Late Medieval Quarrying at Rear of 52 High Street Somersham



Archaeological Evaluation Report



November 2010

Client: R. Parker

OA East Report No: 1227 OASIS No: oxfordar3-86685

NGR: TL 36187 77859



Late Medieval Quarrying at Rear of 52 High Street, Somersham

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Report Date: November 2010

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Report Number: 1227

Site Name: Land at rear of 52 High Street, Somersham

HER Event No: ECB 3480

Date of Works: 5th November 2010

Client Name: R. Parker

Client Ref: Archaeological Evaluation at 52 High Street, Somersham

Planning Ref: 0900490/OUT

Grid Ref: TL 36187 77859

Site Code: SOMHIS10

Finance Code: SOMHIS10

Receiving Body: CCC Stores

Accession No: SOMHIS10

Prepared by: Taleyna Fletcher
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Position: Project Manager Date: November 2010

Signed:

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Summary

On 5th November 2010, Oxford Archaeology East were commissioned to carry out an archaeological evaluation at the rear of 52 High Street, Somersham in the Huntingdonshire district of Cambridgeshire. The investigation consisted of an L-shaped trench measuring 21m in total in the footprint of a proposed residential development.

The evaluation revealed what appears to be evidence of quarrying dating to the late medieval period. The archaeology was recorded at a depth of between 1.68 and 2.20m from the current ground surface. It was considered unsafe to fully investigate at this depth and unlikely to be impacted upon by the proposed bungalow foundations and therefore protected in-situ.

A small assemblage of pottery was retrieved from the top fill of the pit which dates to between 1500-1650. This confirms the presence of late medieval quarrying activity which has also been recorded at other locations within the village.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at the rear of 52 High Street within the core of the historic village of Somersham. The modern village is located approximatively 22km to the north-west of Cambridge and 13km to the north-east of Huntingdon (Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire County Council (McConnell 2010), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Oxford Archaeology East (Clarke 2010).
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results will enable decisions to be made by Cambridgeshire County Council, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited in Cambridgeshire County Stores.

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The settlement sits on a flat plateau at an average height of 10m AOD, on the First and Second Terrace Gravels within the valley of the River Great Ouse (BGS Sheet 172). The solid geology comprises Oxford Clays that have been quarried during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The gravel plateau falls sharply to the north and east towards Colne and Chatteris fen (Anon/CCC 2003).
- 1.2.2 The Anglian Glaciation resulted in the spread of a bluish-grey till (Boulder Clay) with chalk clasts and finer derived materials. The till masks the solid geology except where the watercourses cut down into it (Green 2000).
- 1.2.3 The gravel plateau falls sharply to the north and east to the fen where peat deposition during the Neolithic period was followed by a widespread Bronze Age deposit of marine clay and the formation of roddons. Thereafter, peat continued to grow until recently (Hall 1992).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Somersham has a rich archaeological and historical record. Its name may be a derivative of 'Sumor's homestead' or possibly 'homestead south of the mere' (Mawer and Stenton 1969, 222-3); the first documentary reference dates to the 10th century when the manor of Somersham was acquired by Ely Abbey (Page et al 1974). The site of the Bishop of Ely's Palace (CHER 01078; SM20415) and associated moat, fishponds

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and deer park lies on the southern edge of the village, *c.* 200m to the south-west of the study area. Much of the following information has been taken from the Extensive Urban Survey (2003) for Somersham.

Prehistoric

- 1.3.2 The following Fen has benefited from the Fenland Survey which has identified the largest Mesolithic concentration of nearly 800 flints on the extremity of the gravel plateau.
- 1.3.3 The higher gravels were not surveyed. These show many cropmarks and there are several known stray finds and scatters as early as the Palaeolithic from gravel extraction during the later part of the nineteenth century-beginning of the twentieth century. In many cases the provenance of these finds is not accurate. The HER entries for the village area include Neolithic axes (HER 01750 and 01848) and Bronze Age pottery and a polished axe (HER 01344 and 03605).
- 1.3.4 Immediately outside the settlement, extensive areas of cropmarks extend from Knobb's Farm Gravel Pits to the gravel quarries at Colne. At the former site, excavations conducted in advance of gravel extraction in the early part of the twentieth century produced evidence for Iron Age occupation (Tebbutt 1929). Recent evaluations revealed Later Iron Age/Early Roman field ditches in the area (Masser 2000; Hatherley 2001).
- 1.3.5 Within the village an evaluation carried out in advance of residential development at 14, Parkhall Road produced evidence for early and mid-later Iron Age occupation peripheral to an area of main settlement (Cooper 2000; Roberts 2002; CBHER 14790 and 14791). Stray finds of pottery from Parkhall Road are also recorded (HER 01789).

Roman

- 1.3.6 Several finds dating to the Roman period are known from the parish and the village through chance discovery and quarrying, including coin hoards (Phillips 1970) of uncertain provenance. These finds are part of the distribution of sites discovered on the gravel terraces of the neighbouring parishes of Earith and Colne.
- 1.3.7 One of the earliest known Roman sites is the 'village' on the north-west side of the Somersham-Chatteris road (HER 03720, RCHM(E) 1926, 236 (1)). The site was discovered during gravel extractions in 1904 and 1905 (Keynes 1905).
- 1.3.8 During quarrying to the north of the village antiquarian C. F. Tebbutt (1929) excavated a Roman settlement at Knobb's Farm visible on aerial photographs (HER01447), and a possible villa of uncertain location at Turkington Hill (HER 03762).
- 1.3.9 Stray finds of Roman pottery (HER 1453) and metalwork (HER10322) have also been found in the village.

Saxon and Medieval

- 1.3.10 Very little is known of Saxon Somersham, despite reference to a manor in the later Saxon period. Finds of pottery, a broken bone, a scissor and a cinerary urn generically assigned to the Saxon period were found in Hurst Field, to the south of the village (HER 03651).
- 1.3.11 Much of the church (CHER 00609; Listed Building No. 54153) is of 13th and 14th-century date, although it may have a Saxon precursor. Medieval features, including property boundaries and rubbish pits, have been identified to the south of Church Street at the western end of the village (CHER 11909; Roberts 1996). The results

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- indicated that medieval activity decreased away from the High Street towards the lower ground to the south.
- 1.3.12 It is worthy of note that previous research has suggested that Somersham village was relocated to the north of its original site, possibly during the 12th century, as a result of the development of the Bishop's Palace and associated landscape features. Taylor (1989, 211-24) argues that the original main street axis may have lain to the south of the church and may be partly preserved in the line of Pinfold Lane. If this is the case the projected line of this route would pass to the south of the current site. Somersham was granted a market charter in the late 12th century; the site of the medieval market cross (CHER 01878) is known to have been located at the junction of Church Street with the High Street to the west of the current site.

Post-Medieval

- 1.3.13 An evaluation close to the church (MCB16838) revealed a post-medieval ditch and a large pit that could be the remains of one of the medieval fishponds associated with the Bishop's Palace.
- 1.3.14 There are a number of listed buildings within the village, many of which are located along the High Street frontage to the north of the current site. These include 50 High Street (LB 54160), a mid-19th century house and shop, 58 High Street (LB 54161) and Nos 60, 62 and 64 High Street (LB 54163), all early 19th-century houses.

Development Site

1.3.15 The first edition Ordnance Survey map of the village (Figure 2) shows a number of buildings within the study area, including No. 52 on the frontage. There is a walled garden or yard to the rear, beyond which is a row of narrow buildings abutting the eastern and southern boundaries, presumably stables or outbuildings, with associated walls. These appear to be in the location of the proposed development. A pump (well) is marked within the access and there is another small building to the south of this. The area further to the south, beyond the property boundary, is under orchard at this time.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 The author would like to thank Mr Parker who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by James Drummond-Murray. The author carried out the evaluation and on-site survey using a Leica GPS.

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2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The main objectives of the evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development.

2.2 Archaeological Evaluation Methodology

- 2.2.1 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. The site survey was carried out by the author using a Leica 1200 GPS which located the site on the Ordnance Survey grid and provided level data.
- 2.2.2 The client set out the trenches as per the trench plan approved along with the Specification by Dan McConnell before work commenced. The trenches were located within an area of hard-standing, previously used for parking heavy vehicles. The concrete was cut (again by the client) prior to arrival on site. An additional 5m trench, originally intended to go in the footprint of a proposed garage was not excavated as the design plans had been amended. This was confirmed and relayed to Development Control on the day of the works and the trench plan revised to omit this trench.
- 2.2.3 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.4 Site conditions were good with bright, warm sunshine.

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3 Results

Cut numbers will be displayed in **bold** text, all other contexts in normal text. The location of the trench is shown in Figure 1, the trench detail and drawing of the section is given in Figure 3.

3.1 Trench 1 (Figures 2 and 3 and plates 1-3)

- 3.1.1 Trench 1 was L-shaped in plan orientated north-south for a distance of 15m and turning at 90° at the southern end running east-west for 6m and was a constant 1.6m wide (Figure 3). This trench was excavated to a total depth varying between 1.7 and 2.2m where natural gravel and silt was encountered. As the concrete was pre-cut for the trenches, it was not possible to step the sides. This trench contained what appears to be a large feature, possibly a quarry pit and six distinct layers overlying it (Figure 3, Section 1 and plate 3). During machining a brick surface was encountered in the northern 6m of the trench. This is likely to relate to a floor surface of the building recorded on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 2) and was recorded in section (plate 3). The bricks were 19th century with frogs and had no surviving obvious mortar or bond.
 - Layer (01) comprised the concrete and associated layers for the car park surface. Measuring 0.40m in thickness, there were no finds retrieved from this layer.
 - Below the concrete was a thick deposit of crushed red brick/highly fired material (02). This layer is likely to be a levelling layer for the car park surface. It measured 0.16m in thickness and did not contain any finds.
 - Below 02 was a deposit of a light brown silt with frequent gravel and stone inclusions. (03). This layer had a maximum thickness of 0.14m and contained no other obvious inclusions. This sealed layer 04.
 - Layer 04 was a dark grey brown clayey silt with frequent gravel stones and a maximum thickness of 0.16m. There were no obvious inclusions within this layer. This layer sealed 05.
 - Layer 05 was a light brown sandy silt with occasional small stone inclusions. It measured 0.30m in thickness and contained a single sherd of post-medieval redware (1500-1800).
 - Layer 06 was a light grey brown sandy silt with occasional small stone inclusions and bands/lenses of light yellow sand. It measured 0.28m in thickness (in Section 1), however the full extent of the layer was revealed in a sondage at the end of the trench where its full thickness measured 0.90m. No finds were retrieved from this deposit.
 - A large feature, interpreted as a possible quarry pit **08** was recorded spanning most of the length of the trench (Figure 3). This feature measured a minimum 11.25m in length. Due to the depth of the trench and inability to step it out, this feature was only briefly excavated. The upper fill 07 was a dark grey-brown clayey silt with no obvious inclusions. Pottery retrieved from the top of the feature (context 07) was dated to 1500-1650 providing a date for the latest sequence of infilling.

3.2 Finds Summary

3.2.1 Several sherds of Bourn D pottery and a small bag of animal bone (see Appendix B) were recovered from context 07. A single sherd of post-medieval redware was recovered from layer 05 (see Appendix A).

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3.3 Environmental Summary

3.3.1 No samples were taken for environmental analysis.

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4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Excavations at the rear of 52 High Street Somersham have revealed the survival of archaeology at a depth of between 1.70 and 2.20m. Although difficult to interpret in such a small area, the dimensions and depth of this feature would suggest it may be a large quarry pit. Other sites within Somersham have revealed gravel and sand extraction which still continues on the outskirts of the village to the present day.
- 4.1.2 The pottery retrieved from the upper-most fill (07) has indicated a late medieval date for the in-filling of the pit and may suggest that there was late medieval occupation close to the area of excavation. It is possible that as the quarry pits went out of use they were used for rubbish deposition. Excavations at 14 Parkhall Road, approximately 300m to the northwest of the site, also recorded quarry pits. Believed to be medieval in date, this may be further evidence of aggregate extraction in the area around this time. The pits discovered at Parkhall Road excavations were believed to be dug to provide gravel to surface an early route across the fen, north to Chatteris (Roberts 2002). It is possible quarrying at the back of the High Street had a similar purpose.

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APPENDIX A: POTTERY ASSESSMENT

By Carole Fletcher

Introduction

A.1.1 Archaeological evaluation on land at High Street, Somersham, Cambridgeshire produced a small pottery assemblage of 23 sherds, weighing 0.468g. The assemblage is mainly late to post-medieval, dating to the mid 15th to mid 17th century. The condition of the overall assemblage is relatively unabraded and the mean sherd weight is moderate at approximately 20g.

Methodology

- A.1.2 The Medieval Pottery Research Group (MPRG) A guide to the classification of medieval ceramic forms (MPRG, 1998) and Minimum Standards for the Processing, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Post-Roman Ceramics (MPRG, 2001) act as a standard.
- A.1.3 Recording was carried out using OA East's in-house system based on that previously used at the Museum of London. Fabric classification has been carried out for all previously described medieval and post-medieval types. All sherds have been counted, classified and weighed on a context-by-context basis. The pottery and archive are curated by Oxford Archaeology East until formal deposition.

The Assemblage

A.1.4 Ceramic fabric abbreviations used in the following text and the summary catalogue by context and the sherd count and weight of fabrics are given in Table A1

Fabric Code	Fabric Name	No. Sherds	Weight (kg)
BOND/BONDT	Bourn D / Bourn D type ware	22	0.454
PMR	Post medieval redware	1	0.014

Table A1 Fabric codes

- A.1.5 Evaluation revealed a large deep feature presumed to be a quarry pit. The majority of the pottery was recovered from a single context within this feature.
- A.1.6 Context 5 produced a single moderately abraded sherd from a PMR bowl. Context 7 produced 22 sherds from several vessels including a BOND bowl rim, jug body sherd and 18 sherds from a BONDT jar all dating to the mid 15th-mid 17th century.
- A.1.7 Domestic in nature, the assemblage suggests that there was late medieval occupation close to the area of excavation and that the quarry pits when they went out of use were used for rubbish deposition. There are no fabrics present that date to later than the end of the 18th century suggesting that after this date the area's usage changed.

Statement of Research Potential and Further Work

- A.1.8 An assemblage of this size provides only basic dating information for a site. The post-medieval pottery sherds are large and unabraded and may represent primary deposition since the quarry pit was backfilled, indicating that quarrying ceased by the end of the 18th century.
- A.1.9 No further work is required on this assemblage.

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A.1.10 Pottery Summary by Context

Context	Fabric	Basic Form	Sherd Count	Sherd Weight (kg)	Context Date
5	PMR	Bowl	1	0.014	16th-late18th century
7	BOND	Bowl	1	0.031	Mid 15-mid 17th century
	BOND	Jug	1	0.010	
	BOND		2	0.014	
	BONDT	Jar	18	0.398	

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APPENDIX B. ANIMAL BONE ASSESSMENT

By Chris Faine

B.1 Results

Nine fragments of animal bone were recovered from the evaluation at 52, High St, Somersham with 6 fragments identifiable to species. All faunal material was recovered from context 07. These consisted of a portion of butchered adult cattle radius along with portions of sheep/goat pelvis, radius and tibia. Portions of sub adult dog humerus and pelvis were also recovered.

B.2 Further Work and Methods Statement

No further work is required on this assemblage.

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APPENDIX D. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project De	etails										
OASIS Num	ASIS Number oxfordar3-86685										
Project Nam	Archaeological Evaluation at Rear of 52 high Street, Somersham										
Project Date	∍s (fieldw	vork)	Start	05-11-2010			Finish	05-	11-201	0	
Previous Wo	ork (by C)A Ea	ıst)	No			Future	Wor	k No		
Project Refe	erence C	odes	5								
Site Code	SOMHIS1	10			Plannir	ng App.	No.		09004	190/OUT	
HER No.	ECB 348	30			Related	d HER/	OASIS N	lo.	n/a		
Type of Proj	ect/Tecl	 hniqı	ues Use	 d	<u> </u>						
Prompt			nning cond								
Developmen	t Type	Urba	an Resider	ntial							
Please sele	ect all t	techi	niques	used:							
Aerial Photo	ography - ir	nterpre	etation	Grab-Saı	mpling				Remo	ote Operated Vehicle S	urvey
Aerial Photo	ography - n	ıew		Gravity-C	Core			X			
☐ Annotated S	Sketch			Laser Sc	anning				Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure		
Augering				Measure	Measured Survey				Targeted Trenches		
☐ Dendrochro	nological §	Survey		Metal De	Metal Detectors				Test Pits		
Documenta	ry Search			Phosphate Survey				Торо	graphic Survey		
Environmen	ıtal Sampli	ng		Photogra	☐ Photogrammetric Survey ☐ Vibro-core						
☐ Fieldwalking	j			Photogra	☐ Photographic Survey ☐ Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)				· Visit)		
Geophysica	I Survey			Rectified	Photograp	phy					
Monument List feature type together with th	es using th	ne NMF ctive pe	R Monume	ent Type Thesau	urus and si	ignificant				Object type The	saurus
Quarry Pits			Medieval	1066 to 1540		none				None	
			Select per	riod						Select period	
	-		Select per	riod	riod			Select period			
Project Lo	ocatior	7									
County	County Cambridgeshire				Site Ad	dress (in	clud	ling p	ostcode if possible)	
District	Strict Huntingdonshire				Somers		treet				
Parish	Somersham					Hunting Cambs,	idon , PE28 3JB	i			
HER	Cambrido	geshire	e								
Study Area	345 sq m	1.				Nationa	al Grid Re	efer	ence	TL 36187 77859	



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Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Cambridgeshire County Council
Project Design Originator	Dan McConnell
Project Manager	James Drummond-Murray
Supervisor	Taleyna Fletcher

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Stores	OA East Offices, Bar Hill	CCC Stores
SOMHIS10	SOMHIS10	SOMHIS10

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents		Paper Contents
Animal Bones			
Ceramics			
Environmental	\boxtimes	\times	\times
Glass			
Human Bones			
Industrial			
Leather			
Metal			
Stratigraphic			\boxtimes
Survey		\boxtimes	
Textiles			
Wood			
Worked Bone			
Worked Stone/Lithic			
None			
Other			

Digital Media	Paper Media
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GIS	
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Spreadsheets	□ Мар
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	X Survey

Notes:

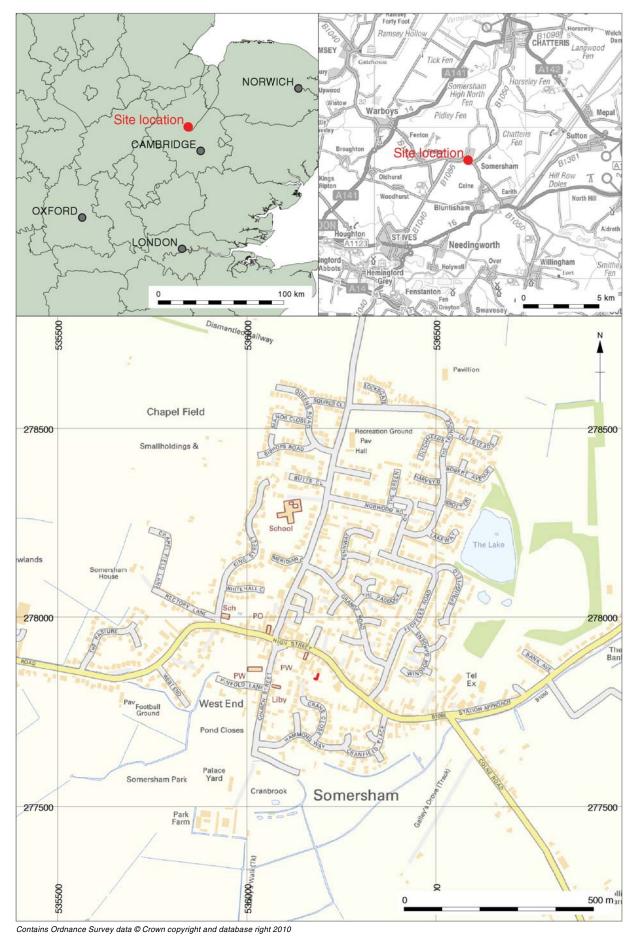


Figure 1: Site location (trench outlined red)

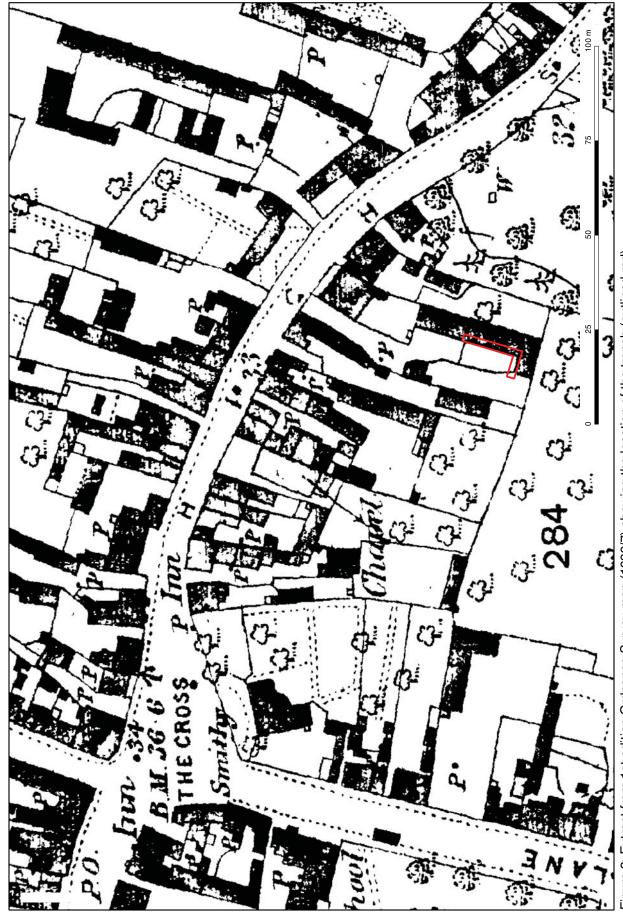


Figure 2: Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1886/7) showing the location of the trench (outlined red)



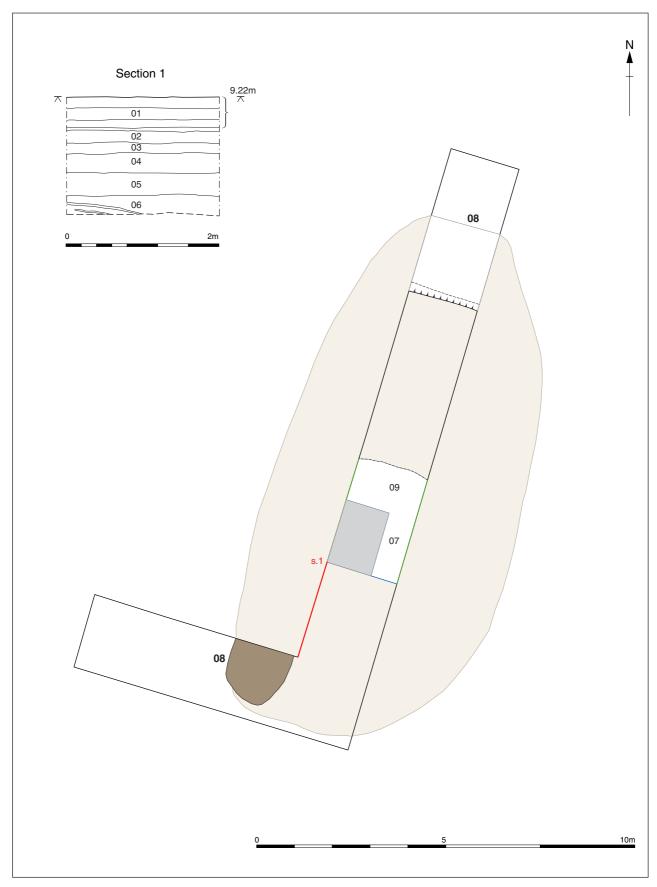


Figure 3: Trench plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:50

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Plate 1: Trench 1, looking north



Plate 3: Trench Section



Plate 2: Trench 1, looking west

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