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# Land at Bridge Street Wye, Kent

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR TR 049 468

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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# Land at Bridge Street, Wye, Kent; Archaeological Evaluation

## 1 Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Ruddy Developments Ltd on 5100 sq. m. of land at Bridge Street, Wye (near Ashford) (Fig. 1). It was carried out in fulfilment of conditions placed upon planning permission for residential development (Condition 9, Planning Application 94/471/AS). It was conducted to a specification set by the Planning Department of Kent County Council. The work took place on 1st - 3rd February 1995.

## 2 Objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to determine the depth, extent, date, nature and quality of any archaeological remains on the development site in order to enable an appropriate archaeological strategy to be formulated.

## 3 Methods

The evaluation took the form of five mechanically excavated trenches positioned according to the specification. Four of them were 15 m long and one 5 m long and each was about 1.5 m wide. The discovery of archaeological deposits (Tr 4) subsequently led to the excavation of an additional trench (Tr 6) 13 m long to help determine their extent. The total area of excavation (117 sq. m.) represents a 2.29% sample of the development site (Fig. 2).

The trenches were machine-excavated down to significant archaeological deposits and were then cleaned by hand, with potential archaeological features being sampled by excavation. Exceptions to this general procedure are noted under individual trench descriptions (below). Recording was carried out to standard OAU practice.

## 4 Geology and Topography

The site lies on the north- and west-facing slopes of a low hill on the right bank of the River Great Stour a few yards from Wye Bridge. The general elevation is between 32 m and 35 m OD. The underlying geology is Head Brickearth and gravel of the Third River Terrace and comprises clayey silts and sands with localised flint.

At the time of the evaluation the higher part of the site was rough grassland. The ground fronting Bridge Street was concreted over and just behind that was an area much disturbed by recent earth-moving.

## 5 Archaeological Background

There were no known archaeological remains on the site itself. Roman sites are common in the immediate area, the nearest being located c. 80 m away (SMR no. TR 04 NE 22). A settlement has been recorded c. 400 m up valley (TR 04 NW 19) and a pottery production site c. 300 m down valley (TR 04 NW 16).

The Pilgrims' Way crosses the SE corner of the site. The site's topographic position, above the floodplain of the Great Stour and at a historic crossing place, gave it some archaeological potential.

Several features of historic interest are recorded in this part of Wye, including the 'Granary' on the site itself and the Wye Watermill, a Grade II listed building, adjacent.

## **6 Summary of Results**

The main feature of archaeological interest was a shallow ditch [413] crossing the slope of the hill in Tr 4. Relatively large quantities of prehistoric pottery, dating to the Later Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, were recovered from the layer overlying it [404]. Worked flints were also recovered from above and within the ditch. These are broadly of the same period, although there might be an earlier element.

The ditch was traced into Tr 6 where it was much truncated by modern disturbances. It appeared to be turning northward rather than enclosing the higher ground to the south.

No features of archaeological interest were found in the southern part of the site (Trs 2, 3 & 5). The extent and nature of the prehistoric occupation therefore remains enigmatic.

Tr 1 revealed a relict stream channel or pond with peat and waterlogged wood at its base. It contained some preserved charred and waterlogged plant remains but its dimensions, date and nature are not known.

There follows a description of the deposits encountered in each of the trenches. A summary of all the deposits encountered is presented in Table 1, reports on the finds are contained in Appendices 1 and 2, and a report on the environmental remains is contained in Appendix 3.

## **7 Trench Descriptions**

### Trench 1

This trench was situated in the lowest part of the site. Due to the depth of deposits and the rapid infilling of groundwater (rendering the sides of the trench unstable) it was not possible to record the trench in detail. It was excavated to a general depth of 1.2 m exposing waterlaid silts (layer [103])

along the length of the trench. Samples of layer [103] and the peat below it [104] were excavated by machine before the trench was immediately backfilled (see Appendix 3).

Under the modern tarmac and concrete was a uniform dark brown silt loam [101] extending across the trench. This was seen to contain some post-medieval building debris including a chalk rubble layer at its base. It was probably a colluvial accumulation possibly caused by ploughing. It overlay a cleaner grey clayey layer [102] which was interpreted as a natural silting of a hollow in this part of the site. This was c. 0.4 m thick. It overlay a greenish grey sandy silt [103] which, although not well-bedded as far as could be observed, was probably a waterlaid deposit. The mixture of charred plant remains suggested a component of dumped rubbish. No finds were recovered. The lowest layer [104] was a dark brown peaty clay with abundant fragments of waterlogged wood, including some worked pieces. No diagnostic finds were retrieved.

This sequence of deposits was the same as that recorded in Trial Pit 10 of the geological survey and indicates the presence of a relict pond or stream channel. It can be noted that Trial Pits 7 and 17 to the west also recorded peat at depth, but not Trial Pits 15, 8 and 11 which seem to be located at the margins of this feature. The date of this pond or channel, and whether natural or man-made, are not known.

#### Trench 2

This trench was located on the highest part of the site. The geology here was a rather soft orange-brown silt which was over-machined to be sure of its interpretation.

The topsoil was a deep brown clayey loam. It overlay a cohesive mottled orange-brown clayey silt [201] which was interpreted as a naturally weathered subsoil merging into the natural. A single feature [203] was recorded in section. Its fill was very similar to the topsoil and it was clearly quite recent.

#### Trench 3

Modern topsoil, 0.35 m deep, directly overlay natural clayey sand. A single shallow dubious feature at the N end [302] contained a probable medieval potsherd.

#### Trench 4 (Fig. 3)

This trench was located at the NE side of the site running down the slope. Under a modern dump of brick and rubble and a buried topsoil was a compact, brown flinty silt loam [402]. It was a quite uniform layer with well-mixed inclusions suggesting that it was a ploughsoil, presumably of medieval/post medieval date. It was cut by a relatively modern feature at the N end of the trench [411].

At the S (upslope) end of the trench [402] directly overlay the natural orange-brown clayey silt, but downslope from the lip of ditch [413] was revealed a sequence of layers. [403] and [406] were brownish mottled infill or interface layers which overlay an extensive mid-grey sandy clay silt [404]. This layer was initially difficult to interpret, for although it filled the top of ditch [413], downslope it extended well beyond the edge of the ditch. Beyond ditch [413] it was largely removed by machine to the layer beneath, but over the ditch it was completely excavated by hand and yielded a large quantity of prehistoric pottery as well as a number of worked flints.

Ditch 413 ran E-W. Its S edge was clearly defined but its N edge was more diffuse. It had a shallow, rounded base. Excluding [404] it had a single main fill [405] which was a light grey clayey silt yielding a few flints but no pottery. The lowest fill [412] was no more than a skim of dark brown silt.

Layer [407] was a light, slightly bluish grey clayey silt occupying the hill slope N of the ditch. It was very similar to [405], but there was a suggestion that it was cut by the ditch. If so, it must be interpreted as a buried prehistoric soil but there was no indication of a ground surface. It was partially hand-excavated without yielding finds.

This layer overlay a probable tree-hole [414] and a layer of colluvial? accumulation [415] at the base of the slope. These deposits could not be recorded in detail due to the rising water level.

#### Trench 5

Trench 5, on the west-facing slope, was a shallow trench showing modern topsoil over a mid-brown possible ploughsoil [501]. There were no features or finds.

#### Trench 6

This trench was located at right-angles to Trench 4 so as to intercept the line of ditch [413]. At the E end was a considerable depth of modern dumping [600], and a possible ploughsoil [601] was recorded here. However, most of the trench was excavated into a very disturbed area where the ground had been truncated to below the surface of the natural clay-silt.

The probable course of ditch 413 (ditch [607] in this trench), albeit much truncated, was found at the W end of the trench. Some flints were collected from its light grey fill on the side of the trench.

The base of an E-W ditch [605] was also discovered. It was sampled by hand excavation but the ground was so boggy it was impossible to define the feature's depth. Its fill was similar to [601] and it seems likely to be medieval or later.



## 8 Discussion and Conclusions

### General Stratigraphy

A contrast can be noted between the shallow soils at the top of the hill (particularly in Trs 3 and 5, and at the S and E ends of Trs 4 and 6 respectively) and the deep accumulation of deposits at the base of the slope (Tr 1). In Tr 1 the lower deposits were water-laid. Peat at the bottom of this trench was also recorded in Trial Pits 10, 7 and 17, suggesting a stream inlet running E-W here, but the origin of this feature must remain uncertain. The deposits were not closely datable but the charred seeds recovered from the upper fill suggested a Saxon or later date. The lower, waterlogged deposits may have had a Roman or earlier component, but this is based upon a single glume of spelt wheat whose significance is far from clear. The upper deposits in this trench may have accumulated through plough wash, possibly entirely in post-medieval times.

In Trs 4, 5 and 6 there was also the suggestion of a ploughsoil under the modern topsoil. This was considered less likely in Tr 2, and this might be explained if the Pilgrims' Way indeed followed the indicated route across this part of the site and remained uncultivated.

### Prehistoric occupation

Archaeological deposits appear to be confined to the vicinity of Tr 4 in the NE area of the site. The prehistoric ditch [413] was traceable into Tr 6, but this area had been subjected to much modern disturbance and the feature was almost totally vertically truncated.

Ditch [413] was running E-W but appeared to be taking a more northerly course on Tr 6 and does not seem to be enclosing the higher ground as might be expected.

No archaeological features were found on the higher ground. It is possible that shallow and/or infrequent ones were present but had been destroyed by ploughing. Alternatively, occupation associated with the ditch might have been largely confined to the land to the east.

Pottery dating to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age came from a dark layer [404] above the main fill of the ditch. This presumably represents an accumulation of rubbish on the hillside which was protected from later erosion and ploughing. The flint from the ditch fill [405] is not particularly diagnostic but it could be slightly earlier than the pottery.

**Table 1: Context Summary**

Tr/Cxt	Type	Depth	Width	Finds (No.)	Comments
1/100	tarmac & concrete	0.28			
1/101	layer	0.45			post-med ploughsoil?
1/102	layer	0.40			natural infill
1/103	layer	c 0.30			waterlaid?
1/104	layer	c 0.45		worked wood	peaty clay
2/200	topsoil	0.3			
2/201	layer	0.38			weathered subsoil
2/202	fill of 203	0.17	0.78		
2/203	pit?	0.17	0.78		post-med
2/204	natural				
3/300	topsoil	0.35			
3/301	fill of 302	0.15 max	0.55	med? pot (1)	
3/302	pit?	0.15 max	0.55		
3/303	natural				
4/400	turf & rubble	0.20			mod dump
4/401	buried topsoil	0.20			
4/402	layer	0.20-0.25			ploughsoil?
4/403	layer	0.10 max	1.8		infill
4/404	layer/fill of 413	0.15 max		prehistoric pot (69) flint (8) fired clay (2)	occupation layer
4/405	fill of 413	0.20 max	1.5	flint (8)	
4/406	layer	0.02		prehistoric pot (3) flint (4)	interface between 402 & 404
4/407	layer	0.15			colluvium/buried soil?
4/408	natural				
4/409	fill of 414	0.30+			
4/410	fill of 411	0.7	1.0	window glass (2) C 19th pot (3)	
4/411	pit?	0.7	1.0		?C 19th pit
4/412	fill of 413	0.05 max			lowest fill
4/413	ditch	0.40	1.5		prehistoric ditch
4/414	tree-hole?	0.30+	?		
4/415	fill of 416	0.20+	?		colluvium?

Tr/Cxt	Type	Depth	Width	Finds (No.)	Comments
4/416	cut?	0.20+	?		natural hollow?
5/500	topsoil	0.26			
5/501	layer	0.20			ploughsoil?
5/502	natural				
6/600	topsoil & dump	0.40			mod
6/601	layer	0.40 max			ploughsoil?
6/602	natural				
6/603	natural				
6/604	fill of 605	?	0.3+		
6/605	ditch	?	0.3+		post-med?
6/606	fill of 607	0.20+	0.6+	flint (4)	same as 405?
6/607	ditch?	0.20+	0.6+		same as 413?

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## Appendix 1: The Flint by Philippa Bradley

### Introduction

A small assemblage of 23 pieces of struck flint and a single piece of burnt unworked flint was recovered from the evaluation. In general the material would appear to be the product of an unspecific technology, probably Bronze Age in date.

Flakes tend to be hard-hammer struck. The only retouched form is a piercer made on a core fragment and although it is not a diagnostic form it would not be out of place in a Bronze Age context. A minority of the assemblage may be earlier in date, for example, the blade-like flake from 606 and a couple of soft-hammer struck flakes from context 404.

The raw materials are relatively good being orange-brown to mid-brown and black in colour. Cortex where present is white and rolled or occasionally chalky.

### Assemblage composition

Context	Type
404	5 flakes, 1 piece of irregular waste, 1 piercer on a core fragment, 1 burnt unworked flint
405	6 flakes, 1 chip, 1 multi-platform flake core
406	2 flakes, 1 piece of irregular waste, 1 core fragment
606	2 flakes, 1 blade-like flake, 1 piece of irregular waste

## Appendix 2: The Prehistoric Pottery by Alistair Barclay

The evaluation produced a total of 72 prehistoric sherds from two contexts. All the material can be placed in the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age.

Context 404	69 sherds
Context 406	3 sherds

The prehistoric material is in a fresh condition and includes some large sherds. The large number of sherds from 404 may represent a dump of domestic material. The prehistoric fabrics are tempered either with flint, or flint and sand, and some also contain ferruginous pellets. The assemblage includes a small number of featured sherds including three angular shoulders with finger-tip decoration, three base sherds and two rims. One squared rim was from a bipartite vessel with an upright neck. A number of sherds have been coated on the exterior surface with a clayey grog wash. Most, if not all, of this material is likely to be late Bronze Age/early Iron Age in date.

### Appendix 3: Environmental remains

The assessment of preservation of the various indicators of environment and economy at the site was made problematic by the weak dating of the deposits sampled, and by the lack of late Bronze-early Iron Age samples. Charred remains appear well-preserved but in low concentrations; samples of about 20 litres for both the waterlogged and unwaterlogged remains would be recommended. Waterlogged preservation seems poor but interpretable assemblages can be extracted from the usual sample sizes (10-15 litres). Snails and small bones are preserved in the waterlogged deposits.

Two samples were taken during the evaluation and processed to extract charred plant and waterlogged macroscopic remains. These remains were assessed by Gillian Campbell of English Heritage's Environmental Archaeology Unit, the University Museum, Oxford.

Sample 1 is from deposit 103, the latest fill in the possible stream course or pond. The charcoal is dominated by non-oak species, but comminuted oak (*Quercus*) charcoal is present. The charred remains are dominated by seeds, approximately 100 in all, most of which are cereal grains. Six-row hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and free-threshing wheat (*Triticum*) account for most of the cereal, but glume wheat, rye (*Secale cereale*) and oat (*Avena*) were also observed. Remains other than cereals include shell fragments of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and an uncharred possible fig seed. Vetch or tare (*Vicia / Lathyrus*), orache (*Atriplex*), corn cockle (*Agrostemma githago*) and a broom-grass (*Bromus secalinus* type) are preserved by charring, and uncharred seeds of elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and fool's parsley (*Anthusa cynapium*) show that the deposit is just at the margin of waterlogged preservation. Cereal chaff is absent, as are land snails. Fish bones had floated with the charred remains.

The charred remains are characteristic of dumping of mixed rubbish, possibly charred during drying prior to milling or during cooking. They are consistent with a Saxon or later date. The preservation is good, but the concentration of charred remains is low.

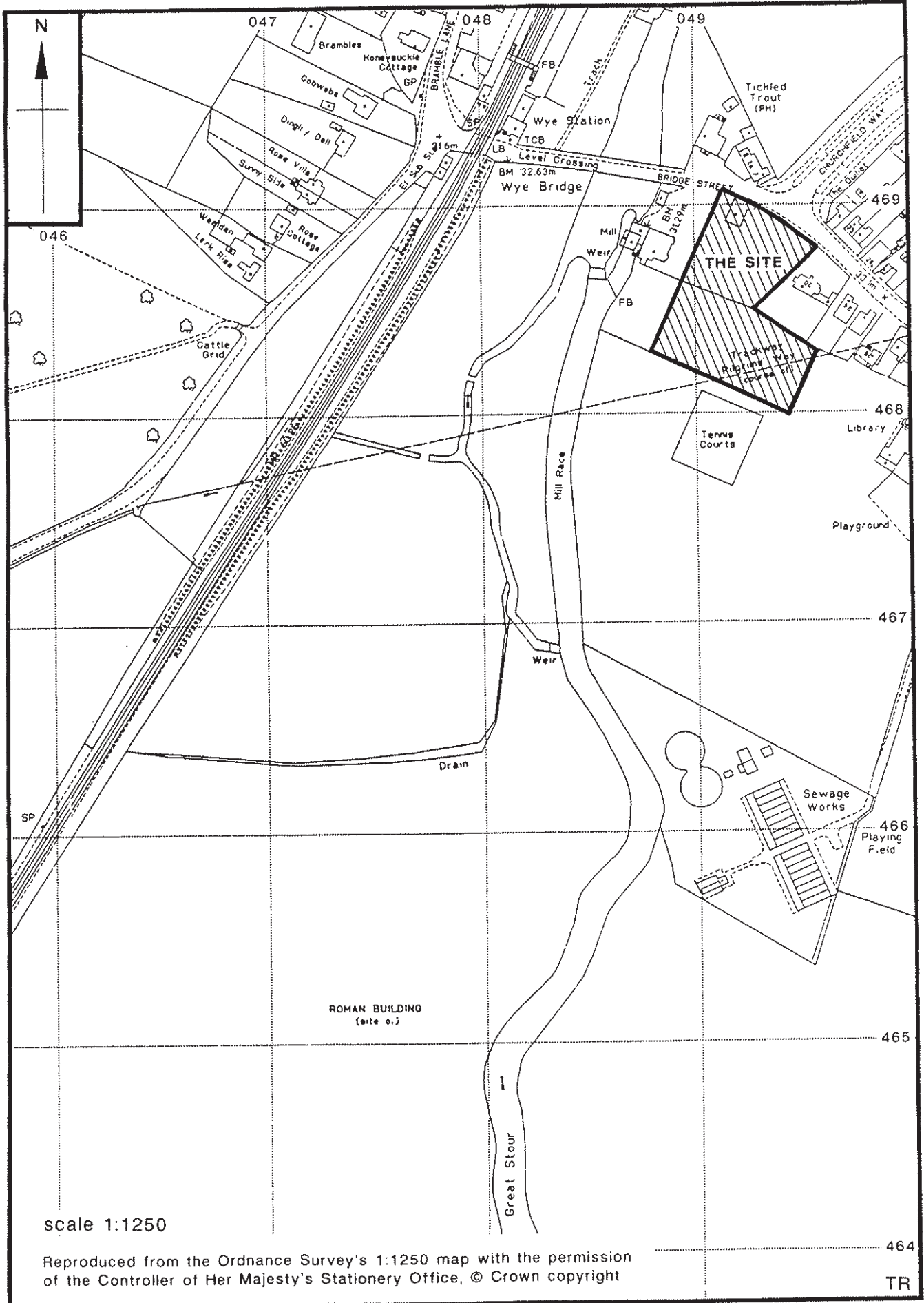
Sample 2 is from deposit 104, the lower fill of the possible stream course or pond later filled by 103, discussed above. Waterlogged remains are poorly preserved. Rush (*Juncus*) dominated, with a large number of other seeds including sedges (*Carex*), thistle (*Carduus*), dock (*Rumex*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), various grasses, a mint (*Mentha*), wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum*), plantain (*Plantago major*), water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* subgen. *Batrachium*), buttercup (*Ranunculus*, subgen. *Ranunculus*) and henbane (*Hyocyamus niger*). Elder seeds and hazel fragments were also present.

The rare charred remains were mostly cereal chaff which included a single glume base of spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*).

The preserved snails are fresh water species, probably of slow-flowing water

habitats. Insects included a water beetle (*Helophorus aquatica* or *grandis*), an unspciated caddis fly, and drier ground beetles such as the non-aquatic *Semus*, a grassland type (*Agrypnus murinus*) and one characteristic of rotting organic matter (*Anotylus*).

While the preservation is poor, the plants are characteristic of muddy ground and wasteland, possibly with some scrubland. The glume base of spelt wheat would be unusual in a post-Roman deposit, and may mean that the deposit is Roman or earlier, that the glume base is derived from Roman or earlier activity in the vicinity, or that spelt was grown in later periods at Wye.



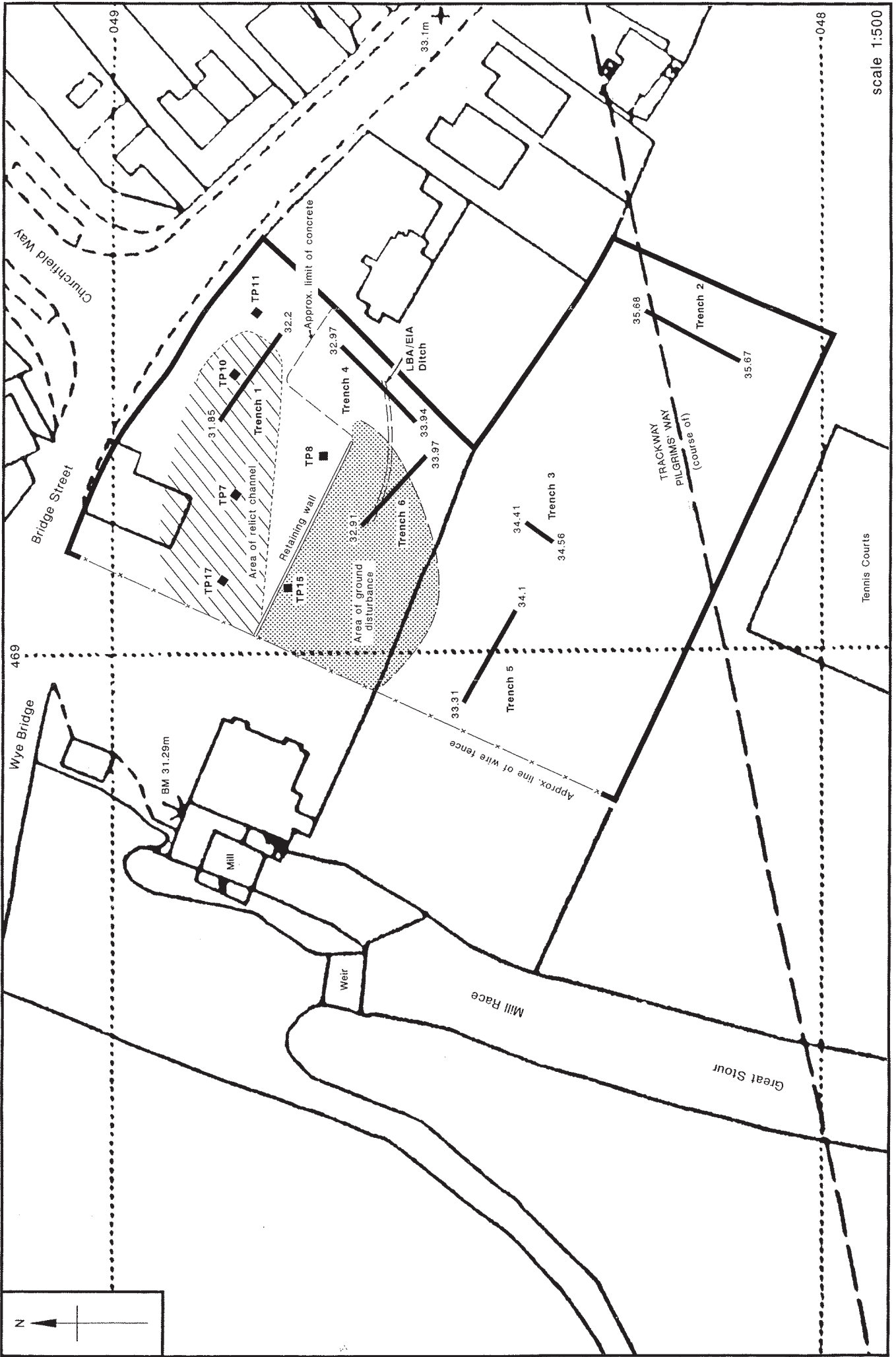
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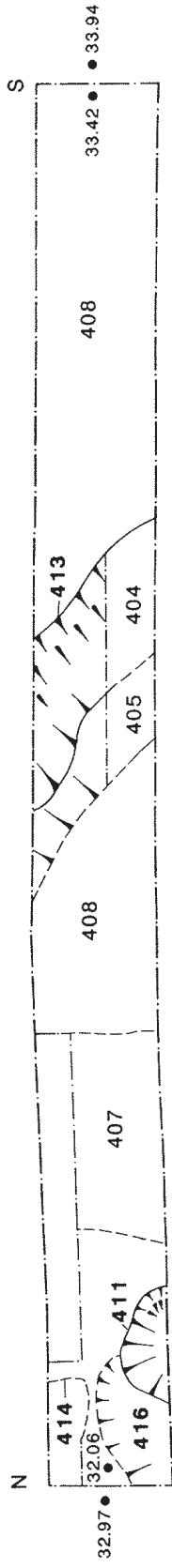
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figure 1



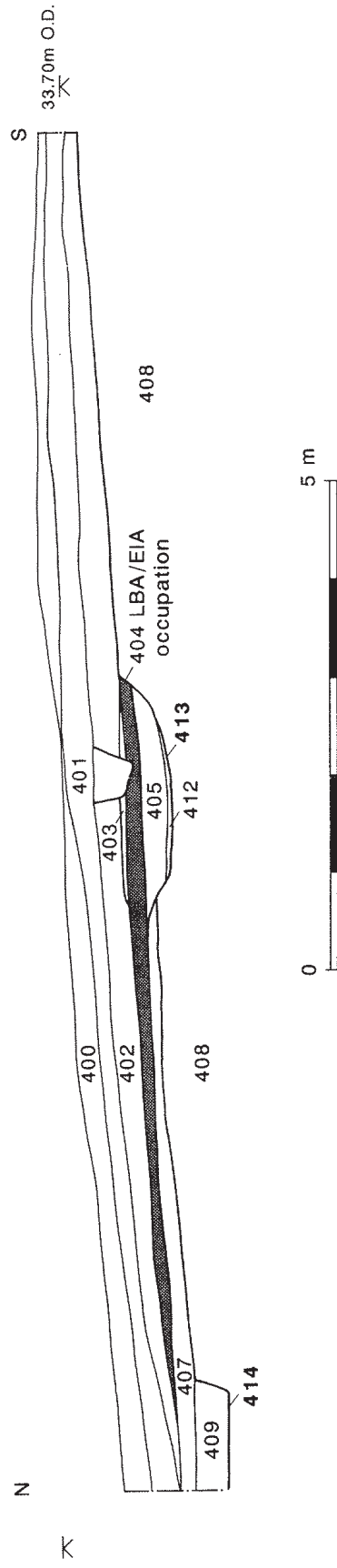


Trench 4: Plan



● Levels in m O.D.

Section



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