

Land adjacent to  
The Royal Oak, Blackthorn,  
Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief  
NGR 6228 1934

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
May 1996

# LAND ADJACENT TO THE ROYAL OAK, BLACKTHORN, OXON.

NGR SP6228 1934

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

### SUMMARY

*A watching brief during construction work on the site of new housing in Blackthorn, Oxon, observed deposits confirming that the demolished 'Regina Cottage' was not built upon earlier foundations and that the site in general had not been developed until the post-medieval period, a conclusion also arrived at in the archaeological evaluation undertaken in 1994.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU), on behalf of The Broughton Beattie Partnership, maintained a watching brief on the plot of land immediately SW of the Royal Oak inn, in Station Road, Blackthorn, Oxon (NGR 62281934), during the demolition of 'Regina Cottage', and the excavation of footing trenches and drains for three new dwellings.

The watching brief was requested by the County Archaeological Officer, Paul Smith, in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, as a result of the evidence revealed by the original archaeological evaluation (*Land Adjacent to The Royal Oak, Blackthorn, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation Report. (OAU. January 1995 - client report).*)

### BACKGROUND

Blackthorn lies approximately three miles east of Bicester, on the lower Oxford Clay. The village partly surrounds a large 'green' with long narrow parcels of land radiating from it, particularly on the south and east sides. The development area is one of these parcels of land. 'Regina' cottage stood back from the road in the centre of the site, and, by its appearance had been dated to the late 18th - early 19th century.

### SUMMARY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION.

Six trenches were machine excavated across the site, corresponding with the proposed building footprints, the road frontage, and the area immediately in front of the cottage. A small quantity of medieval pottery suggested a low level of 12th or 13th century activity, but no indication of structures. There was no evidence to indicate any development of the site until the 18th century, at which point there appears to have been a major programme of consolidation of the site, with dumped material, presumably to alleviate the problem of the high water table.

The dating material recovered in contexts associated with the cottage and its outbuildings, being of 17th-18th century date suggested either that the cottage was older than was assumed, or that the present structure superseded an earlier building, possibly on the same plan.

## WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

To avoid confusion with the evaluation recording strategy, the watching brief trenches numbered from Trench 7. Contexts were numbered from 100. Where they are mentioned in the text, evaluation contexts are in square brackets [].

The site was first visited during the final stage of the demolition of the cottage, in October 1995. With the cooperation of the demolition contractor, a short trench was machine excavated across the front (north-west) wall footing of the cottage, and the resulting section recorded (Trench 7).

During the excavation of the footings, in December 1995, the very wet conditions, and the unsafe nature of the excavated trenches, meant that it was not possible to properly record some of the deposits exposed. This was particularly the case in plot 2 (Trench 9).

A final visit was made to the site in May 1996 to observe the long section exposed by the main drainage trench (Trench 2). It was noted at this time that an estimated 0.3 m of the upper deposits of the site had been heavily disturbed or removed altogether in places by the contractors machinery.

## RESULTS Fig 2 & 3

### Trench 7

The section showed the mid grey alluvial clay (102) cut by the construction of the wall footing (103), 0.80 m wide and 0.45 m deep. The interior of the building, south-east of the wall showed a flagstone floor resting on a rubble and brown clay make up layer (104), which itself overlaid 102. A fragment of clay pipe stem and a sherd of salt glazed 18th century pottery were recovered from the matrix of the wall context (103)

To the north-west of the wall the alluvial layer 102 was overlaid by a layer of pale brown clay (101), and the modern topsoil (100). Adjacent to the wall was a modern drain trench (105).

### Trench 8

The drainage trench was excavated to a depth of approximately 1.0 m at the N part of the site, shallowing to approximately 0.70 m at the south-east end of the site. Apart from the footing of Regina cottage, and the edge of the evaluation Trench 1, no archaeological features were noted in the main length of trench. In the section of the branch leading to Plot 2 a small feature was identified, probably a pit, cut into the brown alluvial clay (102) with a fill of dark grey brown silty clay. Two sherds of sand tempered 12th/13th century pottery were recovered from this fill.

It was also noticeable that the alluvial clay was more silty and less stiff towards the southern part of the site, which might suggest that it was less prone to flooding than the area nearer

to the road.

### Trench 9

Deposits in this profile section are similar to those seen in evaluation trench 4. A layer of stiff yellowish clay (111) was overlaid by a grey silty clay layer 0.30 m deep (110) [4/9]. This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of mixed limestone rubble and orange-brown sandy clay (109) [4/13]. This in turn was sealed by a thin layer of dark grey silty clay (108) [4/4] and a disturbed topsoil (100). The evaluation concluded that the layer 4/13 represented the make up or consolidation for a floor or yard surface. If so, the surface apparently extended at least three metres to the north-east. However, no dating material was recovered from these deposits during the watching brief, so the original conclusion that this represented post-medieval activity stands.

### Trench 10

The unsafe nature of the ground during the excavation of this trench meant that no section drawing was possible. The footing trenches of the north-west side of the building exposed what appeared to be the southern edge of either one large linear feature or a series of pits on a north-east - south-west orientation. They were cut to below the bottom of the footings, and their fill was seen to contain fragments of brick, and dumped limestone rubble. It is the observer's opinion that they represented post-medieval activity, possibly the infilling of pits.

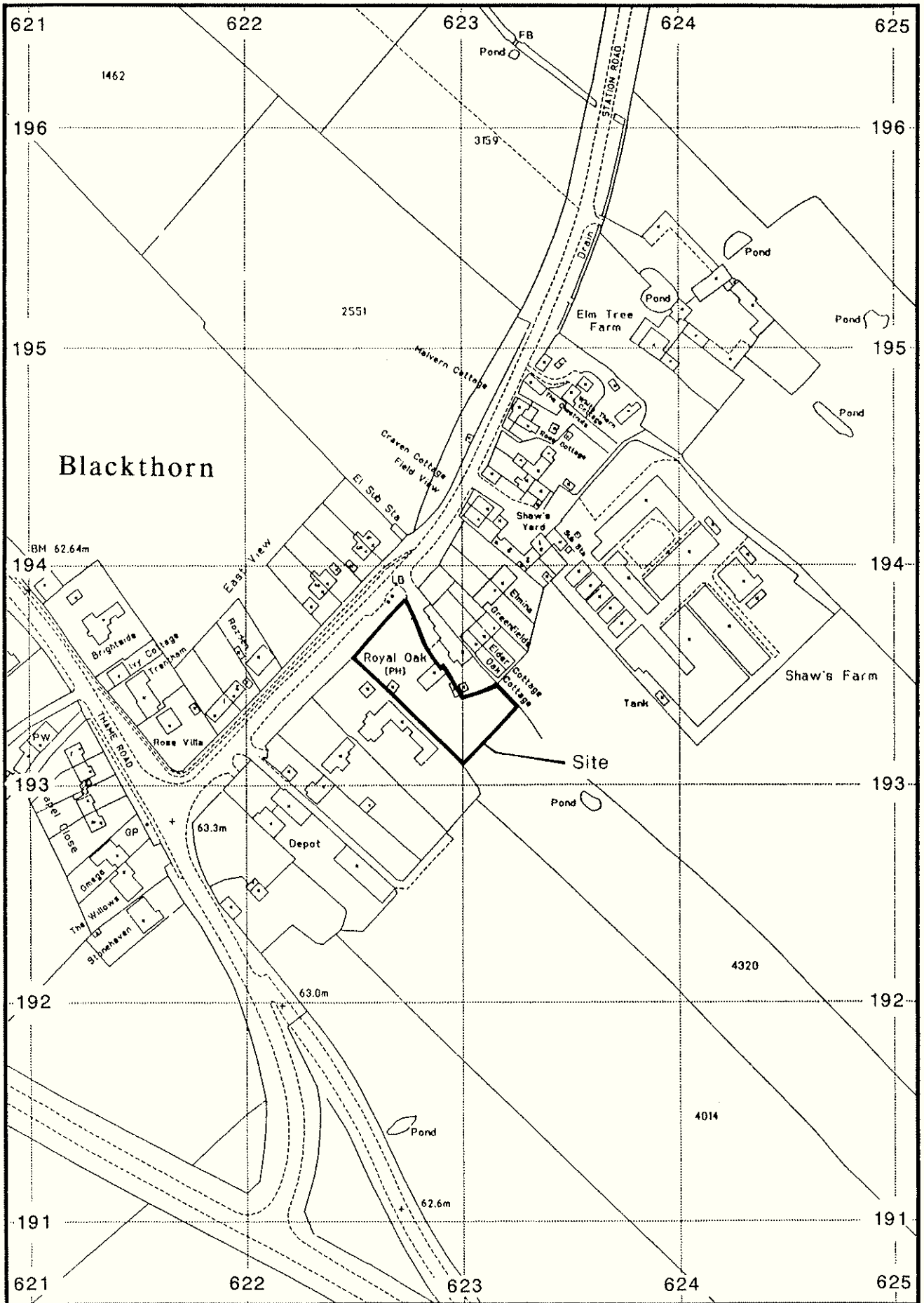
## **CONCLUSION**

The watching brief, like the evaluation, recovered a small amount of evidence of medieval activity, but not enough to suggest the close proximity of medieval occupation. The possibility that the southern part of the site may have been drier in antiquity may suggest that any focus of medieval occupation might be further to the south -east.

The footings and floor surface of Regina Cottage do not suggest that the demolished building was a successor to an earlier structure on the same plan. The likelihood is that the construction date of the cottage is a few decades earlier than surmised, and the two pieces of dating evidence recovered from the wall context would be consistent with this interpretation.

The large feature(s) seen in Trench 10 are difficult to interpret, but they do seem to represent more 18th century activity, judging by their relatively loose fills and inclusions of brick fragments. As an outbuilding of the cottage stood over this area, it would be reasonable to interpret these deposits as representing the consolidation of the area prior to construction.

Alan Hardy  
OAU



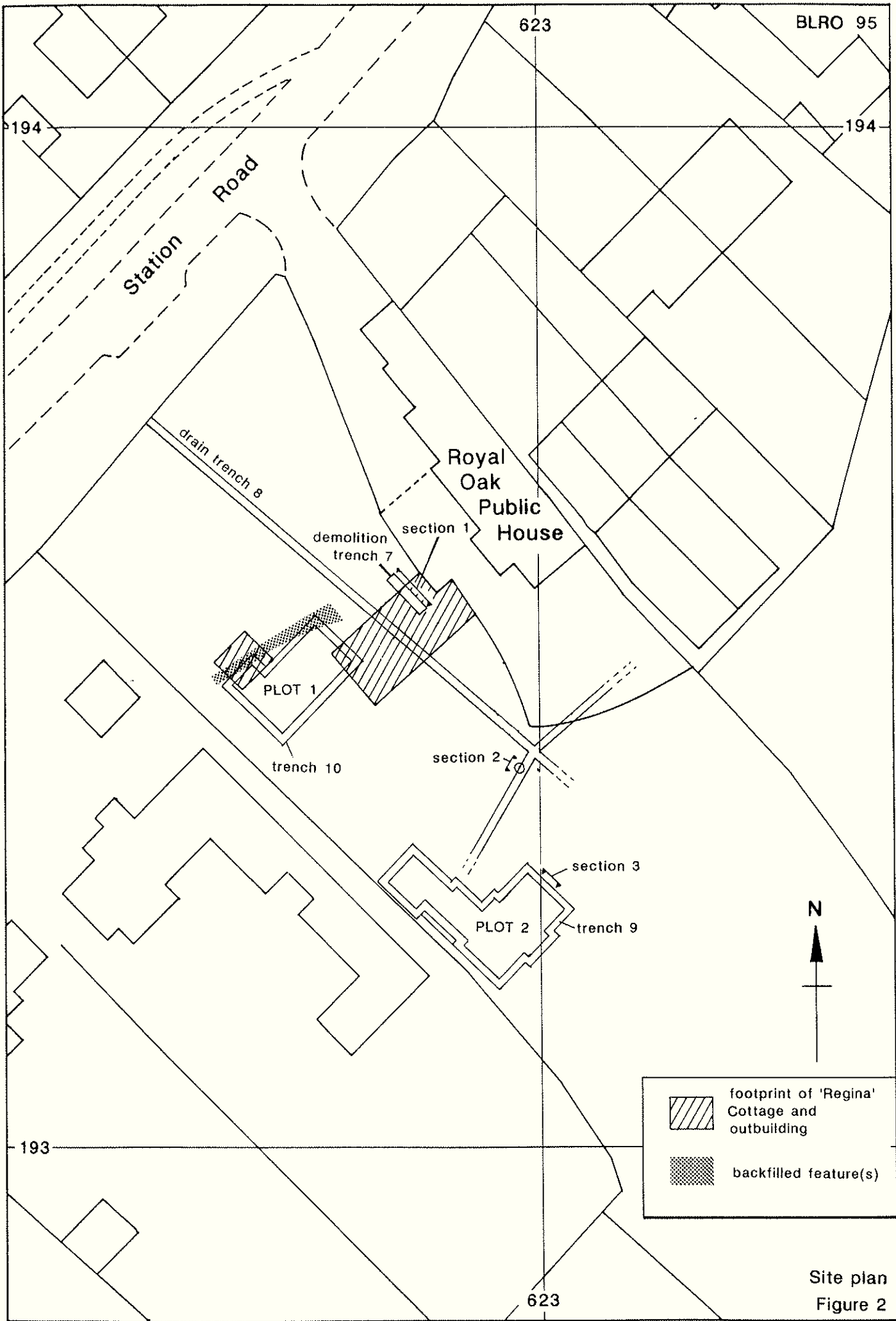
Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map of 1993 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright

Site location

scale 1:2500

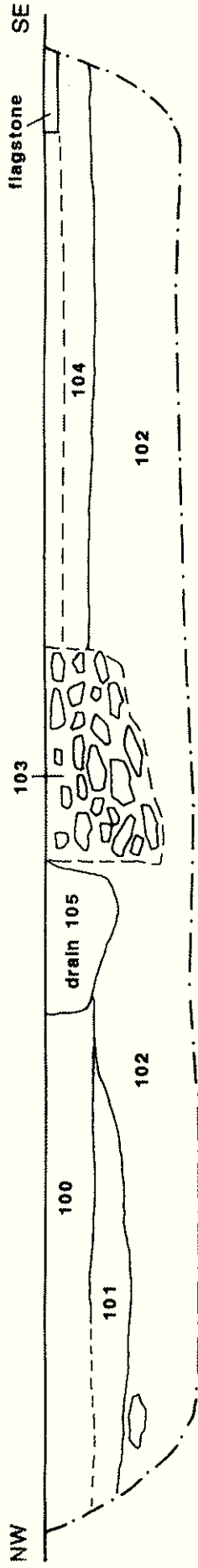
Figure 1



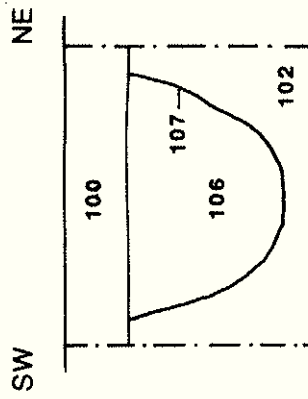


Site plan  
Figure 2

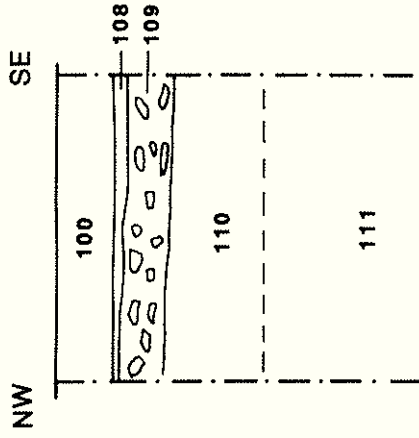
trench 7 section 1



trench 8 section 2



trench 9 section 3



trench sections

scale 1:25

Figure 3



## OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

46 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, OX1 2EP

Head Office Tel: 01865 243888 Fax: 01865 793496

Post-Excavation Tel: 01865 204642 Fax: 01865 204637



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Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.