

THOMAS MERRIFIELD

ENOCK'S COAL YARD, 75 OCK STREET, ABINGDON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

SU 4934 9704

planning ref: Abingdon 15484

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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ENOCK'S COAL YARD, 75 OCK STREET, ABINGDON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Enock's coal yard, 75 Ock Street, Abingdon on behalf of Thomas Merrifield. Three trenches were excavated in the area of proposed development. In Trench 1 the evaluation revealed a probable 12th century horizon overlain by a wall, a well and a yard surface. These settlement features were overlain by 13th and 14th century occupation deposits. Further evidence of settlement was identified in Trench 2 in the central area of the site, consisting of a ditch, a pit, two lines of postholes and two gullies. One of the gullies contained 14th century pottery. In all of the trenches the archaeological features were overlain by a thick homogenous layer which appeared to represent a late medieval and post-medieval accumulation, possibly a garden soil. The lack of archaeological features within this layer tends to suggest a period of inactivity in the proposed development area during this period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work (Fig.1)

In October 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at the coal yard, 75 Ock Street, Abingdon on behalf of Thomas Merrifield in respect of a planning application (Abingdon 15484) for residential development, and, in accordance with a brief set by the Deputy County Archaeologist and a WSI agreed with him. The development site (Fig.1) lay on the north side of Ock Street west of the historic centre of Abingdon. The site is c. 0.14 hectares in area. The site was previously known as Enock's coal yard.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site is located at around 52 m OD on 2nd terrace gravel deposits overlying Kimmeridge clay north of the River Ock.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The site lies beyond the area of significant prehistoric and Roman discoveries made beneath the town centre, and east of a second concentration of prehistoric activity under the industrial estates at the west edge of town (Rodwell 1975, 38 Map 2; Allen 1997, 47-54). A small assemblage of struck flint was however recovered from 83-88 Ock Street in 1994 (Roberts 1997, 174).

The site is also located west of the medieval town ditch (Allen 1997, 47-54), and beyond the limits of the 12th century town as identified in the Historic Towns Survey of 1975, though the survey identified the site as part of the area developed in the later medieval period along the east-west road leading from the Market Square and the Abbey gateway to the Ock Bridge (Rodwell 1975, 38 Map 2). An excavation (Roberts, 1997) carried out recently at Nos 83-88 Ock Street (c. 60 m to the west) suggested that plots along this part of the street were first laid out in the 12th century, and confirmed that during the 13th and 14th centuries there were buildings either of stone or of timber on stone footings along the street frontage. The medieval buildings extended beneath the pavement on the south, showing that the medieval street frontage was nearer to Ock Street than at present.

The development site is also identifiable on several historical maps. The Christ's Hospital Map of 1844, the 1st edition OS map of 1877 and the 1930 edition show occupation of the street frontage and buildings located along the east and west flanks of the plot. The central area seems to have been an open yard that was accessible from Ock Street.

Medieval finds have previously been recovered from the site (Rodwell 1975, 38 Map 2). Within the last three years the Abingdon Archaeological Society (AAS) has carried out limited excavation within the site. The results of their work have not yet been published, but the records were made available to OAU. Two small trenches (one set 6 m back from the street front and the second towards the north-west corner of the yard) revealed c.0.90 m of overburden which sealed medieval stone-lined pits and a stone-lined drain (see Fig. 2).

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation consisted of trial trenching. One trench was targetted upon the street frontage to look for medieval buildings, the other trenches were positioned to provide coverage of the whole site, supplementing the trenches already excavated by the Abingdon Archaeological Society.

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork (Fig.2)

The evaluation was based upon a 2% sample of the development area, and consisted of three trenches. Trench 1 measured 20 m long and Trenches 2 and 3 were each 10 m long. All three trenches were excavated to a width of between 1.60 and 1.70 m. The overburden was removed by a JCB mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The underlying soil type was a clayey silt. The soils of this part of Abingdon were not included in the 1972 Soil Survey map of Abingdon, but are comparable to the brownearths of the Sutton and Sherborne series. Ground conditions were wet.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

Archaeological deposits were found throughout the site, but were concentrated within the southern half of the site fronting Ock Street (Trenches 1 and 2). The deposits

included both negative dug features (ditches, pits and postholes), structural remains (walls and wells) and layers, providing a vertical stratigraphic sequence.

4.3 Presentation of Results

The results of the evaluation are described by trench from the earliest to the latest deposits. The context inventory is contained in Appendix 3. The descriptions of the deposits refer to the individual trenches.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was orientated north to south and was positioned in the southern end of the site adjacent and perpendicular to Ock street. The trench was located to investigate the street frontage. The trench was excavated to a depth varying between 1.0 and 1.20 m. The earliest deposit observed within the base of the trench was a light brown clay (129), exposed at either end of the trench, which is believed to be the natural subsoil. Although no direct physical relationship was established it appears that 129 was followed by the deposition of layer 121, a yellowish-brown sandy-silt containing a considerably high gravel inclusion and a pottery assemblage comprising types current from the late 11th to the 13th century.

Directly overlying this layer was deposit 125, a roughly constructed, but compacted stone surface. The surface was made up of small angular stones with occasional flint cobbles. The surface was between 0.06 and 0.08 m thick, and although only partially uncovered, the western limit of the surface appeared to be defined by an edge aligned north-west to south-east.

A circular stone-lined well was partially exposed in the west section of the trench, some 0.40 m from the edge of the stone surface. The well lining was about 0.28 m thick. The exposed part of the well shaft was 0.50 m wide and was empty to a depth of about 1.0 m below the surface. The diameter of the well appeared to widen towards its base.

The possible remains of a stone wall (124) aligned north-south was partially exposed on the east side of the trench north-west of the surface 125. The wall, well and surface were all overlain by layer 101, a greenish-brown clayey-silt 0.10 m thick. Numerous fragments of animal bone and pottery dated to the 13th century were recovered from this deposit. Layer 100, a brown silty-clay 0.22 m thick, immediately overlay deposit 101. A considerable amount of pottery and bone was also retrieved from this layer. The pottery assemblage from deposit 100 mainly comprises medieval wares of 13th and 14th century types; two later sherds are believed to be intrusive from layer 108 above (see below).

Overlying 100 was layer 108, a brown silty-clay 0.60 m thick. This layer covered the whole of the trench, and contained pottery of post-medieval date. It was partially truncated by later features. In the extreme north end of the trench was a vertical-sided deep cut (112), which ran east-west right across the trench. A loosely built wall (111) was visible in section running east, and just within the trench the wall made a right-

angled turn, continuing north to the limit of the excavation. The wall was 0.42 m wide and consisted of loosely constructed and roughly hewn blocks of stone. The base of the wall was not revealed. This is interpreted as a stone-lined pit or cellar. The wall was abutted by soil 110, and was overlain by layer 109 which infilled the cut. Pottery of 19th century date was retrieved both from the fabric of the wall and from layer 109. West of the wall the fill of cut 112 was excavated by machine to natural subsoil 129.

Considerable disturbance appears to have occurred at the extreme south end of the trench, where deposit 107, a dark brown silty-clay, appears to have infilled a cut truncating layer 108. Overlying 108 were the modern deposits 102, 103 and 104, consisting of topsoil and modern rubble. These layers were in turn cut by the modern pits 113 and 115.

5.1.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

Trench 2 was orientated east to west and was positioned centrally within the site. The earliest deposit identified within the trench was layer of natural clay (203). This clay was the same light orangey-brown clay observed in trench 1 (layer 129). Cut into the surface of the natural clay were two post hole alignments which ran parallel on an east-west alignment 0.40 m apart. The postholes of the more northerly line were slightly larger and had a darker fill than those of the southern line. There were five postholes in the northern line, of which posthole 218 was excavated; this was 0.35 m in diameter and 0.20 m deep with almost vertical sides. The post hole was filled by a single dark greyish-brown silty-clay (217). The four post holes of the other alignment were more regular in shape. Posthole 220 was excavated, and was 0.28 m wide and 0.10 m deep with steep sides (but less steep than those of posthole 218). A single deposit filled cut 220 and this consisted of a light greyish-brown silty-clay. No finds were recovered from the fill of the post holes.

Immediately overlying the natural clay was layer 222, a light greyish-brown silty-clay 0.16 m thick with considerable root penetration, very similar to layer 303 identified in Trench 3 (see below). Five features were cut into layer 222, two being pits partially exposed at either end of the trench. One pit (212) at the west end was filled by 211, a dark greyish-brown clayey-silt containing frequent large flecks of charcoal. The remaining pit (210) at the east end was filled by 209, a lighter greyish-brown silty-clay.

A further two linear features were also observed crossing the trench north-south and aligned roughly parallel to each other. One of these features (213) was partially excavated. It was 0.22 m wide and 0.26 m deep and the sides of the cut were almost vertical. The slot or gully was filled by 202, a greyish-brown silty-clay and one sherd of 14th century pottery was retrieved from the fill.

The remaining feature identified in Trench 2 was a linear ditch (216) orientated north to south. The ditch was 2.40 m wide and 0.52 m deep and was filled by deposits 215 and 214. The primary fill (215), consisted of a dark yellowish-brown silty-clay 0.20 m thick whilst the upper fill (214) was a lighter yellowish-brown silty-clay 0.32 m thick. No finds were recovered from the fills of the ditch. The northern post hole alignment cut across the upper fill of the ditch. The relationship between the more southerly post hole alignment and the ditch was uncertain, although a break in the alignment of the post holes suggests that the ditch may have been later.

Overlying deposit 222, the postholes and the pits was layer 208, a compacted dark greyish-brown clayey-silt up to 0.36 m thick, which ran the length of the trench. At the east end of the trench this deposit was cut by a large modern trench or pit (205). This was filled by 201 which contained modern building debris. Overlying 208 in the west end of the trench was layer 207, a deposit of compacted greyish-greenish silty-clay. This layer was in turn cut by 206. This feature was associated with the construction of a modern drain and was back filled with 204, a deposit of modern rubble. A single thick deposit of modern rubble (200) sealed all of these deposits, and was a levelling layer associated with the former coal yard.

5.1.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 4)

Trench 3 was also orientated east to west and was positioned within the north-east area of the site. The natural orangey-brown clay (304) was exposed at the base of the trench. No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the surface of the natural clay. Immediately overlying the clay was layer 303, a fairly light greyish-brown silty-clay which varied in thickness ranging from 0.20 m in the west end of the trench to about 0.05 m in the east end of the trench. Although no archaeological features or deposits were identified within this layer considerable root penetration was observed. Overlying deposit 303 was layer 302, a dark greyish-brown silty-clay about 0.20 m thick. This layer was cut by a single pit-like feature (307) partially exposed in the south section towards the west end of the trench. On an east-west axis the pit measured 1.50 m wide with a depth of 0.66 m. The sides of the pit were steeply sloping and the base of the pit was flat. The pit was filled with 306, a dark greyish-brown clayey-silt containing frequent medium to large charcoal flecks, overlain by 305, dark greyish-brown clayey-silt. A single sherd of pottery dated to the 13th century was recovered from deposit 306. Sealing both layer 302 and the pit was layer 301, a dark greyish-brown silty-clay about 0.20 m thick. This layer was in turn overlain by a layer of modern rubble (300) 0.50 m thick.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 Medieval pottery

The range of pottery types present indicates that there was occupation at this site throughout the medieval period. The earliest assemblage (from context 121) dates between the late 11th and early 13th centuries. There was considerable activity during the 13th and 14th centuries, as shown by the larger group of pottery of that date from contexts 101 and 100. The single sherds of 16th century and 15th century pottery retrieved from context 100 are likely to be intrusive. For details see Appendix I.

5.2.2 Animal bone

The majority of the bone assemblage was derived from layers 100 and 101. Sheep and cattle dominate the assemblage. It is possible that pig is under represented since pig bones are more porous and easily damaged, and may not have survived as well as the cattle and sheep. The sheep were an unimproved breed, and the recorded ages at death suggest that they were kept primarily for their wool, milk and manure. This would then suggest that their meat would have been viewed as a by-product. The skeletal element

representation suggests that the bones derive from butchery or domestic refuse, especially so in context 100. For details see Appendix 2.

5.2.3 *Other finds*

Two pieces of worked stone were retrieved from Trench 1. One of the stone fragments appeared to represent a quern fragment reused in surface 125. The other piece of stone was retrieved from layer 101 and was a whetstone fragment.

5.3 **Environmental data**

No waterlogged deposits were encountered during the evaluation, and charred deposits were not of suitable quantity to merit sampling.

6 **DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

6.1 **Reliability of field investigation**

Some truncation of the archaeological deposits was evident within Trenches 1 and 2. In Trench 1 there were two modern pits, probably associated with the former coal yard which were cut to the base of the trench, and pits or cellars also destroyed the medieval deposits at the north and south ends of the trench.

In Trench 2 the disturbance to the underlying archaeological deposits was confined to the construction of a drainage system associated with the former coal yard.

Although some truncation of the archaeological deposits had occurred as a result of the Victorian and 20th century developments, there was very little evidence to suggest disturbance to these deposits prior to the 19th century. Significant medieval deposits observed in the base of Trenches 1 and 2 were generally preserved *in situ* unaffected by post-medieval activity.

6.2 **Overall interpretation**

6.2.1 *Summary of Results*

Trench 1 exposed a sequence of significant archaeological deposits. The first occupation horizon (121) contained pottery which probably indicates a 12th century date, similar to the earliest dated activity at 83-88 Ock Street to the west. This was overlain by structural remains (a wall, a well and a cobbled yard) suggesting the presence of a tenement, which was itself overlain by occupation layers (100 and 101) dated to the later 13th and 14th century.

Trench 2 also had a thin layer overlying the natural clay (222), into which medieval features were cut. These included two slots or gullies, one of which (213) contained a single sherd of 14th century pottery, suggesting that this went out of use in the late medieval period. This gully cut a posthole alignment, which is presumably earlier, though the second posthole alignment, which was parallel to the first, contained fragments of brick and stone, suggesting a post-medieval date. The linear ditch (216)

orientated north to south in the centre of the trench was undated as was the single pit (212) identified in the west end of the trench. The archaeological features were overlain by thick layer 208, which appears to be equivalent to layer 108 in Trench 1 and layers 301 and 302 in Trench 3, all of which represent late medieval and post-medieval cultivation deposits. The lack of any archaeological features, or indeed any significant number of finds, within this layer may indicate a period of lengthy inactivity during the post-medieval period.

The relative paucity of archaeological deposits in Trench 3 may indicate the northern boundary of the medieval settlement. In the absence of any significant archaeological remains in the trench apart from a single 13th century pit, it is likely that the northern area of the development site originally represented the rear of medieval tenement plots, with the main areas of occupation situated in the vicinity of the existing street frontage.

No evidence of surviving medieval buildings was found along the street frontage in Trench 1, although the Abingdon Archaeological Society Trench 2 (AAS2) did identify an east-west slot at the south end of their trench which they felt might represent the back wall of a building. Traces of medieval buildings were however found set back from the street frontage in Trench 1.

6.2.2 Significance

The results of the evaluation indicate that medieval archaeology is found throughout the site. The earliest pottery found suggests that development of this area began earlier than previously supposed, probably in the 12th century. Significant evidence of a tenement dating to the 13th century exists within the southern half of the site, and overlying this are occupation layers of the later 13th or 14th centuries containing large and well-preserved assemblages of artefacts and animal bones, which are of considerable potential for illuminating the development of the western suburb of medieval Abingdon.

6.2.3 Impact of development

It is proposed that the site will be used for residential development. Any impact on archaeological deposits will be dependent on the nature of the development design. The results of the evaluation show that the significant medieval archaeological deposits in Trenches 1 and 2 will be found at c. 52.10 m O.D. The surface of pit 307 and the associated layer within Trench 3 were observed at c.52.65 m O.D.

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Appendix 1 Pottery Identification

By Paul Blinkhorn

Introduction

The pottery assemblage comprised 167 sherds with a total weight of 1,256 g. The occurrence per context by number and weight (in g) of sherds is shown in table 1. All the assemblages are medieval or later, and all the fabric types are well-known. Where appropriate, the coding system of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1994) has been used, as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350
 OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 - 1400
 OXAG: Abington ware, mid-late 11th – 13th century
 OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600
 OXAP: 'Overfired' Brill/Boarstall wares, AD1280-1600

The other wares were as follows:

KING: Kingston white ware, AD1250-1450 (Pearce and Vince 1988).
 LMOx: Late Medieval Oxidized ware, c AD1450-1550. A precursor of the Red Earthenware tradition, pottery of this type was produced at numerous sites throughout the south midlands.
 GS: German Stonewares AD1450+.
 RE: Red Earthenwares, c Mid 16thC+.
 19th: Miscellaneous 19th/20th century wares

Discussion

The range of pottery types present indicates that there was occupation at this site throughout the medieval period. The earliest assemblage, a small group from context 121, could date as early as the late 11th century, but these fabric types are current throughout the 12th and into the 13th century. There is little doubt that there was considerable activity during the 13th century, evidence by the group of material of that date from context 101. The group of pottery from context 100 is dated to the 16th century by the presence of a single sherd of Red Earthenware, but the bulk of the pottery is earlier, and the assemblage mainly comprises medieval wares of 13th/14th century types.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per fabric type per context

Context	OXAC		OXBF		OXAG		OXAM		OXAP		KING		LMOx		GS		RE		19th		Date	
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt		
121			1	4	3	10															L11th C?	
306							1	3													1200+	
101	1	8	1	10	8	64	21	250			1	2									1250+	
202							1	18*													14thC ?	
100	3	39	7	60	45	329	56	201	4	67			1	10			1	24			M16th C	
108															1	15	4	49	1	8	19thC	
109							1	4											2	66	19thC	
111																				3	15	19thC
Total	4	47	9	74	56	403	80	476	4	67	1	2	1	10	1	15	5	73	6	89		

*late form

Appendix 2 The Animal Bone

by Bethan Charles

Introduction and Quantification

A total of 58 fragments of bone was retrieved from the site, of which 75% were identifiable. The majority of bone was in excellent condition with very little attritional damage or breakage.

Through an assessment of the bone a quick calculation of totals was made along with a rough estimation of the number of individuals in each context and in total. All fragments of bone were recorded including ribs, long bone shafts and teeth.

Butchery cut marks were found on the distal half of a cattle femur and on ribs, and an astragalus in context 100 had been cut in half. There were no clear butchery marks on any other identifiable fragments.

Species representation

Sheep and cattle dominate the assemblage with a few fragments of pig and bird bone. Table 2 shows that the majority of the assemblage is from context 100.

Table 2: Number of animal bones by context.

Context	Sheep	Cattle	Pig	Unidentified Bird	Unidentified
100	20	14	2	1	11
101	5	0	0	0	3
306	0	1	0	1	0
Total	25	15	2	2	14

Element representation

It can be seen from Table 3 that the lower skeletal elements dominate the assemblage of sheep and cattle bones.

Table 3: Number of sheep and cattle elements by context

Context	Sheep		Cattle	
	100	101	100	306
<i>Element</i>				
Teeth	2	2	0	0
Mandible	2	0	0	0
Pelvis	1	0	0	0
Radius	1	0	0	0
Femur	0	0	1	0
Astragalus	0	0	2	0
Metacarpal	5	0	0	1
Metatarsal	5	0	0	0
Phalanges	4	1	8	0
Ribs	0	0	3	0

Only the sheep bones were numerous enough for ageing. A combination of Silvers (1969) and O'Connors (1982) tables were used to give the age of epiphyseal closure for the sheep and the

majority of bones indicate that the animals were culled after the ages of 2 to 3 years old. This is only a rough assessment since it was not possible to compare the data with that from tooth eruption and wear due to the lack of complete mandibles in the collection.

Biometric evidence

In order to establish the probable size of the sheep the 4 metacarpal bones were measured, these being the most common complete elements found. Each bone was measured following Driesch's (1976) definitions. Four variables were taken as defined by O'Connor (1995), as being the most useful for defining the general size of the animals, and are as follows: the maximum length (GL), the proximal medio-lateral width (Bp), the distal medio-lateral epiphysial width (Bfd), and the minimum medio-lateral shaft width (KD). The mean of the four sets of measurements is shown in Table 4, where they are compared with those of Soay sheep, which are more similar in size to those typical of the unimproved breeds, and the Clun Forest which are larger improved modern sheep. It has been demonstrated by Ryder (1981) and Noddle (1975) that skeletal remains from the Medieval period have been mostly the same as those from earlier periods.

Table 4: The Biometrical variations in sheep's metacarpals. (Data from O'Connor 1995)

Breed and Phases	GL	Bfd	Kd	Bp
Clun Forest	131	29.2	17.6	26.2
Soay	116.2	22.2	12.4	19.8
ABEY 98,172	101.5	21	10	18.5

It can be seen from the data that the sheep were an unimproved breed. Certainly in the 12th century Ryder (1981) states that records indicate a 'lack of breeding policy'. It was not until the late medieval period that selective breeding seriously began.

Discussion

It is clear that sheep and cattle dominate the assemblage. It is possible that the pig is under represented since pig bones are more porous and easily damaged, and may not have survived as well as the cattle and sheep.

The sheep were an unimproved breed and the age at death of the majority of sheep suggests that they were kept primarily for their wool, milk and manure. Their meat would have been viewed as a by product.

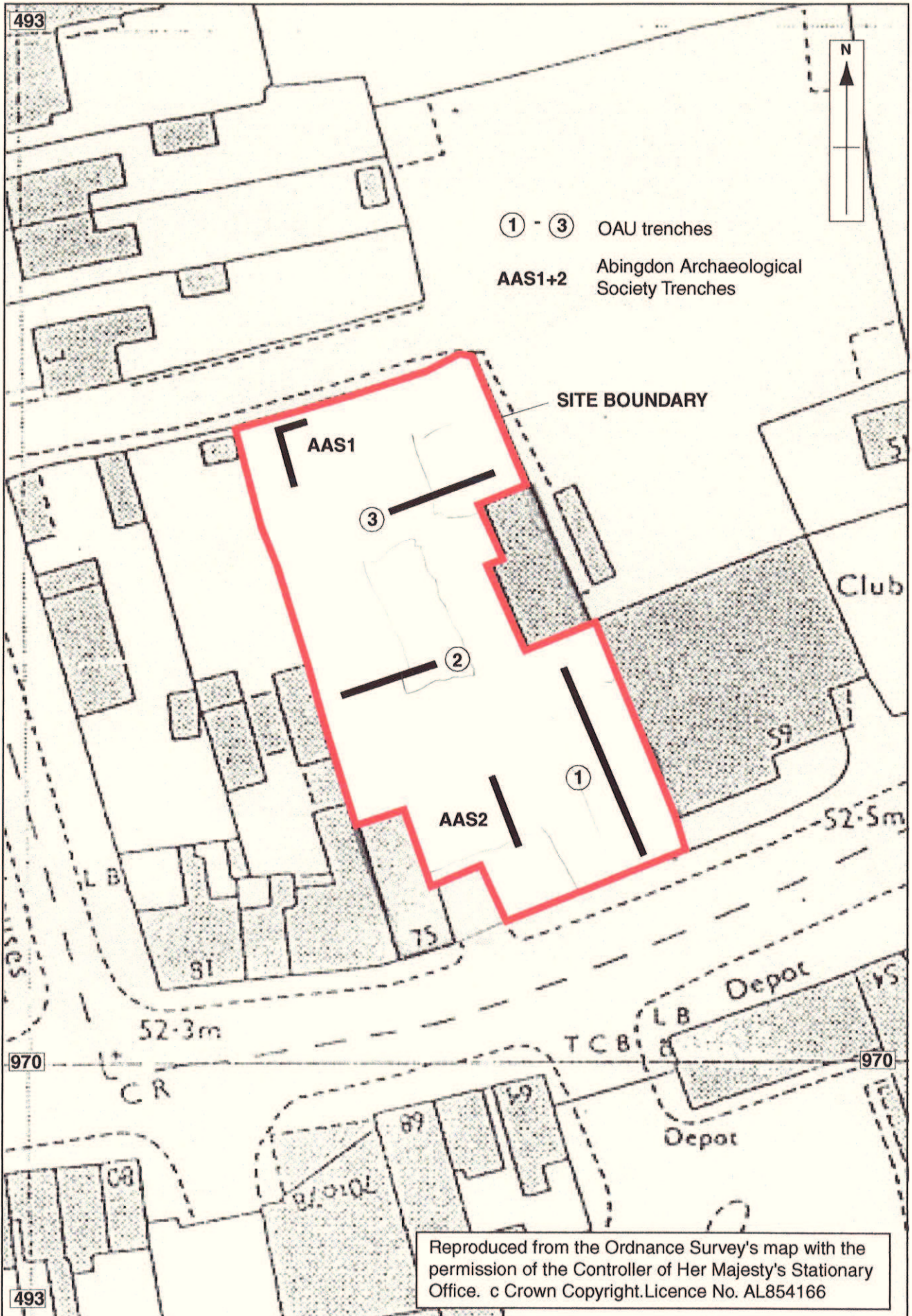
It is almost certain that the assemblage represents butchery or domestic refuse, especially so in context 100.



scale 1:10,000

Location of site

figure 1



scale 1:500

Trench location plan

Figure 2

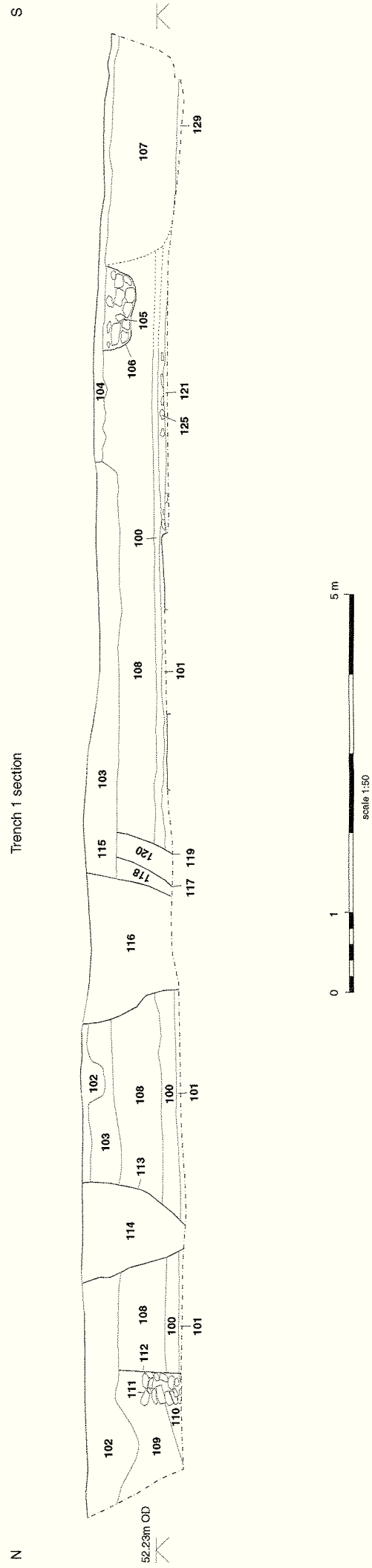
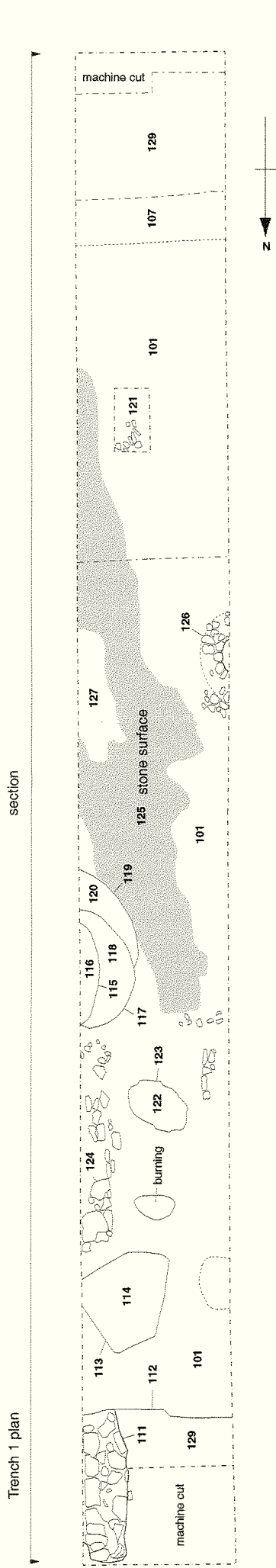
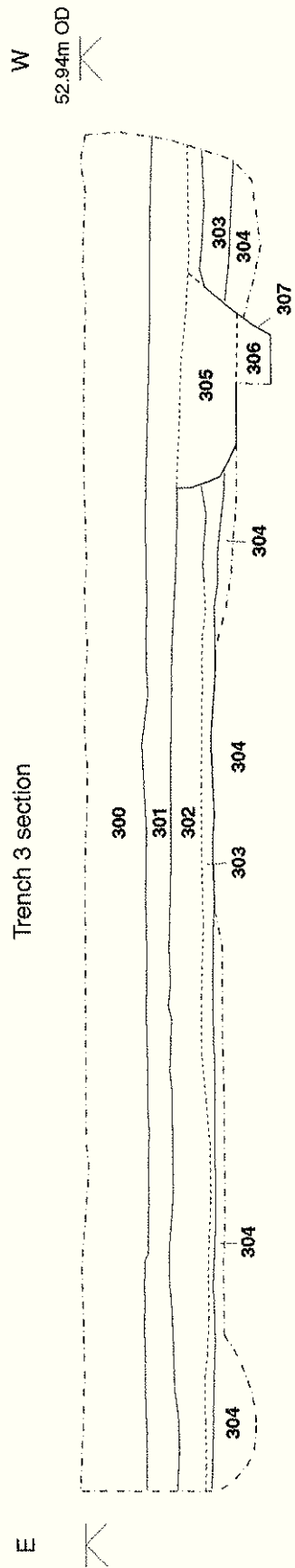
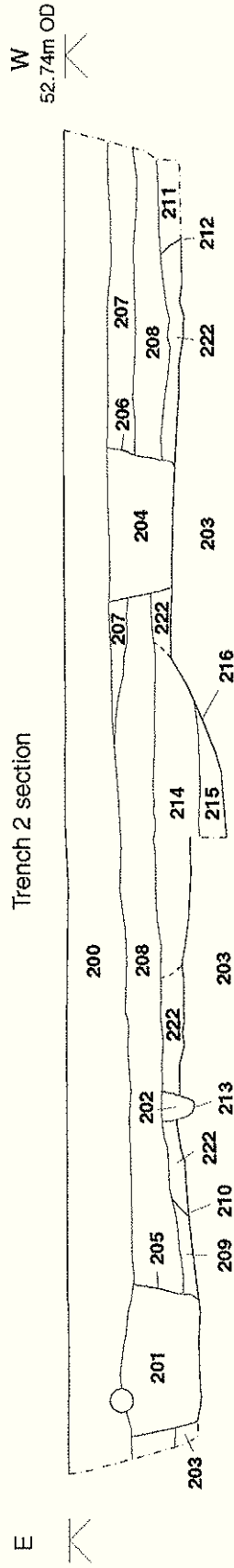
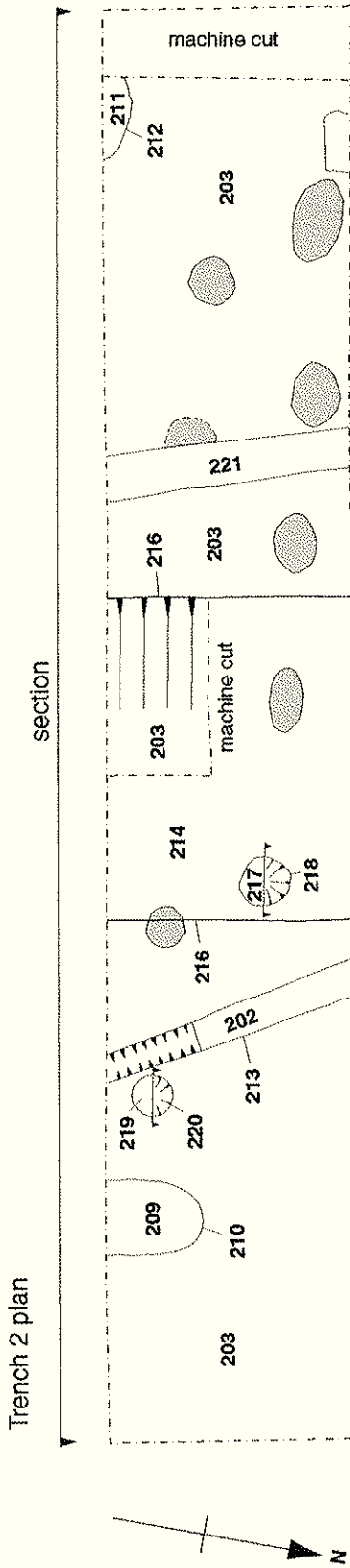


Figure 3

Trench 1 plan and section



Trench 2 plan and sections and Trench 3 section

Figure 4



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