

Fig 1: General view of VII and IV at the end of excavation. The 1m scale in the left foreground lies in the base of pit (2).

Excavations at Rectory Grove, Clapham, 1980-81

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THIS LARGE redevelopment site lies about half a mile north-east of Clapham Common, and a mile and a half south-west of Vauxhall. Rectory Grove is about a mile south of the modern course of the Thames, on high ground (c. 17m (56ft) above Ordnance Datum) overlooking its floodplain (Fig. 3). To the west of the excavated area a small valley may mark the old course of a stream (Fig. 3). The site is situated on the northern edge of an area of Taplow Terrace deposits¹ of sand and gravel, beyond which the subsoil is London Clay.

Trial work was begun in June 1980 by the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation

Committee to test the potential of the site which lies quite close to the locations of the medieval church (replaced by St. Paul's in 1815) and the Manor House (Fig.2a). It was hoped that features relating to the historical village would be found. In the event, five Saxon pits containing pottery of the fifth to seventh centuries A.D. were discovered in one (IV, Fig. 2b) of the six small machine-dug trenches. After they had been excavated, areas VII, IX, X and XI, (Fig 2b)² were examined and a further five pits³ were located. The ten pits intersected, and cut the clayey-sandy natural, and formed a concentration at the east of IV and in VII (Figs. 2c

1. Geological Survey sheet 270 (1:50,000).
2. Areas I, II, III, V, VI and VIII are not shown on Fig. 2b.

3. Additionally, three small pits, which are of uncertain date because they contain only one Saxon sherd each, will be published in the final report.

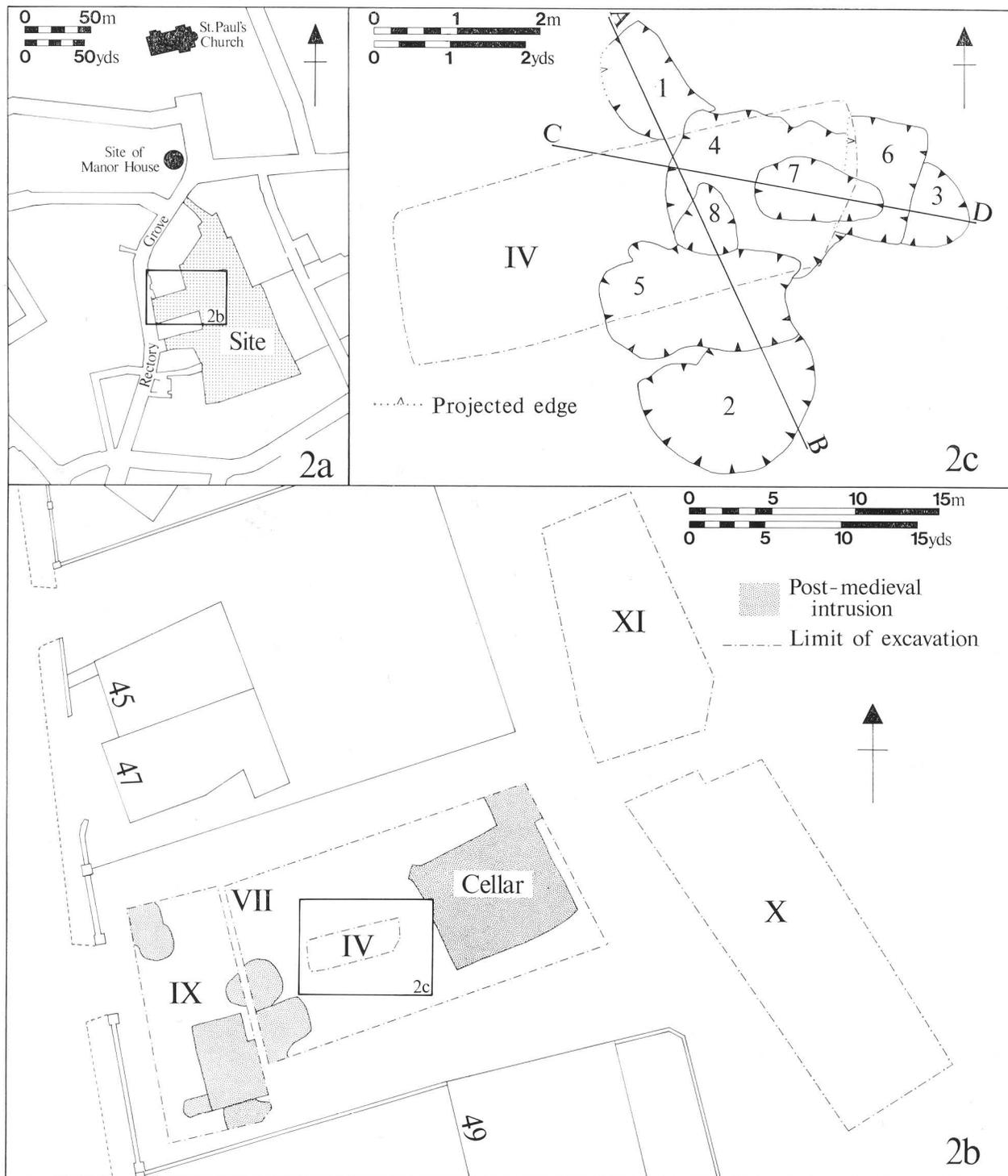


Fig. 2 (a): Site Location; (b) Excavated areas IV, VII, IX, X and XI (the cellar in the eastern part of VII was seventeenth century in date); (c): Saxon pits (1)-(8) (for sections A-B and C-D see Fig. 4).

and 4). The pits were overlain by either later medieval features or 'ploughsoil'. This article is primarily concerned with the Saxon pits and their pottery.

Historical Background

The earliest surviving form of the place-name Clapham is Cloppaham, which occurs in an Old English will⁴ of c. 880. It appears to mean settlement on or by a hillock⁵ which aptly describes the local topography (Fig. 3). The will states that the extensive lands of ealdorman ('earl') Alfred included 30 hides⁶ at Clapham.

Domesday Book records that the Manor of Clapham⁷ was assessed at 10 hides before 1066⁸, and at 3 hides in 1086. There was land for seven ploughs, five acres of meadow but no woodland. Only eleven people are mentioned in Domesday Book, and this suggests that the settlement was small in the later eleventh century.

The medieval parish church and Manor House both stood on the north side of Rectory Grove, some 150m and 50m (165yds and 55yds) respectively north of the site (Fig. 2a). The church was in existence by the later twelfth century⁹ and the Manor House by the fourteenth¹⁰.

Prehistoric and Roman Finds

An important discovery was a large fragment of an early Neolithic¹¹ wide-mouthed carinated bowl, tempered with crushed flint (Fig. 5.1). This is apparently the first vessel of this date to have been found away from the banks of the Thames in Inner London. It was found at the base of the 'ploughsoil' over natural clayey-sand in the south-west of X (Fig. 2b). Over 100 prehistoric flint flakes including a few tools, as well as small sherds of bronze age pottery and an iron age sherd were found in Saxon and later features and in the 'ploughsoil'.

Some Roman material was also present on the site, mainly in the Saxon pits, but also in later features and the 'ploughsoil'. It included large pieces of tile, a few sherds of pottery and glass and a fourth century coin. Some of the finds may have been brought onto the site in post-Roman times, but the majority represent 'field-scatter'.

The site lay some 700m (770 yds) north-west of the line of Stane Street (Fig. 3). An eighteenth century reference to finds of Roman material in the Clapham area¹² may suggest that an occupation site lies in the vicinity.

Saxon

The ten Saxon pits ((1) - (10) Fig. 4 and (1) - (8) Fig. 2c) were concentrated in the area of IV. They were irregular in plan and varied in depth between c. 0.2m (8in) and 0.9m (2ft 11in). The pits were overlain by later medieval features (14) - (16) or 'ploughsoil' (18) (Fig. 4), and were filled with grey-brown sand with charcoal and lenses of redeposited natural clayey-sand. Because of the similarity in colour and texture of their fills, it was difficult to distinguish the pits where they intersected. It is clear that (11), (12) and (13) must represent undifferentiated upper fills of (2), (3), (5), (6) and (7) (Fig 4). It is probable that the tops of the pits and the Saxon ground surfaces were destroyed by the later medieval features (14) - (16) and the working of the 'ploughsoil' (18).

Pits (1), (2) and (4) - (9) and layers (11) - (13) contained pottery of the period c. A.D. 450-700 (see below). The only sherd in (10) was Roman but as it overlaid (1) this pit also appears to be Saxon. No pottery was recovered from (3), though layers (12) and (13) which included its upper fills, did contain Saxon sherds. Other finds from the pits included over thirty pieces of Roman tile. All the fills, except (10) had at least some burnt flint, and layer (11) had sixty-seven fragments. Charcoal was present in all these deposits, and formed a lens at the base of (3), but no hearths were found. A few pieces of what may have been burnt daub were recorded in (1). A baked clay spindle-whorl was discovered in (4) (Fig. 5, 27) and another (Fig. 5, 28) came from the part of the 'ploughsoil' (18) over pits (3) and (6). Presumably these indicate local spinning of wool or flax.

A few carbonised grains of hulled 6-row barley and oats were identified in the soil samples from the pits, and many impressions of these cereals were recognised on the Saxon pottery. There was

4. D Whitelock (ed) *English Historical Documents Vol I*, (1980) 537-9.

5. J Field, 1980, *Place-Names of Greater London*, 39.

6. A hide was an assessment of value and responsibility related to land holding. It is uncertain, however, how many acres the 30 hides at Clapham represented, but a figure of 3,600 acres is possible.

7. J Morris, (ed) *Domesday Book: Surrey*, (1975) 36a, b.

8. Assuming a hide to represent 120 acres, the size of the estate "before 1066" would have been about 1200 acres, which corresponds remarkably well with the

figure of 1120 acres given as the parish acreage in H N Batten, *Clapham with its Commons and Environs* (1829).

9. O Manning, and W Bray, *History and Antiquities of Surrey Vol V*, (1814) 363.

10. *Ibid*, 361.

11. Dating kindly provided by John Barrett, Dr Ian Kinnes and Stuart Needham (*pers. comms.*).

12. J Leland, *De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea I* (1774) 59; a possible location for the finds is given in *Clapham Antiquarian Society Newsletter*, No 177 (October 1962).

RECTORY GROVE

SITE LOCATION AND MODERN TOPOGRAPHY
WITH SUGGESTED LINE OF STANE STREET

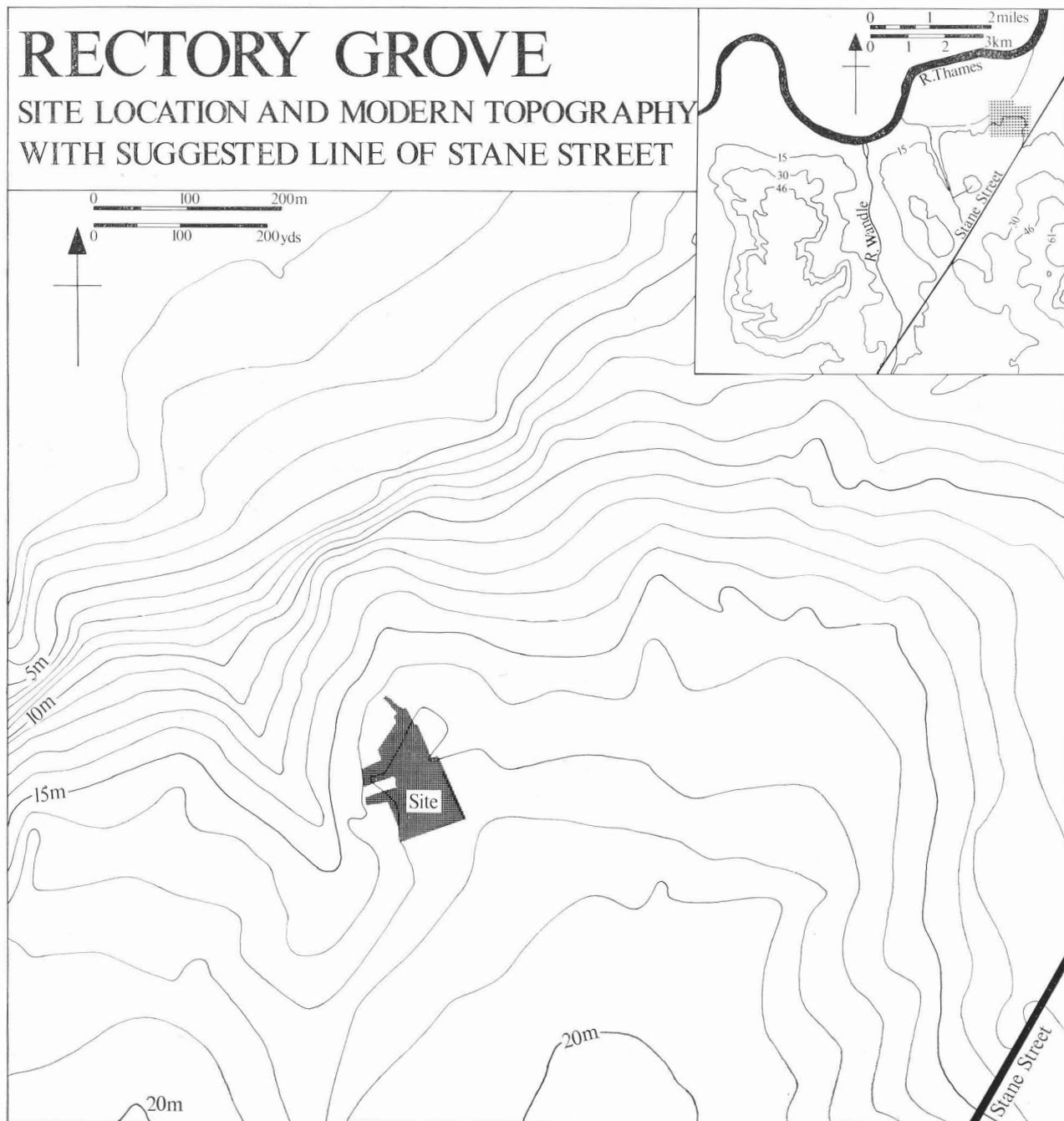


Fig. 3

little other evidence for diet or economy: only one animal tooth and a fragment of bone were recovered from the pits, and no more were found during the examination of the soil samples from these contexts. It may be that bone has not sur-

vided in the pits, or that it was never present in them in any quantity.

It is probable that the pit fills represent domestic rubbish, with the organic content having decayed away, and this is supported by the nature of the

pottery (cooking pots with pierced lugs and simple jars) and the spindle-whorl from (4). No evidence for any Saxon buildings was found. This could be because they were slight and were destroyed by later features and the turning over of the 'ploughsoil': the presence of many loam-filled root holes up to 0.15m (6in) in diameter penetrating the natural made the recognition of any small stake holes impossible at this level. Alternatively, the Saxon structures may have stood beyond the excavated area.

No Saxon features were found in IX, X or XI, and only a few sherds of this period were present in later contexts in these three trenches. No later Saxon features were discovered, and the little pottery of the tenth to twelfth centuries is thought to be residual.

The Saxon Pottery

At the time of writing, 697 sherds of Saxon pottery weighing 5.2kg have been recovered. Of these, 589 sherds (84.5%) weighing 4.2kg (81.4%) were found in pit-fills (1)-(13), and the rest in later contexts in IV, VII, X and XI. Only eleven sherds were recovered from X and XI, more than 14m (46ft) east of the Saxon features. Material from IX has not yet been examined. All the Saxon pottery contains vegetable temper apart from two small rim sherds (Fig. 5, 25-26) which are sand- and chalk-tempered respectively. Vegetable matter may be the only temper (Fig. 5, 2-22, 29) or it may be supplemented by sand (Fig. 5, 24) or grog (Fig. 5, 23) inclusions. (See Table 1).

Virtually all the pottery that contains vegetable temper only is soft, and consequently a large proportion of the sherds are small and abraded. Frequently, only the very thin, better-fired surfaces of sherds were found, the soft heavily-tempered cores having eroded away. Most of the pottery with vegetable and sand temper is similar in appearance and hardness to the pottery with vegetable temper only, but some is slightly harder. There is a wide range of colour in this pottery group, mainly grey and brown but also red and black sherds. Grey and brown sherds predominate. The inner and outer margins of individual sherds can vary considerably in colour and many sherds

with light margins often have black cores. The potting technique seems very poor. Profiles are not symmetrical, tempering is often coarse and uneven, the fabric is soft, the colour varies considerably on individual vessels, and the most elaborate finishing process employed appears to be simple wiping of the surfaces. The sections of the larger sherds show that the pots were formed by building up coils of clay and then smoothing the surfaces. There is no direct evidence to determine whether the pots were manufactured in the vicinity of the site but the quality and form of the vessels suggests that they could have been produced from local materials and fired in simple bonfire kilns.

Twenty-six rim sherds (Fig. 5, 3-5, 8-26) representing 23 different vessels were recovered, along with two base sherds (Fig. 5, 6-7) and a pot with a complete profile (Fig. 5, 2). Because many of these sherds are very small, and the rims of the hand-made vessels are irregular, it has been possible to calculate an accurate diameter for only a few examples. The forms are simple, consisting mainly of round-bodied jars with everted rims and straight-sided vessels with plain rims. These vary considerably in size. The thin-walled jar (Fig. 5, 12) is one of the smaller pots from the site, with a diameter of approximately 123mm (4.8in). The thickness of the sherds also varies, and some examples (not illustrated) up to 20mm thick demonstrate that the assemblage includes some very large vessels. The pots from Rectory Grove probably form a domestic group, the pierced-lug vessel (Fig. 5, 2) being a cooking-pot. Decorated vessels of this period are often interpreted as funerary but a domestic function for the vessel represented by sherd (Fig. 5, 29) cannot be ruled out.

One of the distinctive features is the presence of pierced-lugs on the cooking-pot (Fig. 5, 2) and probably on the rim sherds (Fig. 5, 3-5). The lugs of the cooking-pot (Fig. 5, 2) appear to have been formed by drawing up and strengthening the rim with extra clay so that they could support the weight of the pot and its contents. The pierced holes are worn in such a way that suggests that a metal handle is less likely to have been used than a leather or fibre thong. These lugs are not useful for closely dating the pot as they occur at Wijster, Holland in

Temper	No. of sherds	%	Weight in grams	%
Vegetable	648	(93.0)	4160	(80.5)
Vegetable and sand	46	(6.6)	974	(18.8)
Vegetable and grog	1	(0.1)	20	(0.4)
Chalk	1	(0.1)	10	(0.2)
Sand	1	(0.1)	5	(0.1)

Table 1

the 2nd century A.D.¹³ and in Britain certainly up to c. 850 A.D. This pot type is probably an imitation of similar metal forms^{14,15}.

Of the two base-sherds identified, one is similar to the concave, rounded base of the cooking-pot (Fig. 5,2) but smaller. The other (Fig. 5,6) has a footring in a style which is usually dated to the early Saxon period, and has been found at Mucking, Essex; Spong Hill, Norfolk; Wistbury, Wiltshire; Wykeham, Yorkshire and Federsen Wierde in Germany. This type of footring has been found on both plain, lugged cooking-pots and on carinated bowls which may be decorated in a wide variety of styles and date to the earliest Saxon occupation of Britain.

Only one decorated sherd (Fig. 5,29) was recovered. This small fragment of a black vegetable-tempered pot has a pattern of two stamped motifs arranged in bands on either side of a shallow groove. The groove is incised on a small ridge which probably represents the waist of the pot. One of the motifs used is an incised circle c. 3.5mm in diameter and the other is a diagonal cross measuring c. 7mm x 6mm. There is no parallel for this design but each motif occurs separately, or in combination with others. The incised circle is very common, probably because it can be produced easily by using natural materials such as hollow plant stems or quills. The diagonal cross is far less common, having previously been found on only 15 sites, of which just three, Caistor-by-Norwich, Norfolk; South Elkington, Lincolnshire; and Sancton, Yorkshire have produced more than one example. (Lady Briscoe, *pers.comm.*). The diagonal cross has not been found further south than Rectory Grove, Clapham or at any local Thames Valley site, including Mucking. In the upper Thames Valley a similar stamp has been discovered at Abingdon, Oxfordshire (Lady Briscoe, *pers.comm.*) and a bone tool for making diagonal cross stamps has been excavated at Shakenoak, Oxfordshire¹⁶.

Handmade, vegetable-tempered pottery similar to that from Rectory Grove occurs in the early and middle Saxon periods (c. 450-650 AD and 650-850

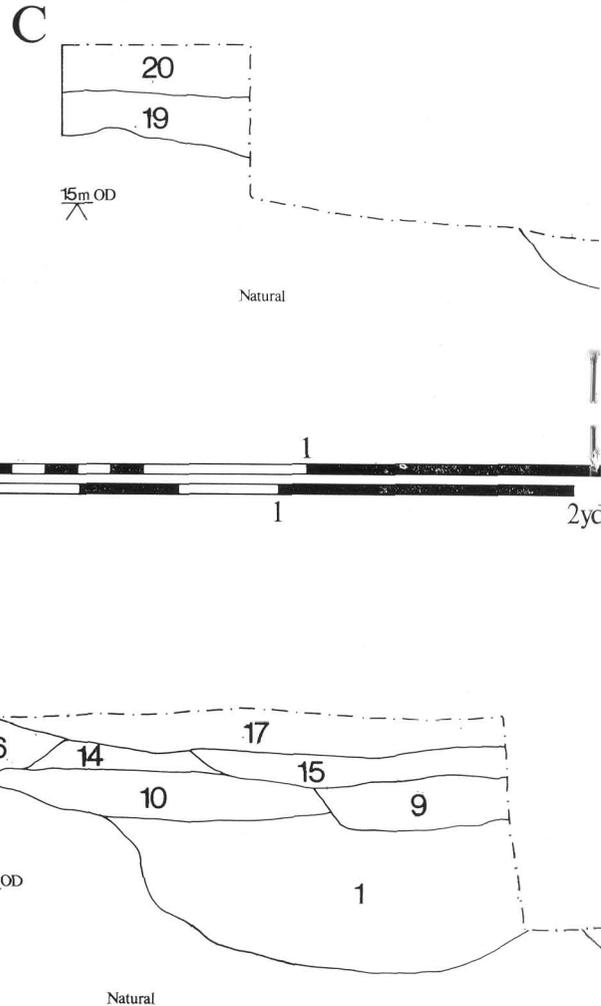
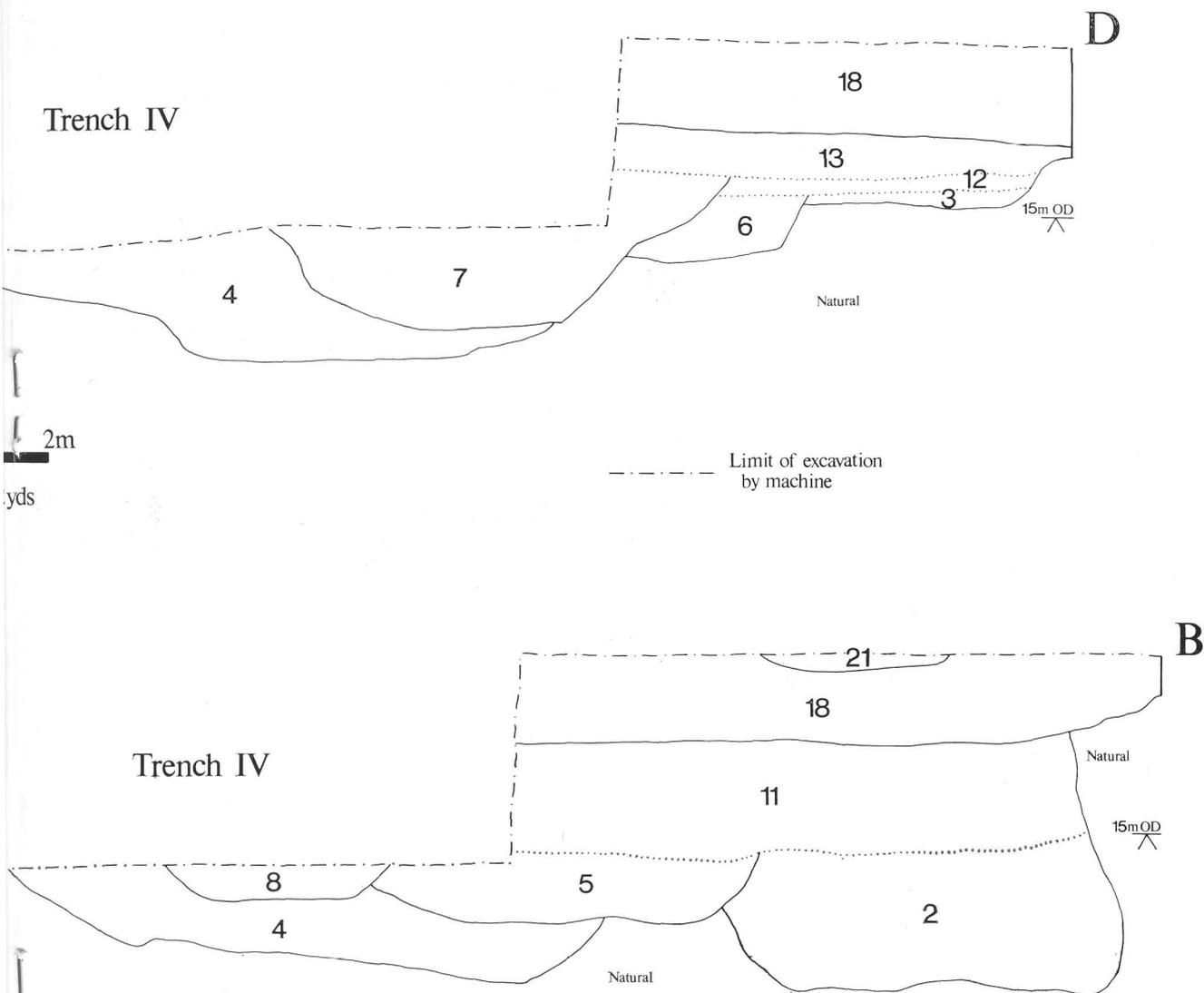


Fig. 4: Composite sections, projection; (14) thirteenth century g... fill; (18) 'ploughsoil' containing

AD). The lack of variety in the pottery styles and the small number of pits suggest that the site was not occupied throughout this period but there are no closely datable finds from the Saxon contexts to narrow this date range. The pottery was studied by members of the Mucking Post-Excavation Project who suggested that the absence of middle Saxon wheel-made wares indicates a pre-650 AD date, and that the assemblage is similar to material from the second phase at Mucking (late 5th to early 7th centuries), probably dating to c. 550 AD.

13. W A Van Es, *Wijster Palaeohistoria* 11 (1965-67), 266, Fig. 156, No. 944.
14. Museum of London, Acc. No. A 10121.
15. F H Thompson, *Anglo-Saxon sites in Lincolnshire*, *Antiq. J* 36, (1956) p 187, Fig. 2, No. 5.
16. A C C Brodribb, A R Hands, and D R Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm, near Wilcote, Oxfordshire. Part III Site F*, p 124, Fig. 60, No. 76.



rejected from sections and plans. Located on Fig. 2c (1)-(13) Saxon pit fills, grey-brown loamy gravel spread; (15) thirteenth century pit fill; (16) medieval pit fill; (17) fifteen century pit fill; (18) thirteenth century pit fill; (19) 'ploughsoil'; (20) thirteenth century pit fill; (21) eighteenth century pit fill.

Conclusion

The significance of the site is that it is the first early Saxon settlement to have been discovered in Inner London. Cemeteries have been found, as at Greenwich, but no domestic sites were previously known close to the City. The excavation supports the place-name and documentary evidence, mentioned above, for early medieval settlement at Clapham. Similar evidence suggests that further Saxon sites await discovery in South London, at Streatham for example. The excavation might also serve as a

reminder of the value of trial trenching on urban sites of uncertain potential.

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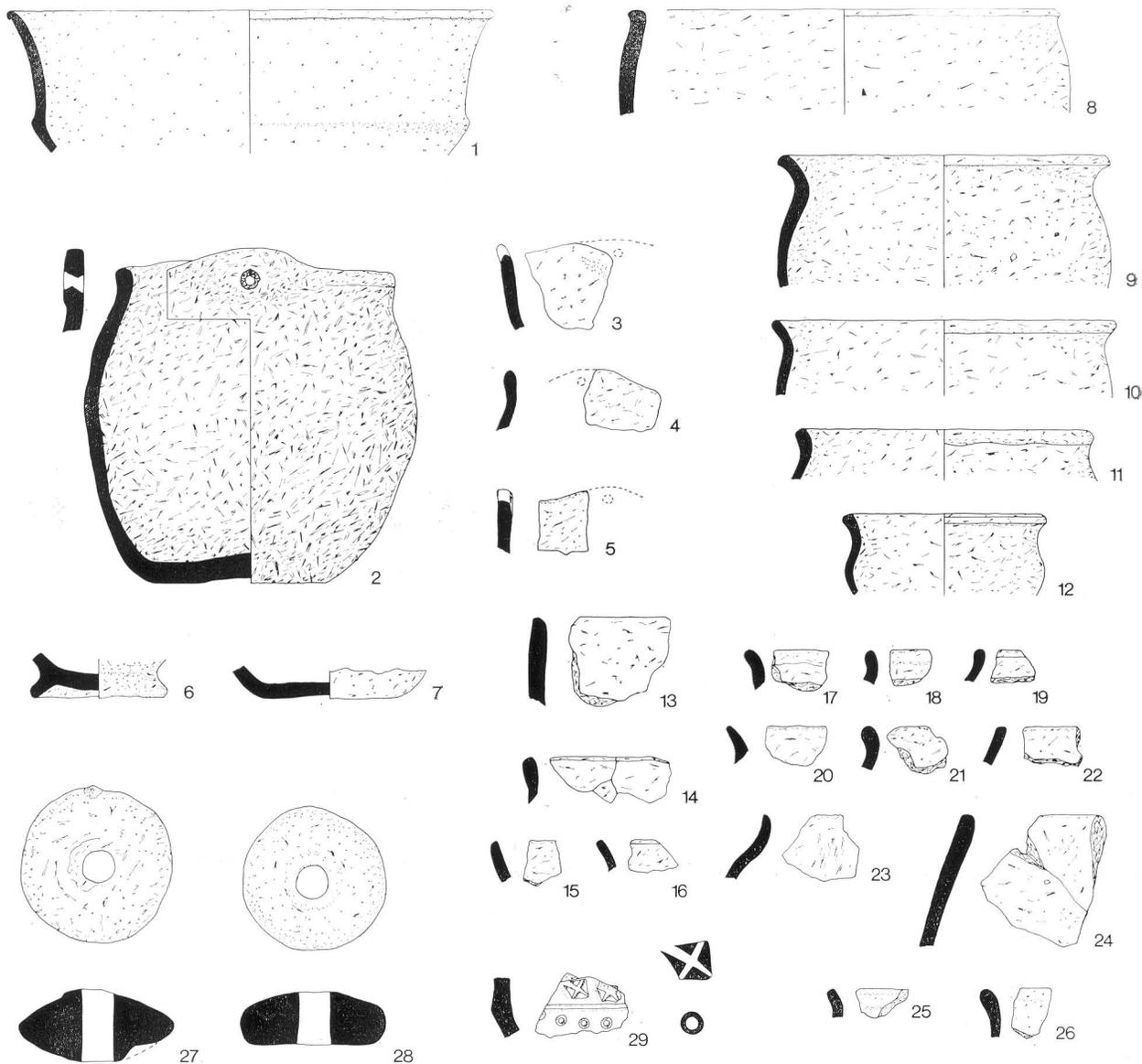


Fig. 5: Neolithic bowl 1; and Saxon finds. 1-26 at 1:4; 27-28 at 1:2; and 29 at 1:2 with detail at 1:1. 1 from 'ploughsoil' over natural; 5, 8, 13, 15, 20, 23, 28 and 29 from post-Saxon contexts.

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