

# BROOKFIELD, NUTCOTE, NASEBY NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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BROOKFIELD, NUTCOTE, NASEBY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

### Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Haddon Developments on 0.7 ha of land at Brookfield, Nutcote, Naseby (NGR SP 68757775 - Fig. 1). It was carried out in fulfilment of a condition put upon planning permission with regard to an application for residential development (Ref. DA 92/1173).
- 1.2 The work was conducted to a specification agreed with Northamptonshire Heritage. It involved a preliminary earthwork survey of the site, the transposition and interpretation of the 1630 map of Naseby, and the excavation of trial trenches by mechanical excavator.

### Archaeological Background

- 2.1 The application site contained earthworks which have been recorded by the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments, England as part of the medieval settlement of Naseby and Nutcote. The site was thought likely to contain archaeological remains of importance to understanding the development of the village, and as such was considered to be of county importance.
- 2.2 The village is thought to have had a polyfocal development, with Naseby and Nutcote forming distinct settlement foci. The northern edge of the site is defined by a hollow-way possibly dividing the two settlements. The 1630 map of Naseby (NRO Map Ref. 2166) shows a piece of land called Sow Green immediately to the west of the development site which might have formed the original focus of Nutcote. (See figure 3 for transposition of 1630 map onto the earthwork survey). The nature of the relationship between the two settlements is of particular research importance.
- 2.3 The land subject to this investigation, while lying within the modern village, does not appear to have been built on since at least 1630. The good state of preservation of the earthworks suggests that it has not been intensively cultivated since that time either. It was, therefore, thought that any archaeological remains would be likely to be little disturbed.

### Site Topography and Earthwork Survey

- 3.1 The earthwork survey was conducted using an EDM and plotted using FastCAD graphics program. The field drawings were made at 1:200 (Fig. 2).

- 3.2 The main earthwork elements comprise two sub-rectangular features in the eastern area of the site. The southern earthwork presents itself as a bank reaching a maximum height of a little over a metre. The northern earthwork is slighter and appears as a platform without an appreciable interior slope. The broader picture, recorded by the Royal Commission survey and supported by air photographic evidence (Cambridge University Collection, AWV 16 & AWV 19), suggests that these might represent the rear of tenements fronting High Street.
- 3.3 The ground drops away markedly towards the west and more gradually towards the north. The western and northern edges of the site are marked by pronounced scarps which dip into Nutcote Lane and the hollow-way respectively. Cartographic evidence from the 1630 map and the OS indicate that the hollow-way was once occupied by a small stream which has presumably given its name to the property.
- 3.4 The underlying geology comprises yellow-brown clay with patches of flinty gravel of the Upper Lias series. Groundwater was encountered in the NW end of Trenches 1 and 2, probably due to a perched watertable or local spring-line.

### Strategy

- 4.1 The evaluation took the form of 6 trial trenches excavated using a JCB equipped with a 1.5 m ditching bucket (Fig. 2). The trenches were positioned to:
- a) see if any structural remains were associated with the sub-rectangular earthworks (Trs. 1 & 2);
  - b) examine the frontage onto 'Sow Green' to locate any medieval buildings (Trs. 5 & 6);
  - c) examine the evidence for buildings and stratigraphic information on the edge of the hollow-way (Tr. 3).
- An additional trench (Tr. 4) was positioned in the centre of the paddock.
- 4.2 The examined area represents a 2.57% sample of the site.

## RESULTS

### Summary of Results

- 5.1 Trenches 1, 2 and 3 contained archaeological features and a small quantity of finds. Trenches 4, 5 and 6 contained nothing of interest. The principal features were a series of recut ditches in Trench 1 (Ditches 1/5, 1/19 and 1/20), which appeared to be related to the earthwork enclosure. Fragments of 10th-11th century (Late Saxon) pottery were recovered, and were also present in superficial deposits here. Other smaller ditches and gullies were present in Trench 1 but contained little or no dating evidence. Late Saxon pottery was also recovered in small quantities from Trench 2. Here, three shallow ditches were encountered, but none appeared to be related to the extant earthwork. In Trench 3, a shallow ditch yielded sherds of 1st-2nd century (early Roman) pottery.
- 5.2 There follows a more detailed account and discussion of the archaeological features and deposits encountered in Trenches 1, 2 and 3. A summary of all the archaeological contexts is presented in Table 1 and an assessment of the pottery is provided at the end of this report.
- 5.3 The numbering sequence used in recording archaeological contexts was unique to each trench with the prefix 1/, 2/ etc. used to denote the trench number.

### General Stratigraphy

- 6.1 The general stratigraphy in Trs. 1, 2 and 3 comprised a dark grey modern turf and topsoil (Contexts 1/1, 2/1 & 3/1) overlying a friable reddish brown silt loam (1/2, 2/2, 2/15 & 3/2). This was of variable depth, reaching a maximum of 450-560 mm beneath the earthworks in Trs. 1 and 2 (see long sections, Figs. 4, 5 & 6). This subsoil was everywhere 'clean' with few finds or inclusions other than occasional pebbles. In view of the prominence of the earthworks in this field it must be doubted whether the land had ever been ploughed. The subsoil is, therefore, probably entirely naturally weathered, although mixing by hand cultivation is a possibility.
- 6.2 In Tr. 3, this subsoil directly overlay the weathered surface of the natural clay (3/3). However, in Trs. 1 & 2 there was a thin intervening layer of greyish brown fine gravelly silt (1/4 & 2/3) which was confined to the central part of each trench. This layer was cut by features containing Late Saxon pottery (Ditches 1/5 & 2/9). The layer is interpreted as an early colluvial accumulation. It appeared to seal Gully 1/7.
- 6.3 There was no good evidence of earthwork construction in Trs

1 and 2. The banks in both trenches were made up of the loamy subsoil, 1/2 and 2/2, which was only marginally differentiated in Tr 2 in the distinction between the slightly reddish brown colour upslope (2/2) and the more markedly reddish brown colour downslope (2/15). It must be assumed that the banks were largely constructed with loose earth and/or turf. In Tr. 1 a thin, patchy layer of redeposited clay (1/3) might represent upcast from the ditches.

- 6.4 In Trs 4, 5 and 6 superficial deposits consisted of the modern turf and topsoil overlying a light or yellowish brown clayey subsoil. In Tr. 5 there was an additional underlying subsoil of grey-brown silty clay.

#### Trench 1: Late Saxon Ditches (Fig. 4)

- 7.1 Ditches 1/5, 1/19 and 1/20 were 500-600 mm deep and were clearly sequential cuts of essentially the same feature. They ran NE-SW, parallel to the direction of the earthwork. The ditches did not appear in Tr. 2 and it can be assumed that they turned SE following the line of the earthwork. Ditch 1/19, which was interpreted as the latest cut, ran on a slightly different alignment (ENE-WSW). It was visible on the surface of the field as a shallow depression at the base of the bank.
- 7.2 Ditch 1/19 was largely filled with a fine gravelly light bluish grey silt with brown mottling (1/22). This was very similar to fill 1/24 of Ditch 1/20, and the exact edge between the two was difficult to determine.
- 7.3 The middle phase ditch (1/5) had a very distinctive fill of dark grey clayey silt with abundant charcoal lumps and flecks. The carbonised remains included wheat of Saxon/Medieval type (Mark Robinson, University Museum Oxford, pers. comm. Samples not fully analysed.) It yielded relatively large quantities of Late Saxon pottery.

#### Trench 1: Other Ditches and Gullies

- 8.1 Five or six other smaller ditches and gullies indicate relatively dense activity here. However, very few finds were retrieved. The features were rectilinear and ran either approximately parallel to the main ditches (9, 15 & 17) or more directly N-S (7 & 12). They are likely to reflect at least two phases of activity. None of the features appeared likely to be beam slots or otherwise interpretable in structural terms. They were filled with greyish brown clayey silts, sometimes with a more reddish brown upper fill.
- 8.2 Ditch 1/9 was the most substantial of the minor ditches and had steep sides and a rounded base. Two Late Saxon sherds

came from the upper fill (1/10), but these might relate to later infilling rather than the original use of the feature.

- 8.3 Gully 1/17 was a shallow feature with a broad V-shaped profile. A shallow (50 mm) circular depression on its S side was unconvincing as a posthole. The feature appeared to be sealed by 1/4, but the closely similar nature of the two soils makes this relationship uncertain.
- 8.4 Ditch 1/15 was a broad, shallow feature with an asymmetrical profile. Possible animal/root disturbance on its N edge gave it some irregularity. It was possibly cut by Ditch 12, but the relationship was unclear in both plan and section.
- 8.5 Ditches 1/7 & 1/12 were parallel features about 3 m apart and of similar dimensions. Both had a shallow, round-based profile.

#### Trench 2: Ditches (Fig. 5)

- 9.1 Ditch 2/7 was a broad, shallow rectilinear feature with a flattish base. While on the same alignment as Ditches 1/5 etc., it seems unlikely to represent a continuation of these features.
- 9.2 Ditch 2/9 ran NW-SE approximately at right angles to 2/7. It was shallow with a flattish base and cut Ditch 2/11. It yielded single sherds of Late Saxon and Roman pottery.
- 9.3 Ditch 2/11 was a more substantial feature. Its edges were difficult to define due to the similarity of the light brown clayey fill to the natural geology. Flooding also impeded the examination of its W edge.

#### Trench 3: Roman Ditch (Fig. 6)

- 10.1 Feature 3/5 was a shallow ditch running along the contour of the hill slope. It had a round-based profile and its single mottled light grey-brown fill yielded four sherds of 1st-2nd century Roman pottery.
- 10.2 A narrow gully (Feature 3/7) ran parallel to the ditch and terminated within the trench. It had moderately sloping sides and a flattish base without evidence of postholes.

#### Conclusions

- 11.1 The area of archaeological interest was limited to the N and E part of the development site in Trs. 1, 2 and 3. Here ditches and gullies appear to indicate predominantly Late Saxon activity, with early Roman features present in

Tr. 3.

- 11.2 Large recut ditches in Tr. 1, yielding 10th-11th century St Neots Type Ware pottery, appear to be related to the more substantial of the two earthwork enclosures. The pottery was not found in large quantities and was generally in poor condition. Carbonised organic remains were abundant in one of the ditches.
- 11.3 There was no evidence for earthwork construction in either Trench 1 or 2. It is assumed that the banks were composed of loose earth scraped up or of turf. Traces of a clayey horizon in Tr. 1 (1/3) might, however, represent the upcast from ditch digging here. The earthwork in Tr. 2 may be interpreted as lynchet which developed along the boundary of a medieval property fronting High Street.
- 11.4 There was little surviving archaeological stratigraphy in any of the trenches. In both Trs. 1 and 2 a thin layer of early soil survived (1/4 & 2/3), which, in Tr. 1 appeared to both be cut by, and seal, archaeological features. This was probably a colluvial accumulation. There was no evidence for a buried ancient land surface and it must be assumed that this had completely weathered or been removed by later cultivation.
- 11.5 In Tr. 3 no discernable stratigraphy was found on the edge of the hollow way. Here, it is possible that the horizon of weathered clay 3/3 represented the remains of an early land surface. The trench section suggests features 3/5 and 3/7 cut this horizon, but this was not at all clear in plan and the layer was machine excavated to clarify the features.
- 11.6 The minor ditches in Trs. 1 and 2 probably represent two or three phases of activity. It is probable that at least some of these were associated with the Late Saxon occupation but it is uncertain whether any relate to a pre-10th century activity. None of the features had a clearly structural purpose but it is possible that some functioned as timber-slots.
- 11.7 Ditch 3/5 yielded four sherds from an Roman coarseware jar, and it seems likely that this is a Roman feature. Gully 3/7, although without finds, appeared to be precisely parallel to the ditch and is likely to be contemporaneous.
- 11.8 No evidence of activity was discovered on the W side of the site in the area fronting 'Sow Green' of the 1630 map. Here, the scarp dropping into Nutcote Lane appears to be entirely natural. The gully-like depression running down the slope was a purely superficial feature.

#### Discussion and Comment on Results



- 12.1 The evaluation, while not elucidating the medieval development of the village, has suggested an earlier focus of settlement in Nutcote - one with origins in the 10th-11th century. The nature of this late Saxon activity is not clear. The general paucity of finds suggests that the site might have been peripheral to actual settlement. The lack of clear structural evidence in the form of postholes or wall trenches may also support this view. However, traces of timber structures can be notoriously difficult to recognise or interpret particularly in narrow trenches. It can be added that the weather, which was very wet for two days, made conditions far from ideal for recognising subtle features and the presence of constructional features here cannot be ruled out.
- 12.2 An understanding of the site largely hinges upon an interpretation of the late Saxon ditch and earthwork enclosure. Its significance is not, however, entirely clear. Outside the area of investigation the earthwork has been destroyed and its overall size and shape is not known. Taking a somewhat speculative view, it is possible the Nutcote/Naseby enclosure was related to a relatively high status domestic residence. Excavations on rural medieval sites - for example Sulgrave, Northamptonshire and Goltho, Lincolnshire - have shown the origins of these medieval manors to lie in late Saxon halls dated to the 9th-11th centuries. In both these cases the halls were within bank and ditch enclosures. While the enclosure at Goltho was substantial enough to have a clear defensive function, that at Sulgrave was apparently composed of a low turf bank fronted by a relatively shallow (0.31 m) ditch, comparable to the Nutcote/Naseby example, and is likely to have been a mark of status rather than defensive.
- 12.3 If this were an early 'manorial' centre of a Saxon thegn it would suggest reasons for the 'polyfocal' development of Nutcote/Naseby which, according to the hypothesis presented by Christopher Taylor, would relate to the presence of different manorial units in the same village.
- 12.4 The evaluation indicates that this polyfocal development was not related to a nucleus at 'Sow Green'. It seems more likely that the focus of early Nutcote lay further to the east. The cartographic and field evidence suggests that the SE part of the evaluation site formed the rear of tenements fronting High Street and that the late Saxon/medieval origins of these features became partly fossilized as modern property boundaries.
- 12.5 The nature of the early Roman activity here is obscure. There seems to be no direct link between it and the late Saxon occupation. Evidence for Roman activity has occasionally been found underlying late Saxon occupation (eg. at Goltho, Sulgrave, Cheddar) without indications of continuity between the two.

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Brookfield, Nutcote, Naseby

## Pottery Assessment

Lucy Bown (with Paul Blinkhorn, NAU)

46 sherds (0.3 kg) of pottery were recovered from four trenches. The condition of the sherds is very poor and in the majority the inclusions/temper have leached out. The following identifications have therefore been based on a few diagnostic sherds.

### Trench 1

Of interest is a piece of Stamford Ware dating from the 10th-mid 12th century found in topsoil which is consistent in date with the remainder of the pottery found in this trench.

Two sherds of St Neots Type Ware carinated bowls of the 10th-late 11th century are the only diagnostic pieces from 19 sherds which appear to be of this same pottery type. These sherds are found in contexts 1/+, 1/2, 1/6, 1/10, 1/21 and 1/24.

Three sherds from context 1/4 are of a similar appearance to the St Neots Type Ware. The texture of the sherds is riddled with voids where the inclusions have leached out and therefore further identification has not been possible.

Four sherds in context 1/6 and 1/22 have oolitic limestone temper and by association with St Neots Type Ware in context 1/6 are suggested to be of the same date (AD 900-1100).

### Trench 2

Five post-medieval sherds of 18th century date are found in context 1.

Two sherds of St Neots Type Ware (AD 900-1100) are found in context 2/8 and 2/15. However, context 8 also contains a small sherd from the base of a Roman greyware beaker or jar.

### Trench 3

Four sherds from the base of a Roman coarseware jar are also badly eroded and the inclusions have been leached out. Calcite-gritted jars of a 1st-2nd century date are common but limestone or shell tempered wares are also known at this date. With the absence of the relevant inclusions further identification of this vessel is not possible.

### Trench 6

Four sherds of 18th century post-medieval wares were recovered from topsoil - context 1.

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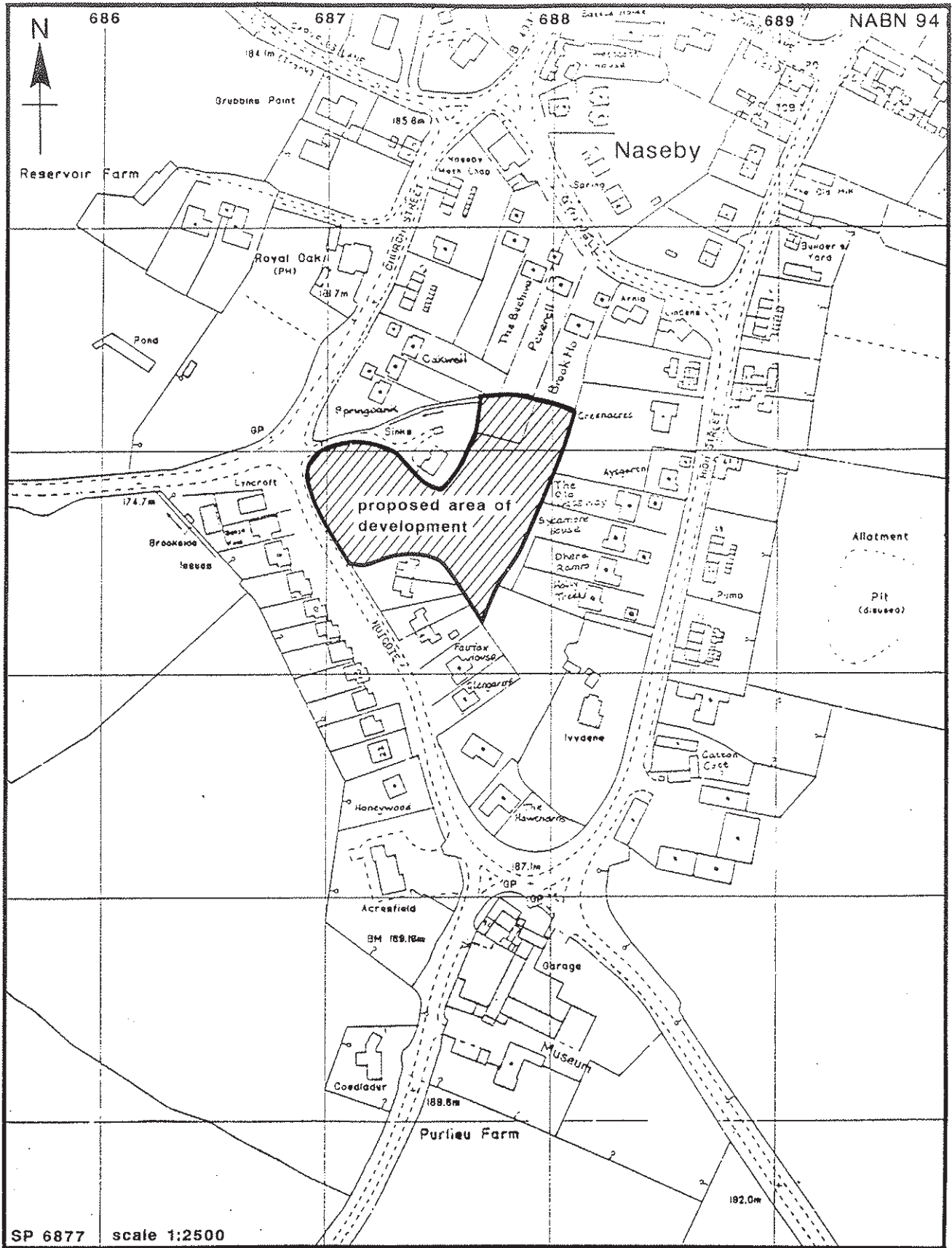
Table 1: Context Summary

TR/CXT trench/context no.  
 W width  
 D depth  
 FO fill of  
 LSAX late Saxon  
 ROM Roman  
 P-M post-medieval

TR/ CXT	TYPE	W m	D mm	FINDS (No.)	COMMENTS
1/1	layer	-	150	pot LSAX (2)	turf/topsoil
1/2	layer	-	150-450	none	subsoil
1/3	layer	-	100	none	patchy clay
1/4	layer	7.0	120 max	pot LSAX (3) flint (1)	colluvium?
1/5	ditch	1.2	500	-	runs NE-SW cuts 20
1/6	FO 5	1.2	500 max	pot LSAX (13) LSAX? (1) ROM? (1)	charcoal sample
1/7	ditch	0.95	250	-	runs N-S
1/8	FO 7	0.95	250	none	
1/9	ditch	0.55	300	-	runs NE-SW cuts 28
1/10	FO 9	0.55	100-150	pot LSAX (2) iron obj. (1)	upper fill
1/11	FO 9	0.55	200 max	none	lower fill
1/12	ditch	0.8	300	-	runs N-S cuts 15?
1/13	FO 12	0.8	100	none	upper fill
1/14	FO 12	0.8	200	none	lower fill
1/15	ditch	0.8	200	-	cut by 12?
1/16	FO 15	0.8	200	flint (1)	
1/17	gully	0.6	200	-	runs NE-SW sealed by 4?
1/18	FO 17	0.6	200	none	
1/19	ditch	2.0	600	-	runs NE-SW cuts 20, 5?

1/20	ditch	1.0+	550	-	runs NE-SW cut by 5, 19
1/21	FO 19	1.6	200	pot LSAX (1)	upper fill
1/22	FO 19	2.0	410	pot ? (3)	middle fill
1/23	FO 19	0.6	300 max	none	lowest fill
1/24	FO 20	1.0?	350	pot LSAX (1)	upper fill
1/25	FO 20	0.8	200	none	lower fill
1/26	FO 5	0.4	120	none	lower fill
1/27	layer	2.5	200 max	none	overlies 5
1/28	gully?	0.7	50	-	cut by 9
1/29	FO 28	0.7	50	none	
2/1	layer	-	160	pot P-M (5)	turf/topsoil
2/2	layer	-	300-560	none	subsoil
2/3	layer	c.3.5	120	none	colluvium? cut by 9
2/4	FO 5	0.3+	250+	none	
2/5	ditch?	0.3+	250+	-	runs NE-SW?
2/6	FO 7	0.65	100	none	
2/7	gully	0.65	100	-	runs NE-SW
2/8	FO 9	1.0	150	pot ROM (1) LSAX (1) flint (1)	
2/9	ditch	1.0	150	-	runs NW-SE cuts 3, 11
2/10	FO 11	1.0	300	none	
2/11	ditch	1.0	300	-	runs NE-SW cut by 9
2/12	FO 13	0.28	150+	none	
2/13	gully	0.28	150+	-	land drain
2/14	deposit	-	-	-	natural geology
2/15	layer	c. 5.0	200-350	pot LSAX (1) ? (1)	subsoil overlies 2
3/1	layer	-	200-250	none	turf/topsoil
3/2	layer	-	200-350	none	subsoil
3/3	deposit	-	-	-	weathered natural
3/4	FO 5	1.2	600	pot ROM (4)	

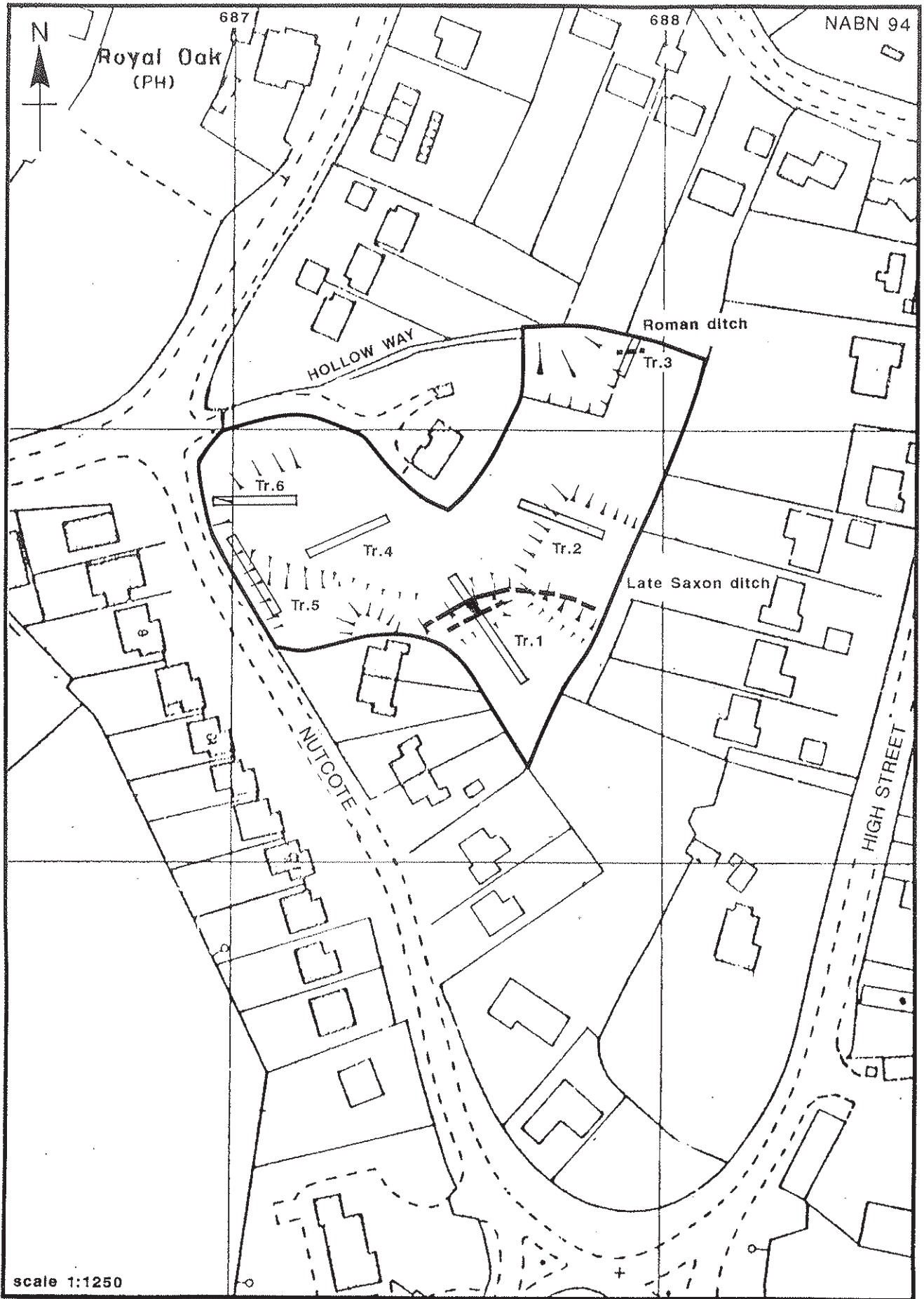
3/5	ditch	1.2	600	-	runs NE-SW
3/6	FO 7	0.5	280	none	
3/7	gully	0.5	280	-	runs NE-SW
4/1	layer	-	200	none	turf/topsoil
4/2	layer	-	300	none	subsoil
4/3	deposit	-	-	-	natural clay
5/1	layer	-	100	none	turf/topsoil
5/2	layer	-	200-500	none	subsoil
5/3	layer	-	50-350	none	subsoil/ weathered natural
5/4	deposit	-	-	-	natural clay
6/1	layer	-	220	pot P-M (4)	turf/topsoil
6/2	layer	-	220-230	none	subsoil



site location

figure 1





scale 1:1250

trench location and earthwork survey

figure 2

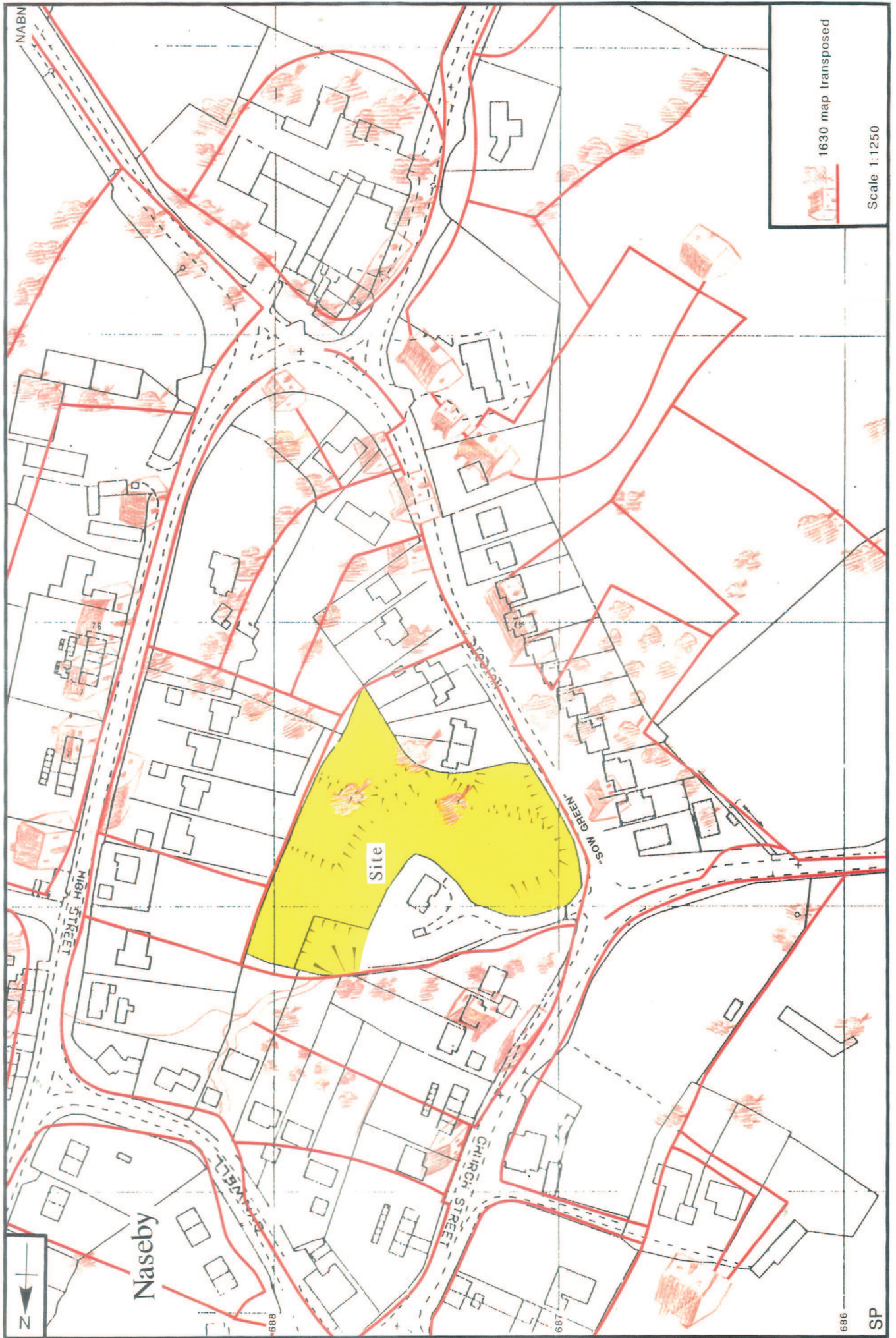


figure 3

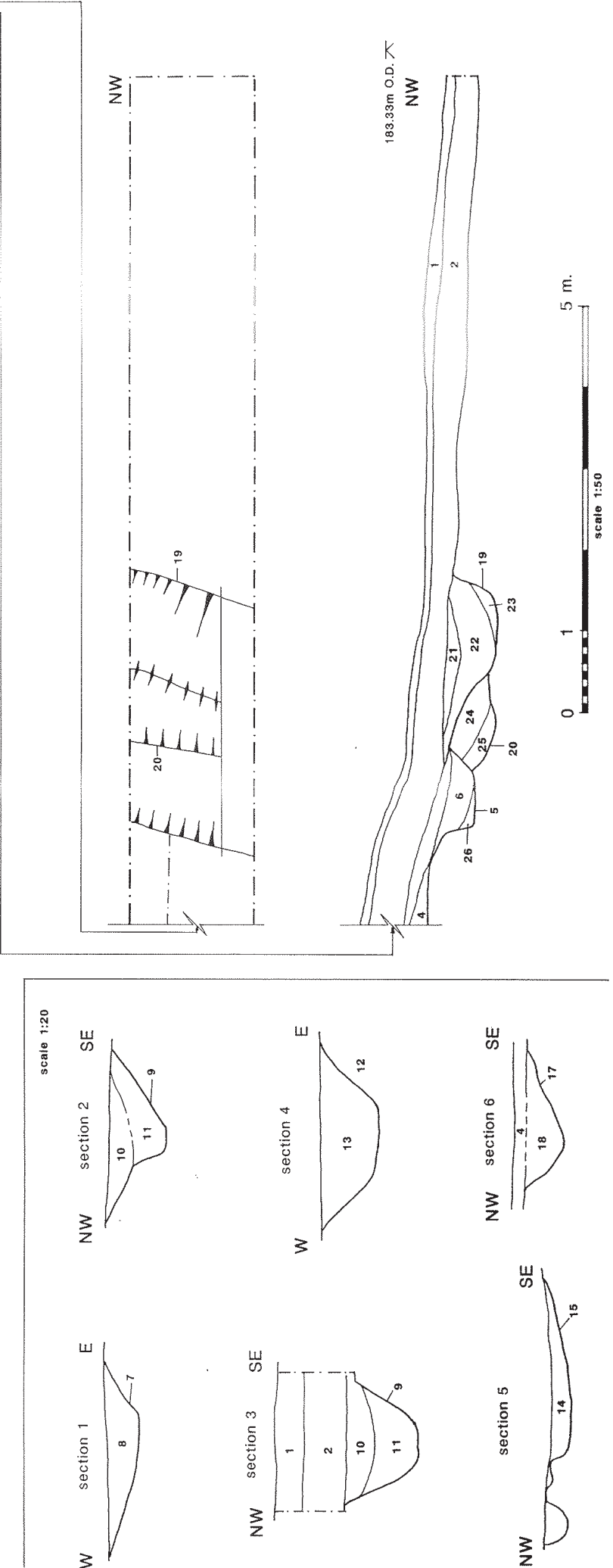
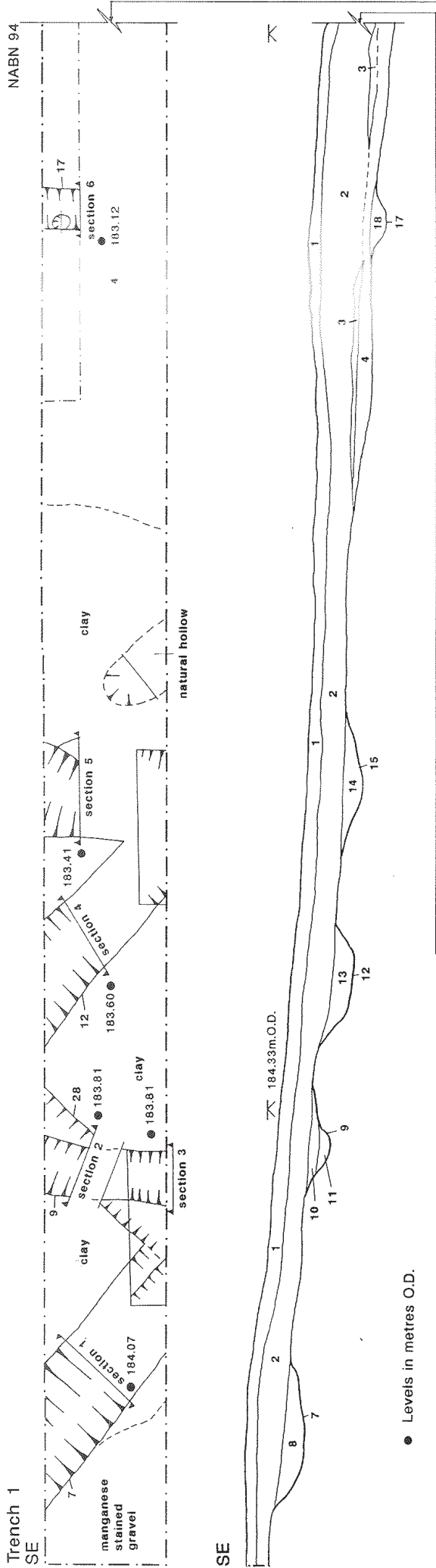
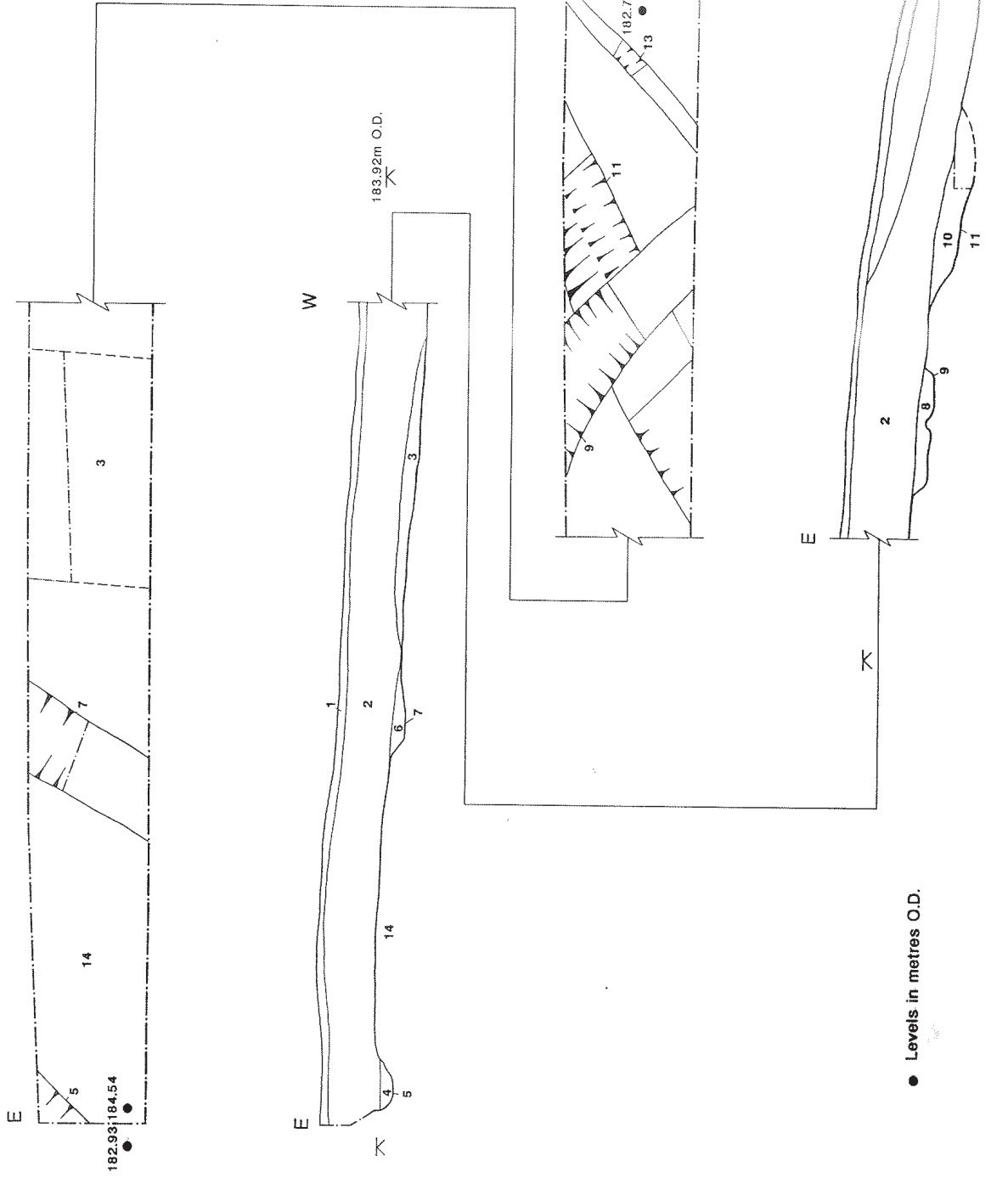


figure 4

Trench 2

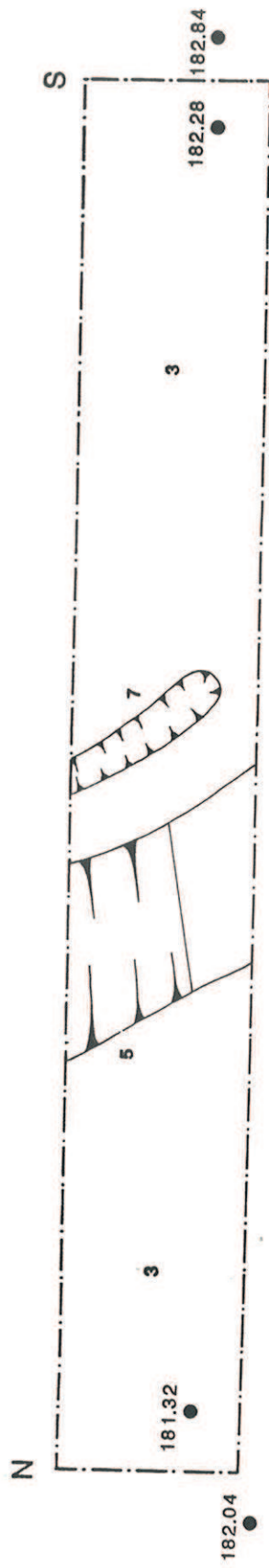


Scale 1:50

figure 5

# Trench 3

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● Levels in metres O.D.

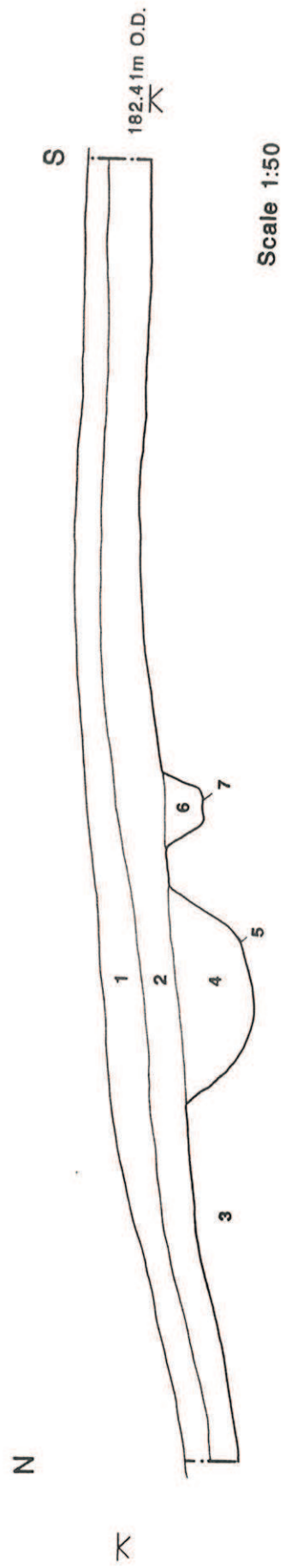


figure 6

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