Land adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire.

An archaeological evaluation for D. W. Lacey

June 1995

Land adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire. An archaeological evaluation.

Report 95/39

by Tess Durden,
with a contribution by Steve Ford.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Mr. D. W. Lacey prior to the development for housing of the piece of land adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor. The site is centred on SP 7560 0085 and work was carried out according to a brief approved by the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist, Mr. Paul Smith. Fieldwork was carried out by Tess Durden and Joanna Pine between 21st and 23rd June 1995, and the site code is CRC95.

Aims and objectives

The purpose of the evaluation is to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, nature and date of any archaeological deposits on the site. A desk-based component has served to add further information on past activity on the site and in the vicinity. The evidence recovered will form the basis of any proposals for possible mitigation strategies to limit the damage to any significant archaeological deposits present, in accordance with the Planning Policy Guidance relating to archaeology (PPG16, 1990).

Planning background and site description

The proposal is for the construction of six semi-detached cottages and garages, and a new double garage for No. 8 Church Road. The archaeological work is

carried out under planning condition 11 attached to the planning permission, which states that the site shall be investigated prior to the commencement of building works, as it may be of archaeological importance.

At present the 0.198 hectare development site is vacant residential land, under grass, with some scrub and trees.

Geology and topography

The site is situated on the Icknield Belt, between the Chilterns escarpment and the Clay Vale, at a height of about 122 m. OD, sloping downwards very slightly to the North. It is located on well drained calcareous soil, the solid geology being Lower Chalk in the form of chalk marl (BGS 1994).

Archaeological background

The site for development lies almost equidistant between the Upper and Lower Icknield Way in the historic core of Chinnor, immediately adjacent to the 13th century parish church of St. Andrews (Fig. 2). The site may therefore contain deposits relating to the Medieval and later development of the settlement. The Sites and Monuments Record for Oxfordshire holds no further information for the area, there being no other recorded archaeological sites in the immediate vicinity.

Cartographic Sources

A number of older and historical maps were consulted (see Appendix 2) in order to ascertain what activity had been taking place throughout the site's later history, and whether the type of landuse may have affected the preservation of possible archaeological remains. The Tithe map for Chinnor (Fig. 3), dating to

1844, shows the piece of land in question to be open ground with no buildings present. Listed in the Tithe Awards as plot 1741, it is recorded as "Church Yard piece", with arable land use. The Enclosure map of 1853 again shows the plot to be empty, with no recorded owner or land use.

Recent Ordnance Survey maps (1975 and following updates) show no buildings on the site.

THE EVALUATION

Four 11 m. long 1.6 m. wide trenches were laid out randomly/uniformly across the site (Fig. 4), providing a 3.6% sample of the proposal area. The trenches were excavated using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket; after the removal of the topsoil, the subsoil was stripped off in thin spits down to the chalk marl natural. No archaeological features were found until the level of the chalk was reached.

Results

In trenches 2, 3 and 4 the natural bedrock was reached between a depth of 0.59 and 0.90 m. below the present ground surface. Typically this was overlaid by a layer of brown silty clay subsoil containing flint nodules and chalk flecks 0.30 - 0.50 m. deep. These coarse components were more frequent at the base of the subsoil layer, which in trench 2 also appeared to be a slightly darker layer. A thin interface layer between this and the natural bedrock was often visible, consisting of mixed subsoil, orangey clay and marl. Trench 1 contained a much deeper layer of subsoil, almost a metre thick. It is likely that the thickness of the subsoil is the result of colluviation, probably due to clearance on the Chilterns

and cultivation in the Medieval period. Trench 1 is situated on the top of the slope down towards the vale, so it is possible the depth of colluvium here may be a result of soil building up against a field boundary.

A number of possible archaeological features were observed cut into the natural in trenches 1 and 2. A large number of irregular patches of orange clay packed with flint nodules on the level of the natural were of geological origin, probably the result of ice wedges.

Trench 1 contained five archaeological features, F3, F4, F5, F6 and F7. F3 and F4 were two parallel ditches or gullies running roughly north - south, 0.7 - 0.8 m. across but narrowing to the south, both containing a brown silty clay fill (50 and 51) with chalk and flint pieces. Pottery of Roman date and bone was recovered from F3, and an undated piece of fired clay and a struck flint flake from F4. The ditches were both relatively shallow at 0.25 m. deep, and would have been only fractionally truncated by the machine stripping. The identical fills, profiles and alignment of the ditches suggest they are contemporary. A small oval feature 0.2 m. in diameter, F5, cuts the side of F3 and has a similar fill (52). No finds were recovered from it.

A shallow gully, F6, was also present in trench 1, running roughly north-south. The gully is shallow, only 0.02 - 0.03m. deep, and peters out halfway across the trench. One undated sherd of pottery was recovered from the grey/brown silty clay fill (53). Immediately to the east of F6 is a small post hole, F7, 0.15 m. in diameter and 0.11 m. deep. Charcoal specks and tiny fragments of decayed pot were found in the fill (54), which appears to be the same as that for F6.

Two possible features were identified in trench 2. F8 is a small irregular feature which may represent a stake hole or may be a solution hole of geological origin. The fill (55) was a dark yellowish brown silty clay, and contained chalk and charcoal flecks, and one small pottery sherd, possibly of Prehistoric date, from the top of the fill. F9 is an irregular oval feature 1.32 m. across and 0.14 m. deep, appearing from the west side of the trench. A small amount of bone was recovered from near the top of the brown silty clay fill (56). On excavation, the irregular sides and base of the feature suggest that it is probably a tree hole.

No archaeological features were noted in trenches 3 and 4, and no finds were recovered from the spoilheaps of any the trenches.

The Pottery by Steve Ford

5 sherds of pottery and a fragment of fired clay were collected from various features during the evaluation.

F3 (50) Large rim sherd, grey ware, burnished. **Date**: Roman 2nd-4th century.
Neck sherd, grey ware, burnished. **Date**: Roman 2nd-4th century.
Body sherd, black sandy fabric. **Date**: ?Roman.
F6 (53) Fragment, grey flint-gritted. **Date**: Undated.
F8 (55) Fragment, orange flint-gritted. **Date**: Undated, ?Prehistoric.
F4 (51) Fragment of fired clay, undated.

Conclusion

All the features of clearly archaeological origin are located in trench 1. It is difficult to speculate on the function of the gullies and ditches, as such a potentially small portion of them has been uncovered and because they are relatively isolated features. The largish sherds found in F3 may indicate a Roman date for the ditches, which may be field boundaries. The evidence revealed cannot be interpreted as showing the location of a settlement focus, but it is likely that one is to be found not far away. Although the information recovered is minimal, it serves to add to the picture of Roman settlement in Oxfordshire, in a part of the county which has provided relatively little evidence of activity of this date (Steane 1986, map 9).

References

BGS 1994: **Geological Survey of England and Wales**, sheet 237, solid and drift edition, 1:50 000.

PPG16, 1990: **Archaeology and Planning** DoE Planning Policy Guidance note 16. (HMSO).

STEANE, J,. 1986: Commentary to accompany distribution maps of the archaeology of Oxfordshire. In G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds) **The Archaeology of the Oxford Region**. Oxford University Department for External Studies. 160-189.

Appendix 1 Trench details

0m at west or south. Topsoil depth 0.2 m. to 0.4 m. Chalk marl bedrock unless otherwise stated.

Trench	Length	Depth	Comments
1	11m	1.3m-1.4m	Marl with orange clay patches. 1m subsoil. Ditches (F4 and F3) at 2.5-3.5m. Depression (F5) at 4m. Gully (F6) at 6m, posthole (F7) at 6.5m.
2	11m	0.85-1.10m	Marl with orange clay patches. Test pit at 2-3m. 0.4m subsoil. ?Stake hole (F8) at 6m, pit/treehole (F9) at 7m.
3	11m	0.59m	Marl with orange clay patches. Very flinty. 0.32m subsoil.
4	11m	0.8m	Marl with orange clay patches. Very flinty. 0.56m subsoil.

Appendix 2 Features

Trench 1

Feature	Fill	Description	Date	Dug
F3	50	Small ditch/gully	Roman	Y
F4	51	Small ditch/gully	Roman	Part
F5	52	Small oval depression	undated	Y
F6	53	Shallow gully	undated	Part
F7	54	Posthole	undated	Part

Trench 2

Feature	Fill	Description	Date	Dug
F8	55	?Stakehole	undated	Part
F9	56	?Pit or treehole	Undated	Part

Appendix 3
Historic and modern maps consulted.

Source: County Records Office and Central Library, Oxford

1) 1844 Chinnor Tithe map and Awards.
2) 1853 Enclosure map, Chinnor.
3) 1975 (and update) Ordnance Survey SP series, 1:1250.

Oxfordshire

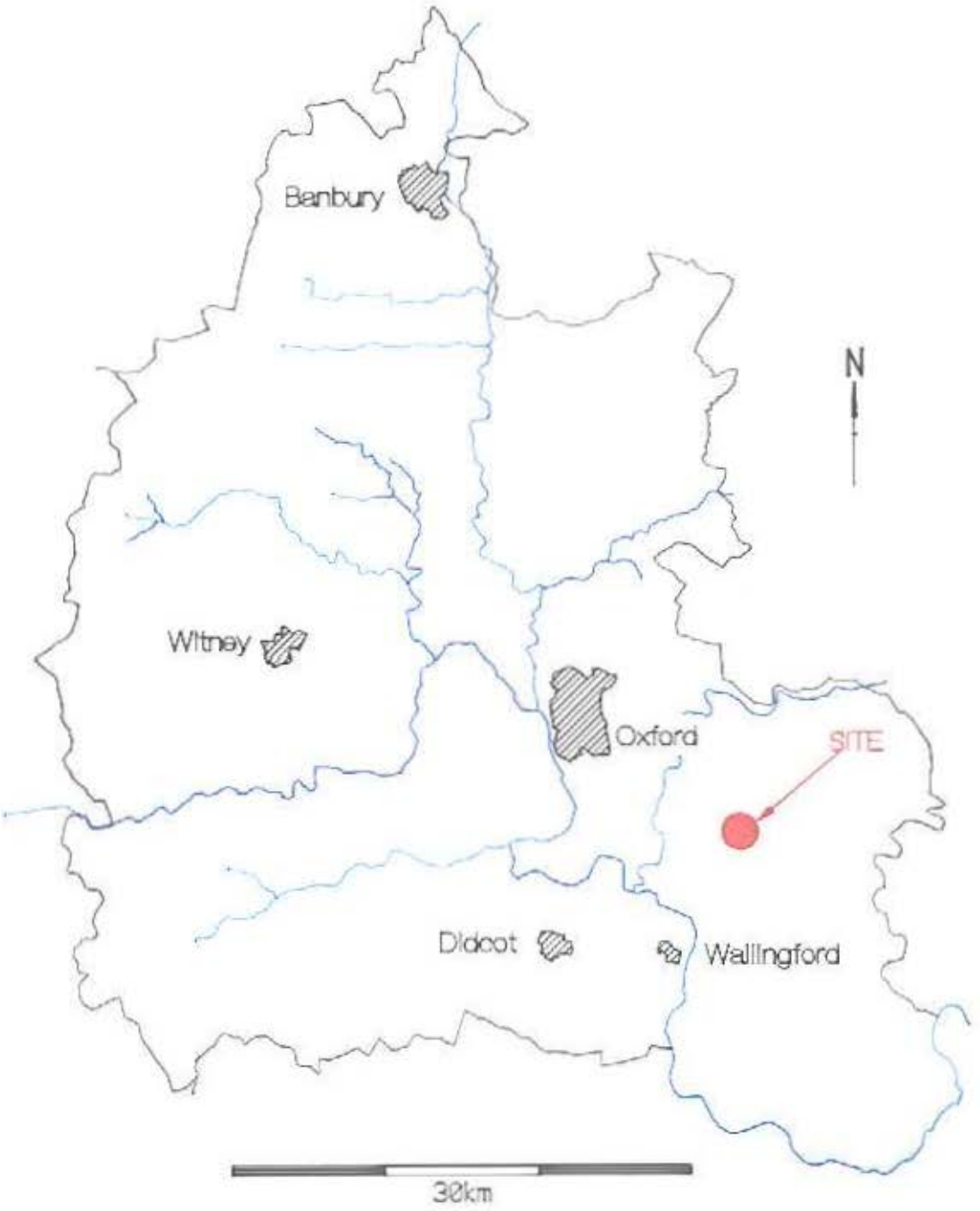

Figure 1. Location of site within Oxfordshire.

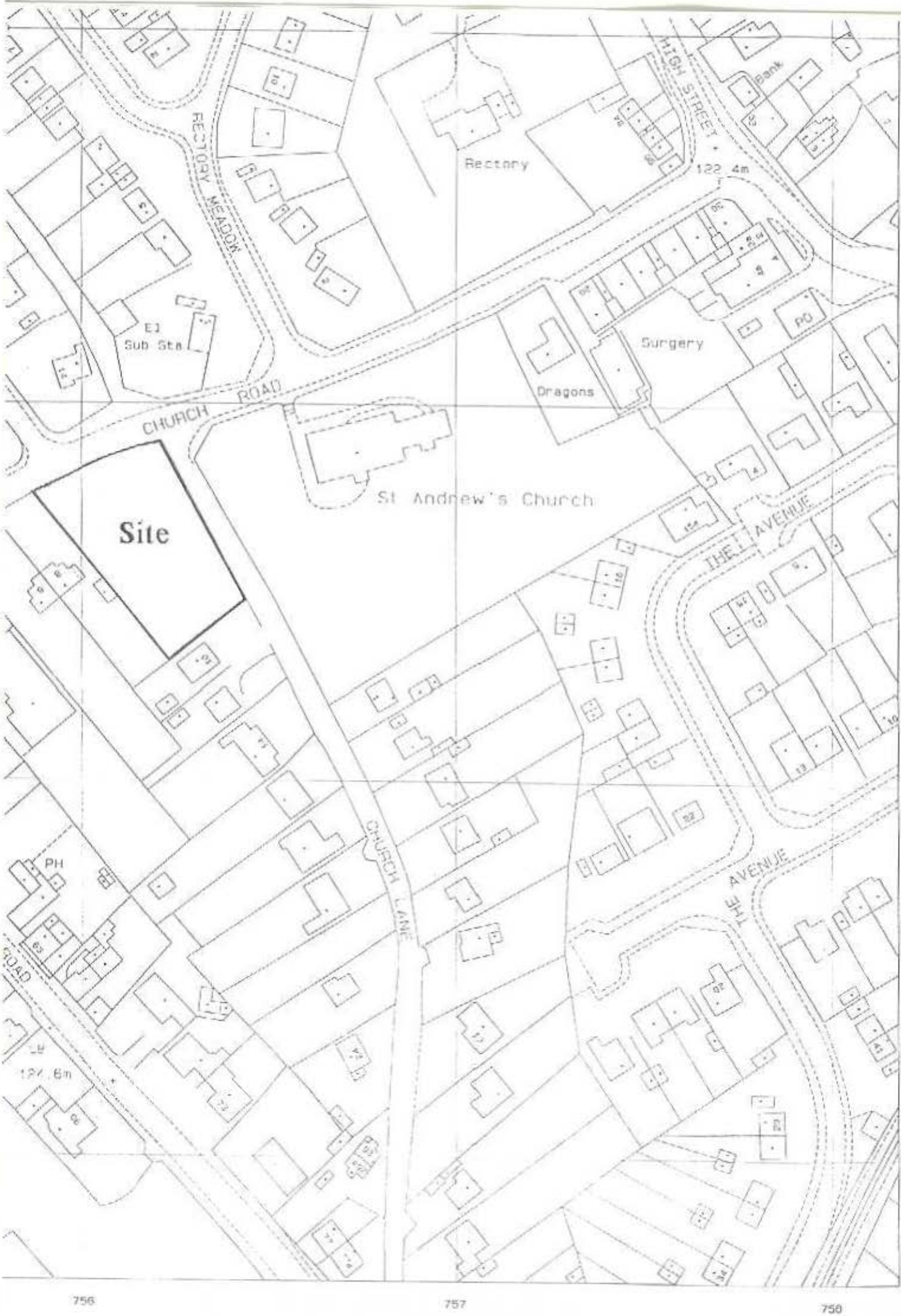

Figure 2. Site Location

Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, 1995

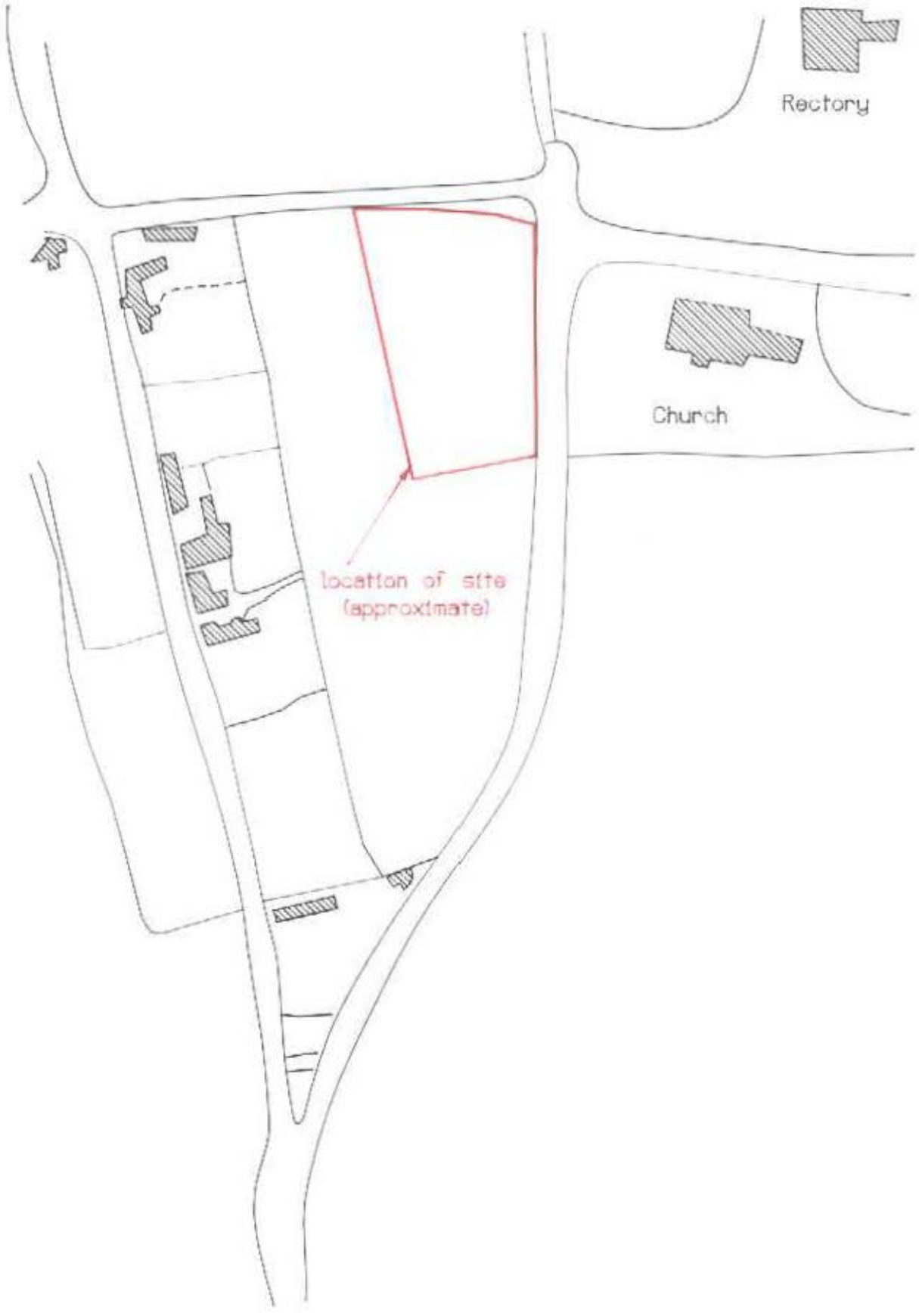

Figure 3. Extract from Chinnor Tithe map.

CRC95

Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire 1995

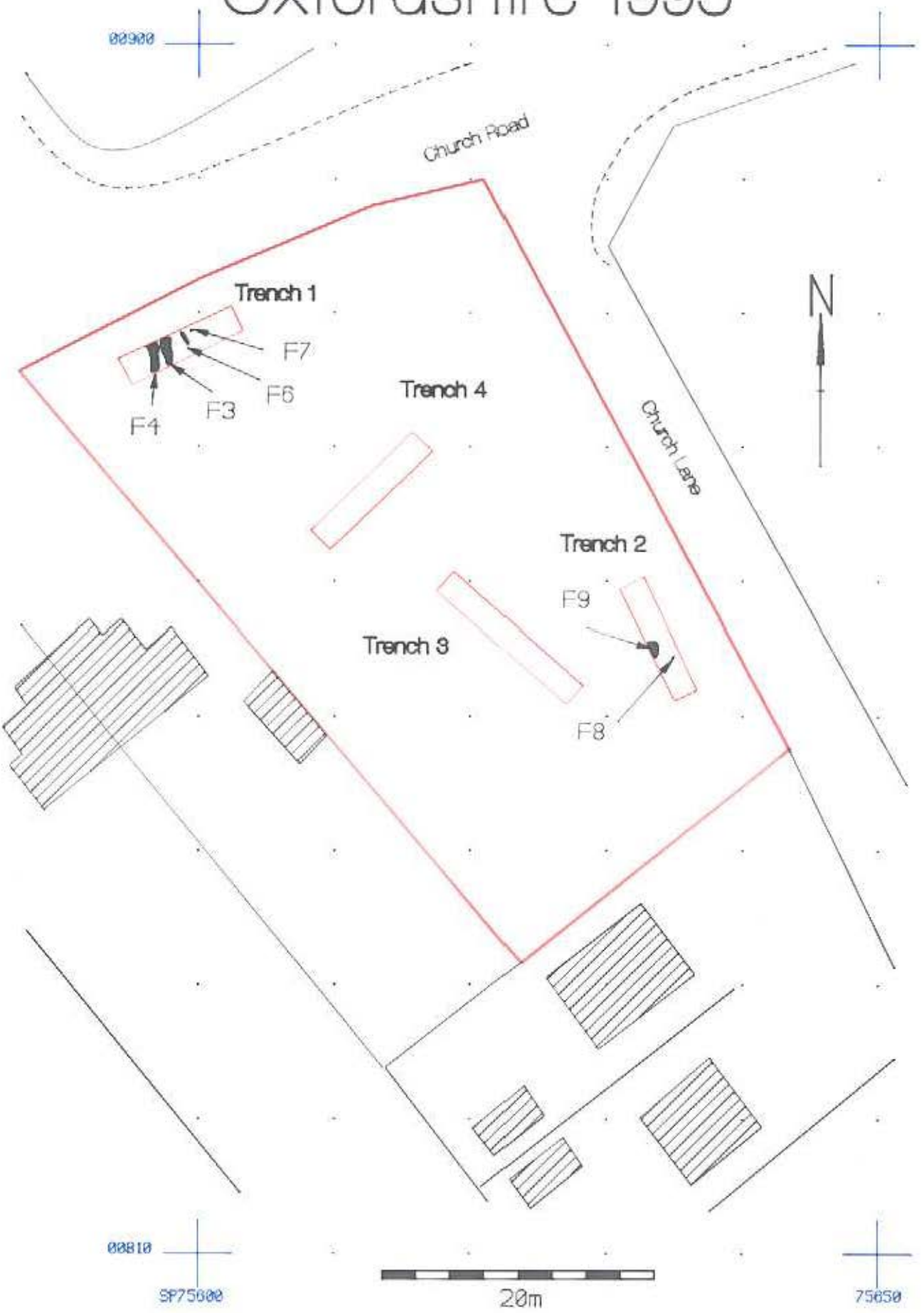

Figure 4. Trench location plan.

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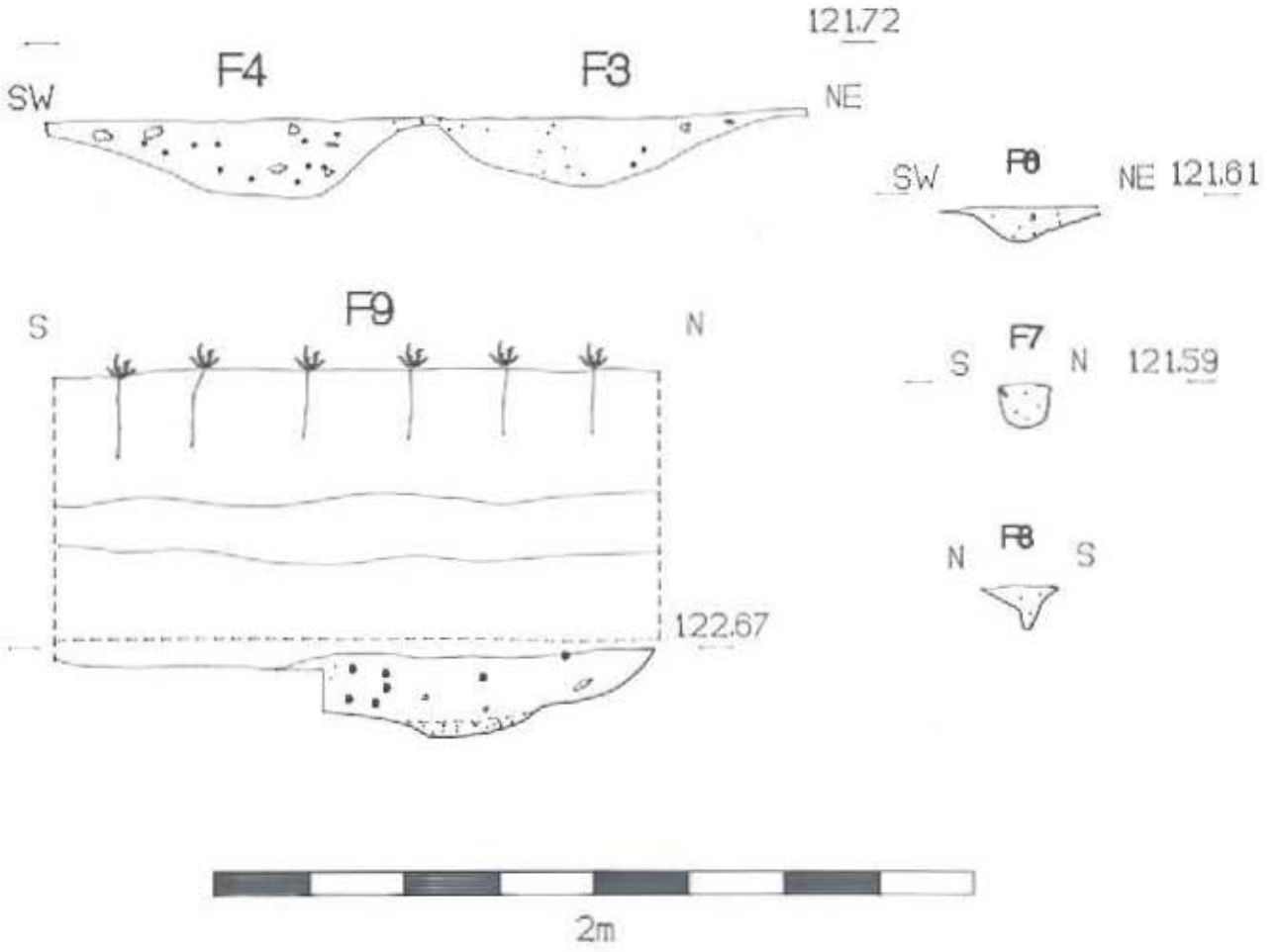
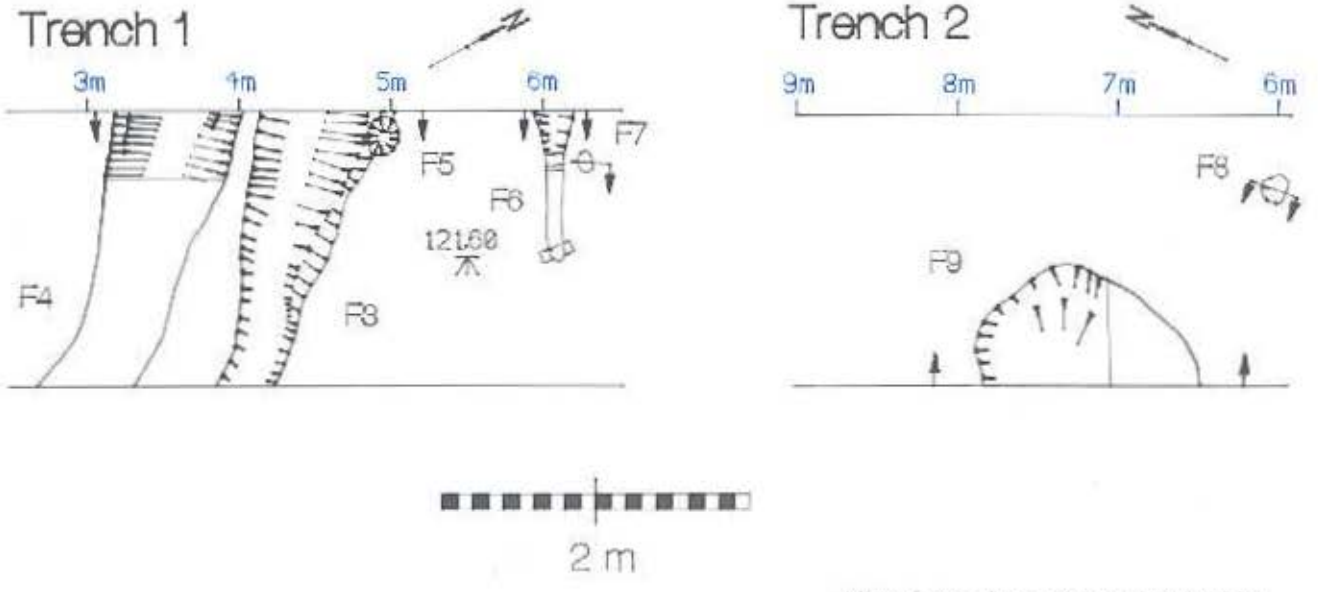
Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire 1995





All heights in metres above OD

Figure 5. Plans and sections. CRC95

Plate 1. **Church Road, Chinnor**. General shot of Trench 4 looking east.

Plate 2. **Church Road, Chinnor**. Ditches F3 and F4 in trench 1. Looking north. Vertical scale 0.5 m.