

Worton Rectory Farm  
Recycling Plant  
Yarnton, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 47201 11308

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
May 1996

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## 1 Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a trial-trench evaluation on the above named site in May 1996. The work was carried out on behalf of Worton Farms Limited in connection with a proposal to build a recycling plant. The evaluation established that well preserved archaeological deposits survived within the area of the proposed development, representing early Iron Age settlement activity.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 Worton Farms Limited propose to build a site office, weighbridge and recovering facility to expand their existing recycling plant, which lies to the south of the village of Yarnton, Oxfordshire. The site of the proposed development lies within an area of known archaeological interest. Therefore, as part of the conditions of planning for this development, Worton Farms Ltd commissioned the Oxford Archaeological Unit to undertake an archaeological evaluation on the site. The aim of the evaluation was to establish the existence, significance and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits which might survive.
- 2.2 The field work took place over a period of two days in May 1996 and was carried out according to specifications agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service.

## 3 Archaeological Background

- 3.1 The area of proposed development lies adjacent to sites of known archaeological interest, as outlined in the brief for archaeological field evaluation set by the Oxfordshire County Archaeological service and described in *Yarnton-Cassington Project: a Neolithic to medieval landscape*, a research design prepared by the Oxford Archaeological Unit for English Heritage in November 1994, a copy of which is lodged in the County SMR. Archaeological remains of all periods from the Neolithic to Saxon have been recovered in the vicinity.
- 3.2 The two most relevant archaeological sites which lie in close proximity to the proposed development are Yarnton Worton Rectory Farm (Hey 1993) to the south-east and Cresswell Field (Hey and Bell 1996) to the west (see Fig. 1). An excavation undertaken by the OAU on the Yarnton Worton Rectory Farm site in 1990 discovered a complex sequence of intercutting features representing activity associated with a long-lived settlement dating from the

late Bronze Age through to the middle Saxon period (see Fig. 2 for plan of excavation). The OAU's excavation on Cresswell field in 1995 recorded a dense scatter of features, predominately representing occupation activity from the late Bronze Age through to the middle Iron Age, but domestic and burial evidence from the Neolithic and earlier Bronze date and Saxon occupation evidence was also found (see Fig. 3 for plan of excavation).

## **4 Location and Topography**

- 4.1 The area of investigation lies on second terrace gravel, on land immediately adjacent to the ARC Cassington gravel extraction pit and currently forms part of a hard-standing yard of the recycling plant (Fig. 1). The topography of the surrounding area suggests that a palaeochannel may run through the western end of the site.
- 4.2 Part of the site lies over the 19th century railway line from Oxford to Fairford which is known, in part, to have been constructed within a cutting (Dawkins "Traces of the early Britons" in *The Gentleman's Magazine and Scientific Review*, London August 1862, 144). Prior to the construction of the railway this area was arable land.

## **5 Methodology**

- 5.1 The development in the east half of the site will utilize existing buildings and services. Therefore, the only area of the proposed development that could be evaluated at this stage was the western segment, where the site office and weighbridge are to be constructed. Two trenches were excavated in this area, and these were located in regard to the position of the proposed buildings and the necessity to avoid existing services (Fig. 4).
- 5.2 The trenches were excavated down to the top of the first significant archaeological deposits using a 360° mechanical exactor, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The trench sections and exposed surfaces were then cleaned by hand, and the various archaeological deposit were described, drawn and photographed. Sections were then excavated through a representative sample of the exposed archaeological features in order to assess their character, date and state of preservation.

## **6 Results**

- 6.1 *Trench 1* (see Fig. 5a for trench plan and section)

This trench was 15 m long x 1.85 m wide and was located in the south-west corner of the site in an east-west alignment.

- 6.2 The trench was excavated to depth of between 0.80 m to 1 m below the

present ground surface. The top of the natural subsoil (120) was only visible in a few small areas in the bottom of the trench, having been mostly cut away by a series of discrete and intercutting soil-filled features. Three shallow north-south aligned gullies (104, 106 and 108) ran parallel through the west end of the trench, and small quantities of early Iron Age pottery, burnt stone, slag and animal bone was recovered from each of these features. Immediately to the east of the gullies lay a series of intercutting pits, ditches and postholes (110, 112, 114, 116 and 118), and these features also produced significant quantities of pottery, burnt stone, animal bone and charcoal.

6.3 In the remaining area of the trench layers of silt and clay (102 and 121) sloped away to the east, apparently slumping into the top of a large deep feature. This feature was not excavated further at this stage due to the depth of excavation and also because of the consideration that the depth of the foundations of the proposed building would not penetrate below this level. However, this feature coincides with a linear depression which can be observed in the topography in the area immediately to the north, and it seems likely that this feature represents the line of a palaeochannel (see Fig. 3 for projected line of channel).

6.4 All of the features in this trench were sealed beneath a thick deposit of silt loam (101) containing frequent sherds of Iron Age pottery. This deposit appeared to be a buried ploughsoil and the existence of the pottery within it is the result of ploughing over the top of the features. Although this layer contained very little material later than Roman date it was almost certainly a post-medieval ploughsoil, representing the original ground surface prior to the construction of the railway line. The ploughsoil was buried beneath a thick deposit of ballast material ("reject") (100) which forms the present yard surface of the recycling plant.

6.5 *Trench 2* (see Fig. 5b for trench plan and section)

This trench was 7 m long x 1.85 m wide and lay east-west within the footprint of the proposed site office.

6.6 Where it had not been truncated by archaeological features, the top of the natural subsoil (201) was located at an average depth of 0.80 m below the present ground surface. Archaeological features existed in this trench of a similar density and character to those seen in Trench 1, consisting of a small number of pits, postholes and gullies (205, 206, 208 and 210) cut by a wide but shallow curving ditch (204), which extended through the length of the trench. All these features produced varying quantities of early Iron Age pottery, animal bone and burnt stone. These features were also sealed beneath a buried ploughsoil (212), but this was different in character to the ploughsoil in Trench 1 and was not as thick. This possibly represents different land use to either side of the palachannel which formed a natural boundary. The ploughsoil was buried beneath the ballast material (200) which formed the present yard surface.

## **7 Comment on Validity of Results**

- 7.1 The abundance of the archaeological features which lay within the two evaluation trenches, and the large quantities of artefacts recovered from them, mean that the date and character of these deposits was clearly established. The extent and character of the Iron Age occupation in this area is already well understood from the excavations undertaken as part of the Yarnton-Cassington Project. The results of the evaluation can therefore be regarded with a considerable degree of confidence.

## **8 The Pottery (by Paul Booth)**

- 8.1 The evaluation produced 104 sherds of pottery, of which 89 were from Trench 1. The great majority of this material was of early Iron Age date. Five sherds were tentatively assigned to the middle Iron Age on the basis of their fabric, but it is possible that most of these were also of early Iron Age date. Three Roman sherds were recovered, two from a ploughsoil (101) and one from a gully fill (203). It is likely, however, that this last sherd was intrusive from ploughing action, and the same explanation is preferred to account for a fragment of asbestos from a ditch fill 202.
- 8.2 As elsewhere at Yarnton on the gravel terrace, the pottery was in good condition, with surfaces well preserved and edges unabraded. Many of the sherds were quite substantial; even some of the material from ploughsoil 101 consisted of large unabraded sherds which had presumably only been disturbed once or twice and had clearly not been subject to continual turning in the ploughsoil.
- 8.3 The bulk of the early Iron Age pottery was in shell-tempered fabrics. The inclusions ranged from coarse to very fine. A few sherds in fine sand-tempered fabrics also occurred in diagnostic early Iron Age forms. Forms, where recognised (there were nine rim sherds), were of characteristic angled forms, those in coarser fabrics being more slack-shouldered than the fine ware examples. Seven decorated sherds were recorded, all from Trench 1. Three of these had fingertip impressions on the shoulder (one in two rows, apparently with white inlay), two were incised, one had an impressed ring stamp and one sherd may have been 'haematite'-coated.
- 8.4 The material is representative of that seen elsewhere in the Yarnton complex. The very heavy early Iron Age emphasis in the assemblage is more similar to YCF than YWRF overall, but a concentration of early Iron Age activity was noted at the west end of the latter site. The range of fabrics and forms contains little that is new, but the ?inlaid fingertip decorated sherd is noteworthy. With one possible exception in each case, neither the middle Iron Age nor Roman sherds occurred in stratified contexts. All of these sherds could have been introduced by ploughing from adjacent areas where occupation of these dates was extensive.

## **9 Other Finds**

- 9.1 These consisted of fragments of fired clay (all but one piece from Trench 1), four flint ?flakes (all from Trench 2), small slag and copper-alloy fragments from the early Iron Age gully fill 105, and animal bone. There were some 83 fragments of the latter, occurring in most contexts which produced pottery.
- 9.2 A copper-alloy, Charles I "Royal" Farthing dating from the 1630/40's was recovered from the machine spoil from Trench 2, and this almost certainly came from the buried ploughsoil 212.

## **10 Discussion and Conclusions**

- 10.1 The evaluation has established that archaeological deposits, predominately dating from the early Iron Age, exist within the area of the proposed development, and, perhaps surprisingly given the recent history of the site, these survive relatively undisturbed. However, some truncation of the features by ploughing has taken place, reflected in the occurrence of pottery and other material within the ploughsoil above the features. The features discovered consist of a scatter of pits and postholes, truncated by a slightly later phase of enclosure ditches and gullies. The character of these features, and the existence of domestic debris within them, indicate that they are associated with settlement activity, and it is apparent that several phases of activity are present.
- 10.2 This activity clearly represents the continuation of the settlement observed in the Yarnton Worton Rectory Farm excavation, and the features discovered in the evaluation are similar in date to those which occurred in the north-west area of the excavation. However, whereas the area of early Iron Age activity in the north-west corner of the YWRF excavation consisted almost entirely of pits, the features found in the evaluation also comprised ditches and gullies, suggesting a different activity area within the early Iron Age settlement.
- 10.3 The archaeological remains uncovered in the evaluation trenches makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the extent of the early Iron Age occupation at Yarnton and the range of activities carried out upon it.

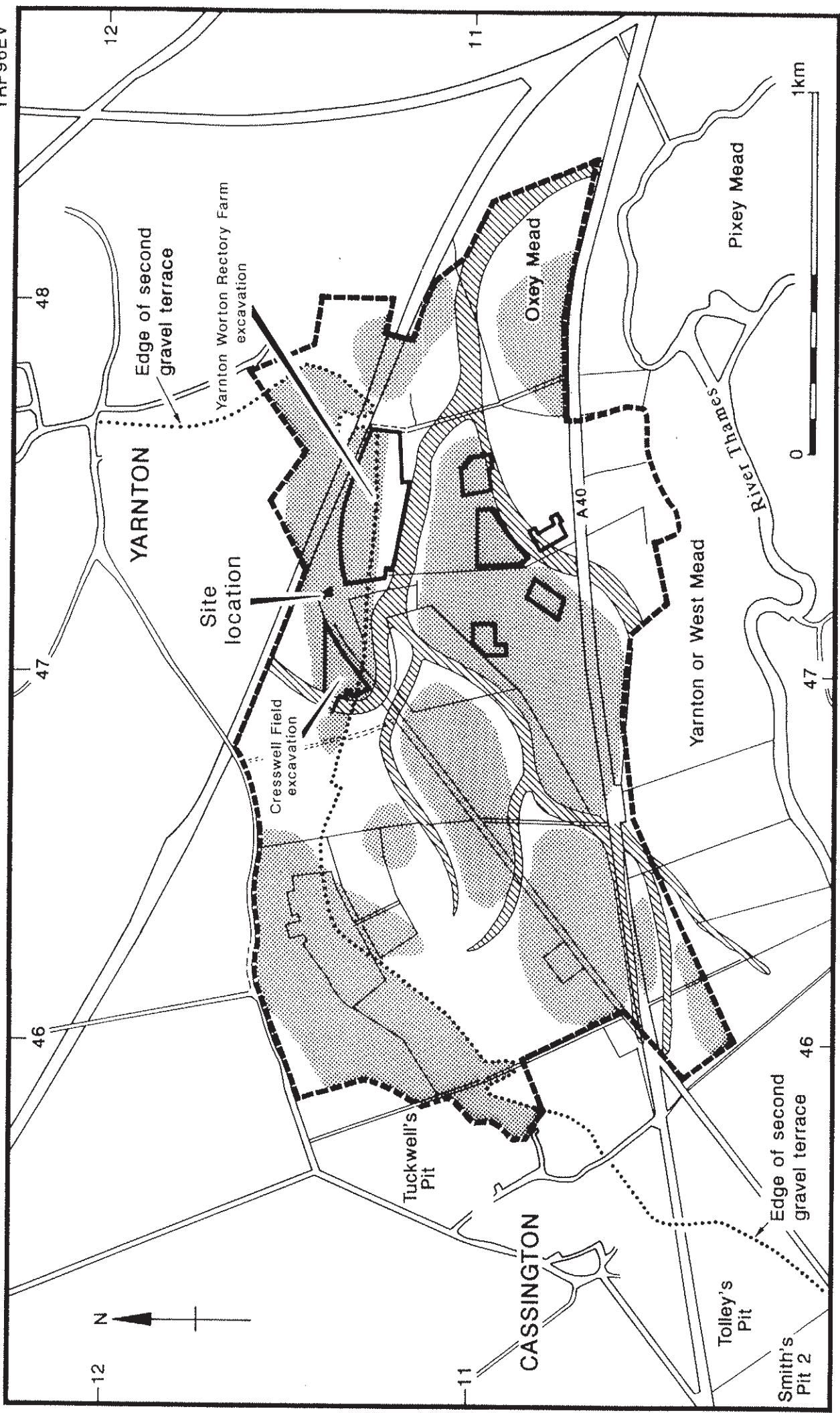
C Bell  
OAU  
May 1996

**Table of Contexts and Finds**

| TRENCH | CXT | TYPE                    | WIDTH   | DEPTH   | COMMENTS                                 | FINDS  |
|--------|-----|-------------------------|---------|---------|--|--|
| 1      | 100 | Ballast surface         |         | 0.60 m  | Modern                                   |  |
|        | 101 | Buried ploughsoil       |         | 0.40 m  | Seals all of the archaeological features | 44 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 2 sherds of Roman pot, 38 frags of animal bone, 5 lumps of fired clay, 2 pieces of slag, burnt stone and 1 Fe. obj. |
|        | 102 | Buried ploughsoil       |         | 0.25 m  | Slumping into top of palaeochannel ?     | 2 sherds of early Iron Age pot   |
|        | 103 | Fill of gully 104       |         | 0.13 m  |  | 9 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 9 frags of animal bone and 1 lump of fired clay  |
|        | 104 | Gully                   | 0.50 m  | 0.13 m  | N-S aligned                              |  |
|        | 105 | Fill of gully 106       |         | 0.13 m  |  | 8 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 8 frags of animal bone, 4 lumps of fired clay and 2 pieces of slag   |
|        | 106 | Gully                   | 0.70 m  | 0.13 m  | N-s aligned                              |  |
|        | 107 | Fill of gully 108       |         | 0.15 m  |  | 4 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 15 frags of animal bone and 2 lumps of fired clay  |
|        | 108 | Gully                   | 0.50 m  | 0.15 m  | N-S aligned                              |  |
|        | 109 | Upper fill of ditch 110 |         | 0.30 m  |  | 7 sherds of early Iron Age pot and 1 frag of animal bone   |
|        | 110 | Ditch                   | 1.00 m  | 0.50 m  | N-S aligned                              |  |
|        | 111 | Fill of ditch 112       |         | 0.40 m  |  | 10 sherds of early Iron Age pot and 6 frags of animal bone   |
|        | 112 | Ditch                   | >0.70 m | 0.40 m  | N-S aligned                              |  |
|        | 113 | Fill of posthole 114    |         |         | Not excavated                            |  |
|        | 114 | Posthole                | 0.30 m  |         | Truncated by later features              |  |
|        | 115 | Fill of posthole 116    |         |         | Not excavated                            |  |
|        | 116 | Posthole                | 0.30 m  |         | Truncated by later features              |  |
|        | 117 | Fill of pit 118         |         | >0.10 m | Only partially excavated                 | 2 sherds of early Iron Age pot   |

| TRENCH | CXT | TYPE                    | WIDTH   | DEPTH   | COMMENTS   | FINDS   |
|--------|-----|-------------------------|---------|---------|--|---|
|        | 118 | Pit                     | 0.85 m  | >0.10 m | Truncated by later features                            |   |
|        | 119 | Lower fill of ditch 110 |         | 0.20 m  |  |   |
|        | 120 | Natural subsoil         |         |         | Light orange clay silt                                 |   |
|        | 121 | Layer of clay silt      |         | >0.10 m | Slumping into top of palaeochannel ?                   |   |
|        |     |                         |         |         |  |   |
| 2      | 200 | Ballast surface         |         | 0.80 m  | Modern   |   |
|        | 201 | Natural subsoil         |         |         | Light orange clay silt                                 |   |
|        | 202 | Fill of ditch 204       |         | 0.12 m  | Truncated by later ploughing                           | 3 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 3 frags of animal bone, 3 flint flakes, 1 lump of fired clay (1 intrusive ? fragment of asbestos) |
|        | 203 | Fill of gully 205       |         | 0.20 m  |  | 4 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 1 (intrusive?) sherd of Roman pot, 2 frags of animal bone   |
|        | 204 | Fill of gully           | 1.50 m  | 0.12 m  | Part of ditched enclosure ?                            |   |
|        | 205 | Gully                   | 0.40 m  | 0.20 m  | N-S aligned  |   |
|        | 206 | Small pit               | 0.50 m  | 0.30 m  | Truncated by 204                                       |   |
|        | 207 | Fill of pit 206         |         | 0.30 m  | Charcoal rich  | 5 sherds of early Iron Age pot, 1 frag of animal bone and 1 flint flake   |
|        | 208 | Gully                   | >0.10 m | 0.10 m  | N-S aligned, only partly within the area of excavation |   |
|        | 209 | Fill of gully 208       |         | 0.10 m  |  |   |
|        | 210 | Feature (pit ?)         | 0.30 m  | >0.20 m | Much truncated by later features                       |   |
|        | 211 | Fill of feature 210     |         | >0.20 m |  | 3 sherds of early Iron Age pot  |
|        | 212 | Buried ploughsoil       |         | 0.20 m  | Overlies the archaeological features                   |   |









-  Excavated areas
-  Evaluated area
-  Palaeochannel
-  Gravel

Figure 1



Figure 2

YARNTON CRESSWELL FIELD EXCAVATION

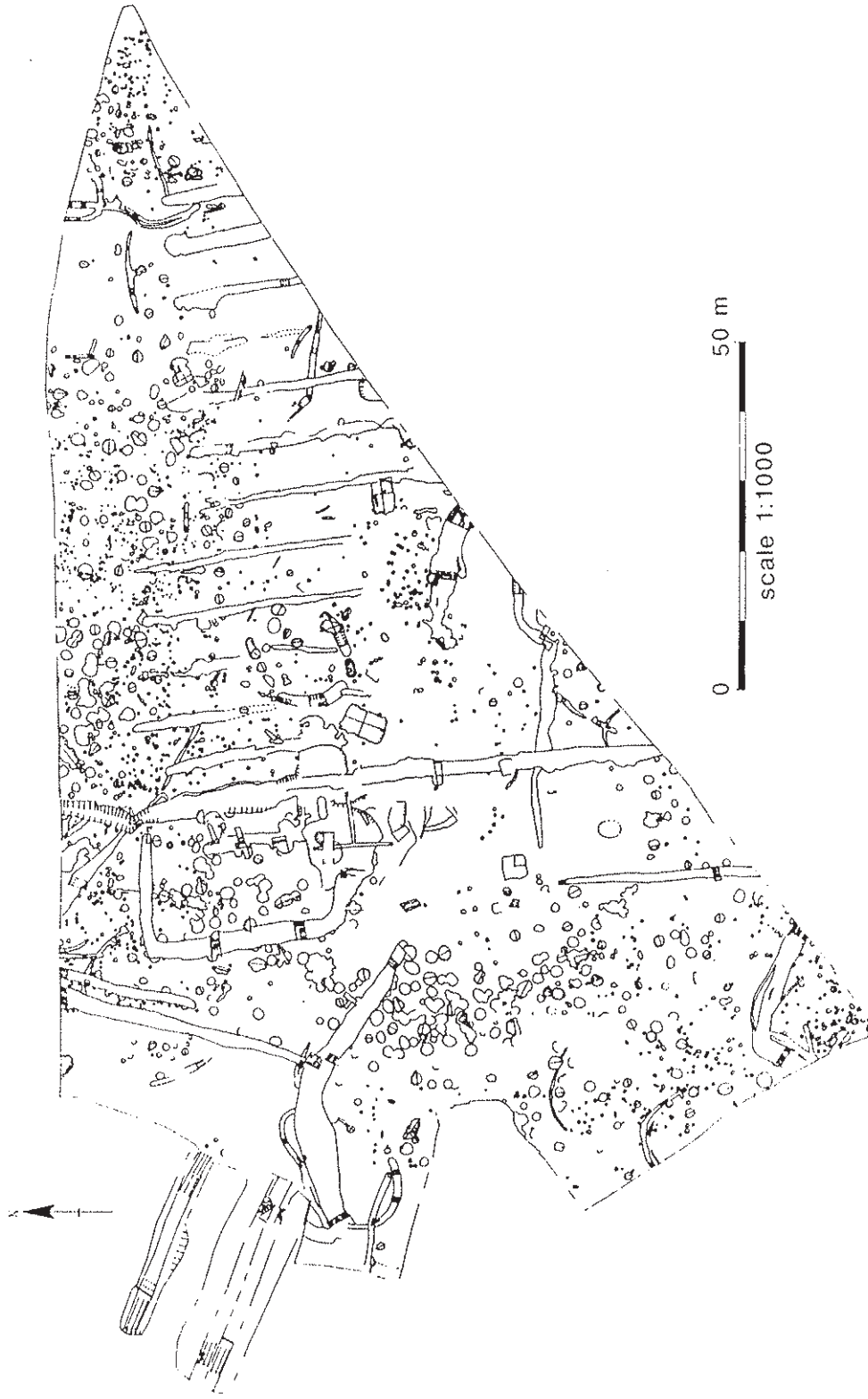


Figure 3

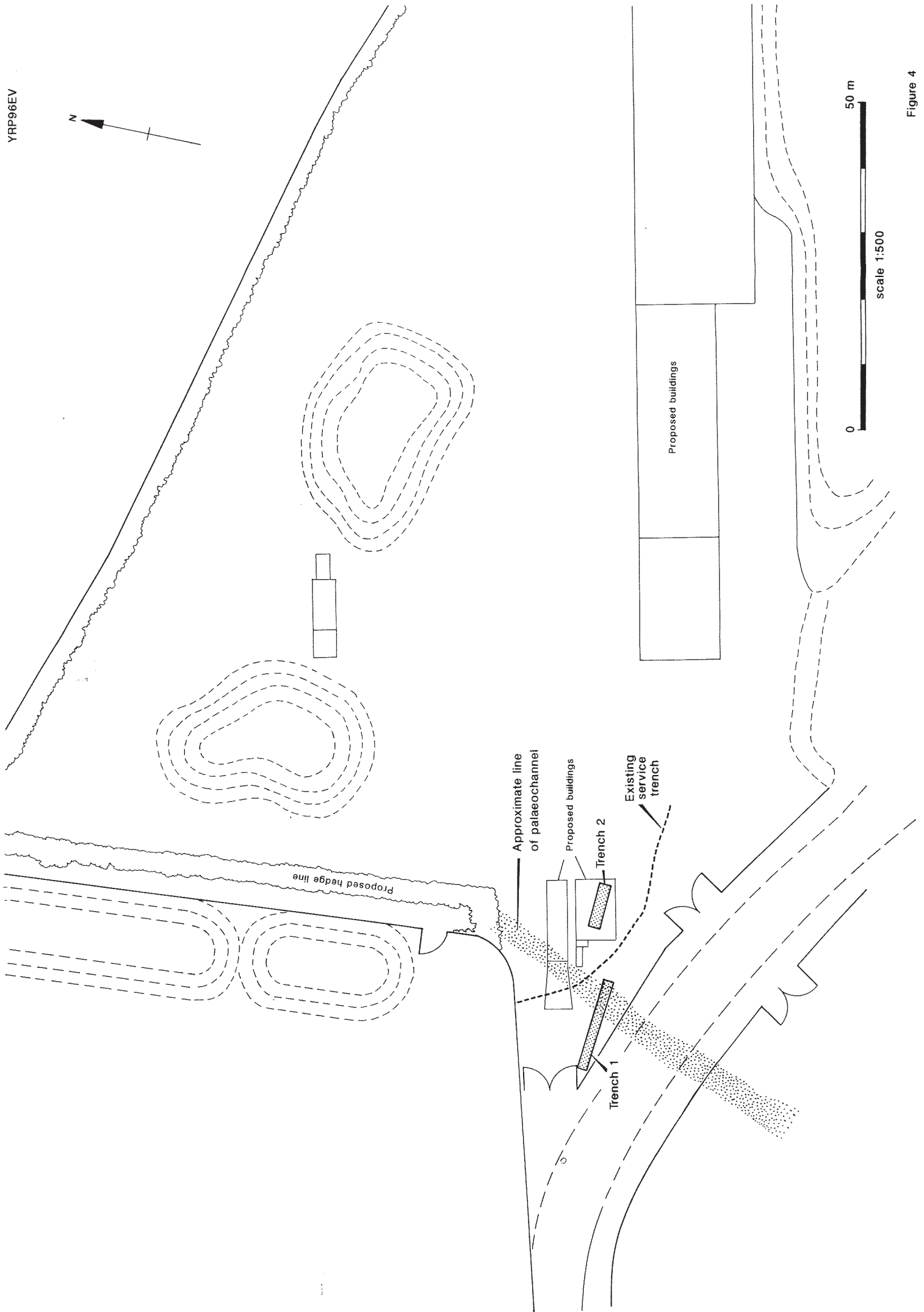
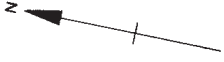


Figure 4

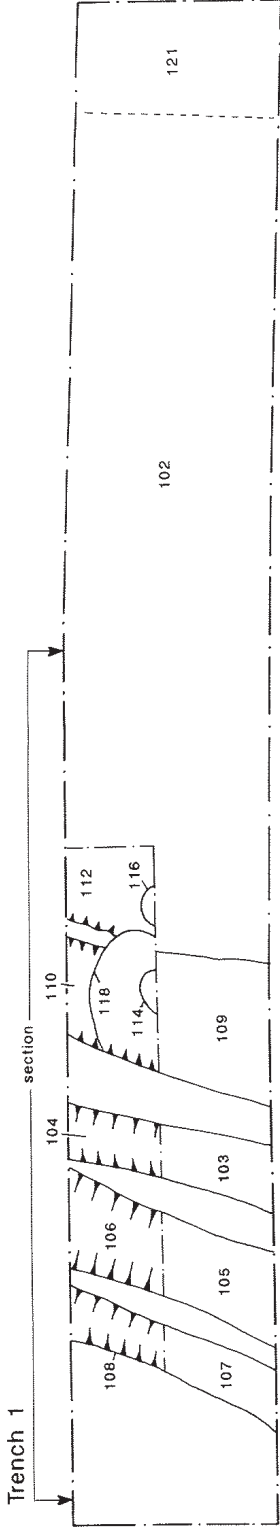
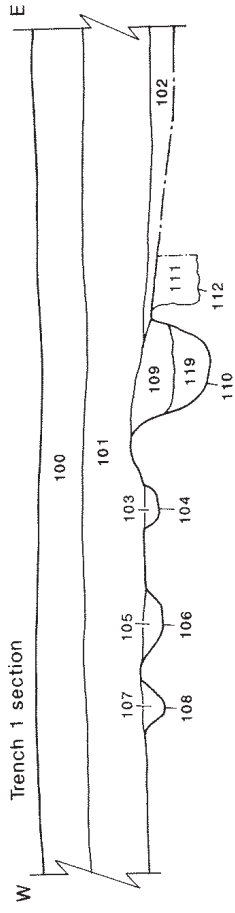


Figure 5a



0 5 m  
scale 1:50

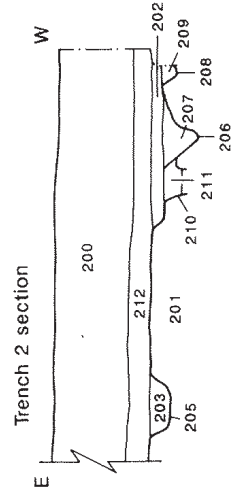
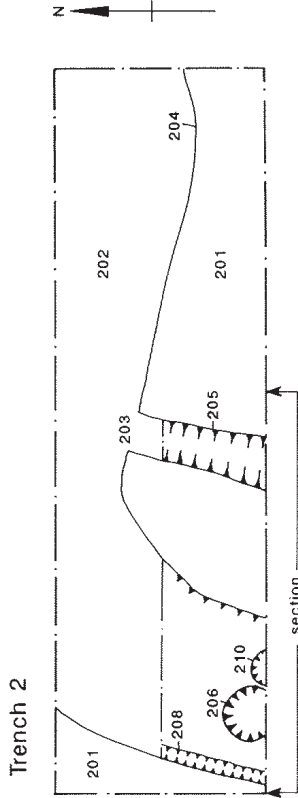


Figure 5b



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