

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
EVALUATION AT  
OLD MILL HOUSE ESTATE,  
OLD MILL LANE,  
COWLEY, UXBRIDGE,  
LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON**

**APRIL 2006**

DOCUMENT VERIFICATION

OLD MILL HOUSE ESTATE, OLD MILL LANE,  
COWLEY, UXBRIDGE,  
LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON

EVALUATION

Quality Control

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited			K1144
	Name & Title	Signature	Date
Text Prepared by:	Peter Boyer		May 2006
Graphics Prepared by:	Adrian Nash		May 2006
Graphics Checked by:	Josephine Brown		May 2006
Project Manager Sign-off:	Chris Mayo		May 2006

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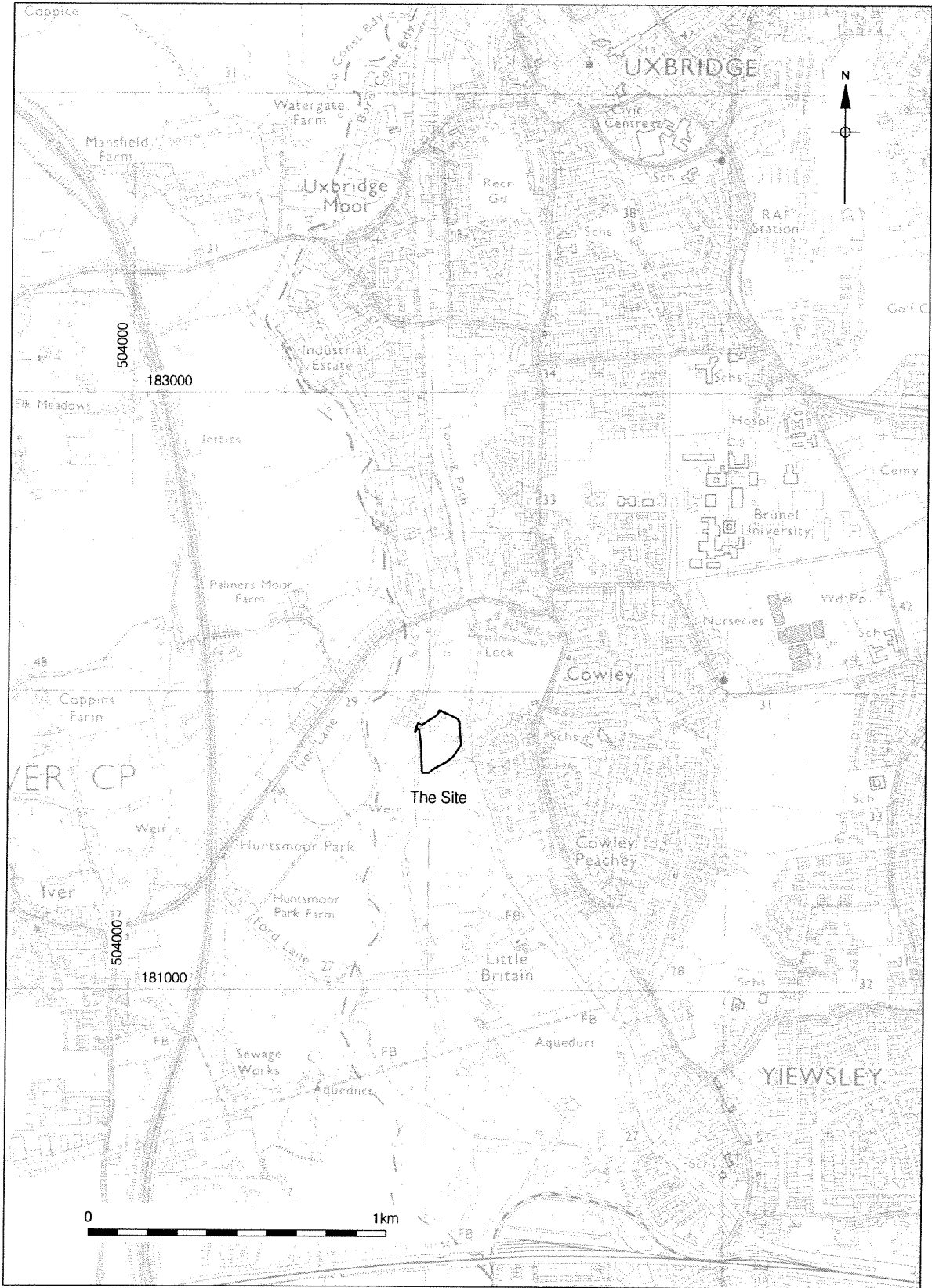
Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd  
Unit 54  
Brockley Cross Business Centre  
96 Endwell Road  
London  
SE4 2PD

# 1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 During April 2006, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. carried out an archaeological evaluation at the Old Mill Estate, Old Mill Lane, Cowley, Uxbridge, London Borough of Hillingdon. Four trial trenches measuring between 7m and 16m in length, by 1.6m to 1.8m in width were excavated at locations across the site.
- 1.2 In all trenches the earliest deposit was a natural layer of poorly sorted gravel. In trenches 3 and 4 this was overlain by a layer of alluvial clay, which in turn was overlain by deposits of reworked alluvium and capped by modern topsoil. In trenches 1 and 2 the natural gravel was overlain by a recent horticultural soil and capped with modern topsoil and a concrete slab.
- 1.3 In Trench 1 the natural gravel was cut by a shallow, east-west aligned gully, which itself was cut by a smaller gully on a slightly different alignment. Towards the eastern end of the trench a very shallow, irregular feature, probably a heavily truncated tree bole was identified, also cut into the gravel. None of the features produced any dateable finds and all were sealed by the horticultural soil.
- 1.4 In Trench 2 another east-west aligned gully was recorded. This was narrow and very shallow and produced no dateable finds. It was sealed by the horticultural soil. At the southeastern end of the trench a pit containing an animal burial was cut through the topsoil and sealed by the concrete slab. This was clearly of very recent origin and not fully excavated
- 1.5 Trenches 3 and 4 produced no archaeological finds or features.
- 1.6 Overall the evaluation revealed no archaeological features apart from those in Trenches 1 and 2, and the dating and function of these was not entirely clear, apart from the modern animal burial. Extensive stripping of the site for industrial and horticultural usage during the later post-medieval period appears to have removed all traces of any earlier archaeological deposits, had any ever been present.

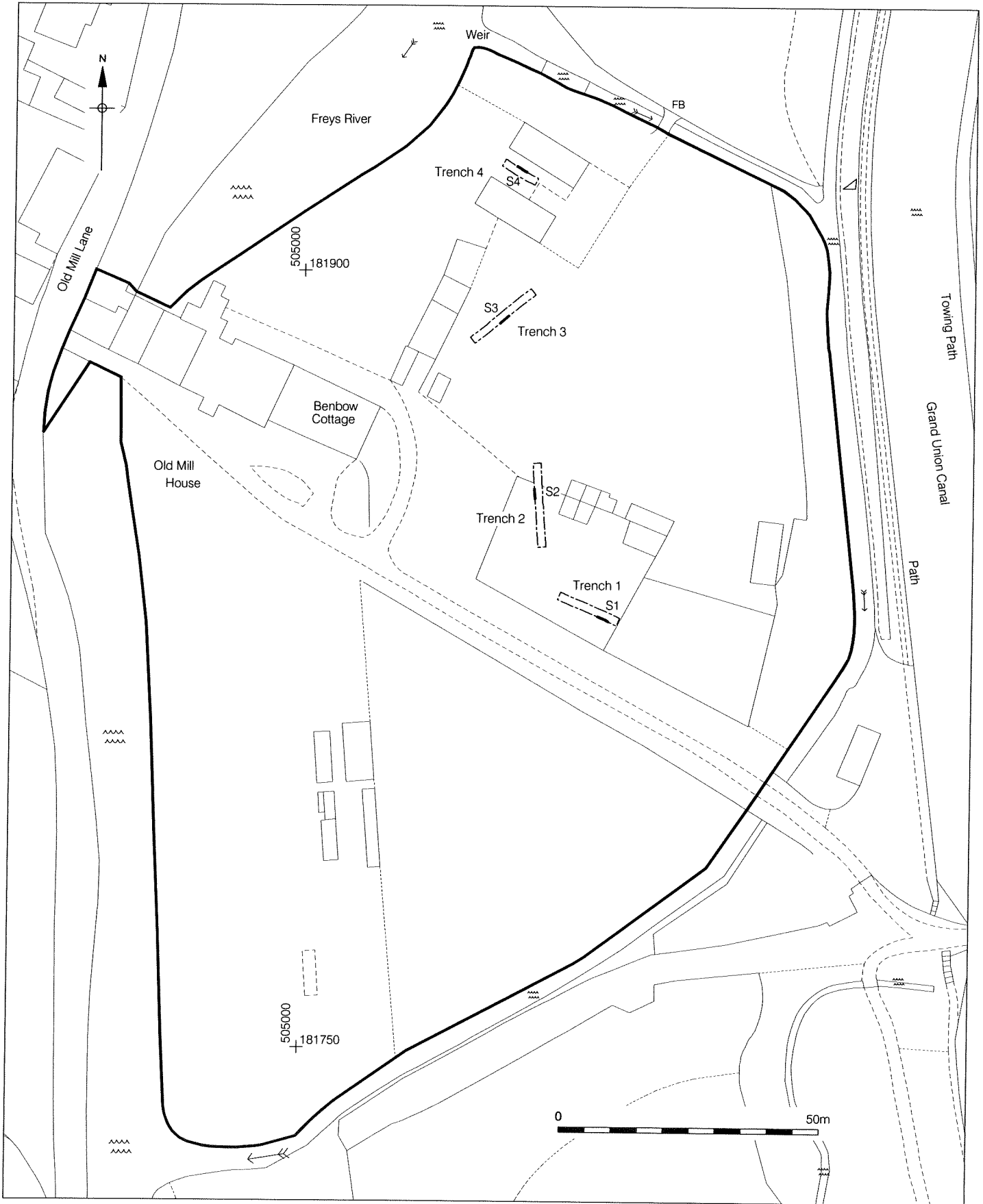
## **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 During the period, - April 2006, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. carried out an archaeological evaluation at the Old Mill House Estate, Old Mill Lane, Cowley, Uxbridge, London Borough of Hillingdon (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Old Mill Developments, and carried out as part of a planning condition prior to the redevelopment of the site for residential use. The evaluation consisted of the excavation and recording of four trial trenches (Fig. 2). The site was situated on land between Fray's River and the Grand Union Canal, in an area thought to have some archaeological potential.
- 2.2 A method statement for the archaeological evaluation was prepared by Jon Butler (Butler 2006). The site was supervised by the author and project managed by Jon Butler.



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Figure 1  
 Site Location  
 1:20 000



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Figure 2  
Trench Location  
1:1000

### 3 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.1 The underlying geology of the site is believed to consist of deposits of Taplow Gravels, overlying Eocene series London Clay. The gravels themselves were probably formerly overlain by brickearth.
- 3.2 The site is irregular in shape and extends to c. 2.1ha. It is essentially level, though with numerous small topographic variations, with surface elevations generally varying between c. 27m AOD and c. 29m AOD, though there are raised banks adjacent to Fray's River. The site is located on the floodplain of the River Colne, c. 200m east of the current course of the river and c. 10km upstream of its confluence with the Thames.
- 3.3 Gibbard (1985) recorded a section through the floodplain sediments in the old Iver Bridge quarry at (TQ 043813), c.1.0km to the south-west of the present site; and another section at Sandstone (TQ 044836) near Mansfield Farm c.1.5km to the north of the present site. In both cases stratified sand and gravel c.2.0m in thickness rested on bedrock London Clay and was overlain by alluvium. Lacaille (1963) described the sequence at the Sandstone site as comprising gravel and sand (with Mesolithic artefacts on the top surface), overlain by 0.85m of peat (also containing Mesolithic artefacts in its lower levels). The peat was overlain by 0.45m of grey calcareous mud, which in turn was overlain by 0.24m of peaty clay. The sequence was capped by 0.76m of made ground.
- 3.4 Mesolithic artefacts were also recorded by Lacaille (1963) resting on gravel beneath peat at Boyers Pit, Denham (TQ 054855), c 3.0km to the north of the present site. A lenticular bed of shell and *Chara* marl was also recorded at this site beneath the peat.
- 3.5 The site is centred at National Grid Reference TQ 0510 8182, and lies on a narrow tract of floodplain between the Grand Union Canal to the east and Fray's River, a minor distributory channel of the Colne, to the west. The site is bounded to the north and south by scrubland.

## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 There is limited evidence within the Cowley area for human activity from the Palaeolithic to post-medieval periods. The earliest records of human activity come from some distance to the south of the study site at Iver, West Drayton and Yiewsley, where quantities of Lower Palaeolithic stone artefacts have been recovered (Wymer 1991), though no such material is reported from the vicinity of the site.
- 4.2 As already discussed (above), Mesolithic artefacts have been recovered from sites to the north of the study site (Lacaille 1963), though again, such material is not recorded from the immediate vicinity of the site. Similarly there are no records of Neolithic activity in the vicinity of the site.
- 4.3 Evidence for Bronze Age activity in the area is a little more substantial. Two Late Bronze Age gullies, probably representing a linear field boundary or trackway were found at Cowley Business Park, less than 1km north of the study site in 1989 (Heathcote 1990). At Packet Boat Lane, c. 1km south of the site, excavations revealed a probable prehistoric stream channel, a linear ditch and other features probably dating to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (*ibid.*). Further evidence of Iron Age activity in the area is sparse.
- 4.4 Evidence for activity during the Roman period in the vicinity of the site is also sparse. However, a possible Roman road was identified in the vicinity of Cowley Station (GLSMR: 050303). Roman remains were found in 1959 at St. Lawrence's Church, Cowley (NMR Ref: TQ 08 SE 3), and more recently on the site of an unidentified earthwork at Coney Green, Hillingdon (GLSMR: 050472).
- 4.5 Evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity is also sparse. However, a number of local place-names, such as Hillingdon, Colham, Cowley and Yiewsley, probably have Saxon origins. It is also thought that Uxbridge is associated with the 5th century Wixan tribe, suggesting an early settlement here.
- 4.6 Domesday Book records only two villains and a cottar in Cowley manor. In neighbouring Hillingdon, 33 persons are recorded and in Colham manor a further ten. Uxbridge was almost certainly in existence by 1086 but is not mentioned by name in the Domesday survey. However, by the time it is first mentioned in the 12th century, it is already an important settlement.



- 4.7 There is little surviving evidence for medieval activity in the vicinity of the study site though clearly there was considerable activity during this period in Cowley, Uxbridge and Hillingdon, and a number of timber-framed buildings are still extant in Uxbridge, though these mostly date from the 17th century onwards. The one obvious exception is the mill building, which stands on the study site. Although clearly having undergone many phases of development there is evidence to suggest that it had medieval origins (F. Keith-Lucas, pers. comm.). It is understood that Fray's River was excavated in the medieval period in order to power a series of mills, the building on site being the remains of one of these. This forms the current western boundary of the site
- 4.8 At the end of the 18th century the Grand Union Canal was excavated, and thus now forms the eastern boundary of the site.
- 4.9 During the 17th and 18th centuries extensive areas of the Colne valley in which the study site is located was exploited for Brickmaking and nursery/market gardening. The former activity appears to have removed large tracts of brickearth from the study site and the latter activity appears to have involved extensive levelling and landscaping. Together they are likely to have substantially truncated any earlier archaeological deposits.

## **5 PLANNING BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- 5.1 The study aims to satisfy the objectives of the London Borough of Hillingdon Council, which fully recognises the importance of the buried heritage for which they are the custodians.
- 5.2 In considering any planning application for development, the local planning authority is bound by the policy framework set by government guidance, in this instance Department of the Environment, Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16), by current Development Plan Policy and by other material considerations.
- 5.3 The relevant Development Plan framework is provided by the London Borough of Hillingdon Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in September 1998. The plan contains the following policy, which provides a framework for the consideration of development proposals affecting archaeological and heritage features.

### **POLICY BE3**

**THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY WILL ENSURE WHENEVER PRACTICABLE THAT SITES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST ARE INVESTIGATED AND RECORDED EITHER BEFORE ANY NEW BUILDINGS, REDEVELOPMENT, SITE WORKS, GOLF COURSE OR GRAVEL EXTRACTION ARE STARTED, OR DURING EXCAVATION AND CONSTRUCTION. DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD DESTROY IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.**

- 5.4 The proposed development consists of two blocks of residential properties and associated services, together with surface parking and amenity areas. Redevelopment of the existing mill buildings is also proposed
- 5.5 It was believed that degradation of archaeological deposits during previous development could have been substantial. Industrial activity associated with brickearth extraction followed by landscaping and horticultural exploitation are likely to have severely truncated any archaeological remains.
- 5.6 It was thought that proposed development on the site could potentially cause archaeological impacts through the cutting of footings and service runs in any previously undisturbed areas.

- 5.7 Given the archaeological potential of the site, it was thus recommended that an archaeological evaluation be carried out in line with guidance contained within PPG 16 and the London Borough of Hillingdon UDP.
- 5.8 The evaluation aimed to determine, as far as was reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development. The evaluation also sought to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusions and hence assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits and any surviving structures of archaeological significance.
- 5.9 Within these parameters, and given the archaeological and historical background, the evaluation presented the opportunity to address a number of research themes:
- Is there any evidence of prehistoric activity on the site?
  - Is there any evidence of prehistoric settlement or occupation of the area?
  - Is there any evidence of Roman activity on the site?
  - Is there any evidence of Saxon activity on the site?
  - Is there any evidence of medieval activity on the site?
  - Are there any post-medieval remains on the site?

## **6 METHODOLOGY**

- 6.1 The evaluation was carried out according to an archaeological method statement (Butler 2006) and conformed to the IFA code of conduct.
- 6.2 The evaluation consisted of the excavation of four trial trenches (Fig. 2), measuring between 7m and 16m in length and between 1.6m and 1.8m wide. The trenches were located within the footprints of the two proposed residential blocks and within the proposed car-parking area.
- 6.3 All trenches were machine excavated to the base of modern, unconsolidated deposits, or the top of archaeological deposits. All machining was undertaken by a 360° tracked excavator using a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision. The longitudinal sections and bases of the trenches were then cleaned, and sample sections and base plans recorded. Sample excavation of cut features was then carried out by hand and these recorded. Spoil heaps were also checked in order to collect any dateable evidence and assess the extent of residual finds preservation. A written, drawn and photographic record of archaeological features was made, and the location of each trench was recorded and tied into local and national grids.
- 6.4 A temporary benchmark was set up on the site on a level concrete slab in the area of the proposed residential development (value: 28.49m AOD). This was taken from an earlier survey plan of the site.

## 7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

### 7.1 TRENCH 1 (Figure 3)

- 7.1.1 This trench was aligned approximately northwest-southeast and located towards the southern edge of the proposed car-parking area, though it had to be shortened slightly because of a substantial, deep footing at its southeastern end. The basal deposit was a natural, firm and well compacted, dark greyish brown to pale beige gravel [4] (upper elevation, 27.99m AOD). Towards the eastern end of the trench a rather irregular feature [10] was identified. This measured 0.96m north-south by 0.90m east west, but was just 70mm deep. It contained a moderately compacted, dark greyish brown, clayey silty fill [9], with no dateable finds. The feature is believed to have been the base of a heavily truncated natural tree bole.
- 7.1.2 Traversing the trench on an approximate northeast-southwest alignment was a shallow gully [8]. This was 1.00m wide and 0.13m deep and continued to the north and south of the trench. It contained a firm, very dark greyish brown, silty clay fill [7], but this contained no dateable finds. The feature is thought to be post-medieval in date and possibly related to previous horticultural activity on the site. This was partly truncated to the south by another small gully on a slightly different alignment [6]. This also extended to the north and south of the trench but was just 0.51m wide and 0.13m deep. It contained a firm, dark greyish brown, silty clay fill [5], but again no dateable finds. This is also thought to have been related to post-medieval horticultural activity.
- 7.1.3 All of the features were sealed by a layer of loose, dark greyish brown clayey silt [3], up to 0.46m thick. This has been interpreted as a post-medieval horticultural soil. It was overlain by a layer of modern topsoil [2] (Figure 5.1), up to 0.14m thick, and this in turn was sealed by an 80mm thick concrete slab [1].

### 7.2 TRENCH 2 (Figure 4)

- 7.2.1 This trench was aligned approximately north-south and extended from close to the northwest corner of the proposed car-park towards its centre. The basal natural deposit was a similar gravel [15] (upper elevation, 27.94m AOD) to that recorded in Trench 1. Cut into the gravel was an east-west aligned gully [14]. This extended east and west of the trench but was just 0.80m wide and 0.12m deep. It contained a compact, dark bluish grey

silty clay fill [13], but no dateable finds. This is believed to have been a further feature associated with post-medieval horticultural activity.

7.2.2 The gully, and the gravel across the rest of the trench, was sealed by a loose, dark yellowish brown clayey silt [12] (Figure 5.2), up to 0.30m thick. This contained no dateable finds but appeared to be a similar deposit to the horticultural soil [3] recorded in Trench 1. It was sealed by topsoil [11] up to 0.30m thick. At the southeastern end of the trench the topsoil was cut by a large irregular pit [17]. The fill [16] contained a large animal burial, which was clearly of quite recent date. Modern brick, pottery and slag were also present. The Trench 2 sequence was capped by the same concrete slab that capped that in Trench 1.

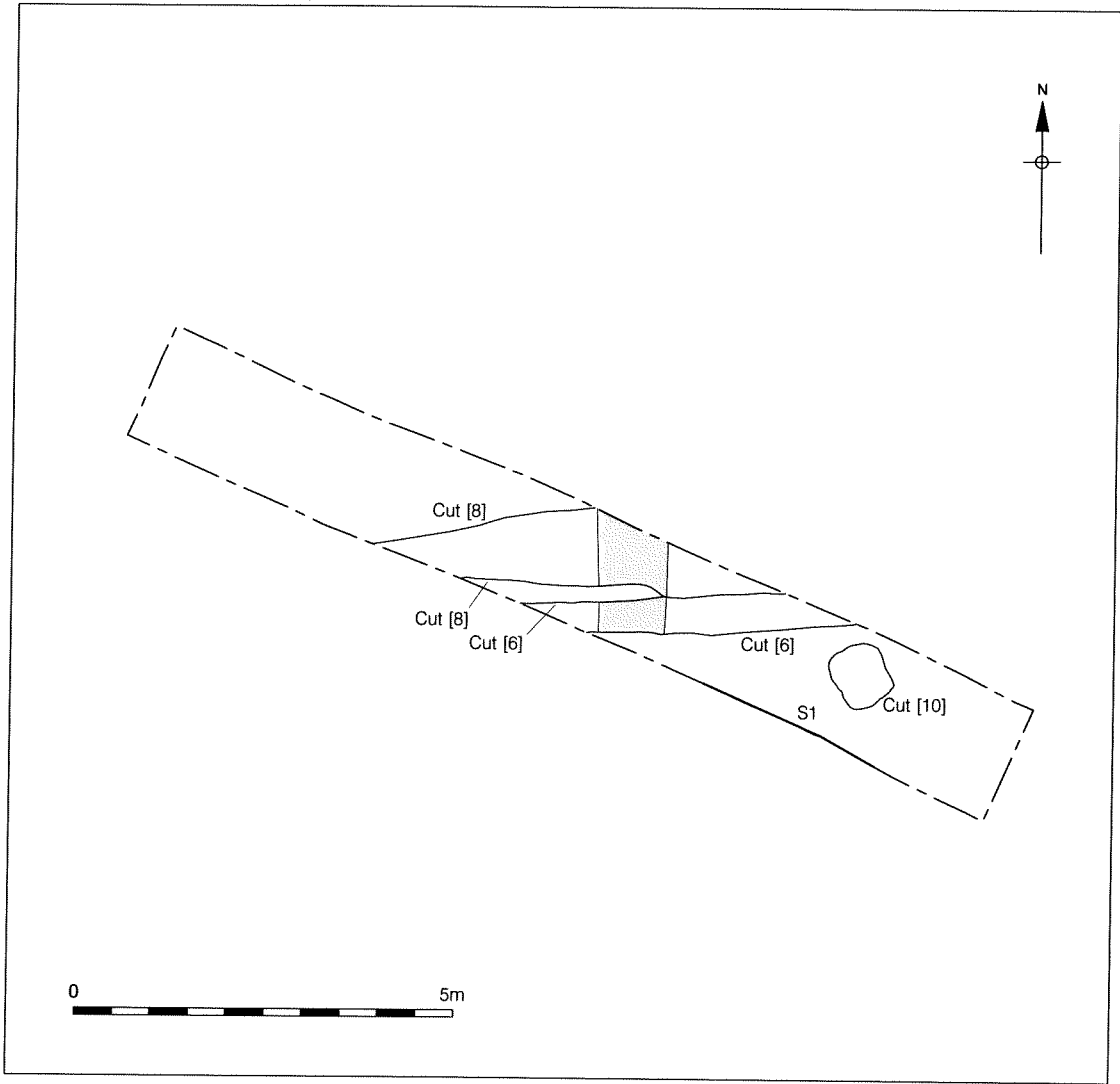
### 7.3 TRENCH 3

7.3.1 This trench was aligned northeast-southwest, and was located within the footprint of the southernmost of the two proposed residential blocks. The basal deposit was a firm and well compacted, dark greyish brown to pale beige gravel [22] (upper elevation: 27.92m AOD). This was overlain by a layer of very firmly compacted, dark greyish brown clay [21] (Figure 5.3), up to 0.30m thick. This is believed to be a fine-grained alluvium deposited by the River Colne. It was sealed by up to 0.48m of a friable, dark greyish brown, clayey silt [20]. This contained no dateable finds but is believed to have been alluvial material, extensively reworked by post-medieval horticultural activity. It was overlain by a very firmly compacted, light yellowish brown silt [19], up to 0.18m thick. This contained no dateable finds but appears to have been deliberately deposited in the recent past. The Trench 3 sequence was completed by a layer of modern topsoil [18], up to 0.19m thick. This had been firmly compacted by recent heavy machine activity. No archaeological finds were recovered from Trench 3, neither were any archaeological features identified.

### 7.4 TRENCH 4

7.4.1 It was originally intended to locate this trench along the eastern edge of the footprint of the proposed northern residential block. However, much of the footprint was occupied by extensive pre-existing footings to be re-used for the new build. The trench was thus relocated further west, to an area within the footprint where there were no footings, and aligned approximately northwest-southeast. Consequently the trench was shorter than originally intended. The basal deposit was a very similar gravel [27] (upper elevation: 27.78m AOD) to that recorded in the other three trenches. This was overlain by up to

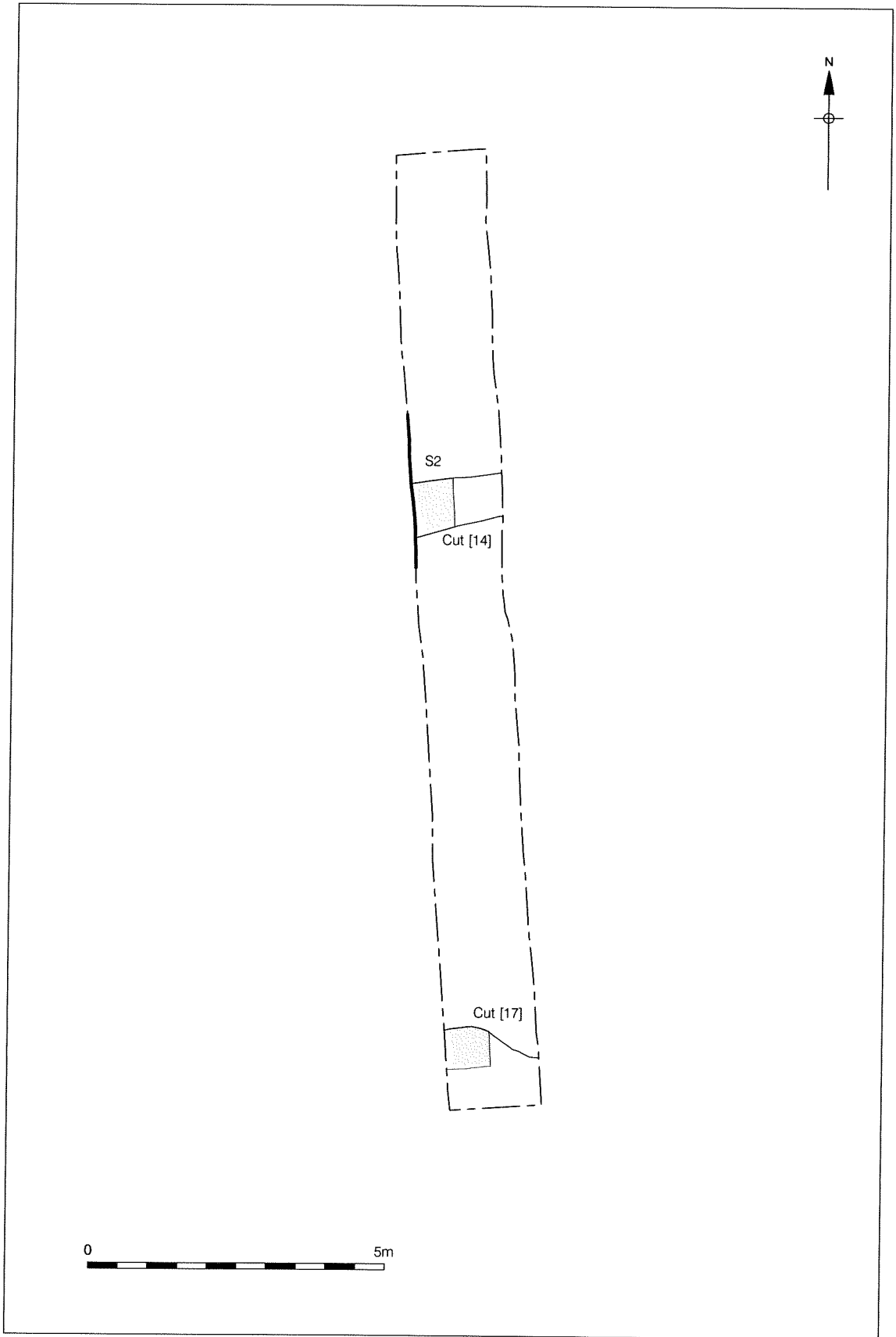
0.12m of a firm, mid yellowish brown, silty clay [26], which contained no dateable finds. This has been interpreted as material deposited following the dredging of Fray's River, a short distance to the west. This was overlain by a deposit of firm, dark bluish grey clay [25], up to 0.19m thick (Figure 5.4), also interpreted as a dredging deposit. Above this was up to 0.40m of firm, dark yellowish brown, silty clay [24], interpreted as a possible subsoil or post-medieval horticultural soil. The sequence was capped by modern topsoil, up to 0.18m thick. No archaeological features or finds were identified within Trench 4.



Key:  
■ Excavated Slot

Figure 3  
Trench 1  
1:100





Key:  
□ Excavated Slot

Figure 4  
Trench 2  
1:100

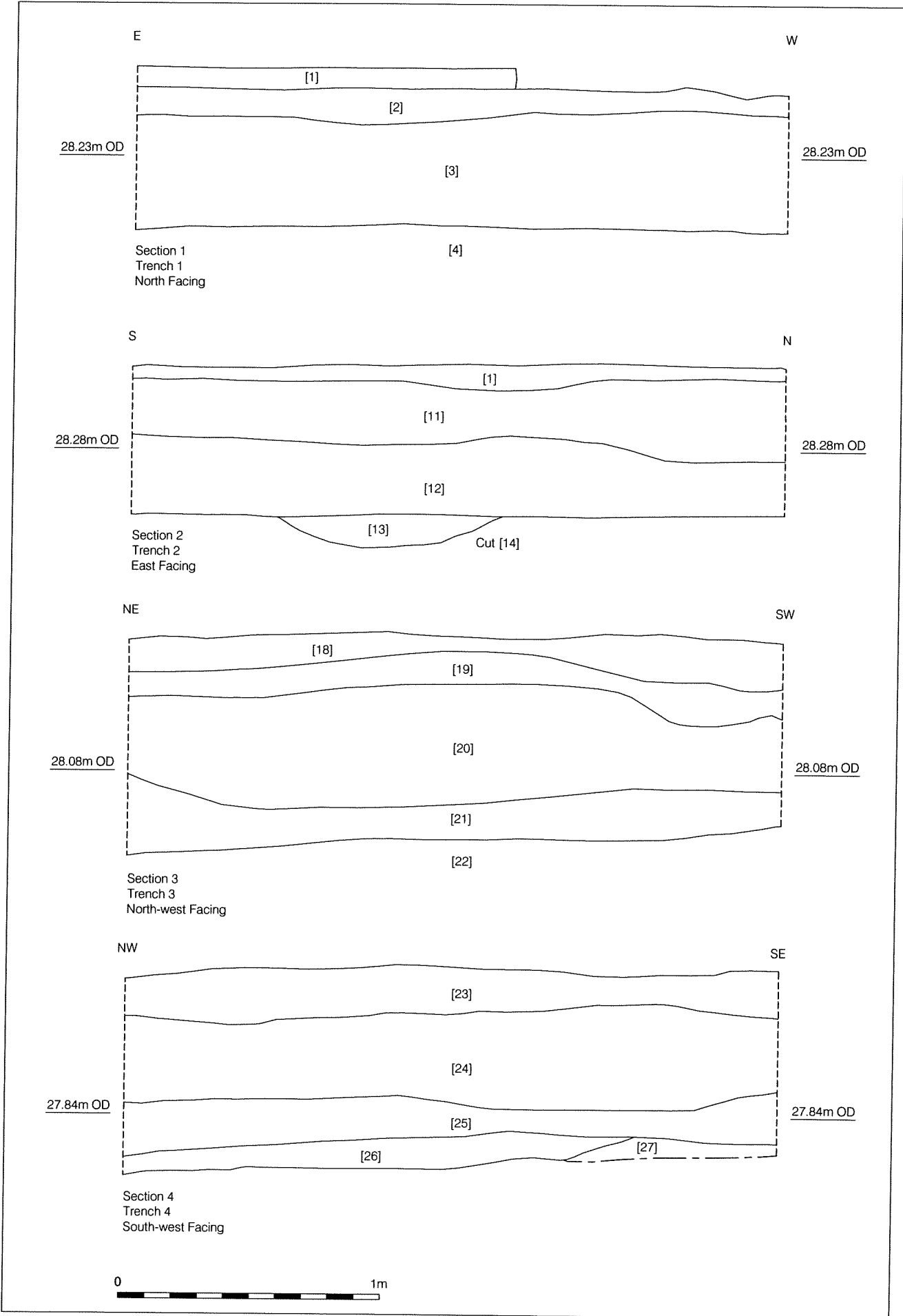


Figure 5  
 Sample Sections 1-4  
 1:20

## 8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Despite there having been some archaeological potential for the site, very little evidence of activity pre-dating the modern period was found. Only two trenches, both located in the proposed car-parking area revealed earlier features. These were all east-west aligned gullies, and all very shallow, probably having been extensively truncated by later activity. It has been tentatively suggested that they were all associated with former horticultural activity on the site, though they may have been earlier agricultural features, sealed by the extensive soil deposit, apparently associated with former landscaping and horticultural exploitation of the site.
- 8.2 It seems likely that the site was extensively truncated by brickearth quarrying prior to a horticultural usage, and this would explain the sequences in Trenches 1 and 2, where the horticultural deposits appeared to lie directly over natural gravel, no evidence for other natural deposits or a subsoil having been present. This also appears to have been the case in Trench 4, though dredging deposits appeared to have been present here. However, in Trench 3 an apparently natural alluvial deposit was present, directly overlying the natural gravel. There are three possible explanations for this. Firstly, this may simply have been material dredged from Fray's River, secondly it may have been material deposited during flooding of Fray's River, and thirdly there may have been no brickearth here and this was material deposited by the River Colne. Given the sequences recorded in the other trenches, this latter explanation seems unlikely. Either one of the first two possibilities thus seems more likely.
- 8.3 Overall the evaluation was somewhat disappointing, as not only were few features identified, but also very few finds were recovered, even from residual contexts. No evidence for the exploitation of the landscape for prehistoric agricultural purposes was found, indeed no evidence was found for any prehistoric activity at all. Evidence for Roman and Anglo-Saxon activity was also absent. The earliest human activity on the site has been tentatively dated to the post-medieval period, and comes from three features, though even these have not been accurately dated.

## **9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 9.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank Old Mill Developments for funding the work, and acknowledges Joe Shingadia for commissioning the project. The help and advice of Alan Driscoll and the staff of Old Mill Developments are also gratefully acknowledged. The author wishes to thank Jon Butler for his project management and editing, Mary-Ellen Crothers for her assistance on site, and Adrian Nash for the illustrations.

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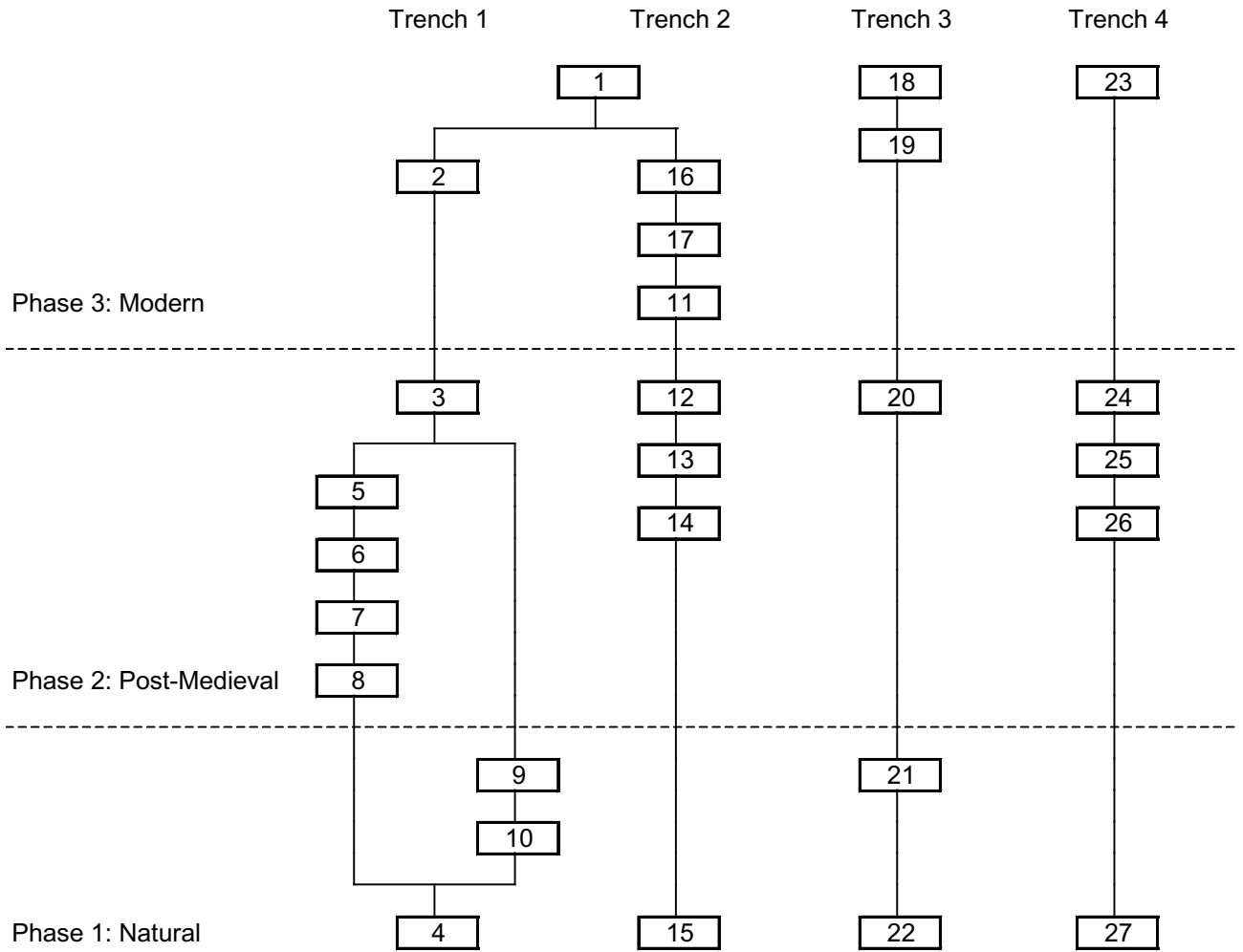
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## APPENDIX 1 – Context Index

Context No.	Trench	Type	Plan	Section	Photo	Sample	Phase	Comments
1	1, 2	Layer	*	1	Yes	*	3	Concrete Slab
2	1	Layer	*	1	Yes	*	3	Topsoil
3	1	Layer	*	1	Yes	*	2	Horticultural Soil
4	1	Layer	TR1	1	Yes	*	1	Natural Gravel
5	1	Fill	TR1	*	Yes	*	2	Fill of [6]
6	1	Cut	TR1	*	Yes	*	2	Shallow NE-SW Gully
7	1	Fill	TR1	*	Yes	*	2	Fill of [8]
8	1	Cut	TR1	*	Yes	*	2	Shallow NE-SW Gully
9	1	Fill	*	*	No	*	1	Fill of [10]
10	1	Cut	TR1	*	Yes	*	1	Base of Tree Bole
11	2	Layer	*	2	Yes	*	3	Topsoil
12	2	Layer	*	2	Yes	*	2	Horticultural Soil
13	2	Fill	TR2	2	Yes	*	2	Fill of [14]
14	2	Cut	TR2	2	Yes	*	2	Shallow NE-SW gully
15	2	Layer	TR2	*	Yes	*	1	Natural Gravel
16	2	Fill	TR2	*	Yes	*	3	Fill of [17]
17	2	Cut	TR2	*	Yes	*	3	Animal Burial Pit
18	3	Layer	*	3	Yes	*	3	Topsoil
19	3	Layer	*	3	Yes	*	3	Bedding Deposit
20	3	Layer	*	3	Yes	*	2	Subsoil/Reworked Alluvium
21	3	Layer	*	3	Yes	*	1	Alluvial Clay
22	3	Layer	TR3	3	Yes	*	1	Natural Gravel
23	4	Layer	*	4	Yes	*	3	Topsoil
24	4	Layer	*	4	Yes	*	2	Subsoil/Horticultural Soil
25	4	Layer	*	4	Yes	*	2	Reworked Alluvium
26	4	Layer	*	4	Yes	*	2	Reworked Alluvium
27	4	Layer	TR4	4	Yes	*	1	Natural Gravel

## APPENDIX 2 – Site Matrix



APPENDIX 3 - OASIS Form

## OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM

**OASIS ID: preconst1-14729**

Project details

Project name Old Mill House Estate, Cowley, Uxbridge

Short description of the project

During April 2006, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. carried out an archaeological evaluation at the Old Mill Estate, Old Mill Lane, Cowley, Uxbridge, London Borough of Hillingdon. Four trial trenches measuring between 7m and 16m in length, by 1.6m to 1.8m in width were excavated at locations across the site. In all trenches the earliest deposit was a natural layer of poorly sorted gravel. In trenches 3 and 4 this was overlain by a layer of alluvial clay, which in turn was overlain by deposits of reworked alluvium and capped by modern topsoil. In trenches 1 and 2 the natural gravel was overlain by a recent horticultural soil and capped with modern topsoil and a concrete slab. In Trench 1 the natural gravel was cut by a shallow, NE-SW aligned gully, which itself was cut by a smaller gully on a slightly different alignment. Towards the eastern end of the trench a very shallow, irregular feature, probably a heavily truncated tree bole was identified, also cut into the gravel. None of the features produced any dateable finds and all were sealed by the horticultural soil. In Trench 2 another NE-SW aligned gully was recorded. This was narrow and very shallow and produced no dateable finds. It was sealed by the horticultural soil. At the southeastern end of the trench a pit containing an animal burial was cut through the topsoil and sealed by the concrete slab. This was clearly of very recent origin and not fully excavated. Trenches 3 and 4 produced no archaeological finds or features. Overall the evaluation revealed no archaeological features apart from those in Trenches 1 and 2, and the dating and function of these was not entirely clear, apart from the modern animal burial. Extensive stripping of the site for industrial and horticultural usage during the later post-medieval period appears to have removed all traces of any earlier archaeological deposits, had any ever been present.

Project dates Start: 24-04-2006 End: 26-04-2006

Previous/future work No / No



Any associated project reference codes OMH 06 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Current Land use Grassland Heathland 3 - Disturbed

Monument type GULLY Post Medieval

Monument type GULLY Uncertain

Project location

Country England  
Site location GREATER LONDON HILLINGDON UXBRIDGE Old Mill House Estate, Old Mill Lane, Cowley, Uxbridge

Postcode UB8

Study area 2.10 Hectares

National grid reference TQ 0510 8182 Point

Height OD Min: 28.18m Max: 27.63m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd

Project brief originator Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service

Project design originator Jon Butler

Project director/manager Jon Butler

Project supervisor Peter Boyer

Sponsor or funding body Old Mill Developments

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient LAARC

Physical Contents 'Ceramics','Industrial'

Digital Archive recipient LAARC

Digital Contents 'Stratigraphic','Survey'

Digital Media available 'Spreadsheets','Text'

Paper Archive recipient LAARC

Paper Contents 'Stratigraphic','Survey'

Paper Media available 'Context sheet','Correspondence','Diary','Drawing','Manuscript','Map','Matrices','Photograph','Plan','Section','Survey '

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Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

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Author(s)/Editor(s) Boyer, P.

Date 2006

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Description Unpublished evaluation report, detailing project background, methodology, results and conclusions.

Entered by Peter Boyer (pboyer@pre-construct.com)  
Entered on 28 April 2006

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