Milham Ford School, Harberton Mead, Oxford

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) Limited

by Sean Wallis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MFO 06/103

September 2006

Summary

Site name: Milham Ford School, Harberton Mead, New Marston, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 5305 0730

Site activity: Field Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 21st–22nd August 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: MFO 06/103

Area of site: *c.* 0.3ha

Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features were recorded during the evaluation

Monuments identified: None

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

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 25.09.06
	Steve Preston✓ 26.09.06

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Milham Ford, Harberton Mead, Oxford
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Report 06/103

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at the former Milham Ford Upper School, Harberton Mead, New Marston, Oxford (SP 5305 0730) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Cliff Buddery of Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) Limited, Berkeley House, Abingdon Science Park, Barton Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 3NB.

Planning permission has been gained from Oxford City Council (App no 03/00302/OUT) to construct new housing on the site. This is subject to a condition (18) relating to archaeology, which requires an archaeological evaluation of the site, prior to the commencement of groundworks. A strategy would then be devised to mitigate the effects of the development on any archaeological remains which may be present.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the City Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Brian Durham, City Archaeological Officer for Oxford City Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Sean Wallis and Neil Zammit during August 2006 and the site code is MFO 06/103. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

An archaeological desk-based assessment (Hardy 2002) indicated that there were few sites or finds in the immediate vicinity of the site, although the site lies within an area of the city with a moderate range of entries on the Sites and Monument Record. This desktop study covered the whole of the area previously belonging to Milham Ford Upper School, the south-east corner of which forms the current development site.

Location, topography and geology

The site is situated approximately 1km to the north-east of Oxford City centre, on the eastern side of Marston Road, New Marston (Fig. 1). The development site is currently occupied by former school buildings, a car park, and various grassy areas, including an in-filled swimming pool (Fig. 2). Despite the obvious landscaping which has taken place, probably during the construction of the school, it is clear that the ground rises sharply from the

west (*c.* 69m AOD) to the east (*c.* 74m AOD). According to the British Geological Survey the underlying geology consists of Upper Oxford Clay (BGS 1982), and this was confirmed in all three trenches.

Archaeological background

The archaeological desk-based assessment carried out for the project indicated that there were few known sites or finds in the immediate vicinity earlier than the post-medieval period (Hardy 2002). However, there are a larger number of entries in the Sites and Monuments Record in more distant locations in the general area, especially to the south and south-west, which represent a wide range of periods from prehistoric to post-medieval. The site contained a Second World War air-raid shelter which has previously been recorded (Preston 2002).

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. The specific research aims of the project are:-

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

It was proposed to excavate three trenches, each 15m long and 1.6m wide, using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision. If any features of archaeological, or potentially archaeological, interest were present, the trenches were to be hand cleaned using appropriate tools, and the features planned and sufficient of them excavated to satisfy the aims of the project. The work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which warrant preservation *in situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation. Allowance was made for sampling deposits of environmental potential.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Trench 1

This trench was aligned NE–SW, and was 15m long (Fig. 3). Up to 0.3m of Tarmac and related bedding material were removed to reveal a layer of redeposited yellow brown clay, which varied in thickness from about 0.2m at the north-east end of the trench to about 0.4m thick at the south-west end. This layer contained brick fragments (not retained), and it was clear from the sections of the trench that this deposit had been used to level the ground for the Tarmac surface. Immediately beneath the clay was a thin layer (0.1m) of dark brown organic material, which overlay a deposit of greenish grey clayey silt, up to 0.3m thick, which contained sherds of 19th-century pottery (not retained). These deposits followed the original slope of the hill, and probably represent the former ground surface and soil horizon, which were subsequently buried by the clay levelling layer. The natural Oxford Clay was encountered immediately beneath the buried soil deposit and, due to the original slope of the hill, the trench varied in depth from 1.05m at its north-east end to 1.6m at its south-west end.

No archaeological finds or features were observed.

Trench 2 (Pl. 1)

Trench 2 was 17.4m long and aligned approximately NW–SE (Figs 3 and 4). Up to 0.3m of turf and topsoil were removed to reveal a layer of mid brownish grey clay, which contained numerous fossilized mollusc shells. A 1.35m deep test pit was dug at the north-west end of the trench to confirm that the clay was not redeposited. Although the quantity of fossil shells decreased with depth, it was clear that the deposit was indeed Oxford Clay natural. The quite sterile natural of the topsoil and the complete lack of any subsoil deposits would suggest that the area around this trench has been landscaped at some time in the past, probably when the school was built.

No archaeological finds or features which recorded in this trench.

Trench 3 (Plate 2)

This trench was aligned approximately east-west, parallel to Harberton Mead, and was 14.8m long (Figs 3 and 4). A thin layer of turf, up to 0.04m thick, overlay a layer of mid brownish grey clay, which contained a large number of fossilized mollusc shells. Although this deposit seemed identical to the natural Oxford Clay encountered in trench 2, following the advice of the City Archaeological Officer, Mr Brian Durham, a small test pit was excavated at the west end of the trench. This demonstrated that the clay deposit here was in fact

redeposited, and overlay a layer of greyish brown silty clay which contained brick and tile fragments (not retained). This layer was up to 0.25m thick and lay directly above a thin layer (30mm) of gravel, which in turn lay above the natural Oxford Clay (with numerous fossil shells). It seems likely that the various made ground deposits present in this trench are connected to the construction of the nearby swimming pool (now filled in).

No archaeological finds or features were noted in this trench.

Finds

No finds of archaeological interest were observed during the course of the evaluation.

Conclusion

No features or finds of any archaeological interest were observed during the evaluation. The results from all three trenches suggest that the current development area has been significantly landscaped in the past, probably during the construction of the school buildings in the 1930s. This landscaping is quite evident on the current ground surface, where it is obvious that the natural slope of the hill has been terraced and levelled in various places. Whilst it is possible that archaeological deposits may be present beneath the playing fields to the west, it seems most unlikely that any such remains will be disturbed by the current phase of development.

References

BGS, 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 236, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth

Hardy, L-M, 2002, 'Milham Form Upper School, Marston Road, New Marston, Oxford, desk-based assessment', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 01/111, Reading

PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

Preston, J, 2002, 'Milham Ford Upper School Air Raid Shelter, Marston Road, New Marston, a building survey and photographic survey', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 01/111b, Reading

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

Trench No.	*Length (m)*	*Breadth (m)*	*Depth (m)*	*Comment*
1	15.0	1.6	1.05 (NE) 1.6 (SW)	0-0.08m Tarmac; 0.08-0.3m sand and gravel bedding layer; 0.3-0.5m yellow brown clay with brick and tile fragments; 0.5-0.6m dark brown organic layer (buried vegetation); 0.6-0.9m mid greenish grey clayey silt (buried soil horizon); 0.9-1.05m+ yellow brown clay natural. No archaeology.
2	17.4	1.6	0.5	0-0.3m turf and topsoil; 0.3-0.5m+ mid brownish grey clay natural. No archaeology. **[Plate 1]**
3	14.8	1.6	1.0 (E) 1.17 (W)	0-0.04m turf and topsoil; 0.04-0.65m mid brownish grey clay; 0.65-0.9m greyish brown silty clay; 0.9-0.93m yellow brown gravel; 0.93-1.17m mid brownish grey clay natural. No archaeology. **[Plate 2]**

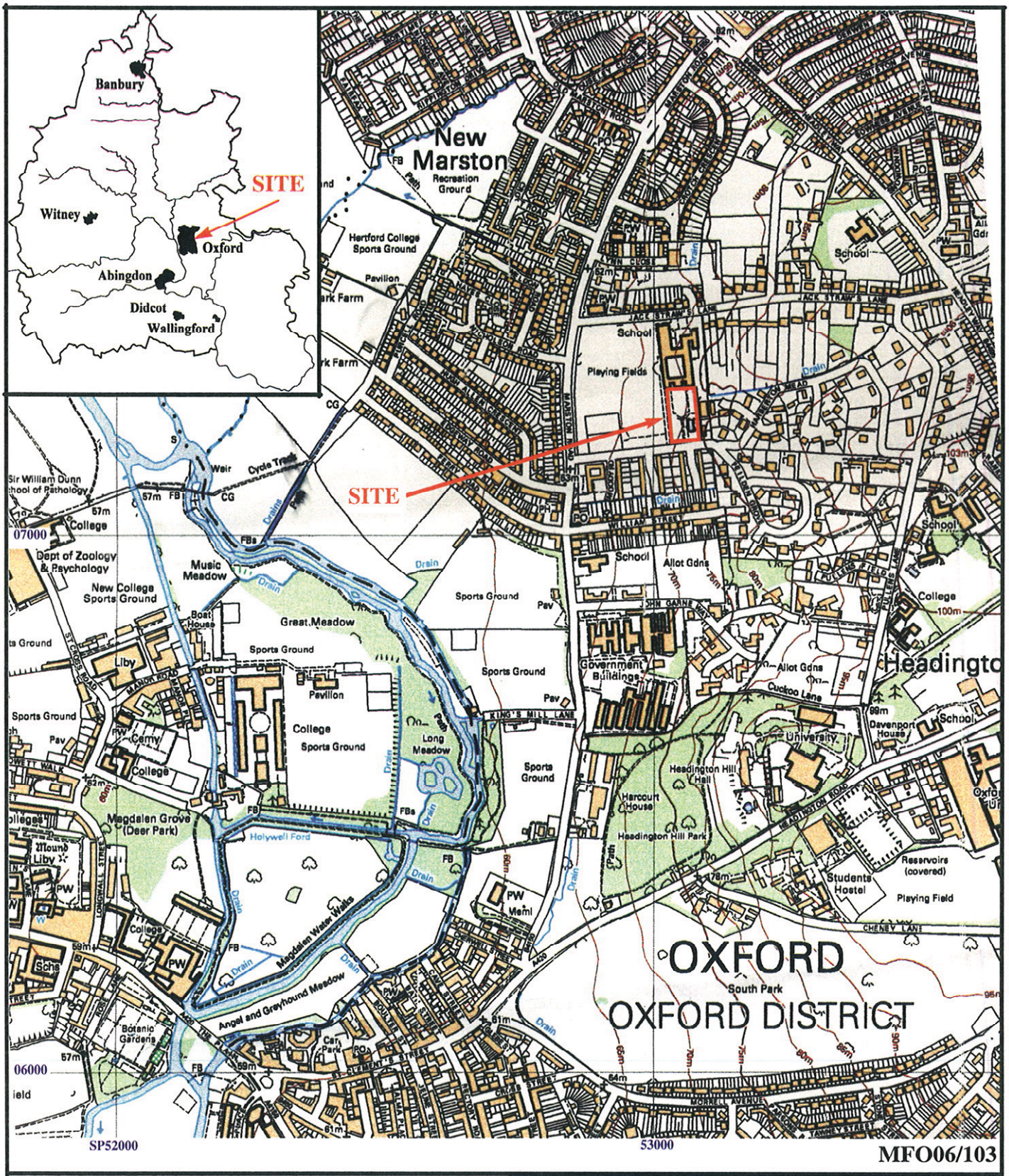

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Figure 1. Location of site within Oxford.

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Milham Ford School, Harberton Mead, Oxford, 2006

0 100m

Figure 2. Location of Site

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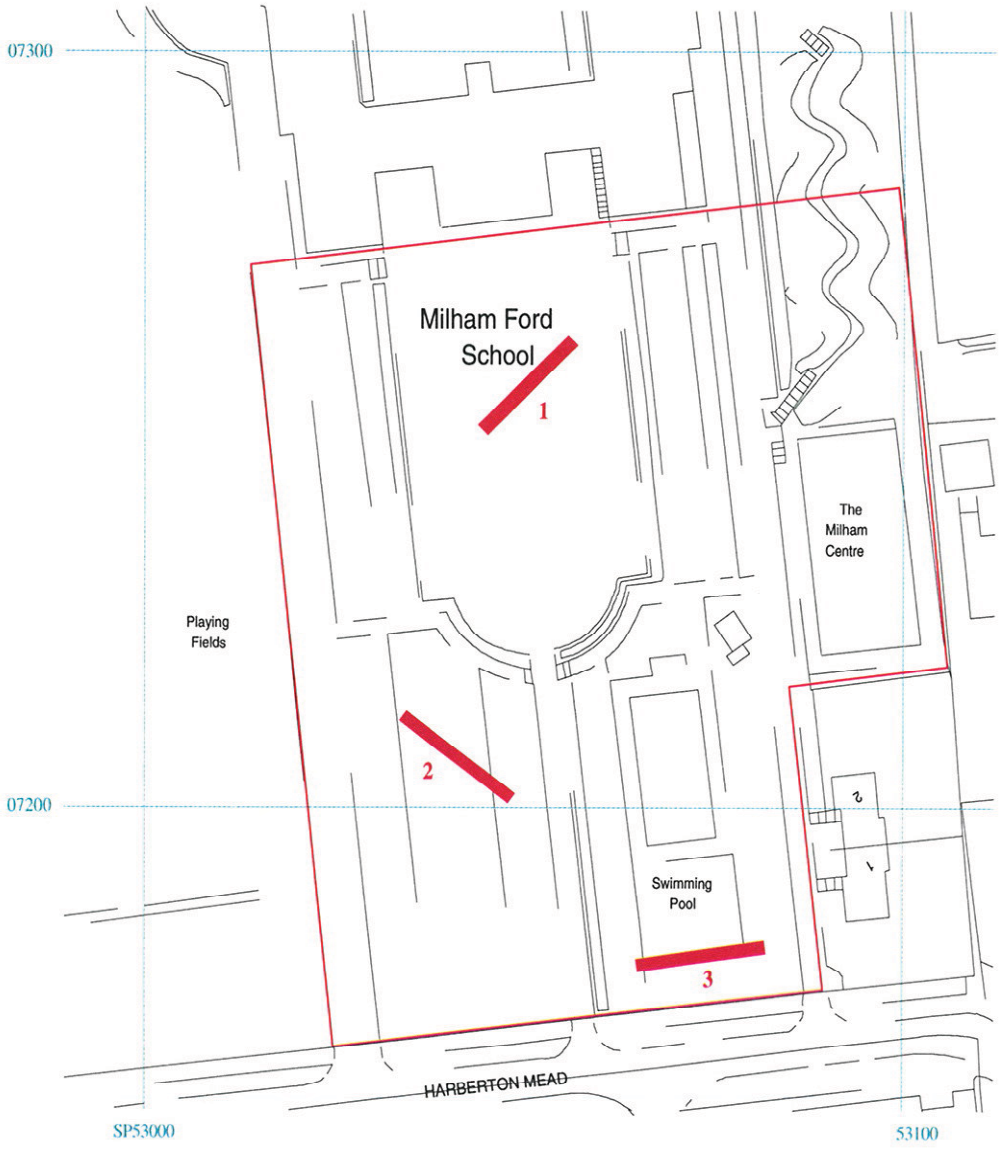

Figure 3. Location of Trenches

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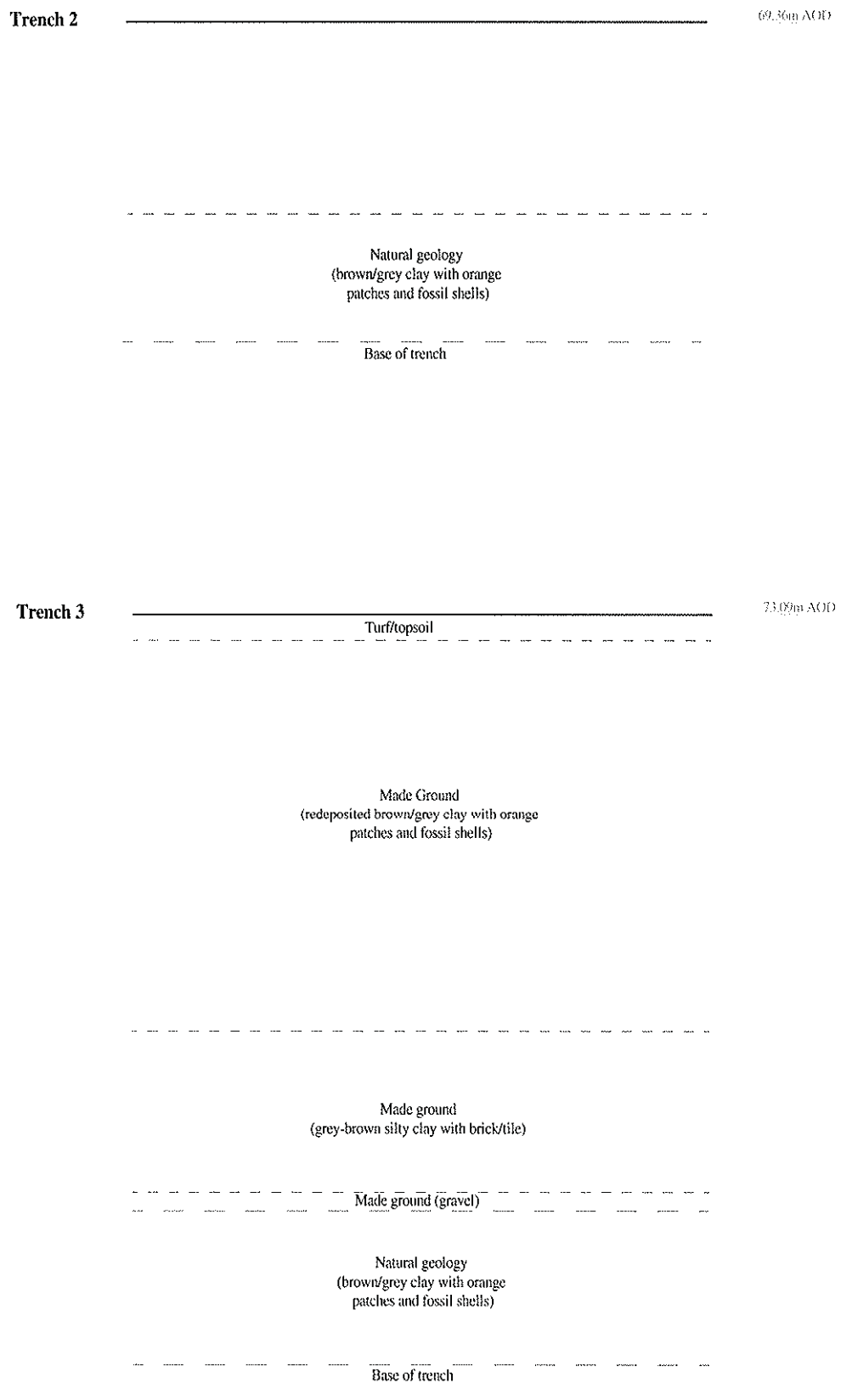

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Figure 4. Representative sections

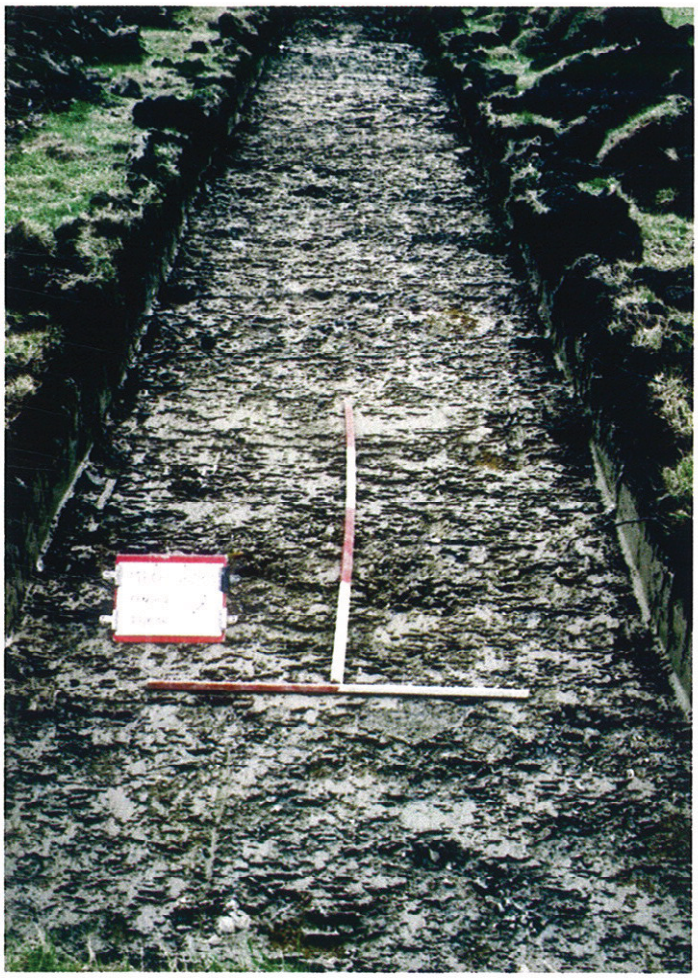

Plate 1. Trench 2 looking north-west, Scales 2m and 1m.

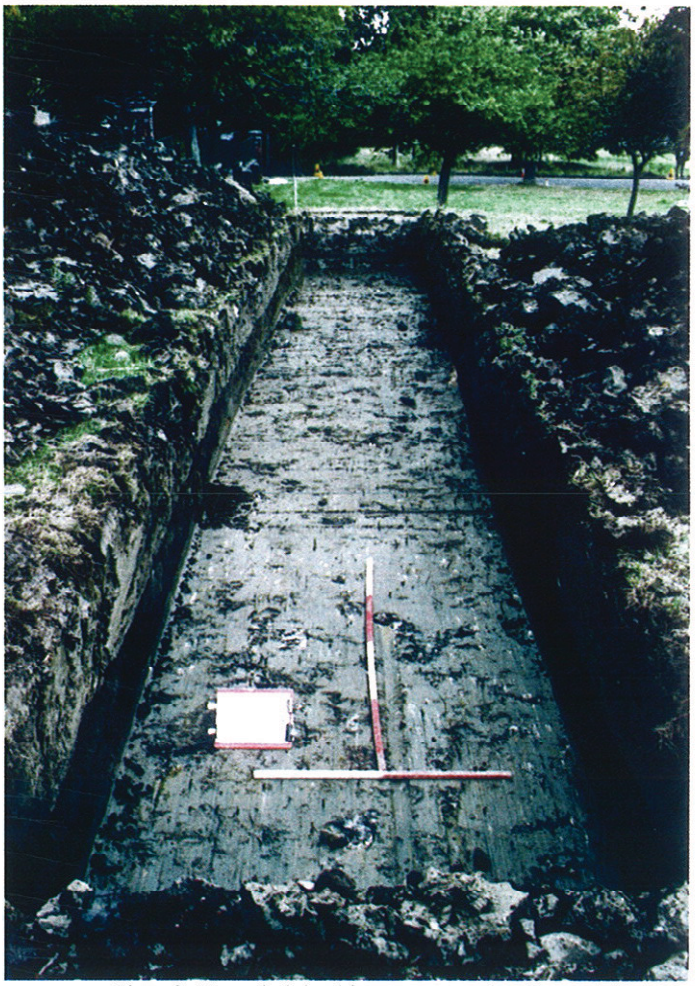

Plate 2. Trench 3 looking west, scales 2m and 1m.