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Muller Dairy North, Market Drayton

Archaeological Site Investigation: Trial Trenching

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FIGURES

PLATES

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Acknowledgements

SLR is grateful for the assistance of Andrew Wigley (Shropshire Council) during the course of the site works.

The investigation was designed and directed by Tim Malim (SLR). Fieldwork was undertaken by Thomas Wellicome (SLR Consulting) and Marcus Headifen. Drawings were produced by Caroline Malim (SLR).

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1.0 SUMMARY

In September 2013, a programme of archaeological evaluation was carried out on land north of the Muller Dairy, Market Drayton, Shropshire.

The programme consisted of 16 evaluation trenches located (centred) at NGR SJ 649 335. The evaluation located several ditches, mostly located at the southern end of the site, and a part of the track bed and revetting associated with the local route of the Great Western Railway. Although no dating evidence was recovered from these features, the ditches were not only earlier than the railway but also earlier than medieval field boundaries, and as such could be of considerable antiquity. In the eastern part of the site a large ditch was investigated which lies beneath a boundary shown on tithe maps, and probably formed a furlong boundary as to the east historic mapping show the characteristic pattern of long sinuous fields associated with ridge and furrow cultivation. Several quarry pits were also found which were of post-medieval (probably 19th century) date.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Planning background

The site is the proposed location for an extension to the Muller Dairy including '*Erection of manufacturing facility to include a production building, high-bay warehouse, distribution buildings; associated on-site road layout and parking areas/lorry turning areas; alterations to existing road layout; formation of new vehicular access; landscaping scheme; to include diversion of public right of way.'* (Planning Refs. NS/07/02018/EIA & 11/00527/REM).

The permitted development area covers c.25ha of which 8.5ha has been allocated for Muller's expansion and specific development needs. The scheme includes construction of a cold storage and distribution centre, production building, boiler house, delivery yard, lorry park and car parking. Around this central zone allocated for development, but within the 25ha boundary, other landscaping will occur including the cut and fill construction of bunds surrounding the buildings.

The permission includes Condition 8 which refers to the archaeological potential of the site, and the need for appropriate recording of archaeological features and finds. In response Muller (the client) commissioned SLR Consulting to design a scheme of archaeological work. A Written Scheme of Investigation[1] was approved by Shropshire Council in April 2013, and implemented in September 2013, which is in accordance with NPPF 141, and would lead to discharge of the planning condition. Under the National Planning Policy Framework[2] an assessment is required to be submitted by the applicant to inform the planning authority on the potential impacts of the development on any buried archaeological deposits or materials.

[1] SLR Consulting 2013 *Muller site North of A53, Market Drayton, Shropshire: Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation* April 2013

[2] The NPPF introduced in March 2012 states the relevant government policy in section 12: *Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*, paragraphs 126 – 141.

2.2 Purpose of document

This document contains the full report of the results of the archaeological site investigation required as part of a condition on planning consent.

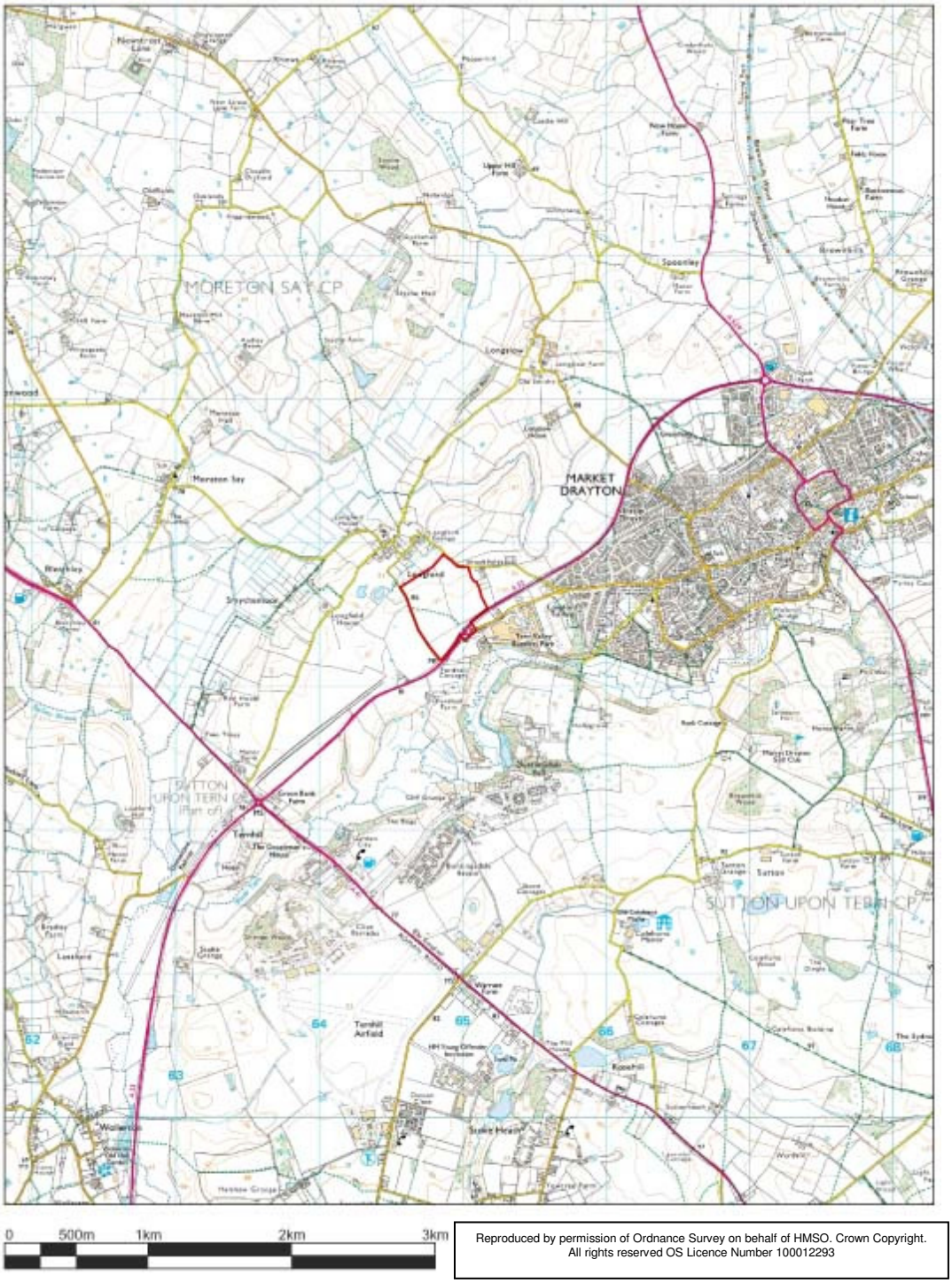

Figure 1. Site Location.

3.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

3.1 Location and Land Use

The site is located immediately north of the current Muller Dairy plant, at the Muller Dairy North Site, Shrewsbury Road, Market Drayton, Shropshire, TF9 3PN, NGR SJ 649 335 (364931, 333591 approximate centroid) (Figure 1). It comprises two large adjacent fields, covering an area of 25ha. The fields are improved pasture and are currently used for the grazing of livestock.

3.2 Geology and Topography

The geology consists of mudstones from the Bollin Mudstone Member. These are sedimentary rocks formed in the Triassic period.

The topography is pronounced in that the land rises to the northwest, and the highest point in the generally flat local landscape is located in the northern part of the application area. The land then drops off north of this to Longford, where a series of ponds, springs and streams drain slowly through Smithymoor as part of the River Duckow catchment area. *The ridge* within the application area is therefore the watershed between the Duckow and Tern river valleys.

3.3 Archaeological Background

The following sections are summarized from the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment which contained a chapter on Cultural Heritage (Chapter 12 submitted in 2007 as part of planning application 07/02018/EIA).

The Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record lists 27 entries within 2km of the application area. Plotting of these on to a map in comparison to the boundaries of the permitted development area, demonstrates that no recorded artefacts lie within the site, although the west-east line of the Great Western Railway (1867 - 1963; SMR 08029) bisects the southern part of it. The chronologically earliest artefact was one of the closest to the application area: a hammerstone or net sinker (SMR 01672) dating to the Bronze Age (2500 - 750BC) which lies 500m beyond the eastern edge of the permitted development area, and was found during road improvements to the A53 in the recent past. Of greater significance is a further findspot, almost adjacent to the permitted development, comprising a Roman coin hoard c.100m beyond the northern boundary, found in 1898 by ploughing opposite Fabric Cottages, Longford (SMR 01664). There were between 700 - 1000 coins, dating to the 3rd century, and the location of their discovery was accurately recorded by the editor of the Shrewsbury Chronicle. The Victoria County History (VCH) of 1908 gives further details on the dates and the then present possession of the coins.

Archaeological features visible on the ground include the slight cutting of the old railway line running through the southern part of the site, a slight lynchet following the west-east line of a removed field boundary near the top of the ridge on the northern edge of the site, and a number of depressions: these latter are probably old ponds or in-filled quarries.

4.0 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Aims

- to contribute to establishing the extent and significance of any archaeological remains which may exist within the Site; and
- to assess the impact on the heritage significance of archaeological remains from the proposed development.

4.2 Objectives

Trenches were located (see Figure 2) in order to address the following objectives:

- to establish the nature and date of the general deposit–sequence on the site;
- to establish the nature and date of any man-made archaeological features or remains which may be present on the site;
- to establish the potential for evidence for past environments to exist within the site;
- to investigate the inter-action between human and natural activity within the site; and
- to provide an appropriate level of information for planning further mitigation (if required).

4.3 Methodology

The investigation was guided by the Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation 2008.

Sixteen trenches were excavated by a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under the direction of an archaeologist. Their locations were chosen to investigate features visible as slight undulations in the field, or to investigate features shown on historic mapping (Figure 3), as well as a random distribution to investigate other parts of the development site. Trenches were hand cleaned where features or deposits indicated possible human activity or change to the natural deposit sequence. Manual sample excavation and recording of cut features was undertaken by experienced archaeologists. Digital photographs were taken of every trench as overall site shots to locate them and show the nature of the natural geology and deposit sequence. Further photographs were taken of discrete features during investigation. Textual records were completed using Trench recording sheets, and pro-forma context sheets for deposits and archaeological features.

The drawn record includes plans of the site at scale 1:5000 for trench locations, 1:100 for trench plans, 1:20 for sections and 1:10 for profiles.

The altitude was established through a survey loop from a benchmark marked on the development plan lying in the centre of the Muller entrance roundabout with a value of 83.55m AOD.

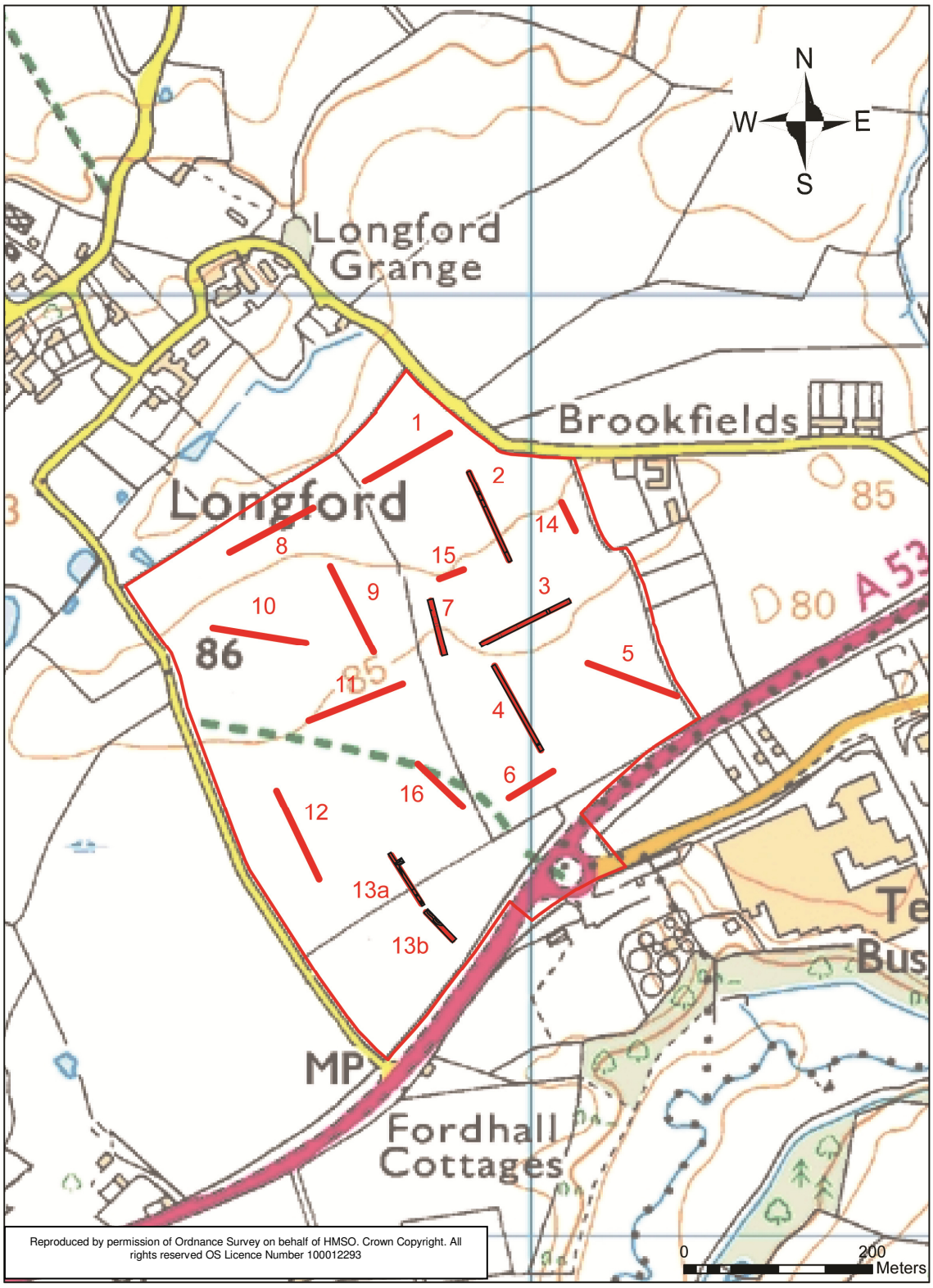

Figure 2
Trench plan showing distribution against modern OS map and permitted boundary. Black outlines show trenches with archaeological features and their locations within trenches.

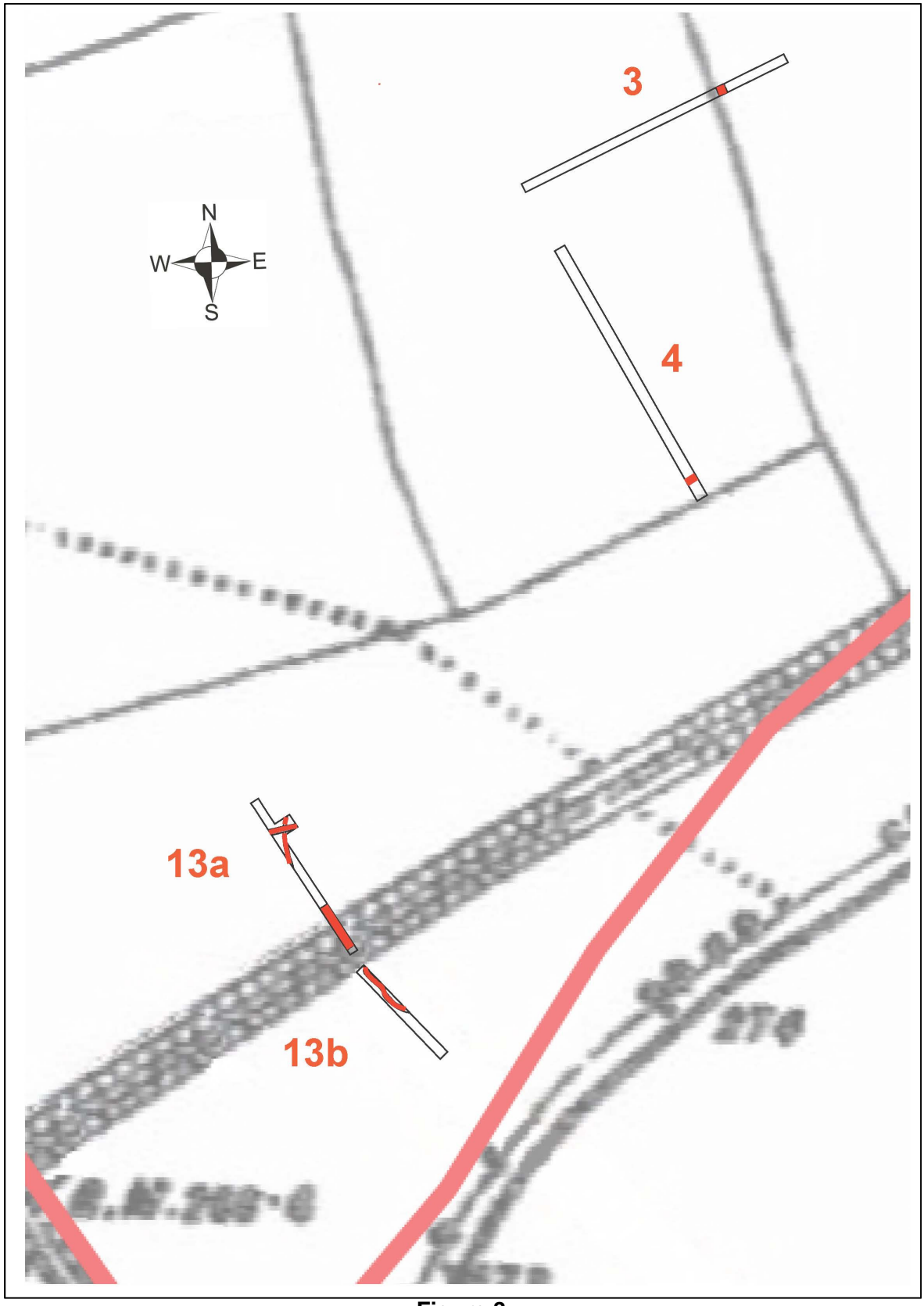

Figure 3
Archaeological features and trench plan superimposed on the 1888 1st edition OS map

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Plate 1. Trench 1 Overview. View: SE

Dimensions: 100 x 1.6m. Orientation: NE – SW.

No archaeological features were located in this trench, with the stratigraphy consisting of a loosely compacted brown silty sand topsoil (101) overlying an orangey brown silty sand sub-soil interface (102) with the natural sands (103). Natural generally occurred at a regular depth of around 0.3m, but at the eastern end of the trench the ground appeared to gradually slope off or hollow to the east, overlying which was an accumulated greyish brown sandy clay (104). The origins of this material are unclear, although it shared similar characteristics with backfills of the quarry pits to the south in trenches 2, 7 and 15. Considering its location at the base of the slope, however, it is likely to have been formed by a mixture of ploughing and colluvial activity dragging material to the lowest point on this side of the field.

5.2 Trench 2

Plate 2. Trench 2 Overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 100 x 1.6m. Orientation: NW – SE.

Underlying topsoil (201) was light orangey brown sandy clay sub-soil (202). In the southern half of this trench this soil overlaid the tightly compacted greyish clay fill (205) of a gently sloped cut [204], which extended to a depth of 1.4m below the existing ground level. This cut probably relates to quarrying activity, which appears to have targeted gravel seams within the sandy natural (203), although it is possible that this is a natural depression.

Plate 3. Feature [205]. View: NE

At the northern end of the trench was a further feature; this was possibly natural in origin, although the limited area exposed made interpretation inconclusive. It consisted of a shallow northeast to southwest orientated cut [205] (Plate 3), which tapered to a point towards the southwest. Filling this feature was a light brown sandy silt (206).

5.3 Trench 3

Plate 4. Trrench 3 Overview. View: SW

Dimensions: 100 x 1.6m. Orientation: NE – SW.

Underlying topsoil (301) and subsoil (302) was a single feature, located at the eastern end of the trench (Figure 3). Cut [304] appeared to form part of a linear ditch, orientated in a NW to SE direction, running across the width of the trench (Plates 5 and 6). The feature was c. 3.10m in width and 0.75m deep, with a sharp break of slope top, gently sloping sides and an undulating base (Figure 4). Filling the ditch were four contexts, the uppermost of which was a 0.30m thick firmly compacted light greyish brown silty sand (305), which overlaid a firmly compacted mid-brown silt sand (306) (Figure 4 and Plates 5 and 6). Underlying (306) were two layers of slumped material, the uppermost of which was a loosely compacted mid-yellow brown silt sand (307), which overlaid a loosely compacted dark orange brown slightly silty sand (308). Ditch [304] cut into the natural sands and gravels (303).

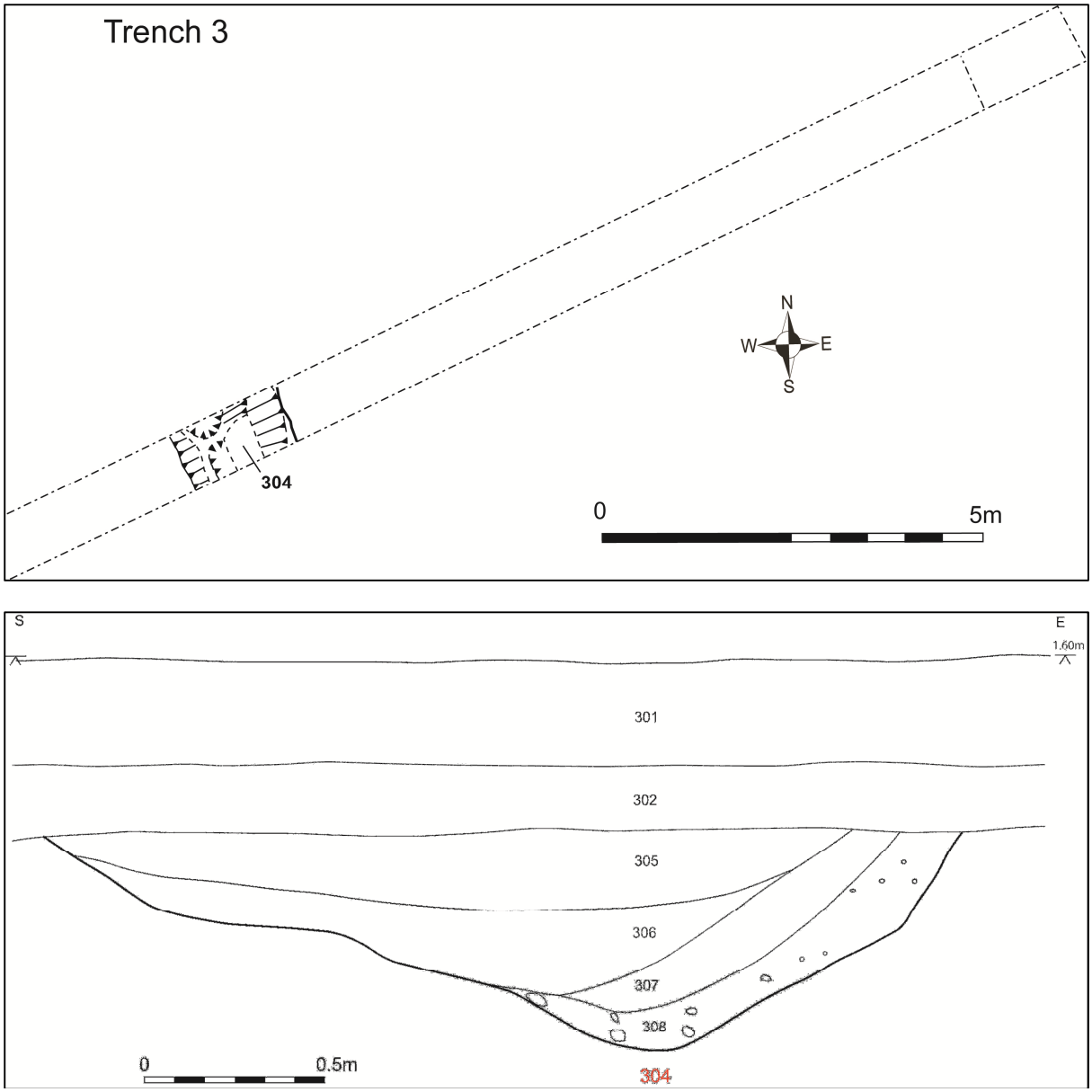

Figure 4
Boundary ditch 304 plan and south-east facing section through the infill sequence

Plate 5. Ditch [304]. View: SE

Plate 6. Ditch [304]. View: NE

5.4 Trench 4

Plate 7. Trench 4 Overview. View: S

Dimensions: 100 x 1.8-1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE.

The majority of the trench had a uniform deposition sequence, consisting of topsoil (401), overlying a light orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones, which formed the subsoil (402). Over the majority of the trench this material overlaid natural sands and gravels (403), although at the southern end of the trench there was a single possible boundary ditch feature [404] (Figure 5 and Plate 8). Orientated NE – SW, with a depth of between 0.35 and 0.45m, the feature had a moderate break of slope top, steeply sloping sides and a sharp break of slope base. The base itself was revealed to be undulating after the feature was partially excavated with a test slot across its width. Filling the ditch was a single fill of firmly compacted mid-brown silty sand. No dateable material was recovered from this feature.

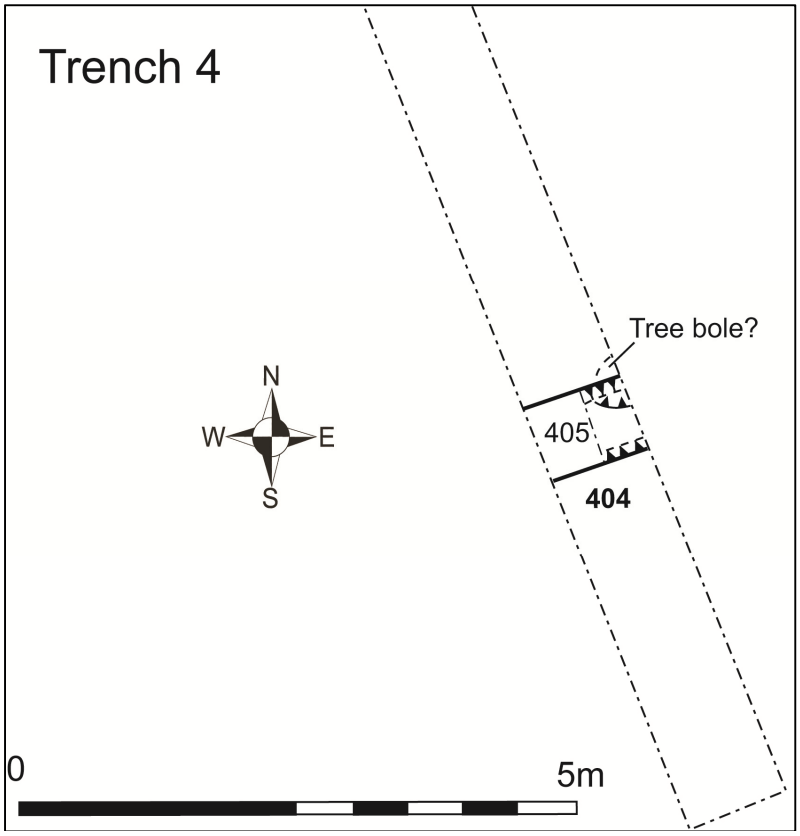

Figure 5
Plan showing location of Ditch 404 in Trench 4

Plate 8. Feature [404]. View: NE

5.5 Trench 5

Plate 9. Trench 5 overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 100m x 1.8-1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE

Underlying the topsoil (501), was a loosely compacted subsoil of light brown sandy silt (502), which overlaid natural sands and gravels (503) across the trench, except at the southeast end, where the subsoil overlaid a pinkish brown sandy clay soil (504). This thickened towards the lowest point in the trench, and was interpreted either as a colluvial deposit shitfted downslope by gravity and ploughing activity. No archaeological features were located in this trench.

5.6 Trench 6

Plate 10. Trench 6 Overview. View: E

Dimensions: 60 x 1.9m. Orientation: NE – SW.

Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (601), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (602). This overlaid natural sands and gravels at a depth of c. 0.50m – 0.60m.

No archaeological features were located within this trench.

5.7 Trench 7

Plate 11. Trench 7 Overview. View: S

Dimensions: 60 x 1.8-1.9m. Orientation: N – S.

Trench 7 was specifically located to target some undulations located on the western side of the eastern field.

Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (701), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (702). Underlying the subsoil was a gently sloping concave cut [706] (Plate 12), spanning most of the central and southern parts of the trench. Filling the cut was a pinkish brown firmly compacted clay (707), with occasional gravel inclusions and one fragment of post-medieval pottery. This cut into natural sands and gravels at a depth of c. 0.50m – 0.60m. Like the depression in Trench 2 this feature seems likely to be a quarry pit.

At the northern end of the trench, sealed by subsoil (702) there was a possible shallow post hole [704] (Plate 13) with gentley sloping sides and a concave base. This was filled with a mid-brown loosely compacted sandy silt with occasional small angular stones (705). Given the size of the posthole it is appears to have either been heavily eroded by ploughing or may be a natural feature, although its uniform shape seems to make the latter interpretation unlikely. Given its position it is quite possible that its function related to the nearby quarrying activity.

Plate 12. Quarry Pit [706]. View: E

Plate 13. Possible post hole [704]. View: E

5.8 Trench 8

Plate 14. Trench 8 Overview. View: WSW

Dimensions: 100 x 1.8-1.9m. Orientation: NE – SW.

Underlying topsoil (801) and a moderately compacted clayey silty sand subsoil (802), was a series of clay deposits (803), within which were pockets of sand, which made up the natural geology. The clays appear to be typical of glacial till; but their location, at the base of slope at the northern end of the field, probably explains the build up of ground water in the pond to the south.

No archaeological features were present in this trench.

5.9 Trench 9

Plate 15. Trench 9 Overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 100 x 1.8-1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE.

This trench was positioned to target a slight ridge crossing the field from NE – SW, which probably represents the remains of a field boundary. Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (901), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (902). This overlaid natural sands and gravels (903) at a depth of c. 0.50m – 0.60m. No trace of any features associated with the boundary were located, which was itself revealed to only consist of a slight thickening of topsoil material, rather than a definitive bank.

No other archaeological features were located within this trench.

5.10 Trench 10

Plate 16. Trench 10 Overview. View: SE

Dimensions: 100 x 1.8 – 1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE.

This trench was positioned to target a slight ridge crossing the field from NE – SW, which probably represents the remains of a field boundary. Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (1001), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (1002). This overlaid natural clays and sands and gravels (1003) at a depth of c. 0.50m – 0.60m. No trace of any features associated with the boundary were located, which was itself revealed to only consist of a slight thickening of topsoil material, rather than a definitive bank.

No other archaeological features were located in this trench.

5.11 Trench 11

Plate 17. Trench 11 Overview. View: WSW

Dimensions: 105.10 x 1.8 - 1.9m. Orientation: NE – SW

Located in the central part of the western field. This trench crossed the line of a possible service at the southwestern end of the trench, and the trench was therefore not excavated at the point where it reached its probable course. A further extension was added at the southwestern end of the trench to make up the lost distance, therefore the trench consists of one 6.9m section and one 96.5m section.

The stratigraphic sequence of this trench consisted of topsoil (1101) overlying a light brown silty sand sub-soil (1102), which overlaid natural sands and gravels (1103).

No archaeological features or finds were located in this trench.

5.12 Trench 12

Plate 18. Trench 12 Overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 100 x 1.8 – 1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE

Located in the southwestern quadrant of the western field. Three deposits were recorded as being present within this trench. These consisted of topsoil (1201), overlying a thin layer loosely compacted silty sand subsoil (1202), which overlaid natural sands (1203).

No archaeological finds or features were located in this trench.

5.13 Trench 13a and b

Plate 19. Trench 13a Overview. View: SE

Plate 20. Trench 13b Overview. View: NW

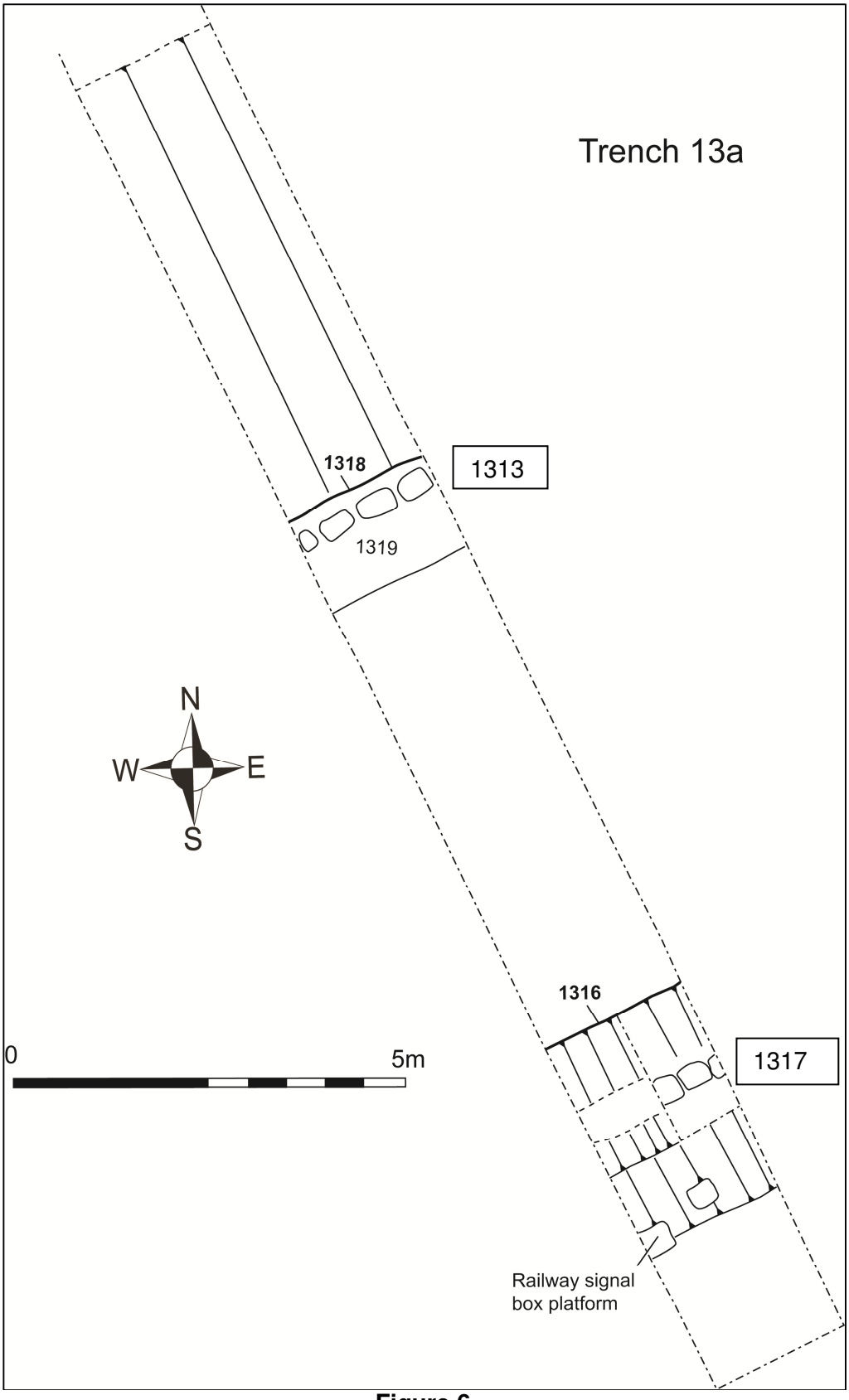

Figure 6
Trench 13a South end showing railway cutting and related features

Trench 13 was located at the southern end of the western field and was divided into two sections, due to paddock fencing running through its proposed original location.

Trench 13a was located to the north of the fencing, and was positioned to intercept the route of the Great Western Railway, which is visible as an earthwork cutting within the southern end of the western field. Underlying topsoil (1301) and light brownish yellow silty sand subsoil (1302), were a series of features. At the southern end of the trench, the railway cutting itself and the remains of associated revetting walls or drains, (1313) and (1317), were located (Figure 6). The southernmost of these (1317) was located in a 2.80m wide cut, backfilled with a mixture of clinker and soil layers (1312), (1319), (1314) and (1315) (Figure 7). The structure appeared to have been badly truncated during the removal of the railway line, but was constructed from roughly cuboid worked stones (Plate 21).

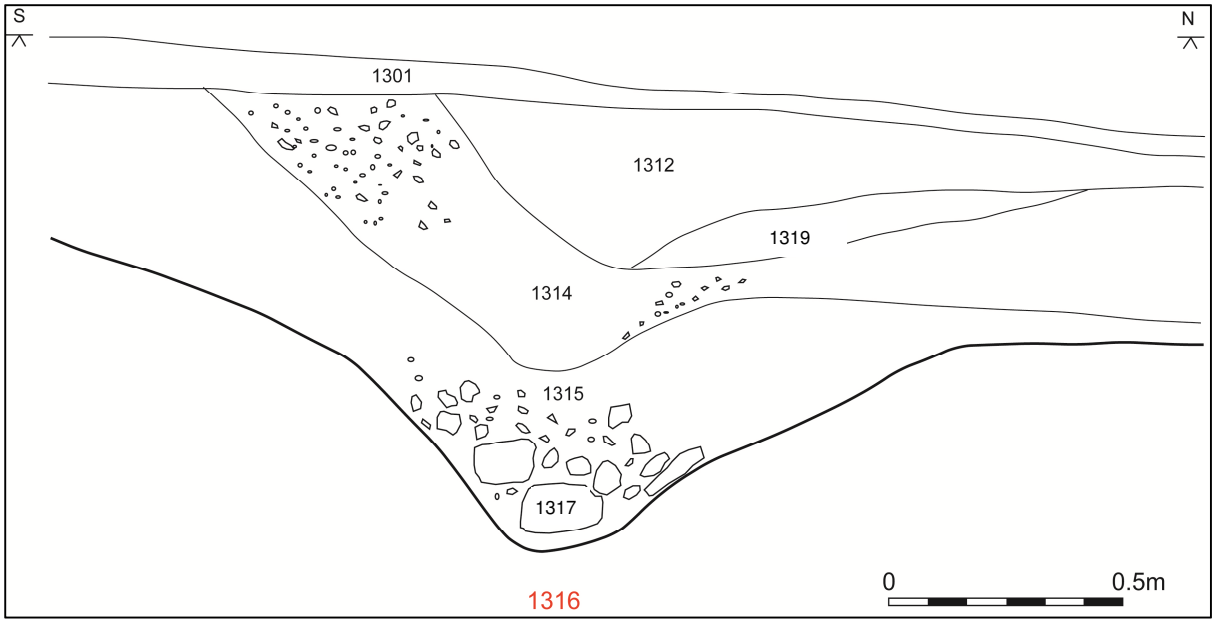

Figure 7
Section through railway feature

The northern structure was similarly constructed, from roughly shaped cuboid sandstone blocks (1313) (Plate 22), and lay within a linear ditch [1318] orientated on a NE – SW alignment. Abutting these blocks and backfilling the trench was a fill consisting of light brown silty sand and clinker (1319). These structural remains could be interpreted in a number of ways. Considering their depth, and their position in a cut, it seems probable that these are drainage features designed to take away accumulated water in the railway cutting. However, there is the possibility that they represent the remains of revetting walls associated with either supporting the track bed itself or the edges of the cutting.

The track bed was heavily disturbed, but enough remained to suggest the bedding material used was a layer of compacted clinker and coal dust material (1314). The top of the back-filled railway bed was located 0.6m below the field surface, and the base of the railway bed was at 1.1m below ground level.

Plate 21. Overhead view of railway line remains in Trench 13a. View: NW

Plate 22. Revetting wall (1313). View: NW.

To the north of the railway track itself were two-three earlier ditches or gullies, which intersected approximately 10m from the northern end of the trench (Figure 8). The larger and later of these [1307], was orientated approximately E – W, and was over 6.5m in length and

1.10m in width. In profile the ditch had a moderate break of slope top, moderate break of slope base, and sides sloping at angle of 30º. The base was concave, with the depth of the ditch being 0.21m. Filling this feature was a dark greyish brown firmly compacted silty sand with occasional sub-rounded pebbles (1306).

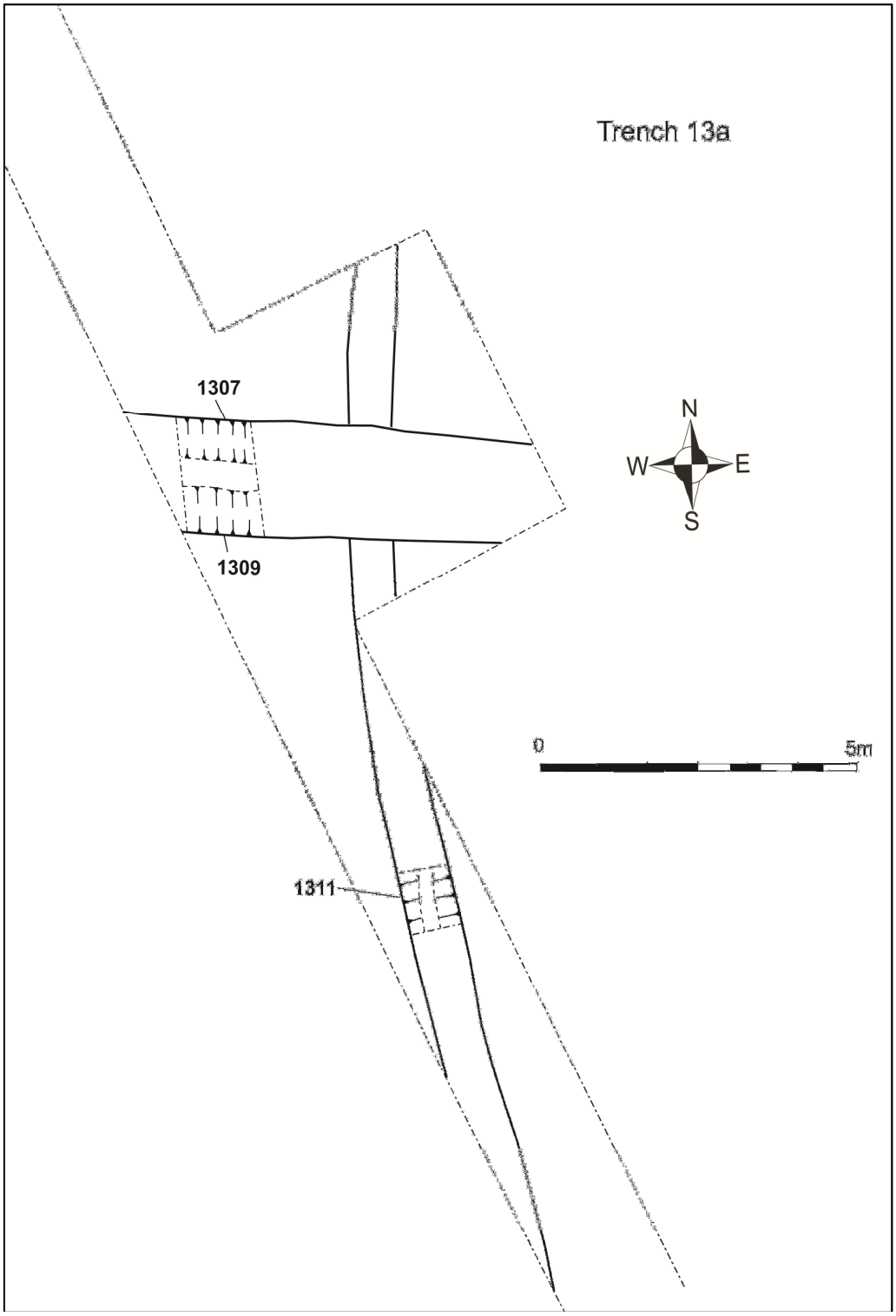

Figure 8
Early ditches in north part of trench 13a

This ditch cut an earlier ditch [1309] (Plate 23), also on the same alignment. This was over 0.5m in length and 0.8m in width, with a moderate break of slope top, 50º sloping sides, a moderate break of slope base and a concave base. It was filled with mid-grey brown, moderate to firmly compacted silty sand (1308), with frequent sub-rounded pebbles and very occasional cobbles.

Plate 23. Ditches [1307] and [1309]

Plate 24. Ditch/ gulley [1311]. View: N

Both these ditches truncated a linear N – S aligned concave ditch cut [1311] (Plate 24), measuring over 16.5m in length and 0.6m in width. This was filled with a light grey brown loosely compacted silty sand (1310) containing occasional charcoal flecks and sub-rounded pebbles and cobbles.

Given the extremely loosely compacted sandy soils in the study site it is quite possible for all these ditches to have been of close chronological association, as even a large ditch is unlikely to have stayed open for any great period given the rate of collapse observed during the evaluation.

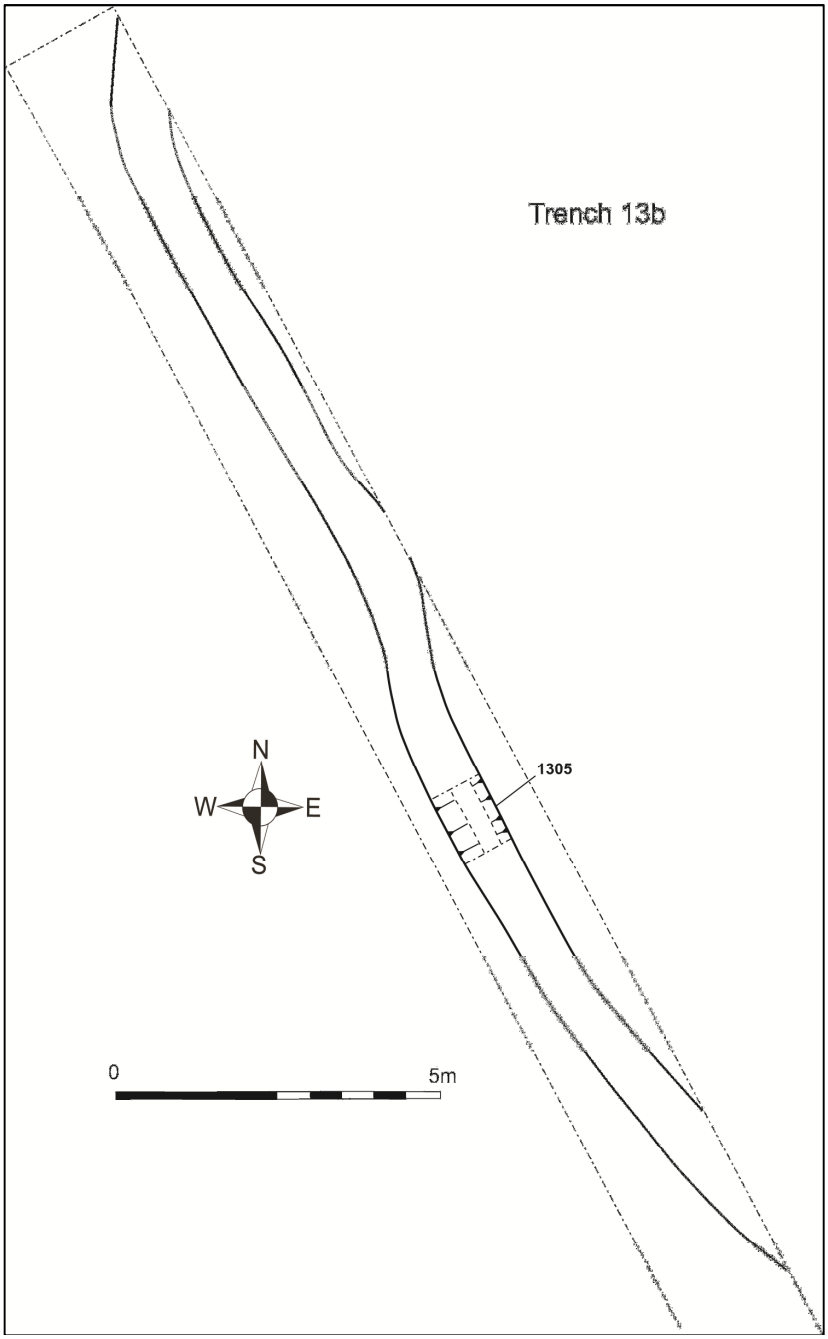

Figure 9
Trench 13b showing early sinuous ditch feature

A single feature was located in trench 13b, this consisted of a single, slightly curving NW – SE aligned ditch/ gulley [1305], measuring c. 22m in length, 0.85m in width and 0.25m in depth (Figure 9). Filling the ditch was a well defined, mid-brown silty sand with very occasional charcoal flecks and moderate amounts of sub-rounded, well sorted stones (1304).

Plate 25. Profile of ditch feature [1305]. View – NW

Ditches [1305], [1307], [1309], and [1311] do not appear to be shown on the Tithe map, although [1311] could be a relict field boundary between Big and Little Milling Fields.

5.14 Trench 14

Plate 26. Trench 14 Overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 30 x 1.8 – 1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE.

Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (1401), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (1402). This overlaid natural sands and gravels (1403) at a depth of c. 0.50m – 0.60m.

No archaeological features were located in this trench.

5.15 Trench 15

Plate 27. Trench 15 Overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 30 x 1.8 -1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE.

Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (1501), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (1502). At the southeasten end of the trench a natural patch of sand and gravel with occasional clay lenses (1503) was visible (see bottom end of trench in Plate 27).

5.16 Trench 16

Plate 28. Trench 16 Overview. View: NW

Dimensions: 60 x 1.8-1.9m. Orientation: NW – SE.

Underlying mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (1601), was a loosely compacted mid-orangey brown silty sand with occasional angular stones (1602). This overlaid natural sands and gravels (1603) at a depth of c. 0.50m – 0.60m. No archaeological features were located in this trench.

6.0 INTERPRETATION

Although the results of the evaluation proved generally negative, there was evidence for activity in the form of ditches and gullies at the southern end of the site within Trenches 13a and b. No dating evidence was acquired for these features, and given the sandy material they were excavated into, it can be assumed they were not in use for long.

The large ditch located in Trench 3, appears likely to have been a field boundary, as it seems to line up with a surviving oak tree within this part of the field and is shown on historic mapping as dividing Member Flat field from Mill Gate field (1838 Tithe map Figure 10). The ditch is, however, somewhat wide to be a typical boundary ditch, although it would be reasonable to argue that the soil conditions, sandy and extremely loosely compacted, would necessitate a wider ditch as anything too thin and shallow would have probably collapsed and been backfilled within a few weeks of being excavated. It is also possible that this boundary and the strip fields further east shown in the 1838 Tithe map as Mill Gate, Tough Horn, and Near and Far Tough Horn, might have been relict medieval selions.

Trenches 9 and 10 were located to cross a slight ridge running east-west near the crest of the modern field. This ridge is shown on the 1838 Tithe map as a field boundary between Top Yard (adjacent to Longford) and Town Field, but no trace of it was found beyond a slight thickening in the topsoil.

Trench 12 was sited to cross another east-west field boundary visible on the Tithe map. No trace of this was revealed. A further 1838 field boundary was, however, found in Trench 13a, the northern most of two features filled with sandstone blocks related to a phase of use by the railway. This field boundary separated Town Field from Big Milling on the Tithe map ([1307] and [1309] or [1318]).

The purpose and focus of the probable quarry pits in trenches 1, 2, 7, and 15, which appear to have been mainly concentrated on the high ground in the eastern field (called Member Flat on the 1838 Tithe map), is unclear. Given the sandy nature of the soils in this field, it could have been for sand extraction, although the areas focused on by the quarry depressions appear as more gravel-rich deposits, thus it could be that gravel extraction was the primary reason. Perhaps construction of the railway or repairs to the road would have provided a need for such works.

Trench 13a and 13b in the southwestern part of the site span the railway line (Figure 11). Various elements of this feature including the railway cutting and drainage works, have survived.

Given the very sandy nature of the soil, and the rate of collapse amongst the excavated features exposed during this excavation, it seems unlikely that any historically excavated features would stay open for long. It is also likely that any subsequent ploughing would have removed emphemeral features in a short space of time. A single posthole sealed by subsoil was observed in Trench 7, however, which presumably pre-dated modern ploughing.

The results located during this programme of works suggest that one area of the site could contain ancient ditches and other activity, in the south-western part of the site around Trench 13. Although no dating evidence was found to suggest these were of prehistoric origin, the features do appear to pre-date the tithe map boundaries which resulted from enclosure of an open field system, visible as strip fields further east. The features would not be consistent with medieval ridge and furrow cultivation and are thus likely to be of earlier origin. Further investigation of this zone would identify the heritage significance of the archaeological remains.

Figure 10
Trench plan overlaid on 1838 Tithe apportionments map with field names transcribed

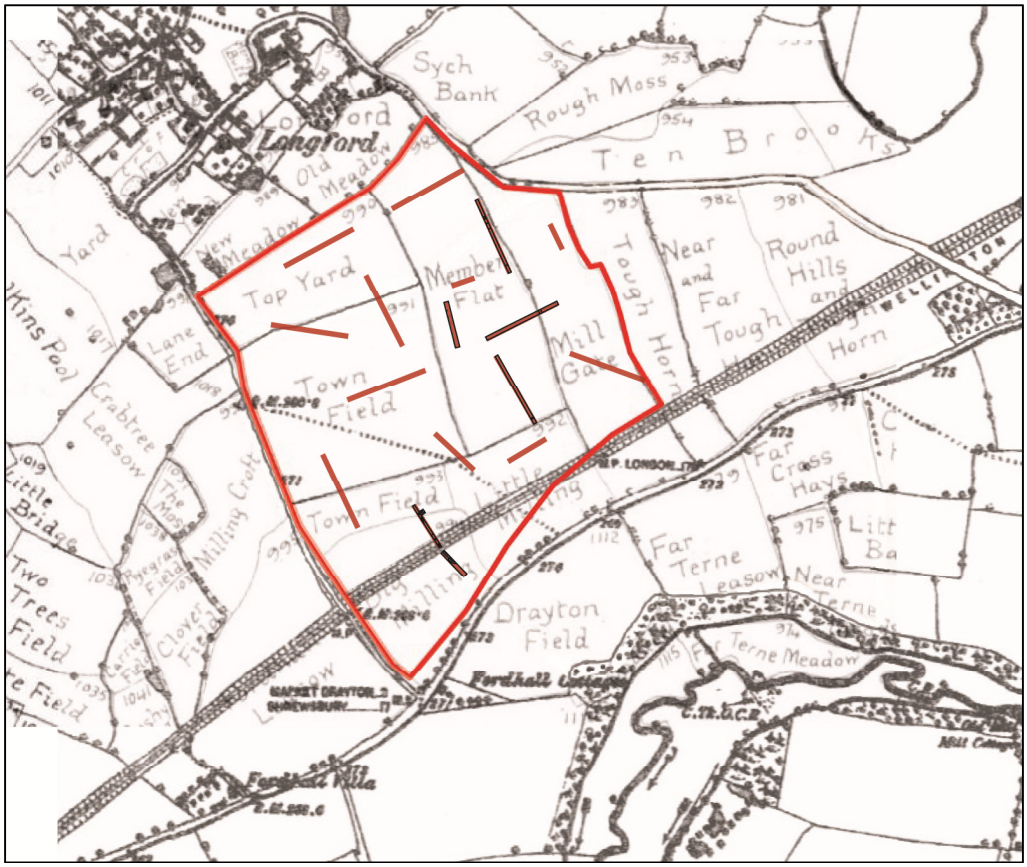

Figure 11
Trench and feature plan combined with Tithe and 1880 OS map

7.0 CLOSURE

This report has been prepared by SLR Consulting Limited with all reasonable skill, care and diligence, and taking account of the manpower and resources devoted to it by agreement with the client. Information reported herein is based on the interpretation of data collected and has been accepted in good faith as being accurate and valid.

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