

**Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury,
Bicester, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Prime Park Limited**

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MFW 06/17

March 2006

Summary

Site name: Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 5780 1920

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 27th February to 3rd March 2006

Project manager: Jo Pine

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: MFW 06/17

Area of site: c.2 hectares

Summary of results: Five ditches, a gully, gully terminus and a pit or ditch terminus were identified, the majority of which were undated. One ditch was dated to the Roman period.

Monuments identified: Ditches (one Roman) and gullies.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 13.03.06 Steve Preston✓ 13.03.06
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Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Report 06/17

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire (SP 5780 1920) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr K Clarke of Simmons and Sons, 32 Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 2BH on behalf of Prime Park Ltd.

Planning permission (05/01157/F) has been gained from Cherwell District Council for the creation of a two-hectare reservoir. This consent was subject to a condition requiring an archaeological monitoring and recording action.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Hannah Fluck, formerly Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council, advising the District. The monitoring of the site was carried out by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer. A brief for the site (Fluck 2004) outlined the archaeological potential. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor, Danielle Colls and Richard Oram between 27th February and 3rd March 2006 and the site code is MFW 06/17. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located 1.2km to the north of the village of Merton and 1.5km to the east of Wendlebury, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site is currently arable farmland and the underlying geology is Oxford Clay with Kellway Beds and occasional Cornbrash (BGS 1979), which was observed in all trenches. The site lies at a height of approximately 61m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The site lies c.600m to the south-east of the Roman fortress and later civilian town of Alchester. This is a site of national importance with a Roman military presence from the early years of the conquest (SMR 1583) and settlement through to the 5th century when the town was abandoned (Munby *et al.* 1975). A possible parade

and associated with the element the north of the Roman road, 60b Dore] Ald Margary located 500m this 923 Roman field systems laid the of the road SM Less than 200m the north and the Roman build with possible pre-Roman and 4th-century pottery (M 59) evaluation carried out by Thomas Ley Archaeology Serv. Oct 2003 the of the farm did identify deposit of historical significance

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the excavation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposit within the area of development.

Specific objectives of the project were:

- a) determine archaeologically if any remains have been identified on the site;
- b) determine archaeological deposits of any period present;
- c) determine archaeological deposits representing pre-1900 occupation present.

23 trenches were excavated using a type of trenching method with less ditching. Excavation was dug under constant archaeological supervision. It measured between 10m and 15m and located possible intended positions of spoilheaps. It was noted for the existence of trenches, their depths and descriptions and geology. See Appendix 1.

Results

The trenches consisted of topsoil only, with no natural geology identified for contrast.

Trench 1 (Fig 1) and

Trench 1 contained a gully (Fig 1) slot 0.83m length, 1.2m wide and 0.2m deep. Excavation through the slot was recovered. Also found this trench between 1.2m and 1.5m slot through the ground 0.2m length, 0.7m wide and 0.2m deep. This slot did not contain any dating material.

Trench 4 (Figs. 3 and 5)

This trench contained a ditch aligned approximately north–south. A slot (3) was dug through it measuring 0.65m in length, 1.65, wide and 0.52m deep. It contained two fills (55 and 56) neither of which provided any dating evidence.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3)

This trench contained a continuation of the ditch identified in trench four. No further slots were dug through the ditch in this trench.

Trench 14 (Figs. 3 and 5)

Another ditch, aligned approximately NW–SE, was identified in this trench between 4.10m and 7.50m. A slot (9) was dug through it measuring 0.90m in length, 1.15m wide and 0.28m deep. No datable finds were retrieved from either of its fills (63 and 64) but four fragments of animal bone came from fill 63.

Trench 15 (Plate 1, Figs. 3 and 5)

A gully aligned approximately east–west was located between 14.50m and 17.30m. A slot (10) was excavated through it measuring 1.00m in length, 0.66m wide and 0.18m deep. Its mottled grey yellow silty clay fill (65) did not produce any finds.

Trench 18 (Figures 4 and 5)

A ditch aligned approximately north–south was observed between 2.50m and 3.80m. A machine slot (6) was dug through this ditch, due to a change in the natural geology. This measured 1.50m wide and was 0.43m deep. A single sherd of Roman pottery was retrieved from the bottom of this ditch.

Trench 19 (Figures 4 and 5)

A further ditch was identified in this trench between 11.40m and 14.30m. A slot (7) was dug through it measuring 0.95m in length, .25m wide and 0.44m deep. No finds were retrieved from its mottled light grey brown silty clay fill (60).

Trench 20 (Figures 4 and 5)

Between 3.70m and 5.20m was what was either a pit or a ditch terminus. It was fully excavated within the trench (8) measuring 1.45m across and 0.48m deep. Again no finds were retrieved.

Trench 23 (Plate 2, Figures 4 and 5)

A continuation of the ditch identified in Trench 18 was observed in this trench between 10.30 and 11.50m. It was aligned approximately north–south. A slot (6) was dug through it measuring 0.82m in length, 1.13m wide and 0.37m deep. It was found to contain two fills (58 and 59). 58 was a light grey silty clay and 59 was a mid orangey brown. Neither of these contained any dating evidence.

Finds

Pottery by Andy Taylor

A single sherd of pottery from a flagon neck was retrieved from ditch 5. This most likely comes from a Nene Valley flagon, possibly from the 2nd century

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A total of four animal bone pieces were recovered from a single context, (fill 63, ditch 9, Trench 14) weighing 234g. Three of the fragments, which were well preserved although demonstrating some minor damage through root activity, could re-fit into a single cattle metatarsal. The fourth fragment remains unidentifiable due to its poor preservation.

Conclusion

A moderate number of archaeological deposits were encountered during the evaluation. However, due to the paucity of the finds retrieved it is difficult to securely date these features. They most likely represent parts of Roman field systems probably associated with the nearby town of Alchester. Further work would be required to ascertain the full extent of these deposits, provide more secure dating evidence and achieve a full plan of their layout.

References

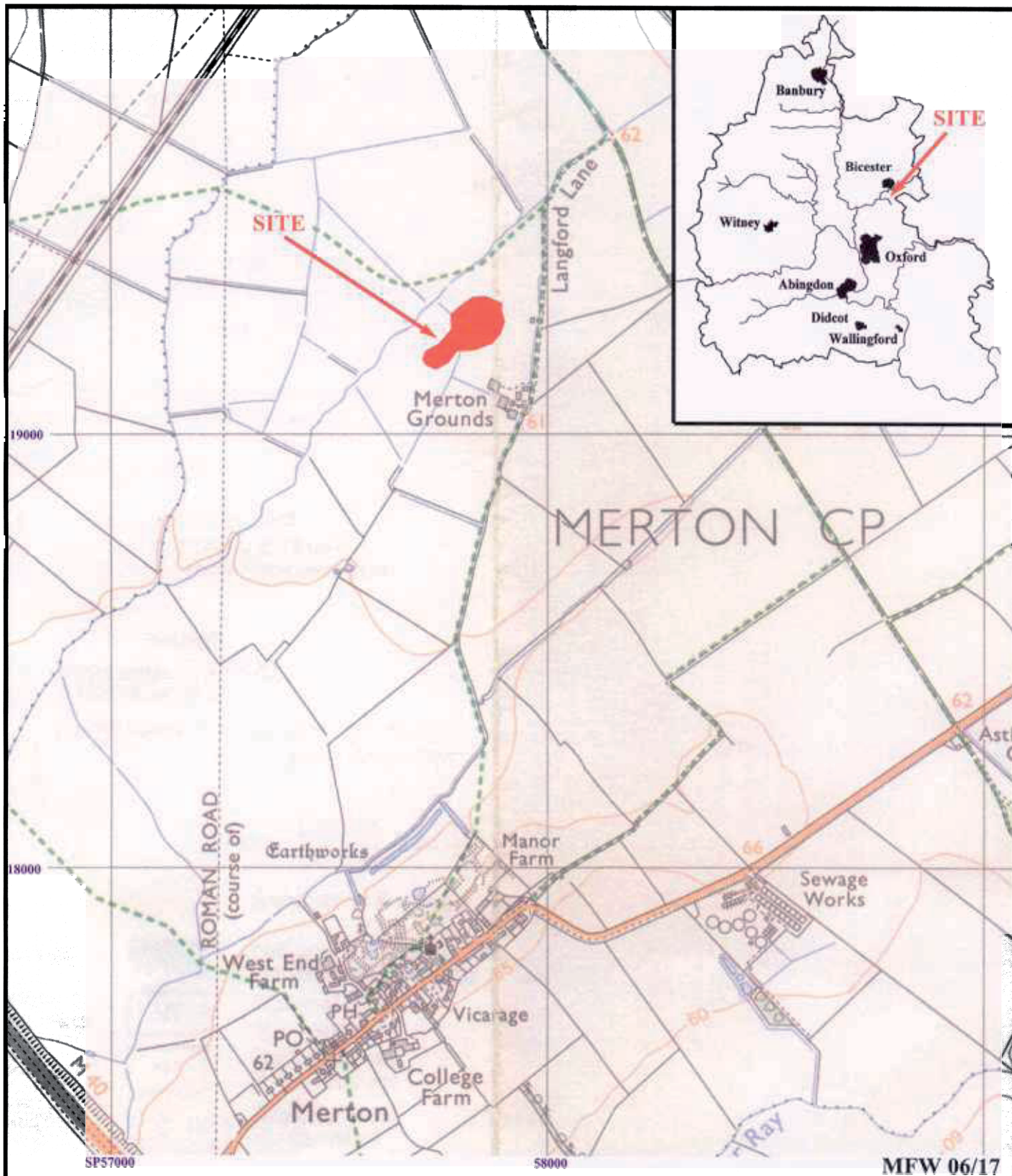
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at S or W end

<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	21.00	1.50	0.35	0.00m-0.26m topsoil; 0.26m-0.31m subsoil; 0.31m-0.35+m clay and cornbrash natural. Gully Terminus 1; Ditch 2.
2	20.20	.50	0.46	0.00m-0.26m topsoil; 0.26m-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
	20.50	1.50	0.34	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.34m subsoil; 0.34m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
4	19.90	1.50	0.39	0.00m-0.29m topsoil; 0.29m-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 3.
5	20.10	1.50	0.32	0.00m-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m-0.32m subsoil; 0.32m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 4
6	18.20	1.50	0.52	0.00m-0.32m topsoil; 0.32m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m-0.52m clay and cornbrash natural.
7	19.80	1.50	0.41	0.00m-0.29m topsoil; 0.29m-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m-0.41m clay and cornbrash natural.
8	21.10	1.50	0.35	0.00m-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
9	19.30	1.50	0.42	0.00m-0.36m topsoil; 0.32m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m-0.42m clay and cornbrash natural.
10	20.80	1.50	0.40	0.00m-0.33m topsoil; 0.33m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
11	20.10	1.50	0.50	0.00m-0.36m topsoil; 0.36m-0.49m subsoil; 0.49m-0.50m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
12	19.70	.50	0.40	0.00m-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.36m subsoil; 0.36m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
13	20.50	1.50	0.48	0.00m-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m-0.48m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
14	21.10	1.50	0.20	0.00m-0.15m topsoil; 0.15m-0.20m subsoil; 0.20m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 9.
15	20.40	1.50	0.35	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Gully 10. [Plate 1]
16	20.50	1.50	0.40	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
17	19.40	1.50	0.60	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.60m subsoil; 0.60m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
18	20.10	1.50	0.40	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 5.
19	21.90	1.50	0.51	0.00m-0.36m topsoil; 0.36m-0.51m subsoil; 0.51m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 7
20	20.70	1.50	0.65	0.00m-0.31m topsoil; 0.31m-0.65m subsoil; 0.65m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Pit/Ditch Terminus 8.
21	21.30	1.50	0.40	0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.36m subsoil; 0.36m-0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
22	20.00	1.50	0.38	0.00m-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m+ clay and cornbrash natural.
23	21.00	1.50	0.48	0.00m-0.46m topsoil; 0.46m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 6. [Plate 2]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	1	52	Gully Terminus	Unknown	None
1	2	53	Ditch	Unknown	None
4	3	55, 56	Ditch	Unknown	None
5	4		Ditch	Unknown	None
14	9	63, 64	Ditch	Unknown	None
15	10	65	Gully	Unknown	None
18	5	57	Ditch	Roman	Pottery
19	7	60	Ditch	Roman	Same as [5]
20	8	61, 62	Ditch	Pit/Ditch Terminus	None
23	6	58, 59	Ditch	Unknown	None



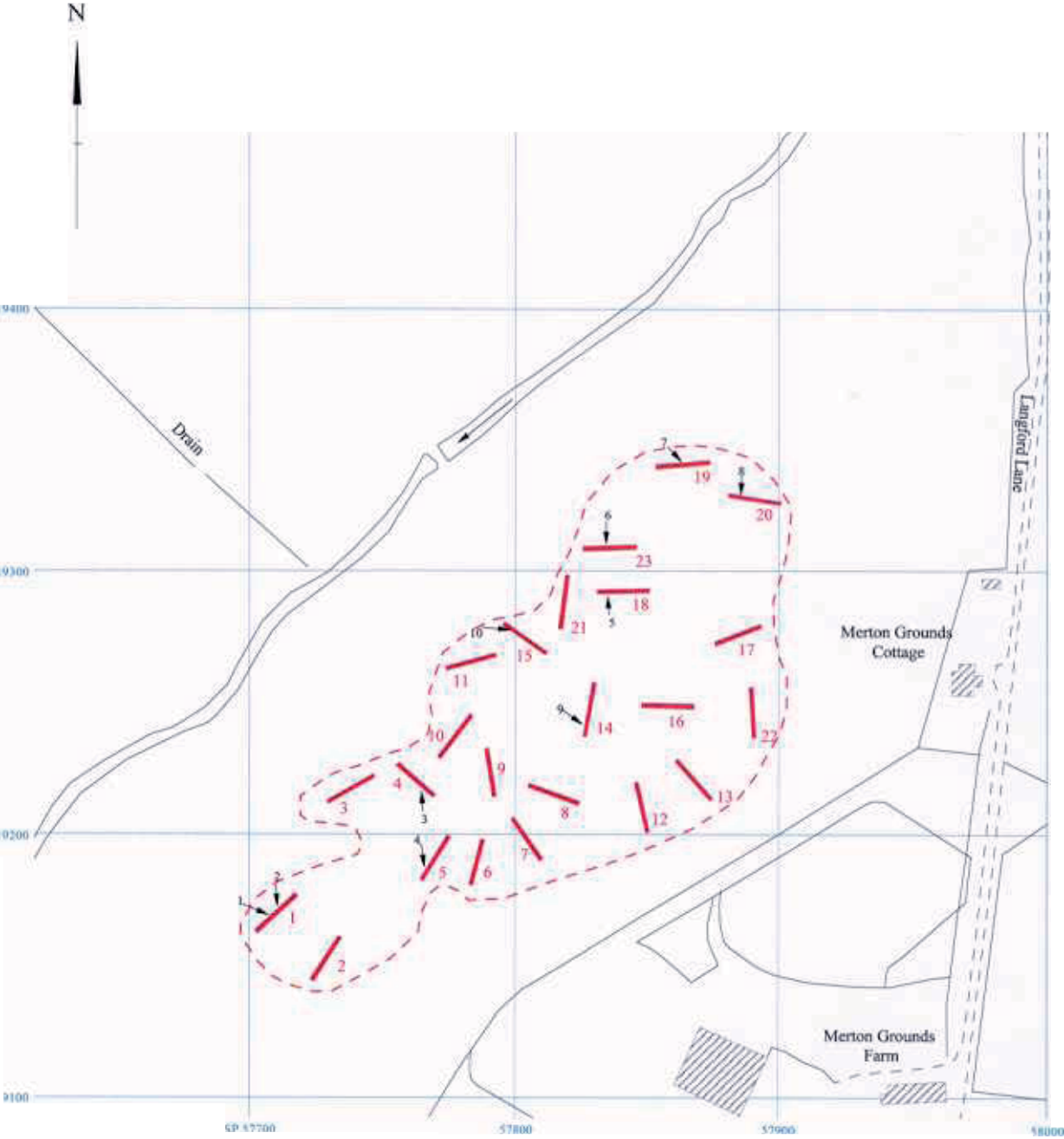
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An Archaeological Evaluation**

**Figure 1. Location of site at Merton Grounds Farm
and Oxfordshire.**

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Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006



0 250m

Figure 2: Trench Locations

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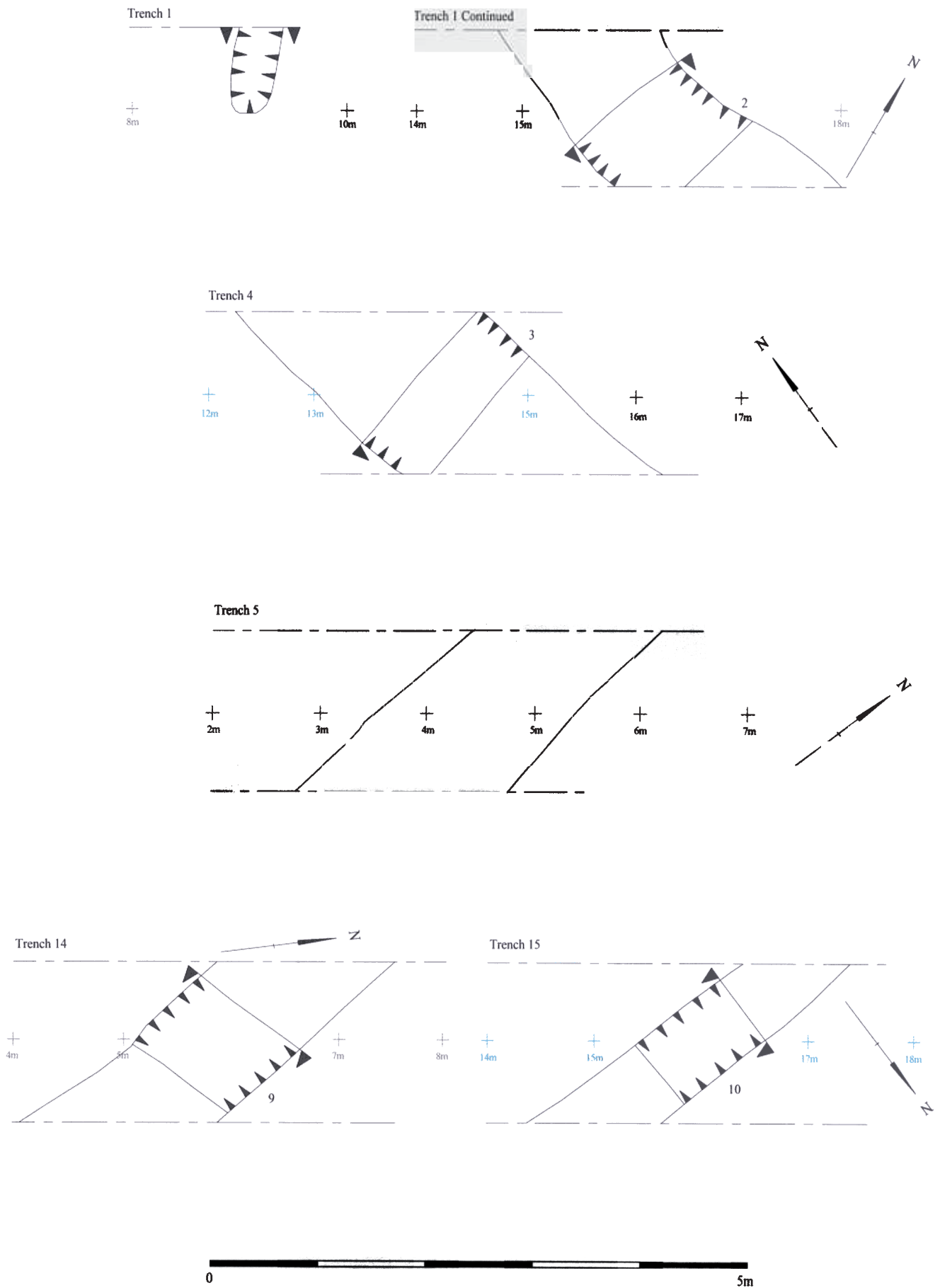


Figure 3: Trench Plans

Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006

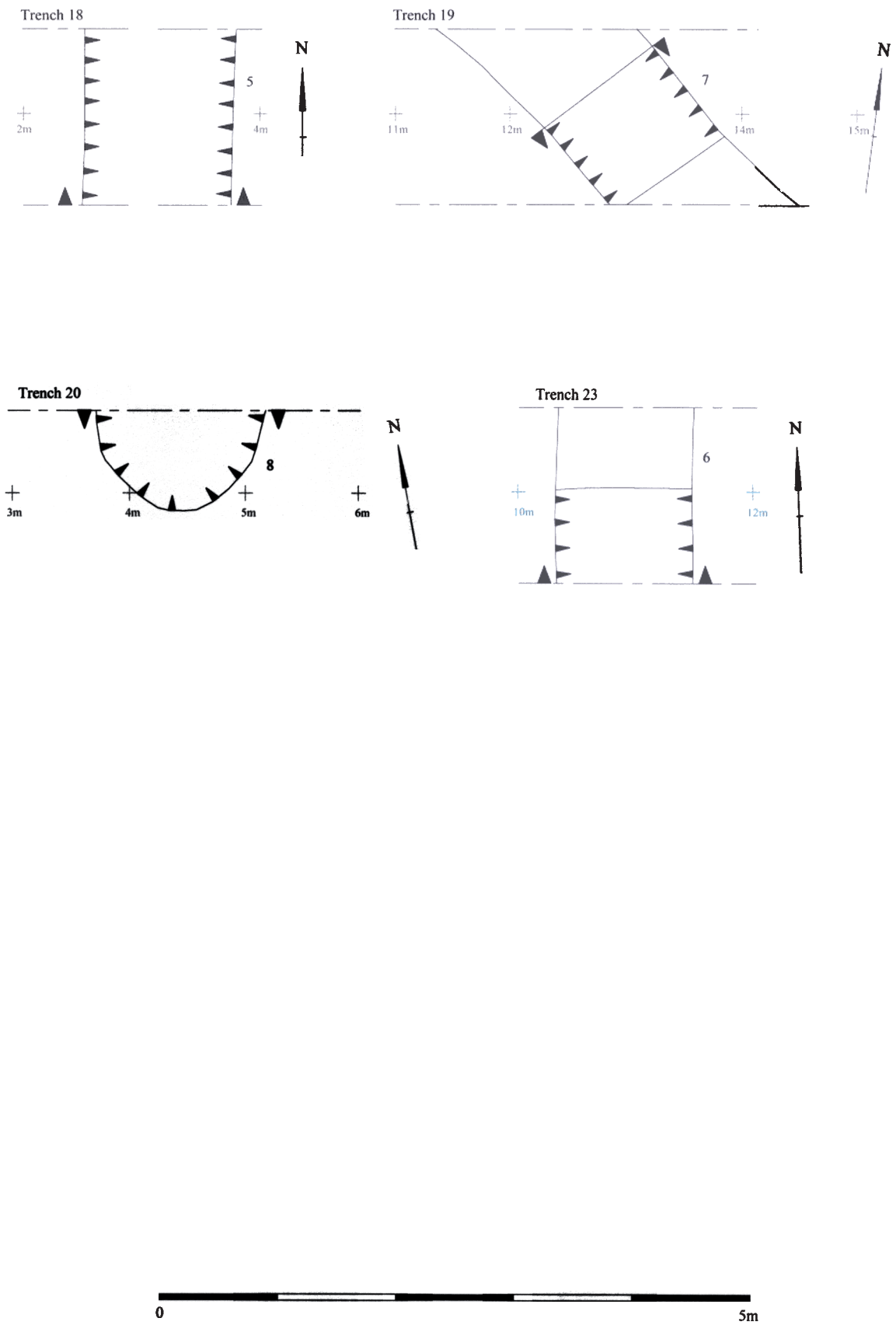


Figure 4: Trench Plans

Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006

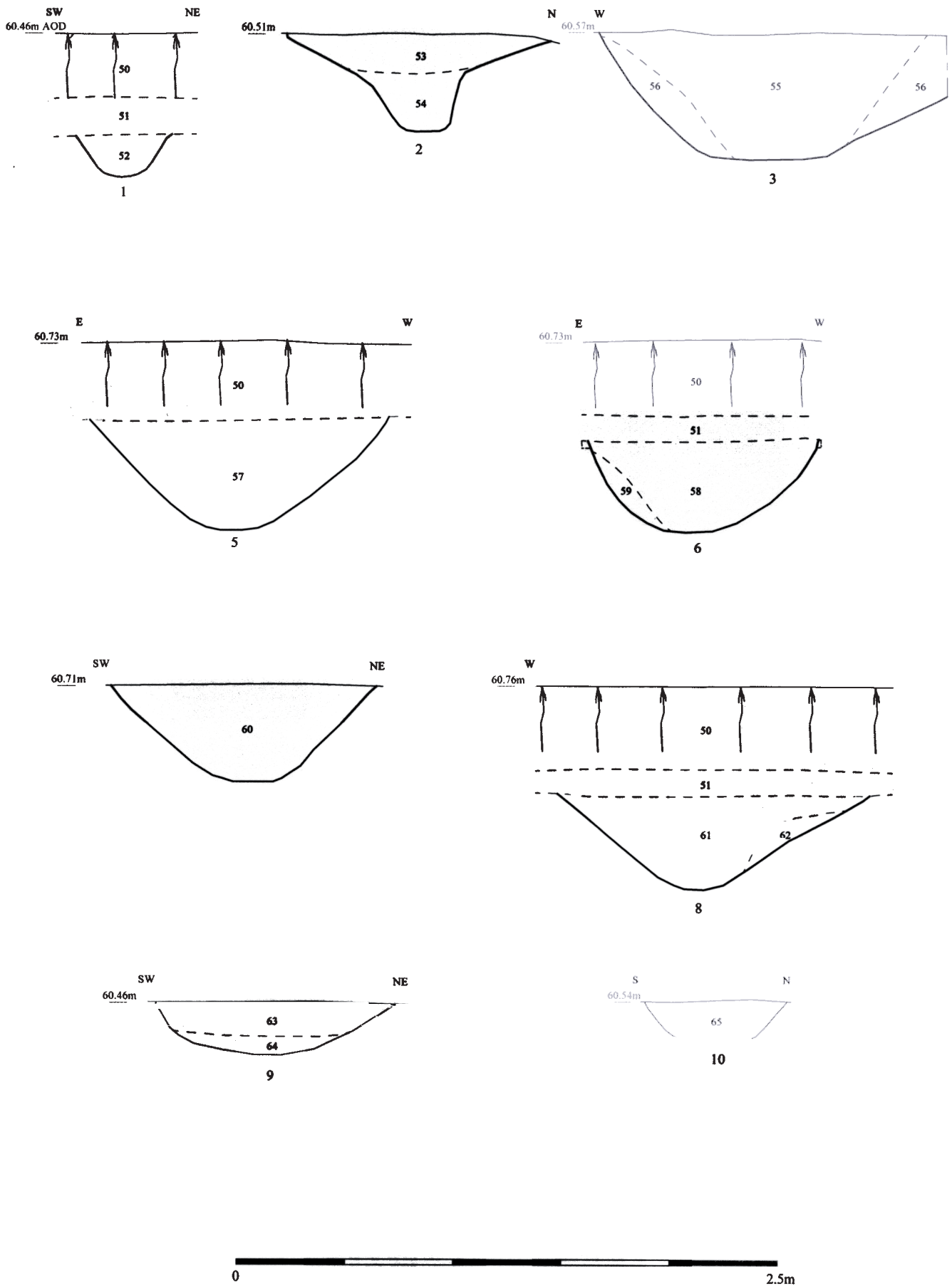


Figure 5: Sections



Plate 1. Trench 15 looking north west, scales 2m, 1m.



Plate 2. Trench 23, Ditch 6, looking SE, horizontal scale 1m and vertical scale 0.5m.