PAINT SHOP BUILDING GARSINGTON WAY, OXFORD

NGR SP 5590 0390

Archaeological Evaluation Report

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

November 1995

Rover Group Ltd

Paint Shop Building, Garsington Way, Oxford

SP 5590 0390

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Site code OXROPS

Oxford Archaeological Unit
20 November 1995

Rover Group Ltd

Paint Shop Building, Garsington Way, Oxford

SP 5590 0390

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Site code OXROPS

LIST OF CONTENTS **PAGE**

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) evaluated the archaeological potential of land on the west side of Roman Way within the Rover Group car works at Cowley, Oxford. Four trenches were excavated. Clear evidence for a change in the natural geology from limestone to sand was found in Trench 1. Roman and medieval ploughsoils were found in Trenches 1, 2 and 4. No archaeologically significant features were found. The possibility of finding Roman burials within the development area, especially at its south end, cannot be ruled out.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) evaluated the archaeological potential of land on the west side of Roman Way within the Rover Group car works at Cowley, Oxford. The evaluation was requested by Oxford City Council on the advice of Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS); the development site lies in an area of very high potential for Roman remains. The evaluation was commissioned by SDC Ltd on behalf of Rover Group, and took place from 30 October to 2 November 1995.

Roman Way forms the eastern boundary of the site and, as its name suggests, the Way was an important thoroughfare between the towns at Alchester and Dorchester-on-Thames throughout the Roman period. Supposedly Roman burials were found at the southern edge of the development area during extension of a railway siding in 1940.

The site is currently laid to tarmac and concrete, the latter largely being associated with a substantial modern building which has been demolished in recent times. Rover Group wishes to construct a new Paint Shop on the site, replacing the existing range of buildings to the west and extending eastwards almost as far as Roman Way. As OAU were already on-site undertaking the evaluation of the proposed Vehicle Quality building, discussions took place between Rover Group, OAU and OAAS as to the best method of evaluating the Paint Shop site. It was agreed that four trenches should be excavated in the currently open area under the general terms of the brief prepared by OAAS, and OAU's project design, for the Vehicle Quality site. The desktop study for the Vehicle Quality site had already covered the Paint Shop site. No geotechnical information was available. The four trenches were to total 75 m in length, which would represent a slightly greater than 2 % sample of the site. Operational and access restrictions meant that only 65 m could be excavated, representing a slightly less than 2 % sample. The results of the evaluation suggest that this shortfall has not significantly affected the evaluation as the trenches which had to be shortened contained uniform ploughsoils only, while one of the trenches exhibited massive truncation of all deposits including natural geology by the construction of the former building on the site.

Contractual arrangements were as for the Vehicle Quality evaluation, with OAU being commissioned by SDC Ltd. The four trenches were excavated from 30 October to 2 November 1995.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The natural geology on the site changes from corallian limestone adjacent to Roman Way to sand over the remainder of the area. The actual break in geology was recorded in

evaluation Trench 1. The surface of the area is level at about 73.3 m to 73.4 m.

METHODS (see Fig 1 for trench layout)

The desktop assessment of the archaeological background to the Vehicle Quality site was also used for the Paint Shop project. The assessment had involved study of the Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record (OSMR), cartographic sources held at the Bodleian library (including tithe and enclosure maps and all available Ordnance Survey editions), published references to archaeological discoveries (especially in *Oxoniensia*, the county's main journal of archaeological and historical record), and secondary sources such as the Victoria County Histories for Oxfordshire. The desktop study is available in the Vehicle Quality evaluation report and is not reproduced here. No geotechnical records were available for the Paint Shop site.

An evaluation plan was devised comprising one 30 m-long and three 15 m-long trenches spread evenly across the site and aligned either in parallel with or perpendicular to Roman Way. The trench plan represented slightly more than a 2 % sample of the total site area of *c.* 5850 m^2 ha (less than this was actually available for evaluation because of service runs). The plan was drawn up in consultation with OAAS and Rover Group. All four trenches were opened up at the same time, but operational and access requirements to adjacent buildings meant that Trenches 2 and 4 had to be shortened by 5 m each, thus reducing the total trench length to 65 m instead of the planned 75 m.

Work on site took place from 30 October to 2 November 1995 and was undertaken in close cooperation with SDC Ltd, who supplied plant, fencing and other materials and also liaised with Rover Group security. A JCB 3X was used to break out tarmac and reinforced concrete as appropriate, and then to remove rubble and overburden layers to archaeological levels or the natural geology (whichever was the closest to the surface). The latter work was undertaken with a 1.6 m toothless ditching bucket under detailed archaeological supervision. Trenches were then cleaned manually in plan and section as appropriate. Recording methods followed standard OAU practice (D Wilkinson (ed) 1992, *OAU Field Manual*), and every trench was recorded to an appropriately full level whether archaeology was present or not. Each trench was numbered from 1-4 (Fig 1). All features, soil layers etc (contexts) were numbered in sequence per trench. The trench number is usually cited first followed by the context in this report; thus 1/2 and 2/6 would represent context 2 in trench 1 and context 6 in trench 2. Post-excavation analysis of the results has comprised a detailed study of all site records and the ceramic finds (no other finds were recovered).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The OSMR study showed that the site was in an area of densely-clustered Roman activity, with burials and settlement evidence known from the north, west and south (see below). The find spots were noticeably concentrated along the Roman road (Roman Way). There was relatively little evidence for earlier activity, and later landuse seems to have been confined to agriculture until modern times. This was confirmed by study of the map evidence, which clearly showed that the area had survived as agricultural land into modern times. The major development on the site comprised the construction of a building in *c.* 1939.

The burials at the south end of the site (OSMR 1852) were discovered during extension of a railway siding. The burials are very poorly documented and the exact location of the find is unclear. One burial was excavated by Captain C Musgrave on 2 October 1940. In a letter to *Oxoniensia* (1941, 89) he reported that he had excavated the body of 'an aged supine extended male' located 'about 20 yards NW of the point where the Roman Road from Alchester to Dorchester crosses the railway'. Workmen on the site reported that about 6 graves had already been 'demolished'. There is no report that any of these burials contained artefacts. Their identification as Roman comes from Musgrave who describes the Romano-British shape of the skull of his skeleton. The Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record does not contain any further material relating to this site. A comparison of the 1939 and 1956 25" maps indicates that a number of additional buildings were constructed between the main Pressed Steel plant and the Roman road between these dates.

RESULTS

Summary of trench results (see Figs 2-4 and Appendix 1)

The natural geology seen across the site was corallian limestone and sand. Only limestone was encountered in Trench 3, and only sand in Trenches 2 and 4. The break between the two geologies was located in Trench 1, where the limestone was seen to overlie the sand (Figs 2 and 3).

Several natural features were seen and investigated in Trench 1. These manifested at the level of the natural sand and initially resembled archaeological features, often with fairly well-defined boundaries (edges). Excavation, however, proved that they were irregular and that apparently clear linear edges on the surface rapidly became diffuse and non-linear. Most of these features are interpreted as tree-throw holes, but the most interesting example was a solution hollow (1/14). Again this initially appeared to have a strongly defined linear edge running roughly diagonally across the trench. Further excavation, however, showed that the feature resembled an inverted cone, continuing beyond the maximum depth of excavation. The fills were equally unusual, with an upper bowl-shaped layer of reddish sand over the general yellow-white sand of the rest of the feature.

No archaeological features were encountered within any of the trenches, although a Roman ploughsoil was identified (1/5, 2/5 and 4/5) sealing the geology and overlain by a medieval ploughsoil (1/4, 2/4 and 4/4).

The pottery, by Paul Booth

A small collection of 23 sherds (total weight 106 g) was recovered from three contexts (1/3, 1/4 and 2/5). All sherds were small and abraded, with the greatest weight per individual sherd being 9 g. The assemblage is mixed, with late Bronze Age/early Iron Age, possible middle Iron Age, late Iron Age/early Roman and medieval sherds being present. A single sherd of late Iron Age/early Roman pottery was recovered from context 1/3, but otherwise all the pottery of this date and earlier derived from Trench 2. Medieval sherds, in contrast, were only recovered from Trench 1. No pottery was recovered from Trenches 3 and 4.

Cxt	NoSh	Wt g	Date	Comments
1/3	1	3	LIR	
	2	13	Medieval	Glazed Brill/Boarstall, 14th century or later
	3	16		
1/4	2	10	Medieval	
	2	10		
2/5	2	13	LBA(?/EIA)	1 flint-, 1 quartzite-tempered
	7	19	?MIA	Sandy fabrics - includes some fired clay
	9	48	LIR	5 grog-tempered including 1 storage jar, 3 sandy grey ware, 1 fine oxidised ware
	18	80		
	23	106		

Table of pottery (NoSh = number of sherds; LBA(?EIA) = late Bronze Age possibly to early Iron Age; MIA = middle Iron Age; LIR = late Iron Age to early Roman)

DISCUSSION

The topography of the site

A clear break in geology was seen in the evaluation trenches. Limestone was present throughout Trench 3 and at the east end of Trench 1. Elsewhere, however, the natural formation comprised red/brown or yellow sand, and this extended under the limestone in Trench 1. There must have been a distinct break in the local topography over this geological change, comprising a natural slope (see ploughsoil levels in **General landuse**).

Several natural features were found in Trench 1. One of these was a geological solution hollow, and the remainder probably represent tree-throw holes. These may relate to land clearance for agriculture, but there is no direct evidence from the site for when this occurred. A later prehistoric or early Roman date would seem plausible on the basis of the pottery from ploughsoils in Trench 2.

Archaeology

No archaeological features were found. This is perhaps surprising given the proximity of the site to the Roman road and the presumed Roman burials discovered immediately to the south of the evaluation site in 1940. Modern truncation has clearly removed any trace of archaeological potential in parts of the area (ie Trench 3), but the presence of intact ploughsoils in Trenches 1, 2 and 4 means that the lack of archaeological features there is significant: it suggests a more general absence of archaeology. The presence of numerous Roman pot sherds in the Trench 2 ploughsoils, however, might suggest that a Roman site lies in the vicinity. The Roman burials from the southern limit of the site reported in 1940 provide a possible context, but no evidence for burials was found in any of the evaluation trenches.

General landuse

The evidence of ploughsoils from Trenches 1, 2 and 4 suggests that the area of sandy geology had been agricultural land for a considerable period before its incorporation into the Pressed Steel plant. The pot sherds from context 1/3 are from modern disturbance and must therefore be regarded as residual, but the two sherds from context 1/4 can be regarded as *in situ*. This ploughsoil can be assigned to the medieval period (although the number of sherds and the small sherd size should be borne in mind). The assemblage from context 2/5 is more mixed, with a range of prehistoric to early Roman sherds present. The earlier material is residual, and the most likely date for the context is late 1st century AD, or possibly later in the Roman period. This context is also a ploughsoil, and it underlies a further ploughsoil in an equivalent position to context 1/4. It can be suggested, therefore, that the lower ploughsoil is of Roman date while the upper one is of medieval date. A headland would have developed at the break in geology, because the limestone surface lies at a higher level (73.18 m) than the ploughsoils (Roman: 72.44 m; medieval: 72.85 m) and would have forced plough teams to turn in front of it.

All other evidence for landuse relates to the modern development of the site. Traces were found of the building known to have existed here. The construction work had obviously involved substantial, deep groundworks.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

OAU believes that the foundations and bases of the existing buildings to the west of the trenches will be retained for the new building. The latter will require new foundations within the evaluated area, and the foundations and associated groundworks appear likely to impact substantially into the natural sands recovered in Trenches 1, 2 and 4. The site has already been truncated by the slab and foundations for the previous building here, however, while service trenches will also have had an impact. The absence of archaeology within the trenches suggests that the impact, though potentially severe, will have very limited archaeological implications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There appears to be no need to undertake further excavation in advance of development of this area. A watching brief would be advisable because the possibility of Roman burials being found certainly cannot be precluded. The excavation of human remains is strictly governed by various Acts of Parliament, most notably the Burial Act 1857. A Home Office licence is required for the removal of ancient burials under Section 52 of this Act. Such licences can be applied for in advance or can be obtained by telephone if remains are disturbed accidentally and/or unexpectedly. "It is a criminal offence under Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857 to remove any human remains from any place of burial without a licence ... or to do so in breach of any condition attached to any licence. The offence is committed by the person who actually removes the remains."[1] Each and every offence (ie every body removed) is punishable by a £200 fine, but adverse publicity could be an equally serious problem.

---

[1] S Garrett-Frost 1992, *The Law and Burial Archaeology*, Institute of Field Archaeologists Technical Paper 11

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation did not locate any significant archaeology, although there was evidence for Roman and later cultivation. Modern construction work has removed all traces of any earlier deposits over parts of the evaluated area.

Graham D Keevill and Mick Parsons
Oxford Archaeological Unit
20 November 1995

APPENDIX 1 TABLE OF CONTEXTS

CXT	TYPE	DEPTH	WIDTH	COMMENTS	DATE
1/1	layer	0.30		concrete	modern
1/2	layer	0.20		make up	"
1/3	layer	0.10		disturbance	"
1/4	layer	0.20		ploughsoil	medieval
1/5	layer	0.30		ploughsoil	?Roman
1/6	layer			natural	geology
1/7	cut	0.40	0.70	natural feature	geology
1/8	cut	0.60	1.85	tree-throw pit	"
1/9	fill	0.20		fill of 1/7	
1/10	fill	0.29		fill of 1/7	
1/11	fill	0.56		fill of 1/8	
1/12	fill	0.68		fill of 1/13	
1/13	cut	0.72	2.32	tree-throw pit	unknown
1/14	cut	1.65+	1.95 dia	natural feature	geology
1/15	fill	1.65+		fill of 1/14	
2/1	layer	0.24		concrete	modern
2/2	layer	0.24		make up	"
2/3	layer	0.10		disturbance	"
2/4	layer	0.25		ploughsoil	?medieval
2/5	layer	0.30		ploughsoil	Roman
2/6	layer	0.20		?sub soil	unknown
2/7	layer			natural	geology
3/1	layer	0.18		concrete	modern
3/2	layer	0.10		make up	"
3/3	layer	0.10		disturbance	"
3/4	layer			natural	geology
4/1	layer	0.26		concrete	modern
4/2	layer	0.14		make up	"
4/3	layer	0.12		disturbance	"
4/4	layer	0.26		ploughsoil	?medieval
4/5	layer	0.22		ploughsoil	?Roman
4/6	layer			natural	geology
4/7	deposit	1.20+	2.25+	disturbance	modern

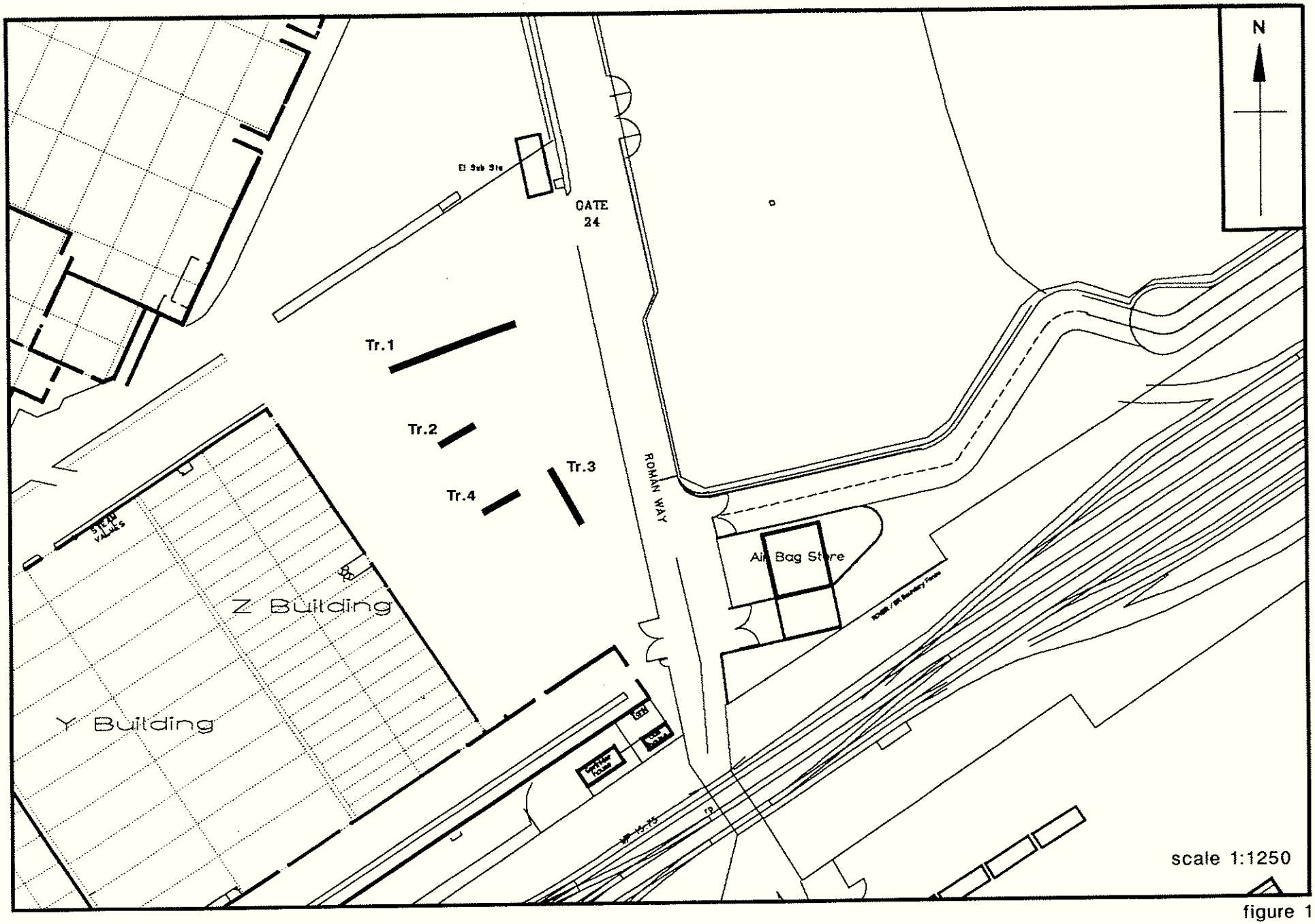

N
GATE 24
Tr.1
Tr.2
Tr.3
Tr.4
ROMAN WAY
Air Bag Store
Z Building
Y Building
scale 1:1250

figure 1

Trench 1 Plan

OXROPS 95

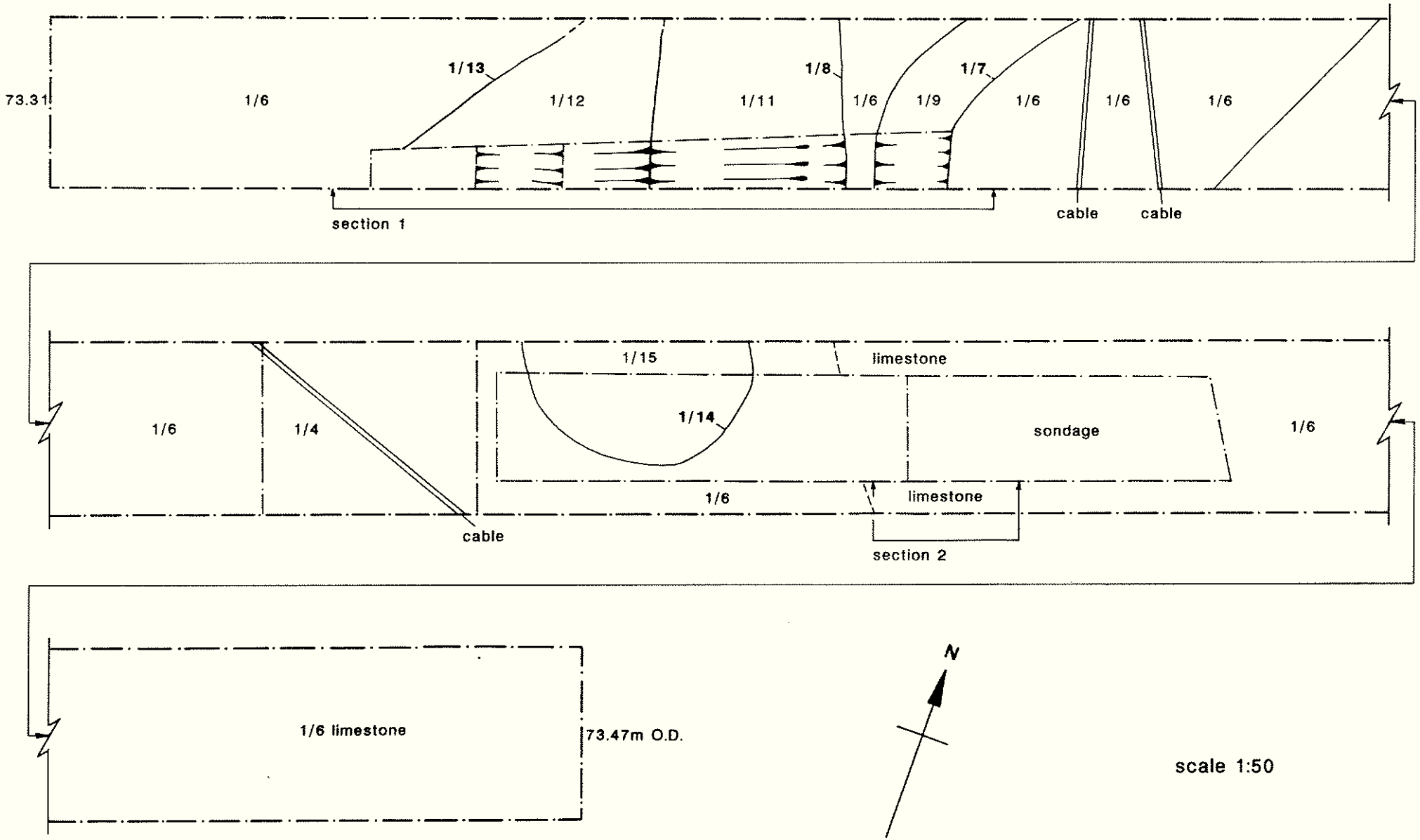
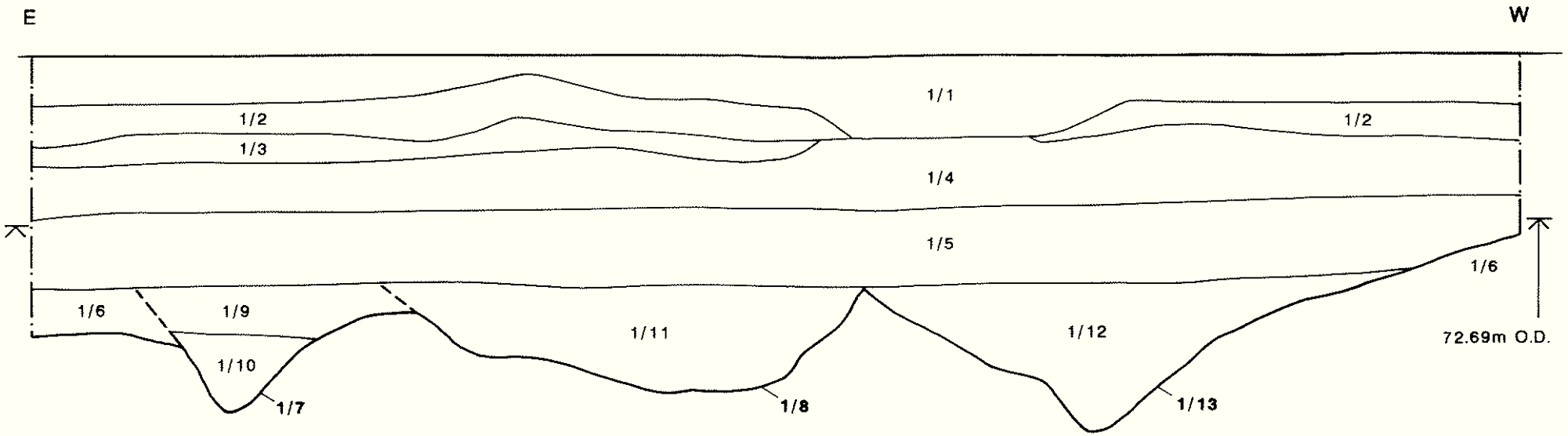
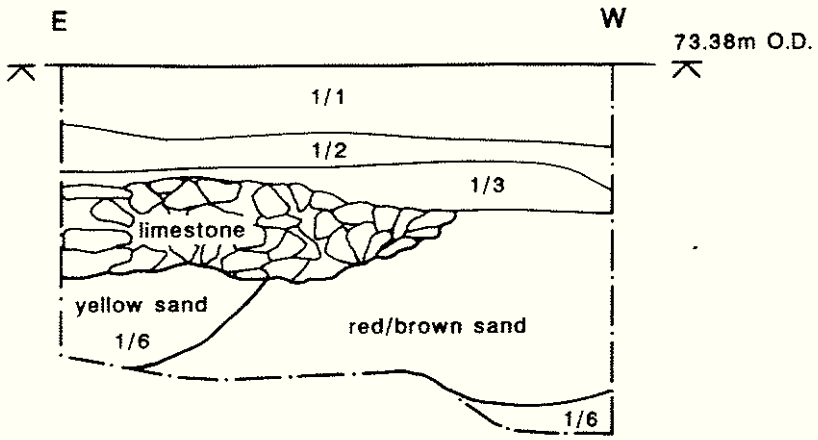


figure 2

Trench 1 Section 1



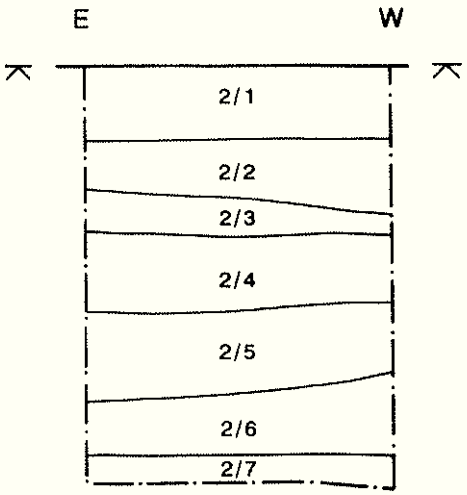
Section 2



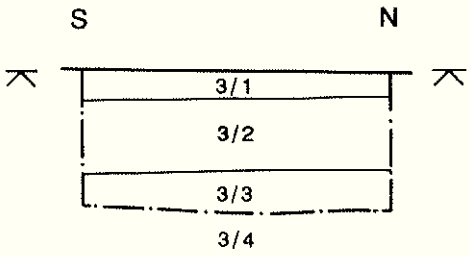
scale 1:25

figure 3

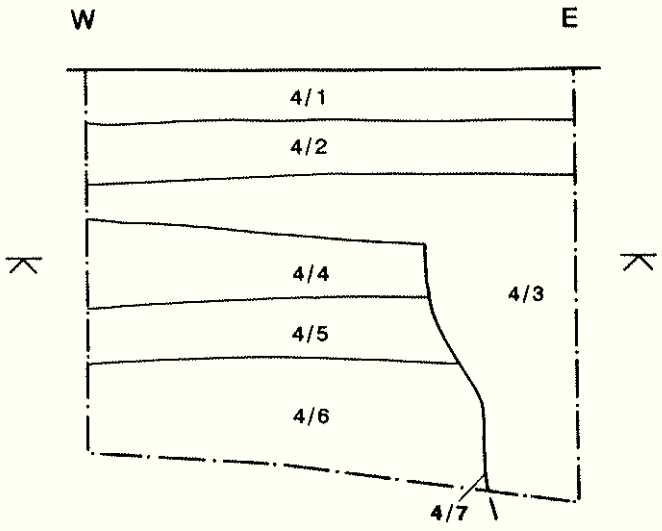
Trench 2 Section



Trench 3 Section



Trench 4 Section



scale 1:25

figure 4

Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP
Tel: 01865 243888
Fax: 01865 793496

Registered Charity No. 285627
Private Limited Company No. 1618597