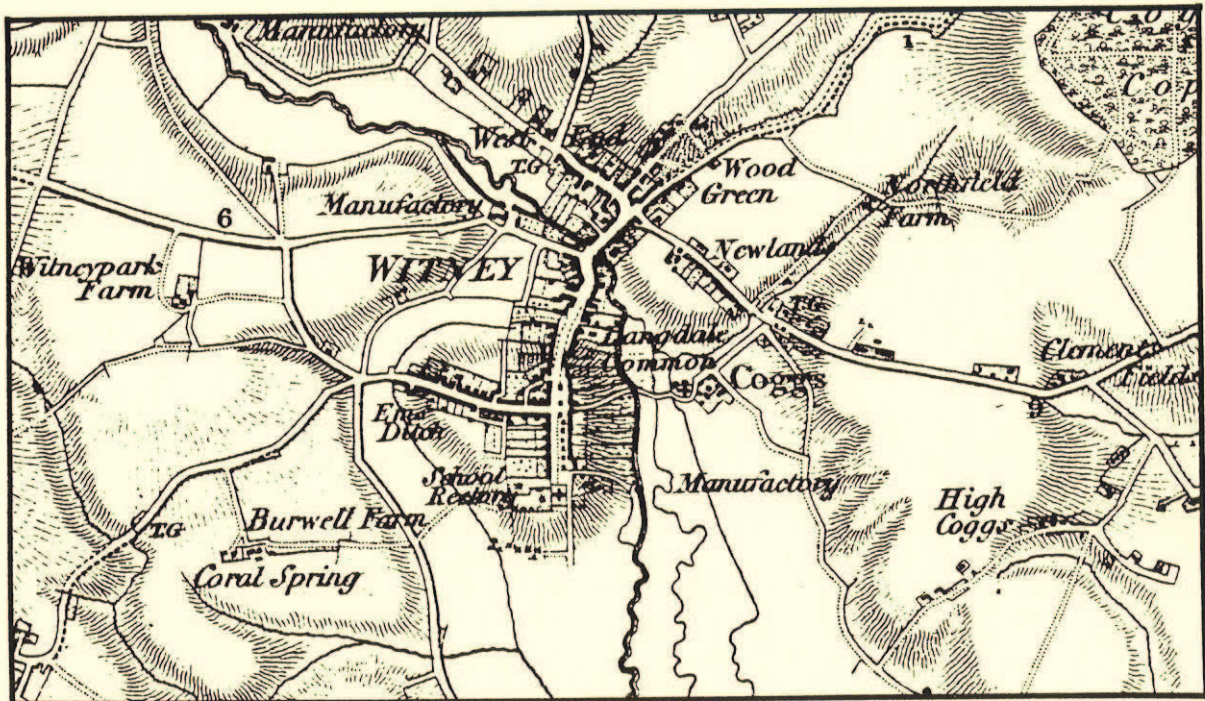


TAY HOMES

LAND WEST OF WITAN WAY, WITNEY, OXFORDSHIRE

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

SP 3584 1000



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

APRIL 1998

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

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## SUMMARY

*In March 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a field evaluation at Land West of Witan Way, Witney, Oxfordshire on behalf of Tay Homes. Six evaluation trenches were excavated. The evaluation revealed a small number of features of probable post-medieval date. The features comprised a large pit or water hole in one trench, and in another trench two post-holes, one with a wooden stake fragment adjacent. Some medieval pottery was also recovered from these trenches. The remaining three trenches were devoid of archaeological features and finds.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

On the 30th and 31st of March 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a field evaluation on land west of Witan Way, Witney (Fig.1) on behalf of Tay Homes in respect of a planning application (Ref No: W97/1766) for a housing development. The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by the OAU following a brief set by the County Archaeological Officer. The development site was located to the rear of 66 High Street and to the West of Witan Way and was 0.45 hectares in area.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

The site geology is alluvial clay overlying silts and limestone gravels of reworked Cornbrash, the surface of which falls toward the south from 79.13 OD to 78.61 OD. The site was situated on an area of waste ground which had been overgrown with vegetation for a considerable period.

### 1.3 Archaeological background

A brief summary of the archaeological and historical background was included with the Written Scheme of Investigation (OAU 1998). The site had not produced evidence of archaeological features prior to this evaluation. The development is located within the limits of the early medieval settlement of Witney. During this period the settlement expanded to include a market and two fairs. The development lies behind the medieval street frontage to the east of the High Street. Burgage plots are likely to have extended from the back of each dwelling towards the River Windrush. There are no known locations with archaeological finds adjacent to the development site.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

As required by the brief provided by the County Archaeological Officer, the aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area. Additionally, the evaluation aimed to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present, to establish the environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features, and to make available the results of the investigation.

### 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised six machine excavated trenches (fig.2) supplemented by hand-cleaning of the trenches and manual investigation of archaeological features. The trenches were excavated using a JCB excavator equipped with a 1.8 m wide ditching bucket . Four trenches were 20 m long (Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4). Trench 4 was extended by 15 m to form a T-shape in order to determine the extent of a feature in Trench 3. Trenches 5 and 6 were 7 m long. All Trenches were excavated to below impact level. The area examined represents a sample of 4.36% of the 0.45 ha site.

#### 3.2 Site Recording and Finds

The trench positions were surveyed in and relate to the OS grid. Archaeological recording was undertaken using standard OAU methods (Wilkinson ed. 1992). Hand sorting was employed to recover any finds. Spoil heaps were carefully monitored for finds during and after mechanical removal of the overburden.

#### 3.3 Environmental

Two 10 litre waterlogged samples were taken from Pit 307 (Fill 306) in accordance with OAU sampling procedures. One of these samples was processed (section 5.2).

### 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

#### 4.1 Superficial Soils

Topsoil consisted of a very dark brown organic loam approximately 0.25m thick. This contained fragments of post- medieval pottery and glass. A lighter brown clayey loam, approximately 0.40m thick, was located between the topsoil and natural sandy clays and gravels. This probably represents disturbed (possibly ploughed) alluvium. These soils were everywhere machine-excavated.

### 5 RESULTS

#### 5.1 Trench descriptions

##### 5.1.1 Trench 3: E-W 20m long (Fig. 3)

One archaeological feature was found towards the centre of the trench. This was a large pit (307) which cut the natural gravel (308) to a depth of approximately 0.96m. The pit measured approximately 3.7m east-west. The north-south dimensions were not fully established, although, following the partial collapse of the north facing section it was apparent that the natural gravel at the base of the pit rose sharply to the south. The pit was primarily filled with a bluish clay (306) containing freshwater molluscs and representing natural silting. Samples of waterlogged soil were taken from this context. This was overlain by a layer of organic clay (305) and a thin layer of redeposited natural gravel (304). No finds were recovered from these fills. The uppermost fill (303)

consisted of a 0.41m-thick silt clay containing pot dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods.

#### 5.1.2 Trench 1: N-S 15m & 5m long (Fig. 4)

Trench 1 was divided into two areas on either side of a large, stone built garden wall. The southern part of the trench extended 15m from the wall and was devoid of archaeological features. In the northern part of the trench the sandy gravel natural had been cut by two postholes 109 and 110. The postholes were situated adjacent to each other on a north south line and were both approximately 0.30m in depth and 0.30m in diameter. They were cut by a possible robber trench (113). The uppermost backfill of the robber trench (106) was a 0.30m-thick silt clay containing a large amount of domestic refuse including a pottery assemblage with a wide date range within the post-medieval period (Appendix 2). This was overlain by three silty clays (105, 104 and 103) possibly representing a sequence of worked soils. No finds were recovered from these. The remains of a timber stake (114) was recovered from the edge of the posthole 110 and appeared to have been driven into the post-hole fill 111. It may have been inserted from higher up although there was no clear evidence of this.

#### 5.1.3 Trenches 2, 4, 5 and 6

Trenches 2, 4, 5 and 6 were devoid of archaeological features. Trench 4 contained dumped deposits of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century date.

#### 5.2 Finds

The finds recovered comprised 43 sherds of pottery, some brick/tile fragments, a few corroded iron objects and several fragments of animal bone. Most of the pottery was of post-medieval date, although there were a few sherds of medieval pottery in residual contexts from Trenches 1 and 3 (see Appendix 2). The other finds came from post-medieval contexts. The tip of a wooden stake from Trench 1 is likely to be quite modern. The collection is generally unremarkable.

#### 5.3 Environmental data

A sample of waterlogged material from Pit 307 showed waterlogged plant remains to be present, but not particularly abundant and in poor condition (Appendix 3). The range and type of species present are unremarkable for post-medieval feature, although they would suggest that any deep features of greater archaeological significance might contain interesting waterlogged deposits.

### 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

#### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The evaluation was carried out under good weather and soil conditions and the results are considered to be reasonably reliable.

#### 6.2 Summary of Results

Although the proposed development lies within the area likely to have been to the rear of medieval burgrave plots, only two archaeological features were found. These were a large pit in Trench 3 and two postholes in Trench 1. The waterlain silts in the large pit suggest that it may have functioned as a well or water hole for livestock. Dating evidence from higher up in the fill indicated the feature to be post-medieval. The postholes may represent a fence line defining a property boundary aligned approximately north-south. These features were overlain by deposits containing post-medieval pottery and are probably post-medieval in date. The wooden stake fragment is likely to be very recent as there were no indications of waterlogging of associated deposits. There was some residual medieval pottery in both trenches.

The features encountered probably represent some peripheral activity related to the burgrave plots which front the High Street to the west. Their presence is of little archaeological significance.

Andrew Mayes  
Oxford Archaeological Unit  
April 1988

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OAU Written Scheme of Investigation, March 1998.
- Mellor, M, 1994            Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and  
early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region *Oxoniensia* 59, 17-217.
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(First edition, August 1992)

## Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	thick.(m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
1							
	101	layer	0.15	topsoil	pot brick iron obj.	1 2 1	1550 +
	102	layer	0.1	sandy clay			
	103	layer	0.25	worked soil	pot bone iron obj.	1 1 3	1550 +
	104	layer	0.22	modern demolition debris			
	105	layer	0.12	worked soil	bone	2	
	106	fill	0.30	upper most fill of robber trench 113	pot bone shell	4 1 6	1550 +
	107	fill	0.40	f.o robber trench			
	108	fill	0.18	f.o robber trench			
	109	cut	0.35	posthole			
	110	cut	0.30	posthole			
	111	fill	0.30	primary f.o robber trench			
	112	layer	-	natural clays and gravels			
	113	cut	0.30	robber trench			
	114	wood		wooden stake			
2							
	200	layer	0.2	topsoil			
	201	layer	0.3	subsoil			
	202	layer	-	natural clayey Cornbrash			
3							
	300	layer	0.35	topsoil			
	301	layer	0.40	sub soil			
	302	layer	-	clay natural			
	303	fill	0.41	upper f.o large pit	pot bone	7 13	1550 +
	304	fill	0.28	gravel			
	305	fill	0.15	organic clay silt			
	306	fill	0.56	primary silting			
	307	cut	0.96	pit			



Trench	Ctxt	Type	thick.(m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
	308	layer	-	natural limestone gravel			
4							
	400	layer	80 mm	topsoil	pot	2	1750 +
	401	layer	0.25	dump	pot clay pipe	11 1	1800 +
	402	layer	0.25	subsoil	pot brick	6 2	1785 +
	403	layer	0.40	dump	pot brick	7 4	1550 +
	404	layer	0.18	early? Subsoil			
	405	layer	-	natural clay			
	406	layer	-	subsoil	pot bone brick iron obj.	2 1 2 1	1550 +
5							
	500	layer	0.28	topsoil	-	-	
	501	layer	-	clay alluvium?			
6							
	600	layer	0.30	Topsoil	-	-	
		layer	-	clay alluvium?			

## Appendix 2: Pottery Assemblages

by Nigel Jeffries

The pottery assemblage comprised 43 sherds with a total weight of 1197 grammes. The assemblage was wholly medieval and post-medieval in date except for one sherd which could be Saxo-Norman from context 106. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1 (below). Most of the pottery types present are well-known from excavations in Oxfordshire, and so, where appropriate, the alphanumeric codes of the Oxfordshire type-series (Mellor 1994) have been used.

The post-medieval assemblage includes such wares as Wedgwood, yellow-glazed earthenwares, Creamwares (OXCRM), Porcelain (OXPO), Ironstone China (OXWHEW) and the later stoneware forms (OXEST) such as marmalade jars.

The chronology of the wares present indicate that the site was in its main phase of occupation in the post-medieval/early modern period. The amounts of late Saxo-Norman/medieval pottery which are redeposited in later assemblages show that there has been some disturbance of the earlier deposits.

*Table 1: Pottery occurrence per context by sherd number and weight (in g) per fabric type*

Cxt no.	Cotswolds Oolitic ware (OXAC)	Brill/Boarstall (OXAM)	Cistercian ware (OXCL)	Red earthenware (OXREW)	Border ware (OXBEW)	London stoneware (OXST)	Misc 18/19 <sup>th</sup> wares	T.P.C.
Ware-dates	c. 1050-1350	c. 1200-1550	c. 1475-1550	c. 1550-1800	c. 1550-1700	c. 1675-1800	c. 1740-1880	
101				1 (14)				1550
103		1 (13)		2 (120)				1550
106	1 (17)	1 (98)		2 (110)				1550
303		3 (47)	1 (1)	2 (45)	1 (84)			1550
400						1 (7)	1 (28)	1750
401							11 (530)	1800
402							6 (24)	1785
403				7 (50)				1550
406				2 (9)				1550
Total	1 (17)	5 (158)	1 (1)	16 (348)	1 (84)	1 (7)	18 (582)	

### Appendix 3: Environmental Samples

By Ruth Pelling

#### Introduction

A soil sample was taken from the primary fill of a 1m deep pit for the extraction and evaluation of waterlogged plant remains. A sub-sample of 10 litres was processed by bulk water flotation and collected onto a 250µm mesh. The flot was kept wet and submitted for evaluation.

#### Evaluation Method

The waterlogged flot was washed through a stack of sieves to break in into manageable fractions. Each fraction was examined under a binocular microscope at x10 to x20 magnification. Any plant remains present were provisionally identified and an estimate of abundance was made.

#### Results

The preservation of material was poor and the remains are obscured by a large quantity of recent rootlets. Waterlogged plant remains were scarce and consisted of occasional *Chara* sp. (stonewort), *Lycopus europaeus* (gipsywort) and *Potamogeton* sp. (pondweed), suggesting the presence of still, muddy water in the bottom of the pit. Seeds of *Urtica dioica* (stinging nettle) and *Ranunculus* subgen *Ranunculus* (buttercup) may have been growing at the edge of the pit. Insect remains are fairly frequent although poorly preserved and fragmentary. An assessment of the insect remains is recommended.

#### Potential

It is unlikely that deposits at this depth will produce well preserved waterlogged material in the event of future excavation. Deeper deposits may produce better material however, and the potential for waterlogged deposits must be taken into consideration. The potential for charred remains appears to be very slim, although it is not possible to evaluate the full potential of a site based on a single sample.

#### Evaluation Results

	Sample	1
	Context	306
	Volume	10
<i>Ranunculus</i> subgen	Buttercup	+
<i>Ranunculus</i>		
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging Nettle	+
<i>Lycopus europaeus</i>	Gipsywort	+
<i>Potamogeton</i> sp.	Pondweed	+
<i>Chara</i> sp.	Stonewort	+

+ = 1-10 item

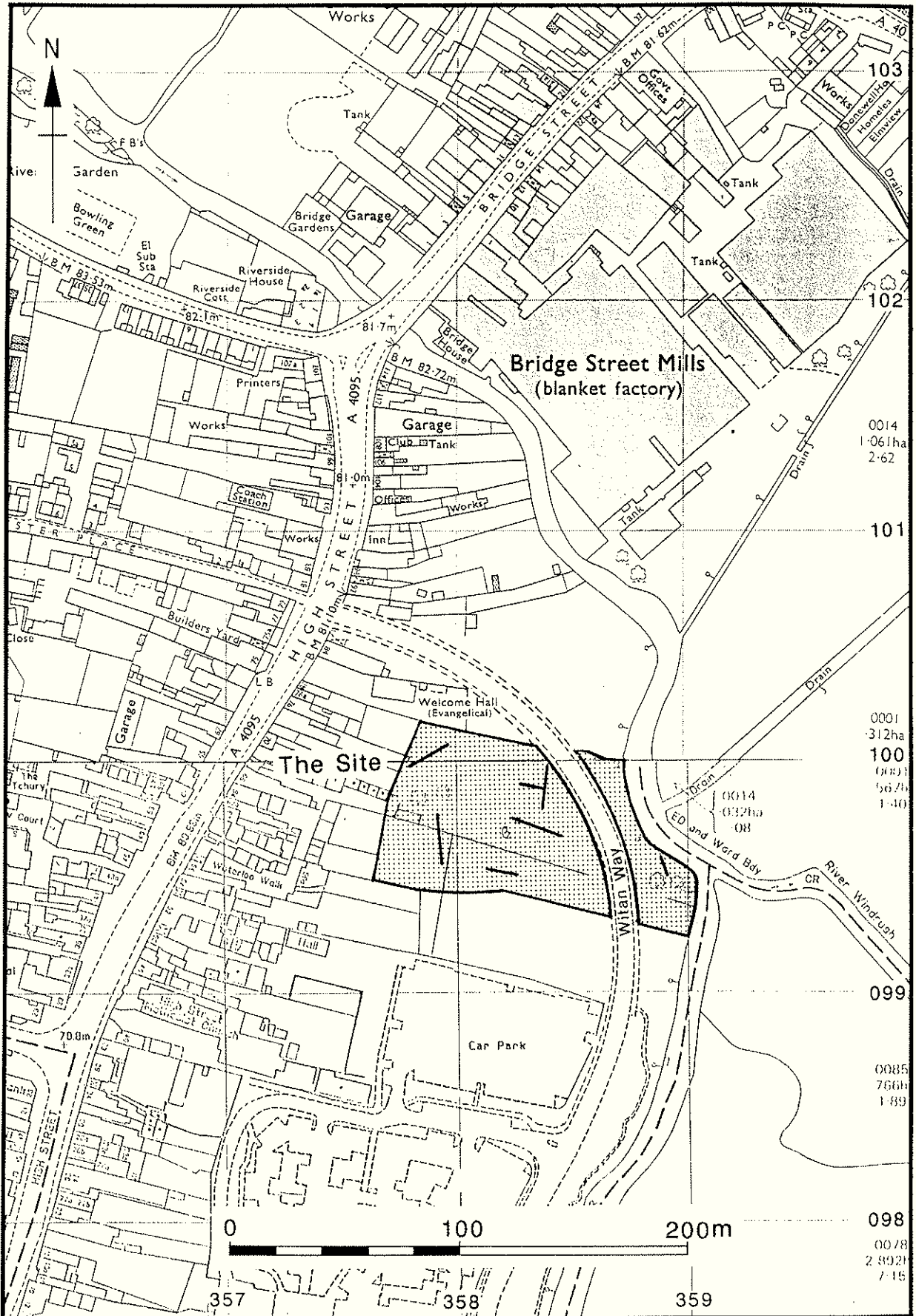


Figure 1: Site location plan

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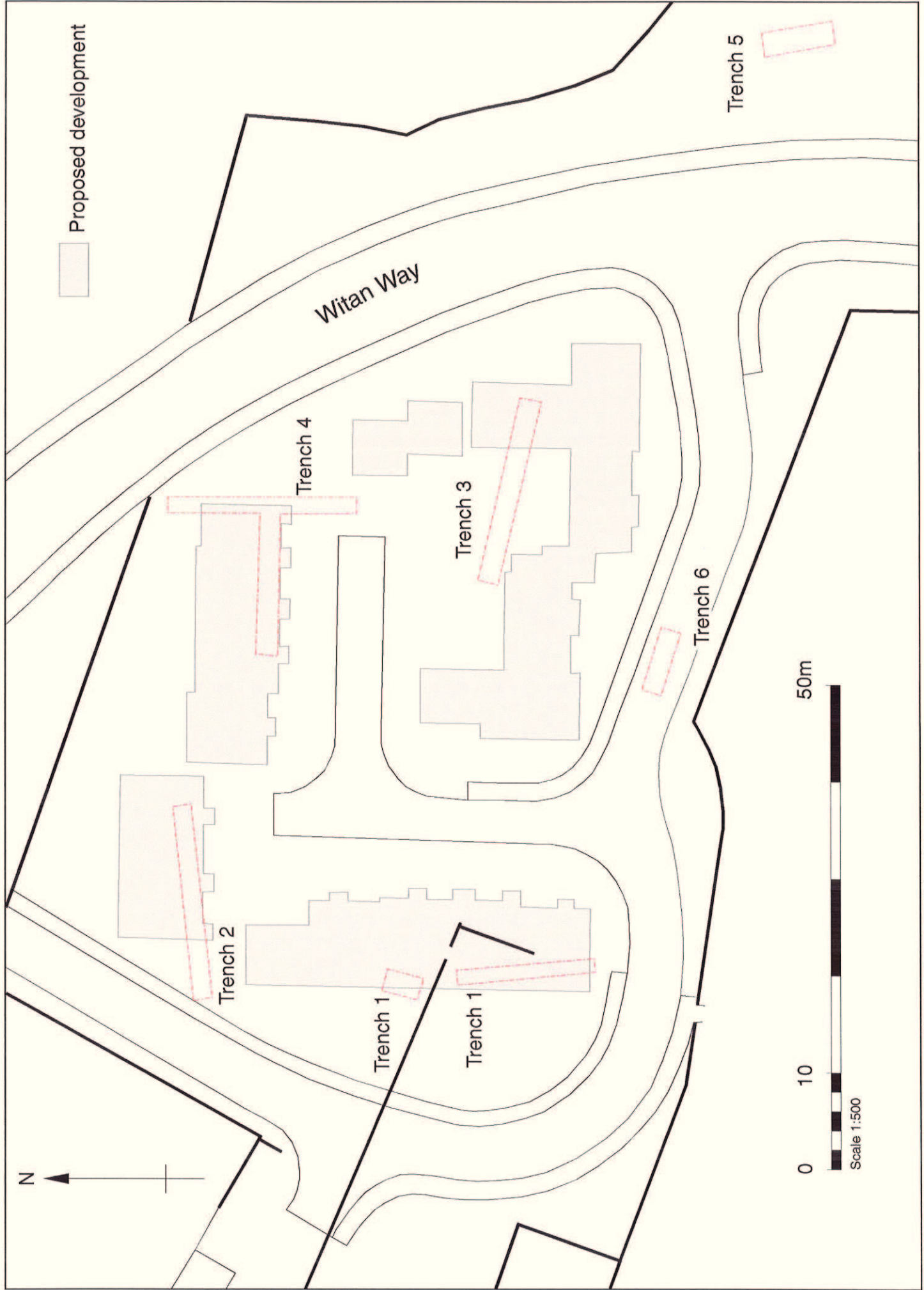


Figure 2: Trench location plan in relation to proposed development

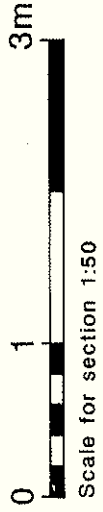
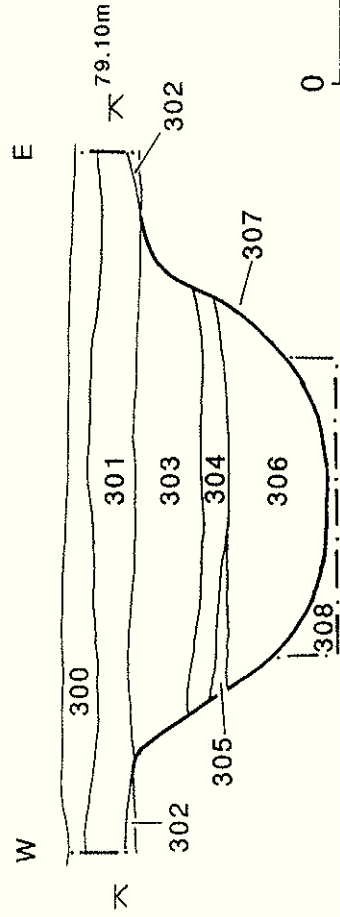
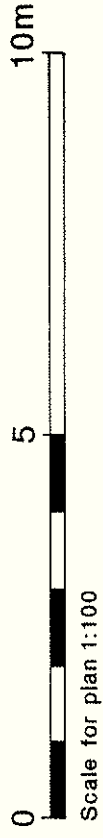
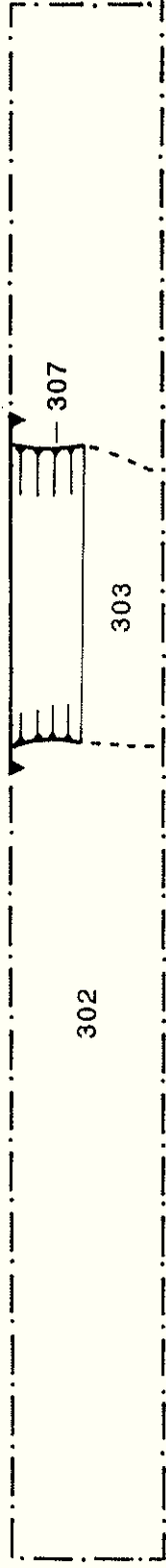
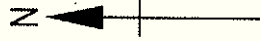


Figure 3: Trench 3, plan and section

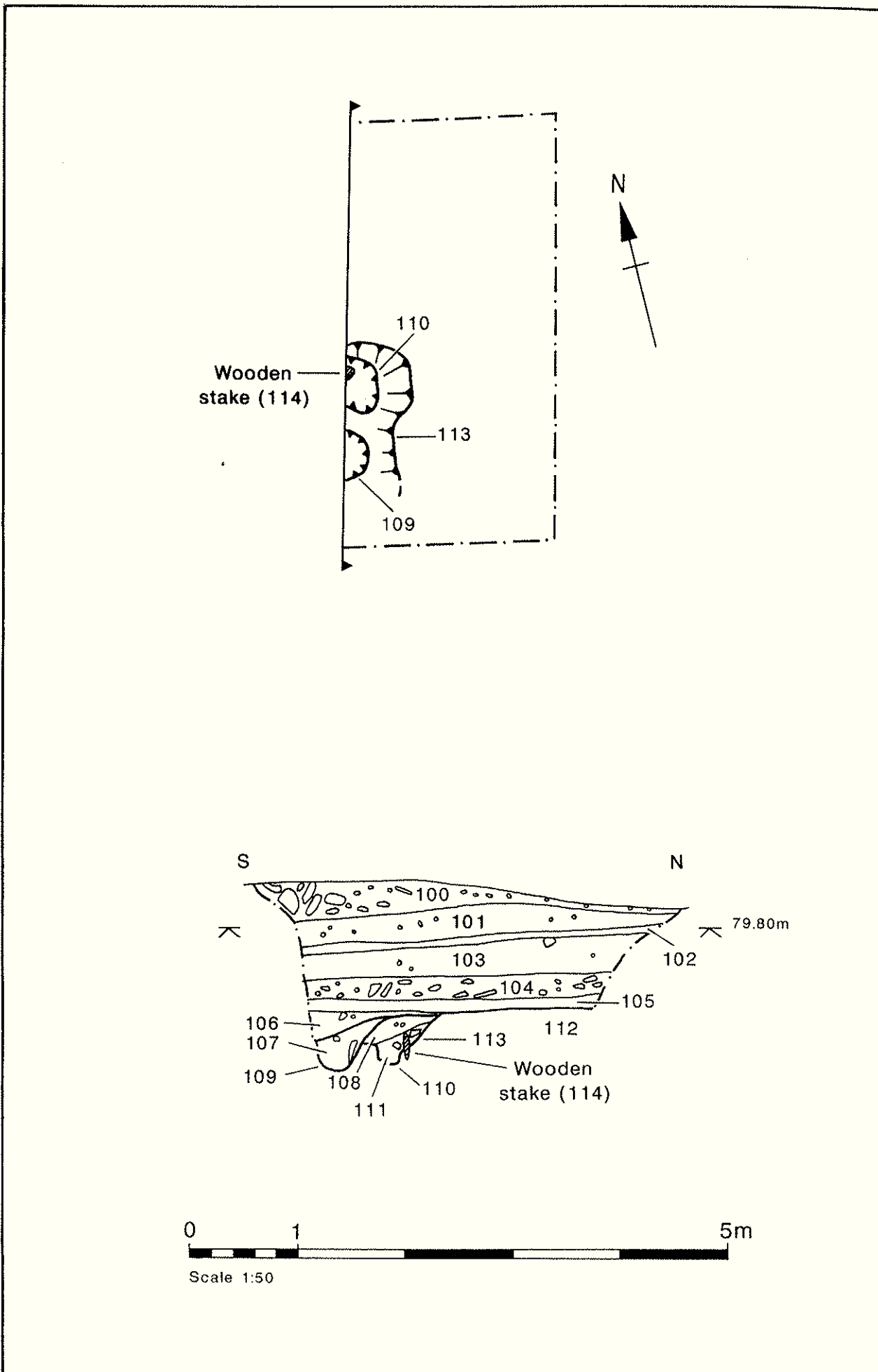


Figure 4: Trench 1, plan and section



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