Archaeological Evaluation at

Low Beck Mill, Norton, North Yorkshire. Phase 2: The Mill.

Report on an Archaeological Evaluation at Low Beck Mill, Norton, North Yorkshire. Phase 2: The Mill Building.

Contents **Page No.**

Figure List	Page No.

Introduction

The site which is the subject of this report consists of the remains of Low Beck Mill, a former water mill situated on the northwards-flowing Mill Beck, Norton Parish, North Yorkshire (SE 79087102) (Figs. 1 and 2). The site lies in a shallow valley at an elevation of c.20m AOD. The underlying drift geology is chalk gravel in a sandy or silty clay matrix.

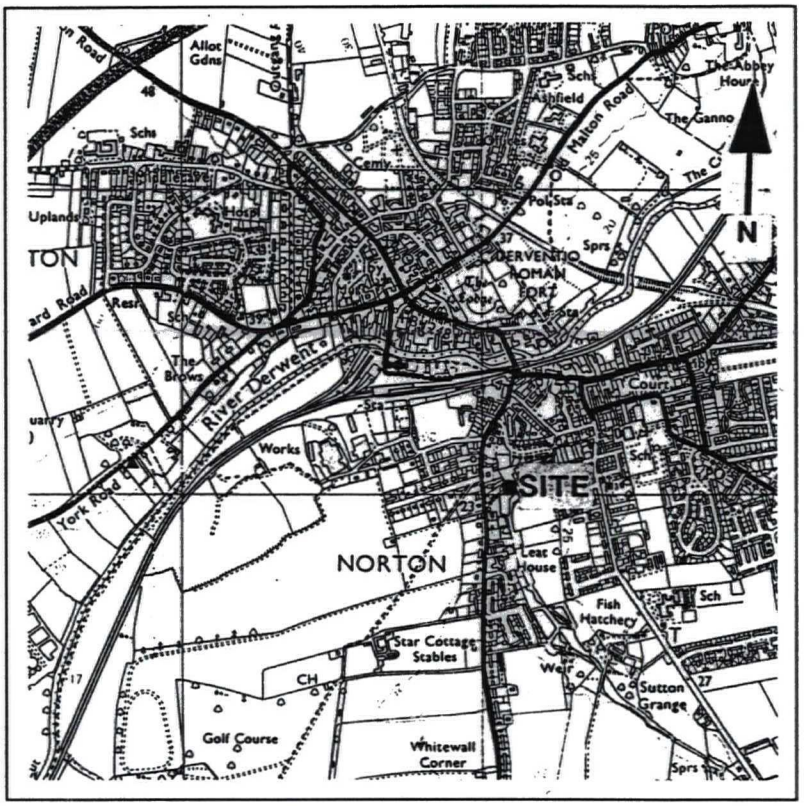

Figure 1.
Site Location Map. Scale 1:25000.

The site is part of the 'Lakeside Village' development. An evaluation excavation over the larger area of the development, situated south of the former mill, left certain areas where further archaeological work would be required. It was recommended that any surviving archaeological deposits in the area of the former mill buildings, which are to be rebuilt as a dwelling, should be identified by the excavation of three trenches, whose size was to be at least 2m x 2m.

The three trenches were excavated in the first week of October by the writer (M R Stephens) with the assistance of K C Grieveson. 1994

All work was funded by K W Linfoot Plc and undertaken with their full co-operation.

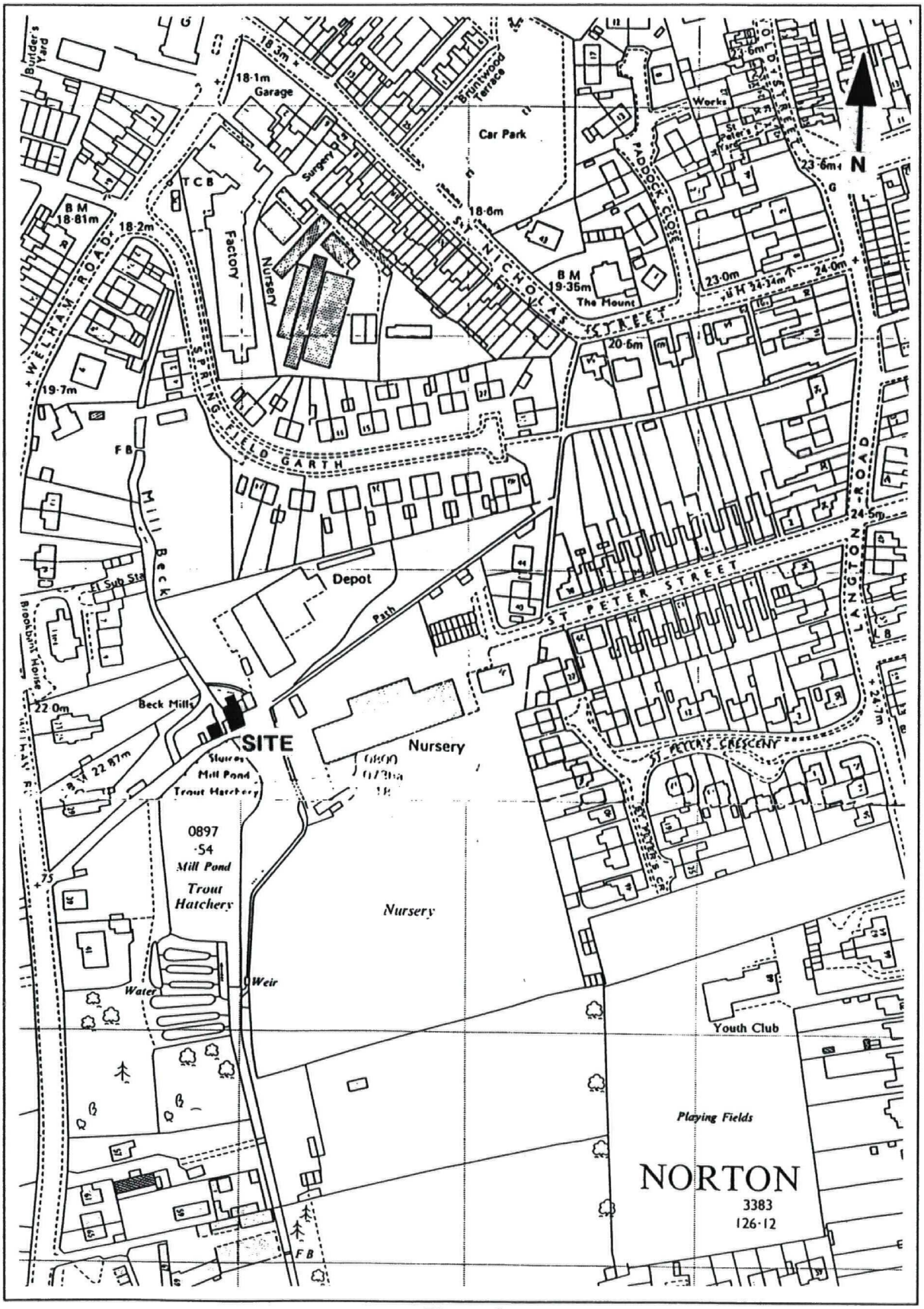

Figure 2.
Site Location Map. Scale 1:2500.

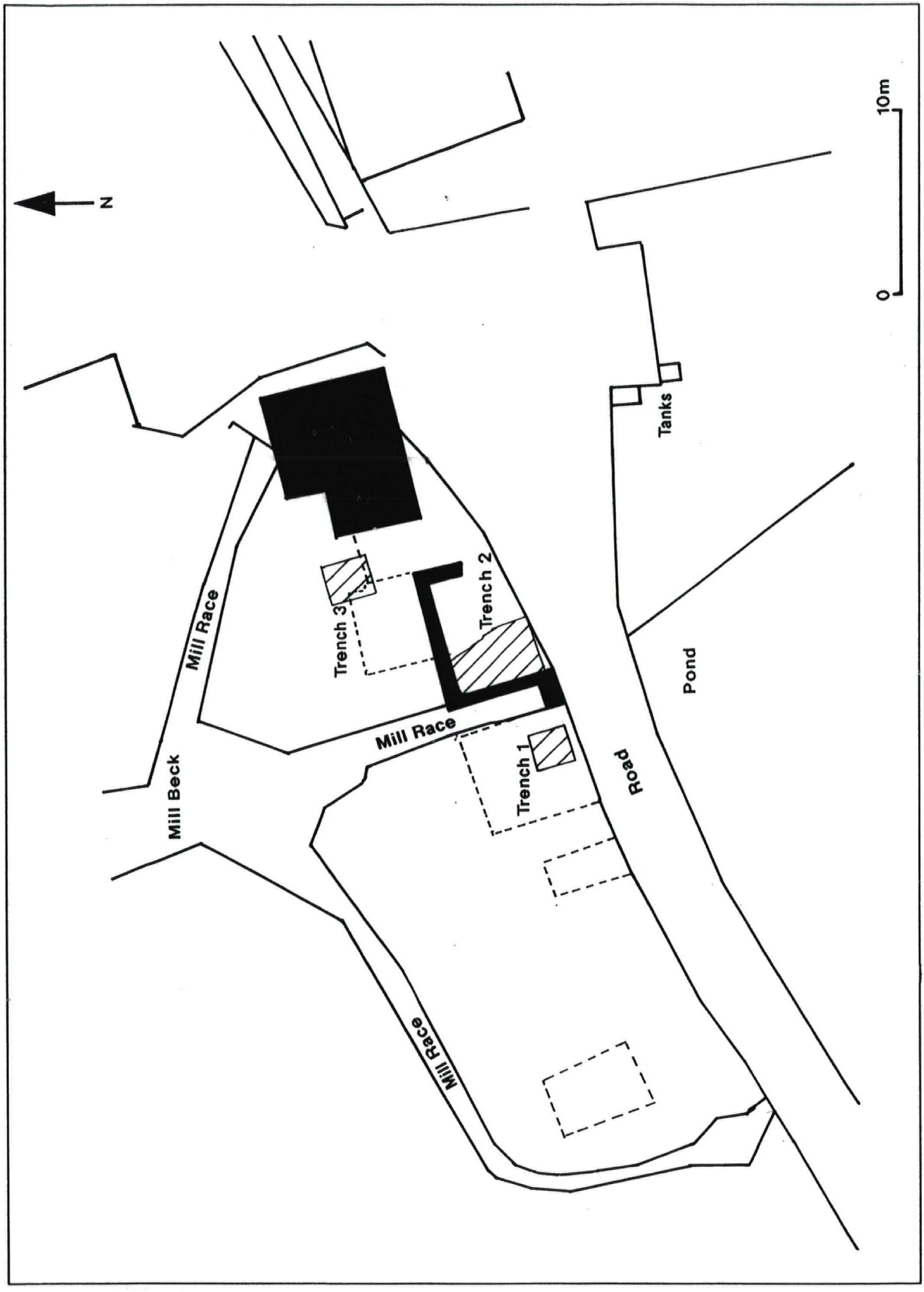

Figure 3.
Trench Location Plan.

Excavation Methods

Three areas were excavated, located over areas most likely to be disturbed by the rebuilding of the mill. Trenches 1 and 3 were 2m x 2m in size; Trench 2 was larger, having a length of 4m and width of 3m (Fig. 3).

In Trenches 1 and 2 modern topsoil and demolition debris was removed by the rear-acter of a JCB excavator equipped with toothless ditching blade, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological deposit. Trench 3 was excavated entirely by hand.

Plans and sections were drawn at 1:20 and 1:10 respectively. Photographic and written records were maintained.

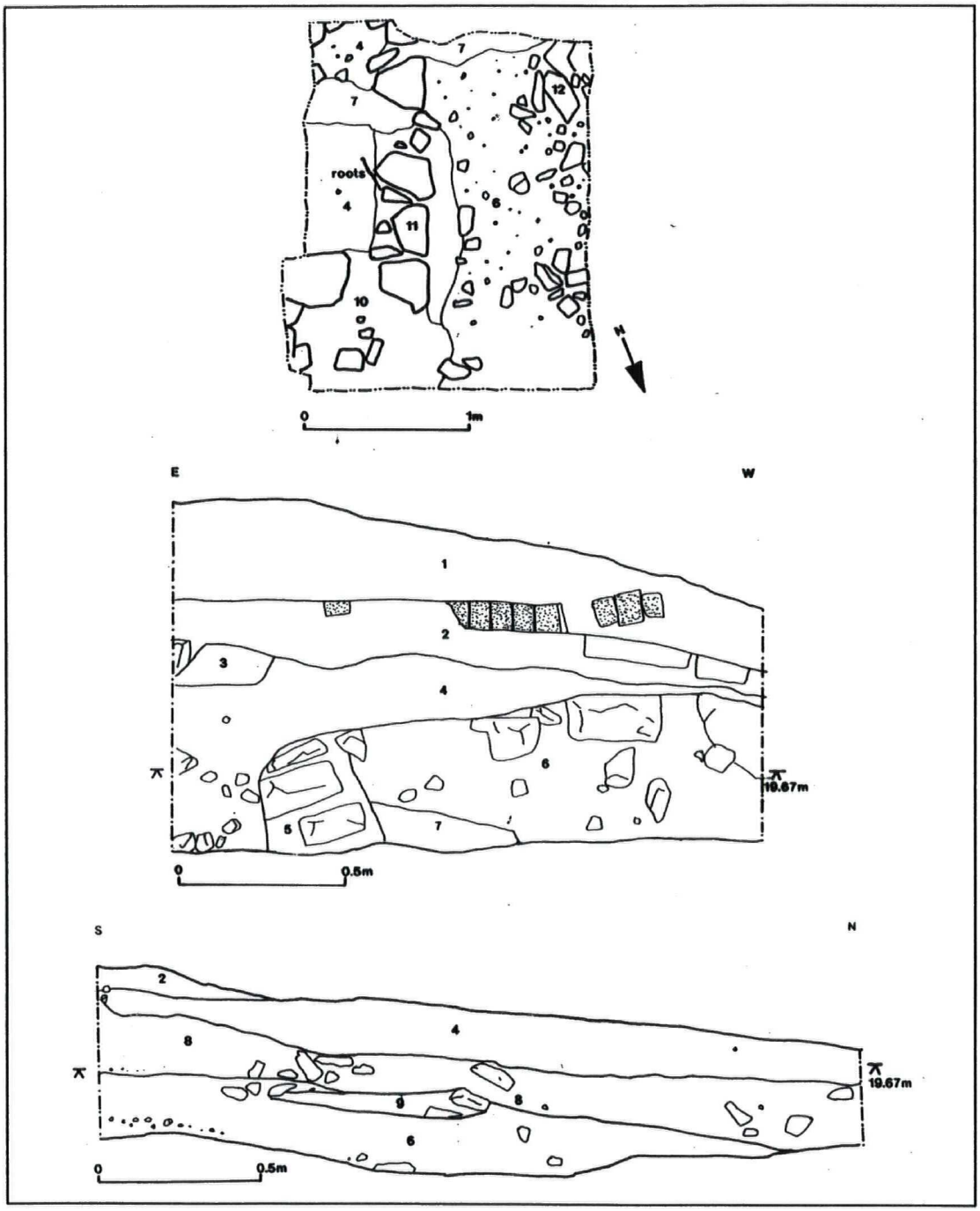

Figure 4.
Plan and Sections Trench 1.

Excavation Results

Trench 1 (Figs. 3 and 4)

The earliest deposits in this trench consisted of a wall, context 11. The wall was situated along the full length of the trench on a north to south alignment. The width was c.75cm. The wall was made of squared limestone blocks, bonded by yellowish-brown sand (context 10) and dark yellowish-brown clay (context 7). The demolition of wall 11 was represented by deposits of limestone rubble, contexts 5 and 12. Subsequent contexts consisted of silty clay (contexts 6 and 8), clay (context 7) and gravelly sand (context 4), which appeared to be levelling for wall 2 (see below).

Context 4 was overlain by the remains of an east to west brick wall on a simple mortared foundation (context 2). This wall was the exterior wall for buildings recently demolished. A modern topsoil (context 1) completed the sequence.

Trench 2 (Figs. 3, 5 and 6)

Trench 2 was situated within the former mill building, whose west, north and east walls survive as brick-patched, mortared masonry up to c.2.5m in height (context 38). The sluice and wheel pit of the mill lie immediately west of this building.

The earliest deposit in Trench 2 was context 42, which consisted of chalk gravel in a silty clay matrix. Context 42 was present in the southern part of the trench and dipped at c.45 degrees to the north.

Context 41 overlay 42 at the extreme south-east corner of the trench. 41 consisted of rounded limestones of varied sizes, laid in one course and bonded by dark brown silty clay.

Two gravelly deposits (contexts 34 and 35) were present in the south west corner of the trench. 34 overlay 35, and was in turn overlain by context 28, described below.

Context 28 was a deposit of gravelly sand overlying 42 and 34. 28 dipped northwards, as did the subsequent deposit, context 26. 26 was a dark brown silty clay, which contained medieval sherds (Appendix 2).

A series of generally shallow deposits (contexts 25, 24, 23, 22 and 21) built up, or was more probably dumped, over context 26. These deposits dipped northwards.

Contexts 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15 and 14 were deposited in the northern part of the trench, subsequent to the deposition of context 21. Context 20 was notable for consisting of crushed chalk or limestone. A small feature (cut 29, fill 30) was cut into the surface of context 21.

At the southern end of the trench, contexts 31, 32 and 33 apparently represented further levelling deposits. Context 31 was cut through by a foundation trench

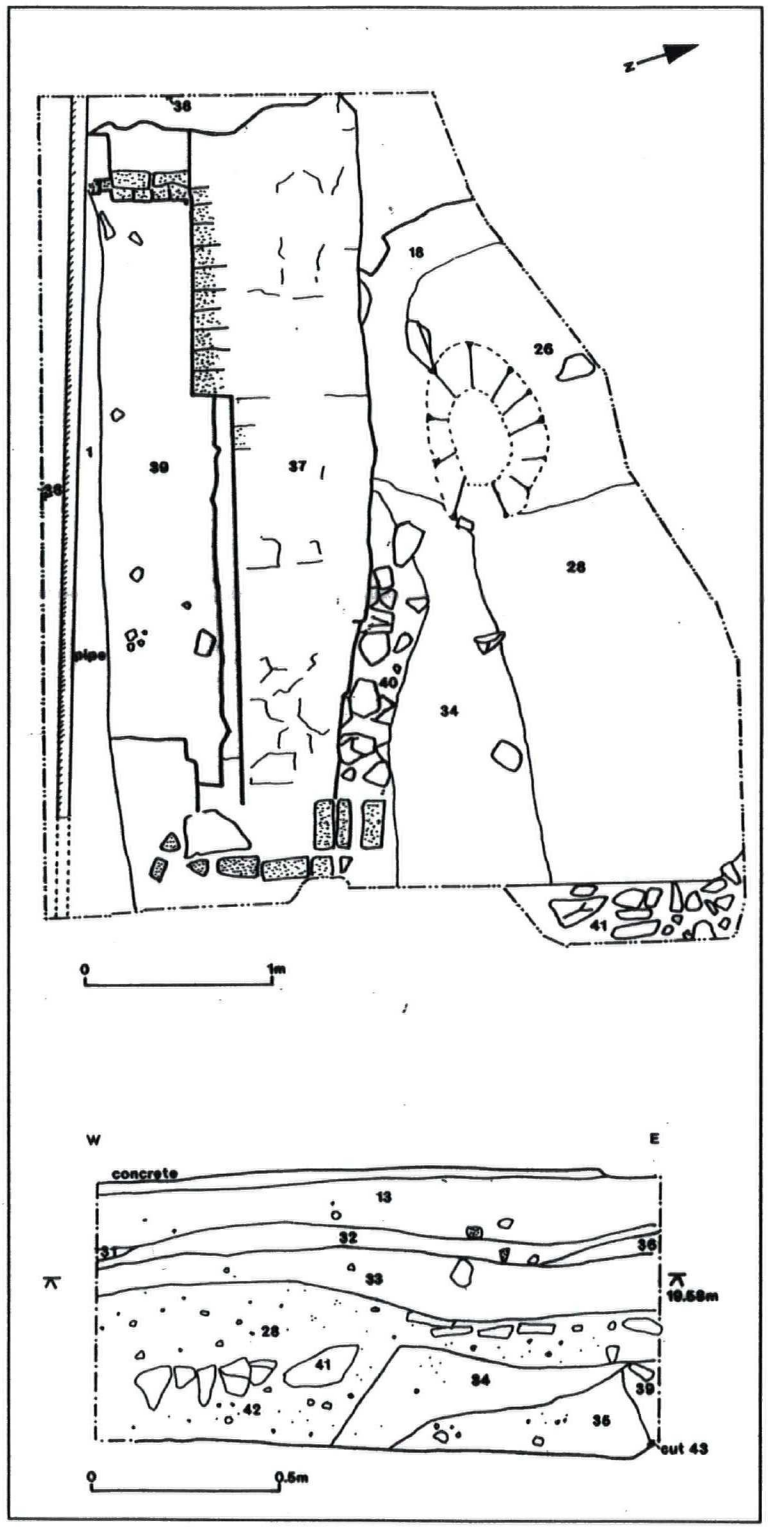

Figure 5.
Plan and Section Trench 2.

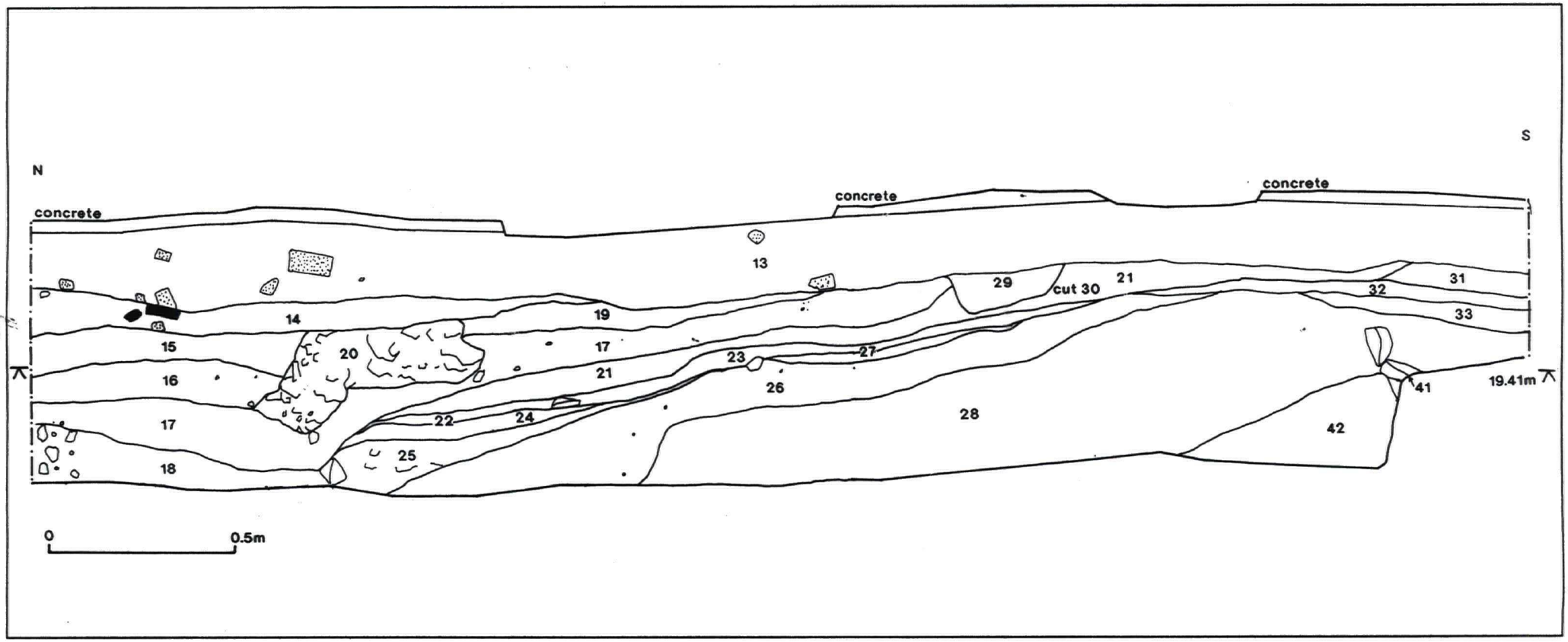

Figure 6.
West Facing Section Trench 2.

(context 43), which contained a mortared limestone foundation deposit (context 40) for a mortared wall on a north to south alignment (context 37). Wall 37 was partly faced with brick along its western face; many of the bricks had been removed.

Context 39 was a deposit of loose mortary rubble situated immediately west of wall 37, and was possibly levelling for the floor described below.

Wall 37 was overlain by a concrete floor (context 13), which was the floor for the mill building represented by wall 38.

Trench 3 (Figs. 3 and 7)

This trench was excavated c.8m north–east of Trench 2 and was 2m square in extent.

The earliest archaeological context was a 20cm thick deposit of dark grey silty clay with 20% chalk gravel inclusions (context 50); it contained three medieval sherds (Appendix 2). 50 overlay the natural chalk gravel (context 54), and was overlain in turn by a deposit of mortar (context 49). Contexts 47 and 48, deposits of dark grey loamy silt and yellowish–brown silty sand respectively, overlay 49. Context 48 lapped up against a brick wall, context 51.

The foundation cut for wall 51 (context 53) cut through 49. The brick wall was founded on context 52, a deposit of fine sandy mortar with 50% angular limestone fragments. A very loose deposit of silty sand (context 46) overlay contexts 47 and 48. A recent pit (context 45) cut through 46 and was filled with a loose, well–rooted dark yellowish–brown silty loam (context 44).

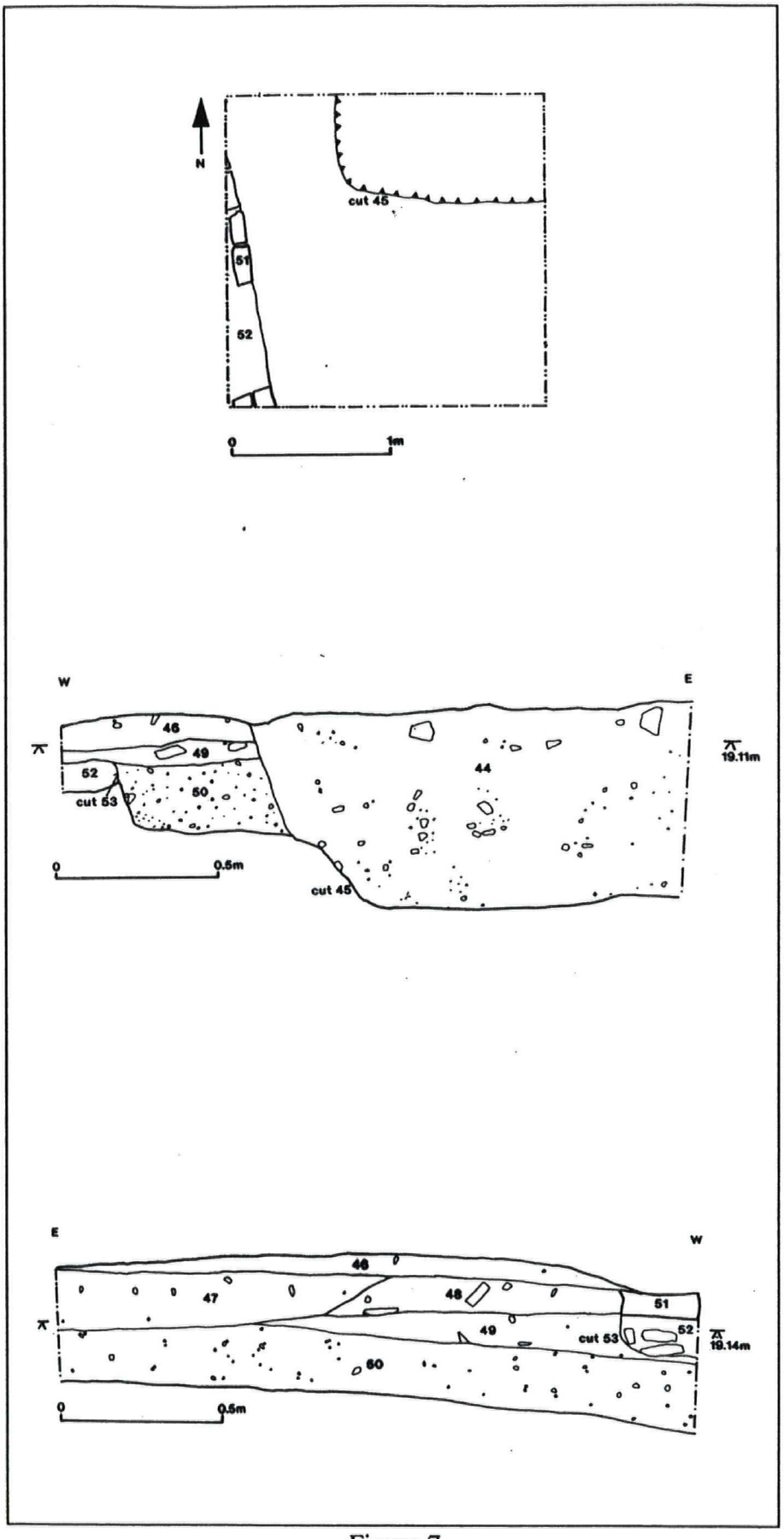

Figure 7.
Plan and Section Trench 3.

Discussion and Conclusions

The history of Low Beck Mill has been recently rehearsed in a desk-top study of the conducted in 1991 (York Survey and Research 1991). To summarise, it is reasonable to suppose that the mill belonging to Hugh son of Baldric mentioned at the time of the Domesday survey (1086) as being situated in Norton and Welham, refers to Low Beck Mill. This gives a possible history for a mill at the site for at least 900 years, from pre-conquest times until the demolition of Low Beck Mill in 1982. It is tempting to link the construction of the final version of the mill building with the sale of Norton manor by the Heblethwaite family in the mid / late 18th century, but such speculation is outside the scope of this report.

The earliest artefacts recovered from the evaluation excavation at the mill were 12-15th century Humber Ware sherds from contexts 26 (Trench 2) and 50 (Trench 3).

Context 26 was a deposit of dark silty clay overlying the gravel 'bank' deposit (contexts 28, 34, 35 and 42); in effect 26 was a buried topsoil. It is likely that the gravel deposits are part of a gravel bank constructed across the valley of the beck in medieval times in order to dam up water into a millpond. Associated with the gravel bank was a cobbled surface (context 41) which was perhaps a road surface or other form of hard-standing on the top of the bank. Subsequently a sequence of dumping or levelling occurred, seemingly to provide a level surface for the construction for the building represented by walls 37 and 38, which formed the early 19th century mill building demolished in 1982.

In Trench 1 a clay-bonded wall (context 11) was encountered at a depth of 70cm below the ground surface. This wall was parallel to wall 37 in Trench 1, but was undated due to lack of finds. Wall 11 was covered by demolition debris or dumping layers (contexts 4, 6, 7 and 8) which apparently levelled the site prior to the construction of a brick wall, whose foundation was represented in the excavation as a deposit of mortar (context 2). This wall formed part of the final version of the mill building.

In Trench 3 the earliest archaeological deposit encountered was a probable ploughsoil or horticultural soil (context 50) which contained the medieval sherds mentioned above. Natural clay-bound chalk gravel lay beneath 50. A recent brick extension to the mill building was represented by contexts 51, 52 and 53.

To summarise, the earliest structural evidence from the evaluation at the mill took the form of the wall in Trench 1 (context 11). This wall pre-dated a levelling phase associated with the construction of the early 19th century mill building, as did as a gravel bank in Trench 2, interpreted as a dam (context 28 *et al.*).

No pre-conquest or early medieval finds or deposits were encountered, nor were any water-logged or anoxic deposits revealed.

Reference: Historical and Archaeological Evaluation of the Site of Low Beck Mills, Norton, East Yorkshire. York Survey and Research, September 1991.

Recommendations

This report shows that archaeological deposits were encountered during the evaluation excavation. However, it is suggested that they are not of sufficient merit to justify an open area excavation, as no demonstrably early structural elements were revealed. Equally, no water–logged deposits were present in the areas excavated.

It is understood that the reconstruction of the mill building will involve the use of conventional strip foundations. A Watching Brief during the excavation of the foundation trenches and service runs is recommended as being sufficient to record any archaeological deposits that may be affected. The Watching Brief must be allowed sufficient time so that proper archaeological recording can take place, and a report should be prepared on the findings.

Appendix 1 – Context List

Context No.	Trench	Description
1	1	Topsoil; 10 YR 2/1, silty loam
2	1	Wall foundation
3	1	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 5/2, gravelly clay silt
4	1	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/3, gravelly sand
5	1	?Demolition; 10 YR 4/1, clay silt with ang. lst.
6	1	?Demolition; 10 YR 5/4, silty clay with ang. lst.
7	1	Wall bonding material; 10 YR 4/2, clay
8	1	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 3/6, silty clay
9	1	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 3/2, clay with lst.
10	1	Wall bonding material; 7.6 YR 4/6, fine sand
11	1	Wall
12	1	?Foundation for 11
13	2	Modern concrete floor
14	2	Former topsoil; 10 YR 3/2, sandy loam
15	2	Levelling for 13; 10 YR 4/4, fine sand
16	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/3, gravelly fine sand
17	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/2, clay sand
18	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 3/1, clay sand
19	2	Levelling for 13; 10 YR 5/8, sand
20	2	Deposit; 5 YR 8/1, crushed chalk / lst.
21	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/6, fine sand
22	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 5/8, medium sand
23	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 3/3, gravelly clay silt
24	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/3, silty sand
25	2	?Dumping / levelling; 7.5 YR 8/1, chalk
26	2	?Old topsoil; 10 YR 3/4, silty clay
27	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 5/3, gravelly silty clay
28	2	?Gravel bank; 10 YR 4/2, sandy gravel
29	2	Fill of 30; 10 YR 3/2, silty sandy loam
30	2	Cut
31	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/4, clay silt
32	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 4/2, clay silt
33	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 3/2, silty clay
34	2	?Gravel bank; 10 YR 4/2, gravelly clay
35	2	?Gravel bank; 10 YR 4/3, gravelly clay
36	2	?Dumping / levelling; 10 YR 3/2, silty clay
37	2	Wall
38	2	Extant wall of mill
39	2	?Infill; 10 YR 4/2, gravelly loamy sand
40	2	Foundation for wall 37
41	2	Cobbled surface
42	2	Bedding for 41
43	–	Not used
44	3	Fill of 45: 10 YR 3/1, silty loam
45	3	Recent pit cut

Context No.	Trench	Description
46	3	Recent levelling; 10 YR 6/2
47	3	Deposit; 10 YR 3/2, loamy silt
48	3	?Demolition; 10 YR 6/4, rubbly silty sand
49	3	Deposit; 10 YR 7/3, mortar
50	3	Deposit; 10 YR 4/1, silty clay
51	3	Modern brick wall
52	3	Fill of 53; 10 YR 7/3, fine silty mortar
53	3	Foundation cut for wall 51
54	3	Natural; 10 YR 6/2 clay matrix, chalk and flint gravel

Appendix 2 – Finds Catalogue

Context 26 – 6 joining sherds from a glazed Humber Ware jug (12–15th Century)

Context 40 – 2 clay tobacco pipe stem frags.
2 brick frags.
1 glass vessel frag.

Context 44 – 1 clay tobacco pipe stem frag.

Context 47 – 1 stoneware flagon sherd (19th century)

Context 50 – 3 joining Humber Ware body sherds

Appendix 3 – Archive Summary

7 A4 permatrace sheets of plans and sections

53 context sheets, completed and checked for consistency

1 monochrome print film

1 colour print film