

61 Priory Road Bicester Oxfordshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeology

14th April 2003

**Client Name:
Coleman Hicks Partnership
Nash's Bakeries**

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1765

Planning Ref N^o: 02/02073/F

NGR: SP 5851 2206

Client Name: Coleman Hicks Partnership/Nash's Bakeries

Client Ref No: 9949/IJC/CB

Document Title: 61 Priors Road, Bicester, Oxon.

Document Type: Evaluation

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SP 5851 2206

Planning Reference: 02/02073/F

OA Job Number: JN 1765

Site Code: BI61PR.03

Invoice Code: BI61PR.EV

Receiving Museum: OCMS

Museum Accession No: *****

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Document File Location \\Server3\users\jon.hiller\Oa\oa\Wbev\Oxon\PriorsRoad
BicesterREP.doc

Graphics File Location Server10\oapubs\BI61PREV*61PriorsRdBicester*AMD*
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**No. 61 Priory Road, Bicester,
Oxfordshire**

NGR SP 5851 2206

Planning Application: 02/02073/F

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SUMMARY

In April 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at No. 61 Priory Road Bicester, Oxon (NGR SP 5851 2206) on behalf of the Coleman Hicks Partnership for Nash's Bakeries of Bicester. The evaluation revealed an east-west aligned ditch of late Saxon date and a further possible ditch feature of comparable date. These features were overlain by former soil layers of unknown date that were cut by modern fence postholes. A few residual worked flints hint at prehistoric activity in the vicinity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In April 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at No. 61 Priory Road, Bicester, Oxon (NGR SP 5851 2206) on behalf of the Coleman Hicks Partnership for Nash's Bakeries of Bicester. The evaluation was undertaken in respect of a planning application for the demolition of existing buildings on the site and the construction of seven new dwellings (Planning Application No: 02/02073/F). The evaluation was required in line with PPG 16 and policies of the Cherwell Local Plan.
- 1.1.2 Hugh Coddington, Deputy Archaeological Officer at Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service (OCAS), prepared a *Design Brief* for the evaluation (OCAS 2002). OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would undertake the requirements of the brief (OA 2003).

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is located to the south of the junction of Priory Road and Chapel Street in Bicester at NGR SP 5851 2206 (Fig. 1). The River Bure lies to the west of the proposed development area and the site comprises 0.12 hectares in area.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology of the site is Cornbrash (BGS *Soil Survey of England and Wales* sheet 219). At the time of the evaluation, the site contained one dwelling and several business units and lay at approximately 68 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 1.3.1 Immediately north of the development site, archaeological excavation revealed structures dating to the early and middle Anglo Saxon period. These included three sunken feature buildings and five timber halls/long houses. Ditches dating to the same period and others dating to the late Saxon/early Norman period were also discovered.
- 1.3.2 Immediately west of the River Bure is the site of St. Edurga's Priory, though its full extent was unclear at the time of the current fieldwork (OCAS 2003).

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Coleman Hicks Partnership for providing plans of the site. OA's Steve Laurie-Lynch and Jodie Morris carried out the fieldwork.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality, date, depth below ground surface and depth of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological and geoarchaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork, methods and recording

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised the excavation of a 5% sample of the proposed development area, resulting in two 20 m long trenches measuring 1.5 m in width.
- 3.1.2 The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. Excavation by machine was carried out down to the natural geology or the top of the first archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.
- 3.1.3 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples.
- 3.1.4 All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).
- 3.1.5 Levels were related to the architect's plans for the new development. As the trenches were placed in close proximity, deposits were given the same context numbers in both trenches where they could be confidently correlated; features were allocated separate numbers.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and generally bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1

- 4.1.1 Trench 1 was reduced to 17 m in length owing to access restrictions at either end. The trench was 1.6 m wide and was orientated north-west/south-east (Figs 3 and 4).
- 4.1.2 The earliest deposit in the trench was a layer of natural cornbrash stone (4) overlain by a distinct layer of clean light reddish-brown silt (3) forming the natural subsoil. This layer was partially covered in plan by a compact layer of red-brown clay (10) up to 0.36 m thick that extended half way along the trench and possibly represents a former soil/cultivation layer.
- 4.1.3 Layer 10 was cut by an irregular feature (9) that was 1.2 m wide and 0.4 m deep and filled with dark clay silty soil (8); on site interpretation suggested that this was a modern fence post-hole with the resulting irregular feature the result of removal of the original post. A similar feature (7, filled by 6) was also identified within the trench, suggesting a possible fence line of recent use.
- 4.1.4 The fills of 9 and 7 were sealed by a layer of gravel (5), a former track/driveway surface that was in turn covered by the present turf and topsoil (1).

Trench 2

- 4.1.5 Trench 2 was 20 m in length, 1.6 m wide and formed an 'L'- shape with its axes orientated SW-NE and SE-NW (Figs 3 and 4).
- 4.1.6 The natural deposits (4 below 3) were cut by an east-west aligned feature (13) that was 1.05 m wide, 0.28 m deep with a flat base and 75 ° sloping sides. The fill was a dark brown sandy silt (12 = 14) up to 0.28 m thick and which contained five sherds of pottery of late-Saxon date, animal bone and flint.
- 4.1.7 Also observed was a cut feature (16) that appeared linear in plan and was 0.5 m wide and 0.18 m deep. The feature extended fully across the south end of the trench and may represent another ditch feature. It was filled by a grey sandy silt (15) that contained animal bone, pottery of late Saxon date and flint (see section 4, below).
- 4.1.8 The fills of both ditches were sealed beneath a layer of reddish-brown loam (2) similar to layers 3 and 10 in Trench 1, which in turn was covered by the topsoil and turf (1 = 11).

4.2 Finds

Pottery

- 4.2.1 Six sherds of shell-tempered pottery of late Saxon date were recovered from the site. Five sherds were found within ditch fill 12 and a single sherd was recovered from ditch? fill 15.

Other finds

- 4.2.2 A total of 7 animal bones were recovered from the site, one each from contexts 12 and 15 and five from ditch fill 14. Two pieces of fired clay were recovered from context 14, which also contained fragments from a lava stone. These finds are too few to merit further comment.
- 4.2.3 A small assemblage of flints was analysed by Hugo Lamdin Whymark of OA. A total of seven flints was recovered comprising a blade, two flakes, two chips a piece of irregular waste and a broken edge retouched flake (see table below). The condition of the flints was variable. The blade, from context 3, was relatively fresh, whilst the flake in context 15 exhibited considerable post-depositional edge damage. The cortication was also variable; most pieces were uncorticated although a light white cortication was present on a chip and a flake exhibited a heavy white cortication. The blade was manufactured on chalk flint, with a thick (7 mm) unabraded cortex.
- 4.2.4 The flakes are relatively thin and where present the platforms exhibited edge abrasion and had clearly been detached with some care. Technologically, the flint appears to date from the Neolithic, and furthermore, the blade would not be out of place in an earlier Neolithic assemblage.
- 4.2.5 This assemblage can be interpreted as a background scatter of artefacts indicating a Neolithic presence within the evaluated area. However, given the dispersed nature of Neolithic activity and settlement there is a possibility of encountering discrete Neolithic features such as pits and tree-throw holes if further work here is undertaken.

Table of flints by context

Context	Description
3	Fine blade, chalk flint, fresh condition. Neolithic, possibly early Neolithic
12	1 flake, 1 edge retouched flake (broken)
14	2x chips. One with light cortication
15	1 flake, heavy white cortication and post-depositional damage, 1x irregular waste, burnt and broken.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**5.1 Reliability of field investigation**

- 5.1.1 The trenches were excavated in accordance with the brief set for the project with minor alterations owing to on site constraints. Weather conditions were good.

5.2 Overall interpretation

- 5.2.1 The two features observed cutting the natural are of late Saxon date, which accords with the archaeological excavation results obtained to the north (OCAS 2003).

- 5.2.2 The site here exhibits a continuation of the ditch activity associated with the Saxon occupation previously identified, and presumably relates to either property divisions or more likely field boundaries in the vicinity of the Saxon occupation.
- 5.2.3 The few flints recovered could indicate prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the site.
- 5.2.4 The evidence from the trenches suggests that after the Saxon period the site was not occupied - the remaining features and layers were clearly modern.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>
001						
	1	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-
	2	Layer	-	0.4	Former soil layer	Saxon Pottery
	3	Layer	-	0.3	natural silt/subsoil	Flint
	4	layer	-	-	Combrash bedrock	-
	5	Layer	-	0.1-0.25	Gravel and hardcore	-
	6	Cut	0.3	-	Modern posthole	-
	7	fill	0.3	-	Modern posthole fill	-
	8	fill	1.2	0.4	?? fill of posthole, modern	-
	9	cut	1.2	0.4	Modern posthole fill	-
002						
	10	layer	-	0.36	Clay layer	-
	11	layer	-	0.1	Topsoil = 1	-
	12	fill	-	0.28	fill of ditch 13	Animal bone; flint x 2
	13	cut	1.08	0.36	Ditch	-
	14	fill	-	0.36	fill of 13	Burnt lava stone; animal bone; fired clay; late Saxon pottery; flint x 2
	15	fill	-	0.18	fill of 16	Animal bone; late Saxon pottery; flint x 2
	16	cut	0.5+	0.18	?ditch/rectangular feature	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

BGS *Soil Survey of England and Wales* sheet 219

CAS 2002 *The Old Bakery, off Priory Road, Bicester: Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation*

IFA 1992 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2003 *The Old Bakery, off Priory Road, Bicester: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Field Evaluation*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: No. 61 Priory Road, Bicester, Oxon.

Site code: BI61PR.03

Grid reference: NGR SP 5851 2208

Type of evaluation: Two 20 m by 1.5 m wide trenches

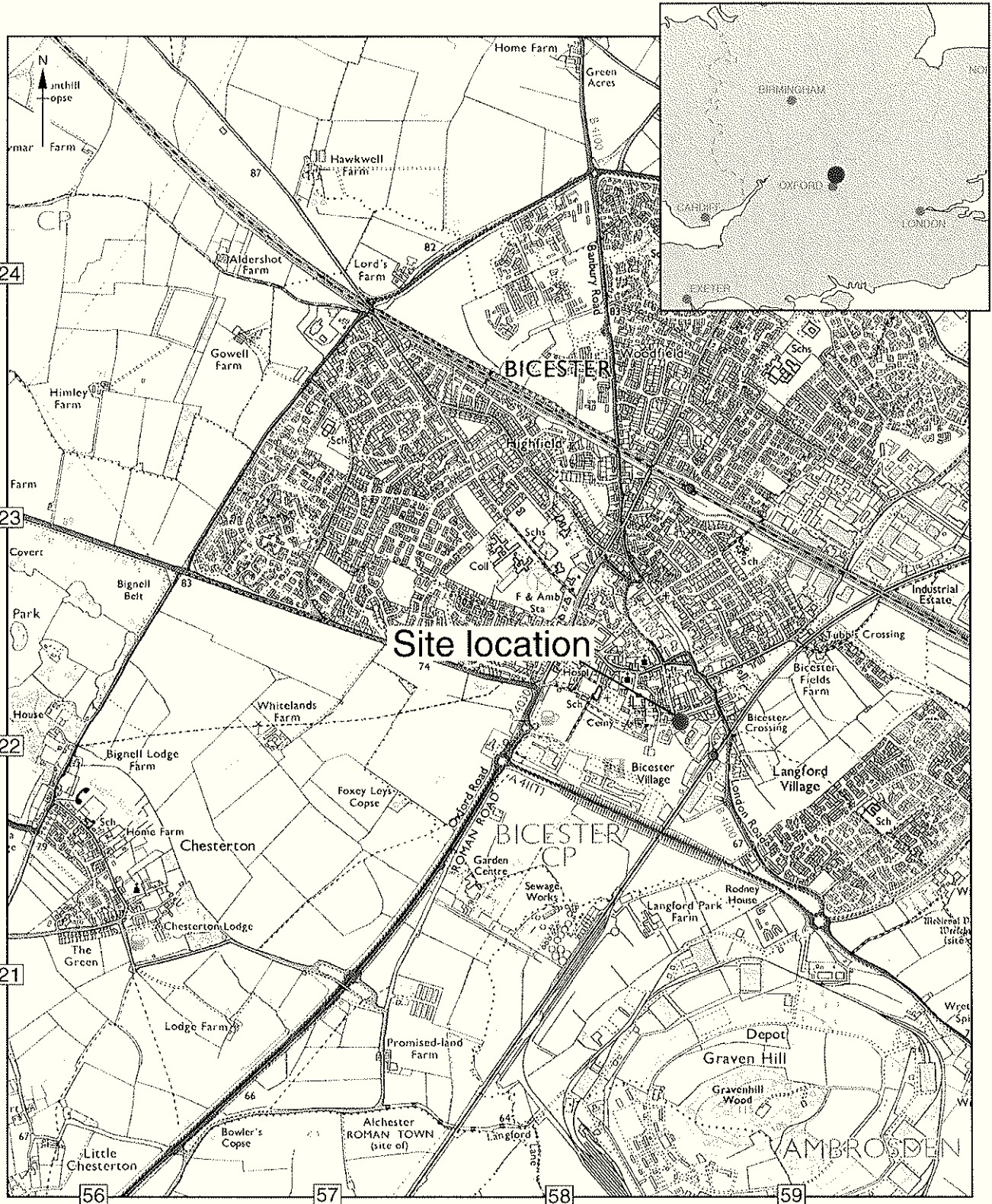
Date and duration of project: 7th and 8th April 2003

Area of site: 0.12 ha.

Summary of results: An east-west aligned ditch of late Saxon date and a further possible ditch feature of comparable date. The features were overlain by former soil layers of unknown date that were cut by modern fence postholes. Several prehistoric flints were recovered; these are residual.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

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Figure 1: Site location

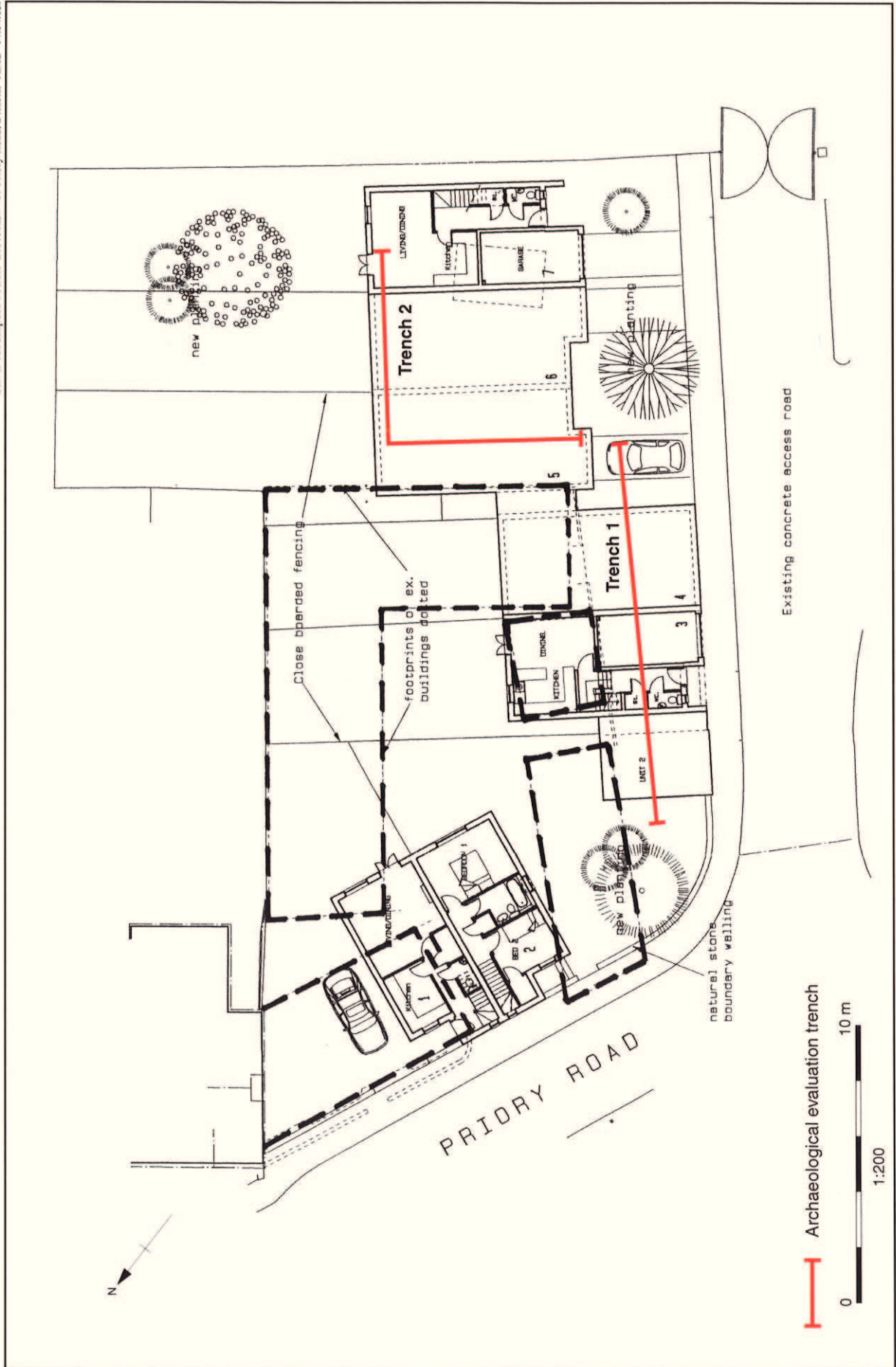
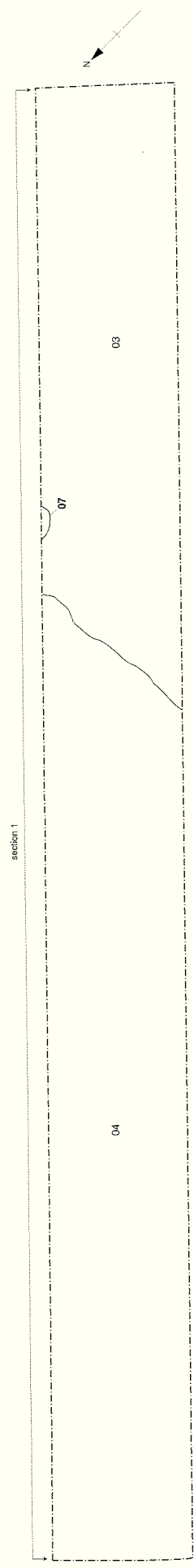


Figure 2: Trench locations

Trench 1: plan



Trench 1: section 1

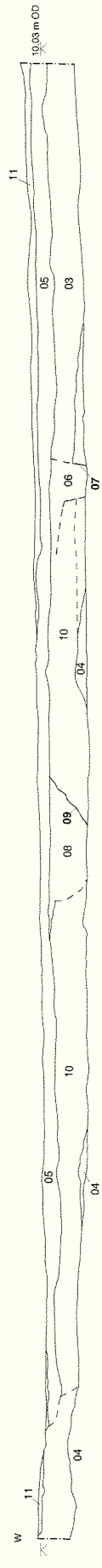


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and section

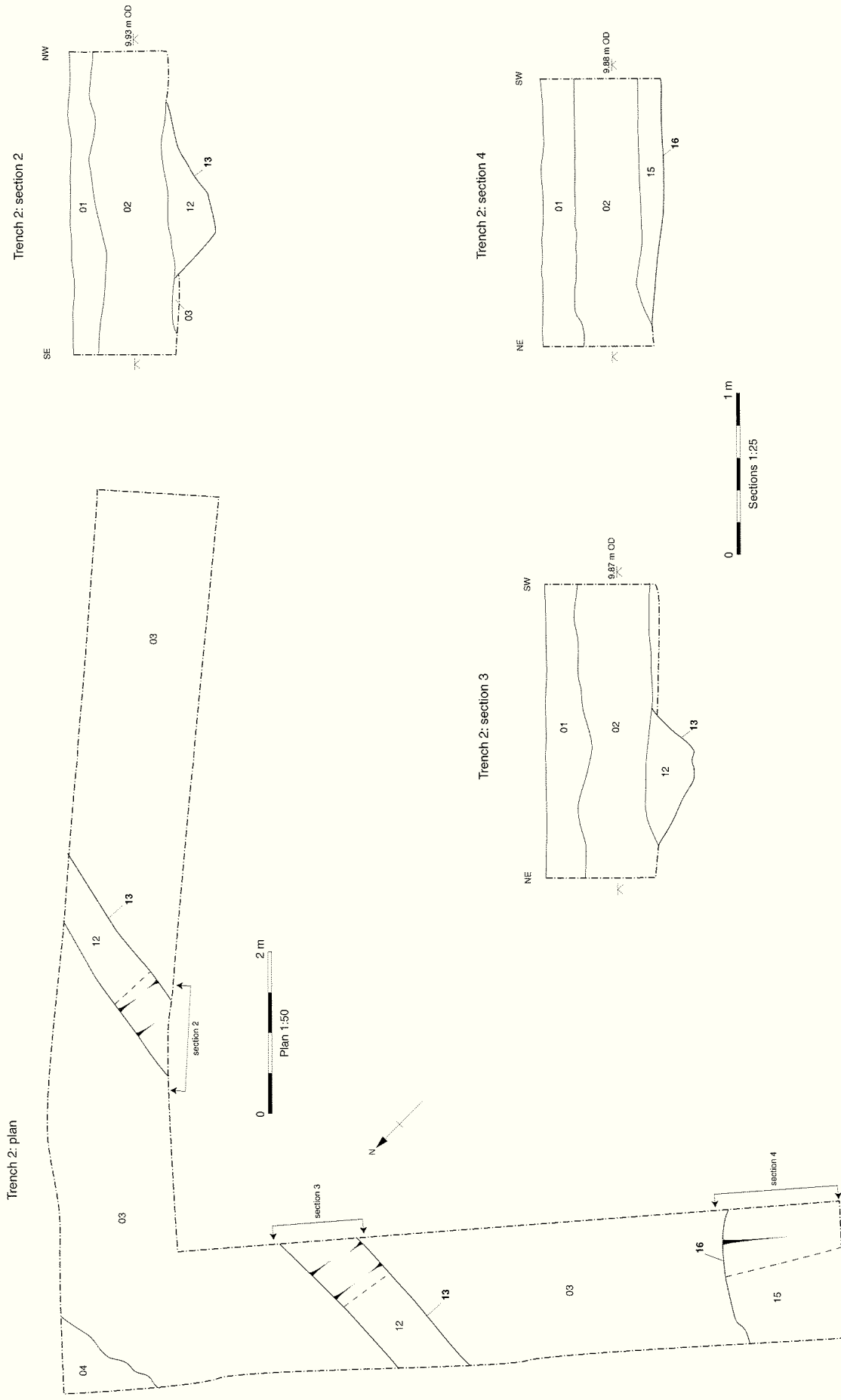

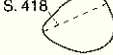










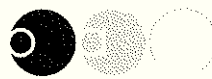


Figure 4: Trench 2, plan and sections

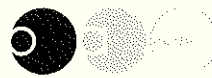
	Section line and number
	Interior section line and number
	Limit of excavation
	Sondage / Interior limit of excavation
	Fill line and number
	Cut line and number
	Structure number
	Unclear boundary
	Stones
	Hachures indicate inclination of slope inside excavated feature
	Levels
	Grid point



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