

**New Library, Wycliffe Hall,
54 Banbury Road, Oxford**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Wycliffe Hall**

by James Lewis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WHO08/104

October 2008

Summary

Site name: New Library, Wycliffe Hall, 54 Banbury Road, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 5115 0740

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 17th –18th of September

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James Lewis

Site code: WHO08/104

Area of site: c. 650 sq m

Summary of results: Several cut features were revealed, three of which were certainly or probably of 19th or 20th century date. A small ditch and a pit are probably of earlier origin though only the ditch produced any dating evidence- comprising a small sherd of prehistoric pottery. It is considered that these latter features do indicate that the site has some archaeological potential.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 06.10.08 Steve Preston ✓ 06.10.08

New Library, Wycliffe Hall, Banbury Road, Oxford An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 08/104

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at New Library, Wycliffe Hall, 54 Banbury Road, Oxford (SP 5115 0740) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Mark Shipton, of Oxford Architects, Bagley Croft, Hinksey Hill, Oxford, OX1 5BS on behalf of Wycliffe Hall, 54 Banbury Road, Oxford.

The site lies within a triangular piece of land between Banbury Road and Norham Gardens (Fig. 2). Planning permission (08/01528/FUL) is being sought from Oxford City Council to construct a new library. The construction of the library will potentially have an adverse impact upon any archaeological deposits located within the footprint of the building. The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment and historic building survey (Morton and Morris 2007). The potential importance of any remains present has taken on added significance in the light of recent discoveries of prehistoric and medieval archaeology, including a mass grave and henge monument, found at St Johns College, Blackhall Road to the south. In addition 150m to the south east of the site is University Parks in which has been observed extensive cropmarks dating from the prehistoric to the Roman period (Hassall 1986, fig 12; Morton and Morris 2007). Due to this, an archaeological evaluation was requested for the site in order to provide information about the archaeological impacts of the proposed development to inform the planning process, as detailed in *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16, 1990) and the City Council policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Radford, City archaeological officer and based on a brief provided by him. The fieldwork was undertaken by James Lewis and Martha Buzcek on the 17th and 18th September 2008 and the site code is WHO08/104. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the north of the city centre and is currently gardens within the grounds of Wycliffe Hall. Delimiting the site to the east, west and south are the roads Norham Gardens and the Banbury Road. To the north

are residential and university buildings and 150m to the south-east are the University Parks (Fig. 1). The site is located at 63m above Ordnance Datum on a flat area of ground with a gentle slope to the east that eventually leads down to the river Cherwell. The underlying geology consists of 2nd terrace river gravels (BGS 1982.)

Archaeological background

The archaeological background to the site has been provided in a desk-based assessment (Morton and Morris 2007) In summary the site lies beyond the northern fringe of the historic (Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval) centre of Oxford and also lies beyond both the Saxon and medieval defences of the city and the later civil war defences. It is located on land which was farmed in later post-medieval times until development in the 19th century. The archaeological potential of the site stems from its position just to the north west of The Parks, an area of open ground which contains crop marks which, on morphological grounds, indicate earlier prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman settlement and burial sites (Hassall 1986, fig. 12). The crop marks appear to be concentrated within The Parks and do not continue north towards the site (Morton and Morris 2007) but this may be because this area has been developed. Evidence for Roman settlement, probably no more than a farm, has been found in the University Science and the University Museum areas (Dodd 2003).

Recently completed fieldwork (August 2008) to the south of the proposal site has altered the perceived significance of the environs of this area of Oxford in earlier prehistoric times. In addition to medieval deposits a segment of a very large ceremonial monument (a henge) of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date has been excavated on Blackhall Road, St Johns College (Wallis in prep.). The remains of a post-medieval windmill may also be present on the proposal site.

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 impact area of the proposed new building.

The specific research aims of this project are:

- To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- To determine if any earlier prehistoric occupation deposits which may relate to the ritual complex to the south;
- To determine if any later prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or later deposits are present on the site;

To determine if any remains of a post-medieval windmill are present on the site.

This work was carried out in a manner which will 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.

Three trenches were to be dug by a JCB-type machine, one at 10m long and two at 5m long, all 1.6m wide and located within the footprint of the proposed new structure. These were to be excavated to the base of the archaeological sequence within the impact depth to address the aims above. Trenches could not be located within 8m of a preserved Lime tree.

Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. A sufficient number of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would be excavated by hand to satisfy the aims of the project. A programme of environmental sampling was to be implemented should sufficient well stratified subsoil deposits be located.

Results (Figs 3 and 4)

Three trenches were excavated in the positions shown in Figure 3. The position of Trench 3 was altered due to presence of a service pipe running through it and its close proximity to a building. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths and description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1 and the features are summarized in Appendix 2.

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

Trench 1 was aligned NW-SE. It was 5m in length, 1.6m wide and 2.08m deep. The stratigraphy observed comprised topsoil (51) at 0.30m thick, over a very deep pit (1) or much less likely, a ditch. This measured at least 5m long and was 1.75m deep. Numerous tip lines were observed within the pit and these were divided into two fills (52 and 53). Fill 52 was at least 0.80m thick. Fill 53 was 0.95m thick. The pit extended beyond the eastern and northern edges of the trench. The brick and limestone fragments recovered from the feature (not retained) indicate a 19th/20th century date.

Trench 2 (Plates 3 and 4)

Trench 2 was aligned NW-SE. It was 6m in length, 1.6m wide and 1.30m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil and 0.45m of made ground overlying re-deposited natural gravel. Several features cutting the natural geology were observed. At the northern end of the trench were two pits (4 and 5) which occupied most of

the base of the trench and extend beyond. Pit 4 was at least 2.8m in length and was 1.3m deep. It contained brown mottled grey sandy clay (61) with occasional stone inclusions. Pit 5 measured 1m in width and was approximately 0.5m deep. It contained a dark black sandy clay (60) with significant charcoal and root inclusions. This appeared to be a later feature than 4. Although neither feature is positively dated, they both have dark fills and are cut from just below the modern topsoil indicating a probable modern origin.

At the western end of the trench was found re-deposited natural gravel (62). This partially overlay ditch 2, which was aligned north-south (Plate 4). This ditch was 1.60m wide and was 0.36m deep (Fig. 5). It contained compact red-brown gravel (54) with occasional root inclusions and a single (fragmented) sherd of possible prehistoric pottery.

Trench 3 (Plate 2)

Trench 3 was aligned north-south. It was 5.2m in length, 1.6m wide and between 1.1m to 1.8m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil, over 0.48m of dark brown sandy gravel (56). Below this was dark brown-red sandy gravel (57). This overlay Pit 3 which was dug to a depth of 0.60m deep, but which may not be the bottom. The pit extended beyond the southern and western margins of the trench3. Pit 3 contained compact, sandy red-brown gravel (58) but no artefacts, datable or otherwise. The pit lay beneath two layers of modern made ground and a pre-modern date cannot be entirely discounted.

Finds

Pottery

A single small fragmented sherd (1g) with a red brown fabric containing fine, sparse shell temper was the only item recovered from ditch 2 to provide dating evidence. It is possibly of prehistoric date.

Conclusion

The evidence recovered from the evaluation trenches has recorded intensive digging activity on the site with all three trenches recording cut features. Several of these though, are certainly or probably of modern origin, and are likely to relate to use of Wycliffe Hall in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Two features are possibly of much earlier origin. One of these is a small shallow ditch which may be of prehistoric date, though this dating relies on the presence of a single small sherd of pottery and both mis-identification and residuality cannot be ruled out. The position of this ditch also lies close to the line of a boundary shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1876

and 1900 (Morton and Moriss 2007) though the orientation is not quite coincident and the nature of its fill seems inconsistent with a boundary that only went out of use in the last hundred years or so. A second feature (a pit) produced no dating evidence and a pre-modern origin is only suggested by the nature of its fill and stratigraphic position.

On balance whilst these results are, unfortunately, less clear cut than desired, it is considered that these latter features do indicate that the site has some archaeological potential.

References

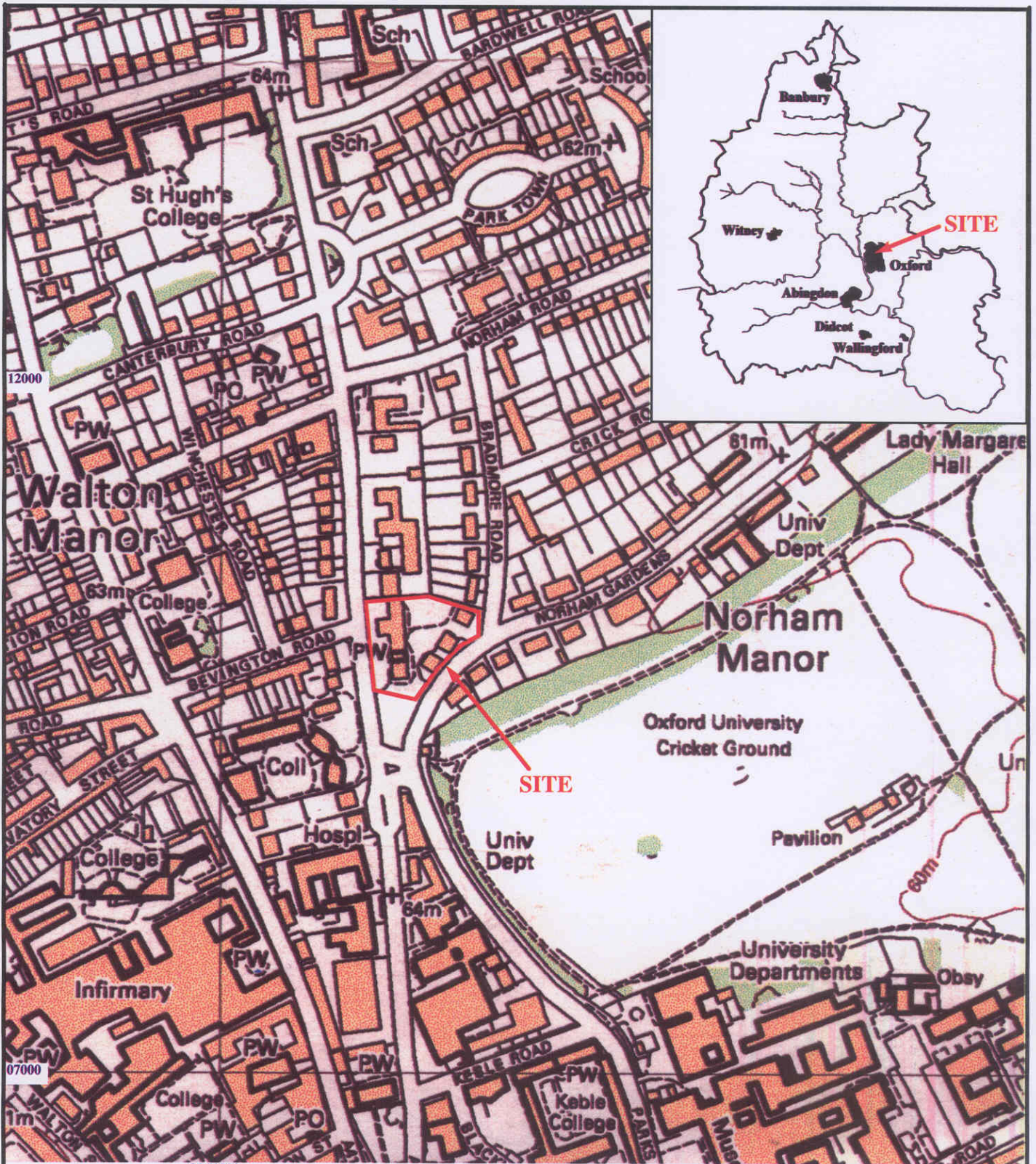
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	5.0	1.6	2.08	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30-2.08m fill of large pit (1); 2.08m+ gravel natural geology [Plate 1]
2	6.0	1.6	1.30	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.45m subsoil; 0.45m+ natural geology. Ditch 2, Modern pits 4, 5 [Plates 3 and 4]
3	5.2	1.6	1.10	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.70m made ground; 0.70m+ natural geology. Pit 3. [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 , 53	Pit	Post-medieval 19th/20th century	Brick
2	2	54	Ditch	Prehistoric? or later	Pottery
2	4	60	Pit	Post-medieval 19th/20th century	Stratigraphic
2	5	61	Pit	Post-medieval 19th/20th century	Stratigraphic
3	3	55–58	Pit	Undated (pre-modern?)	Statigraphic

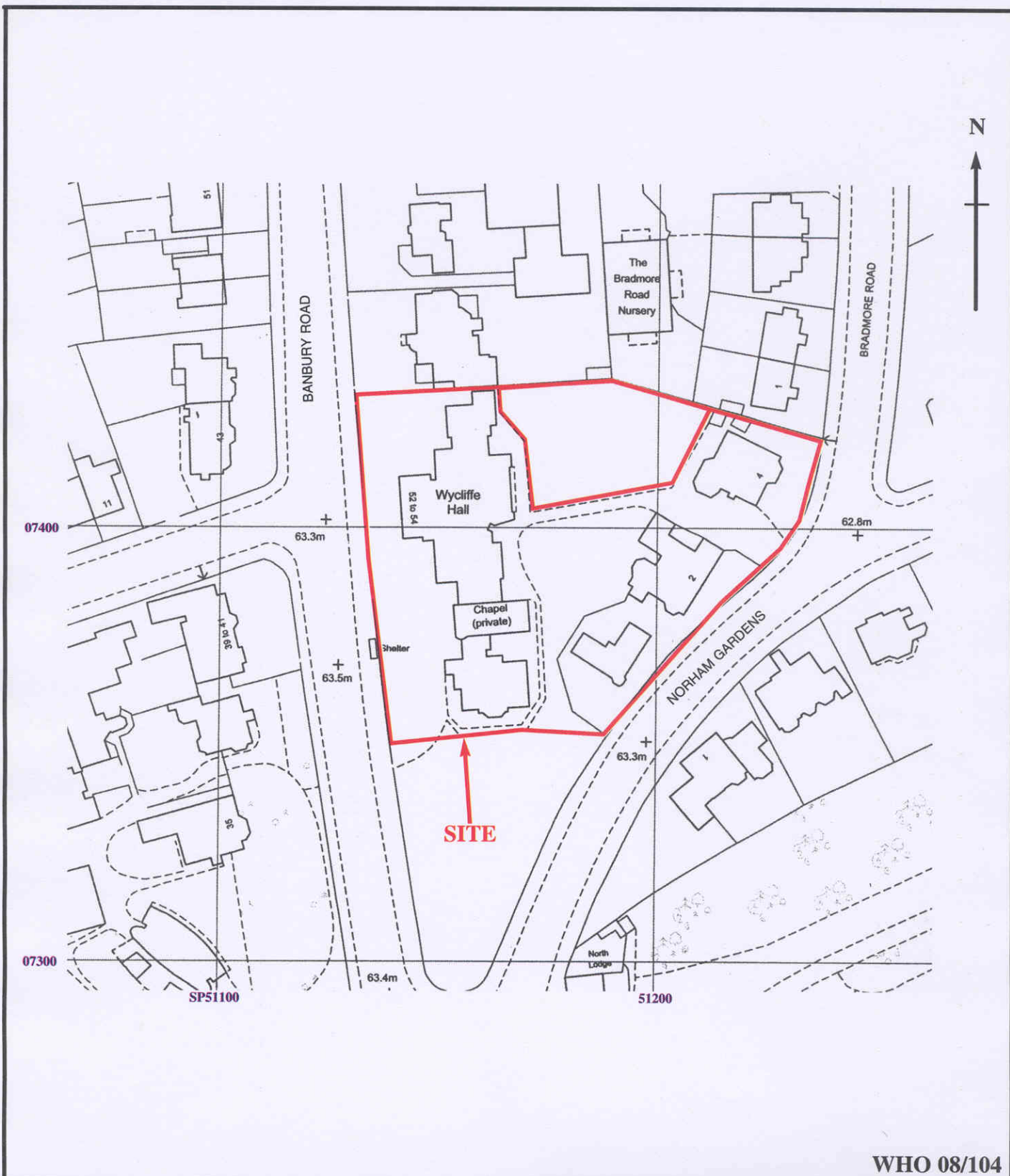


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Figure 1. Location of site within Oxford and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Banbury Road.

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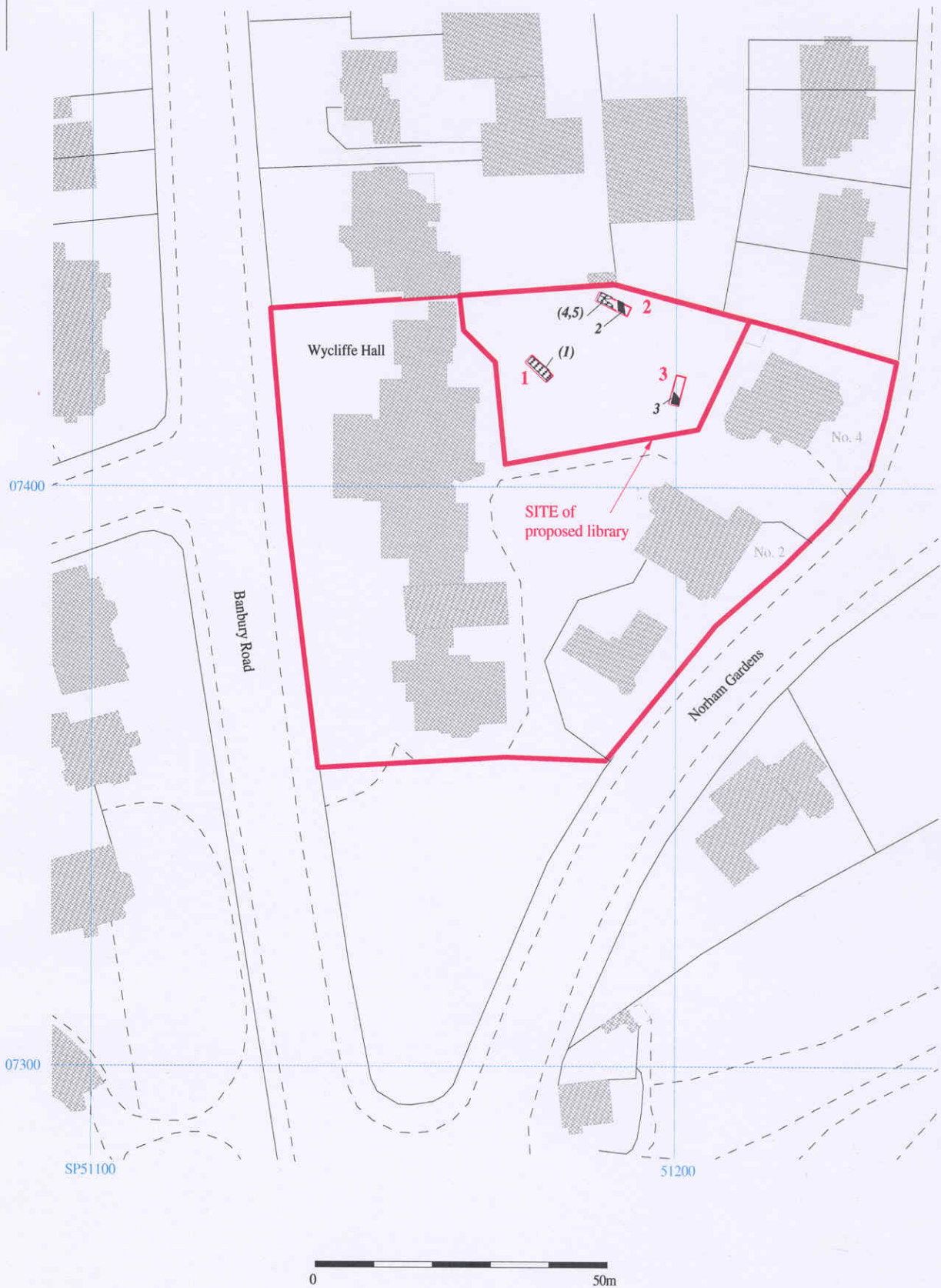


Figure 3. Location of trenches.

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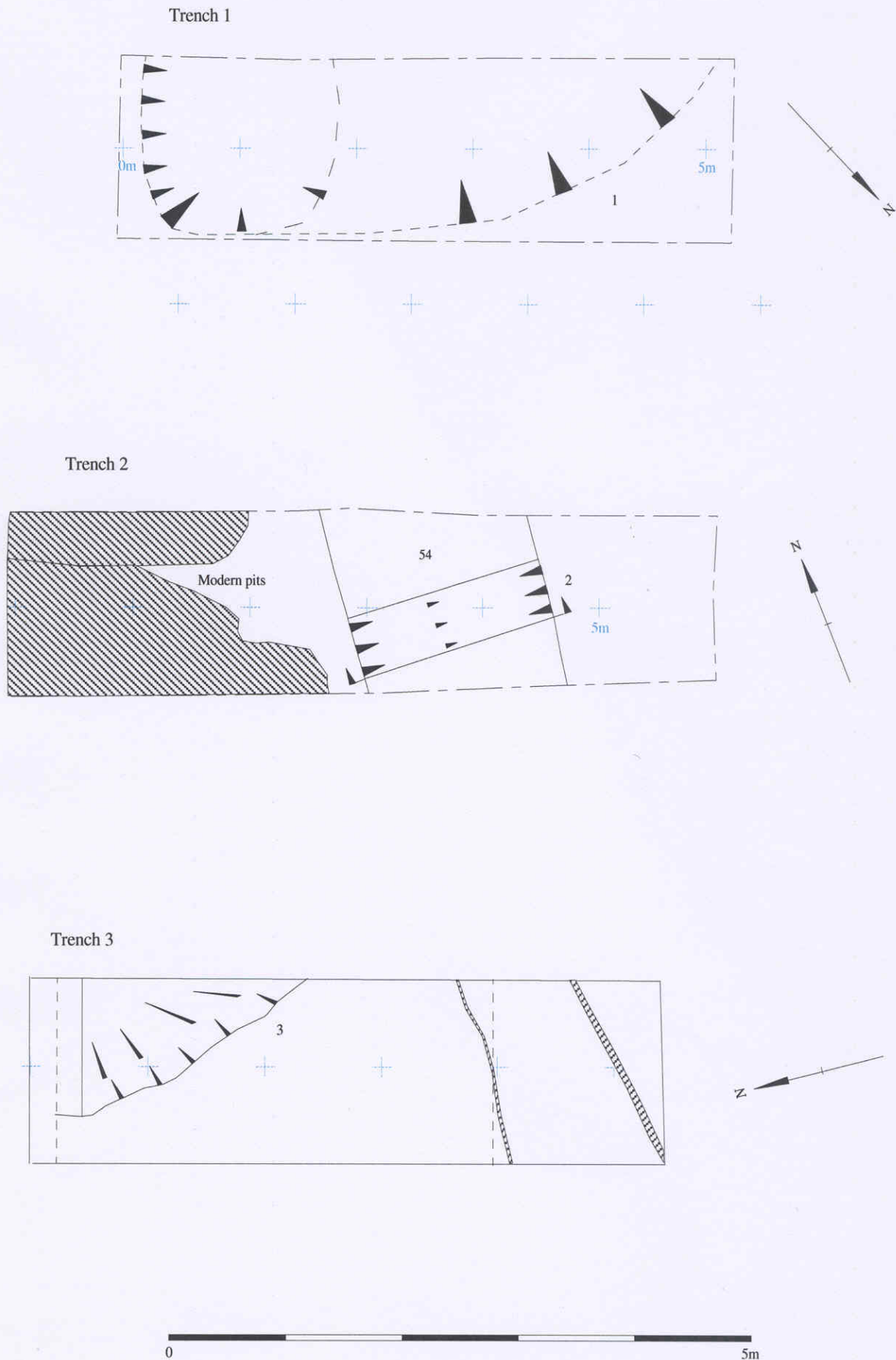


Figure 4. Detail of trenches.

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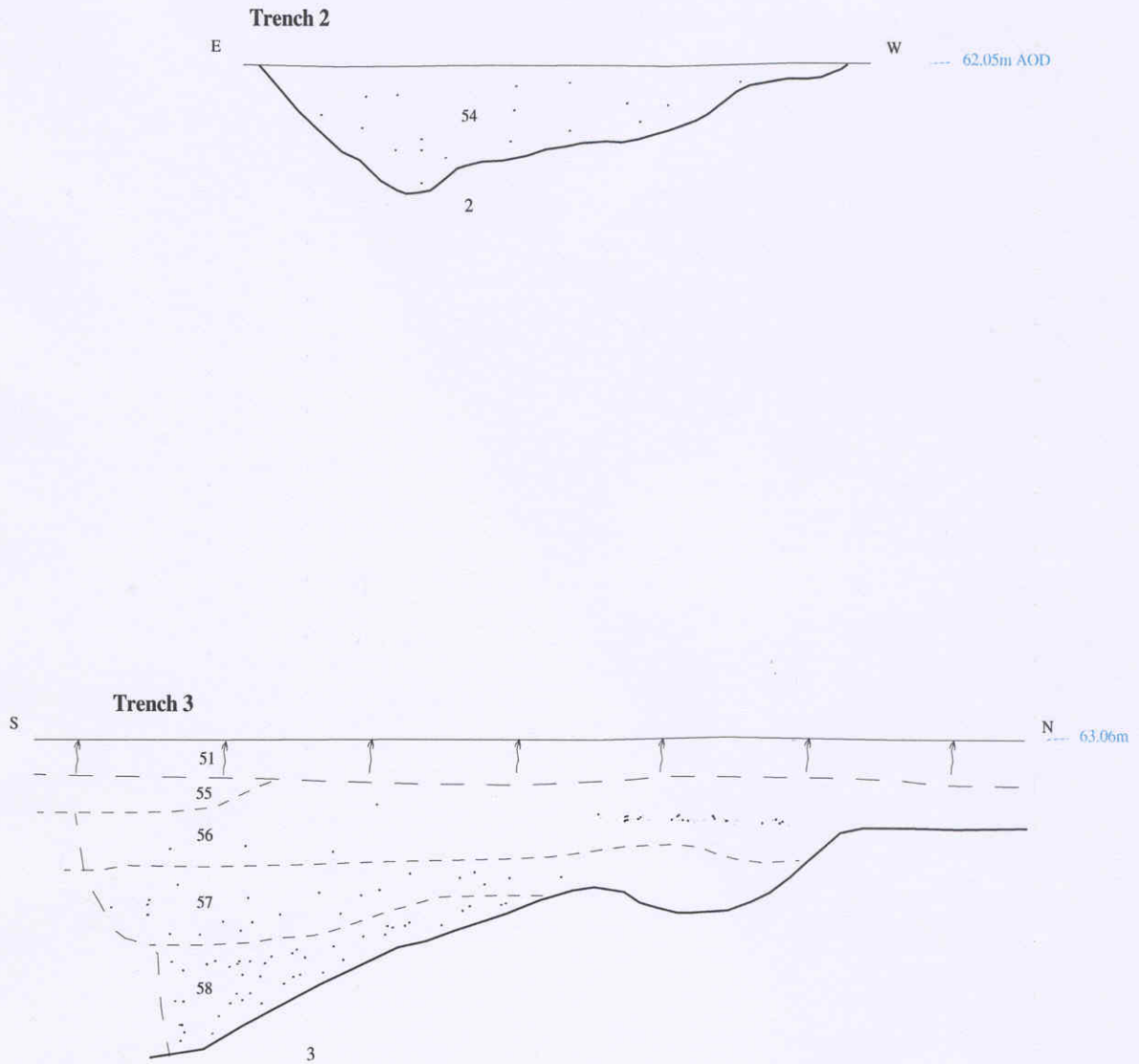


Figure 5. Sections.



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking north. Scales: 2m



Plate 2. Trench 3, looking west. Scales: 2m and 1m



Plate 3. Trench 2, looking south-west. Scales 2m and 1m



Plate 4. Trench 2 Ditch 2, looking south. Scales 1m and 0.4m