

**Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road,
Jericho, Oxford**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd**

by Sean Wallis
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code EIO05/26

March 2006

Summary

Site name: Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road, Jericho, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 5045 0723

Site activity: Field Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 21st February to 1st March 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: EIO05/26

Area of site: c. 1ha

Summary of results: A 17th-century pit and possible 19th-century well were found in the rear of 25 Walton Well Road. No archaeological finds or features were recorded on the Eagle Ironworks site itself.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

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| Report edited/checked by: | Steve Ford✓ 13.03.06 |
| | Steve Preston✓ 15.03.06 |

Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road, Jericho, Oxford An Archaeological Evaluation

by Sean Wallis

Report 05/26b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Lucy's Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road, Jericho, Oxford (SP 5045 0723) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Andrew Saunders-Davies, of Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd, Berkeley House, Abingdon Science Park, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3NB.

Planning permission has been granted by Oxford City Council (consent 04/00387/FUL) for the construction of residential apartments and an office facility, with basement car parking on the site, as part of a larger scheme which also includes other plots of land. The development will involve the demolition of existing industrial structures and the subsurface car parking will cover the entire site. Planning consent had been granted without a condition relating to archaeology but following consultation with Mr Brian Durham, Planning Archaeologist for Oxford City Council, Berkeley Homes voluntarily agreed to fund a programme of archaeological desk-based assessment and field evaluation. It was also decided to dig further trial pits in the rear gardens of properties on Walton Well Road, which lie within an area where construction of a bin store is to be sited. A proposed revision to the layout of the bin store required an application for additional planning consent which has not yet been determined.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Colls, Jo Pine and Sean Wallis from 21st February to 1st March 2006 and the site code is EIO05/26. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment prepared prior to the demolition of the industrial structures (Preston 2005). In summary, the site lies in an area believed to have moderate archaeological potential for both prehistoric and later periods. Due to the sloping nature of the ground it is considered that any potential archaeological deposits on the eastern (uphill) parts of the site will have been severely truncated by the 19th and 20th century factory works. In contrast, the relevant archaeological levels at the western (downhill) part of the site are thought to be deeply buried by modern made ground as indicated by the results of geotechnical investigations. It was considered that an archaeological watching brief was an appropriate response to the possible presence of archaeological deposits on the site.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the boundary between Jericho and Walton, about 1km north-east of the historic core of the City of Oxford. The site is bordered on its north and east sides by residential properties, which front onto Walton Well Road and Walton Street, respectively, and by St Sepulchre's cemetery to the south, while the Oxford and Birmingham Canal forms the western boundary. Although the ground surface occupied by the industrial buildings was relatively level, the underlying natural topography of the area slopes quite steeply down from Walton Street towards the canal. According to the British Geological Survey, the underlying geology is on the border between the First Terrace (flood plain) river gravels and alluvium (BGS 1982), and these deposits were recorded in five of the six trenches excavated.

Archaeological background

The archaeological background of the site has been detailed in a previous desk-top study. In summary, the archaeological potential of the site stems from its position on the margins of the floodplain of the River Thames, which would have made it an attractive location throughout prehistoric and most subsequent periods. A number of prehistoric finds have been recorded in the area, including three possible Neolithic human burials, to the north of the site. Roman finds, mainly pottery, have also been recovered from the vicinity, which may suggest some form of settlement nearby. However, surprisingly little Saxon or medieval evidence has been recorded in the immediate area (Preston 2005).

An archaeological evaluation carried out on the other side of the canal, just north-west of the current site, produced no archaeological finds or features and revealed a low-lying, swampy environment which was subsequently inundated by alluvium (Ford 1996).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development. The work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which warrant preservation *in situ*, or might be better investigated under conditions pertaining to full excavation. Prior to the demolition of the industrial buildings, a series of geotechnical test pits was dug across the site, which indicated that deep made ground deposits overlay alluvium, which in turn overlay natural sand and gravels, in the area covered by the current evaluation (Bassett 2004).

The specific research aims of the project are;

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To establish the depth of deposits above the natural geological outcrop.

To determine if, as anticipated from geotechnical study, the archaeological relevant levels are deeply buried on parts of the site and lie well below the impact level of the proposed new buildings.

To achieve these aims the main body of the site was zoned into three parts; an eastern part where much truncation was evident from surface inspection relative to surrounding land; a central part, where truncation might have been less but which was substantially occupied by the former foundry work foundations; and a western part on the lowest part of the site adjacent to the Oxford Canal which had been raised to form level ground.

It was proposed to excavate four trenches, each 1.6m wide, using a machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision. Two of the trenches were to be 10m in length located within the central zone of the site with two trenches 5m long in the western zone nearest to the canal. The eastern zone was not to be examined. A contingency was allowed for further trenching if needed, to clarify any initial findings. If any features of archaeological, or potentially archaeological, interest were present, the trenches were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools, and the features planned and sufficient of them excavated to satisfy the aims of the project. This was to take place in such a manner as not to jeopardize any remains which might better be investigated under the conditions of full excavation. Allowance was made for sampling deposits of environmental potential.

The fieldwork took place post-demolition. In the event, the position of two of the trenches had to be shifted slightly westwards, due to the presence of spoilheaps, a sewer pipe, and an access road. One trench was not fully excavated, due to the unstable nature of deep deposits, which caused the immediate collapse of the trench sides. As the ditching bucket used during the evaluation was only 1.45m wide, the length of the remaining three trenches was extended slightly.

An additional two trenches were dug in the area currently occupied by the rear gardens of houses in Walton Well Road which will lie within the area of the consented bin store and proposed modified bin store (Fig. 3). This area of the bin store was chosen as it appeared that it would provide a intact sequence of deposits above the

natural geology in contrast to areas within the former factory site which lay 0.8m below the heights of the back gardens. The gardens area was sampled by two small hand-dug evaluation trenches.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Trench 1

This trench was aligned approximately north-south, and was 11.6m long. The position of the trench was shifted approximately 10m westwards from that intended, due to the presence of an access road and a large spoilheap. Made ground deposits up to 1.1m thick overlay a layer of greyish/brown sandy silt. This deposit was about 0.45m thick and although it could possibly be a buried soil horizon, the presence of brick and tile fragments suggests that it was another deposit of made ground. Beneath this was a layer of greyish sand and gravel up to 0.25m thick. This deposit was not encountered in any of the other trenches and could be a further made ground layer. This directly overlay a relatively thin humic layer between 30 and 150mm thick. This layer was sampled and examined and was confirmed as a peaty horizon in which was observed a number of shells. The sample had a fine silty matrix without any obvious macrofossils such as wood or reed fragments and may be more accurately described as an organic mud. This organic deposit lay directly above the natural yellow/brown sand and gravels. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

Trench 2

Due to the presence of a sewer pipe and large spoilheap this trench was also shifted slightly westwards. The trench was aligned approximately NE-SW, but could not be fully excavated due to the unstable nature of made ground deposits which caused the trench sides to collapse immediately upon opening. It was ascertained, following a conversation with the site groundworkers, that a concrete crane base for the former works had recently been removed from the vicinity, which may explain the disturbed nature of the deposits. Where the section could be recorded, it appeared to show a sequence of made ground deposits up to 2.1m thick overlying about 0.5m of bluish grey alluvium, which in turn overlay the natural sand and gravel. Due to the conditions mentioned above, and the ingress of ground water, it was not possible to record the made ground deposits in any detail. Although the trench was approximately 5m long at ground level, it was only 2.5m along its base. No archaeological finds or features observed.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was aligned east-west, and was 7m long. Approximately 1.35m of made ground overlay a band of bluish grey alluvium up to 0.4m thick. In places the made ground deposits were seen to be much thicker, probably representing areas of disturbance from the recent demolition works. The alluvium lay directly above the natural sand and gravels along most of the length of the trench, although occasional thin patches of dark brownish grey organic material were noted between the alluvium and gravel. No archaeological finds or features were noted.

Trench 4

This trench was 6.8m long and aligned approximately north-south. The stratigraphy observed was very similar to that recorded in Trench 3. Up to 1.1m of made ground overlay a band of bluish grey alluvium which was up to 1.05m thick in places. Once again, patches of dark brownish grey organic material were noted, up to 0.2m thick in places, between the alluvium and the natural sand and gravels. This layer was sampled and examined and was confirmed as a peaty horizon with some silt and sand and occasional shell fragments. The sample had a fine silty matrix and contained a small number of macrofossils such as wood fragments. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

Trench 5

This trench was dug by hand, in the rear garden of 23 Walton Well Road. The size of the trench was restricted by the presence of a concrete slab, flower beds and a tree. The trench was aligned approximately north-south and was 1.45m long and 0.9m wide. Up to 0.1m of turf and topsoil was removed to reveal a layer of brown/grey sandy silt up to 0.2m thick, which contained plastic, glass and modern ceramic fragments. This in turn overlay a 0.3m thick deposit of grey/brown sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions which contained fragments of brick and tile, glass, slate and mass produced earthenware pottery. Beneath this was a layer of light brown sandy silt with occasional gravel, which was approximately 0.6m thick. This deposit contained lime mortar fragments along with slate, iron nails, china, brick and tile fragments, and pieces of barbed wire. Three sherds of 19th-century pottery were recovered, along with two residual medieval sherds. Digging stopped when the trench was 1m deep, due to logistical and safety considerations. Although natural ground was not reached in the trench, it was clear that there were made ground deposits at least 1.2m thick in this area. Apart from a few pottery sherds from the lowest layer of made ground, none of the material recovered from this trench was retained.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was also dug by hand, in the rear garden of 25 Walton Well Road, and measured 1.4m long and 1.35m wide. Concrete patio slabs were removed along with about 0.15m of bedding sand to reveal a buried topsoil

layer, up to 0.2m thick, which contained modern material, including plastic. In the western half of the trench the buried topsoil lay directly above 0.11m of light brown sandy silt (52), containing brick and tile fragments and one sherd of late 17th-century pottery, which in turn lay above the deposit of lime mortar (51) discussed below.

In the eastern half of the trench a modern cut (3) was identified, containing a primary fill of grey/brown sandy silt (50), which contained modern finds, including plastic (not retained), and an upper fill of sand (57). This feature was observed along the length of the trench, and truncated layers 52 and 51, along with the upper fill (54) of cut 2, and the natural sand and gravel. Cut 2 appears to be the construction cut for a stone built structure which, based on its curved appearance, is possibly a well (55). Two deposits were seen to backfill 2, the upper of which consisted greyish brown sandy silt (54), which contained oyster shells, glass, clay pipe and tile fragments, an iron nail, and a number of 19th-century pottery sherds. The lower fill was redeposited sand and gravel (56). At least four courses of the circular structure were exposed, and the feature seems to be 'capped' with a layer of lime mortar and tile (51). Some of the tiles within this deposit were laid in a circle, but it was not clear whether this related to the structure's use, or if it represents the remains of a subsequent feature, possibly ornamental, which post-dates the structure.

A pit was recorded in the south-east corner of the trench (1), which was seen to be truncated by the construction cut for the structure (2). Pit 1 was cut through the natural sand and gravels and was filled with a brownish grey sandy silt (53) which contained a large amount of oyster shell (a sample of which was retained), along with several sherds of 17th century pottery, animal bone and ceramic tile fragments.

Finds

Bone

The only animal bone recovered from the site consisted of a single fragment of cattle or horse rib, weighing 40g, which was found in pit 1.

Brick and Tile

Six fragments of brick and tile, weighing 344g, were recovered from the site (Appendix 3).

Clay Pipe

One small fragment of clay pipe stem, weighing 4g, was recovered from the fill of construction cut 2.

Glass

A single shard of clear glass, weighing 6g, was found within construction cut 2.

Metalwork

A small iron object was found within construction cut 2. This weighed 12g and was probably a nail.

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 30 sherds with a total weight of 755g. It was all post-medieval, other than two sherds of medieval material, both of which were redeposited in a 19th century context. The material was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200–1600. 2 sherds, 23g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, AD1550 onwards. 8 sherds, 434g.

OXST: Westerwald/Cologne Stoneware, AD1550–1700. 1 sherd, 89g.

OXCE: Tin-glazed Earthenware, AD1613–1800. 6 sherds, 49g.

OXEST: English Stoneware, late 17th–19th century. 1 sherd, 22g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19th–20th century. 12 sherds, 138g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 4.

Shell

A representative sample of oyster shell, weighing 406g, was recovered from the fill of pit 1. In addition, oyster shell weighing 44g was found in the backfill of construction cut 2.

Conclusion

The four trenches on the main part of the site, although somewhat restricted in placement, encountered no finds or features of archaeological significance. They revealed that the archaeologically relevant levels lay deeply buried beneath made ground for the western part of the site. Although the development proposals include basement car parking throughout the site, this will involve truncation to a level of 57.24m AOD (finished floor level of 57.54m less 0.3m of formation level). It is clear from Figure 4 that for the western part of the site this truncation will only affect the uppermost levels of the made ground and even if archaeological deposits were present in these areas, it is only the minimal extent of piling which would impact on these levels.

Information provided by hand dug trench 6 in the rear garden of 25 Walton Well Road, has partly revealed the surface of the natural geology at a depth of about 0.6m below the ground (58.4m AOD) (Fig. 4). However,

adjacent areas outside of the gardens within the former factory site proper are already more than 0.6m below the level within the gardens suggesting that the natural geology in the central zone of the site is more truncated than envisaged when the evaluation scheme was originally drawn up. In addition it is also clear therefore that the area of the consented and proposed bin stores, which partly straddles the area of back gardens and factory site has also been substantially truncated. Evaluation Trench 5 to the rear of 23 Walton Well Road was dug to a depth of over 1m and failed to reveal the natural geology and therefore also indicated deep truncation in this area. It did produce two unstratified sherds of medieval pottery.

Evaluation Trench 6 did reveal a few finds and some deposits of possible archaeological interest. A probable 17th-century pit was revealed albeit substantially truncated in the 19th century.

It is concluded therefore that the archaeological potential of the site varies across the site, with all of the eastern area and much of the central area having no archaeological potential due to truncation. The western area of the site may well have some archaeological potential, or at least the survival of an archaeologically relevant horizon though as no archaeology was actually revealed this potential can be described as low. In any event in this latter area the impact of the foundations of the proposed development are minimal. In the marginal area of the site where a bin store will be sited, deposits of some possible archaeological interest were revealed. However, the evaluation has made clear that the small area containing surviving archaeology lies within an extensive zone of truncation such that there seems little to be gained from further work in this area.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

| <i>Trench No.</i> | <i>Length (m)</i> | <i>Breadth (m)</i> | <i>Depth (m)</i> | <i>Comment</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|--|
| 1 | 11.6 | 1.45 | 2.1 | 0-1.1m made ground onto 1.1-1.55m mid greyish brown sandy silt onto 1.55-1.8m brownish grey sand and gravel onto 1.8-1.95m dark brownish grey organic layer onto natural sand and gravels. No archaeology. |
| 2 | 2.5 | 1.45 | 2.6 | 0-2.1m made ground onto 2.1-2.6m mid bluish grey alluvium onto natural sand and gravels. No archaeology. |
| 3 | 7.0 | 1.45 | 2.1 | 0-1.35m made ground onto 1.35-1.75m mid bluish grey alluvium onto natural sand and gravels. No archaeology. [Plate 1] |
| 4 | 6.8 | 1.45 | 2.5 | 0-1.1m made ground onto 1.1-2.15m mid bluish grey alluvium onto 2.15-2.25 dark brownish grey organic layer onto natural sand and gravels. No archaeology. |
| 5 | 1.4 | 0.9 | 1.2 | 0-0.1m turf and topsoil onto 0.1-0.3m light brownish grey sandy silt onto 0.3-0.6m mid greyish brown sandy silt onto 0.6-1.2m light greyish brown sandy silt. No archaeology. |
| 6 | 1.4 | 1.35 | 1.1 | Concrete patio slabs onto 0.05-0.2m bedding sand onto 0.2-0.4m buried topsoil onto 0.4-0.51m light brown sandy silt (52) onto lime mortar (51). Natural sand and gravel observed between 0.6-1.1m. Modern cut 3. Construction cut 2 with 19th century pottery. Structure 55. Pit 1 with 17th century pottery. [Plate 2] |

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

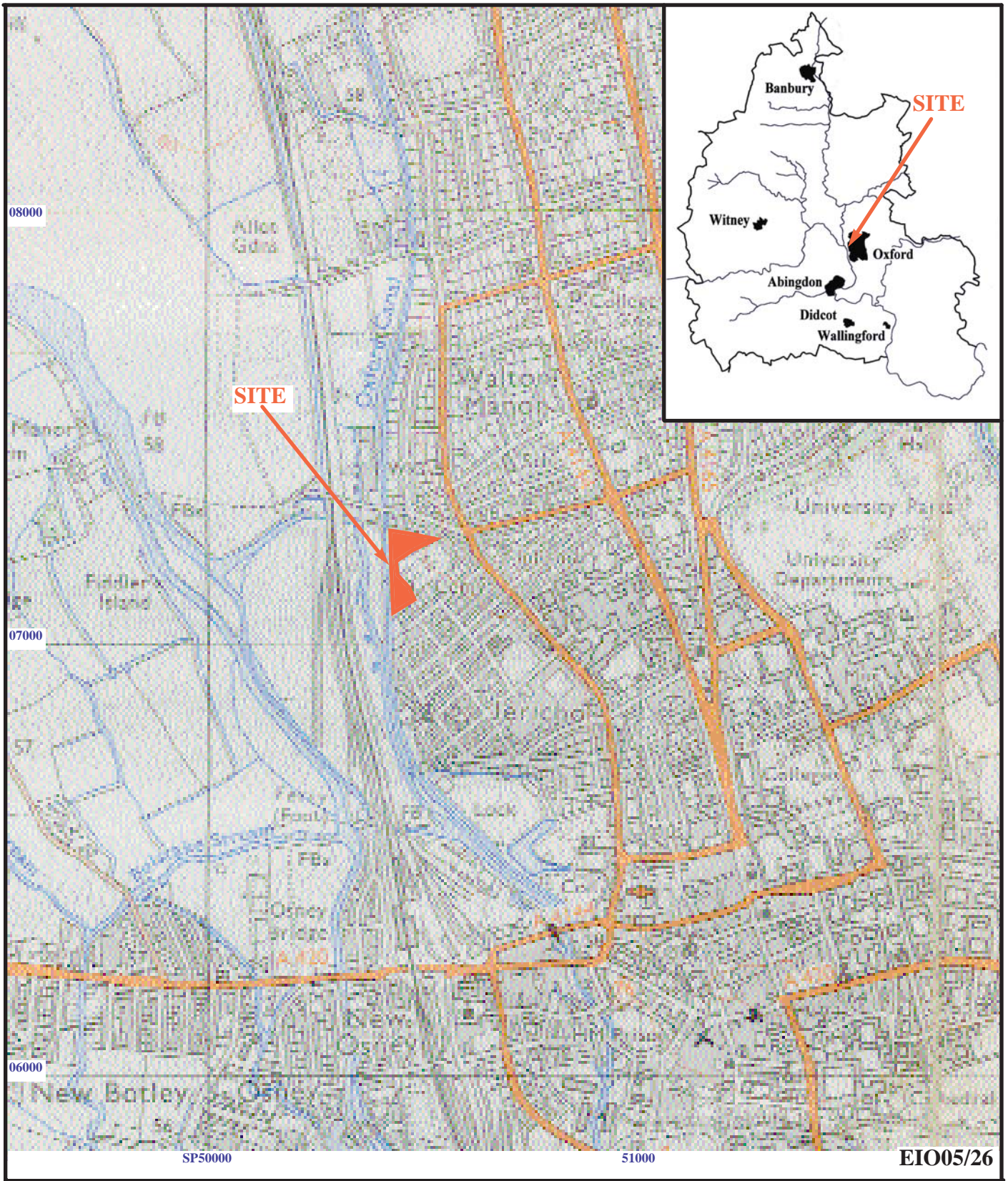
| <i>Trench</i> | <i>Cut</i> | <i>Fill (s)</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Dating evidence</i> |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| 6 | 1 | 53 | Pit | 17th century | Pottery |
| 6 | 2 | 54, 55, 56 | Construction Cut | 19th century | Pottery |
| 6 | 3 | 50, 57 | Modern Cut | 20th century | Plastic |

APPENDIX 3: Brick and Tile

| <i>Trench</i> | <i>Cut</i> | <i>Fill (s)</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>No.</i> | <i>Weight (g)</i> |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|------------|-------------------|
| 6 | 1 | 53 | Pit | 2 | 168 |
| 6 | 2 | 54 | Construction Cut | 2 | 18 |
| 6 | | 52 | Layer | 2 | 158 |

APPENDIX 4: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

| <i>Tr</i> | <i>Cut</i> | <i>Deposit</i> | <i>OXAM</i> | | <i>OXDR</i> | | <i>OXST</i> | | <i>OXCE</i> | | <i>OXEST</i> | | <i>WHEW</i> | |
|-----------|------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| | | | <i>No</i> | <i>Wt</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Wt</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Wt</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Wt</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Wt</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Wt</i> |
| 5 | | Made ground | 2 | 23 | | | | | | | | | 3 | 11 |
| 6 | | 52 | | | | | | | | | 1 | 22 | | |
| 6 | 1 | 53 | | | 8 | 434 | 1 | 89 | 6 | 49 | | | | |
| 6 | 2 | 54 | | | | | | | | | | | 7 | 95 |
| 6 | 3 | 50 | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 32 |
| | | Total | 2 | 23 | 8 | 434 | 1 | 89 | 6 | 49 | 1 | 22 | 12 | 138 |

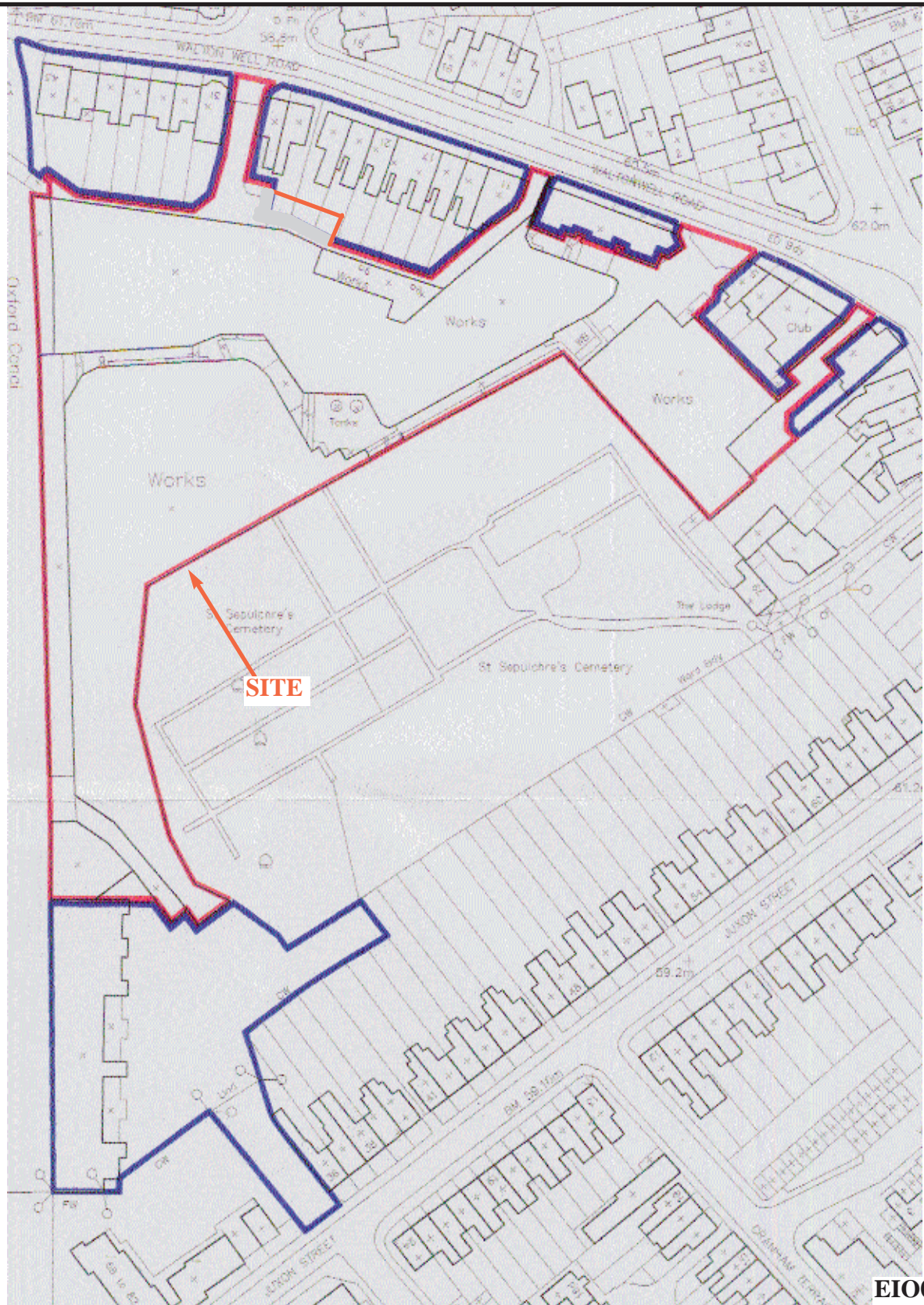


**Eagle Ironworks, Walton Well Road,
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Figure 1. Location of site within Oxford.

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Figure 2. Plan of site on Walton Well Road

Not to scale

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Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road, Oxford 2006



Figure 3. Location of trenches.

Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road, Oxford 2006

Trench 6

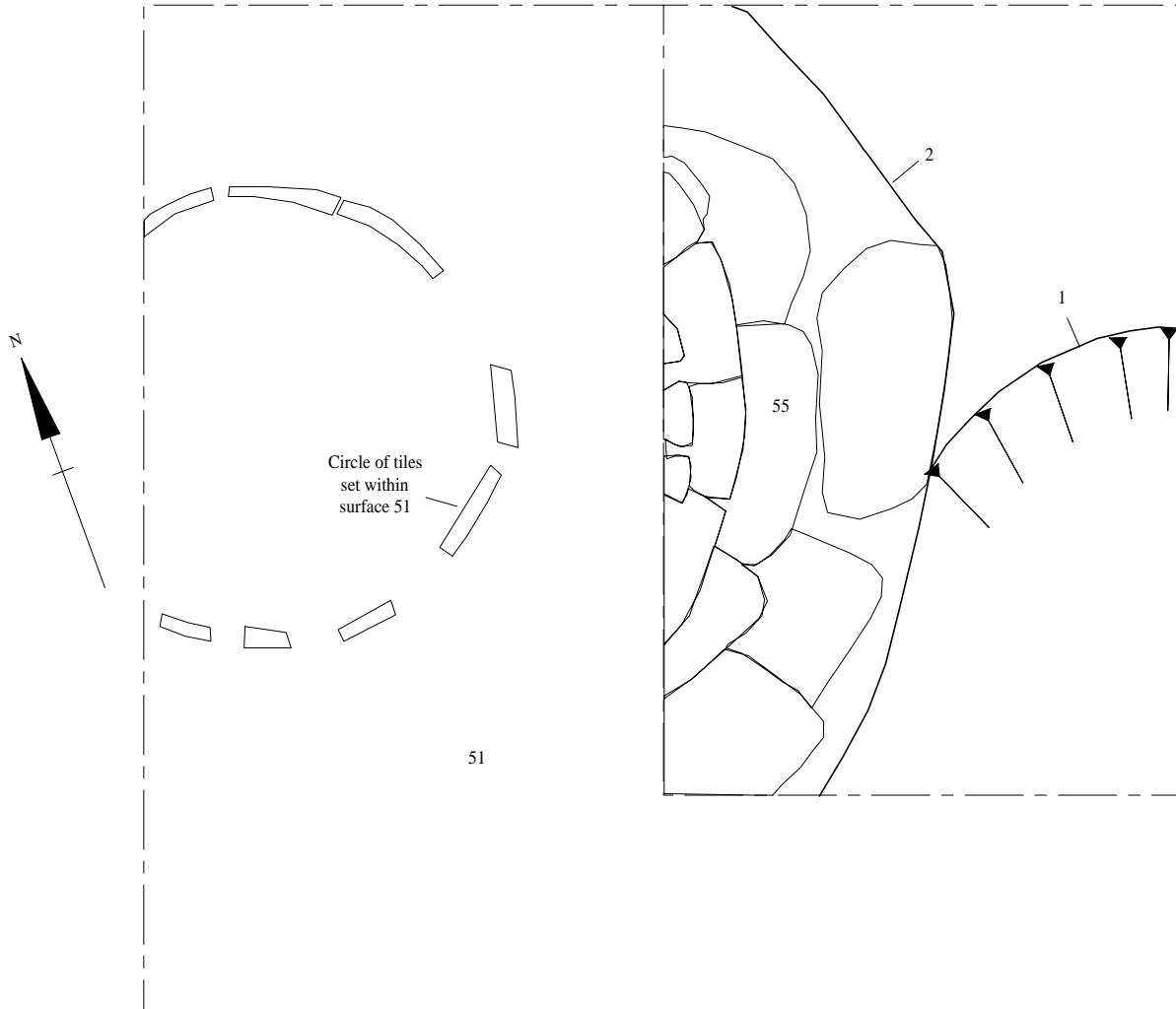


Figure 4. Plan of Trench 6

Eagle Iron Works, Walton Well Road, Oxford 2006

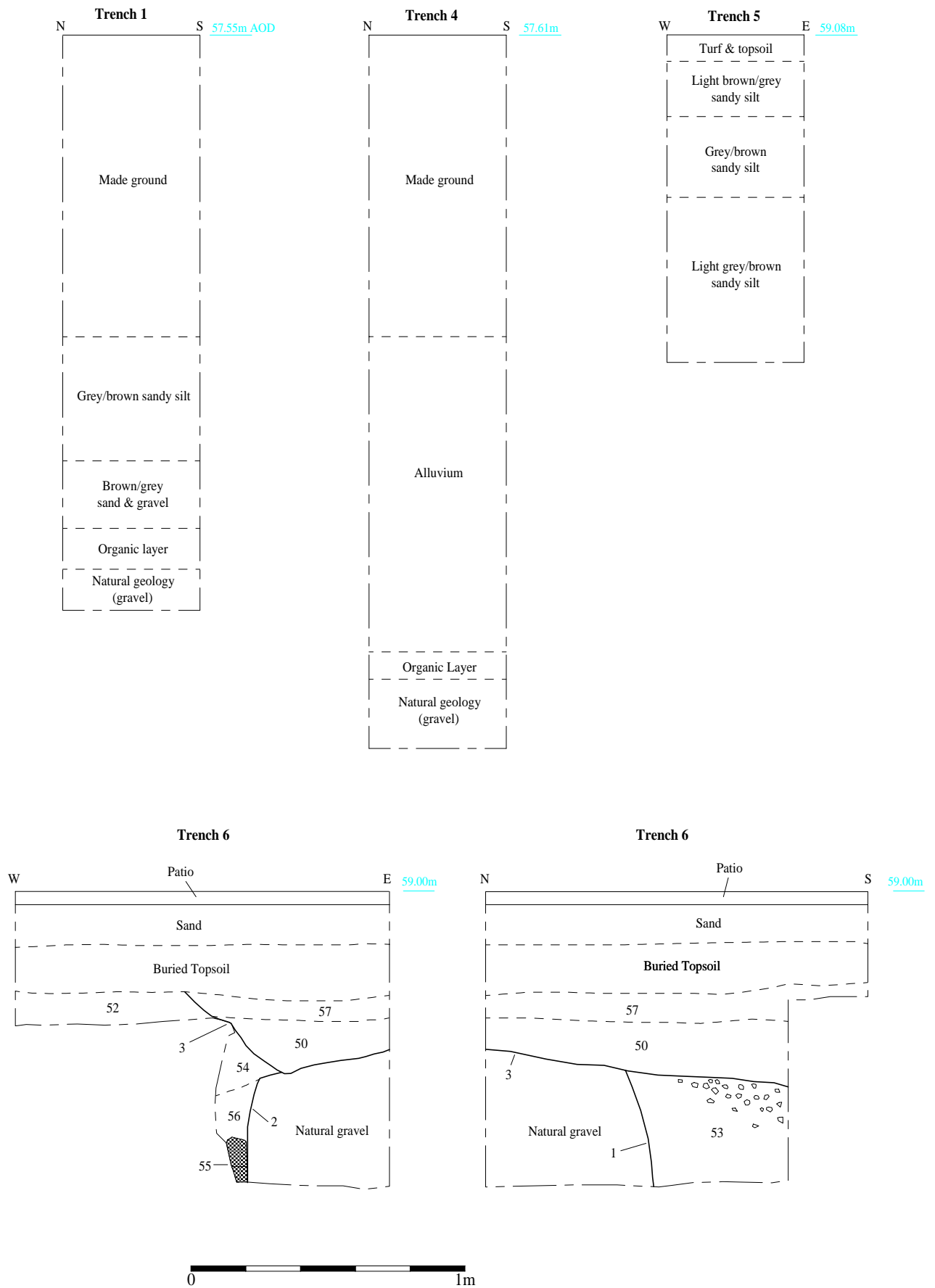


Figure 5. Sections

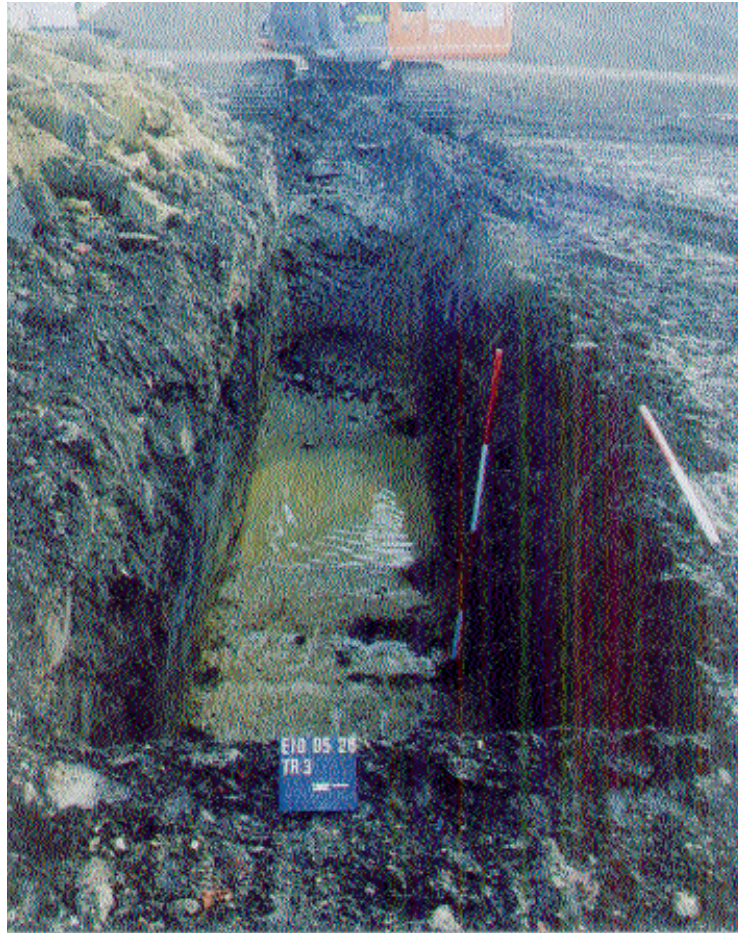


Plate 1. Trench 3 looking east, horizontal scale 1m, vertical scale 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 6 looking east, vertical scale 1m.