

Rochford Nurseries Stansted Mountfitchet Essex



Archaeological Evaluation Report



July 2006

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Prepared by: J Hiller

Position: Senior Project Manager

Date: 24th July 2006

Checked by: Melanie Pomeroy Killinger

Position: Senior Project Manager

Date: 26th July 2006

Approved by: Nick Shepherd

Position: Head of Fieldwork

Date: 27th July 2006

Signed.....

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Oxford Archaeology

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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**Rochford Nurseries,
Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex**

NGR TL 5145 2415

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SUMMARY

In July 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out the first phase of a field evaluation at Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex (TL 5145 2415) on behalf of CgMs Consulting. The 32-trench evaluation revealed natural flint gravel in clay sealed beneath shallow soil layers. Evidence was found of the brick and concrete footings for Rochford's Nursery greenhouse structures that once stood at the west side of the site in the 19th and 20th centuries. Several modern ditches were identified: these are likely to be 19th or 20th century field divisions. Recent hedgerow ditches and modern drainage ditches were also recorded. One ditch probably dated to the very recent past, possibly excavated to deter travellers. A number of irregular modern features and tree-throw holes were also noted. The only evidence for occupation of periods earlier than the late 19th century was a single flint end-scraper of probable Neolithic or Bronze Age date.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In July 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out the first phase of a field evaluation at Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex on behalf of CgMs Consulting (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken in respect of an Outline Planning Application for development of the site (Planning Ref: UTT/0443/98/OP).
- 1.1.2 The development proposal comprises 315 new dwellings, access, public open space, a play area, a school and a health centre and shop. The planning permission includes a condition requiring a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), submitted by the applicant and approved by the planning authority.
- 1.1.3 In connection with the planning application, a desk-based assessment of the site was undertaken by CgMs (Chadwick 2002) and supplied to the Heritage Advice Management and Protection Group of Essex CC (HAMP), acting as specialist archaeological advisors to Uttlesford District Council.
- 1.1.4 In response to a Brief for a trenched evaluation of the site issued by HAMP, CgMs prepared a Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how the requirements of the Brief would be met (Chadwick 2004).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The 3 hectare site lies on glacial sand and gravels over London Clay outcrops with other outcrops of Woolwich Beds and Chalk (IGS 1979; BGS Sheet 222) and at c 85 m OD.
- 1.2.2 The site comprises a broad, flat, east-west ridge to the south of Stansted Mountfitchet. Immediately north of the site is a valley, occupied by Manor Road and

Stoney Common. The south and centre of the site are essentially level and to the south - beyond Foresthall Road - levels decrease to the west and the south.

- 1.2.3 Historic maps show that a pond once lay near the east boundary of the site and a stream drained north and then west down the valley occupied by Manor Road and Stoney Common; two further ponds are shown south of Foresthall Road. Stansted Brook passes c 150 m west of the site leading to a confluence with the River Stort, about 1 km SW of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate desk-based study completed in 2002 by CgMs (Chadwick, 2002). The results of this document were summarised in the Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation, and are only briefly repeated here.
- 1.3.2 The nearest SAM is Stansted Mountfitchet Castle, some 800 m north of the site. No archaeological sites or finds are known on the site: a number are recorded nearby (CgMs 2004, Fig. 3).

Prehistoric

- 1.3.3 Excavations by Framework Archaeology at nearby Stansted Airport have confirmed the generally held view that Lower Palaeolithic occupation on areas of London Clay is rare. Neolithic finds are also likewise scarce, though north-west of this site a flint chisel has been found in Stansted Mountfitchet (SMR 4632; CgMs 2004, Fig. 3 No. 1). A Middle Bronze Age cremation burial has been located on the north side of the valley occupied by Manor Road and Stoney Common, some 300 m north of the site (CgMs 2004, SMR 4662; Fig 3 No. 2). Little (if any) evidence of Iron Age activity is known in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Roman, Saxon and medieval

- 1.3.4 East of Stansted Mountfitchet Church there is evidence of a Roman building, possibly a high status villa (SMR 4558; CgMs 2004, Fig. 3, No. 3). Further Roman artefactual evidence is known on the opposite side of the Stansted Brook from the development site near Ash Plantation (SMR 4629/4713; CgMs 2004, Fig. 3, No. 4). No Saxon evidence is reported on or near the site. It is suggested that the site was largely agricultural in the medieval period; no finds of this date are reported.

Post-medieval

- 1.3.5 By the time of Chapman and Andre's map of 1777, the main local settlement was at Stansted Street to the north-west and at the church and Stansted Hall to the east. Tithe maps dated to the mid-1830s show the development site partly enclosed and partly open landscape and part of Stoney Field Common. By 1860, all open fields in the vicinity had been enclosed. By 1898, Stansted Park had been enlarged, partly falling within the east end of the development site. Newman's Plantation was

established here. To the west, greenhouses of Rochford's Nursery are evident with a tramway connecting the greenhouses to Stoney Common Road and the GER at Rochford's siding. Up to 1923 the nursery complex and the tramway extended further into the development site. The greenhouses stood on the site until the 1970s, together with a water tower.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 Ryan Whalley of OA supervised the evaluation. Paul Chadwick monitored the work on behalf of the developers as did Richard Havers for Essex County Council.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence/absence, location, extent, date, character, condition and depth of any archaeological remains within the development area.
- 2.1.2 The evaluation sought to clarify the impact of 19th and 20th century ploughing and thereby assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits, in particular the presence and character of any later prehistoric and Romano-British occupation.
- 2.1.3 The field evaluation was conducted within the general parameters of PPG16, the Essex County Structure Plan and the Uttlesford District Local Plan.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised the first phase of a large field evaluation of the site. The original Specification for the project methodology was revised in the light of developments on the site, in particular the need for the trapping and relocation of newts and reptiles.
- 3.1.2 A total of thirty-two trenches (Fig. 2) were proposed to be opened in this phase of works, twenty-eight at the south end of the site and four trenches to the north of the site, along the line of a sewer link. In the event, five trenches were opened along the realigned sewer link, while Trench 25 was not excavated at all owing to contamination in that area. Thus 32 trenches in total were in fact opened.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Each trench measured 25 m in length by 3 m in width.
- 3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. 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 detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No samples suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of deposits: General

- 4.1.1 Natural on the site comprised large cobble flint gravels in a matrix of reddish-brown clay silt over brickearth clay. In places spreads of glacial flint nodules were observed and recorded. The soil layer above averaged 0.1 m - 0.3 m in depth and comprised a dark red-brown silty clay with up to 70% rounded and angular flint. This layer represents either a ploughsoil or a former topsoil layer. The present topsoil was shallow, at the most 0.15 m thick, supporting grass.

4.2 Trench descriptions

Trenches 1-14 - south part of site (Fig. 3)

- 4.2.1 The majority of these trenches exhibited the same soil sequence of natural capped by ploughsoil/former topsoil beneath the present topsoil. Two irregular and shallow features were identified in Trench 2 (0203 and 0204). Both features, interpreted as tree holes, were approximately 1 m in diameter with concave sides and uneven bases. Finds from the fills of both were dated to the 19th and 20th centuries: flower pot sherds were retained from tree hole 0203. Modern tile was retained from tree hole 0204.
- 4.2.2 Trench 3 contained a single ditch (0303) aligned approximately east-west and cutting natural (0305). It was 0.4 m deep and 1.5 m in width with steep sides and a flat base. No finds were recovered from the single fill (0305), but was interpreted on site as a probably modern feature along with a number of similar ditches on the site.
- 4.2.3 Trench 4 contained two modern features. Cut 0404 was clearly a modern short linear feature with an irregular shape in plan. It was interpreted as a cut for the footings of one of the greenhouses that once stood on the site. A second feature in the trench (ditch 0406) had been recently cut and was filled with modern soil similar to the present topsoil and including small shrubs and brambles.

- 4.2.4 Trenches 5 through to 10 contained no archaeology. A single small feature was identified in Trench 11 (1103) and was interpreted as a modern post-hole or shallow pit. The feature was 0.4 m in diameter and 0.18 m deep with no finds in its fill. Trenches 12, 13 and 14 contained no archaeology.

Trench 15-24 - north part of site (Fig. 4 and 5)

- 4.2.5 The soil sequences in each trench were generally as across the rest of the site. Trench 15 contained two ditch features, both aligned east-west (1505, 1507). Ditch 1505 had a concave profile and a mixed modern clay fill (1504) that contained tile fragments of 19th/20th century date. To the south was ditch 1507, which had near vertical sides and an uneven base and was filled with a mix of clay, flint and gravel (1506). The ditch was lined with clay at its base, so this is likely to represent a drainage ditch of modern date.
- 4.2.6 Trenches 16 and 17 revealed brick structures/pillar bases (1604, 1606; 1706, 1708) that once supported raised flower bed structures within the nursery site. The pillar bases were set into the natural with a single course, two-bricks wide surviving. The bricks measured 230 mm x 110 mm x 70 mm and were bonded with a yellow-white mortar. A modern service trench (1704) was also present in Trench 17.
- 4.2.7 Trenches 18 and 19 contained structural features relating to the greenhouses formerly on the site. Shallow feature 1803 contained a modern quarry tile, presumably a supporting base. Trench 19 contained a black concrete footing (1905) that was 0.2 m wide and extended the length of the trench. The footing once formed the west wall of one of the greenhouses. A further concrete feature (1904) was associated with the wall and is likely to have been a support for an internal greenhouse structure. A substantial quantity of brick and concrete rubble was removed over the line of the trench. Trench 20 contained no archaeology.
- 4.2.8 Trench 21 contained two brick pillar bases of the same dimensions and type as in Trenches 16 and 17. In Trench 22, two modern pits (2203, 2206) were revealed, whose fills (2204, 2205) containing 19th/20th century flower pot sherds and modern glass. Both pits related to activities on the nursery site. Trenches 23 and 24 contained features filled with modern house bricks: these features would also have acted as supports for the raised flower bed structures.
- 4.2.9 Trench 25 was not excavated owing to localised contamination in this part of the site.

Trenches 26, 27, 28

- 4.2.10 Two linear features were present in Trench 26 (2603, 2605). Both had vertical sides and flat bases and are likely to be modern features of uncertain function. Trench 27 contained no features. A single linear feature (2805), probably a field boundary ditch or former hedge line ditch, was observed within Trench 28. The ditch fill contained pieces of 19th/20th century building tile.

Trenches 29-33 sewer pipe route (Fig. 5)

- 4.2.11 Trenches 29-32 contained no features. Trench 32 produced a single flint scraper that was recovered from the base of the ploughsoil (3202) during machining (see Finds section 4.3 below). Trench 33 contained a single linear feature, probably a field ditch, whose fill (3304) contained flower pot sherds and pieces of tile of 19th and 20th century date.

4.3 Finds

- 4.3.1 Finds were retained from a number of contexts. All of the pottery, building material and glass is 19th or 20th century in date. The finds are tabulated below:

Table 1: Finds by context and type

Material	Ctx	Nos. Sherds	Comments/Date
Flower pot	0203; 0204; 2205; 3304	10	Victorian/C20
Building tile	1504; 2204; 2205; 2804; 3304	14	Victorian/C20
Glass	2205	2	Modern/C20
Animal bone	2204	1	Sheep leg bone
Flint	3202 (Ploughsoil)	1	Neolithic/Bronze Age
Burnt flint	2205	2	In modern context

- 4.3.2 A single flint artefact was recovered from Trench 32, layer 3202. The artefact was assessed by Rebecca Daveaney of OA - it is an end-scraper with evidence of re-touching at the edges. The piece is later prehistoric in date, possibly later Neolithic or Bronze Age.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**5.1 Reliability of field investigation**

- 5.1.1 This is the first stage of the overall investigation of this development site. Trenches (3 metres wide) were evenly spaced across the evaluation area and weather conditions throughout were good. Natural gravel including areas of large flint cobbles thought to be glacial in origin was exposed at the base of all of the trenches, with no masking deposits other than the ploughsoil/former topsoil.
- 5.1.2 The trench sample is therefore felt to be an accurate reflection of the archaeological potential of this part of the site.

5.2 Overall interpretation

- 5.2.1 Natural flint gravel was identified in all trenches, in places overlain by glacial gravel deposits. All features were cut into the natural.
- 5.2.2 No certain features predating the recent 19th and 20th century land use on the site were observed: many of the trenches were devoid of any features. The discovery of a

single flint end-scraper was the only indication of prehistoric activity on the site -and is probably of Neolithic/Bronze Age date.

- 5.2.3 Evidence of the nursery structures that once stood on the site was found in a number of the trenches. The pillar bases for the raised nursery beds and concrete footings for a greenhouse structure clearly show that the 19th/20th century nursery once extended over a wide area. Pits containing modern pottery including flower pots were clearly associated with the horticultural activity here.
- 5.2.4 Ditches found across the site indicate divisions of the site: anecdotal evidence from local people suggested that there was large-scale removal of hedges on the site in the 1950s, so it is likely that some of these ditches relate to that phase of activity. More recent ditches may have been excavated to deter travellers from using the site.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context note: where trenches exhibited the same sequence of soil deposits, these are tabulated as equivalents.

Trench	Ctx No	Type	Width (m)	Thickness (m)	Comments
1	101	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
1	102	Layer		0.78	Ploughsoil
1	103	Layer			Natural gravel
2	201	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
2	202	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
2	203	Layer			Natural gravel
2	204	Cut		0.4	Tree hole
2	205	Cut		0.4	Tree hole
3	301	Layer			Topsoil
3	302	Layer			Ploughsoil
3	303	Cut	1.5		Undated ditch
3	304	Fill	0.4		Undated ditch fill
3	305	Layer			Natural gravel
4	401	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
4	402	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
4	403	Layer			Natural gravel
4	404	Cut			Greenhouse footing trench
4	405	Fill			Fill of 404
4	406	Cut			Modern ditch
4	407	Fill			Fill of ditch 406
5 to 10	501 - 1001	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	502 - 1002	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
	503 - 1003	Layer			Natural gravel
11	1101	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
11	1102	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
11	1103	Cut		0.35	Posthole
11	1104	Fill		0.17	Fill of 1103
11	1105	Layer			Glacial gravel
11	1106	Layer			Natural gravel
12 to 14	1201-1401	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	1202-1402	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
	1203-1403	Layer			Natural gravel
15	1501	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
15	1502	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
15	1503	Layer			Natural gravel
15	1504	Fill		0.36	Fill of 1505
15	1505	Cut	0.78	0.36	Ditch
15	1506	Fill		0.86	Fill of 1507
15	1507	Cut	0.72		Ditch
16	1601	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
16	1602	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
16	1603	Layer			Natural gravel
16	1604	Structure	0.23		Brick pillar base
16	1605	Cut			Cut for 1604
16	1606	Structure	0.23		Brick pillar base
16	1607	Cut			Cut for 1606
17	1701	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
17	1702	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
17	1703	Layer			Natural gravel
17	1704	Cut			Modern service trench
17	1705	Fill			Fill of 1704
17	1706	Structure	0.23		Brick pillar base
17	1707	Cut			Cut for 1706
17	1708	Structure	0.23		Brick pillar base
17	1709	Cut			Cut for 1708
18	1801	Layer		0.2	Topsoil

18	1802	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
18	1803	Cut	0.4		Cut for 1804
18	1804	Structure	0.4		Quarry tile pillar base
18	1805	Layer			Glacial gravel
18	1806	Layer			Natural gravel
19	1901	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
19	1902	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
19	1903	Layer			Natural gravel
19	1904	Cut			Concrete base for structure
19	1905	Cut	0.2		Greenhouse concrete footings
19	1906	Layer			Natural gravel
20	2001	Layer			Topsoil
20	2002	Layer			Ploughsoil
20	2003	Layer			Natural gravel
21	2101	Layer		0.26	Topsoil
21	2102	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
21	2103	Layer			Natural gravel
21	2104	Structure	0.23		Brick pillar base
21	2105	Cut			Cut for 2104
21	2106	Structure	0.23		Brick pillar base
21	2107	Cut			Cut for 2106
22	2201	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
22	2202	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
22	2203	Cut	1.4		Pit
22	2204	Fill		0.6	Fill of 2203
22	2205	Layer			Natural gravel
22	2206	Cut			Pit
22	2207	Fill			Fill of 2206
23	2301	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
23	2302	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
23	2303	Cut	0.3		Cut for 2304
23	2304	Fill			House bricks base in 2303
23	2305	Cut			Cut for 2306
23	2306	Fill			House bricks base for flower beds
23	2307	Layer			Natural gravel
23	2308	Layer			Natural gravel
24	2401	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
24	2402	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
24	2403	Cut			Cut for 2404
24	2404	Fill			House bricks pillar base
24	2405	Layer			Natural gravel
24	2406	Layer			Natural gravel - glacial
26	2601	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
26	2602	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
26	2603	Cut	0.4	0.4	Modern ditch/slot
26	2604	Fill			Fill of 2603
26	2605	Cut	0.42	0.4	Modern ditch/slot
26	2606	Fill			Fill of 2605
26	2607	Layer			Natural gravel
26	2608	Layer			Natural gravel - glacial
27	2701	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
27	2702	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
27	2703	Layer			Natural gravel - glacial
27	2704	Layer			Natural gravel
28	2801	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
28	2802	Layer		0.1	Ploughsoil
28	2803	Layer			Natural gravel
28	2804	Fill			Fill of 2805
28	2805	Cut			Modern ditch
29	2901	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
29	2902	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
29	2903	Layer			Natural gravel
30	3001	Layer		0.22	Topsoil

30	3002	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
30	3003	Layer			Natural gravel
31	3101	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
31	3102	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
31	3103	Layer			Natural gravel
32	3201	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
32	3201	Layer		0.12	Ploughsoil
32	3203	Layer			Natural gravel
33	3301	Layer		0.22	Topsoil
33	3302	Layer		0.11	Ploughsoil
33	3303	Layer			Natural gravel
33	3304	Fill		0.3	Fill of 3305
33	3305	Cut	0.6		Modern ditch

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

British Geological Survey Sheet 222; Great Dunmow

Chadwick 2002 *Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. Desk-based assessment.*
CgMs Consulting, 2002

Chadwick 2004 *Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation. Land at Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex.* CgMs Consulting, August 2004.

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OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition, ed. D. Wilkinson, August 1992)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex

Site code: STMRON06

Grid reference: TL5145 2415

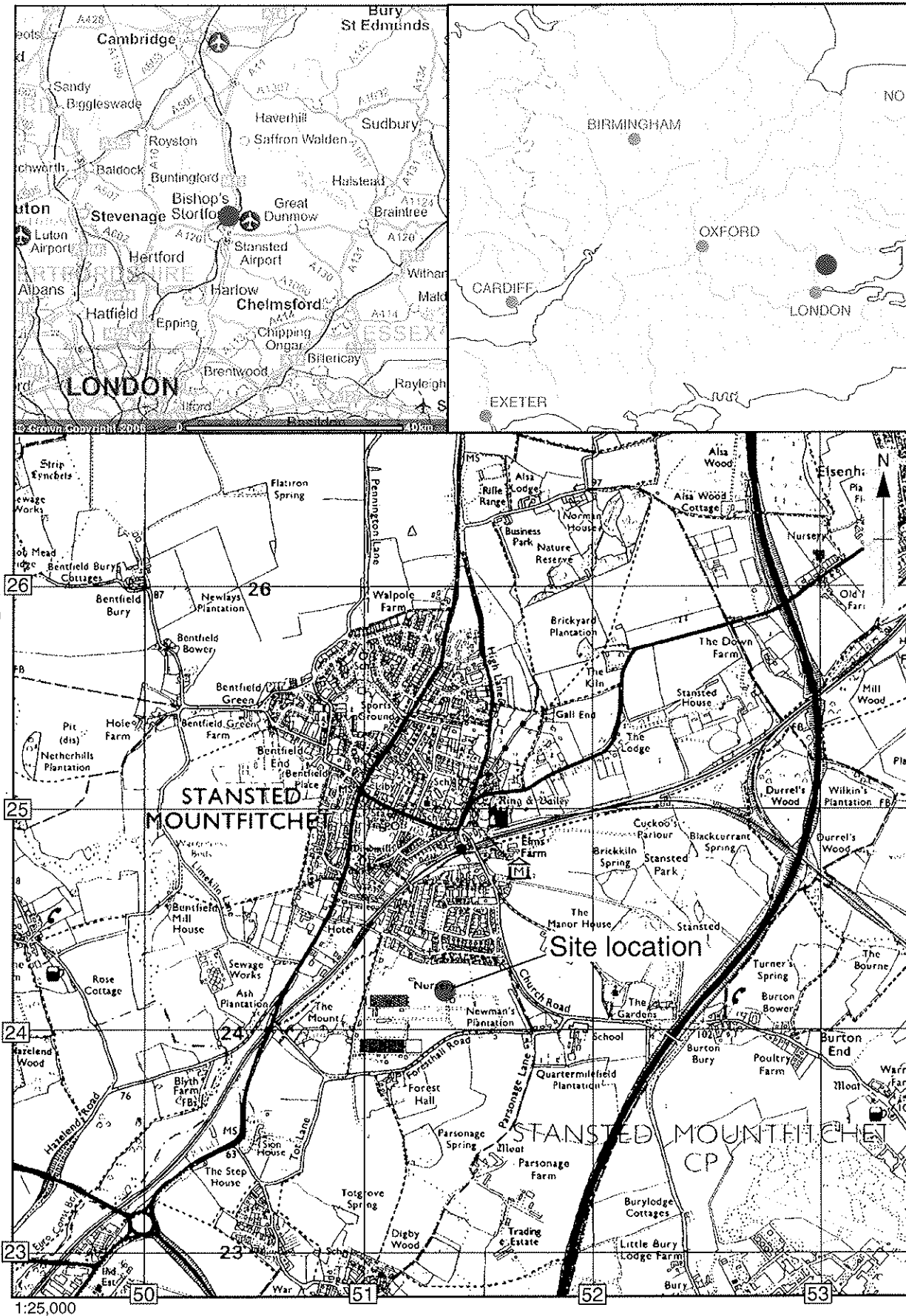
Type of evaluation: 32-Trench evaluation - Phase 1 of investigation

Date and duration of project: 3rd July 2006 - 14th July 2006

Area of site: 3 ha.

Summary of results: The first phase of the evaluation revealed natural flint gravel in clay sealed beneath shallow soil layers. Evidence was found of the brick and concrete footings for Rochford's Nursery greenhouse structures that once stood at the west side of the site in the 19th and 20th centuries. Several modern ditches were identified: these are likely to be 19th or 20th century field divisions. Recent hedgerow ditches and modern drainage ditches were also recorded. One ditch probably dated to the very recent past, possibly excavated to deter travellers. A number of irregular modern features and tree-throw holes were also noted. A single later prehistoric flint tool was found in the ploughsoil.

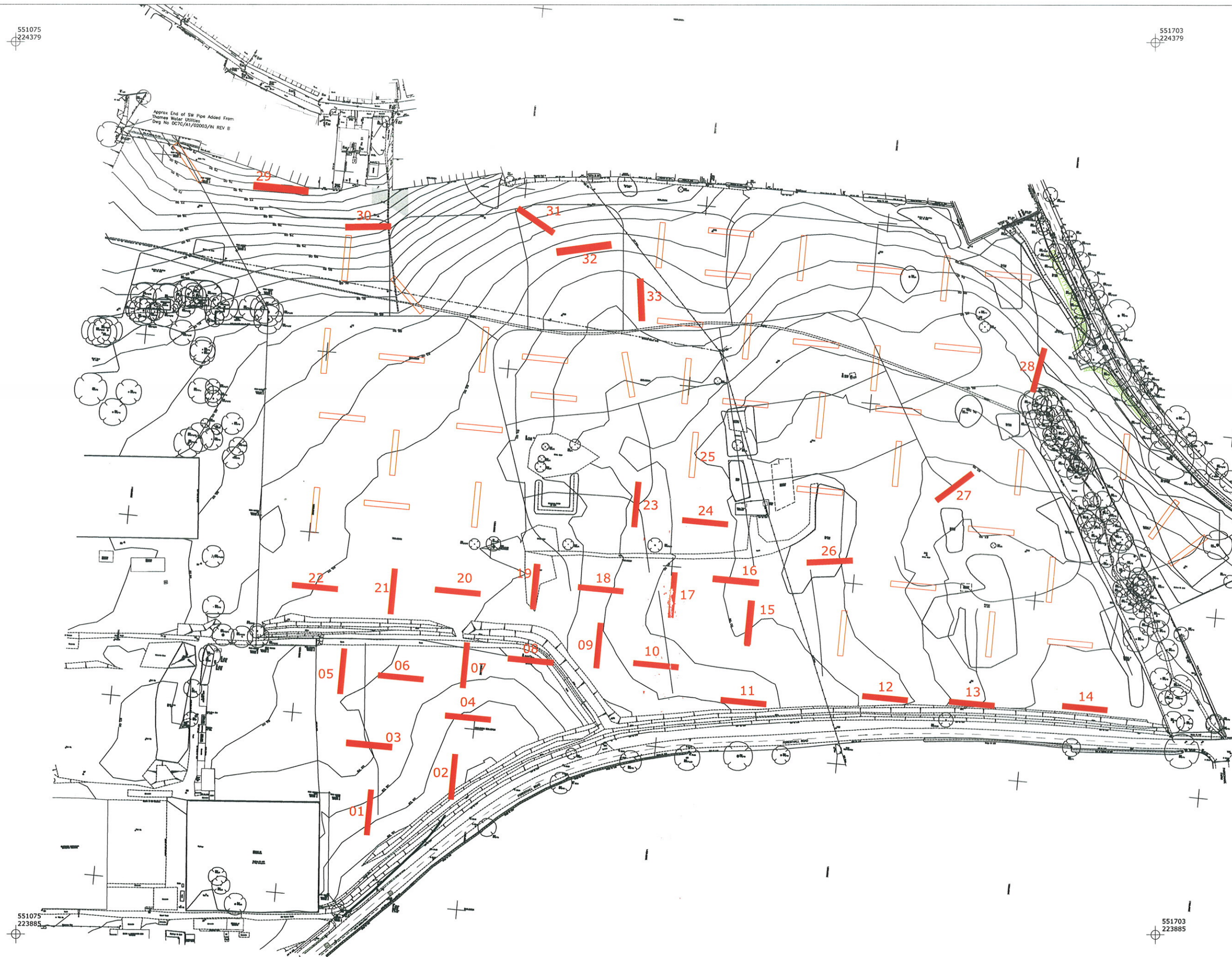
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Saffron Walden Museum in due course, under the following accession number: SAFWM: 2006.36



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Figure 1: Site location

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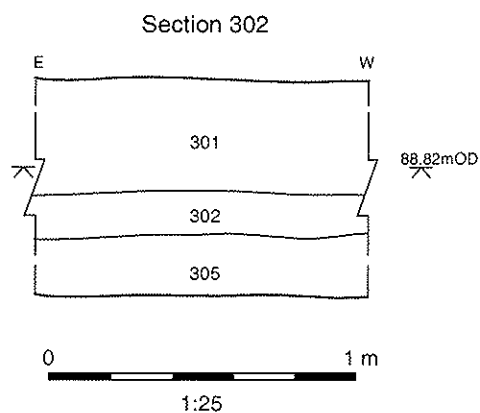
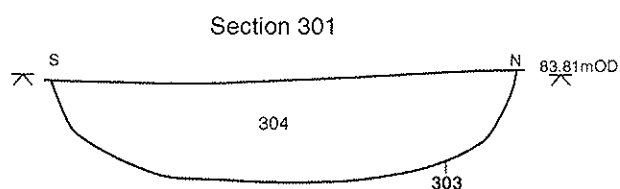
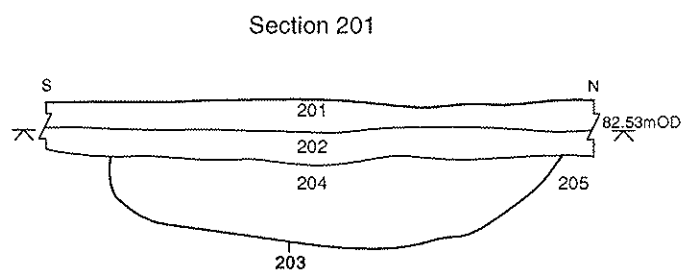
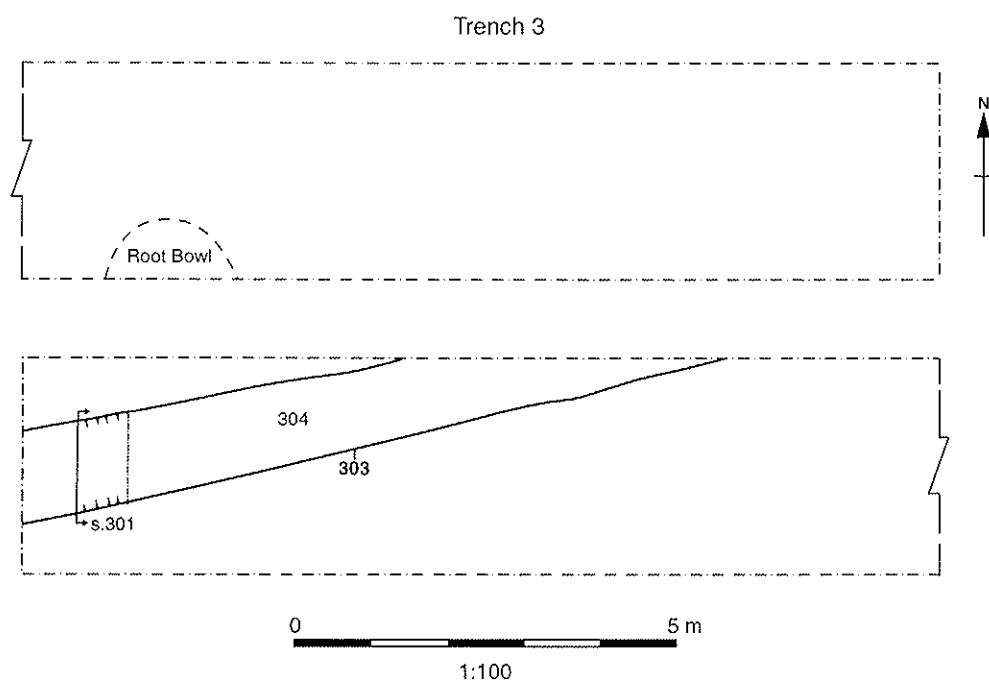


Figure 3: Trench 3, sections 201, 301 and 302

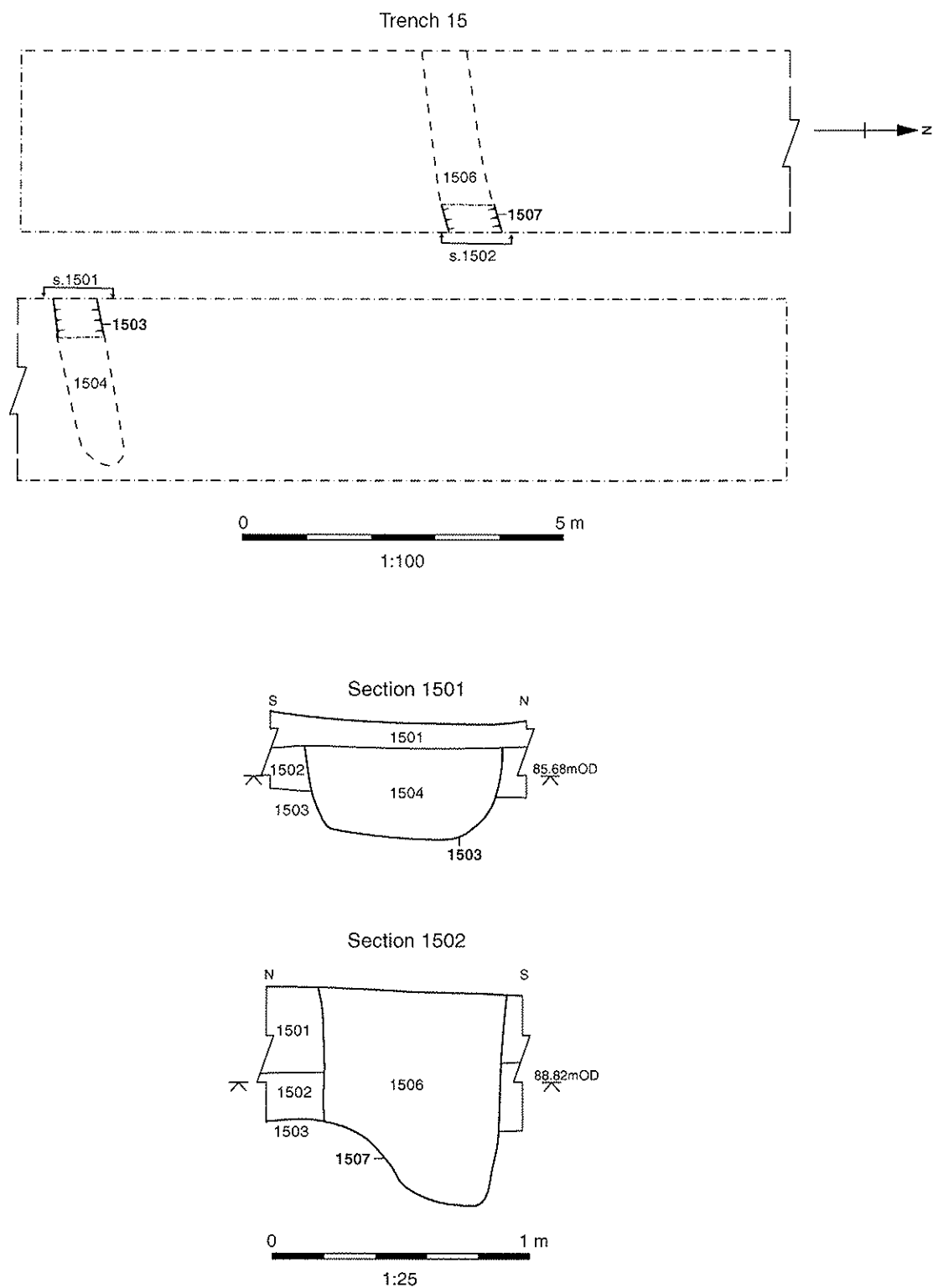


Figure 4: Trench 15, sections 1501 and 1502

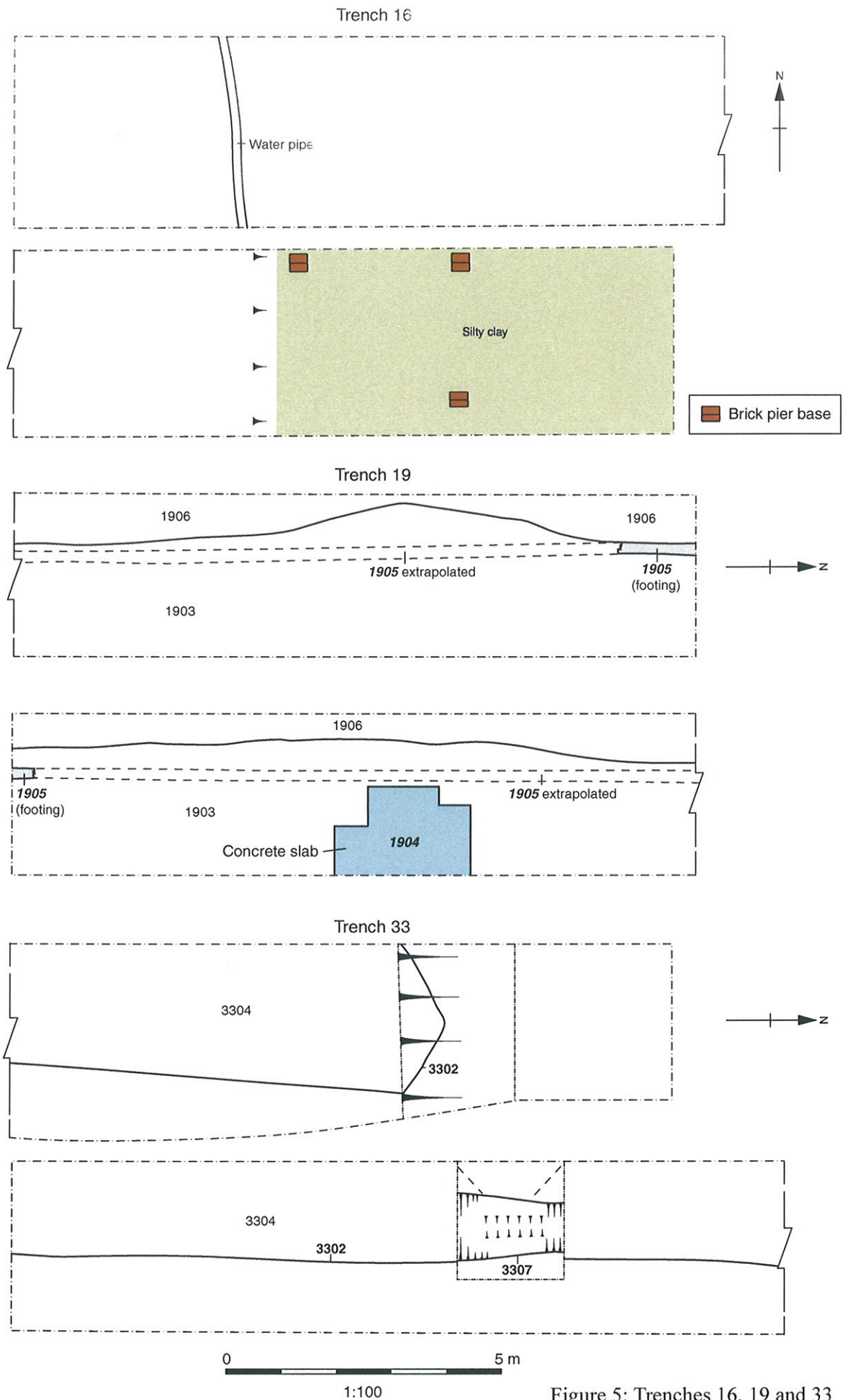


Figure 5: Trenches 16, 19 and 33



Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Oxford Archaeology North

Storey Institute
Meeting House Lane
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 541000
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES