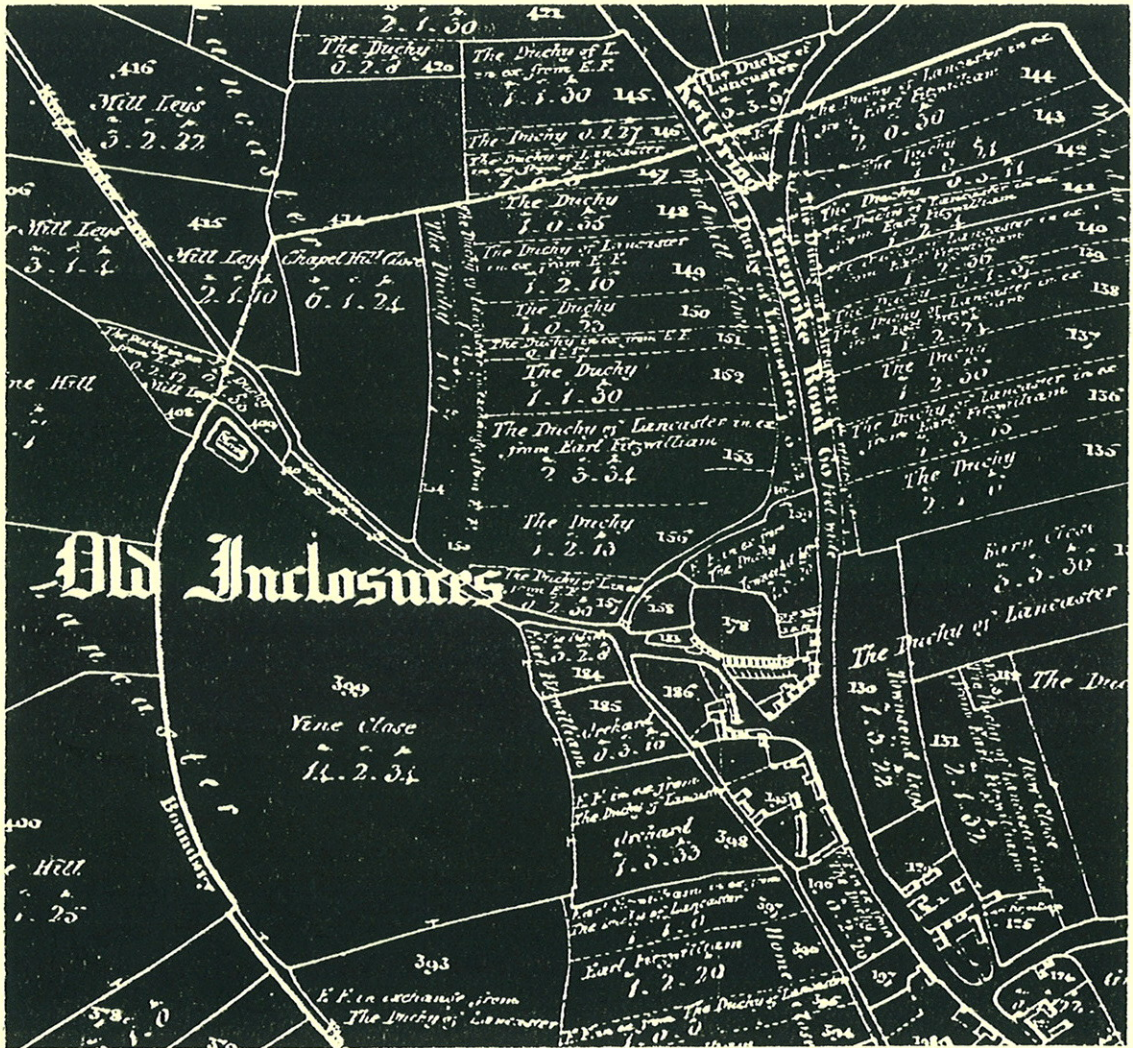


Walnut Tree Station, Higham Ferrers, Northants.

NGR SP 9595 6915

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit
January 1997

**WALNUT TREE STATION, HIGHAM FERRERS
NORTHANTS
(SP 9595 6915)**

Archaeological Watching Brief

LIST OF CONTENTS

Summary

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Background**
 - 2.1 Archaeological Background
 - 2.2 Cartographic Background
- 3 Methodology**
- 4 Results**
- 5 Finds**
- 6 Discussion**
- 7 Bibliography**

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location Plan
- Fig. 2 Trial Pit Location Plan
- Fig. 3 Trial Pit 7: Section and Plan
- Fig. 4 1737 Estate Map
1839 Enclosure Award Map
- Fig. 5 1888 O.S Map

WALNUT TREE STATION, HIGHAM FERRERS

Archaeological Watching Brief

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeological Unit during a geotechnical survey of the former Walnut Tree petrol service station by Thorburn Colquhoun (consulting engineers) for the Duchy of Lancaster on the 13th-14th January 1997. A total of eleven geotechnical trial pits were excavated under archaeological observation and recorded prior to backfilling. Definite archaeological remains, comprising of a thick medieval soil deposit and a limestone wall, were recorded in one trial pit with potential demolition debris from two others.

1 Introduction

The area investigated by geotechnical trial pitting lies towards the northern end of Higham Ferrers, Northants (Fig. 1). It is located to the west of North End at the junction with the Walnut Tree Green to the south and Kings Meadow Lane to the west (Fig. 2) and is situated at approximately 60.5m OD on the Northampton sand and ironstone.

The site is currently occupied by the disused Walnut Tree petrol station on North End and an area of rough grassland behind it on Kings Meadow Lane. The petrol station storage tanks had been removed and the area had previously been subject to a trial pit survey by Miller Environmental for the landowner (Shell). The Oxford Archaeological Unit were subsequently commissioned by the Duchy of Lancaster to undertake an archaeological watching brief of a further trial pit survey.

2 Background

2.1 Archaeological Background

The area at the northern end of Higham Ferrers is known to be rich in archaeological remains dating from the Roman to post-medieval period. Of particular interest for this site is the extensive early-late Saxon settlement in the field to the north partially excavated by the OAU in December 1995 (OAU 1996b). Earlier extensive evaluations of this area had suggested that the later Saxon settlement may continue towards the area of the watching brief (NAU 1991, OAU 1994).

Later medieval deposits have also been identified in the vicinity. These include a probable medieval building situated in the SE corner of the field to the north located during an evaluation by the OAU (OAU 1996a). The preservation of this building was surprisingly good with the survival of archaeological stratigraphy beneath the ploughsoil.

To the immediate north of the watching brief area the remains of a 15th-century pottery kiln was found during construction work in the grounds adjoining Messers Chamberlins factory (Hall 1974). Little of the kiln structure survived, but 11.5 cwt of broken pottery in the local hard course grey sandy fabric was found in the flue.

2.2 Cartographic Background

The 1737 Estate map (Fig. 4) shows very clearly that by this date two houses existed fronting onto Kings Meadow Lane, two onto the current Walnut Tree Green, and a row of four onto North End. Minor alterations were made to some of the properties by the time the 1789 Estate map was produced, but the main row of houses along the Walnut Tree Green and North End remained in use.

The 1839 Enclosure Award map shows the continued existence of these buildings with the addition of a terrace running from behind the North End properties to Kings Meadow Lane (Fig. 4). The buildings, shown on the 1839 map as fronting onto North End and around the Walnut Tree Green also appear on the O.S. map of 1888 with little alteration (Fig. 5).

3 Methodology

A total of twelve geotechnical trial pits averaging 0.75m x 2.5m were excavated to a depth of 2.8 - 4.5m deep (Fig. 2). Trial pit 11 was abandoned at a depth of 1.5m due to dangerous collapsing sides. All the pits were excavated under close archaeological supervision and any potentially significant deposits were left *in situ* in agreement with the site engineer. All the trial pit sections and *in situ* deposits were recorded, and finds recovered from the spoil as the archaeological deposits were excavated.

4 Results

Trial pits 1-4 produced no archaeological remains with only a thin dark silty topsoil 0.1m deep overlying the upper loose ironstone. In addition trial pit 2 had significant modern disturbance to a depth of 2m at its

southern end in the form of a large possible pit filled with the dark topsoil and brick, scrap metal and modern soft drink bottles.

Trial pits 5 and 6 were both located along the frontage to Kings Meadow Lane potentially over the position of two buildings indicated on the 1737 Estate map. Both had a deeper cover of silty topsoil to a maximum depth of 0.4m. In trial pit 5 this sealed a thin layer of limestone rubble in a greyish clay 0.13m deep. This was located at the southern end of the trial pit and lay directly on the ironstone natural. No finds were recovered from the deposit but its proximity to the street frontage suggests that it may be of archaeological significance. As a result it was left *in situ* at the southern end of the trench.

Trial pit 6 revealed a series of three probable archaeological layers in the section with a total depth of approximately 0.8m. Two distinctive limestone rubble and clay layers similar to that revealed in Pit 5 overlie a clay natural. The upper of the two contained charcoal and coke inclusions. These may relate to the partial demolition/modification of a building located here on the 1737 map but which had been altered by the 1789 map, although no finds were retrieved from the layers to confirm this date range. A thin compacted coke and ash surface overlay the rubble layers.

Trial pit 7 was located to the rear of the disused petrol station. Excavation of the pit revealed a series of modern and archaeological layers (Fig. 3). The earliest layer (7/2) consisted of a thick brown silty deposit with limestone and charred inclusions 0.5m deep lying directly on the ironstone natural. A total of two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from this layer providing a *terminus post quem* for the twelfth century. At the western end of the trial pit a single course of large roughly hewn limestone blocks (7/3) running roughly WNW-ESE overlay layer 7/2. A thin sandy soil (7/1) had accumulated against these blocks and contained glazed pottery, ceramic tile and burnt slate tile indicating a late post-medieval date. A final thin archaeological layer of grey clay sealed the wall and accumulated deposits. Modern limestone hard core make up and tarmac surfacing totalling 0.7m deep sealed the upper archaeological layer.

Trial pits 8-12 produced no archaeological deposits with only the modern tarmac surface and hard core make-up layers 1.5m deep lying directly onto the ironstone natural. The position of the former storage tanks was also very clear from the broken surface of the garage forecourt. Trial pits 9, 10, and 11 were all located within this area and confirmed the unlikelyhood of any archaeological deposits surviving in this area as modern backfilled rubble was present to a depth of 2.8m.

5 Finds

A total of three pottery sherds, a ceramic tile fragment, a small piece of burnt slate tile, and six fragments of animal bone was recovered from two contexts in trial pit 7.

Context 7/1

1 small sherd of post-medieval glazed pottery.
1 fragment of plain ceramic tile.
1 fragment of burnt ?slate tile
1 animal tooth.

Context 7/2

The Medieval pottery from context 7/2 consisted of one Cotswold type Oolitic ware sherd (CTS code 205) and one shelly coarseware sherd (CTS code 330). These pottery types are common from the twelfth century onwards in the medieval period.

5 fragments of animal bone.
4 fragments of Oyster shell.

6 Discussion

Although the archaeological and cartographic background suggest quite extensive remains may survive within the watching brief area the majority of the open rough ground behind the petrol station (Trial Pits 1-4) appears to be heavily disturbed by modern activity. Only a thin topsoil cover directly over the ironstone natural survives. Field survey of the localised topography suggests that this may be a result of modern activity levelling the area at the base of the gentle hill slope as the ground level rises sharply towards the site of the factory (Fig 2).

Trial pits 5 and 6 both indicate the potential limited survival of archaeological deposits along the frontage of Kings Meadow Lane possibly relating to the late medieval/post-medieval buildings shown on the 1737 estate map. The increasing depth of the topsoil cover and overburden rising up to the Walnut Tree Green also suggests the possibility of greater preservation of deposits in this area not covered by the trial pitting. Similarly the made ground around the back of the petrol station in trial pit 7 has preserved a deep medieval deposit and a later structure. The lower deep layer, containing two sherds of medieval pottery, may be an occupation soil associated with earlier buildings. The overlying wall probably relates to the later buildings shown running across the site on the 1839 Enclosure Award map.

On the positive side, the watching brief confirmed the presence of the expected medieval and post-medieval deposits. The limited size of the geotechnical trial pits makes it difficult to assess the extent of the

survival of such deposits, although it would appear that this survival is rather localised across the site.

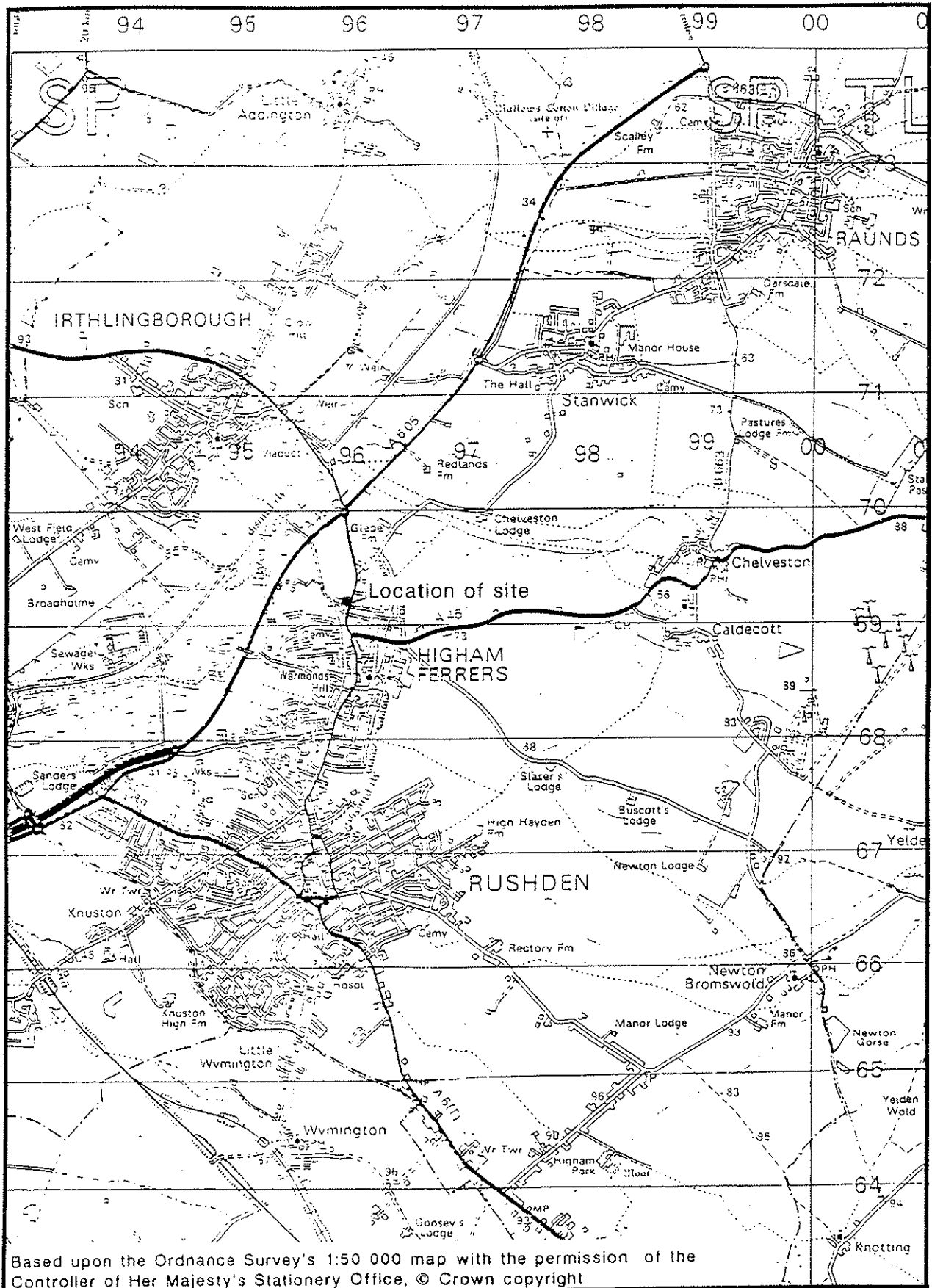
On the negative side no further evidence of medieval pottery kiln structures or pottery waste material was located. Furthermore, no artefacts of Saxon date were recovered and no deposits from this period were located in the trial pits. However, given the ephemeral nature of such features and the limitations of observing small geotechnical trial pits for archaeological purposes, caution must be exercised in any supposition that little of Saxon date may survive in the watching brief area.

Finally, there may be implications for the surviving archaeology from the presence of hydrocarbons noted by the geotechnical engineer across the site during the excavations. This has probably resulted from lateral leachate at a depth of 1.8-2m and was especially evident around the petrol station. Because of its depth it is not thought that any of the observed archaeological deposits are directly affected by this. However, any potentially deep archaeology such as cellared buildings may be affected if the outcome of the geotechnical report confirms the presence and extent of hydrocarbon contaminants.

Steve Lawrence
Oxford Archaeological Unit
January 1997

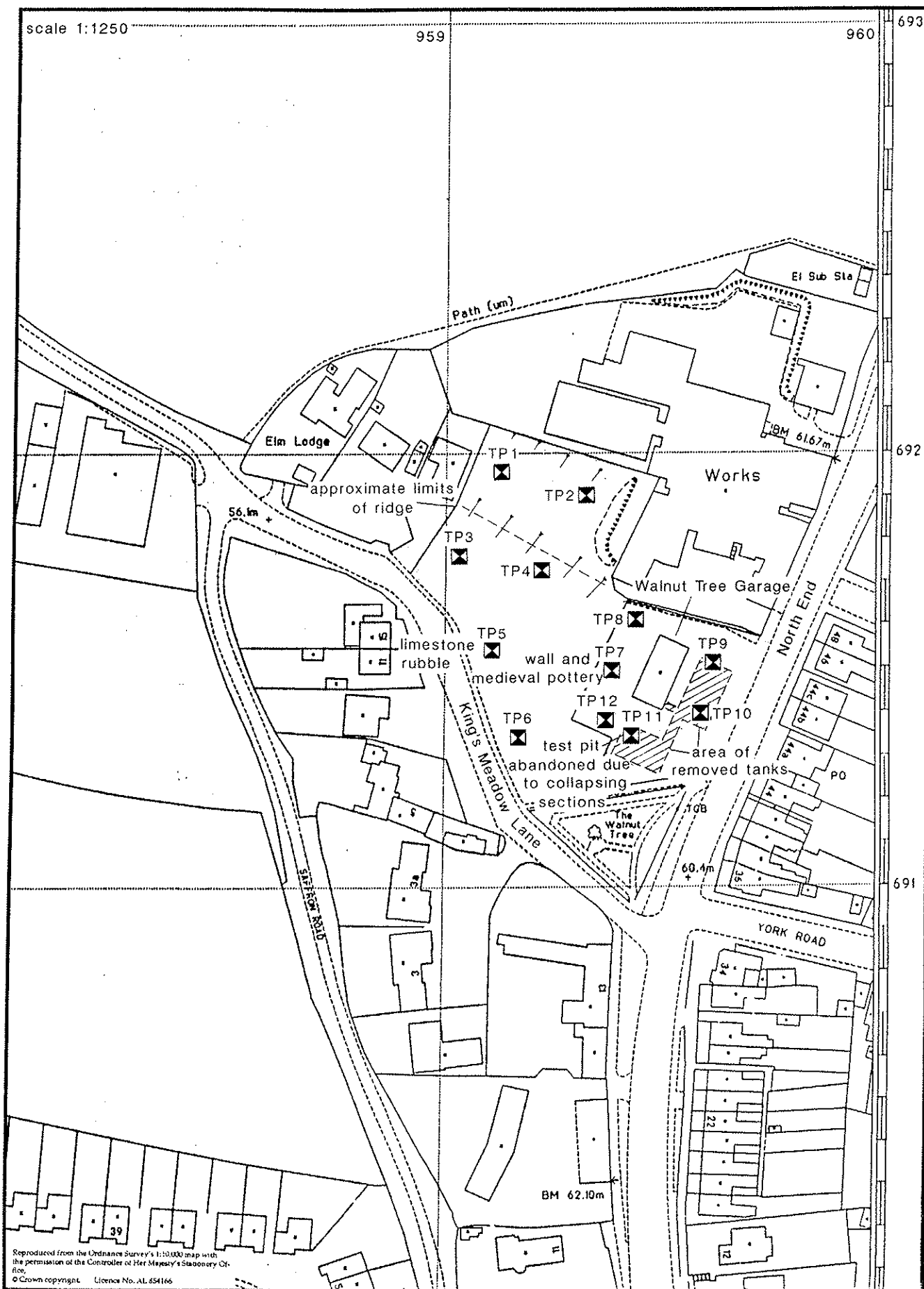
7 Bibliography

- Hall, D.N. 1974 Medieval pottery from the Higham Ferrers Hundred, Northamptonshire. *Journal of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery Vol. 10* pps38-57.
- NAU 1991 Archaeological Evaluation on Duchy of Lancaster land at Higham Ferrers, Northants. (unpublished client report, Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit Contracts Section), March 1991.
- OAU 1994 Kings Meadow Lane, Higham Ferrers, Northants. Archaeological Evaluation. (unpublished client report, Oxford Archaeological Unit), August 1994.
- OAU 1996(a) Kings Meadow Lane, Higham Ferrers, Northants. Archaeological Evaluation. (unpublished client report, Oxford Archaeological Unit), January 1996.
- OAU 1996(b) Kings Meadow Lane, Higham Ferrers, Northants. Post-excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design. (unpublished client report, Oxford Archaeological Unit), December 1996.



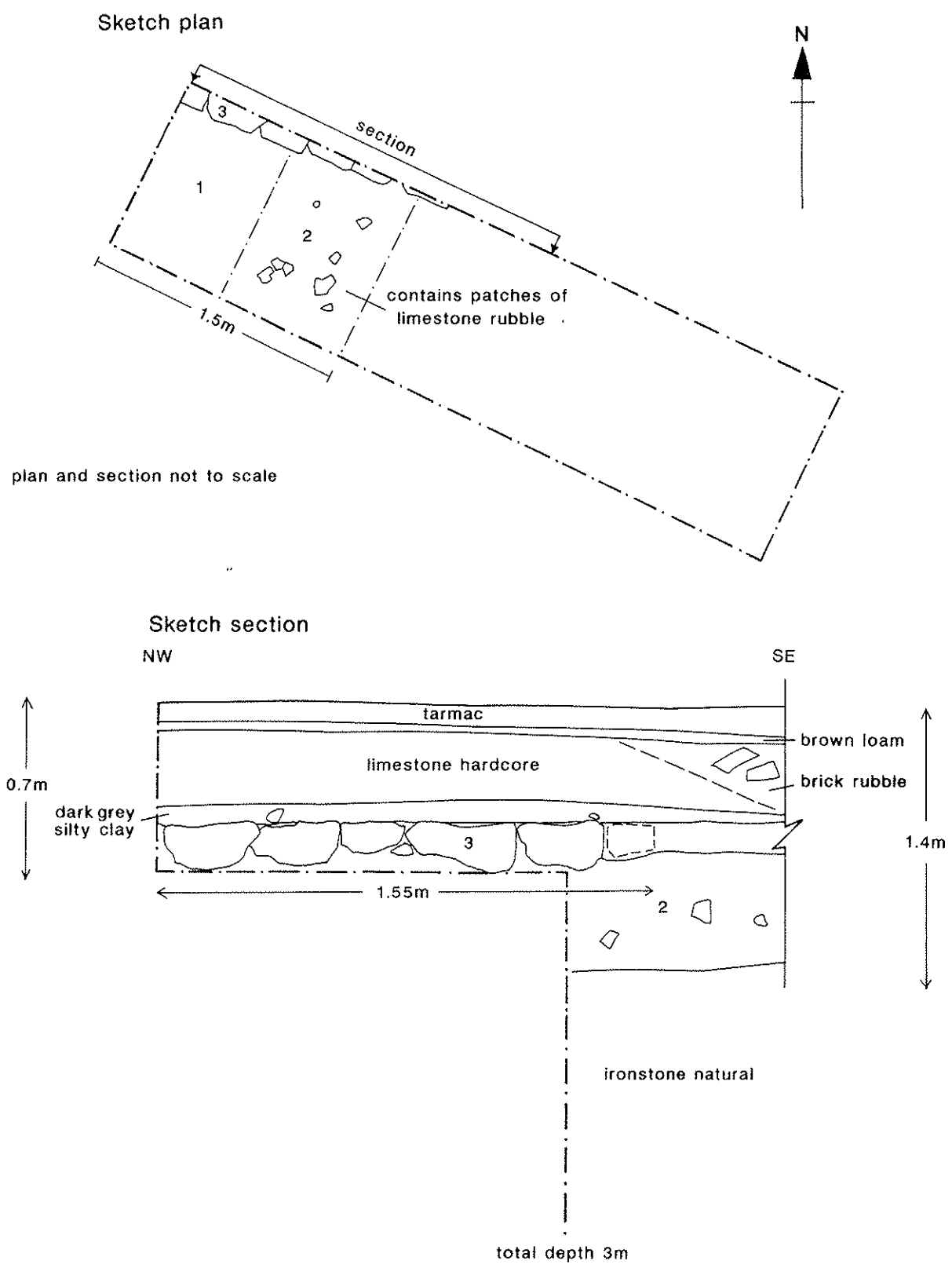
Location of site

figure 1



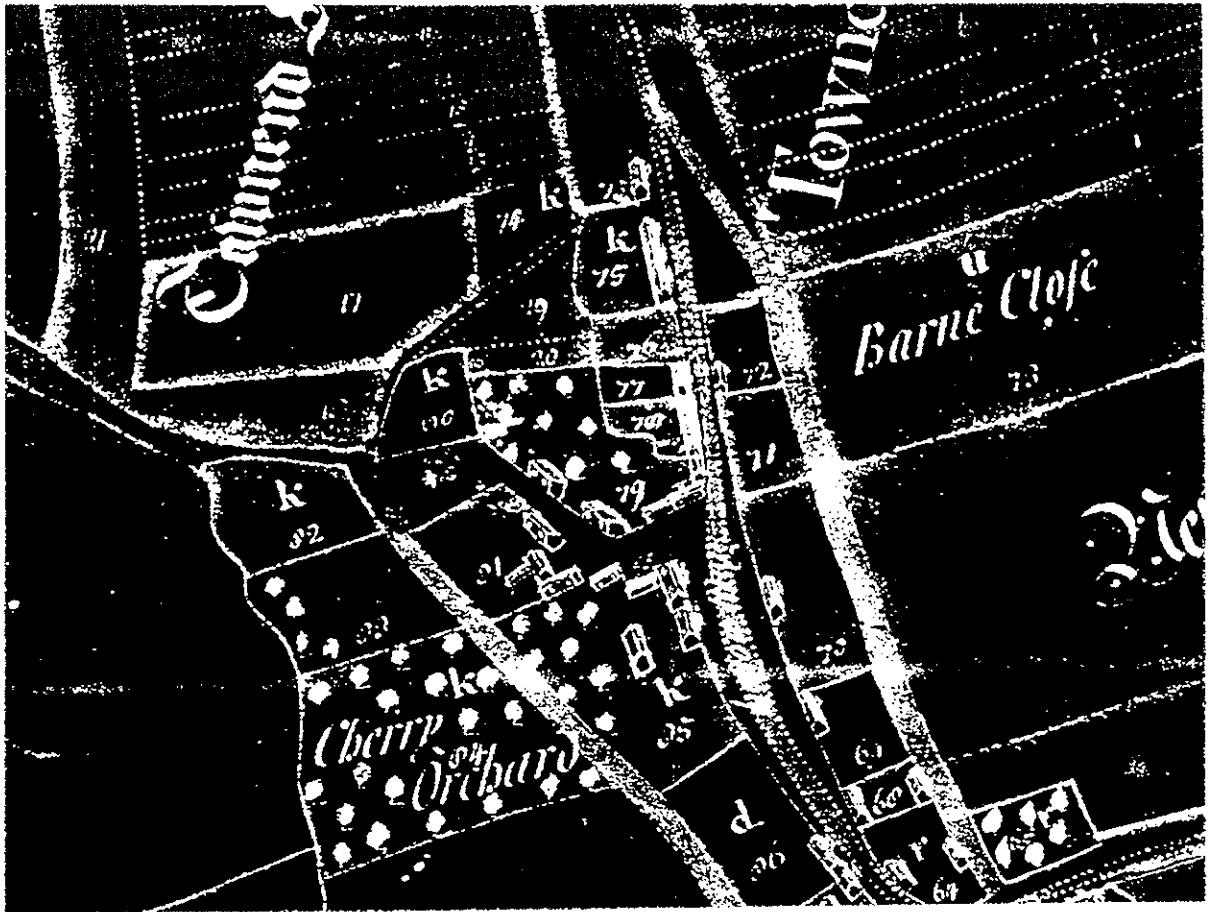
Location of test pits and removed tanks

figure 2

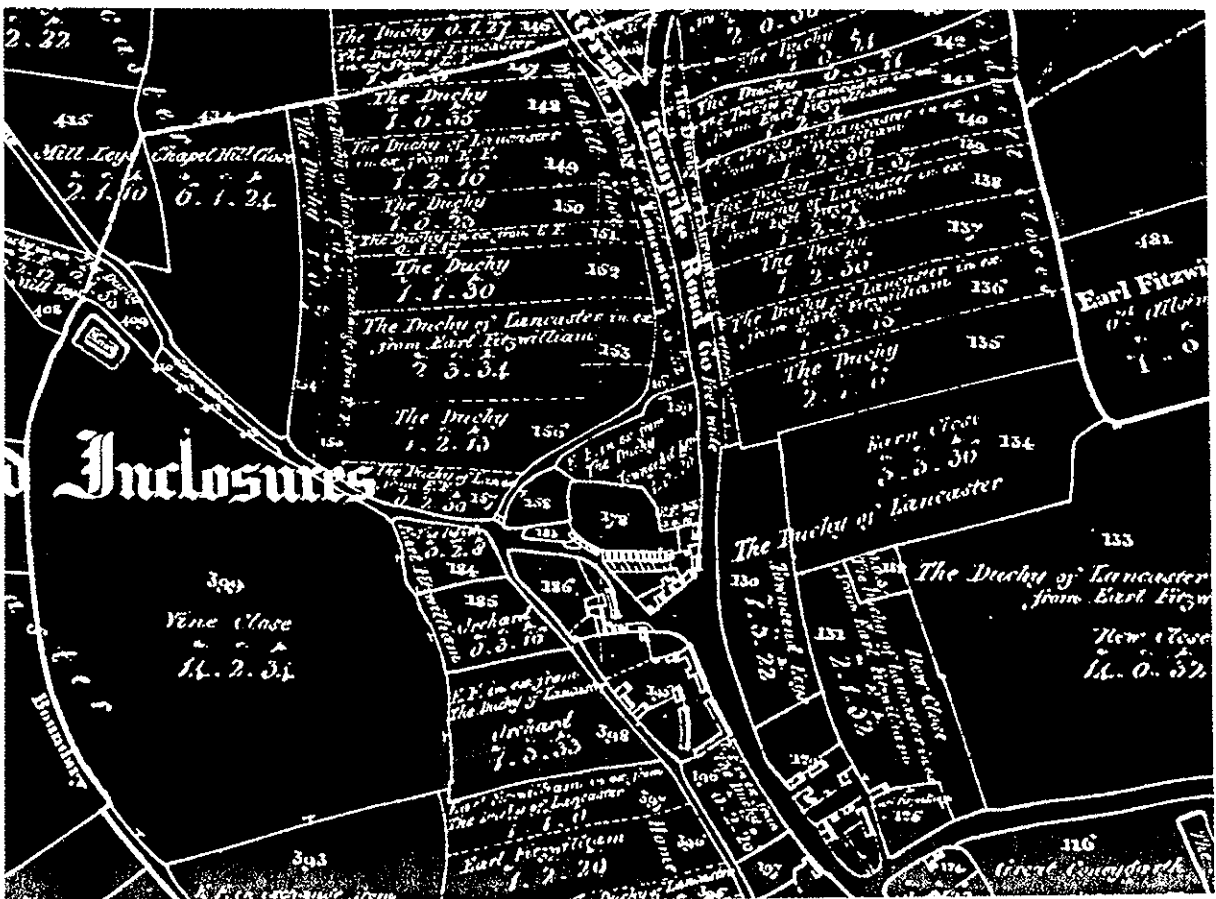


Plan and section of Test Pit 7

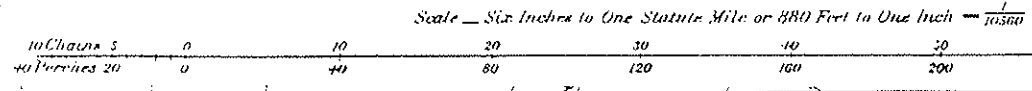
figure 3



1737 Estate Map



1839 Inclosure Awards



1888 edition Ordnance Survey map

figure 5



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES
Telephone: 01865 243888 Fax: 01865 793496



Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.
Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited. Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead
Registered Charity Number: 285627 Private Limited Company Number: 1618597