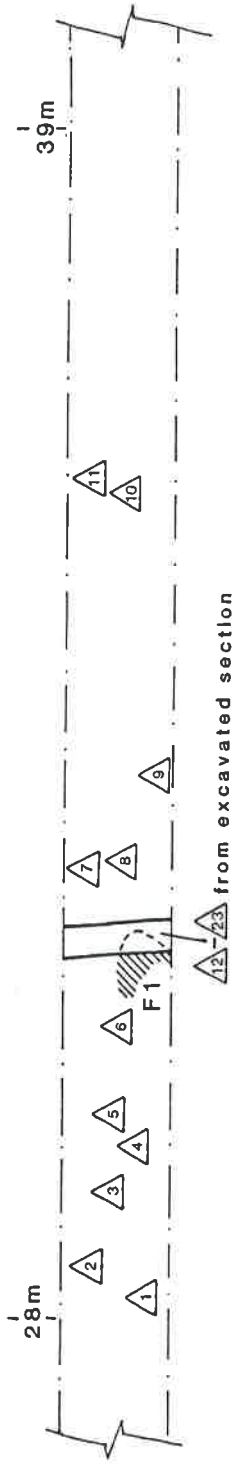
Lying beneath such a thin topsoil the surface of the Corallian sand was marked by past root systems and animal burrows. There was no clear horizon between cultivated and undisturbed soil and prehistoric flint work occurred within apparently undisturbed sand at a depth of 30 cm. in trench 1. It is likely that the lack of top soil and leaching may have rendered deeply cut archaeological features difficult or impossible to recognise within the confines of the trial trenches.

Prehistoric Remains

The only recognisable prehistoric material recovered was a scatter of flint tools and waste flakes from tool manufacture. Flint work was recovered from ten trenches (Fig. 2) and suggests three activity areas. The greatest concentration was to the south-east of the site of the tumulus recorded by the Ordnance Survey and a second less concentrated scatter to the north-west. A thin scatter of flint work suggests a third area of prehistoric activity at or just beyond the northern edge of the wood. Many of the artifacts were not precisely dateable and some may have belonged to Neolithic or Bronze Age activity but smaller blades and cores suggest Mesolithic activity particularly in the south-west end of the wood around trench 1. Four pieces of flint work were recovered from the edge of the ploughed field to the north-west and south-west of trench 25.

The concentration of flint work shown in trench 1 (Fig. 2) is partly due to the excavation of a section across a small, heat reddened pit F1 which remained undated (Figs. 3 & 4). However the flint work from the surface of trench 1 was recovered at a higher rate than that from any other trench including that from trench 25 which lay 140 m. to the north. The clean yellow sand subsoil into which pit F1 had been cut appeared undisturbed but excavation revealed flint work to a

Trench 1



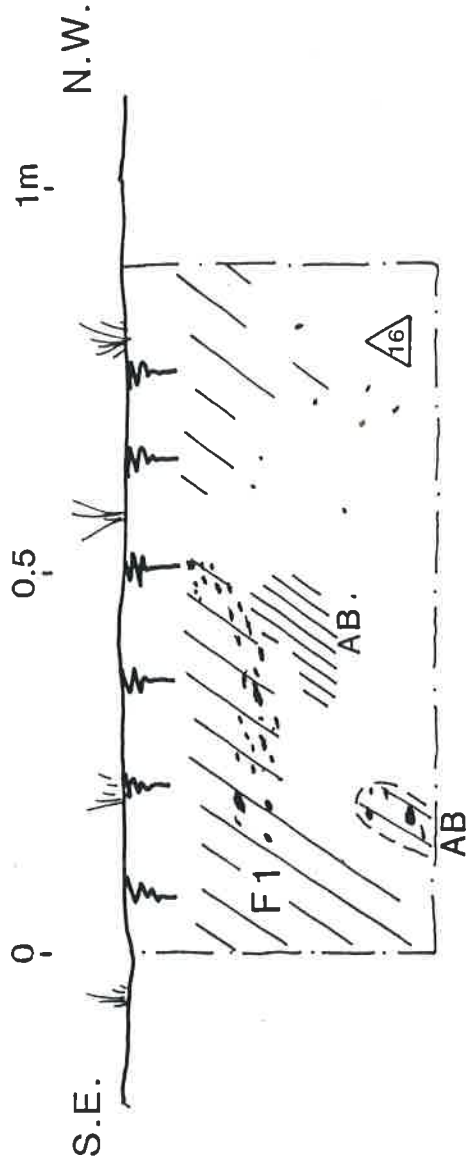
△ Small Find
(flint artifact)

Tubney, New Plantation
Archaeological Assessment
Oxford Archaeological Unit May 1988



Fig 3

Section Across Trench 1



AB Animal burrow

Light- Yellow-brown sand



Darker sand with small clay/silt fraction



Wood Charcoal

0



1m

Tubney, New Plantation
 Archaeological Assessment
 Oxford Archaeological Unit May 1988

Fig 4

depth of 30 cm. from the subsoil surface. One flint blade was heat crazed. Evidence for animal activity was present in the section and a burrow was seen cutting through the bottom of the pit (Figs. 3 and 4).

The Prehistoric Tumulus (site of)

Although the area was initially covered by brambles, trenching and some clearance did not reveal any recognisable evidence for a mound. Three trenches were cut across the site of the tumulus with the position of each trench dictated by the tree density. Apart from the usual root and animal disturbance and a line of tree planting holes along the centre of trench 2, there were no recognisable archaeological features and in particular no trace of a barrow ditch.

Medieval Pottery

Several sherds of medieval pottery dating to the 13-14th. century were recovered from trenches 2, 3 and 4. The majority of sherds were recovered at the site of the possible tumulus and the majority of these sherds may have been from the same green glazed jug. Only two sherds of medieval cooking pot were recovered from the assessment trenches. There were no recognizable medieval archaeological features and the village may have lain entirely in the fields to the north.

Post-Medieval Land Disturbance

Several sherds of 19-20th. century red earthenware, willow pattern china and several red clay roof tile fragments of 13-19 th. century origin were found at the base of the topsoil throughout the plantation.

Since the end of the 19th. century Tubney heath has been subjected to forestry. In 1949 New Plantation had partly reverted to gorse scrub. This was cleared by grazing pigs and grubbing with a tractor before replanting (Allen). Within the ? trenches areas of disturbed sand suggested the grubbing of some larger root systems. In some areas trees only took at the third planting and the regularly spaced 30 cm. square soil filled holes in trench 2 aligned with the present tree planting pattern suggest the failed earlier plantings of 40 years ago.

Past Cultivation

There was no clear evidence for cultivation before the 20th. century.

Conclusions

There is prehistoric occupation at the western end of New Plantation but later settlement appears to have skirted the area. By the Bronze Age human activity had probably turned the area into the scrubby sandy heath that it appears to have remained until enclosure and tree planting in the later 19th. century. The burial mound recorded by the Ordnance Survey was not detected possibly because the sand subsoil concealed the surrounding quarry ditch. Archaeological excavations elsewhere have shown that surviving burial mounds often mark long term prehistoric burial sites containing unmarked burials in a wide scatter of burial pits. Adjacent burials would not necessarily have been detected by the trial trenches.

If New Plantation is quarried for sand, limited area excavation of the Mesolithic occupation site should be undertaken as such sites currently carry a high archaeological value, particularly on the Corallian ridge. Excavation may be undertaken before or after tree felling but before any stumps are removed. Because of the possible presence of unmarked prehistoric burials an inspection of each area after topsoil stripping would be desirable in advance of sand extraction.

Sources

- Allen, Pers. comm. (local forester).
- Brooks, J., 'Tubney, Oxfordshire: Medieval and Later Settlement', Oxoniensia, xlix (1984), 121-131.
- Grinsell, L.V. Berkshire Archaeological Journal, xl (1936), 21.
- Peake, H. Archaeology of Berkshire, (1931), 55 & 235.
- P.R.N., Oxfordshire County Museum Sites and Monuments Record Primary Record Number.
- V.C.H. Victoria County History of Berkshire.