

# The Bittoms Kingston College Kingston upon Thames London



## Post-Excavation Report



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# EXCAVATIONS AT THE BITTOMS, KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES, LONDON

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## INTRODUCTION

Between August and December 2001, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation at The Bittoms, Kingston College, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey (TQ 179 689). The work was undertaken on behalf of Mount Anvil in respect of a planning application for residential flats and a sports hall (Planning Application No. 00/3212/FUL). The site, 0.56 hectares in area, lies just to the south of the historic core of Kingston-upon-Thames, some 150 m to the east of the river. The modern ground surface is at around 8 m AOD in the west, sloping to 7.19 m AOD in the east towards the river Hogsmill (Fig. 1). Prior to the development the site was used for car parking and college buildings. The following report represents a summary of the archaeological results; full details are available in the archive.

## HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located on the eastern edge of the gravel ridge known as Kingston South Lane Island, in an area of marshes and braided channels associated with the Hogsmill (Hawkins et. al. 2002, 186-8, fig. 3). Neolithic activity in the form of occupation debris and a brushwood platform or trackway was revealed during excavations at Eden Walk *c* 200 - 250 m to the north-east of the site (OAU 2001a). Late Bronze Age pottery, indicative of early occupation of the South Lane Island was revealed *c* 30 m west of the development site (Hawkins et. al.

2002, 205), and a late Bronze Age cooking pit were also revealed *c* 50 m to the south-east (Thompson 1991). Flints dating from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age were also recovered from excavations at Woodbines Avenue (Bishop 2002, 243). The Bronze Age activity may have formed part of a single settlement to the south and east of Charter Quay; a late Bronze Age settlement is also thought to have been located at Kingston Hill (Andrews et. al. 2003, p. 9).

During the Romano-British period the site probably comprised agricultural land with any rural settlement located to the north. However, arable farming over long periods may have been made difficult by the increasing marshland development of the area during the late Roman and medieval periods (Branch and Green 2004, p. 15). The small amount of Roman finds recovered from previous excavations may have been indicative of manuring (Hawkins et. al. 2002, 206).

The site lay to the east of an area called *Moreford* (marshy ford) in the early Saxon period (Andrews 2004, 171). Evidence for an early Saxon post-and-stake built building, forming part of a farmstead, was revealed during excavations at South Lane *c* 30 m to the west of the site (Hawkins et. al. 2002). Excavations at Woodbines Avenue (Bishop 2002, p. 239), *c* 50 m to the south of the site, revealed associated evidence for ancillary post-built structures; activity has also been recorded *c* 80 to the north-east and *c* 150 m to the north (OAU 2001a). Excavations by the Museum of London on a Bittoms site immediately to the south-east also revealed features dated to this period, including the possible remains of a sunken feature building (MoLAS 2000). During the 8th or 9th century there was a shift in settlement focus to the central Kingston Island, an important royal demesne of the kings of Wessex (Bird 1987). During the medieval period the focus of the town was in this area and the Bittoms site was on its outer edges. More recently cartographic sources show that housing occupied parts of the site fronting The Bittoms and Kent Road from at least the mid-eighteenth century.

## FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

Following an evaluation of the development site, nine areas were subject to full excavation, focussed in the western part of the site, as the evaluation had not revealed deposits of archaeological potential in the NE corner of the site (OAU 2001b). The overburden was removed by machine to the highest significant archaeological horizon or natural, whichever was encountered first (Fig. 1). All excavation and recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

Five phases of activity were identified based on an analysis of the stratigraphic evidence, artefactual dating and spatial relationships:

Phase 1 - Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (c 1150 BC - 500 BC)

Phase 2 - Anglo-Saxon (5th - 11th centuries)

Phase 3 - Medieval (11th - 15th centuries)

Phase 4 - Post-medieval (15th - 17th centuries)

Phase 5 - Modern (17th - 19th centuries)

## RESULTS

Phase 1 - Late Bronze Age to early Iron Age (c 1150 BC - 500 BC)

Six shallow pits were observed in the central part of the site (307, 1572, 1604, 1822, 1845 and 2093 - Figs 2 and 3). Four of the pits measured between 0.45 m and 0.95 m wide and between 0.15 m and 0.5 m deep. They were filled with orange-brown or grey-brown silty sand and contained a few sherds of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age pottery and flint. They contained few material remains and their function is unclear, although they may have been dug to obtain small quantities of sand, possibly for use as flooring material. Exceptionally pit 1604 was 2.1

m wide and 0.5 m deep, although its fills were similar to those of the smaller pits. A single sherd of late Bronze / early Iron Age pottery was recovered from the fill. It is possible that the limited dating evidence recovered from the pits was residual. Flint artefacts, spanning the Mesolithic period to Bronze Age, and late Bronze Age / early Iron Age pottery were also found within later features and layers.

Although a small assemblage of late Iron Age and early Roman pottery was recovered, no stratigraphic evidence was found to indicate occupation or significant activity at that time.

#### Phase 2 - Anglo-Saxon (5th - 11th centuries)

A probable sand extraction pit (1506) was revealed in the north-western part of the site (Fig. 2), measuring 2.4 m wide and 0.5 m deep. It was filled by a dark grey silty sand and contained a sherd of early to middle Saxon pottery and a sherd of residual Roman pottery. Residual Saxon pottery was also recovered from soils and fills from across the site.

#### Phase 3 - Medieval (11th - 15th centuries)

Large irregular sand quarry pits had truncated the north-eastern part of the site. The pits measured between 3 m and 6 m in width, and were approximately 0.9 m deep. They were filled with grey-brown or orange-brown sandy clays. A few sherds of pottery dating from the 11th to 13th centuries were recovered from the central quarries (628, 1729 and 1946 - Fig. 3), and pottery dating from the 13th century was recovered from the westernmost pits (1617 and 1623 - Fig. 2) and easternmost quarries (915 - Fig. 3). Smaller, similarly filled pits were revealed measuring up to 3 m wide, ranging in depth from 0.5 m to 1.2 m and containing

pottery dating from the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries (typified by pits 1745 and 1847 - Fig. 3). Several undated features were revealed in close proximity to these medieval pits and may have been similarly dated, although it is possible that some may have been prehistoric in date.

A probable well (1589) was revealed in the western part of site (Fig. 2), measuring 1.5 m wide and over 2 m deep. The well was vertically sided and filled with layers of silty sand. Two sherds of pottery dating from the mid-13th century were recovered from the basal fills, and two sherds of late 14th-century pottery from the upper fills. A narrow north-south aligned gully (1570), measuring 0.45 m wide and 0.25 m deep, was revealed to the north of the well (Fig. 2). It was filled by an orange-brown silty sand that contained a sherd of residual prehistoric pottery. A north-south aligned ditch (2072/2082) was observed in the southern part of site (Fig. 2). The ditch was over 2 m wide and 0.6 m deep; it was similarly filled and contained pottery dating from the 13th century. The gully and ditch may have formed boundaries to the rear of properties fronting The Bittoms, and the gully may have also been used for drainage into the well.

Two W-E aligned gullies (2017 and 2019) were observed to the west of ditch 2072/2082, and an E-W aligned ditch (2033) revealed to the east (Fig. 2). Ditch 2033 may have continued into Trench 7 to the east (feature 709 - Fig. 3). The gullies were between 0.3 m and 0.5 m wide and up to 0.3 m deep, and the ditch was 1.6 m wide and 0.9 m deep. Their sandy fills contained sherds of mid-13th-century pottery. These features may also have formed boundaries between properties fronting The Bittoms, or possible field boundaries.

#### Phase 4 - Post-medieval (15th - 17th centuries - Fig. 2)

Square or rectangular sand quarry pits were revealed in the western and central northern part of the site. The square pits (typified by 1763 - Fig. 3) all measured 1 m wide and 0.1 m deep. The rectangular pits (typified by 1520 - Fig. 2) were *c* 2 m long, 0.7 m wide and 0.3 m deep. The pits were filled with sandy clay and contained pottery dating from the 16th or 17th century. A large quarry pit (1669) was also partially revealed, measuring over 4 m wide and 1 m deep (Fig. 3); it contained a single sherd of 16th-century pottery, although this may have been intrusive.

Throughout the eastern part of site E-W aligned and N-S aligned trenches were observed, measuring *c* 8 m long, between 0.5 m and 1 m in width and up to 0.45 m deep. They were filled with brown sandy silt and contained 16th- to 18th-century pottery; the trenches were probably indicative of cultivation beds of a market garden (Fig. 3).

A deposit of brown clayey silt (2304 - NI) overlay the cultivation trenches; it was up to 0.5 m thick in the eastern part of site and contained pottery dating from the 15th or 16th centuries. This was probably an imported cultivation soil.

#### Phase 5 - Modern (17th - 19th centuries - Fig. 2)

The Phase 4 cultivation soil (2304) was truncated by nine N-S aligned trenches (partially shown on Fig. 3), measuring over 30 m long, up to 1 m wide and 0.4 m deep. They were filled by sandy silt deposits that contained 19th-century pottery, and probably were of a similar function to the 16th- or 17th-century cultivation trenches. A similarly filled boundary ditch (1967) was observed to the east (Fig. 3). Some of the cultivation trenches had post holes at the termini suggesting some form of covering.

In the western part of the site were the remains of four, c 4 m square, basements or sunken rooms (2326, 1549, 1609 and 2080 - Fig. 2). These were constructed from 18th-century bricks and due to modern truncation survived to only a few courses deep. The most southerly (1609) had a 19th-century brick floor, incorporating a square void lined with ceramic tiles. The void measured 0.25 m<sup>3</sup> and was capped by a marble tile. The feature may have been used to hide valuables, although the marble tile was far from inconspicuous. The most northerly basement (1549) had no floor evident but its walls were constructed with a large amount of re-used moulded limestone and green sandstone, possibly deriving from a high-status building nearby. Brick soakaways (1577 and 2054 - Fig. 2) and a brick well (1690 - Fig. 3) to the east of the structures may have been located in the rear plots of these properties. Isolated 19th-century rubbish pits and sand extraction slots were also revealed.



## THE FINDS

### General

The following section comprises summaries of the finds and ecofacts recovered during the excavations. Full individual reports and catalogues of each category of material are contained in the archive.

### Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn, Lisa Brown and Daniel Stansbie

Almost 10 kg of pottery was recovered from the evaluation and excavation. The majority was post-medieval in date, but medieval pottery was also noted, suggesting continuous activity from the 11th century to present day. In addition, twenty-three sherds (118 g) of later prehistoric and early Roman pottery were recovered. All sherds in this group are body fragments and no vessel types were identifiable. Precise phasing was not possible as flint temper was used in pottery manufacture throughout the prehistoric and into the Roman period. Small quantities of Roman material (consisting of body sherds of sandy grey ware, oxidised ware, grog-tempered ware, and a base from an Oxfordshire colour-coated ware) and some middle Saxon pottery were present. The middle-Saxon assemblage was fragmented with most sherds quite small and undecorated. The assemblage comprised sand- and chaff-tempered material, and the only feature sherd was an extremely small fragment of a simple upright rim.

## Flint by Kate Cramp

The evaluation and excavation produced 82 worked flints and 156 pieces of burnt unworked flint. Of the worked flints, most were undiagnostic flints, though blades, cores and scrapers are also present. The assemblage represents limited prehistoric activity from the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. Much of it has been redeposited.

## Other finds

Assemblages of clay tobacco pipes, metalwork, ceramic building material and architectural stone were recovered from the site. Almost all the material was post-medieval in date and associated with the construction and subsequent occupation of the 18th-century residential properties. Of note were a pipe with a Masonic decoration and the shaft of what may have been a residual, mid- to late-Saxon dress or hair pin (SF3), unfortunately the head was missing. Fragments of green sandstone were re-used in the 18th-century buildings, and probably originated from an earlier, local high-status structure.

## Ecofactual summaries

A total of 415 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the excavations, of which approximately 50% of the fragments were identified as representing cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse and dog. Cattle predominated in the 11th-13th centuries, but proportions of sheep and pig were much higher in later periods. The plant remains recovered from the site comprised common cereals and weeds.

## DISCUSSION

Although the evidence for prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity is limited at The Bittoms, when the site is considered as part of the wider landscape the development of Kingston South Island can be further defined. The Bittoms is known to have been a low-lying marshy area prior to the later medieval period (Hawkins, 1998, 272). The site rises from east to west, and both Bronze Age and Saxon activity has been observed on higher ground *c* 30 m to the west of site (Hawkins et. al. 2002 and Pre-Construct Archaeology 1998). The prehistoric pitting provides further evidence for the settlement of South Lane Island in the Bronze Age, though it is likely that activity at The Bittoms took place during dry spells, when the land was more accessible. The residual Roman pottery is likely to be a result of manuring, as seen during excavations at East and South Lane, to the west of the site (Hawkins et. al. 2002, p 206). The Saxon pit may represent the eastern limit of activity associated with the early Saxon farmstead, seen during the excavations to the west and south (Hawkins et. al. 2002 and Bishop 2002).

There is evidence for medieval settlement in the form of pits, a well and boundary ditches. It is probable that properties fronted The Bittoms, to the west, prior to structures shown on an anonymous 17th-century map of Kingston, (reproduced in McCormack 1989). The large quarry pits may have been excavated to provide sand for use in the construction of the buildings. The E-W aligned gullies and ditch revealed in the southern part of site may have separated two such properties. The map also shows open land to the east; its probably boggy state would have made it suitable for pasture during the medieval period, and the N-S aligned ditches (2082 and 1570) may have formed a boundary between the pasture to the east and tenements to the west. There was no evidence for the size of individual tenements though they may have been similar in size to the properties shown on Rocque's Map of 1745 (see discussion below).

The northern part of the site was probably utilised as a market garden from the 15th century. Soil was imported in the 16th or 17th century, and the level of the site was raised. Evidence for this land reclamation was also seen during earlier excavations (Thompson 1991), and it may be that the site was used for growing crops or keeping animals in the early 18th century. However, there was continued evidence for cultivation trenches dating from the mid-18th to 19th centuries, suggesting the site reverted back to a market garden.

Properties were located in the western and southern part of site. The properties are probably those shown fronting The Bittoms on Rocque's Map of 1745. Of interest was the amount of re-used high-status architectural stone within one of the structures. There are no known medieval buildings in the close vicinity of the site, but the material may have derived from All Saints Church, which lies c 250 m to the north of the site.

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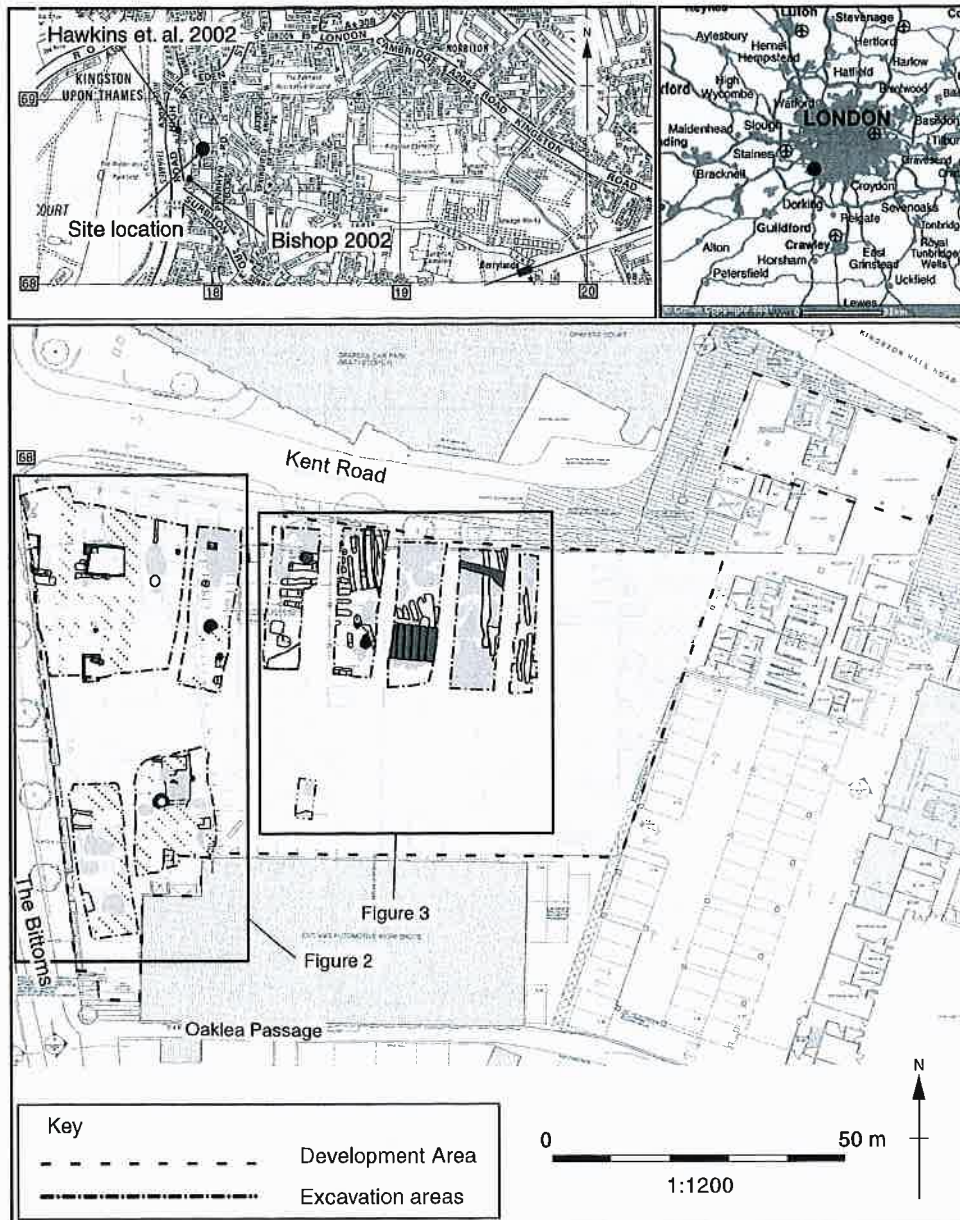


Figure 1: Site location

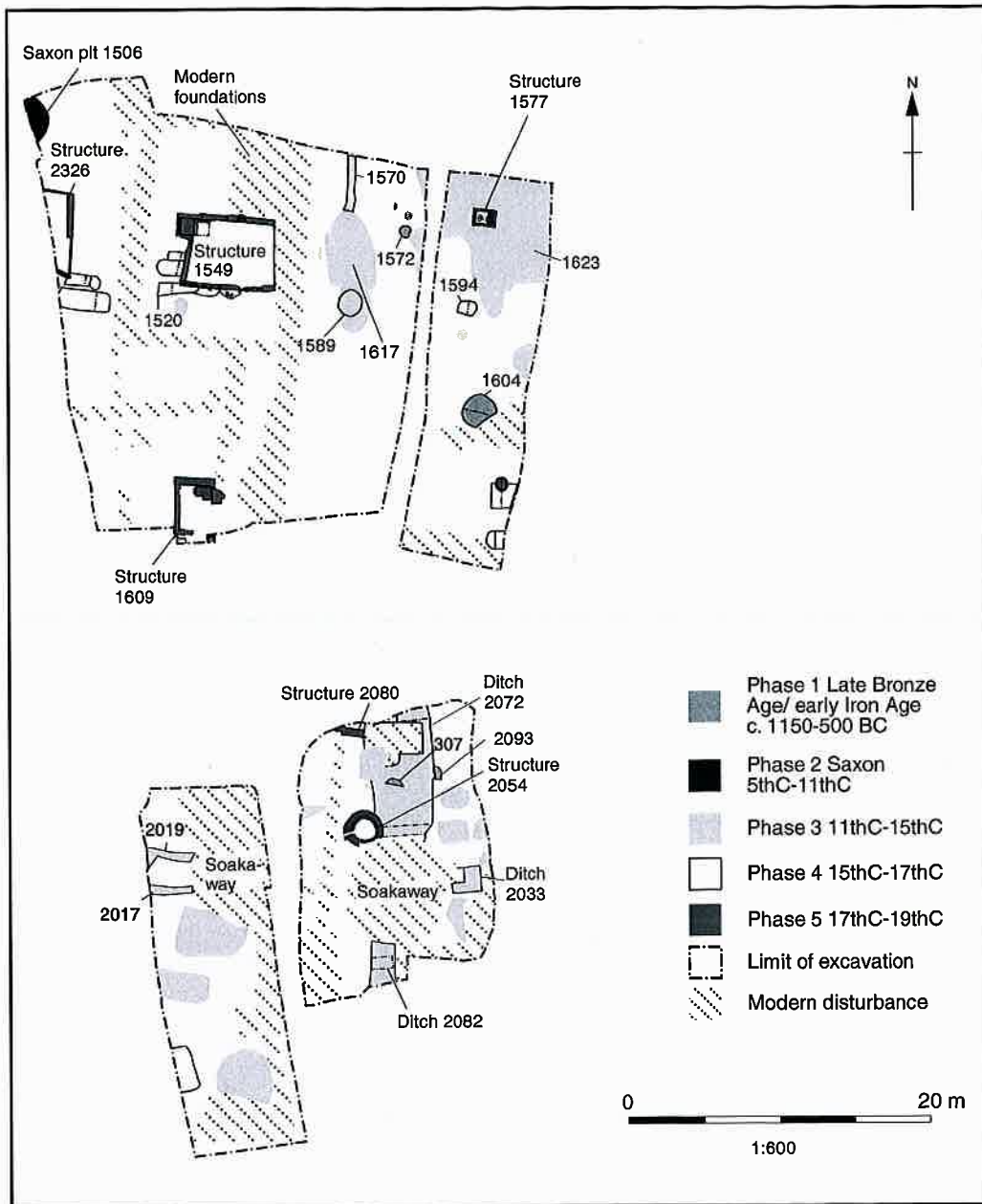


Figure 2: Western archaeological features by phase



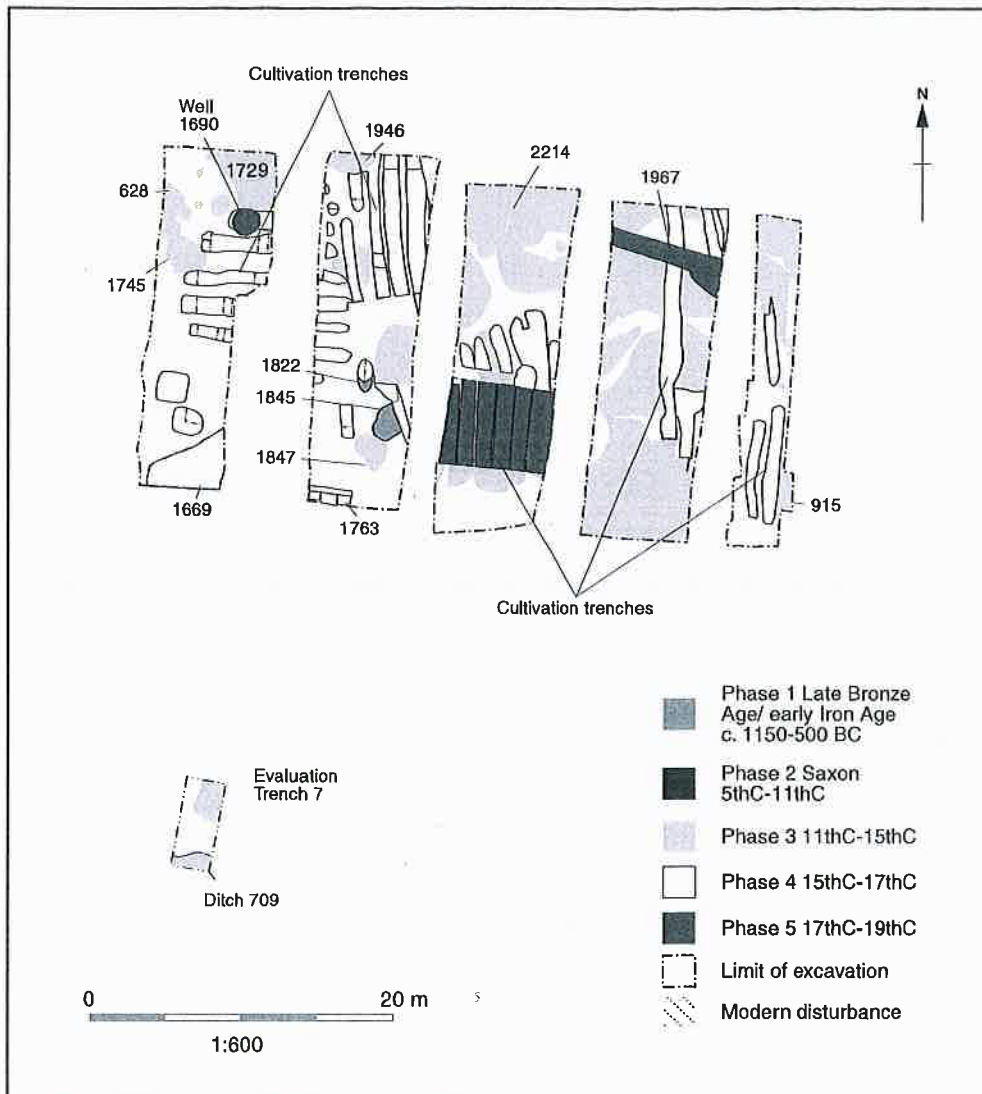


Figure 3: Eastern archaeological features by phase



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