

**25-27 High Street, Marlow,
Buckinghamshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Copystation Limited**

by Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code 25HSM06/30

May 2006

Summary

Site name: 25-27 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SU 8497 9653

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 10th-11th May 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: 25HSM06/30

Area of site: 0.12ha

Summary of results: Post-medieval features survive on the site and some medieval pottery was recovered, perhaps suggesting features of this period may be present also, although no features could be unambiguously assigned to this period.

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

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25-27 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Steve Ford

Report 06/30

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out the rear of 25-27 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire (SU 8497 9653) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Ian Fletcher of WestWaddy-ADP, The Malthouse, 60 East St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 5EB on behalf of Copystation Limited, Lunar House, Mercury Park, Wooburn Green, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP10 0HH.

Planning permission (05/07614/FUL) has been granted by Wycombe District Council to redevelop a parcel of land at the rear of the High Street for new commercial premises. The consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), Wycombe District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Radford, Archaeological Officer at Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, advisers to the District. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford and Jennifer Ryder on 10th and 11th May 2006 and the site code is 25HSM06/30. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the east side of High Street, Marlow to the rear of retail premises on the High Street frontage (Fig. 2). The previous building on the site has recently been demolished. The site lies at height of 31m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is floodplain gravel (BGS 1974).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project provided by David Radford of Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service. In summary the site lies within the historic core of the medieval and later town within the rear of the burgrave plots fronting the High Street. Marlow was mentioned in

late Saxon times and was a modest-sized settlement in Domesday Book (AD1086). There are references to burgage rights in 1083 suggesting a town at this date but a market charter was not granted until 1227. A small number of archaeological excavations have taken place in the town, most notably on the site of the former Wethereds Brewery also on the High Street to the south-west, where occupation evidence from medieval and possibly late Saxon date was recorded.

A rapid assessment of historic maps of the town has provided some information on the later history of the site. The earlier maps, such as ‘Great Marlow’ dating from 1831 and created by Robert Dawson, only show the town in schematic detail and show no more than that the High Street frontage was occupied by structures at that time. The later, Ordnance Survey maps, show much more detail and the second edition map of 1899 shows that whilst the south western portion of the site is occupied by two structures, the eastern portion is not occupied. However, the latter are has been fully developed by the 1925 edition. Changes to the layout on the more recent maps (Fig. 2) dating to the 1990’s suggests that further rebuilding had taken place in the 20th century.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. Specifically, the project objectives were:

- To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- To determine if archaeological deposits and finds representing medieval or early post-medieval occupation on the site are present.

In order to fulfil these aims it was determined that four trenches each 12.5m long and 1.6m wide would be excavated. These were to be dug by a JCB-type machine fitted with a ditching bucket to remove overburden and topsoil until sensitive layers and/or features were encountered. This was to take place under constant supervision. Sufficient of any features encountered were to be hand excavated to ascertain their nature and likely dates and spoilheaps were to be searched for finds.

Results

Four trenches were dug ranging in length from 12.6m to 14.2m as shown on Figure 3. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

This trench was 14.2m long and up to 0.9m deep aligned SW–NE. The stratigraphy comprised, at the north-east end of the trench, a thin layer of recent demolition debris overlying 0.21m of topsoil above 0.24m of made ground above 0.45m of grey brown silty subsoil above gravel with silty clay patches. The stratigraphy at the south western end of the trench was similar except that the upper topsoil level was missing and was replaced by the flooring of the recent demolished building.

Two deposits of possible archaeological interest were revealed. Wall 1, more accurately described as a foundation, was aligned NW–SE. It was 0.52m wide and comprised mortared chalk blocks, with occasional flint nodules resting on the natural gravel but cutting the subsoil (Figs. 4 and 5). The blocks were up to 0.2m across but were not shaped and the foundation was not faced. It stood to a height of 0.3m above which it had been truncated by modern disturbance. The wall included some narrow unfrosted bricks, not of modern dimensions. There was no dating evidence associated with this feature.

Pit 2 was observed once the subsoil had been removed. It comprised a circular pit 0.53m across with a bowl-shaped profile 0.12m deep. It contained a single fill (50) comprising a grey/brown clayey silt with occasional chalk flecks, wood charcoal and some gravel. A single sherd of medieval (12th-century) pottery and two fragments of tile (14g) were recovered from its fill.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

This trench was 13.1m long and up to 0.91m deep aligned SE–NW. At the north-west end of the trench, the stratigraphy comprised 0.25m of topsoil above 0.66m of grey brown silty subsoil above gravel with silty clay patches. At the south east end the topsoil was missing and had been replaced by made ground.

Three areas of modern (late 19th/20th century) disturbance were observed cutting the subsoil. These comprised an elongated area with partial voids representing an animal burrow or rotted out root, and two pits containing mass produced white glazed earthenware pottery. No deposits of archaeological relevance were observed. Two sherds of medieval pottery (11th-14th century) and one post-medieval (17th century) sherd were recovered from the spoilheaps at the north-western end of the trench.

Trench 3 (Plates 3 and 4)

This trench was 12.6m long and up to 0.92m deep aligned SW–NE. The stratigraphy at the south-west end of the trench comprised 0.51m of recent demolition debris on top of made ground overlying 0.2m of grey brown silty subsoil above gravel with silty clay patches. The stratigraphy at the north-eastern end of the trench the

stratigraphy comprised 0.08m of topsoil above 0.27m of made ground above 0.57m of grey brown silty subsoil above the natural gravel with silty clay patches.

Several deposits of possible archaeological interest were revealed. A small pit (3) towards the north-eastern end of the trench partially underlying the baulk was only observed once the subsoil had been removed (Figs. 4 and 5). It was oval or circular in plan, 0.68m across and 0.36m deep with a bowl shaped profile. It contained a single fill (51) comprising a grey/brown clayey silt and some gravel. No pottery was recovered but nine fragments of tile (468g) were recovered from its fill.

Towards the centre of the trench was structure 4 (Figs. 4 and 5, plate 4). This was aligned NW–SE and comprised two chalk block walls, 0.9m apart with an infilled hollow between. The walls were 0.2m wide and the chalk blocks again unshaped and up to 0.2m across. The walls were at least 0.5m deep into the natural geology and stood 0.3m high. A modern pit (5) had truncated the higher parts of the structure and its fill (54) contained much chalk, brick rubble, tile flint and brown clayey silt with occasional fragments of slate (Fig. 4). This in turn had been truncated by the most recent (demolition) activity on the site.

A sondage between the walls was dug down to 0.5m to reveal a sloping mortar layer at which point excavation ceased. The base of the feature was not reached. The main fill of the sondage (53) comprised a dark brown clayey silt with flint nodules, chalk, much tile, bottle glass, clay pipe stems and pottery. The pottery included a near complete red earthenware handled jar of 17th-century date.

Just to the east of structure 4 was an elongated patch (6) with a fill of chalky grey brown clayey silt and a further area of ground disturbance. This area was not further investigated but is considered to relate to construction or use of structure 4.

The brick foundations of either the demolished modern building, or an earlier, 19th-century structure were revealed at a level about 0.2m above the base of the trench. This foundation partly truncated structure 4.

The south-western wall of structure 4 appeared to aligned with wall 1 revealed in Trench 1 to the north. However, although both were made of chalk, they were of markedly different character and are not obviously part of the same structure.

A modern pit (19th/20th century date) containing modern white glazed earthenware pottery was also observed at the north-eastern end of the trench cutting through the subsoil and natural geology. Modern concrete foundations which penetrated the natural geology were also present at the south-western end of the trench.

Trench 4

This trench was 13.1m long and up to 0.82m deep aligned SE–NW. The stratigraphy comprised up to 0.76m of demolition debris and made ground above gravel with silty clay patches. The south-western end of the trench was occupied by substantial concrete foundations which penetrated the natural geology. A modern pit (19th/20th century date) contained white glazed earthenware pottery, etc, was found toward the centre of the trench. No possible archaeological deposits were exposed in this trench.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 24 sherds with a total weight of 918g. It comprised three sherds of medieval pottery, along with a near-complete 17th-century Red Earthenware handled jar and a fragment of a slipware dish of the same date. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. Recording was carried out using the alphanumeric coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994), with the following wares noted:

MS3: *Medieval Grey Sandy Wares*. Mid 11th – late 14th century. 2 sherds, 12g.

PM8: *Red Earthenware*. 17th century. 20 sherds, 885g.

PM5: *Trailed slip-ware* 17th century. 1 sherd, 9g.

The following, which is not included in the Milton Keynes type-series, was also noted:

London ware c. 1150-1350 (Pearce *et al.* 1985). Sandy ware, common in small quantities throughout the Home Counties, and at more distant locations such as Exeter, King's Lynn, Ipswich, Northampton, Hereford, Gloucester and the east coast of Scotland (Pearce *et al.* 6-7 and figs. 4 and 5). Source unknown, but likely to be close to the City of London, where it occurs in extremely large quantities. The jug was by far the most common form, and these were often highly decorated, sometimes copying imported pottery from Northern France. 1 sherd, 12g

Clay pipe

Two clay pipe stems of post-medieval date were recovered from structure 4 (53).

Brick and Tile

Two fragments of tile (14g) were recovered from pit 2 (50), nine fragments (468g) of tile from pit 3 (51) and a sample comprising three fragments (318g) from structure 4 (53).

Bottle glass

Three fragments (320g) from the same green bottle of post medieval (17th or 18th century) date were recovered from structure 4 (53). The pieces comprise two conjoining base fragments and a neck fragment.

Oyster shell

Single oyster shells were recovered from the subsoil adjacent to wall 1 and from structure 4 (53).

Struck flint

Two struck flints were recovered from the evaluation. One flake from the spoilheap of trench 2 is likely to be of prehistoric date though is not closely datable other than to the Neolithic or Bronze Age. A second flake from the subsoil of trench 1 may also be of prehistoric date though there is a possibility that this piece, and indeed the other piece, are accidental by products of the use of flint nodules for construction in medieval and later times.

Conclusion

The evaluation has successfully assessed the archaeological potential of the site. It has revealed that some areas of the site have been subject to disturbance and truncation in modern times but that these zones were very limited in relation to the site area. However, despite this lack of modern disturbance across the site, deposits of archaeological interest were relatively few and none of the deposits found unambiguously pre-date post-medieval times. Medieval pottery and finds of earlier date were conspicuous by their rarity. Two of the deposits examined were, stratigraphically, located beneath the subsoil on the site and on this basis were good candidates for a medieval or earlier date. However, one small pit contained just a single sherd of medieval pottery and a second only produced tile. A length of chalk block wall is almost certainly earlier than the 19th century, though how much earlier is unclear as it incorporated some brickwork. It probably represents a post-medieval construction but it is possible that it is of earlier date with later modifications. A second chalk built structure is rather better dated and appears to have gone out of use and been backfilled in the 17th century. Neither of the chalk walls appears to match features shown on the Ordnance Survey maps discussed above though no internal detail of buildings is shown.

On the basis of these results it would appear that the site does retain some archaeological potential but this is neither complex nor extensive.

References

- BGS, 1974, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 255 Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
Mynard, D C and Zeepvat R J, 1992, *Great Linford* Bucks Archaeol Soc Monog Ser **3**
Pearce, J E, Vince, A G and Jenner, M A, 1985, *A Dated Type-Series of London Medieval Pottery Part 2: London-type Ware* LAMAS Special Paper **6**
PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
Zeepvat, R J, Roberts, J S and King, N A, 1994, *Caldecotte, Milton Keynes. Excavation and Fieldwork 1966-91* Bucks Archaeol Soc Monog Ser **9**

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

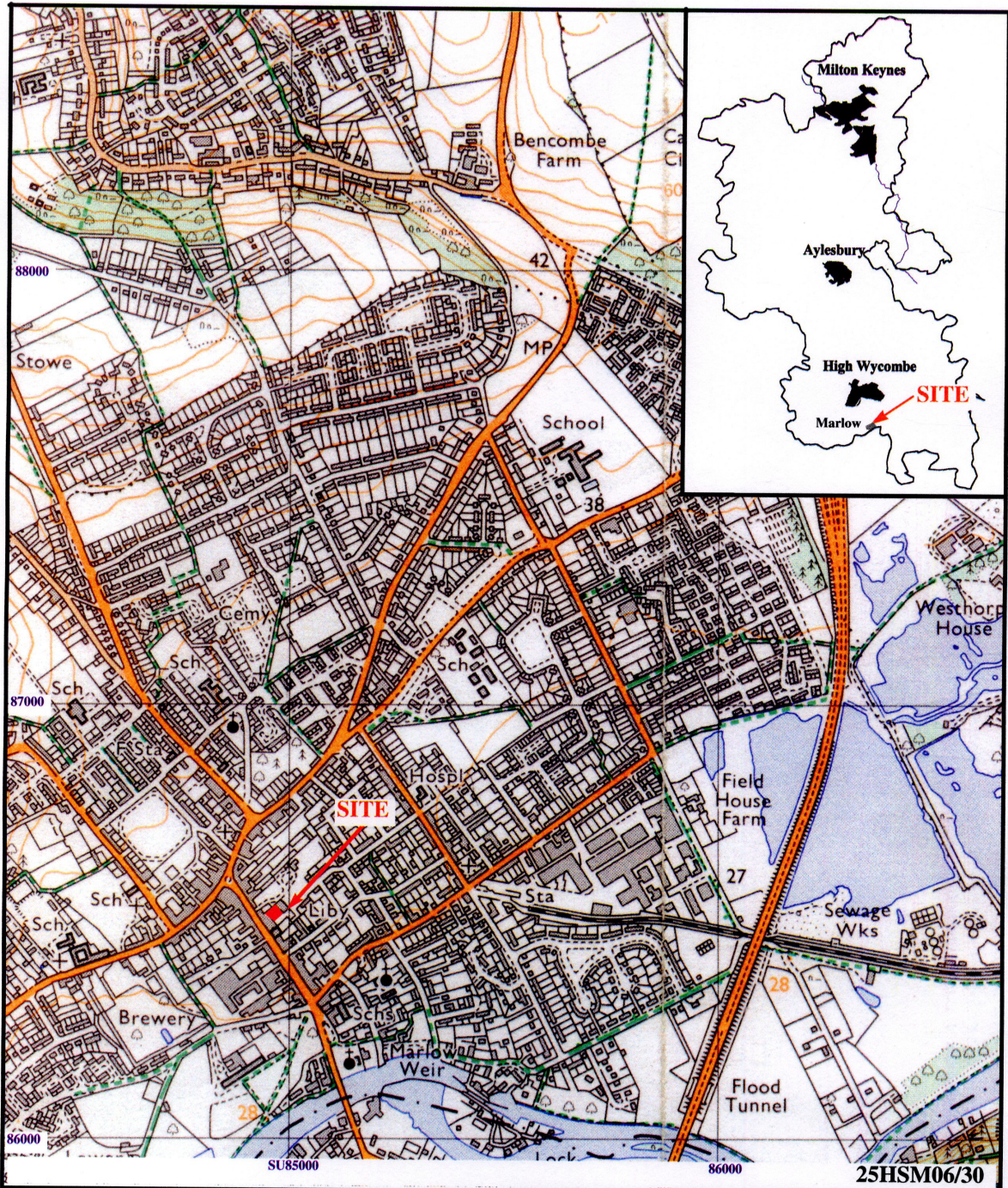
<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	14.2	1.6	0.90	SW end: 0-0.33 floor/made ground; 0.33-0.74m grey brown silty subsoil; 0.74m+ gravel with silty clay patches (natural geology) NE end: 0-0.21 topsoil; 0.21-0.45m made ground, 0.45-0.9m grey brown silty subsoil; 0.9m+ gravel with silty clay patches (natural geology). Wall 1 and pit 2 [Plate 1]
2	13.1	1.6	0.91	NW end: 0-0.16m topsoil; 0.16-0.38m made ground, 0.38-0.76m grey brown silty subsoil; 0.76m+ gravel with silty clay patches (natural geology). SE end: 0-0.38m made ground; 0.38-0.76m grey brown silty subsoil; 0.74m+ gravel with silty clay patches (natural geology) Modern pits and burrow at 3m and 8m [Plate 2]
3	12.6	1.6	0.92	0-0.08 made ground; 0.08-0.35m made ground; 0.35-0.92m grey brown silty subsoil; 0.92m+ gravel with silty clay patches (natural geology) Pits 3, 5 and 6 and Structure 4 and modern pit at 12m [Plates 3 and 4]
4	13.1	1.6	0.82	0-0.76 made ground; 0.76m+ gravel with silty clay patches (natural geology) Concrete foundations at 0-2m and modern pit at 5m

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	-	Wall foundation	Post-medieval?	Pre-modern bricks
1	2	50	Pit	Medieval	Pottery
3	3	51	Pit	Medieval/Post-medieval	Tile
3	4	52, 53	Structure	Post-medieval	Pottery
3	5	54	Pit	Modern	Slate
3	6	-	Deposit	Post-medieval	-

APPENDIX 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>MS3</i>		<i>London</i>		<i>PM8</i>		<i>PM5</i>	
			<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
1	2	50			1	12				
2		N. end subsoil	2	12			1	5		
3	4	53					19	880	1	9
		Total	2	12	1	12	20	885	1	9

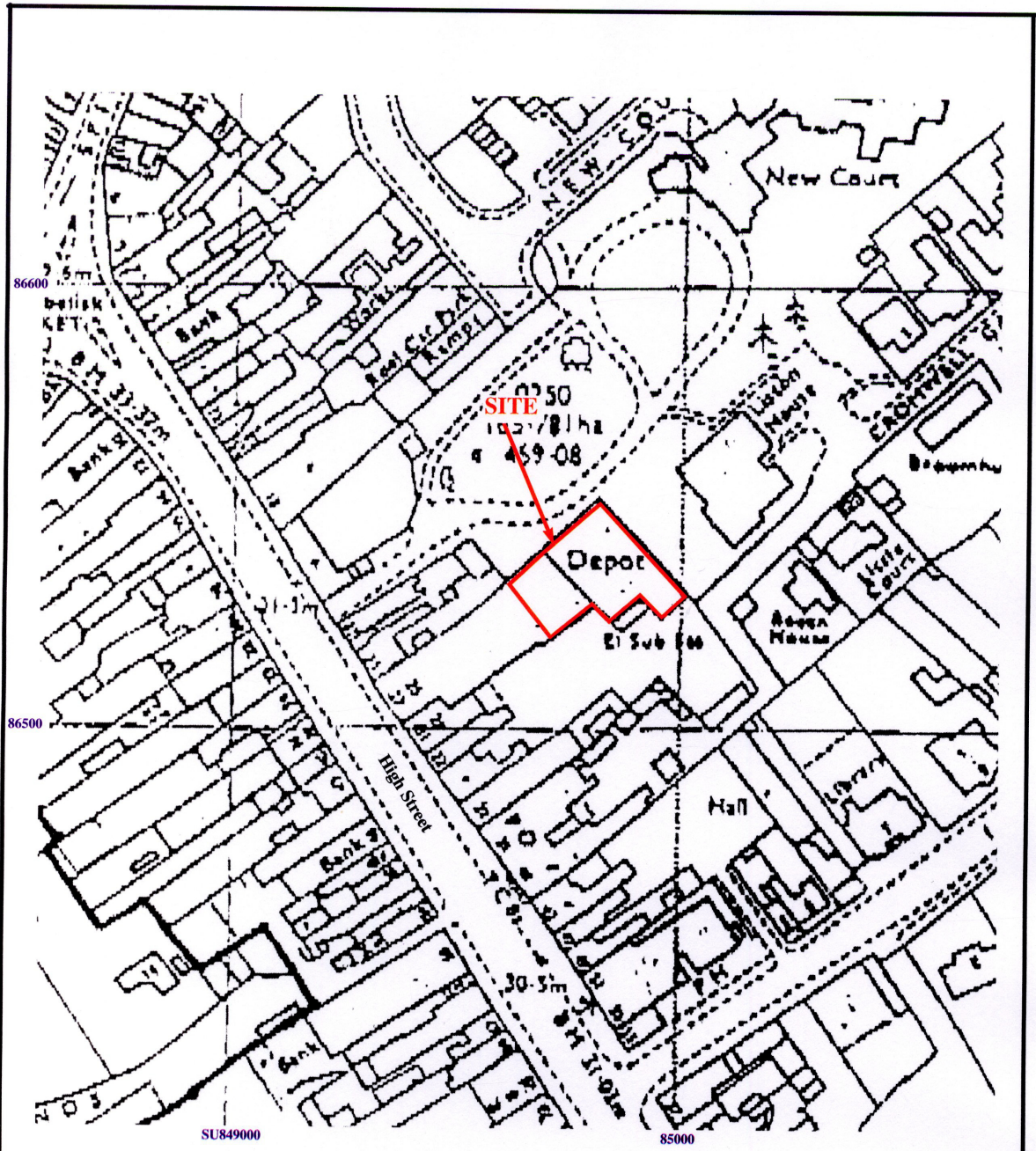


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Figure 1. Location of site within Marlow and Buckinghamshire.

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Buckinghamshire, 2006
An archaeological evaluation**

Figure 2. Location of site to the rear of the High Street.

Scale: 1:1250

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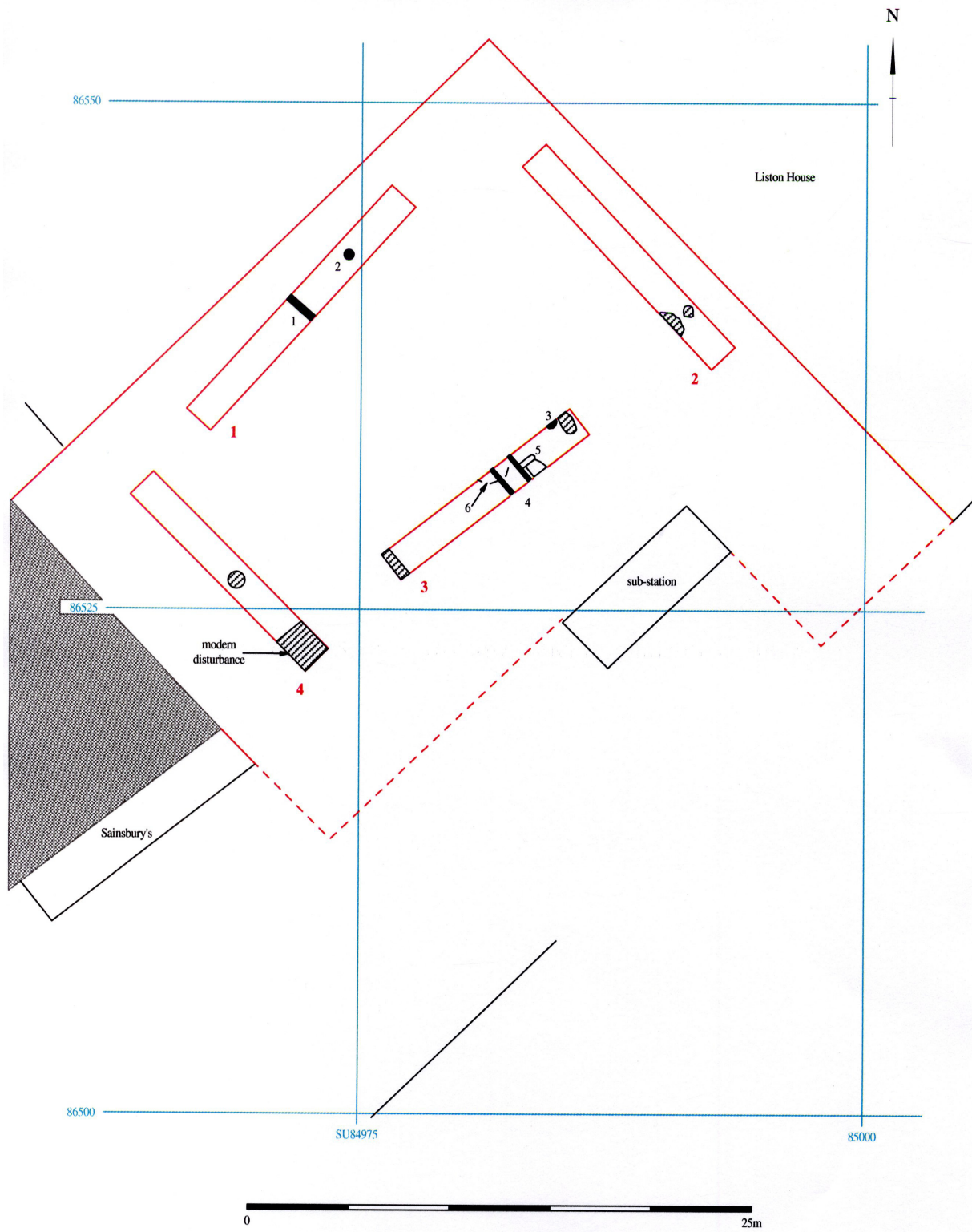
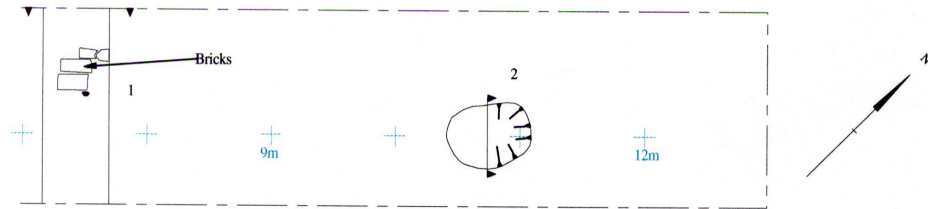


Figure 3. Plan of trench locations

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Trench 1



Trench 3

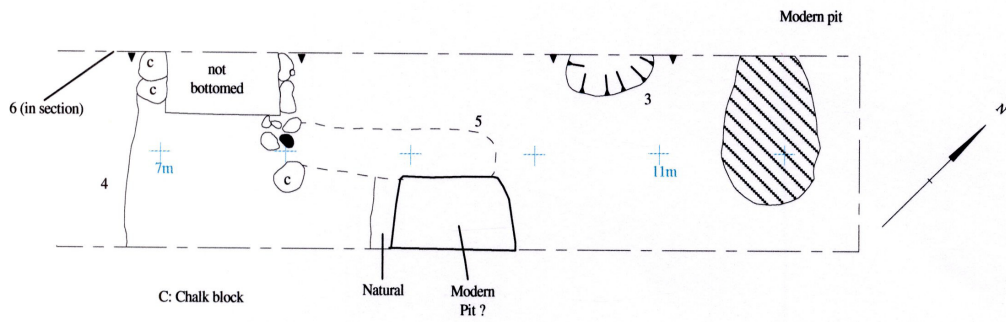


Figure 3 Plan of trenches 1 and 3

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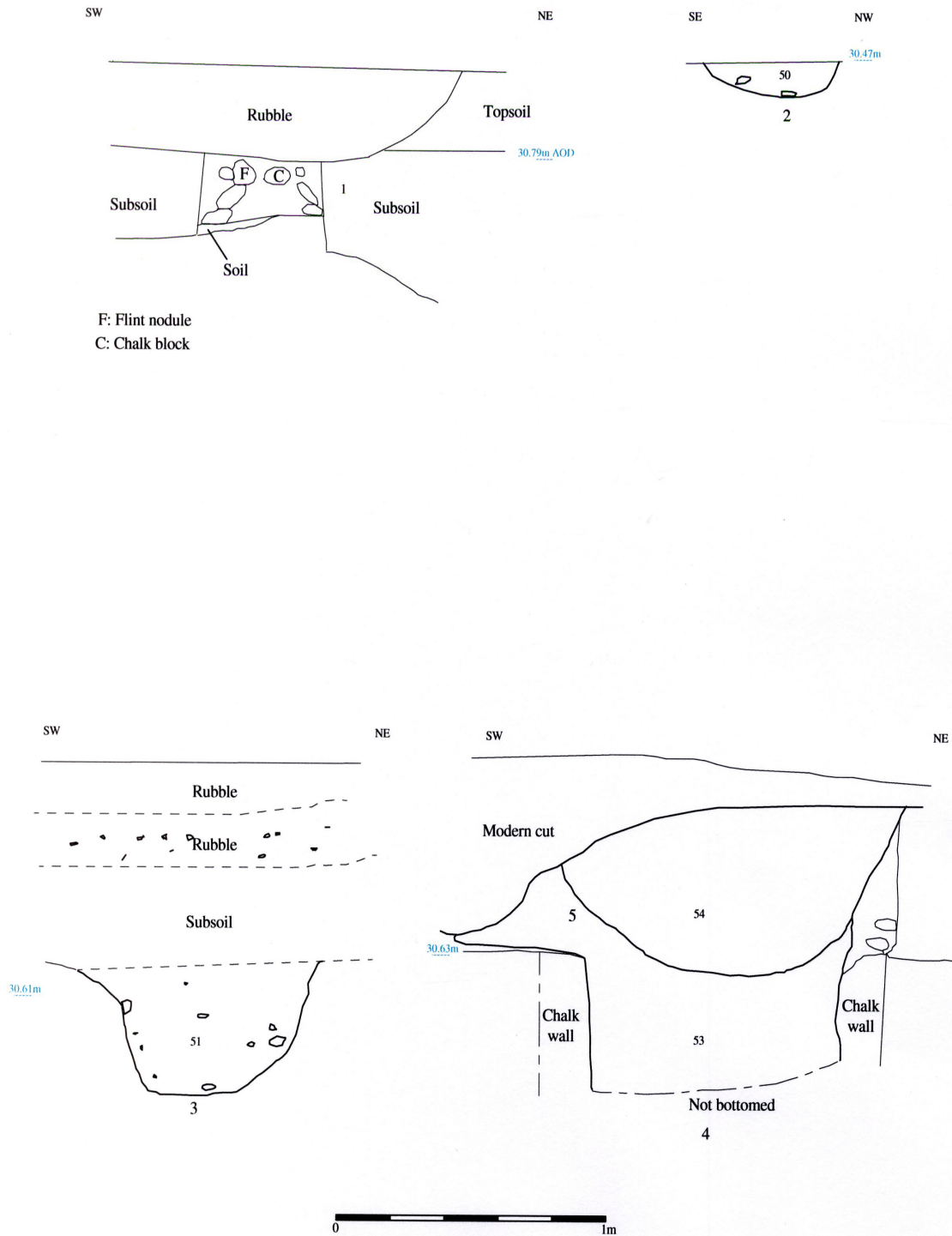


Figure 5. Sections

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Plate 1. Trench 1 Wall 1 and pit 2 looking south-west, horizontal scale 1m.



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking north-west, vertical scale 1m.



Plate 3. Trench 3 Pit 3 looking north-west, vertical scale 1m.



Plate 4. Trench 3 Structure 4 looking north-west, vertical scale 1m.