

WILTON (WI)

WIRS
161/94

13a Russell Street, Wilton Wiltshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

October 1994

13A, Russell Street, Wilton, Wiltshire

NGR SU 0976 3126

Site Code WIRS 94

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit

October 1994

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1 Summary

- 1.1** In September 1994 The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a field evaluation on the site of 13A, Russell Street, Wilton, Wiltshire. The work was carried out on behalf of Peter Borchert (Architectural Design Consultants) in connection with the proposal to build a terrace of three houses on the site.
- 1.2** Four small trial trenches, positioned in the area of the proposed development, were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2 m.
- 1.3** A layer of slightly organic clay, containing early medieval pottery and Oyster shells was located in all of the trenches, roughly 1 metre below the present ground surface. The archaeological features to be located were an undated pit and a post-medieval ditch, both found in the SE corner of the site (trench 2), and a probable late feature in trench 1.
- 1.4** No Saxon deposits were located and no evidence was found to indicate that medieval structures existed on the site. However, the finds recovered suggests that medieval occupation occurred in the near vicinity and that the site was either used as a midden, or for agricultural or horticultural purposes.

2 Introduction

- 2.1** It has been proposed to construct a new terrace of three houses on the site of 13a, Russell Street, Wilton, Wiltshire. As part of the considerations for planning permission Peter Borchert (Architectural Design Consultants) commissioned The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the area of the proposed development. The construction work and associated landscaping, would disturb or possibly destroy any archaeological remains on the site. The aim of the evaluation was therefore to establish the presence, degree of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains, so that the need for possible mitigation strategies could be determined.
- 2.2** The particular concern of the evaluation was to locate deposits relating to the Saxon and Medieval town of Wilton.
- 2.3** Four trial trenches were positioned and excavated according to specifications set by Wiltshire County Council and the field work took place over a period of 2 days in September 1994.

3 Archaeological and historical background

- 3.1** The site lies within the Saxon town of Wilton and the street plan has changed little from the original layout. During the 8th century Wilton was the capital of Wessex and it remained an important town in the region until the late 13th century.

4 Topography and Geology

- 4.1** The site of the proposed development consists of an area of flat land some 27 m x 20 m in size, the previous dwelling having been demolished immediately prior to the evaluation. The site lies on the north side of Russell Street with the river forming the northern boundary of the property (Fig.1). The area is part of a natural flood plain and the underlying geology is alluvial clay.

5 Methodology and Strategy (see Fig. 2 for trench locations)

- 5.1** Two trenches, 2 m x 2 m in size, were excavated towards the frontage of the site, and two at the rear, measuring 1.2 m x 1.2 m in size. The trenches were positioned around the edges of the site to avoid the disturbance caused by the foundations of the previous dwelling and its associated services.
- 5.2** Excavation was limited to a depth of 1.2 m, as the new foundations would be unlikely to go deeper than this level.
- 5.3** The trenches were excavated down to the top of the first significant archaeological deposits, using a mechanical excavator with a 1.2 m toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were then planned and photographed, and a representative sample of features was excavated and sections were drawn where appropriate.
- 5.4** Samples for ecofactual/environmental analysis were taken from deposits of potential interest.

6 Description of Archaeology

6.1 Trench 1 (2 m square) (see fig 3a)

In the bottom 0.40 m of the trench were three fairly similar deposits of clay silt (109, 108 and 107), containing a small quantity of early medieval pottery and animal bone. The upper levels of the trench consisted of a sequence of layers of slit and clay loams (106, 105, 104, 103, 102), overlaid by the present topsoil (101).

From the section drawing it is apparent that a feature (undetected at the excavation stage) must have existed containing fills 102, part of 104, part of 106, 107 and possibly 109. The similarity of deposits (e.g. 105 was only fractionally darker in colour than 106) led to this not being recognised. From plan it would appear that the feature is more linear than circular and possibly represents an east-west ditch of post-medieval date. What it relates to is unknown.

6.2 Trench 2 (2 m square) (see fig 4)

Observed only in plan, in the very bottom of the trench, was a layer of dark grey alluvial clay (211). Above the alluvial clay was a thick deposit of greenish clay silt (210), containing a small quantity of early medieval pottery and animal bone.

A linear (E-W) deposit of chalk fragments (209) overlay 210, towards the south end of the trench. A feature (208) cut into layer 210 was only partly within the trench, but appeared to be a pit, some 0.70 m deep. The possible pit, which produced no dating evidence, was truncated by a shallow ditch (205), which ran through the centre of the trench in an E-W alignment and contained a single sherd of post-medieval pottery.

The ditch was sealed beneath a thick deposit of silt loam (203), truncated along the south edge of the trench by a modern pipe trench (202).

6.3 Trenches 3 and 4 (1.2 m square) (see fig's 3b and 3c)

The sequence of deposits was the same in both of these trenches.

Observed only in plan in the bottom of the trenches was a layer of dark grey alluvial clay (304 and 404). The clay was overlaid by a layer of greenish clay silt (303 and 403) containing Oyster shells, animal bone and a sherds of early medieval pottery.

Above the silt were two layers of silt loam (302, 301, 402 and 401), overlaid by the present topsoil (300 and 400).

7 Finds

7.1 Pottery (by C. Underwood-Keevill)

A small assemblage of medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered from seven contexts. A total of 19 sherds weighing 0.175 kg was recorded, 18 of these were medieval with one 18th century slipped and sgraffito platter rim.

The medieval pottery consisted of orange sandy Laverstock type scratchmarked cooking pot sherds dated to the mid to late 13th century (Musty, Algar and Ewence 1969), Minety type ware cooking pot sherds dated to the 13th century (Musty 1973 and Vince 1982), and coarse scratchmarked ware which is also noted at Old Sarum and could date from the 12th to 13th century. Most of the medieval pottery is from context 303, with small amounts from context 109 and 210.

7.2 Tile (dating by C. Underwood-Keevill)

11 small fragments of tile were retrieved from the evaluation, 5 of which were of medieval date (Laverstock type) and 6 were post-medieval in date (Quartz type). The medieval tile fragments came from context 103, 201 and 302, though in 103 and 201 these were residual. The post-medieval tile came from contexts 102, 104 and 201.

7.3 Animal bone

60 small fragments of animal bone were recovered from the evaluation, with the majority of these (50) coming from context 303 in trench 3 (44 of these were obtained

from an environmental sample which was sieved). A further 8 of the fragments came from contexts 210 and 403, which appeared to be the same deposit as 303. All three of these contexts also contained a large number of Oyster shells. All of the bone found consisted of small fragments and no detailed analysis has been undertaken at this stage.

8 Environmental (species identifications by Mark Robinson)

A 10 litre sample was taken from context 303 for environmental analysis. The aim of the analysis was to establish the potential of organic preservation and to obtain information which would aid the interpretation of this deposit.

Oyster shells made up 15% of the bulk of this sample, which also contained a much smaller quantity of edible marine Winkles and unidentifiable fragments of an another marine shell fish (Muscles ?).

44 pieces of animal bone were found in this sample, consisting entirely of small fragments.

A small amount of carbonized material was obtained from the sample, and this consisted mostly of oak charcoal, but also included a few Wheat grains.

The material obtained from this sample is typical of domestic refuse and suggests that the deposit was either part a of midden or had been subjected to manuring.

9 Discussion

- 9.1** The layer of dark grey clay observed in the bottom of all of the trenches was almost certainly the same deposit throughout and appeared to be alluvium. The layer of greenish clay containing medieval refuse (109, 210, 303 and 403) also appeared to be the same deposit extending across the whole site.
- 9.2** As only part of feature (208) in trench 2 was within the trench its function can not be clearly established, though it appeared to be a small pit.
- 9.3** The interpretation of the deposit of linear chalk fragments in trench 2 (209) is also difficult to establish, due to the very small area of the deposit exposed, and because of its truncation by the pipe trench. The chalk only consisted of a single layer and did not appear to be structural, but may have been demolition material. It was also noted that the pipe trench which truncated the chalk contained many large fragments of flint and some smaller fragments of chalk, possibly indicating that the pipe trench had truncated structural remains, in the area immediately to the south of the site.

10 Conclusions

- 10.1** No Saxon remains were located during the evaluation, and none of the medieval deposits found appeared to related to structures. However, the medieval finds and environmental material recovered suggests that occupation occurred within the immediate vicinity. It is possible, therefore, that occupation deposits, including structures could exist in an area of the site not observed by the evaluation trenches, though both the uniformity of the deposits that were seen, and the very small number of features located, suggest that this is unlikely.
- 10.2** The existence of alluvium seen in the bottom of all the trenches excavated may indicate that this area was too prone to flooding for occupation to have occurred. The evidence that refuse appears to have been evenly dumped in this area suggests that this was either an attempt to raise the level of the site or that this was manuring on agricultural or horticultural land.
- 10.3** It is noticeable that there were no deposits or finds relating to the middle or later medieval period, and that the early medieval layers were directly overlaid, or truncated, by post medieval deposits. This could indicate truncation of deposits by landscaping or other activity, but may simply be reflecting the decline of the town after the 13th century.

C Bell
OAU
October 1994

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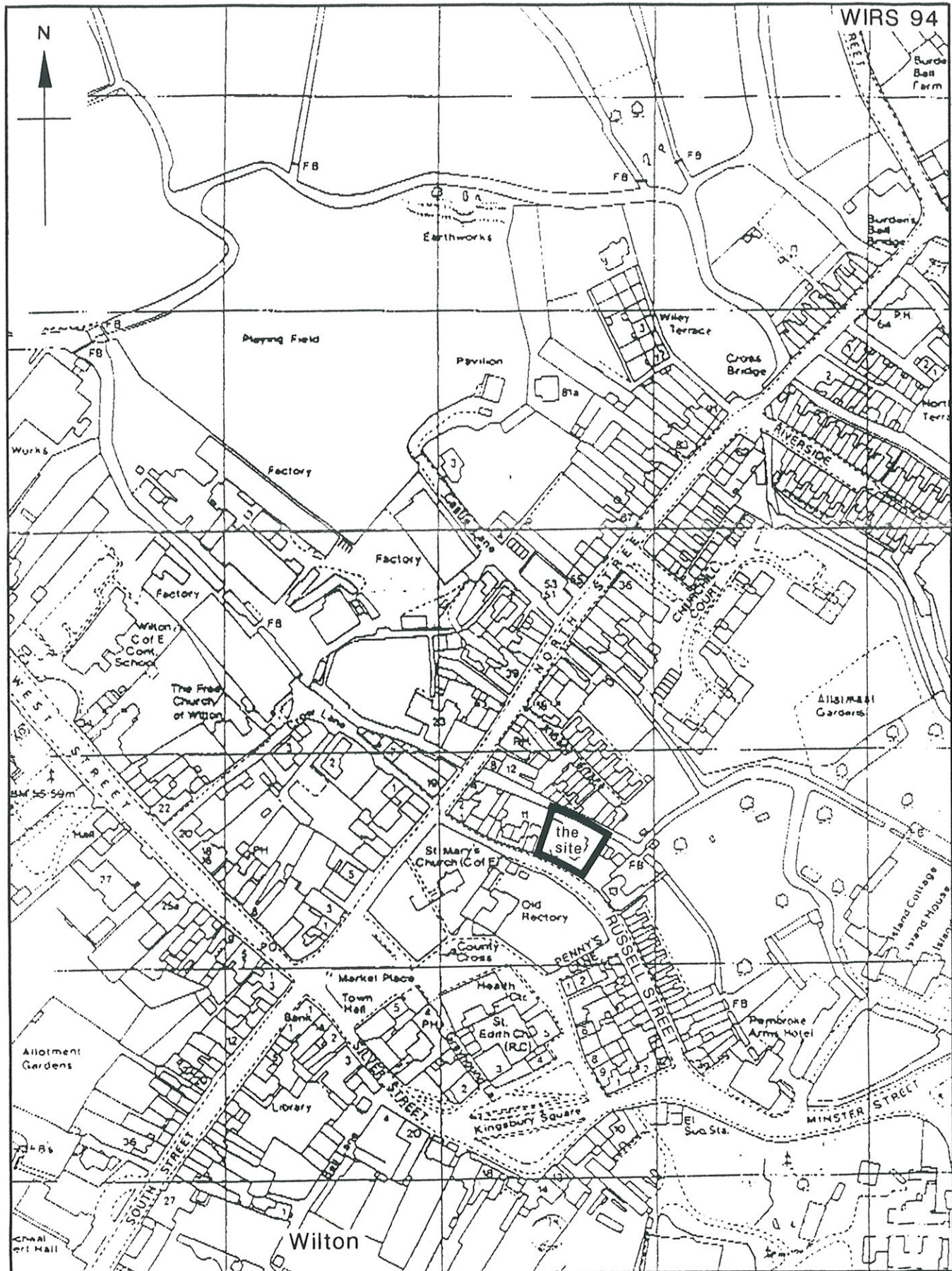
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Table of Contexts and Finds

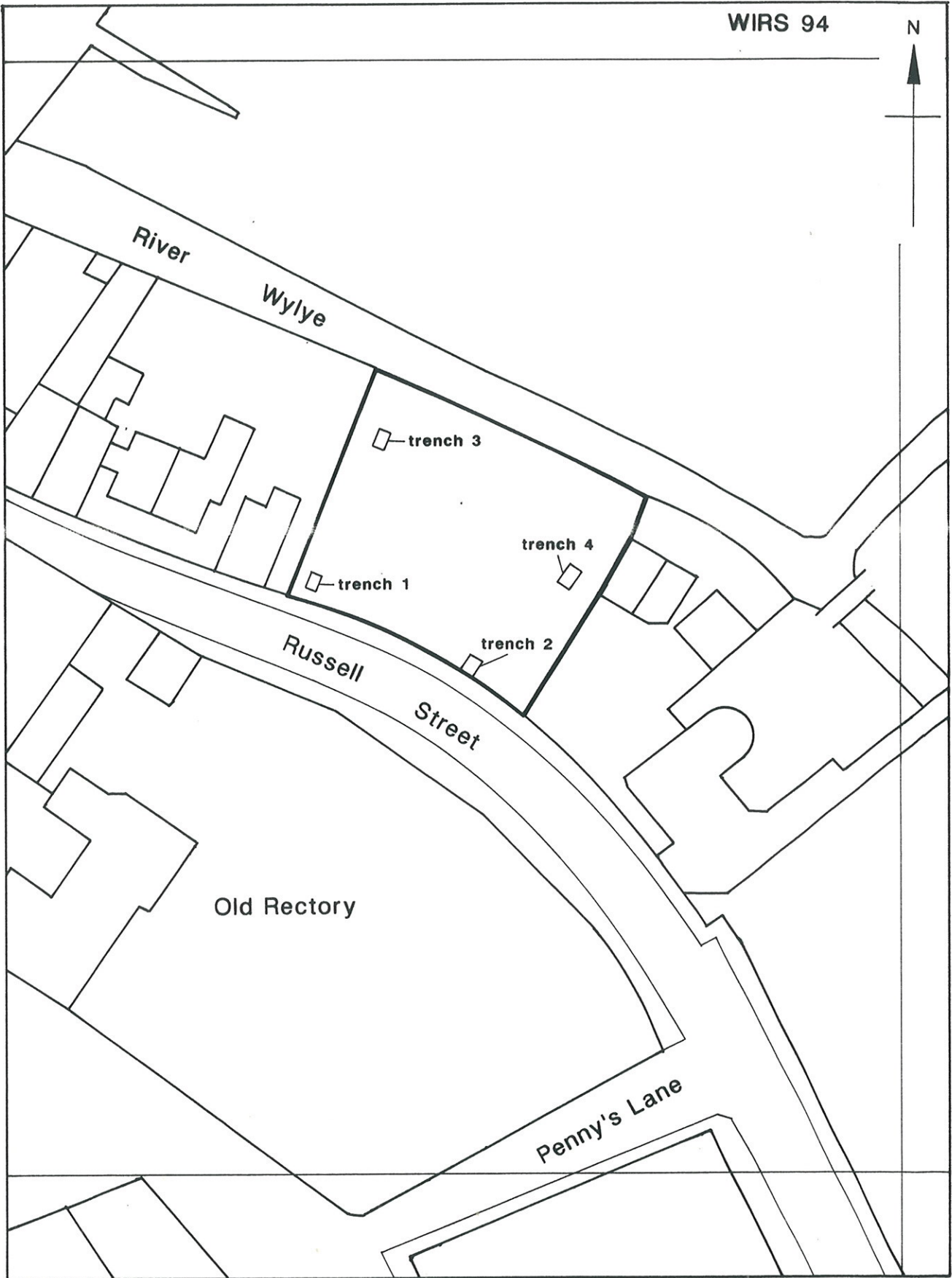
TRENCH	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENTS	FINDS
1	101	Layer		0.50	Topsoil	
	102	Layer		0.20	Dump layer ?	3 pieces of post-medieval tile 1 clay pipe stem fragment
	103	Layer		0.08		1 piece of medieval tile
	104	Layer		0.30		2 pieces of medieval tile
	105	Layer		0.10		
	106	Layer		0.20		
	107	Layer		0.30		1 sherd of early medieval pottery
	108	Layer		0.30		2 pieces of animal bone
	109	Layer		0.15		3 sherds of early medieval pottery Oyster shells
2	200	Layer		0.38	Topsoil	
	201	Fill		> 1.10	Fill of 202	1 piece of post medieval tile and 2 pieces of post-medieval tile
	202	Pipe trench	> 0.50	> 1.10	Contains ceramic pipe	
	203	Layer		0.50	Dump layer ?	
	204	Fill		0.34	Fill of 205	1 sherd of post-medieval pottery 4 clay pipe stem fragments
	205	Ditch	0.70	0.34	E-W aligned	
	206	Fill		0.50	Fill of 208	
	207	Fill		0.38	Fill of 208	
	208	Pit ?	0.60	0.70	Only partly within trench	
	209	Layer	0.20	0.16	Chalk rubble	
	210	Layer		0.55		2 sherds of early medieval pottery 3 pieces of animal bone Oyster shells
	211	Layer			Alluvial clay	
3	300	Layer		0.44	Topsoil	
	301	Layer		0.40	Dump layer ?	
	302	Layer		0.24		1 sherd of early medieval pottery 2 pieces of medieval tile
	303	Layer		0.20		10 sherds of early medieval pottery 50 pieces of animal bone Oyster shells
	304	Layer			Alluvial clay	
4	400	Layer		0.30	Topsoil	

TRENCH	CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENTS	FINDS
	401	Layer		0.36	Dump layer	
	402	Layer		0.40		
	403	Layer		0.26		1 sherd of early medieval pottery 5 pieces of animal bone
	404	Layer			Alluvial clay	



scale 1:2500

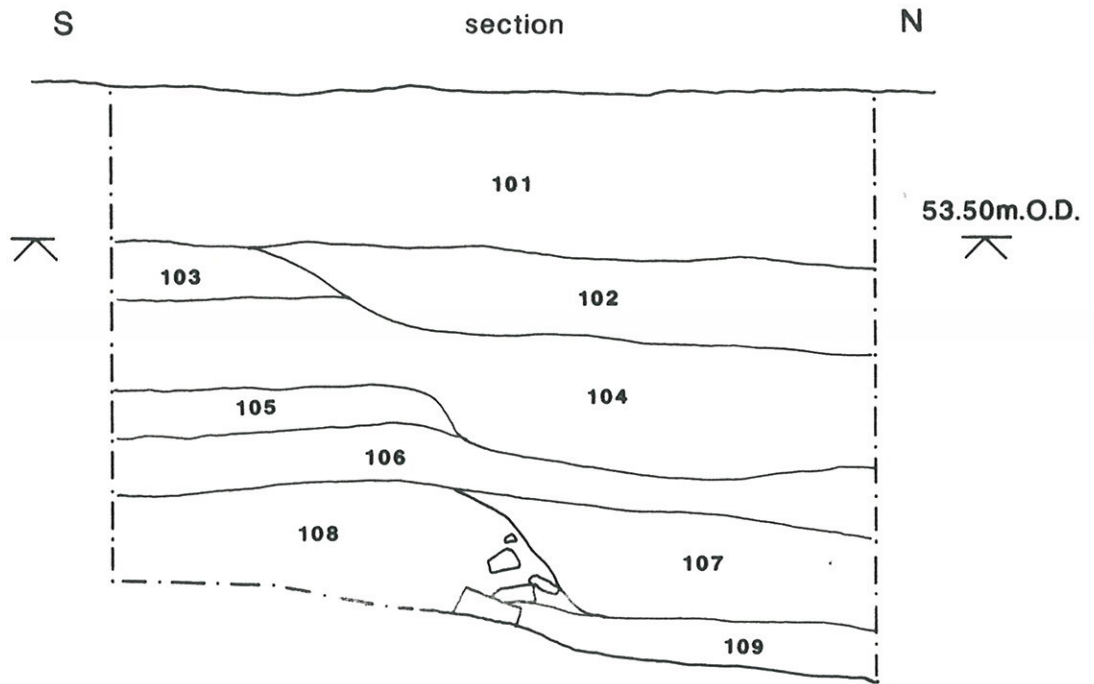
Figure 1 site location



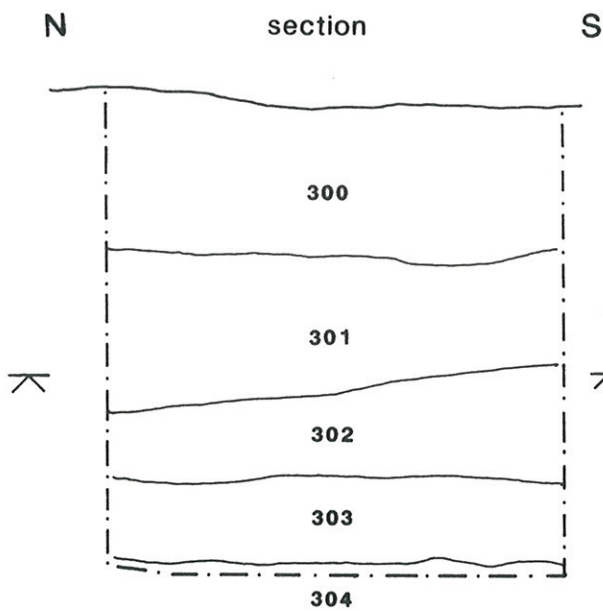
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Figure 2 trench location

trench 1



trench 3



trench 4

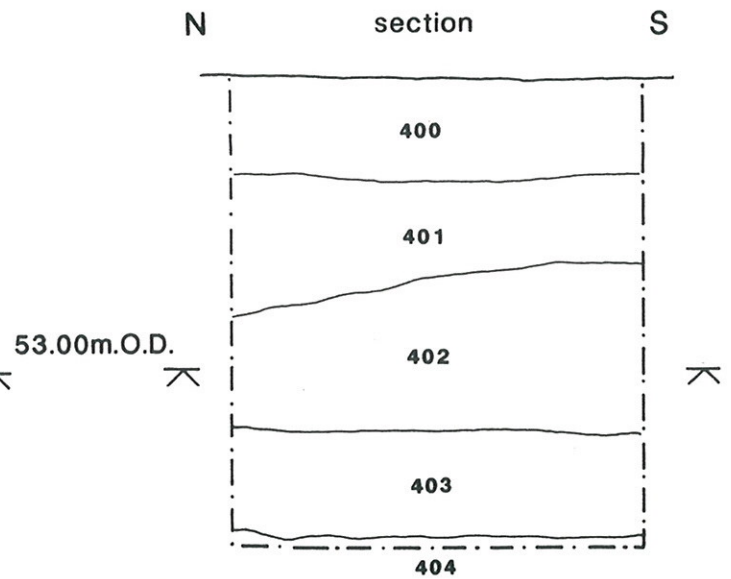


Figure 3 trench sections

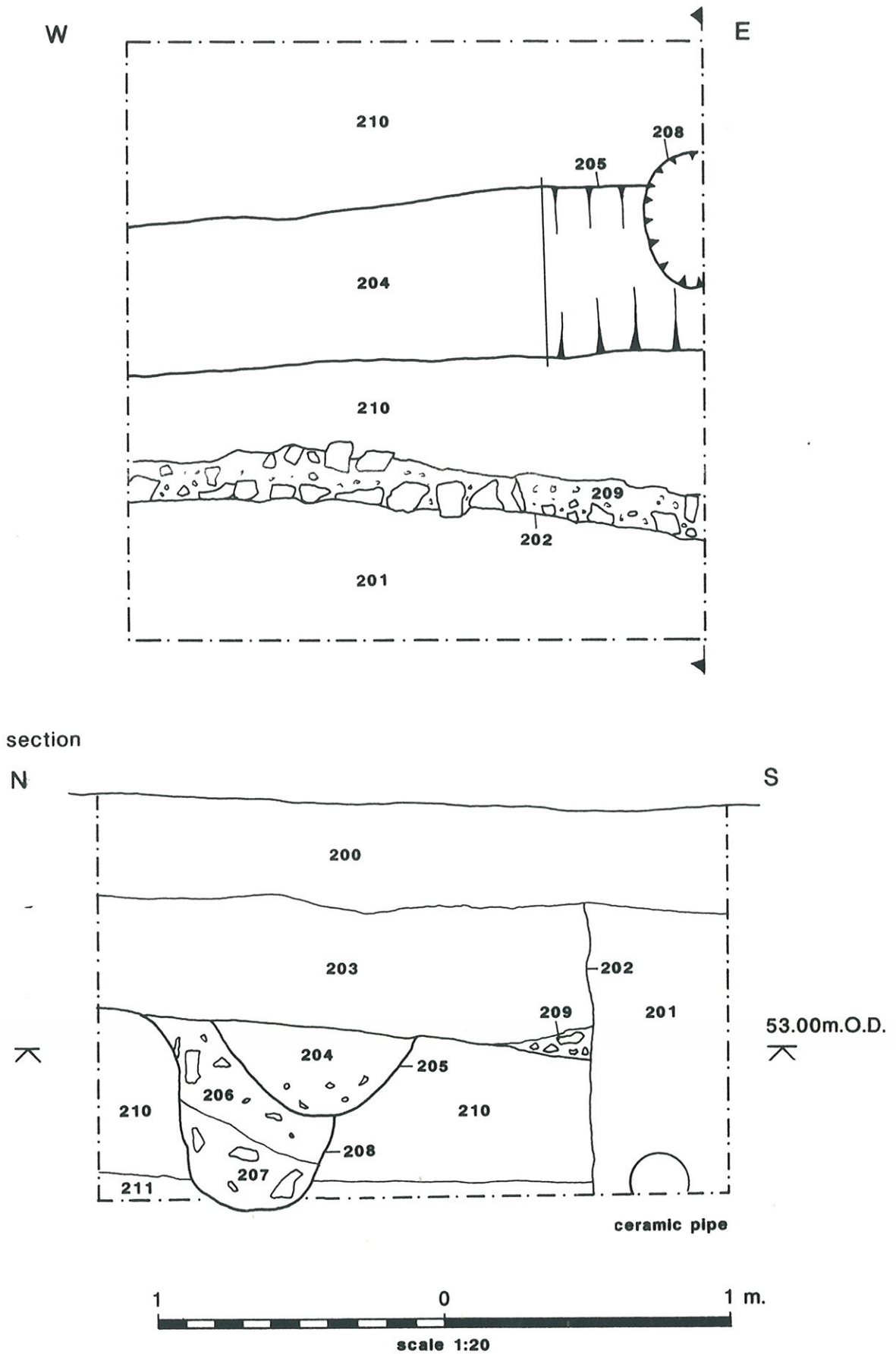


Figure 4 trench 2

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