

Thames Valley Housing Association

50 Croft Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

NGR SU 6034 8924

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 1998

Summary

In 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at 50 Croft Road, Wallingford, Oxon (NGR SU 6034 8924), west of the Anglo-Saxon defences and of Wallingford itself (Fig. 1). Archaeological deposits and features were identified, comprising four pits and a cultivation soil. Medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered, along with a quantity of bone and sundry pieces of post-medieval tile, a nail and fragments of clay pipe.

1 Introduction

The development proposal comprised groundworks prior to the construction of new council housing, consisting of a block of four houses, six maisonettes with associated parking and services.

The watching brief was commissioned by Rushby Builders Ltd., on behalf of the Thames Valley Housing Association, and was necessitated by PPG 16 due to the presence of known sites of archaeological interest in the immediate vicinity. No brief was set for the work; it was undertaken to a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer.

2 Background

The site lies on the west side of Croft Road and some 30 m to the west of the Anglo-Saxon defences (Fig. 1). A bungalow with gardens to the rear previously occupied the site, and was demolished prior to the commencement of groundworks.

Wallingford is located in an area containing some of the most important archaeological complexes in the Thames Valley. The town may have had a Roman precursor, and the presence of a Saxon cemetery predating the 9th century defences may indicate that the area already had a settlement. The Domesday Survey of 1086 noted 491 houses in Wallingford, together with a mint, a market and a guildhall.

Wallingford was the second largest *burh* in Berkshire, and played a prominent role in the conflict between King Stephen and Empress Matilda. Eight properties were destroyed in order to construct the castle, following the Norman Conquest. The town was very prosperous until the 13th century, after which it entered a period of slow decline, reaching its lowest point in the 16th century. Its fortunes revived in the 19th century after the construction of the canal to Bath and Birmingham.

Prehistoric funerary monument complexes lie at Dorchester to the north and South Stoke to the south. While few monuments are known from Wallingford itself, a middle Neolithic double ring-ditch, located 300 m south of the Plough Public House, and containing the burial of a middle-aged female, was excavated in 1959. Cropmarks indicating the possible existence of further ring-ditches are located 1 km to the south of this feature (Case and Whittle, 1982, 55-9).

Excavations in advance of the construction of the Wallingford bypass located both Neolithic and Bronze Age riparian settlements. Both Neolithic pottery and Bronze Age metalwork hoards have been recovered from the river itself. A rectangular enclosure, tentatively dated to the Iron Age, and containing a cropmark which may represent a Roman villa, also was excavated in 1959 (Case and Whittle, 1982, fig. 28). Two Iron Age settlement sites also have been excavated to the south of the town (Rodwell, 1975).

A 6th to 7th century Saxon cemetery was located 160 m from the site in 1910 (Fig. 1), when the school to the south of St John's Road was built. Further burials were located in 1924 and also in 1936 - 38. 50 Croft Road lies to the west of these, immediately outside the defences of the Saxon *burh*, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Oxon 234). A small excavation through the defensive bank was carried out, c. 100 m north of the site, in 1973, which retrieved evidence dating the bank to the 9th century (Durham, cited by Rodwell & Astill in Haslam, 1984). A recording action along the east side of Croft Road, immediately to the south-east of the site, noted that the defensive ditch had formerly occupied most of the space between the road and the bank, although the ditch fills had been disturbed by 19th century tanning pits. A further recording action at St John's Farm, to the south-east of the site, in 1985, noted no significant archaeological features, but did note that the gravel was sealed by an apparently undisturbed subsoil (B Durham, pers comm).

An archaeological watching brief at Bullcroft Park, to the north-east, identified massive flint foundations in association with a large quantity of highly decorated encaustic tiles, located immediately behind 55b High Street (OAU, 1997).

3 Aims

To record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established standards (Wilkinson, 1992), to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

The watching brief comprised a phased programme of inspection visits, synchronised with the contractor's programme.

Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and black and white print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil descriptions use *estimated* percentages based on the use of standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results

A detailed tabulation of finds and context data may be found in Appendix 1.

A number of pits were located to the east of the site and to the west of Croft Road. In addition to these a band of soil, which may have been cultivated, was identified running across the whole site.

The natural (3), a loose yellowish sandy gravel, was seen at 46.43 m OD to the west and 46.16 m OD to the east of the site. It was cut by medieval pits [6], [8], [10] and [15] and was sealed by layer (2) (Figs 2 and 3).

A cluster of pits [6], [8] and [10] was located in the south-east corner of the site, close to the pavement and road. A discrete pit [15] was also located towards the north-east corner of the site. Pits [6] and [8] were seen in a north-facing foundation trench (Figs 2 & 3) and the pits apparently headed towards the southern boundary. Pit [10] was located in a west-facing foundation trench (Figs 2 & 4) and was seen to head east towards the road. Pit [15] was seen to the north of the sewer trench (Figs 2, 3 and 4).

Pit [6] measured 3 m wide by 0.90 m deep and cut deposit (7), the fill of pit [8] (Fig. 3). Pit [6] had near vertical sides and a flat base and was filled by deposits (4) and (5). (5) was the primary fill, a compacted mid brown/gray silty clay, 0.50 m thick. It produced no finds. It was sealed by (4), a compacted yellowish mid-brown gravelly silt, 0.40 m thick. It produced nine sherds of 12th - 13th century pottery.

Pit [8] was 3 m wide and was filled by (7), a compacted slightly orange silty clay. (7) measured 0.70 m to the base of the trench and continued beyond this; no finds were retrieved from this deposit. [8] had near vertical sides and was cut away to the east by pit [6].

Pit [10] had near vertical sides and a flat base, and measured 1.80 m wide by 0.80 m deep and cut the natural (3). It was filled by (9), a compacted mid-brown slightly orange silty clay, 0.80 m thick; no finds were retrieved from it.

Pit [15] measured 2.50 m wide by 0.45 m in depth and cut the natural (3); it was filled by deposit (14), a compact mid-brown slightly orange silty clay which filled the entirety of this feature. It produced 9 bone fragments and 23 pottery sherds. [15] was apparently truncated by (2) and cut by the modern manhole trench [17] (see Fig. 3).

(2) was a friable mid-brown/red silty clay with inclusions of sand and gravel, and varied in thickness from 0.32 m to 0.40 m. No archaeological finds were retrieved from it. It sealed pits [6], [8] and [10], truncated [15], the natural (3) and was cut by modern pit [12] on the western edge of the site.

Pit [12] had vertical sides and a flat base, and measured 1.20 m wide by 0.38 m deep and was filled by (11), a compact brownish/black silt loam, which contained shredded polythene and fragments of modern housebrick. [12] cut layer (2) and was sealed by (1).

(1) was a friable gray/brown silty clay, varying from 0.38 m to 0.52 m across the site. To the east and west this layer had been disturbed by more recent activity.

A modern manhole trench [17] was seen to the north-east of the site which measured 4 m by 5 m and 2 m deep, and was filled by (16). [17] cuts pit [15] and layers (1) and (2) (Figs 3 & 4).

Layer (13) was a deposit of demolition rubble mixed with topsoil, resulting from the demolition of the bungalow which previously occupied the site. (13) overlaid (1) and (2) (see Fig. 3).

6 Finds

Finds were retrieved from three contexts; topsoil (1) and fills (4) and (14). The sherds from (1) were 18th - 20th century. (1) also produced tile, clay pipe and a nail, all post-medieval or later. The sherds from (4) were dated to the 12th century. The sherds from (14) were also dated to the 12th century. A small quantity of animal bone was also recovered from (14).

7 Discussion

It is thought likely the layer (2) is the result of ploughing which took place here in the medieval period. Recent activity, such as the demolition of the bungalow and the removal of tree stumps, has produced a great deal of disturbance, particularly to the topsoil. The word 'Croft' in the names Croft Road and Kine Croft has certain connotations, usually indicating a small piece of arable land close to a house. Medieval rubbish pits are usually seen in association with a property of some sort, although nothing to suggest a medieval structure was seen. Use of the land outside the Saxon defences for agriculture is proof of a growing prosperity and security in this area in the medieval period.

Granville Laws/John Dalton
OAU
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References.

Case HJ and Whittle AWR (eds) 1982, "Settlement Patterns in the Oxford Region; excavations at the Abingdon Causewayed Enclosure and other sites", **CBA Research Report 44**.

Haslam J (ed) 1984, "Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern Britain", **Southampton**.

Rodwell K (ed) 1974, "Historic Towns in Oxfordshire; a survey of the new county", **Oxford Archaeological Unit, survey No. 3**.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).

Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	depth (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date (century)
	1	layer		0.38–0.52	top soil	pottery	18	18th to 19th
	2	layer		0.32–0.40	cultivation soil			
	3	layer			natural			
	4	fill		0.40	upper pit fill	pottery	9	12th
	5	fill		0.50	primary pit fill			
	6	cut	3	0.90	fill by 4 and 5			
	7	fill		0.75	primary pit fill			
	8	cut	3		filled by 7			
	9	fill		0.80	primary pit fill			
	10	cut	1.8	0.80	filled by 9			
	11	fill		0.38	modern pit fill			
	12	cut	1.2	0.38	filled by 11			
	13	layer		0.50	demolition rubble			
	14	fill		0.45	primary pit fill	pottery	23	12th
	15	cut		0.45	filled by 14			
	16	fill		1.50	fill to 17			
	17	cut		2	filled by 16			

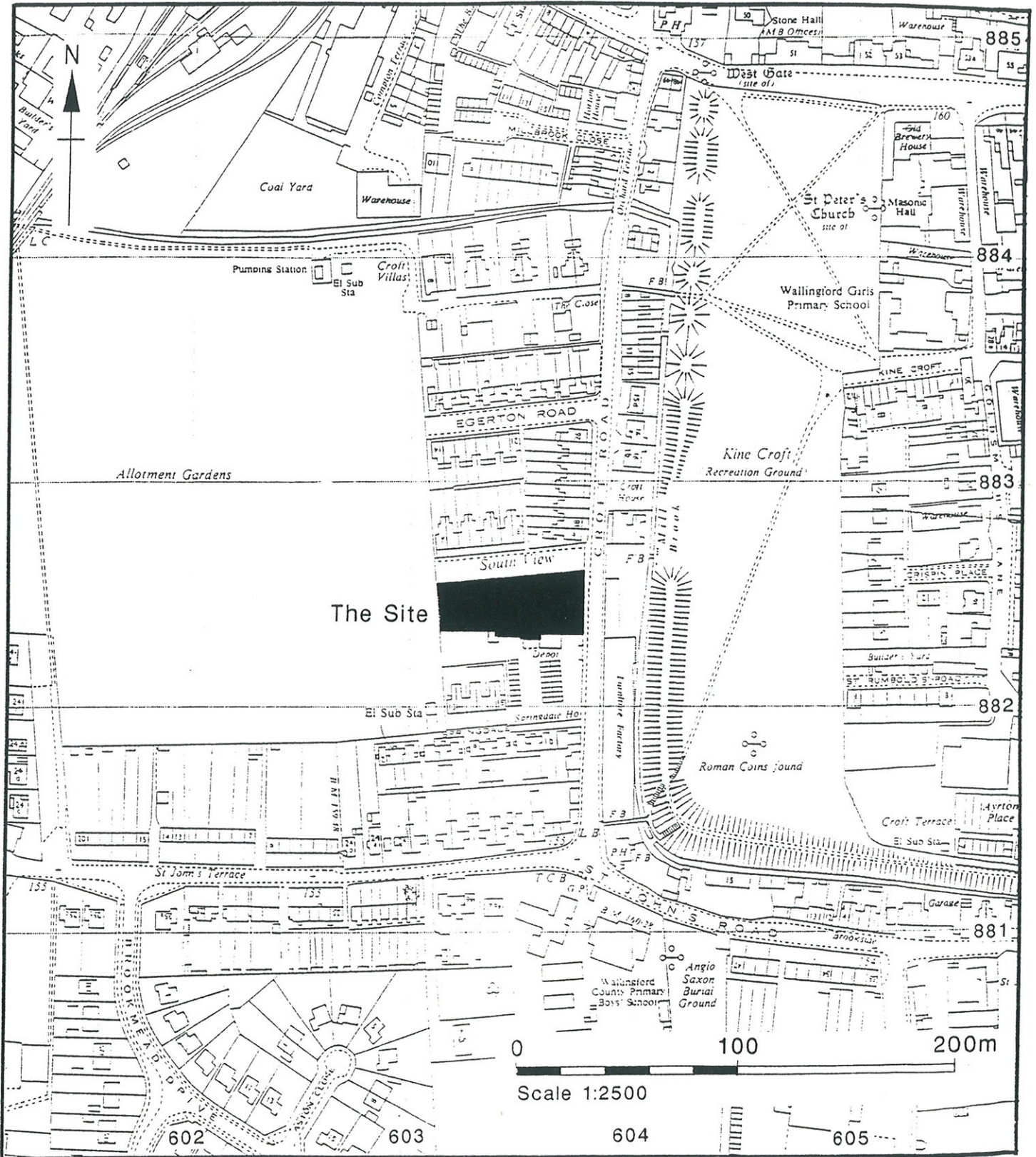


Figure 1: Site location plan

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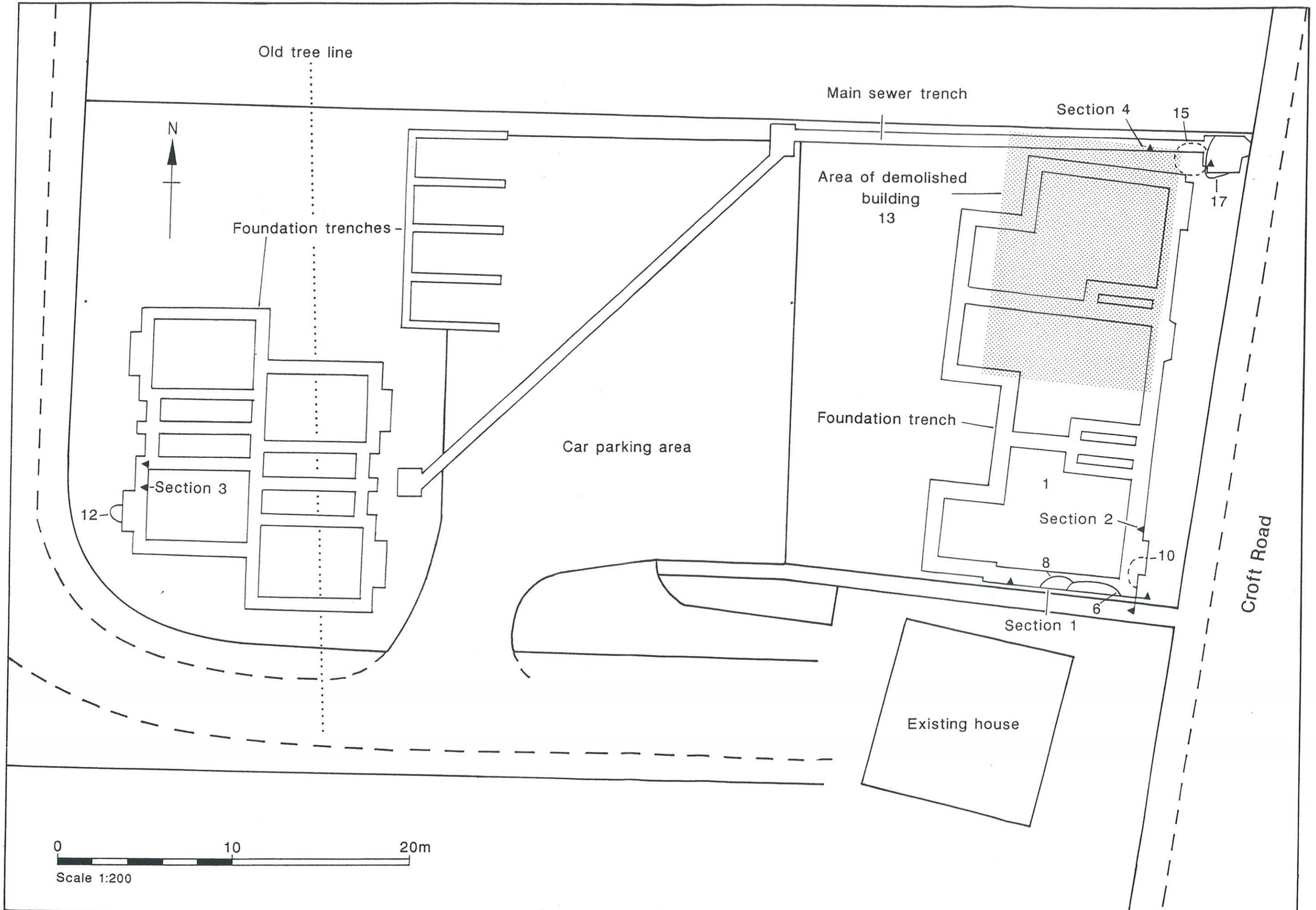


Figure 2: Location of foundation and service trenches

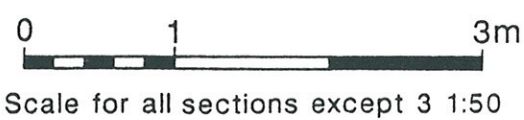
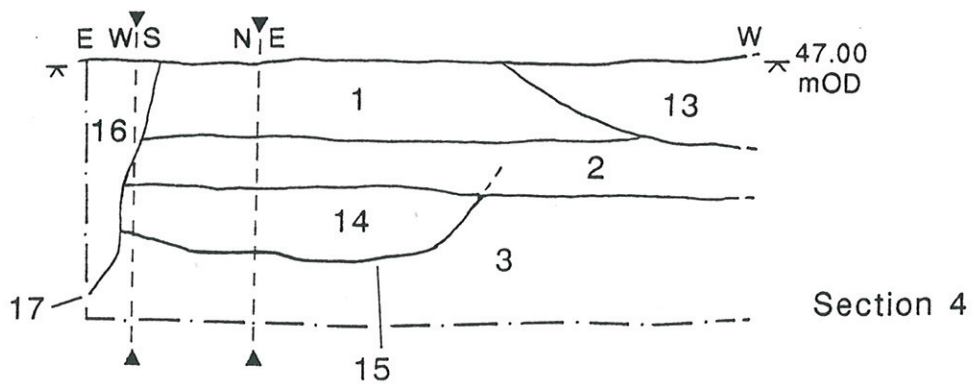
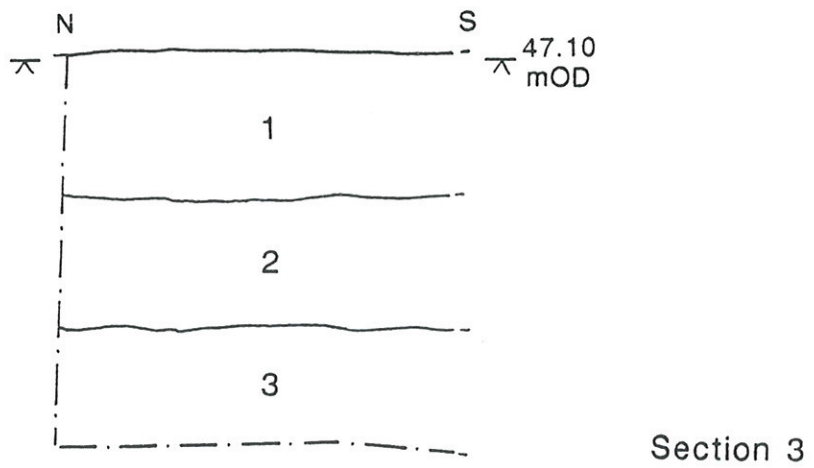
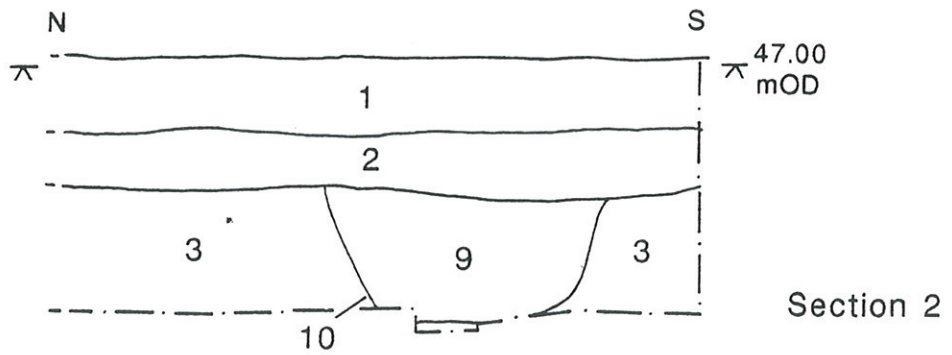
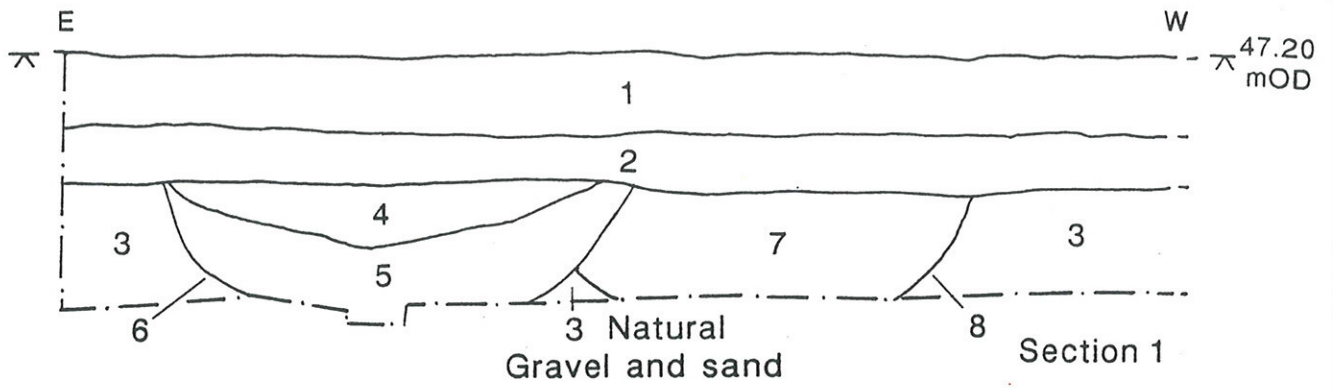


Figure 3: Sections

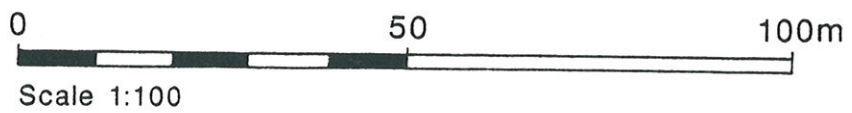
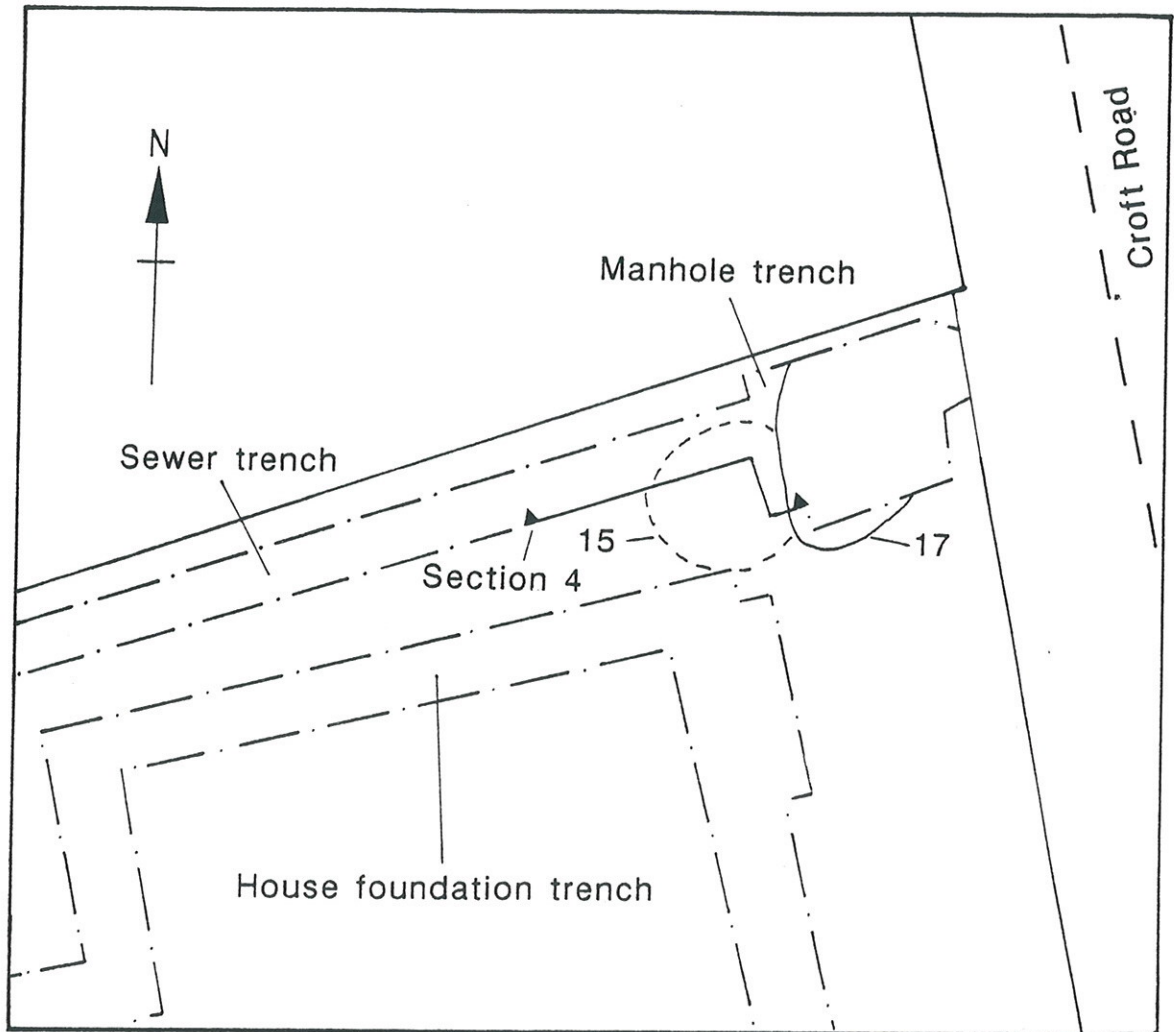


Figure 4: Plan of NE corner of the site

