

Leavesden Aerodrome, Abbots Langley

Watford, Hertfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation

Interim Report

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
March 1998**

LEAVESDEN AERODROME, ABBOTTS LANGLEY

WATFORD, HERTFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

OS GRID TL 097 003

Planning Ref: 92/0221/8

INTERIM REPORT

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LEAVESDEN AERODROME (WALA 98),
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HERTFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

INTERIM REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The evaluation (Fig. 1) was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit between the 9th and 16th of March 1998. The site lies at the eastern end of the former Leavesden Aerodrome, now Leavesden Studios at Abbots Langley near Watford, Hertfordshire (TL 097003). The surrounding area is still occupied by former Aerodrome buildings and associated runways. The areas evaluated are presently grassland.
- 1.2 Two areas were investigated (Fig. 2) comprising a total of 15 trenches:
 - Area 1**, Trenches 1-10 were excavated within an area of proposed residential development which is situated west of Flight Shed 2 and south of the former runway.
 - Area 2**, Trenches 12-15 were excavated to the north of Area 1 within the area of the proposed Business Park.
- 1.3 In addition, Trench 11 was excavated to further determine the orientation and extent of the Late Iron Age features identified in Trench 2.
- 1.4 The geology consists of glacial plateau gravels overlying chalk bedrock (Geological Survey Sheet 238).

2 PREVIOUS WORK

2.1 Desktop assessment

- 2.1.1 A previous desktop study of the site did not identify any archaeological features or finds within the aerodrome (Hughes 1994, *Leavesden Aerodrome, Archaeological Desk Study*).

3 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

3.1 Late Iron Age (Figs 2 and 3)

- 3.1.1 An area of Late Iron Age activity was identified in the north-western corner of the proposed residential development. Two Late Iron Age ditches (204 and 219) and a posthole or small pit (211) were identified in Trench 2 and are summarised in Table 1.
- 3.1.2 An additional trench (Trench 11) identified another ditch (1104) which was not excavated but the dimensions and alignment suggest it is a continuation of Ditch 219 in Trench 2.
- 3.1.3 The character and size of Ditch 219 in Trench 2 and Ditch 1104 in Trench 11 indicate that they may form the western side of a curvilinear enclosure/boundary which continues towards the aerodrome runway.

3.14 The majority of the pottery (151 sherds) were recovered from Ditch 204 in Trench 2. The sherds were large and associated with fragments of fired clay, charcoal and charred grain. The character of the deposit and the quantity of artefacts suggest it represents a deliberate deposit of domestic (and possibly industrial) waste.

Table 1. Summary of Late Iron Age features in Trenches 2 and 11

Type	Context	Trench	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Findings
Ditch	204	2	1.10	0.55	151 sherds of Late Iron Age Pottery. Fired clay
?Tree bole	208	2		0.22	-
Posthole/pit	211	2	0.62	0.25	1 sherd of ?Iron Age pottery
Ditch	219	2	1.93	1.03	1 sherd of Roman pottery
Ditch	1104	11	1.97	-	-

3.2 Medieval

3.2.1 Two large pits, interpreted as quarry pits, were excavated in Trenches 8 and 10. The quarry pit in Trench 10 was in excess of 1.44m in depth and could not be fully excavated under safe conditions. Pottery from the features has been dated to the medieval period.

3.3 Post-Medieval

3.3.1 A ditch was located at the east end of Trench 3, this was orientated north to south and contained a sherd of post-medieval tile. This ditch is probably an old field boundary which predates the aerodrome.

3.4 Modern

3.4.1 There were only limited indications of modern disturbance. All the trenches (with the exception of Trenches 14 and 15) contained an earlier ploughsoil which was overlain by the present topsoil. In Trenches 14 and 15 the topsoil directly overlay the natural gravel and their location adjacent to the former runway may indicate landscaping associated with its construction.

3.4.2 The results of the evaluation and of geotechnical trial pits suggest that most modern disturbance is limited to the area of Flight Shed 2.

4 THE POTTERY AND FIRED CLAY by Paul Booth

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The evaluation produced a small quantity of finds with the exception of material from a single ditch context (206) in Trench 2. The ceramic material was scanned briefly and recorded using codes employed in the OAU Iron Age and Roman Pottery Recording System. An approximate date was given for each context group.

4.1.2 The pottery represented by period was as follows:

Table 2. Summary of pottery from site by period

Period	Number of sherds	Weight (g)
Late Iron Age	151	2672g
?Iron Age	1	11g
?Roman	3	22g
Medieval.	3	22g
Post-medieval	1	9g
Uncertain	3	5g
Total	162	2741g

4.1.3 The Roman sherds were in two fabrics, a reduced sandy ware (R30 in the OAU system notation) and an oxidised sandy ware (O30). A jar rim was present in both R30 and O30, but a second R30 (body) sherd was very small and could possibly have been of medieval date.

4.1.4 Probable Medieval sherds came from Trench 8, one in a sandy oxidised fabric (from quarry pit fill 808) and two in a rough flint-tempered fabric (from quarry pit fill 806) including one with an irregular beaded rim.

4.1.5 In addition there was a single piece of post-medieval tile from a ditch context (305) in Trench 3.

4.2 The Late Iron Age pottery and fired clay

4.2.1 All the material of this date came from a single ditch context (206) in Trench 2. The pottery was dominated by grog-tempered (E80) fabrics but fine and medium fine sand-tempered fabrics (E20 and E30) were also present. Many of the sherds in these fabrics were wheel-thrown, but not all. Nonetheless the great majority of the sherds in these fabrics appears to be of 'Belgic type' in terms of their manufacture.

4.2.2 Only six or seven vessels were represented by rim sherds, but most of these were also consistent with a 'Belgic' repertoire. The principal exception was a large flat rim sherd of a simple barrel shaped form, with oblique roughly scored decoration running right to the lip of the rim. Other forms were mostly jars or jars/bowls (vessels of which insufficient of the profile survived for the height: rim diameter ratio to be judged accurately). Decoration was generally scarce on these vessels. A number of butt beakers were indicated by decorated body sherds, however. These had vertical and horizontal burnished or lightly incised lines, and one example had an applied boss in addition to burnished line decoration.

4.2.3 A collection of fired clay fragments (35 pieces, 1551 g) recovered from ditch context 206 are of Late Iron Age date. Many of the fragments were conjoining to form rectangular plates with one smooth face and one rough face. The smooth face exhibited a greater degree of burning than the rough side. It is likely that these clay plates formed part of the structure of an oven or kiln.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 The concentration of pottery and large sherd weight from Ditch 204 suggest there is little or no post-depositional disturbance or redeposition, and demonstrates considerable potential for recovering a large assemblage of Late Iron Age pottery, as well as identifying the types of activity on the site. The quantity of pottery from Trench 2 indicates that there is domestic

settlement in the immediate vicinity. A possible posthole was identified in Trench 2 which also produced Iron Age pottery. The Roman pottery from Ditch 219 may indicate that settlement continued into the Roman period. Overall, the pottery present suggests occupation on the site in the transitional period from the Late Iron Age and into the beginning of the Roman period.

5 THE FLINT by Theresa Durden

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 A total of 12 pieces of struck flint was recovered from Trenches 1, 6, 8, 10 and 12. One piece of burnt unworked flint (61 g) was collected from Trench 6.

5.2 Description

5.1 The flint is grey/brown with occasional light cortication and is clearly gravel derived, with a worn, buff cortex. The struck flint consists entirely of broad, unmodified flakes apart from two flakes with a small amount of edge retouch from Trenches 1 and 8.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 As the number of pieces is so small and the flint is apparently residual, dating is difficult, but a broadly later Neolithic/Bronze Age date can be suggested.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL

6.1 A bulk environmental sample from Ditch 204, which contained Late Iron Age pottery and fired clay, produced charred remains. The remains were dominated by wood charcoal, probably used as a fuel. A small amount of charred grain and a small number of burnt weed seeds in the sample demonstrate that these materials are preserved at the site. Recent material (modern roots, insects and coal) was observed in very small quantities.

6.2 Molluscs were very rare in the processed sample, and the great majority of these were recent burrowing types. These have little potential for palaeo-environmental reconstruction.

6.3 Bone was absent from the site and this may reflect the acidic nature of the glacially derived drift geology. The lack of hand-collected bone was supported by its absence from the processed bulk sample.

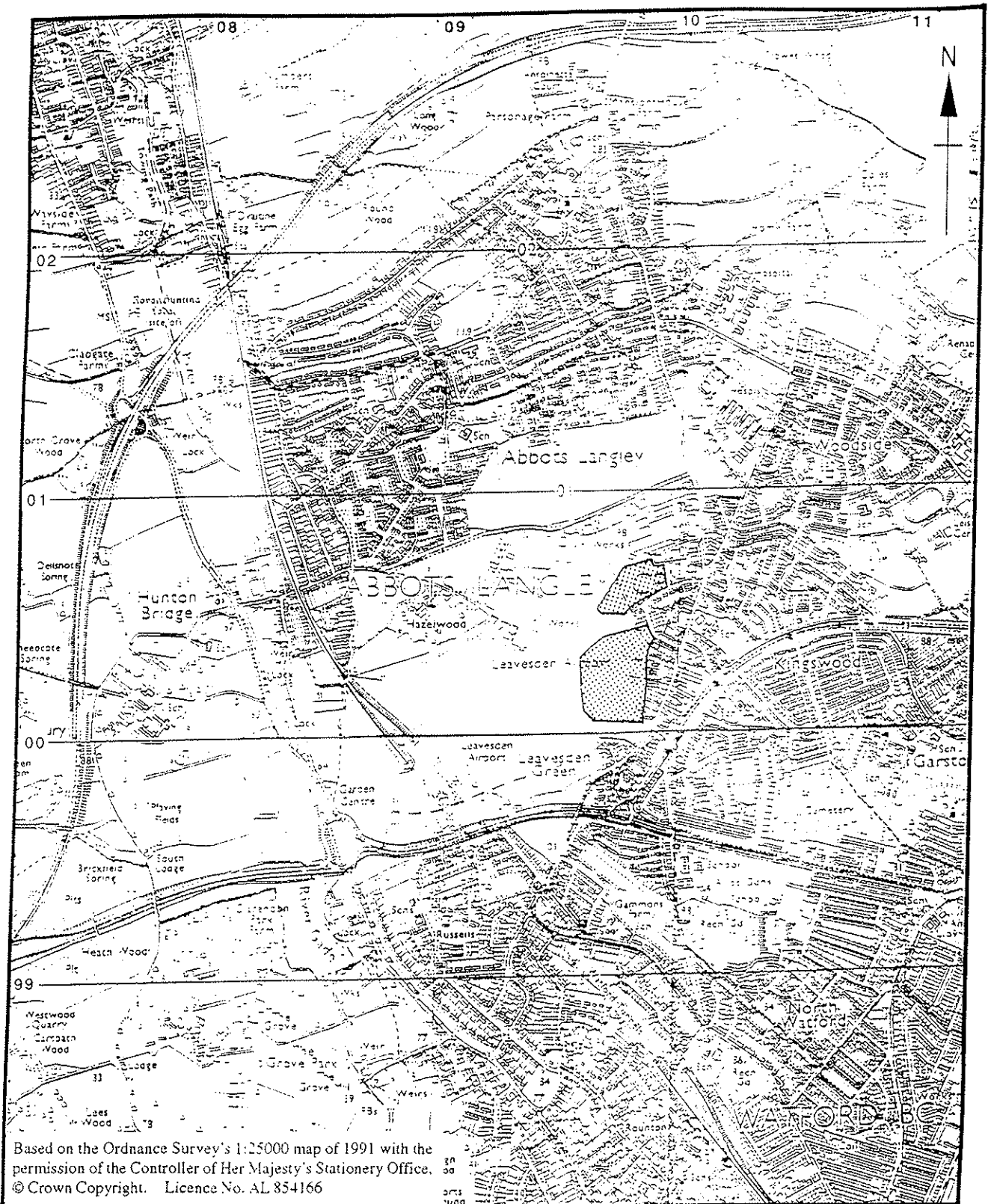


Figure 1 : Site Location

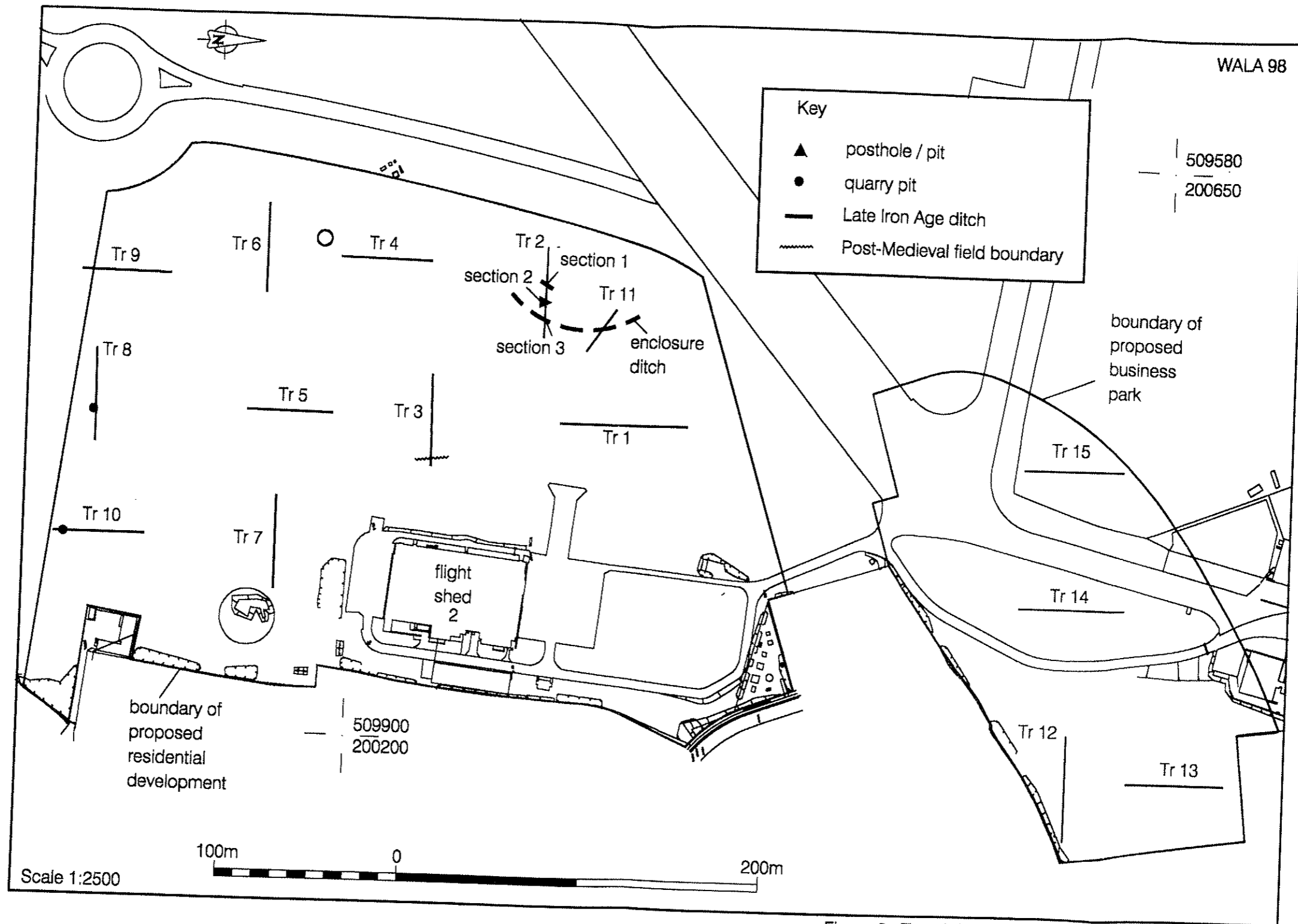
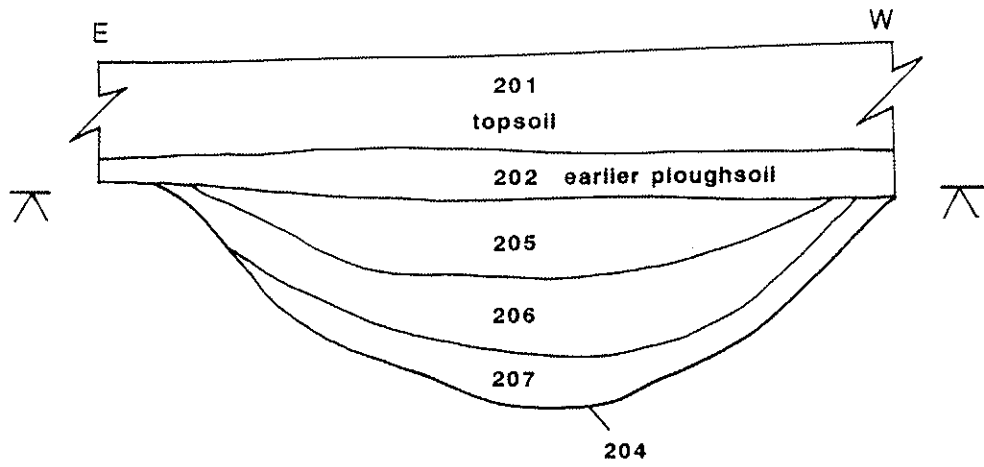
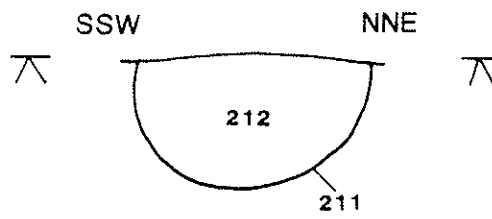


Figure 2 : Trench location and Archaeological Interpretation

Trench 2 Section 1



Trench 2 Section 2



Trench 2 Section 3

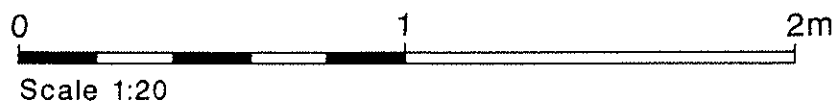
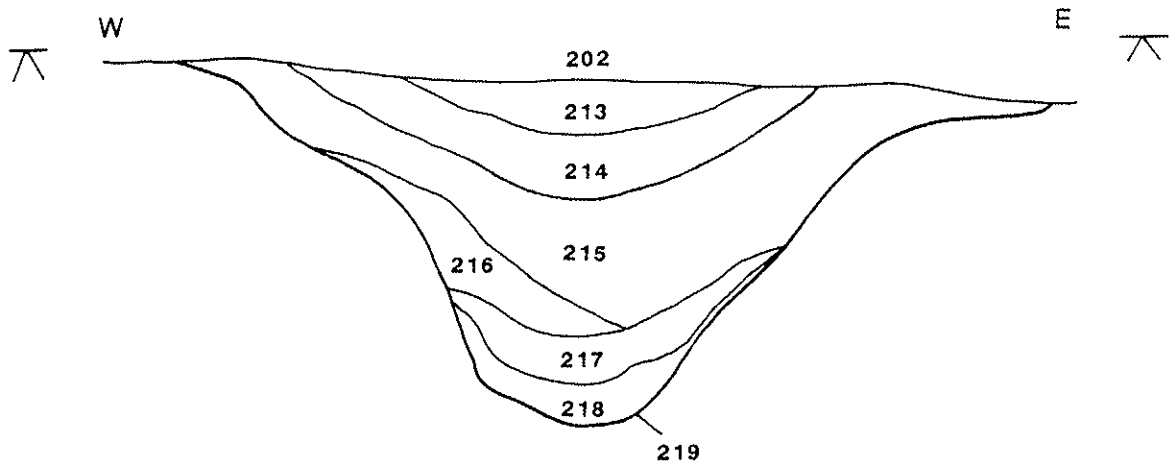


Figure 3