123-129 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Direct Land and New Homes

by Jo Pine

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code
123BRT07/142

December 2007

Summary

Site name: 123-129 Thatcham Road, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 5047 6767

Site activity: Field Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 9th–26th November 2007

Project manager: Jo Pine

Site supervisor: Jo Pine

Site code: 123BRT07/142

Area of site: 0.444ha

Summary of results: Probable Roman roadside ditch an undated pit and a posthole were observed

Monuments identified: Roman Ditch, undated Posthole and Pit

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 17.12.07 Steve Preston✓ 12.12.07

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123-129a Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire
An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 07/142

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out 123-129 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire (SU 5047 6767, Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Jon Kellett, Direct Land and New Homes, 1st Floor, Danefield House, West Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 1RH.

Planning permission has been sought from West Berkshire Council for the construction of new residential accommodation. A brief provided by West Berkshire Archaeology Service has highlighted the potential of the site and its position within the Thatcham town Roman settlement (Orr 2007). As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits being present on the site a field observation has been requested in order to provide information on the potential impact of the proposal prior to the determination of the planning application. A single component of work is proposed, namely field evaluation by means of machine trenching.

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 Sarah Orr, Historic Environment Record Officer for West Berkshire Council Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jo Pine and Natasha Bennett between 9th and 27th of November 2007, and the site code is 123BRT07/142. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the north side of Bath Road in the west of the settlement of Thatcham. The site is bounded on the east, west and the north by residential properties. The site is occupied by residential gardens and is relatively flat, lying on the river terrace (Fig. 2) at *c*.80m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology as shown on the British Geological Survey (BGS 1947) is River and Valley Gravel.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the area has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Ms Sarah Orr of West Berkshire Council Archaeology Service. This is derived from the location of the site which is situated

within the boundary of the Roman settlement in Thatcham. Various observations made during the 1930s (Harris 1930; 1937) revealed deposits spread over *c*. 600m along the Bath Road both to the west and east of the site with some stretching 150m away from the road to the north. The Roman road from Silchester to Cirencester via Speen (Ermin Street) passes close to the site just to the north of the current Bath Road (Margary 1973; Harris 1930; 1937). The fieldwork carried out in the 1930s located a tile floor which may lie within the proposal site. To the west of the site evaluation on Henwick Field located additional deposits (Ford 1992) and a more recent evaluation at no. 63 Bath Road, to the east, revealed additional Roman deposits (Pine 2006). Recent excavations at no. 69-71 Bath Road, also to the east, recorded the Roman road and roadside ditch together with settlement evidence in the form of pits and postholes (Pine in prep.).

Objectives and methodology

The aims of the evaluation were to determine the presence/ absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development. This work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which might warrant preservation *in situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

The specific research aims of this project were:

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site;
To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
To determine if any deposits are present relating to use of the area in Roman and early Saxon times;
To determine the location of the Roman road across the site;
To determine the nature of the tile floor found in earlier fieldwork.

It was proposed to excavate five trenches each 10m long, and 1.4m to 1.6m wide. Depending on access arrangements, the trenches were to be dug with a JCB-type or a Kubota-type machine. In the event due to access restrictions, seven trenches between 0.80m and 12.40m long were excavated (Fig. 3). Trench 4 was hand dug whilst the others were excavated using a Kubota fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. Where archaeological features were present these were cleaned with appropriate hand tools and sufficient of the features were sampled in order to satisfy the aims of the brief.

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

Results (Figs 4–6)

Trench 1

The trench was aligned approximately north-south and was 10m, in length, 1.40m wide and the depth varied between 0.45m to 0.55m. The overlying topsoil was 0.26m thick. Below this was a light grey brown sandy silt, 0.19m thick. Underlying this at 0.45m was found the natural geology which consisted of the river gravel.

At the north end of Trench 1 was found the northern edge of a linear feature (2) (Figs 4 and 6; Pl. 1). This was not bottomed, however, it was at least 3.20m in length and at least 1.05m deep. Within this feature was identified a number of fills. The top fill was a grey brown silt (53) which contained 77 sherds of Roman pottery dated to the 3rd century along with animal bone, tile fragments and a iron nail. This overlay dark grey brown sandy silt (54) this contained ten sherds of 3rd-century pottery, bone and brick/tile. Below this was a lens of gravel (62) which consisted of small rounded stones only. This lay above dark brown grey clayey silt (55) which contained occasional gravel, ten sherds of 2nd-century or later pottery and brick/tile. Underneath this was orange brown sand (61) with small to medium size gravel inclusions. Below this was dark grey brown clayey silt (58) which contained nine sherds of late 2nd-century pottery. At the base of the feature underneath this was found grey brown sandy silt (63) with no inclusions. On the side of feature 2, fill 58 covered a grey brown sandy silt (59) with no inclusions, probably the same deposit as 63.

At the south end of the trench was identified the possible southern edge of the ditch (4). This was not bottomed and a single fill was identified, a brown grey sandy silt (57) with occasional stone and gravel inclusions, which contained five sherds of pottery dating from the mid 3rd century or later, flint and burnt flint. This feature appeared to cut another feature (3) which was possibly a shallow ditch. The shallow ditch contained a single fill (56) of red grey sandy silt which included frequent small stones, a sherd of Roman pottery and a very badly corroded coin.

In the centre of Trench 1 a small sondage was excavated, this measured 0.50m by 0.40m and was 0.20m deep. This fill was grey brown silt (60) very similar to that identified as the top fill (53) of cut 2, appearing to confirm that 2 and 4 were the same feature.

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 9m in length, north–south, 0.9m wide and 0.56m deep. The overlying topsoil was 0.2m thick, underneath this was a light brown grey sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions which was 0.36m thick. Below the sandy silt was found the natural geology which consisted of river gravel.

At the south end of the trench was a shallow east–west aligned linear feature (1) (Figs 4 and 6). It measured at least 0.96m in length, 1.02m wide and was 0.23m deep. It contained a single fill, a red grey sandy silt (52) that contained moderate gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered from this feature.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was aligned east-west, 2m in length, 0.9m width and 0.56m deep. The topsoil was 0.30m thick. Below this was light brown grey sandy silt that contained frequent sub-rounded gravel and this was 0.56m thick. Underneath this was the natural geology that consisted of river gravel.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was hand excavated within an area of very dense vegetation. It was 0.8m in length, 0.60m in width and was 0.80m deep. The topsoil consisted of brown grey sandy silt and was 0.16m thick. Below this was light brown grey sandy silt, 0.22m deep, which sealed a mid grey brown sandy silt (65) which contained gravel inclusions, a probably Iron Age sherd and a piece of modern concrete building material. This deposit was at least 0.42m thick and shows disturbance in this area close to the suggested location of the tiled floor surface located by Harris. Natural geology was not reached in this trench.

Trench 5

The trench was aligned approximately north-south and was 7.70m in length, 1.40m wide and the depth was 0.52m. The topsoil was 0.18m thick, overlying a made ground deposit of 0.10m. This overlay a light grey brown sandy silt, which was 0.15m thick and overlay dirty gravel. A modern pipe cut truncated the majority of the trench (Fig. 5). A slot was excavated through the dirty gravel (67), which revealed sandy silt with frequent small sub-rounded stones together with pea gravel (Fig. 6). This had been badly disturbed by bioturbation and overlay a clayey sand natural (68).

Trench 6

The trench was aligned approximately north–south and was 12.40m long, 1.40m wide and 0.42m deep. Topsoil was 0.22m deep overlay a light grey brown sandy silt which was 0.20m deep. This sealed the natural geology of gravel. At the south of the trench the northern edge of a probable ditch (9) was recorded aligned east-west (Figs 4 and 6; Pl. 2). This, unlike feature 2, with which it does appear to align, was not easy to see on the surface possibly because the fills were redeposited gravels and sand with small elements of humic content (76-79). This feature was at least 2.20m north-south and 0.52m deep and no finds were retrieved.

Just north of ditch 9 was a small oval post-hole, (10), 0.30m long and wide, 0.30m deep; no finds were retrieved from its dark grey-brown silt fill (80). North again from this was a roughly rectangular pit (11), 1.20m long, 0.70m wide and just 0.14m deep; again no finds were recovered from its mid grey brown silt fill (81).

Trench 7 (Pl. 3)

The trench was aligned approximately north–south and was 9.60m, in length, 1.40m wide and was 0.35m deep. Topsoil was 0.18m deep overlying a light grey brown sandy silt which was 0.17m thick. This overlay a dirty gravel (82).

A linear feature (6) with an east-west alignment (Figs 5, 6) was over 0.70m wide and 0.30m deep with a light grey brown sandy silt fill (69). This was truncated by a linear feature 7=8, which was 0.56m deep and (from fill 75) contained a modern flower pot fragment and glazed red earthenware bowl, while a fragment of modern glass jar (Bovril), tile and clinker were collected from its surface. A slot was dug through the dirty gravel (82) showing shallow undulations in this sediment being maximum of 0.15m deep overlying orange sandy clay. Whether this is bioturbation or human agency affecting this deposit cannot be discerned.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological evaluation resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 133 sherds of pottery, weighing 1275g (Appendix 3), dating to the later prehistoric, Roman and post-medieval periods. Pottery was recovered from Trenches 1, 4 and 7, a total thirteen contexts, seven of which are from two ditches (assuming 2 and 4; 7 and 8 are each one ditch). The material is of variable condition with some larger well-preserved sherds and some more fragmented pieces. The overall average sherd weight is 9.6g. For the purposes of the report the assemblage was scanned to assess its likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context.

Later prehistoric

A single base sherd from a hand made vessel in a flint-tempered fabric from trench 4 (65) is probably of Iron Age date.

Roman

Most of the assemblage, some 130 sherds, is Roman in date with the emphasis towards the later Roman period. The assemblage comprises a mixture of continental imports (fineware and *amphora*), regional imports and local grey wares. The continental imports include seven sherds of Central Gaulish samian and one sherd of Dressel 20 olive oil *amphora* imported from the Baetican region, southern Spain. Regional imports include Oxfordshire colour-coated ware and Dorset black burnished ware (BB1 in Appendix 3); whilst most of the local wares derive from the Alice Holt kilns on the Surrey/Hampshire border. Most of the features contain pottery typical from the middle to later 3rd century onwards.

Ditch 2/4/60 produced one of the larger assemblages with a total 106 sherds, nearly 92% of the total recovered assemblage. The presence of a copy of a BB1 flanged bowl and four sherds of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware from context 53 suggests a late 3rd- to 4th-century date from this although material from the lower fills might suggest a later 2nd- to 3rd-century date of deposition. Context 53 also contained three sherds of samian, one of which has a cross-shaped rivet repair hole.

Ditch 4 produced five sherds amongst which was a piece of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware beaker which must date to at least the second half of the 3rd century or later. All other contexts/features produced fewer sherds.

Post-medieval

Two sherds of post-medieval/ modern date were present, one, a sherd of flowerpot from ditch 7; the other a glazed red earthenware bowl from ditch 8 (the same feature).

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A very small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from six contexts across the evaluated area. A total of 20 fragments were excavated, weighing 299g (Appendix 4). All of the bone was very poorly preserved, hindering much of the element identification. The majority of surfaces showed damage either by root activity, cortical exfoliation or cracking. Analysis of the remains primarily involved dividing the remains by size of animal. Horse and cattle are inferred by the large animal category. Medium sized animals represent sheep/goats and pigs. Animals such as dogs and cats etc. are included in the small animal category. A more specific species determination was made where possible.

The only identifiable bone was from ditch 2 (fill 53), which contained the remains of a large animal, more specifically cattle. A rib, a distal humerus and a right metatarsal were present, each fragmented into several pieces. Butchery cut and chop marks were observed on the distal cow humerus. All other remains from the other contexts were much too fragmented and lacked specific element characteristics to allow for identification. Due to the lack of element duplication, a minimum number of individuals (MNI) present in this assemblage was determined to be a single cow. No further information could be retrieved from the poorly preserved remains.

Metalwork by Natasha Bennett

Two iron nails were recovered from ditch 2: the first from fill 53, weighs 19g and the second from fill 55, weighs 22g. They are both unremarkable with flattened heads and are most likely Roman. Also from ditch 2 is a lead fragment, weighing 35g, cone it is hollow with rivets taken out at the wider end . It is a likely pipe fitting.

Coin

A badly eroded probable Roman copper-alloy coin was recovered from ditch 3 (fill 56).

Brick and tile

A small assemblage of brick and tile was recovered during the fieldwork. From Roman deposits; ditch slot 2 contained tile fragments. The remaining assemblage is probably modern (Appendix 5).

Other Finds

Six fragments of bloom slag were recovered weighing 158g, five fragments from ditch 2 (fill 53) and one from the surface of feature 2 in Trench 1. Four fragments of burnt flint weighing 78g were recovered from ditch 4 (fill 57).

Conclusion

This evaluation has been successful in locating Roman deposits, some of which appear to represent a large ditch (2 ,4 and probably 9, all the same feature), perhaps 7.5m wide, observed in two of the gardens of numbers 123 and 125. This is aligned on an ESE-WNW alignment and it is tempting to consider that this may represent a road-side ditch, based on Harris's plotting of the road and the results of the excavations at no 69-71a (Pine in

prep). No positive trace of the Roman road surface itself was recorded although in some of the trenches the gravel was disturbed and discoloured (67 and 82). It is possible, given what is known about the ephemeral nature of the road surface from the excavations at 69-71a, that this may represent the road metalling but further work is necessary to prove this hypothesis.

Regardless of whether the features represent the road and associated ditch the evaluation has indicated the presence of Roman occupation evidence; the cut features are well defined and in the case of the features in Trench 1, contain a substantial assemblage of pottery. This fieldwork has shown that the development site has high archaeological potential.

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	10m	1.40m	0.45-0.55m	0.00–0.26m topsoil; 0.26m–0.45m light grey brown sandy silt; 0.45m+ natural geology(gravel). Ditches 2, 3 and 4. **[Plate 1]**
2	9m	0.9m	0.56m	0.00–0.2m topsoil; 0.2m–0.56m light brown grey sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions; 0.56m+ natural geology(gravel). Feature 1.
3	2m	0.9m	0.56m	0.00–0.30m topsoil; 0.30m–0.56m light brown grey sandy silt with frequent sub-rounded gravel; 0.56m+ natural geology(gravel).
4	0.8m	0.6m	0.80m	0.00–0.16m topsoil; 0.16m–0.38m light brown grey sandy silt; 0.38m-0.80m grey brown sandy silt (65) which contained gravel inclusions.
5	7.70m	1.40m	0.52m	0.00–0.18m topsoil; 0.18m–0.28m made ground; 0.28m–0.43m light grey brown sandy silt; 0.43m-0.52m light grey brown sandy silt; 0.52m+ natural geology(gravel). Modern pipe trench
6	12.40m	1.40m	0.42m	0.00–0.22m topsoil; 0.22–0.42m light grey brown sandy silt; 0.42m+ natural geology(gravel). Possible ditch 9, posthole 10 and pit 11. **[Plate 2]**
7	9.60m	1.40m	0.35m	0.00–0.18m topsoil; 0.18m–0.35m light grey brown sandy silt; 0.35m+ natural geology(gravel). **[Plate 3]**

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

Trench	*Cut*	*Deposit*	*Type*	*Date*	*Dating evidence*
1–7		50	topsoil		
1–7		51	subsoil		
2	1	52	gully	?	-
1	2	53	Ditch	3rd century (Roman)	Pottery
1	2	54	Ditch	3rd century (Roman)	Pottery
1	2	55	Ditch	2nd/ 3rd century (Roman)	Pottery
1	3	56	spread	Roman	Pottery
1	4	57	Ditch	3rd century (Roman)	Pottery
1	2	58	Ditch	2nd/ 3rd century (Roman)	Pottery
1	2	59	Ditch	2nd/ 3rd century (Roman)	Stratigraphy
		60	Ditch	3rd century (Roman)	Pottery
1	2	61	Ditch	2nd/ 3rd century (Roman)	Stratigraphy
1	2	62	Ditch	2nd/ 3rd century (Roman)	Stratigraphy
1	2	63	Ditch	2nd/ 3rd century (Roman)	Stratigraphy
	Not used	64			
4		65	Layer	Modern	Concrete
5	5	66	modern pipe cut	Modern	
5		67	Layer	Natural?	
5		68	Sediment	Natural	
7	6	69	Ditch	?	
7	7	70	Ditch	Modern	Glass, tile, etc
7	7	71	Ditch	Modern	Stratigraphy
7	7	72	Ditch	Modern	Stratigraphy
7	7	73	Ditch	Modern	Stratigraphy
7	7	74	Ditch	Modern	Stratigraphy
7	8	75	Ditch	Modern	Pottery, etc
6	9	76	Ditch	Roman?	
6	9	77	Ditch	Roman?	
6	9	78	Ditch	Roman?	
6	9	79	Ditch	Roman?	
6	10	80	Posthole/ small pit	Roman?	
6	11	81	small pit	Roman?	
7		82	Layer	Natural?	

APPENDIX 3: Pottery Quantification by fabric by context

Tr	*Cut*	*Deposit*	*Type*	*Iron Age*	*Roman*			*Post-medieval*	*Total Number*	*Total Weight (g)*
					Samian	*BB1*	*Other*			
1		7m spoil	spoil		1	1	1		3	37
1		base					2		2	9
1		base					1		1	54
1			subsoil				1		1	13
1	2	53	ditch		3	17	57		77	576
1	2	54	Ditch				10		10	187
1	2	55	Ditch		2		8		10	67
1	2	58	Ditch			3	6		9	91
1	3	56	Spread				1		1	10
1	4	57	Ditch		1	1	2		5	61
4		65		1						
7	7		Ditch					1	1	11
7	8	75	Ditch					1	1	23
1		60	Testpit			2	10		12	136
TOT				**1**	**7**	**24**	**99**	**2**	**133**	**1275**

APPENDIX 4: Inventory of animal bone (MNI = minimum number of individuals; Frag = highly fragmented)

Context			*No. Frags*	*Weight (g)*	*Identified fragments (by animal size)*			*Comments*
Trench	*Cut*	*Deposit*			*Large*	*Medium*	*Small*	
1	2	53	12	263	10	-	-	Cut marks
1	2	54	1	4	-	-	-	Frag
1	3	56	1	5	-	-	-	Frag
1	4	57	4	16	-	-	-	Frag
TP1		60	1	8	-	-	-	Frag
4	-	65	1	3	-	-	-	Frag
Total			20	299	10	-	-	-
MNI			-	-	1 (cow)	-	-	-

APPENDIX 5: Ceramic building material

Trench	*Cut*	*Deposit*	*Type*	*Base-Spoil*	*No*	*Wt (g)*	*COMMENT*
1		51	Subsoil	0.5m	2	72	tile fragments
1	2	53	Ditch		20	940	"blocky" fragments
1	2	54	Ditch		1	17	crumbly fragment
1	4	57	Ditch		7	100	Small fragments
4		65	Layer		5	105	Brick fragments and small fragments
7	7	surface	Ditch		2	26	1 corner brick fragment and 1 curved, possibly pipe fragment

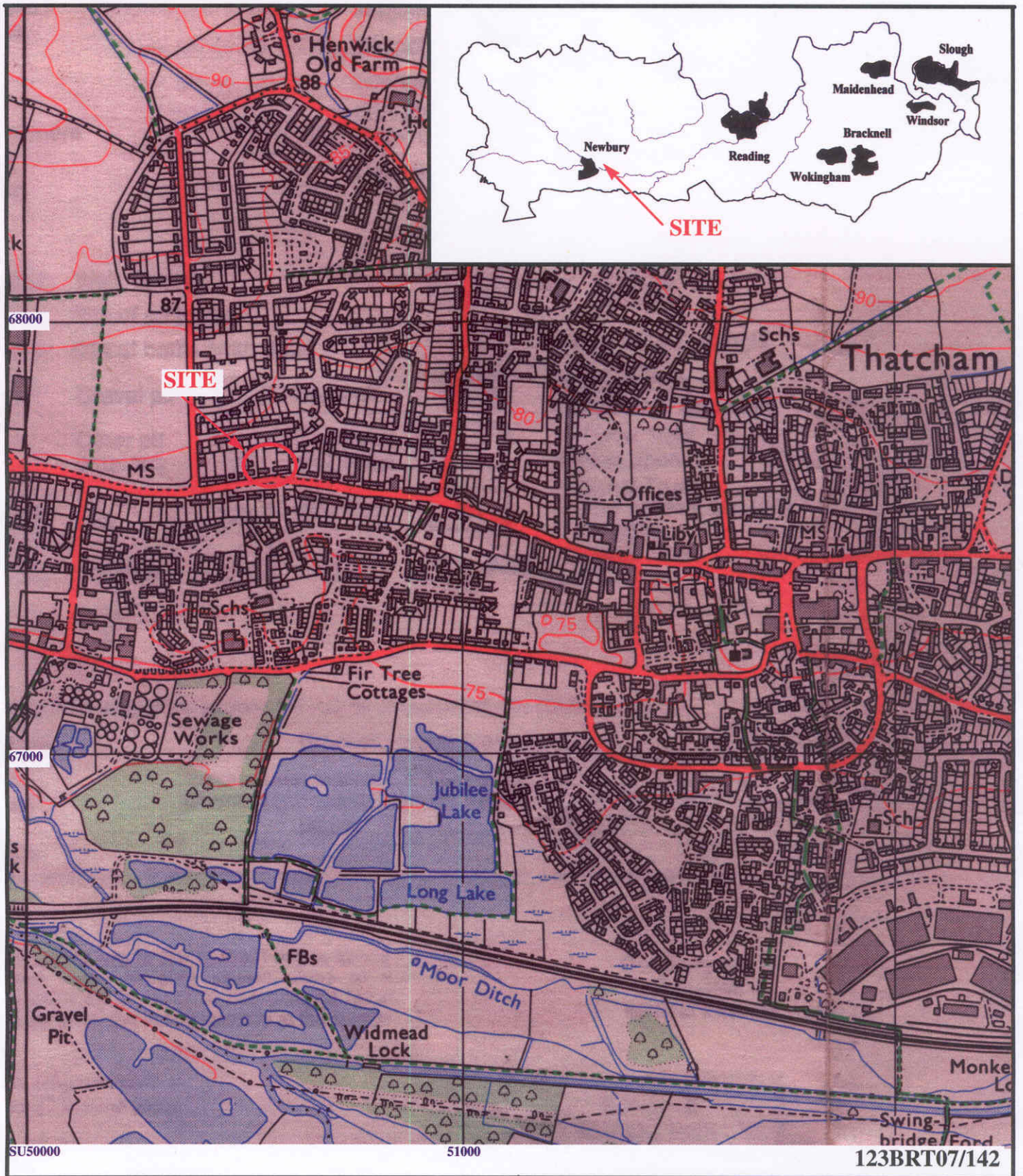

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Figure 1. Location of site within Thatcham and Berkshire.

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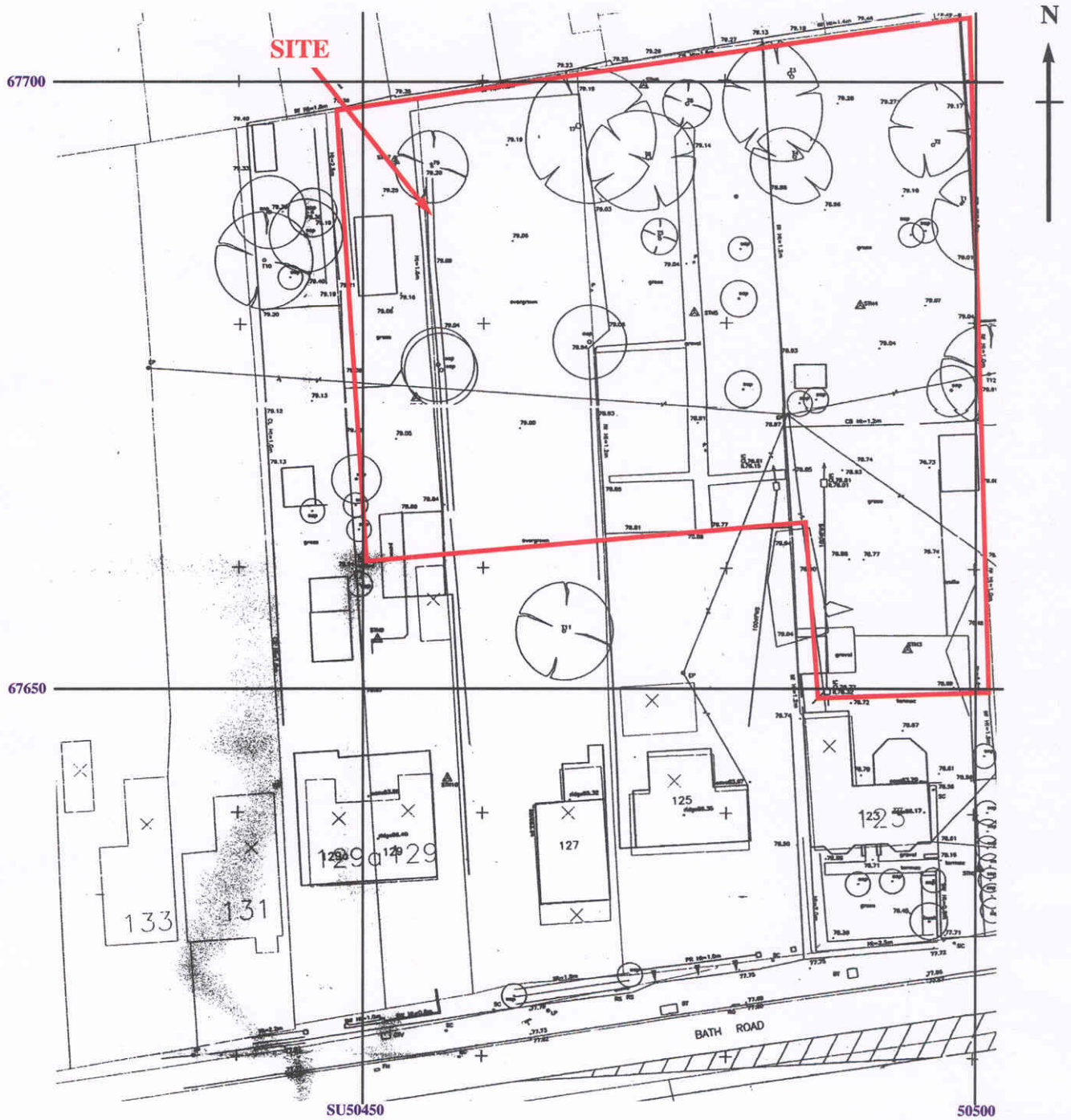

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Figure 2. Detailed layout of site.

Scale 1:500

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123-129 Bath Road, Thatcham, West Berkshire, 2007

Figure 3. Location of trenches.

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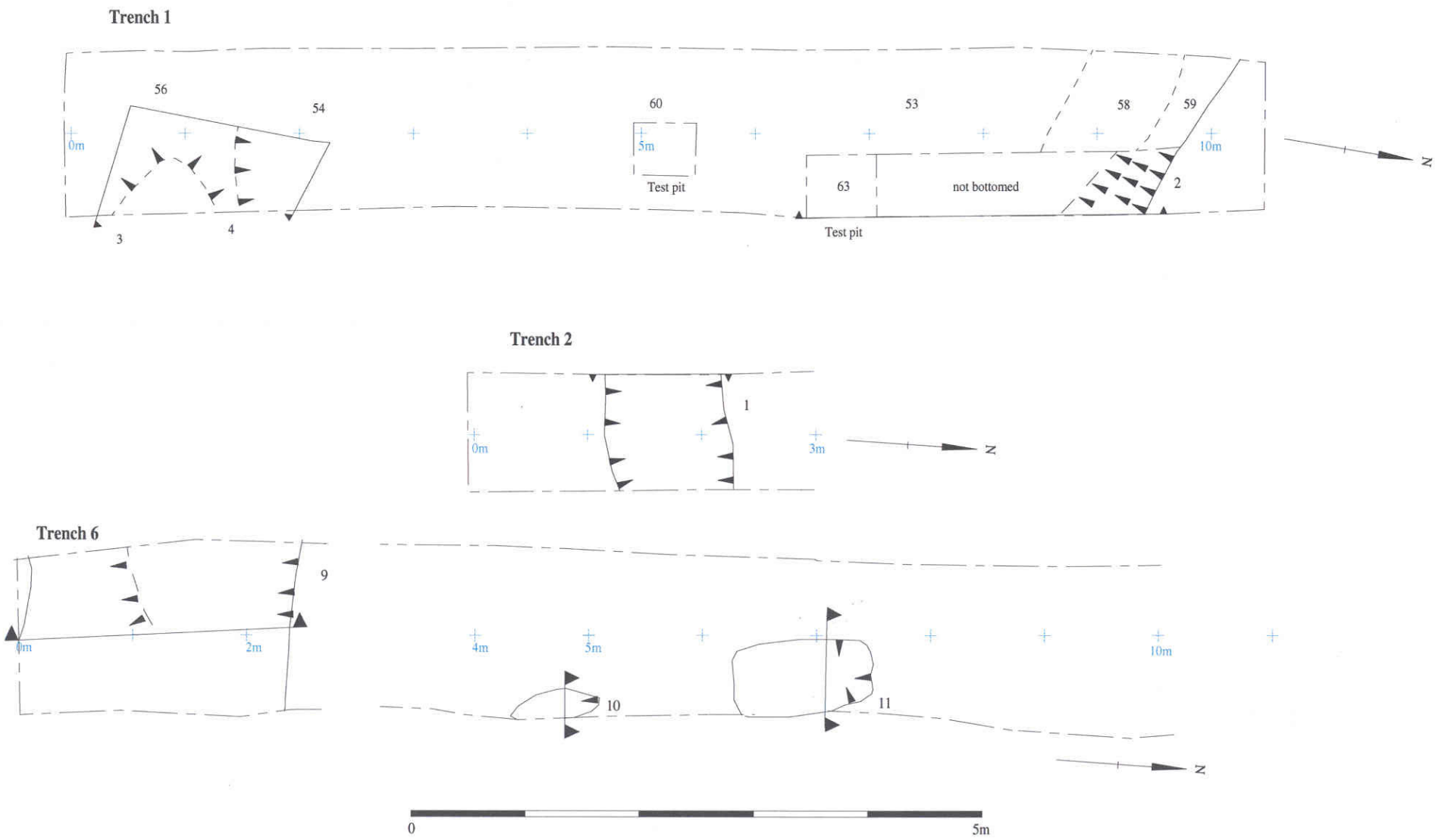

Figure 4. Details of trenches.

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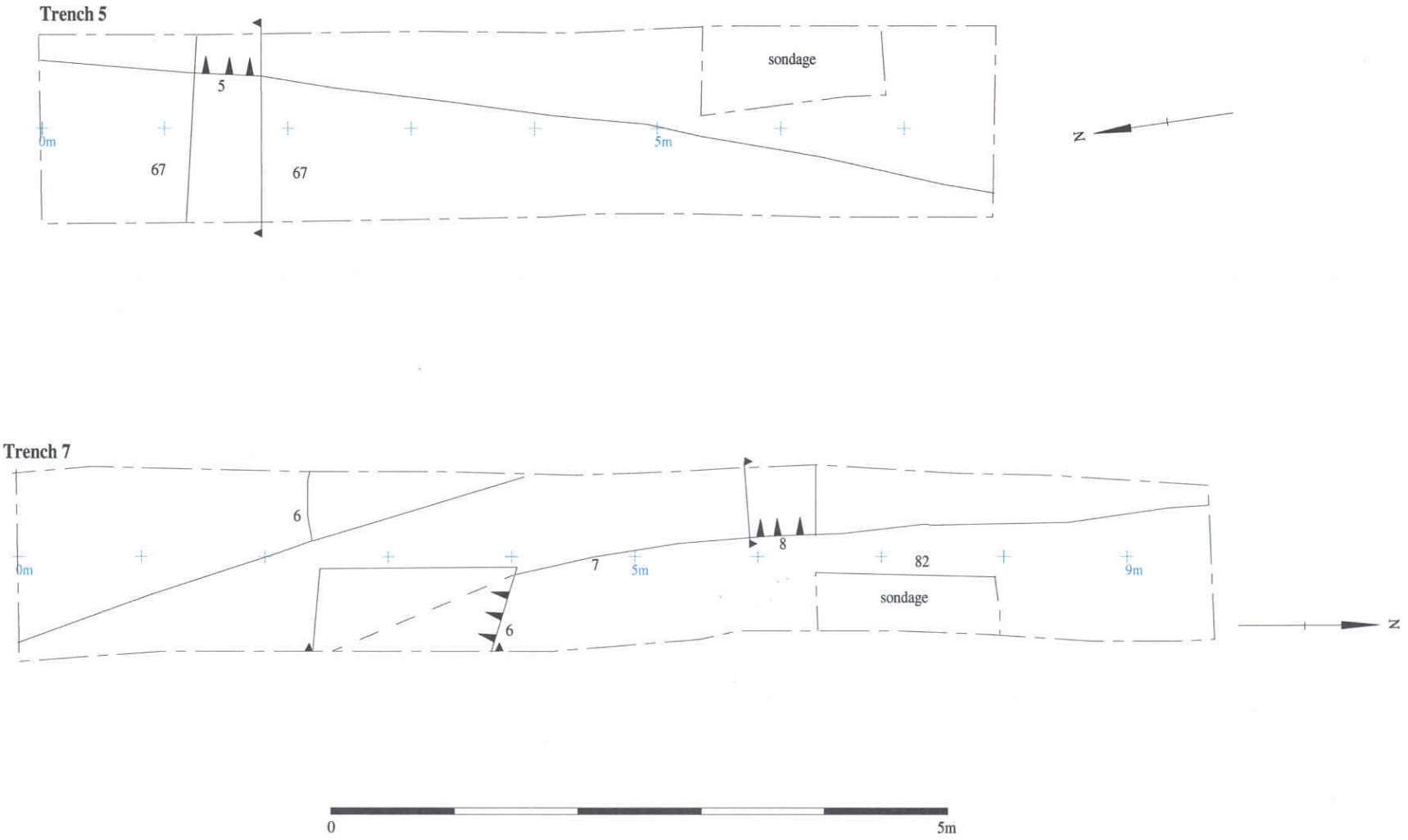

Figure 5. Details of trenches (2).

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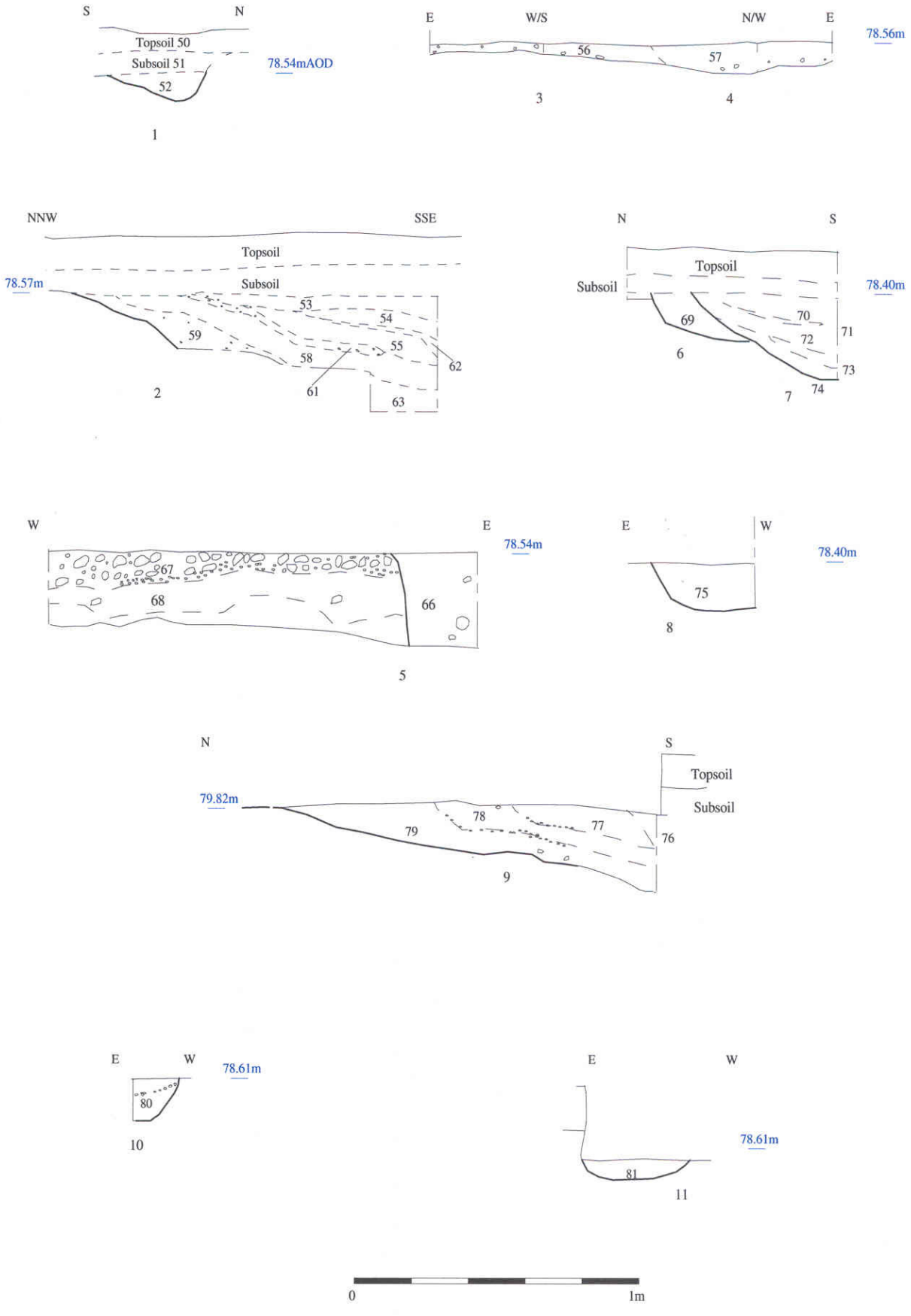

Figure 6. Sections.

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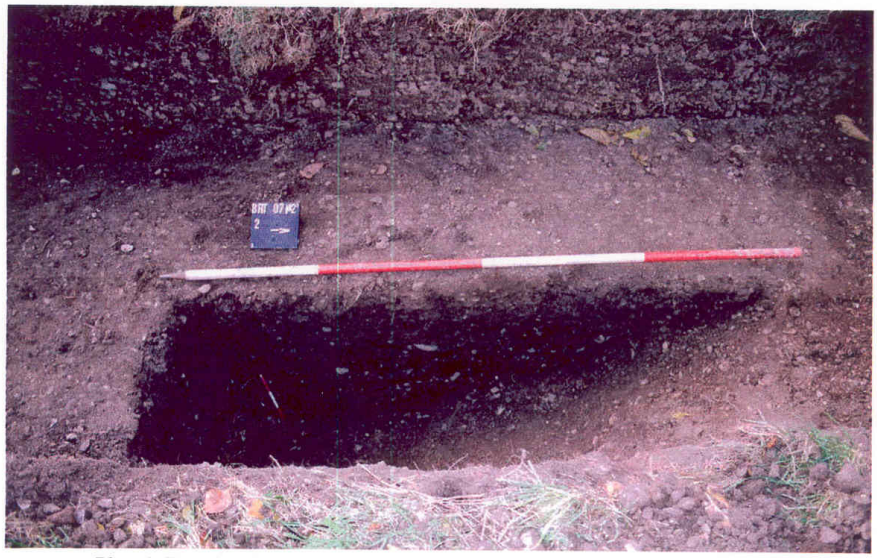

Plate 1. Trench 1, feature 2, looking west, horizontal scale 2m, vertical scale 0.3m.

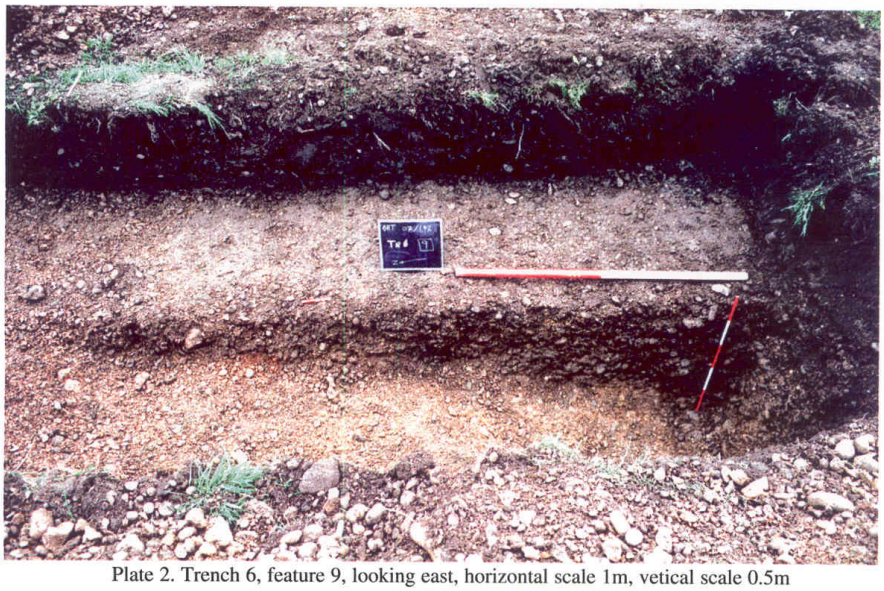

Plate 2. Trench 6, feature 9, looking east, horizontal scale 1m, vetical scale 0.5m

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Plate 3. Trench 7, looking north; Scales 2m and 1m.