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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
& WATCHING BRIEF**

For

GIFFORD

on behalf of

PROWTING HOMES WEST LTD

CAT REPORT: 02020

APRIL 2002



**Cotswold
Archaeological
Trust**

9-11 HIGH STREET, OLD TOWN
SWINDON
WILTSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
& WATCHING BRIEF

CAT PROJECT: 1253
CAT REPORT: 02020

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SUMMARY

Site Name: 9-11 High Street
Site Code: OTS 01
Location: Old Town, Swindon, Wiltshire
NGR: SU 158 838
Type: Excavation and Watching Brief
Date: 11th Oct 2001 – 5th Feb 2002
Planning Reference: S//00/01245CMC
Location of Archive: Wiltshire Museums Service

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeological Trust in October 2001 at 9-11 High Street, Old Town, Swindon. The work was commissioned by Gifford on behalf of Prowting Homes West Ltd. An area 5m by 10m was excavated within the footprint of a proposed block of flats. A watching brief was subsequently carried out during construction of this, and a further, block.

The excavation revealed a build-up of 'dark earth' deposits up to 0.6m thick overlying the natural sand. These deposits were the result of continuing occupation in the vicinity of the site since the Iron Age and Roman periods, and contained pottery and other artefactual material dating from the Iron Age to the nineteenth century. No other archaeological deposits were identified.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In October 2001 Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT) carried out an archaeological excavation and watching brief commissioned by Gifford on behalf of Prowting Homes West Ltd at 9-11 High Street, Old Town, Swindon (centred on NGR: SU 158 838, Fig. 1). The archaeological work was undertaken in fulfilment of a condition placed on planning consent granted by Swindon Borough Council for the construction of two blocks of flats on the site (Planning Ref: S//00/01245CMC).
- 1.2 The excavation and watching brief were carried out in accordance with a project design prepared by Gifford (Gifford 2001) covering a series of stages of investigation defined by Wiltshire County Council Archaeology Service, the archaeological advisors to the Local Planning Authority (Swindon Borough Council). The project design was approved by Wiltshire County Council in advance of work starting on site. The work was monitored by Roy Canham, County Archaeologist, including a site visit on 18th October 2001.

The site

- 1.3 The site is located in the centre of the Old Town of Swindon, and forms a long thin plot fronting at its western end onto the High Street, and extending eastwards for more than 100m. The site lies on broadly level ground at a height of approximately 139m AOD.
- 1.4 The underlying geology of the area is mapped as sands of the Upper Jurassic period (Geological Survey of Great Britain, England and Wales; Sheet 252).
- 1.5 The western street front of the site had formerly been occupied by buildings, but these were under demolition at the time of the excavation. The rear (east) of the site remained as car-park and garden. The area of excavation lay in the centre of the former car-park area, with a watching brief carried out during works in other parts of the site, including the area nearer to the High Street.

Archaeological background

- 1.6 The potential archaeological significance of the site stemmed from its location close to the historic core of Swindon Old Town. This part of the town is known to have origins in the Anglo-Saxon period, and continued as the focus of the town in the medieval and later periods. An estate known as 'High Swindon' is recorded in *Domesday* in 1086, and this is thought to correspond with the Old Town area (Chandler 1993, 4). Previous excavations in the area had revealed material dating from the Mesolithic to post-medieval periods. Of particular relevance to this project were discoveries dating from the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, found adjacent to the site to the north and south. Excavations took place in 1977 to the north of the site in the area now forming the car-park to the rear of Lloyds Bank. This work (recorded as Wiltshire SMR No. SU18SE 531) revealed possible Roman and Anglo-Saxon building remains as well as Iron-Age pottery. An excavation carried out in 1993, 30m to the south of the site at the Hermitage revealed Mesolithic and Neolithic flint scatters, several Romano-British infant burials, and a further Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building (Butterworth and Seager Smith, 1997).

Methodology

- 1.7 The proposed development on the site consisted of the construction of two blocks of flats, Block A, near the street front in the location occupied by the demolished buildings, and block B further towards the rear of the site. The excavation phase of the fieldwork comprised the excavation of a trench approximately 10m long east to west and 5m wide, within the footprint of Block B in a location agreed with the County Archaeologist (Fig. 2). The subsequent watching brief was intended to monitor the digging of footings over the remainder of the outline of Block B, and of Block A to the west.
- 1.8 The excavation trench was dug by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket to a depth of approximately 0.5m. All machine excavation was undertaken under constant archaeological supervision. Where archaeological deposits were encountered they were excavated by hand in accordance with the CAT Technical Manual 1: *Excavation Recording Manual* (1996).

- 1.9 The modern car-park surface, and a layer of hardcore and garden soil immediately below were removed mechanically (contexts 001, 004). Further excavation below this level took place by hand. A layer of 'dark earth' was exposed below the machined layers (005). In order to fully explore the evolution and depositional history of this layer, the site was divided into a grid of squares each 2m wide and 2.5m long (Coded A-J, See Figure 3). In turn the material within each of these squares was excavated separately in spits each 0.2m deep. Pottery and other artefactual material from each spit, within each square was bagged separately in order to allow any spatial variation of the distribution of artefacts through the dark earth to be discerned. The results of this process are discussed fully below.
- 1.10 Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential and, where appropriate, sampled and processed in accordance with the CAT Technical Manual 2: *The Taking of Samples for Palaeoenvironmental/Palaeoeconomic Analysis from Archaeological Sites* (1994). All artefacts recovered were processed in accordance with the CAT Technical Manual 3: *Treatment of Finds Immediately After Excavation* (1995).
- 1.11 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CAT at their offices in Kemble. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the site archive (including artefacts) will be deposited with Wiltshire Museums Service.

2. RESULTS

- 2.1 Once the modern layers described above had been mechanically removed, a layer of dark grey, humic material was revealed (005). This was formed of 'dark earth', an organic build-up resulting from the centuries of human activity on or near the site, and typical of the deposits found in the historic core of towns with a history dating back to the medieval or earlier periods.
- 2.2 The dark earth layer was found to be between 0.5 and 0.6m deep (see Figure 3), overlying natural sand, which was interleaved with thin lenses of friable stone. Only one feature was revealed cutting the dark earth layer, and this was determined to be a recent geotechnical trial hole (002, 003). The excavation of the dark earth layer took place in the manner outlined above, which allowed the distribution of artefactual

material through the layer to be plotted. The results of this are discussed below. No other features of archaeological interest were identified.

- 2.3 No significant archaeological deposits were encountered during the watching brief. A post-medieval well was identified in the vicinity of Block A, while much of the area of the eastern part of Block B, beyond the excavation trench was found to have been dug out and filled with twentieth-century rubble and refuse.

The Finds

- 2.4 An assemblage of 209 sherds of pottery was recovered from the excavation. These dated from the Iron Age (5 sherds), Roman (39 sherds), Anglo-Saxon (1 sherd), medieval (41 sherds) and post-medieval periods (119 sherds). Although no discrete features were identified, this assemblage, dominated by post-medieval material but with earlier periods represented, reflects the chronological range of occupation known to have taken place in Old Town, Swindon. A small number of fragments of building material of various dates, as well as a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon loom weight were also recovered. A full report on this material is included as Appendix 2.
- 2.5 The pottery and other artefactual material recovered from the dark earth layer was also separated both horizontally within the gridded squares, and vertically in excavated spits, as outlined above. This has allowed some analysis of the distribution of material through the dark earth deposit to be carried out. No significant horizontal variation in the distribution of pottery was observed. This is not unexpected as significant depositional variables are unlikely to be revealed within a small excavated area without archaeological features (5m x 10m). A chronological separation was, however, visible in the sequence of vertical spits, both within individual squares, but also more obviously across the site as a whole. Three spits were excavated; 0.5m to 0.7m below the modern ground surface, 0.7m to 0.9m, and 0.9m below, to the top of the natural sand (typically at a depth of 1.0m-1.1m). For each major chronological period, the stratified pottery recovered from each spit can be expressed as a percentage of the pottery of that period recovered from the site as a whole, with the following results (These data are also represented graphically on Figure 4);

Depth of Spit	Pottery Date				
	Iron-Age (No. of sherds - %)	Roman	Anglo-Saxon	Medieval	Post-medieval
0.5m-0.7m	2 - 50%*	7 - 19%	1 - 100%**	31 - 88%	89 - 93%
0.7m-0.9m	1 - 25%*	13 - 34%	0 - 0%**	3 - 8%	6 - 7%
0.9m-1.1m	1 - 25%*	18 - 47%	0 - 0%**	1 - 4%	0 - 0%
* Only 4 Sherds of IA pottery were recovered.					
**Only one sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery, and a fragment of loomweight were recovered.					

- 2.6 It can be seen that where a sufficient number of sherds were recovered to provide a reasonable statistical sample, gradients in the frequency of the various types of material can be discerned. Roman material was most common at the base of the deposit, although present in at all levels, while medieval and later pottery was mostly confined to the uppermost spit, with only occasional sherds lower down. No post-medieval material was recovered from the lowest spit. An Anglo-Saxon loomweight fragment was also recovered from the uppermost spit, which may give an indication of the types of Anglo-Saxon activity which took place in the vicinity.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 It has been noted above that no discrete archaeological features were identified in the course of this project. This was somewhat surprising given the density of activity previously revealed near to the site, but this may be accounted for by the small size of the excavation area. The artefactual evidence does however suggest significant activity in the vicinity from late prehistoric times more or less continuously until the present, with pottery from all major chronological periods represented in the assemblage. This is consistent with the picture of the history of Old Town emerging from other work in the area.
- 3.2 The fairly consistent distribution of artefactual material through the dark earth layer, with relatively little transfer of sherds from the top to the bottom of the soil column, and *vice-versa*, suggests that the area of the excavation trench has been subject only to surface cultivation for much of its history, without major disturbance from for example, structural building, or pit digging. This has allowed a chronologically stratified sequence of material to develop and survive largely unchanged. The small

size of the pottery sherds present would suggest, however, that these deposits have been significantly reworked on the surface, as this has built up over time.

4. CAT PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken by David Kenyon, assisted by Franco Vartuca, Gwil Dore, Jerry Bond, and Paul Riccaboni. The report was written by David Kenyon. The illustrations were prepared by Peter Moore. The archive has been compiled by David Kenyon, and prepared for deposition by Ed McSloy. The project was managed for CAT by Mark Collard and Cliff Bateman.

5. REFERENCES

Butterworth, C, and Seager Smith, R, 1997 'Excavations at The Hermitage, Old Town, Swindon' in *Wilts. Archaeol. Mag.* **90**, 55-76

Chandler, C, 1993 *The Hermitage, Old Town, Swindon, April 1993 (TH 93) An Archaeological Report* (Fresden Archaeological Services, Unpub. report)

Gifford, 2001 *9-11 High Street, Old Town, Swindon, Project Design for archaeological excavation and watching brief*, (Gifford Doc. No. B3756A.R02)

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Context	Description
001	Modern hardcore surface; Grey sandy silt and brick rubble, 0.15m thick.
002	Fill of geotechnical pit; Mix of modern rubble and dark grey humic soil. Not bottomed.
003	Cut of geotechnical pit; 0.5m wide, 1.7m long, at least 1m deep.
004	Former garden soil; dark brown humic sandy silt, occasional small rubble frags, up to 0.25m thick.
005	Dark Earth; dark grey-brown silty sand, occasional small gravel, up to 0.7m thick.
006	Natural sand; pale yellow sand, some layers of thin friable rock. Not excavated.

Context numbers in bold type refer to cut features, those in normal type to deposits.

APPENDIX 2: POTTERY REPORT

Introduction

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 209 sherds of pottery weighing 1790g accompanied by a few pieces of ceramic building material and a fragment of an annular clay loomweight. The pottery is of mixed chronology with sherds of later Prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date present. The material is also of variable condition, the most recent pottery being the better preserved. Generally speaking the assemblage is well-fragmented with an overall average sherd size of just 8.5g suggesting a history of disturbance or redeposition.

The pottery derived from a single deposit with 21 individual groups recovered from the various spits. In addition there is a small group of unstratified material. For the purposes of this assessment the material was scanned to assess its likely chronology. The sherds were quantified by count and weight and the resulting data can be found summarised in Table 1.

No further work has been carried out in conjunction with this assessment to consider the assemblage in its local or regional context.

Later Prehistoric

At least five, possible six sherds of Iron Age date were present, three from Box A, one from Box B and one unstratified. A sixth sherd from Box G could be prehistoric or Anglo-Saxon. The sherds include four calcined flint-tempered examples, one glauconitic sandy ware and one sandy ware with a micaceous paste.

Roman

Thirty-nine sherds of Roman date were present. Most of the wares are grey sandy wares, probably products of the Wiltshire industries. Also local are a couple of sherds of colour-coated ware and some sherds of Savernake ware. These are accompanied by some regional imports including products of the Oxfordshire industries, in particular white-slipped mortaria and colour-coated wares dating to the later Roman period and Dorset black burnished ware. A single scrap of Gaulish samian was also present. Whilst most of the sherds are indicative of a later Roman date the samian and Savernake ware could potentially date to the first to second centuries.

Anglo-Saxon

A single sherd of handmade organic-tempered ware was recovered from Box B. This is a particularly long-lived tradition and the sherd could date from anywhere between the sixth and ninth centuries. An eroded sandy ware sherd from Box G could be prehistoric or Anglo-Saxon in date.

Medieval

Medieval wares were quite well represented with 41 sherds. Most of these are local products from the Minety industry and include jars, jugs and spouted pitchers. Other types present include some jar sherds of Newbury fabric B probably originating from the Kennet Valley, and two jug sherds, one from a Brill-Boarstall type (Buckinghamshire) and a green glazed jug, probably a Wiltshire product.

Post-medieval

Post-medieval to modern wares accounted for the bulk of the assemblage, particularly from the upper horizons with some 119 sherds.

The earliest wares include sherds of Cistercian ware, imported German stoneware, mainly Raeren, and glazed red earthenware, which could all potentially date to the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries.

Most of the wares are typical of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries and include white and transfer decorated refined white earthenware (china), Nottinghamshire stoneware, various glazed local red earthenwares, salt glazed whiteware, porcelain, and plain red earthenware.

Fired Clay

A single fragment of an annular loomweight was recovered from Box D. Such weights are typical of the Saxon period. One other small fragment of fired clay of indeterminate date and function came from Box B.

Ceramic Building material

Eleven fragments of ceramic building material were recovered (Table 2). Of particular note are two joining pieces of a glazed ridge tile from Box B which could potentially date from the thirteenth century. Amongst the other pieces is a plain Minety flat roof tile and one fragment of glazed medieval imbrex.

J R Timby
November 2001

Table 1 Pottery Spot Dates

<i>Context</i>	<i>Grid</i>	<i>Spit Depth</i>	<i>IA</i>	<i>Ro</i>	<i>Sx</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Pm</i>	<i>ND</i>	<i>Tot No</i>	<i>Tot Wt</i>	<i>TPQ</i>
005	A	0.5-0.7	2	1	0	9	24	0	36	211	late 19th+
005	A	0.7-0.9	1	6	0	1	1	0	9	37	16-17th
005	A	0.9-1.1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	?Roman
005	A	0-0.5	0	1	0	1	8	0	10	68	18-19th
005	B	0.5-0.7	0	2	1	9	5	0	17	130	18-19th
005	B	0.7-0.9	0	2	0	0	4	1	7	26	16-17th
005	B	0.9-1.0	1	13	0	0	0	1	15	81	late C3-C4
005	C	0.5-0.7	0	0	0	0	6	0	6	36	18th
005	D	0.5-0.7	0	0	0	2	17	1	20	150	18-19th
005	D	0.7-0.9	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	19	16-18th
005	D	0.9-1.10	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	17	13-14th
005	E	0.5-0.7	0	1	0	0	2	0	3	37	17-18th
005	E	0.7-0.9	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	21	16-17th
005	F	0.5-0.7	0	0	0	0	21	0	21	218	18-19th
005	G	0.5-0.7	0	0	0	9	7	0	16	153	17-18th
005	G	0.7-0.9	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	8	13-14th
005	G	0-0.5	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	30	IA/A-S?
005	H	0.5-0.7	0	2	0	1	3	0	6	56	18th
005	H	0.7-0.9	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	25	Roman
005	H	0.9-1.0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	31	Roman
005	I	0.5-0.7	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	96	17-18th
005	J	0.5-0.7	0	1	0	0	3	0	4	50	19th
US	US	US	1	0	0	5	16	0	22	289	19th+
TOTAL			5	39	1	41	119	4	209	1790	

Table 2 Other Ceramic Finds

Context	Box	Depth	Description	No	Wt	Date
005	B	0.5-0.7	misc brick/tile	1	4	?Pmed
005	B	0.5-0.7	glazed ridge tile	2	198	13th+
005	B	0.5-0.7	tile/brick	1	10	nd
005	B	0.7-0.9	fired clay?	1	3	nd
005	B	0.9-1.0	crumb	1	1	nd
005	D	0.7-0.9	fragment of loomweight	1	42	Anglo-Saxon
005	D	0.7-0.9	cbm?	1	1	nd
005	D	0.9-1.10	cbm?	1	1	nd
005	E	0.5-0.7	?cbm	1	1	nd
005	G	0.7-.0.9	brick	1	10	Med/Pmed
US	US		glazed imbrex	1	24	Medieval
US	US		flat roof tile - Minety fabric	1	29	13-15th
TOTAL				13	324	

APPENDIX 3: LEVELS OF PRINCIPAL DEPOSITS AND STRUCTURES

Levels are expressed as metres below current ground level and as metres above Ordnance Datum, calculated using the benchmark provided by the developer (139.42m AOD).

	Excavation Trench
Current ground level	138.7m
Top of dark earth (005)	0.4m (138.3m)
Limit of excavation; Top of natural (006)	1.0m (137.7m)

Upper figures are depth below modern ground level, lower figures in parentheses are metres AOD.

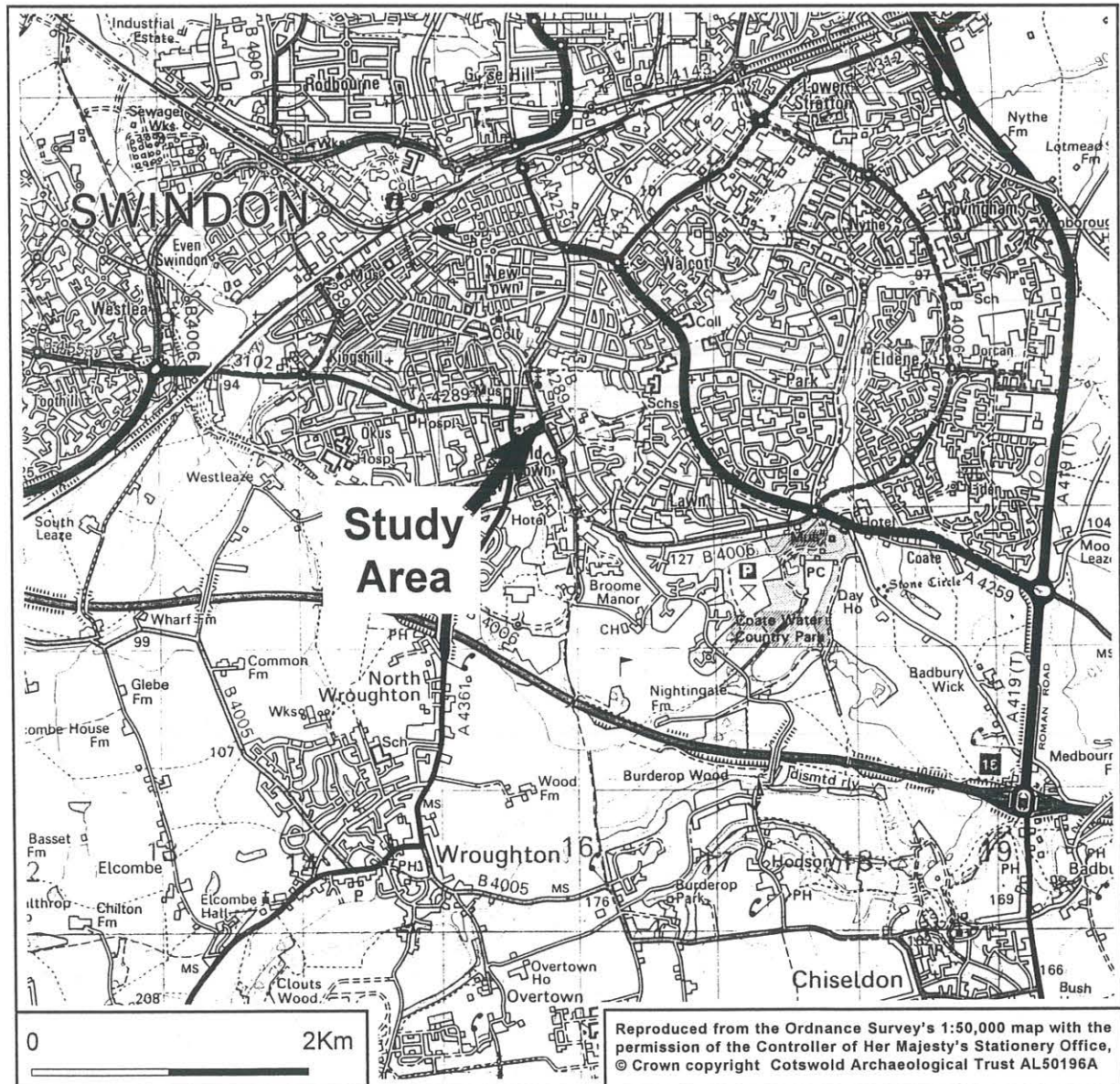


Fig. 1 Location plan

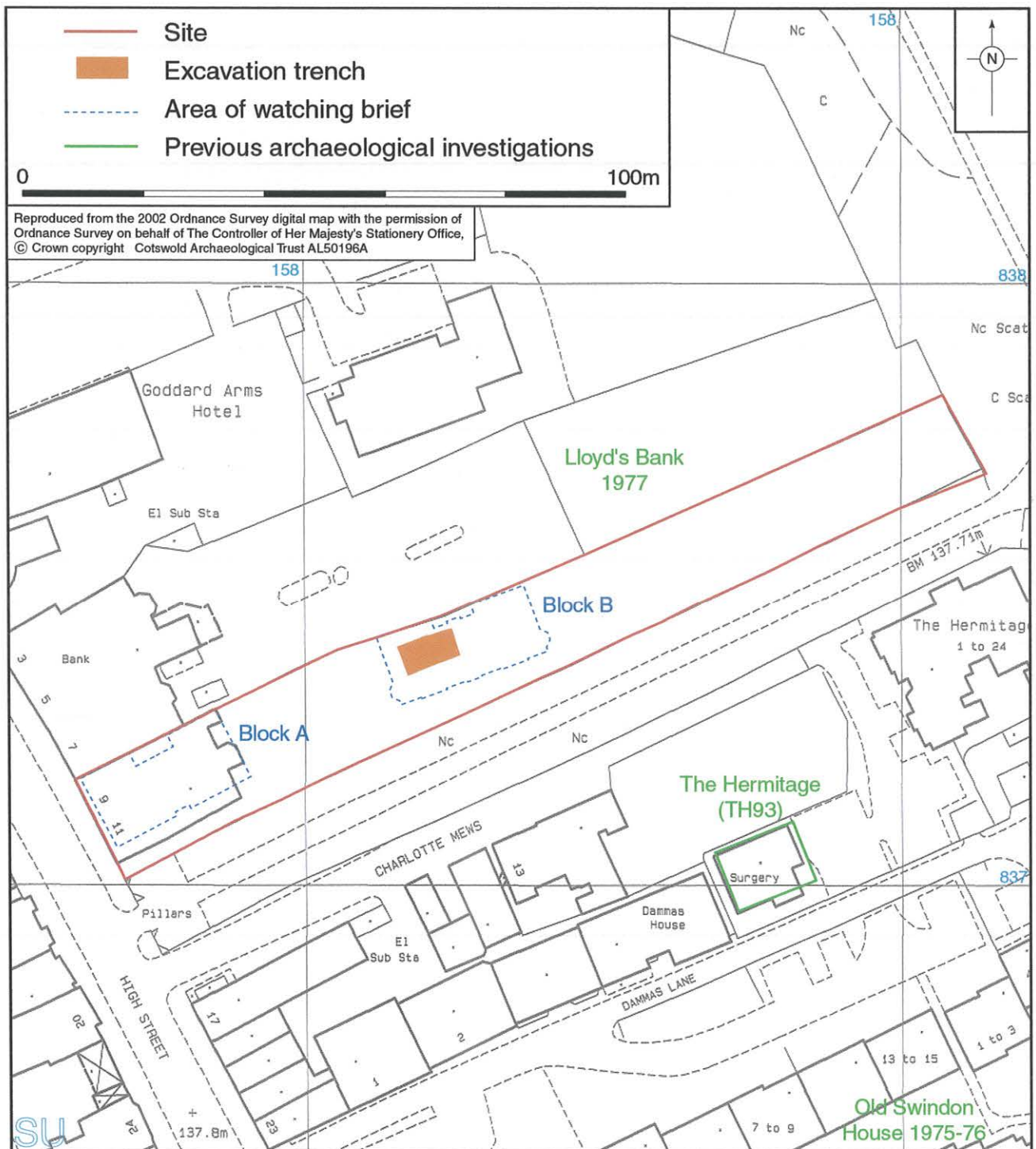


Fig. 2 Site area showing location of excavation trench and watching brief

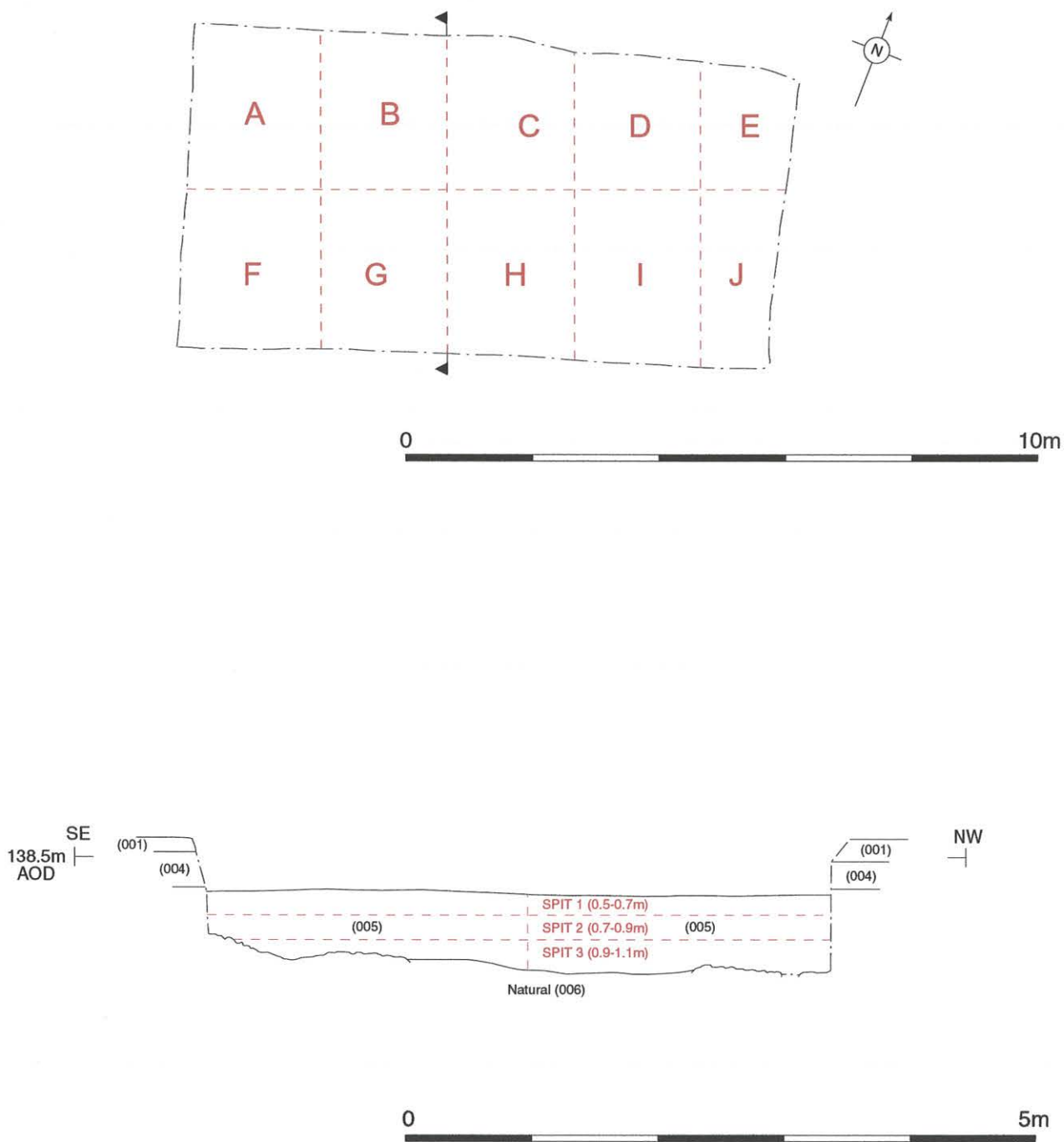


Fig. 3 Plan and section of excavation trench showing dark earth sample grid

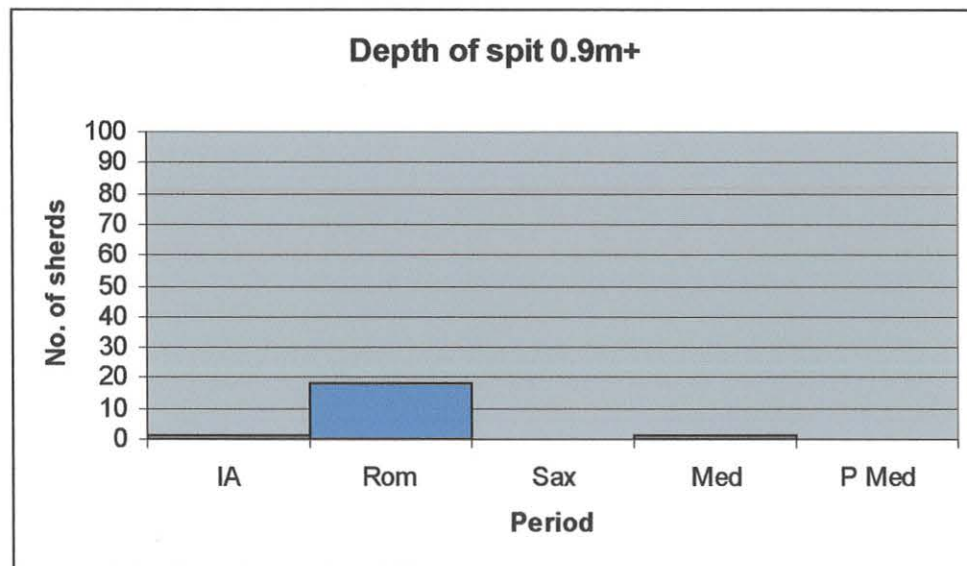
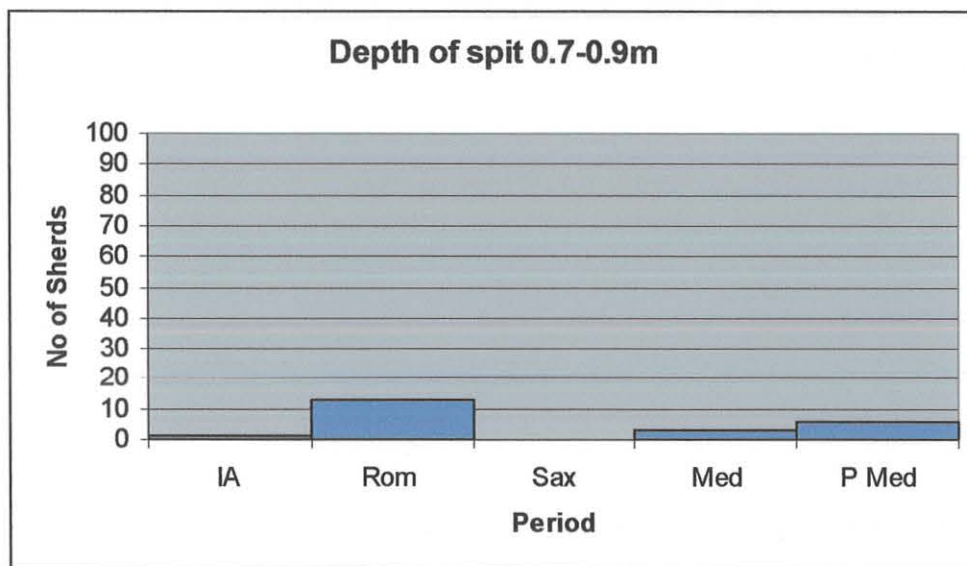
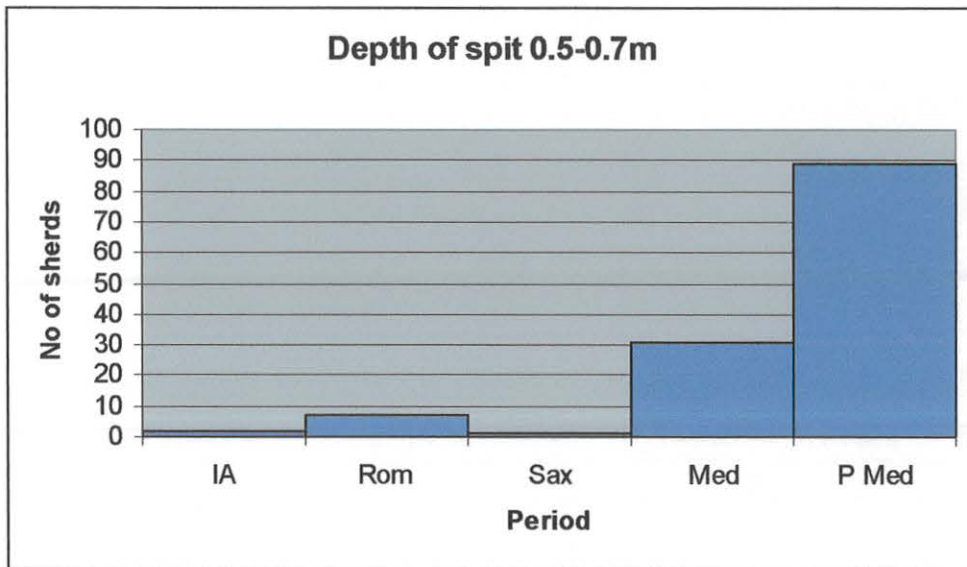


Figure 4. Distribution of stratified pottery through 'dark earth'

