

SUHS (SR)
906/93

335 / 341 HIGH STREET SUTTON
SURREY

TQ 25716497

Archaeological Evaluation

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

1994



335/341 HIGH STREET, SUTTON, SURREY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Abstract

Two trial trenches at 335/341 High Street, Sutton located a single shallow depression containing some knapped flint of possible mesolithic date. There were no other finds of archaeological interest.

Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at 335/341 High Street, Sutton (NGR TQ 25716497) on behalf of Blockbuster Video (Fig. 1). The work was carried out in fulfilment of conditions put upon planning permission by Sutton Borough Council in relation to the development of a retail store and car park (Ref. N93/37912/FUL; Second Schedule paras. 5 & 6).
- 1.2 The evaluation, consisting of two trial trenches, had the aim of establishing the location, extent, date, character and quality of any archaeological remains on the site. It was conducted to a specification agreed to by the client and English Heritage, London Region acting on behalf of the Local Planning Authority. The site methodology, recording system and report preparation followed the guidelines defined by English Heritage in 'London Region Archaeological Guidance Paper: 3 (Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork)'.
- 1.3 The work took place on 11th February 1994.

Geographical and Archaeological Background

- 2.1 The site lies at about 34 m OD on level ground. The geology of London Clay is here capped by flintstone deposits. Borehole information, supplied by the client, indicated superficial deposits comprising c. 400 mm of modern disturbance overlying c. 350 mm of silty clay.
- 2.2 No archaeological sites were known in the immediate vicinity. Although the site's relationship to the medieval village of Sutton was uncertain, it appears to lie to the north of the settlement's historic core.
- 2.3 OS maps of the 1860's and 1880's (Figs. 4 & 5) show houses fronting the High Street and spreading to adjacent areas, but no houses in this particular plot. The site is presently surrounded by housing and shops. It was, until now, largely occupied by a depot of Unigate Dairies.

- 2.4 While the archaeological potential of the site was not, therefore, particularly high, the evaluation presented the opportunity of addressing the question of Sutton's early development.

Strategy

- 3.1 The evaluation took the form of two trenches excavated using a JCB Sitemaster equipped with a 4 ft. ditching bucket. Trench 1 was 12 m long by 3 m wide, and Trench 2 10 m long by 3 m wide. Provision was made for a third trench whose excavation was to be contingent upon the results of Trenches 1 and 2. In the event this was not excavated.
- 3.2 The area of the site was 0.136 ha and the trenches represent a sample of 4.85% of the area under examination (Fig. 2).
- 3.3 The trenches were machine-excavated, by spits as far as the undisturbed flintstone. Features of possible archaeological interest were cleaned and sampled by hand-excavation.

Conditions of Work

- 4.1 The former Unigate Dairy was in the final stage of demolition during the evaluation of the site. A toothed bucket was employed to lift the tarmac and concrete slabs and clear road hardcore over Tr. 1. Rubble and modern overburden presented less of a problem in Tr. 2.
- 4.2 The work was carried out during wet weather. The watertable was encountered at or just below the surface of the flintstone. A recently ruptured water main also contributed to a degree of flooding in the bottom of Tr. 1, particularly at the western end.
- 4.3 Heavy diesel contamination in the flintstone in Tr. 1 made work in that trench unpleasant if not hazardous. If extensive or complex archaeological remains had been encountered, it is doubtful they could have been adequately examined under those conditions. In Tr. 2 there was less diesel contamination and only a little standing water.
- 4.4 The natural clay with flintstone presented a broken surface which was extremely difficult to clean to a high standard. Groundwater seepage made extensive hand-cleaning unproductive and because of this, compounded by diesel contamination, the bottoms of the trenches were hand-cleaned selectively where features were suspected. Elsewhere the machine-cleaned surface was considered adequate for the purposes of observation and recording. One side of each trench was hand-cleaned to record the

stratigraphy.

Summary of Results

- 5.1 This section presents a summary of the evaluation results. A more detailed description of the contexts is presented in tabular form in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 contains a brief report on the flint.

Superficial Layers

- 5.2 Both trenches showed a similar sequence of modern overburden overlying a light brown or greyish brown sandy clayey silt (Contexts 104-6 & 205). To a greater or lesser extent this layer had been discoloured by diesel to a dark greenish grey. Layer 104 had also been penetrated by modern material, but elsewhere the deposit was relatively undisturbed. It contained few finds but some post-medieval brick and tile and a fragment of animal bone were retrieved during machine-excavation.
- 5.3 It was clearly a 'pre-industrial' soil but it was uncertain whether it was an early ploughsoil, or whether material could have been distributed through it solely by natural processes and worm action.
- 5.4 This overlay the undisturbed flintstone geology consisting of tightly packed angular/sub-rounded flints within a silty clay or rather sandy matrix. This was encountered at between about 32.8 and 33 m OD in both trenches.

Feature 108

- 5.5 This was a large, irregularly shaped feature, which extended outside Trench 1 on the southern side. Its dimensions were in excess of 3 m by 3 m. It reached a maximum depth of 210 mm below the surface of the flintstone (109) but it is considered possible that it included 106 as an upper fill (see Fig. 3, Tr. 1 Section). Its base was irregular. Its sandy silt fill yielded 4 knapped flints.
- 5.6 Its irregularity suggested it was not an archaeological feature and it might have been a natural hollow or an ancient tree-root disturbance. The flints suggest early prehistoric activity in the area but are not closely datable. The bladelet and the small truncated flake showing light retouch probably belong to a mesolithic industry.

Conclusions and Comments

- 6.1 Little of archaeological interest was found in the two evaluation trenches. A single, shallow feature (108) encountered in Tr. 1 contained four knapped flints. This

suggests some earlier prehistoric activity here. It is unclear whether the flints are a contemporaneous group or represent a fortuitous accumulation from several periods of activity. However, a mesolithic date for the whole group would be a possibility (see Appendix 2). The feature was probably not man-made. Its irregularity and shallowness suggest it was a natural hollow.

- 6.2 The results of the evaluation are generally considered to be reliable, although it was conducted under far from ideal conditions (Section 4). However, it is clearly possible that small and subtle features might have been missed. The apparent absence of knapped flint from the machined layers cannot be considered a reliable observation, particularly in view of the flinty nature of the geology here which would have made the recognition of artefacts difficult.
- 6.3 The evaluation has suggested that the focus of settlement in the historic period was not in this area. Presumably it lay towards the south. While there has been intensive modern activity on the site, disturbance does not generally appear to have penetrated to a great depth and would not have completely destroyed evidence of early settlement had it existed here.

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APPENDIX 1

Context Summary

CXT: Context number
 Cl: clay
 Sa/Sy: sand/sandy
 Si: silt
 FINDS - : finds not collected/ not applicable
 post-med: post-medieval

CXT	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH MM	FINDS	COMMENTS
101	tarmac	60	-	
102	concrete	160	-	
103	rubble & clinker	230	-	road make-up
104	dk grey-green Sy Si/Cl	max. 480	-	contaminated soil
105	lt greyish brown Si/Cl	160	1 tile	earlier soil
106	lt brown Si/Cl	160	none	earlier soil
107	olive green Si Sa	max. 210	1 flint bladelet; 4 flakes	fill of 108
108	hollow (3 x 3 m +)	max. 210	-	natural feature?
109	flintstone	-	-	natural geology
201	yellow brown Cl with brick & rubble	250-450	-	
202	dk grey Si loam with brick & chalk	250-350	-	post-med. dump
203	lt brown Sy Si with chalk lumps	150	-	post-med. dump
204	chalk lumps in grey Si	100	-	post-med. dump
205	mid brown/grey- green Si Cl	250-350	1 brick 1 tile 1 bone	earlier soil

APPENDIX 2

The Knapped Flints from Feature 108

The small assemblage of flint from this feature consisted of a bladelet, a truncated and lightly retouched flake, and two unretouched flakes. There is evidence of both hard and soft hammer working. One of the flakes shows signs of light burning and platform trimming. All the pieces are small and would not be out of place in a mesolithic assemblage. It is unclear whether the raw material was locally derived or imported.

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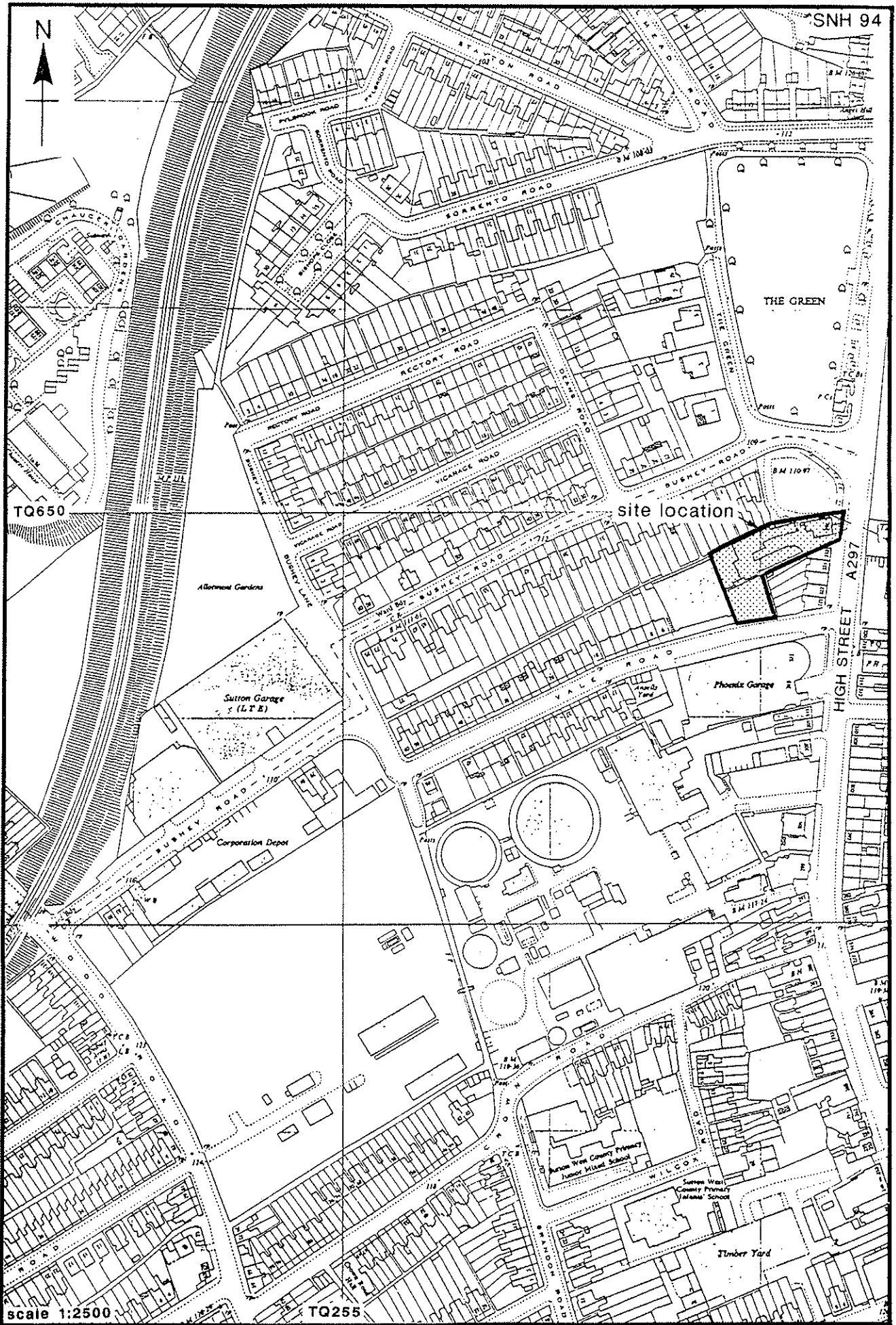
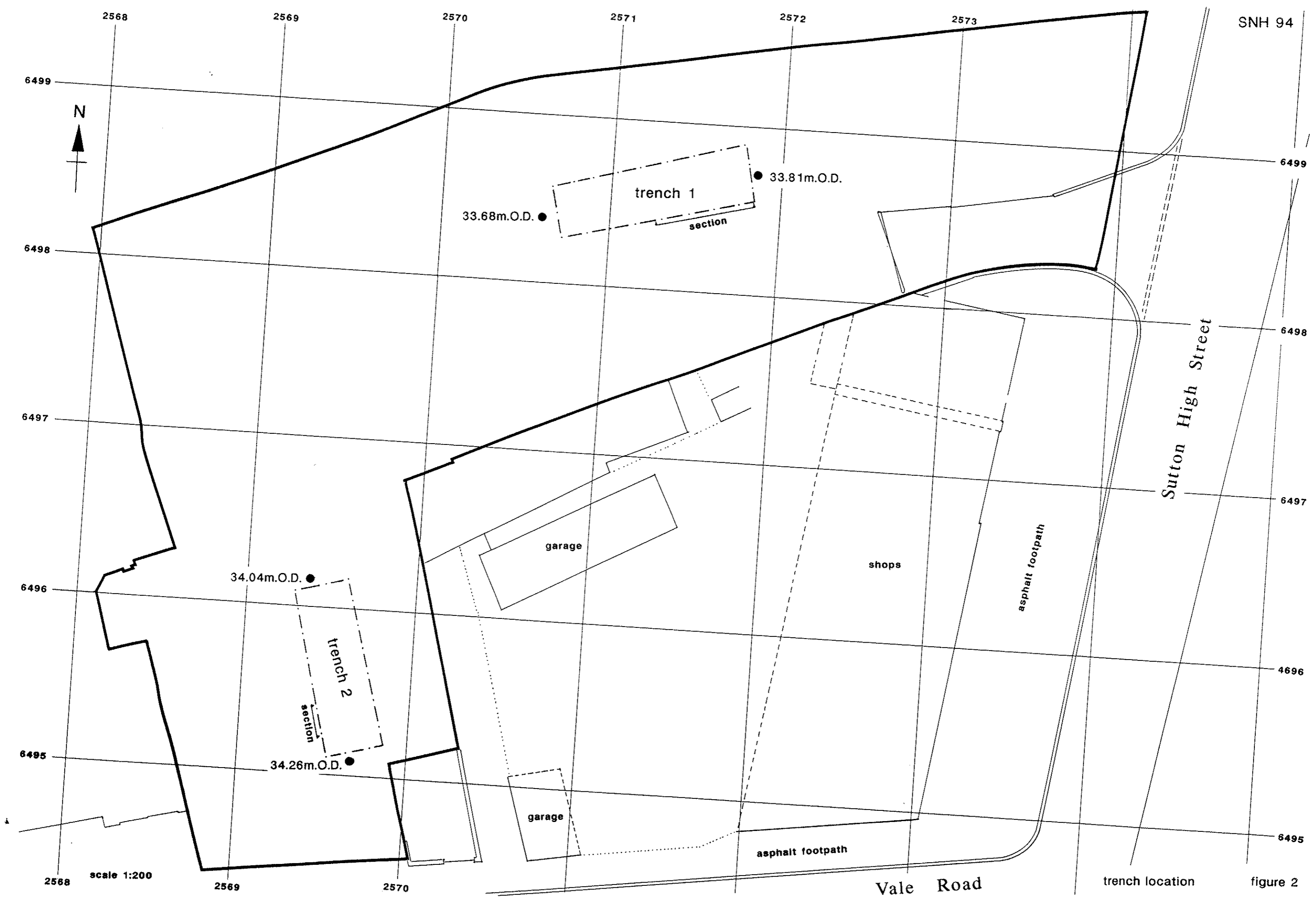


figure 1

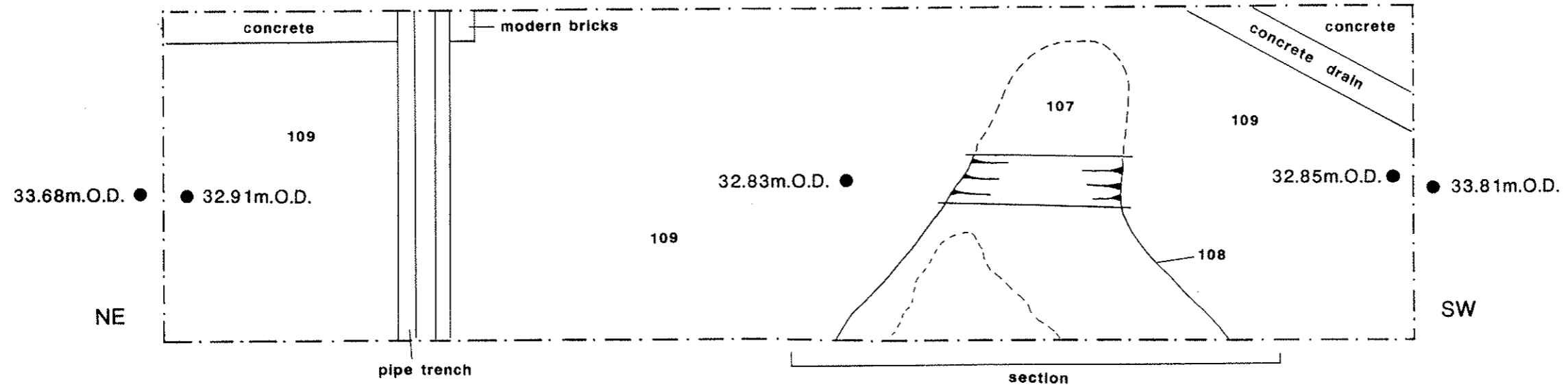


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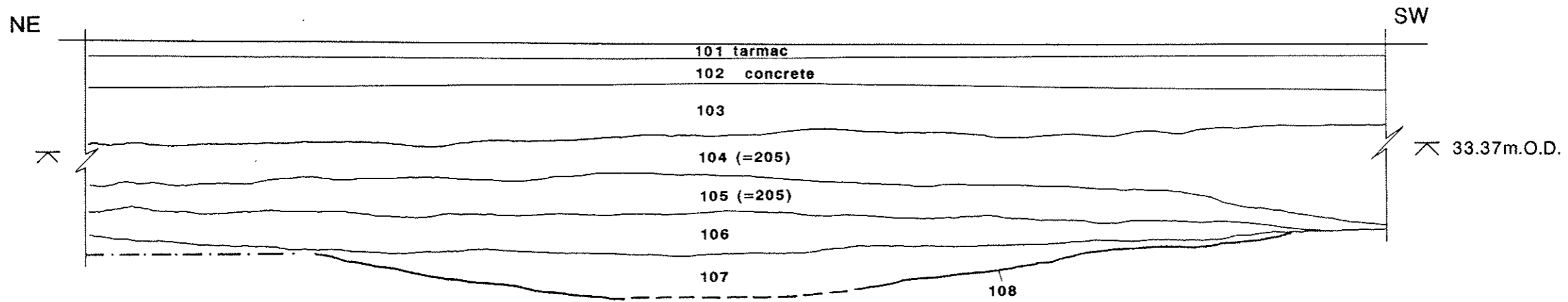
trench location

figure 2

Trench 1



Trench section



Trench 2 section

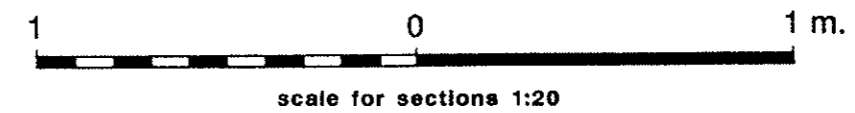
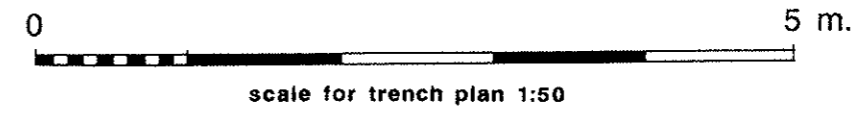
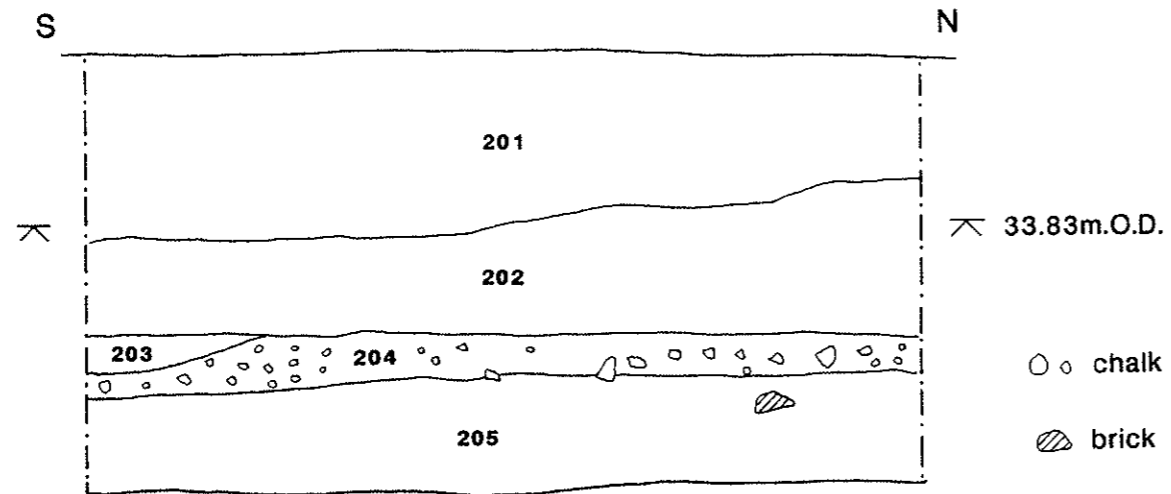
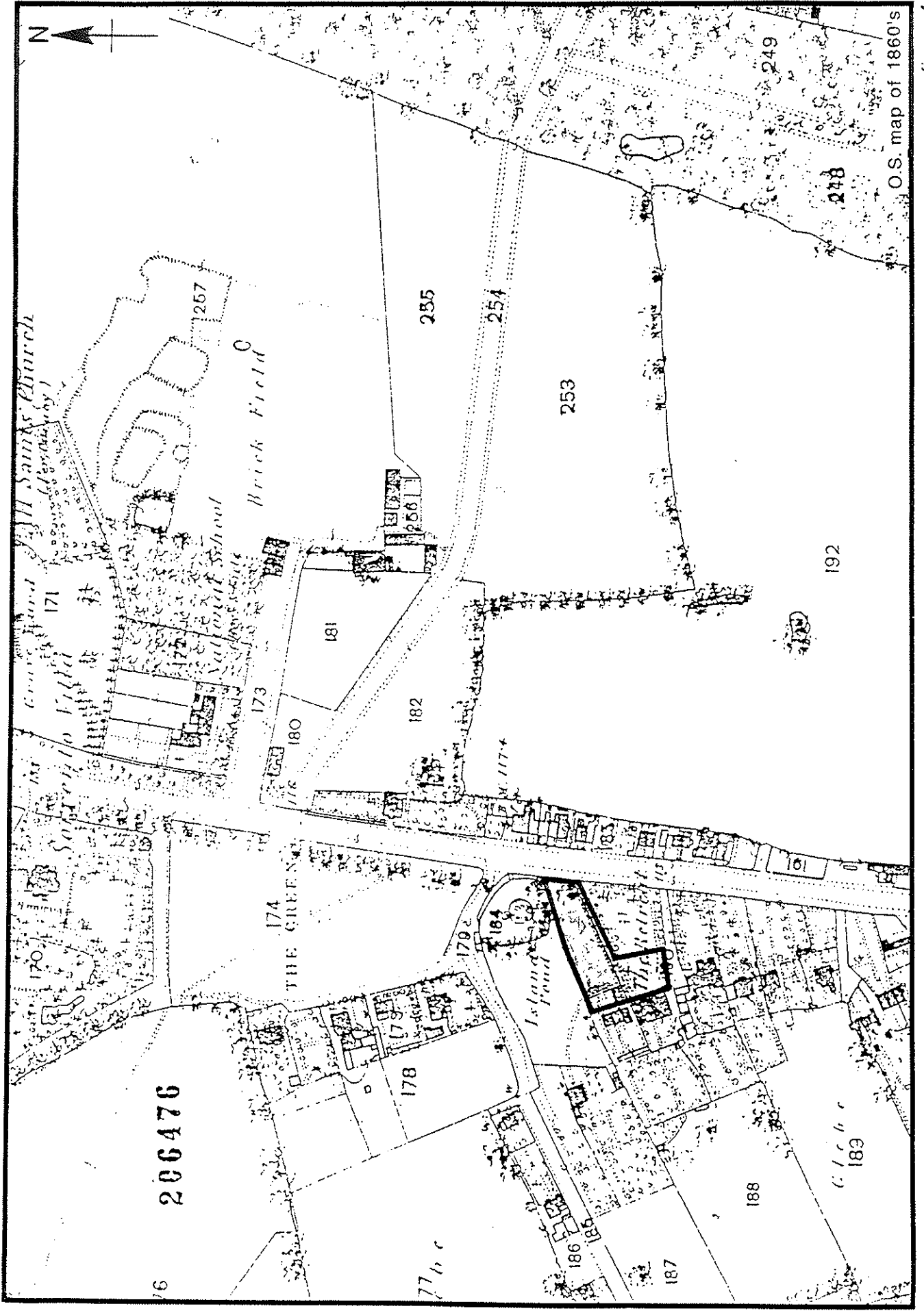


figure 3



O.S. map of 1860's

figure 4

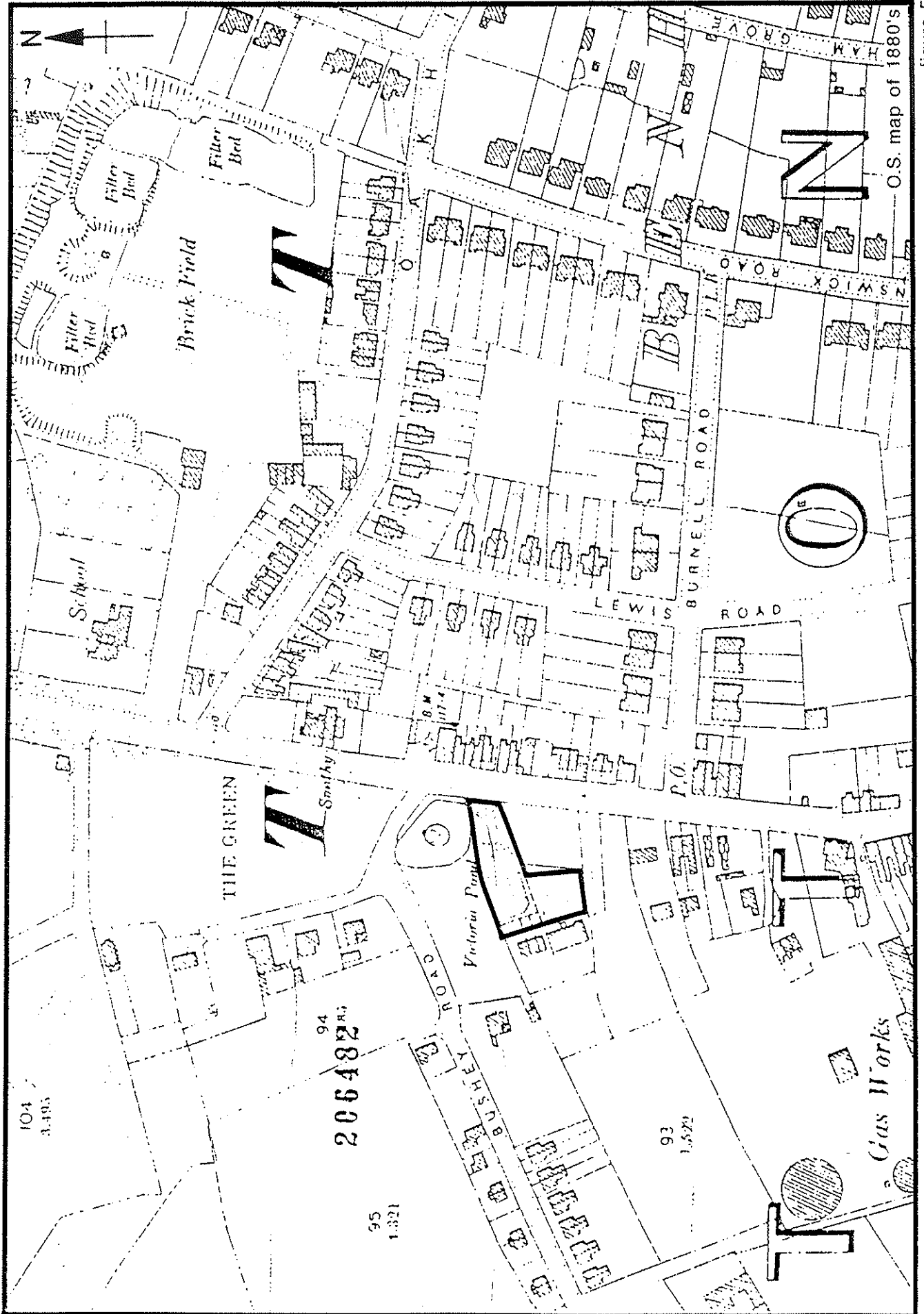


figure 5

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