

# **Beenhams, Railway Lane Littlemore, Oxford**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Vanderbilt Homes Ltd**

by James Lewis and James McNicoll-Norbury  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BLO 07/83

**March 2009**

## Summary

**Site name:** Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford

**Grid reference:** SP 5352 0265; SP 5350 0269

**Site activity:** Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 19th-20th March 2009

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** James Lewis

**Site code:** BLO 07/83

**Area of site:** 2930 sq m and 375 sq m

**Summary of results:** Several cut features were recorded including ditches, small pits and postholes, along with a modest collection of pottery of Roman, medieval and early post-medieval date were recorded. A small number of the cut features are tentatively dated to the medieval period.

**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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# Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford An Archaeological Evaluation

by James Lewis and James McNicoll-Norbury

**Report 07/83**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford (SP 5352 0265) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. Geoff Murrain of Vanderbilt Homes, 30 High Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, OX20 1TG.

Planning permission has been gained from Oxford City Council to construct new housing (App no 06/00387/FUL) subject to a condition relating to archaeology (18) stating that no development shall proceed until the developer has carried out an archaeological evaluation of the site and secured the implementation of a scheme of mitigation of any significant archaeological impact, which may be achieved by redesign, or by archaeological recording action in accordance with a supplementary written scheme of investigation.

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 David Radford, the Oxford City Council Archaeologist, who also visited the site to monitor the evaluation. The fieldwork was undertaken by James Lewis and James McNicoll-Norbury between the 19th and 20th March 2009 and the site code is BLO 07/83. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site consists of two parcels of land, one centred at SP 5352 0265 and the other at SP 5350 0269, either side of Railway Lane, which is situated off Sandford Lane in the area of Littlemore in south-west Oxford (Fig. 1). Littlemore is located immediately to the south of the Oxford ring road (A4142). To the north and north-east, the site is bordered by housing and to the south-east by Sandford Road. Bordering the south-west of the site is a disused railway. The Thames flows within 700m to the west of the site, and Littlemore Brook is a similar distance to the south. The underlying geology is described as Beckley Sands (BGS 1993), a sand and calcareous sandstone mix which was observed in all of the trenches. The site was previously occupied by garages, houses and greenhouses and lies at an elevation of 72m above Ordnance Datum.

## **Archaeological background**

The site is thought to be located within or on the fringe of the late Saxon and medieval core of Littlemore village. Archaeological work in the area has uncovered evidence for activity from several periods. An evaluation carried out at Sandford Road just to the south of the Church of St Mary and St Nicholas revealed a range of deposits of medieval date (Ford 1995). Of wider significance however, is the evidence for Roman activity which comprised pottery production remains such as kilns. The areas to the south and south-east of Oxford City are notable for the large numbers of kiln sites whose products were traded widely across southern England in Roman times (Young 1977).

## **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 aims of the project are:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period were present;
- to determine if any Roman pottery production areas were present on the site;
- to determine if any late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval deposits were present; and
- to determine if boundaries and structures present on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps (Fig. 3) have earlier (late/ early post-medieval?) origins.

Ten trenches between 10 and 15m in length were to be excavated, targeted at the proposed building footprints, with a contingency for an additional 20m if required to clarify initial findings. The trenches were to be dug using a 360<sup>0</sup> machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. All features found were investigated by hand and the spoil heaps were checked with a metal detector for finds.

## **Results**

The ten trenches were dug on site ranging between 10 and 20m in length and between 0.24 and 1.08m in depth. All trenches were 1.8m wide. Two trenches (1, 10) were positioned in the northern part of the site and the rest in the south. Due to the presence of buildings and spoil heaps the layout of several of the trenches was altered from that initially proposed. This was done with the agreement of Mr Radford. In addition Trench 8 was extended to

20m because the alignment and length of Trench 9 was changed due to the presence of a building (Fig. 4). All features found were excavated by hand and recorded. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

#### Trench 1

Trench 1 was aligned NW–SE and measured 10.0m long and 0.58m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.27m of topsoil above 0.28m of subsoil which in turn overlay the natural geology, a yellow brown sand. A single pit (5) was located at the southern end of the trench (Fig. 5) which was 1.5m in length, 1.24m wide and was 0.25m deep (Fig. 7). The feature contained a single brown sandy fill (55) from which four sherds of 18th-century pottery and three iron objects were recovered.

#### Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned east-west and measured 15.2m long and 0.61m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.29m of topsoil above 0.31m of subsoil which in turn overlay the natural geology. No archaeological deposits were identified in this trench.

#### Trench 3 (Fig. 5)

Trench 3 was aligned NNE–SSW and measured 15.0m long and was 0.59m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.26m of topsoil above 0.30m of subsoil which in turn overlay the natural geology. Two features were identified in this trench; a posthole (3) which measured 0.30m in diameter and was 0.27m deep and a circular pit (4) 0.65m in diameter and 0.17m deep (Fig. 7; Pl. 3). Single sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from each feature, both of which dated from the 12th to 13th centuries.

#### Trench 4 (Fig. 5; Pl. 1)

Trench 4 was aligned northwest-southeast and measured 15.1m long, and was 0.58m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.15m of made ground above 0.10m of topsoil under which was 0.31m of subsoil and this in turn overlay the natural geology.

Three, possibly four ditches were recorded in Trench 4 (6, 7, 10 and 11). Two of these were excavated (6 and 7). Ditch 6 was orientated north-south and was 1.35m wide and was 0.25m deep (Fig. 7; Pl. 4). Its dark brown sandy fill (56) contained a sherd of 18th-century pottery. Ditch 7 was aligned NE–SW and was 1.4m wide and was 1.0m deep with vertical sides. The ditch contained two fills (Fig. 7); the top fill (57) was a brown sand from which 2 medieval sherds and one early post-medieval sherd were recovered. This overlay a dark brown

sand (58) from which a sherd of Roman pottery was recovered along with a few fragments of animal bone. This ditch is roughly on the line of a boundary shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1899 (Fig. 3).

#### Trench 5 (Fig. 5)

Trench 5 was aligned NE - SW and measured 15.0m long and 1.0m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.25m of modern made ground (demolition debris) above 0.2m of topsoil above 0.44m of subsoil which in turn overlay the natural geology. Two features were recorded in this trench; Feature 1 was a possible drain, 1.20m wide, and was 0.60m deep. It contained two fills (Fig. 7); a dark brown top fill (50) which overlay a black sandy basal fill (51) with no finds. Pit 2 contained modern glass.

#### Trench 6

Trench 6 was aligned north-south and measured 15.4m long, and was 1.08m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.15m of modern made ground above 0.25m of topsoil above 0.45m of subsoil which in turn overlay the natural geology. No archaeological deposits were recorded.

#### Trench 7

Trench 7 was aligned NW-SE and measured 15.2m long and was 0.91m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.24m of modern made ground above 0.17m of topsoil which overlay 0.33m of subsoil which overlay the natural geology. No archaeological deposits were recorded.

#### Trench 8

Trench 8 was aligned NNW-SSE and measured 20.2m long. The depth varied between 0.30m at the south end and 0.70m at the north end. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.25m of topsoil which overlay natural geology at the southern end, while 0.30m of topsoil was above 0.32m of subsoil which overlay natural geology at the north end. No archaeological deposits were recorded.

#### Trench 9 (Fig. 6; Pl. 2)

Trench 9 was aligned north-south and measured 10.3m long, and was 0.39m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.32m of topsoil which overlay the natural geology. A ditch/pit (9) and a re-cut (8) were recorded. Feature 9 was probably orientated NE-SW and measured at least 1.8m east-west, 1.8m north-south and was 0.65m deep (Fig. 7). Two fills were identified in this feature; the top fill (60) was yellow brown sand which contained a single residual sherd of Roman pottery. This overlay the lower fill which was a dark brown sand (61) which contained

three sherds of medieval pottery. No finds were recovered from the re-cut (8, 59) along the northern side of feature 9.

#### Trench 10

Trench 10 was aligned NE–SW and measured 10.2m long and was 0.24m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m topsoil over the natural geology. No archaeological deposits were recorded.

### **Finds**

#### *Pottery by Jane Timby*

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 15 sherds of pottery, weighing 305 g, dating to the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods. Pottery was recovered from six cuts, a total seven deposits. The Roman and medieval sherds are in quite abraded condition with moderately small sherds; the post-medieval sherds are larger. For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to assess its likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. The resulting data are summarized in Appendix 3.

#### Roman

Two Roman sherds were recovered. A single sherd of Central Gaulish samian was recovered from cut 9 (60). The piece is from a bowl, Dragendorff form 38. The outer surface appears to have originally had a post-firing *sgraffito* which has been partially obliterated. The sherd probably dates from the mid-late 2nd century. A second rim sherd of 3rd-century Oxfordshire whiteware *mortaria* (probably Young (1977) form M22) came from cut 7 (58).

#### Medieval

Seven sherds of medieval date were recovered from three features: 3, 4 and 7. The single sherd from post hole 3 is residual. The fabrics include a piece of sandy grey Oxfordshire ware (Mellor 1994, OXY); a rim from a simple everted rim jar in shelly ware, (OXB), a tradition dating from the late Saxon period, and five sherds of probable Kennet Valley ware: sandy wares with sparse flint and/or limestone and all from unglazed jars. Although sparse in number the sherds suggest activity from at least the 11th century, perhaps earlier, to the 12th/13th century.

#### Post-medieval

Six sherds of post-medieval date were recovered from features 5, 6 and 7. The largest piece, a base from a streaky iron-glazed buff ware from pit 5, has broken into five fragments. Amongst the other five pieces are one

sherd of imported German salt-glazed stoneware, two sherds of glazed red earthenware and two unglazed earthenware sherds.

### *Animal bone* by Ceri Falys

Two fragments of animal bone were recovered from ditch 7 (58), weighing a total of 33g. Although the overall preservation of the remains was good, the pieces present were non-descript. Identification of each fragment to skeletal element and/or species of origin was not possible. No further information could be derived from these animal remains.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation has shown that possible deposits of archaeological interest have survived on parts of the site but the archaeological potential of these deposits has to be qualified. The features include pits, post-holes and ditches recorded in five trenches (1, 3, 4, 5 and 9). Pottery recovered is of Roman, medieval and post-medieval dates.

A small pit in Trench 1 is of late post-medieval date. This is the only cut feature located in the portion of the site north of Railway Lane. On the basis of the results of this evaluation exercise, this area of the site can be considered to have no archaeological potential.

The three trenches (5-7) in the south-east portion of the site revealed only a few modern features and again this area can be considered to have no archaeological potential.

One boundary present on the 19th century OS map (Fig. 3) seems to have been investigated by Trench 4. Ditch 6, which contained late post-medieval pottery in its fill seems to be on the wrong alignment, as are uninvestigated features 10 and 11. However, ditch 7 is on the same alignment as the mapped boundary, and despite the recovery of Roman, medieval and early post-medieval pottery from its fill, seems likely to have been open into the early years of the 20th century. These finds may derive from earlier activity on the site, or could have been dumped amongst imported backfill material.

A small pit and posthole in Trench 3 are possibly of medieval date, though dating is provided only by single sherds of pottery. Ditch 9 in Trench 9, which produced 3 sherds of medieval and one sherd of residual Roman pottery, also might be of medieval date.

In conclusion, some parts of the site, along the south side of Railway Lane, appear to have modest archaeological potential relating to the medieval period.



## References

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- Ford, B, 1995, 'Sandford Road, Littlemore, Oxford, an archaeological evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 95/43, Oxford
- Mellor, M, 1994, 'Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, **59**, 17–217
- Young, C J, 1977, *The Roman Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region*, BAR Brit Ser **43**, Oxford

## APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end

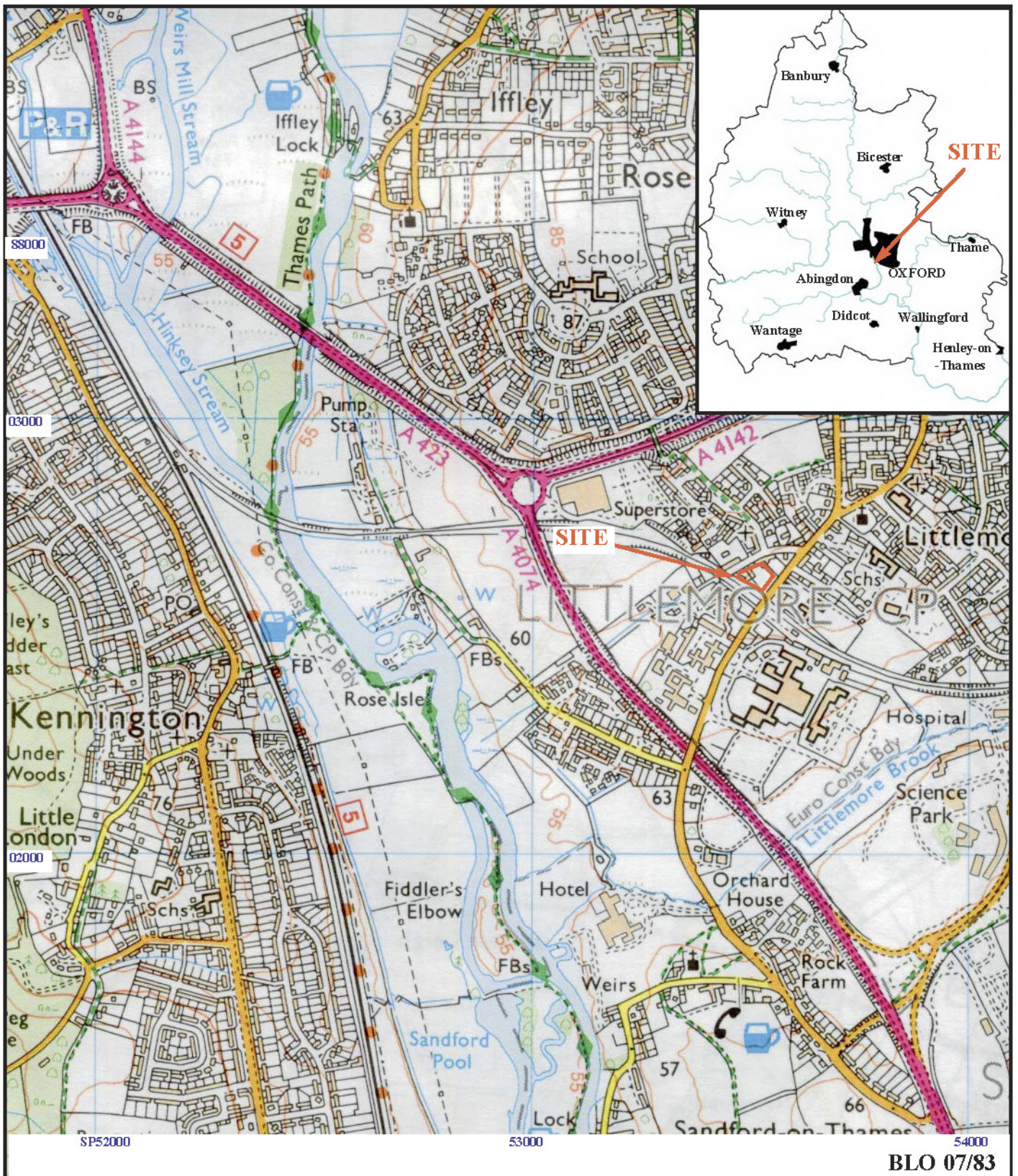
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	10.0	1.8	0.58	0-0.27m Topsoil; 0.27-0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ yellowish brown sands natural geology. Pit 5
2	15.2	1.8	0.61	0-0.29m Topsoil; 0.29-0.60m subsoil; 0.60m+ natural geology.
3	15.0	1.8	0.59	0-0.26m Topsoil; 0.26-0.56m subsoil; 0.56m+ natural geology. Posthole 3, pit 4. <b>[Plate 3]</b>
4	15.1	1.8	0.58	0-0.15m Made ground; 0.15-0.25m dark brown grey silty clay layer; 0.25-0.56m subsoil; 0.56m+ natural geology. Ditches 6, 7, 10 and 11. <b>[Plates 1 and 4]</b>
5	15.0	1.8	1.00	0-0.25m made ground; 0.25-0.45m dark brown grey silty clay layer; 0.45-0.89m subsoil; 0.89m+ natural geology. Ditch 1, pit 2.
6	15.4	1.8	1.08	0-0.15m made ground; 0.15-0.40m dark brown grey silty clay; 0.40-0.85m subsoil; 0.85m+ natural geology.
7	15.2	1.8	0.91	0-0.24m made ground; 0.24-0.41m dark brown grey silty clay layer; 0.41-0.74m subsoil; 0.74m+ natural geology.
8	20.2	1.8	0.70	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.62m subsoil; 0.62m+ natural geology.
9	10.3	1.8	0.39	0-0.32 topsoil; 0.32m+ natural geology. Ditches 8, 9. <b>[Plate 2]</b>
10	10.2	1.8	0.24	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20m+ natural geology.

**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	5	55	Pit	Late post-medieval	Glass
3	3	53	Posthole	Medieval 12th-13th century	Pottery
3	4	54	Pit	Medieval 12th-13th century	Pottery
4	6	56	Ditch	Late post-medieval C18th	Pottery
4	7	57, 58	Ditch	Post-medieval	Pottery, Cartographic
5	1	50, 51	Drain	Modern	
5	2	52	Pit	Modern	Glass object
9	8	59	Ditch (recut)	Medieval or later	Stratigraphic
9	9	60, 61	Ditch	Medieval 11th-12th century	Pottery
4	10	-	Ditch?	-	-
4	11	-	Ditch or gully?	-	-

**APPENDIX 3: Pottery**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Medieval</i>	<i>Post-medieval</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
3	53		1		1	5	
4	54		1		1	7	
9	61		3		3	19	
9	60	1			1	7	
5	55			4	4	191	5=1 fresh breaks
6	56			1	1	11	
7	57		2	1	3	21	
7	58	1				46	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>261</b>	



**Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore,  
Oxford, 2009  
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 1. Location of site within Littlemore, Oxford and Oxfordshire.

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THAMES VALLEY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
SERVICES



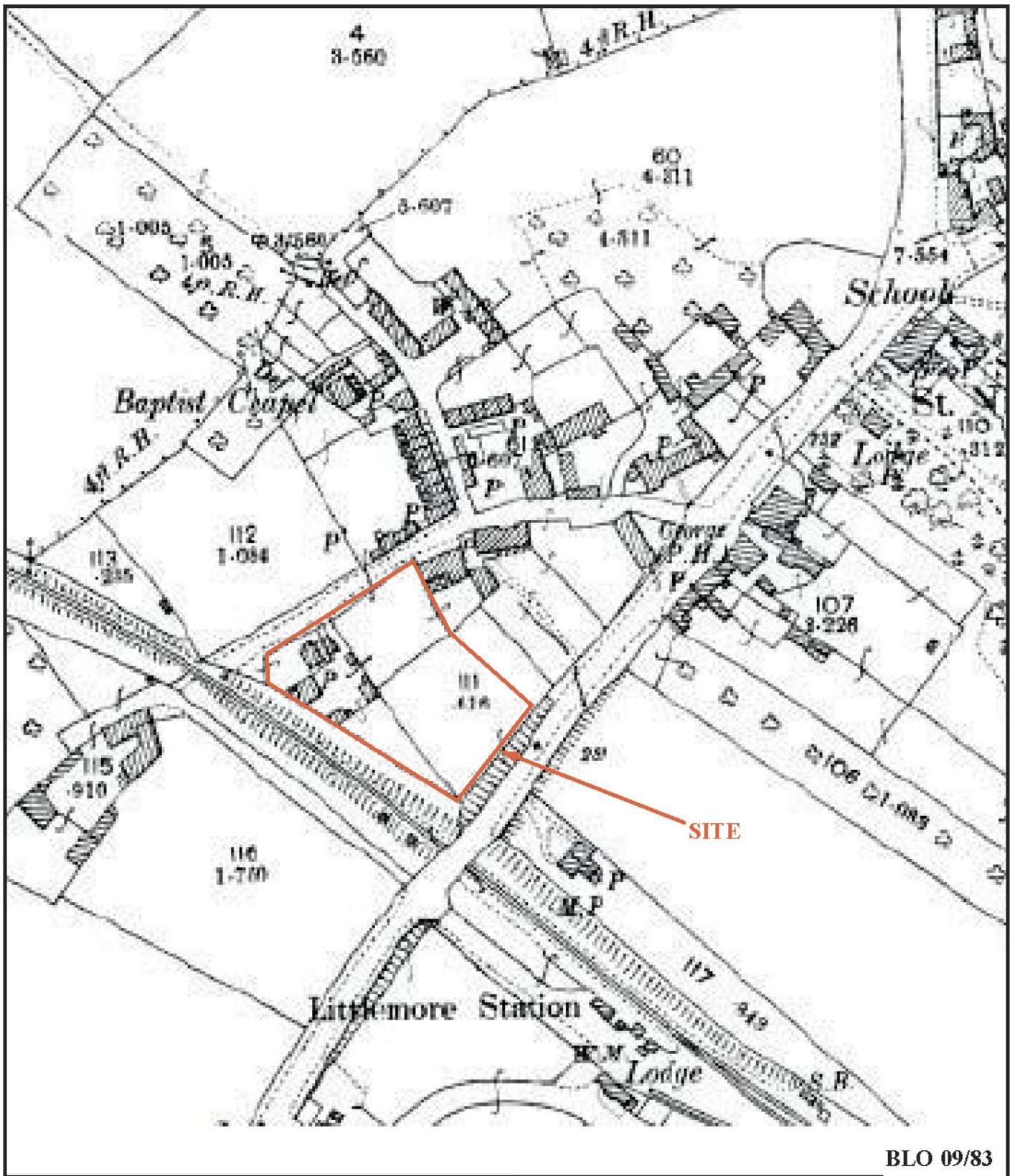
BLO 07/83

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Figure 2. Location of site off Railway Lane.

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Figure 3. Ordnance Survey map, 1899/1900.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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# Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford, 2009



Figure 4. Location of trenches.



# Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford, 2009

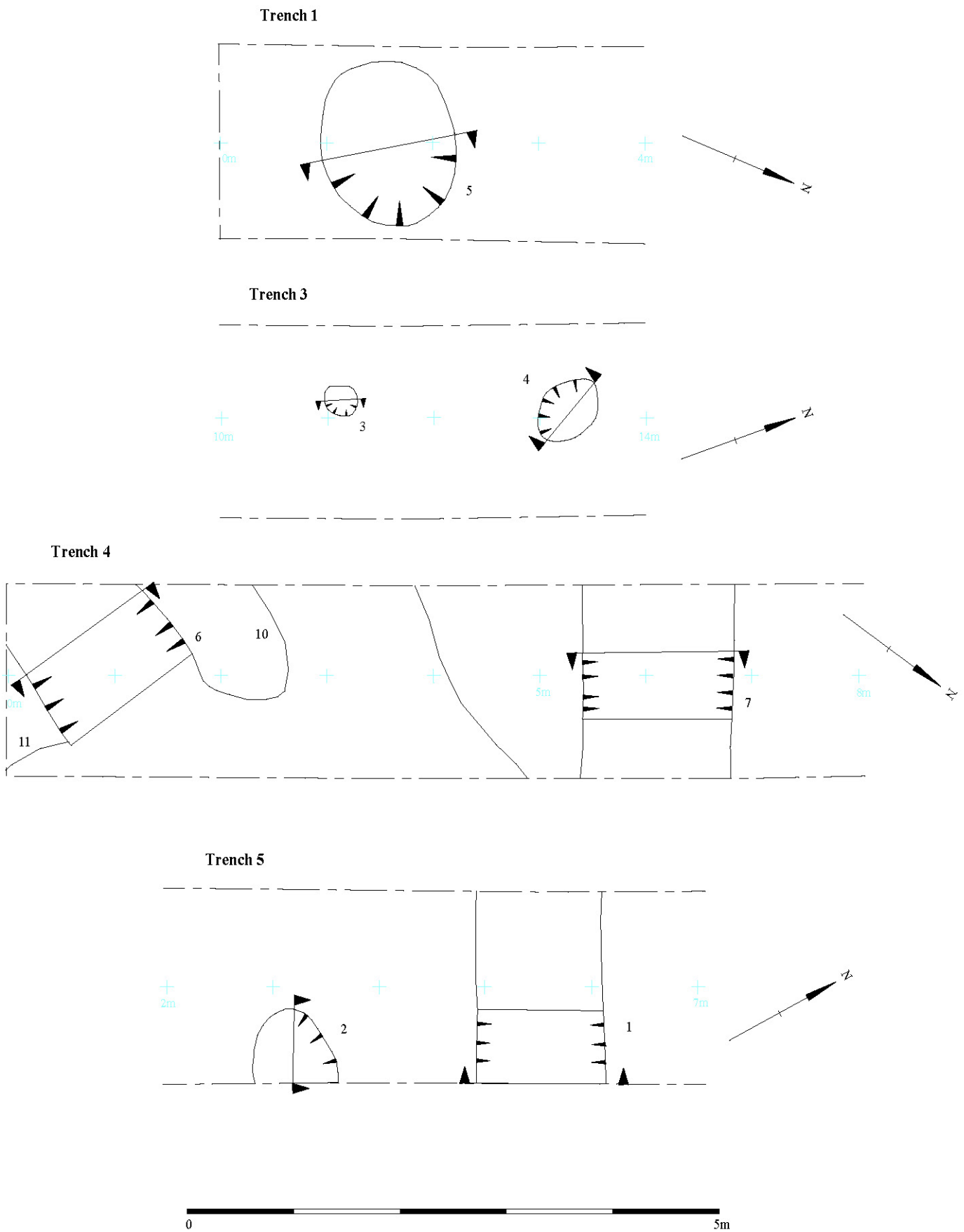


Figure 5. Detail of trenches.

# Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford, 2009

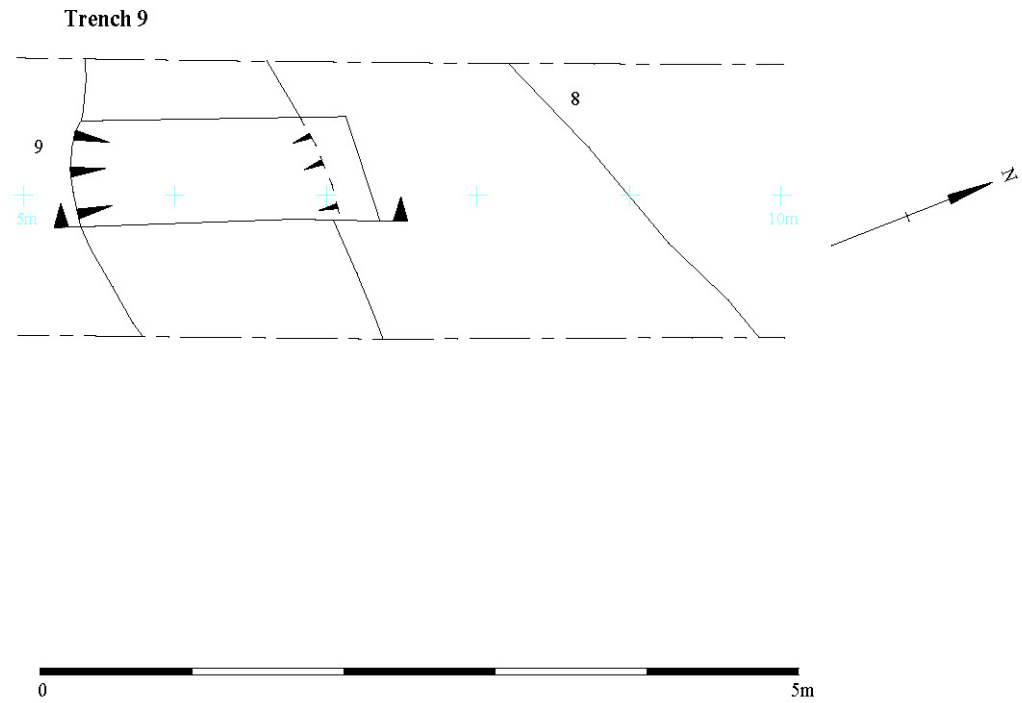


Figure 6. Detail of Trench 9.

# Beenhams, Railway Lane, Littlemore, Oxford, 2009

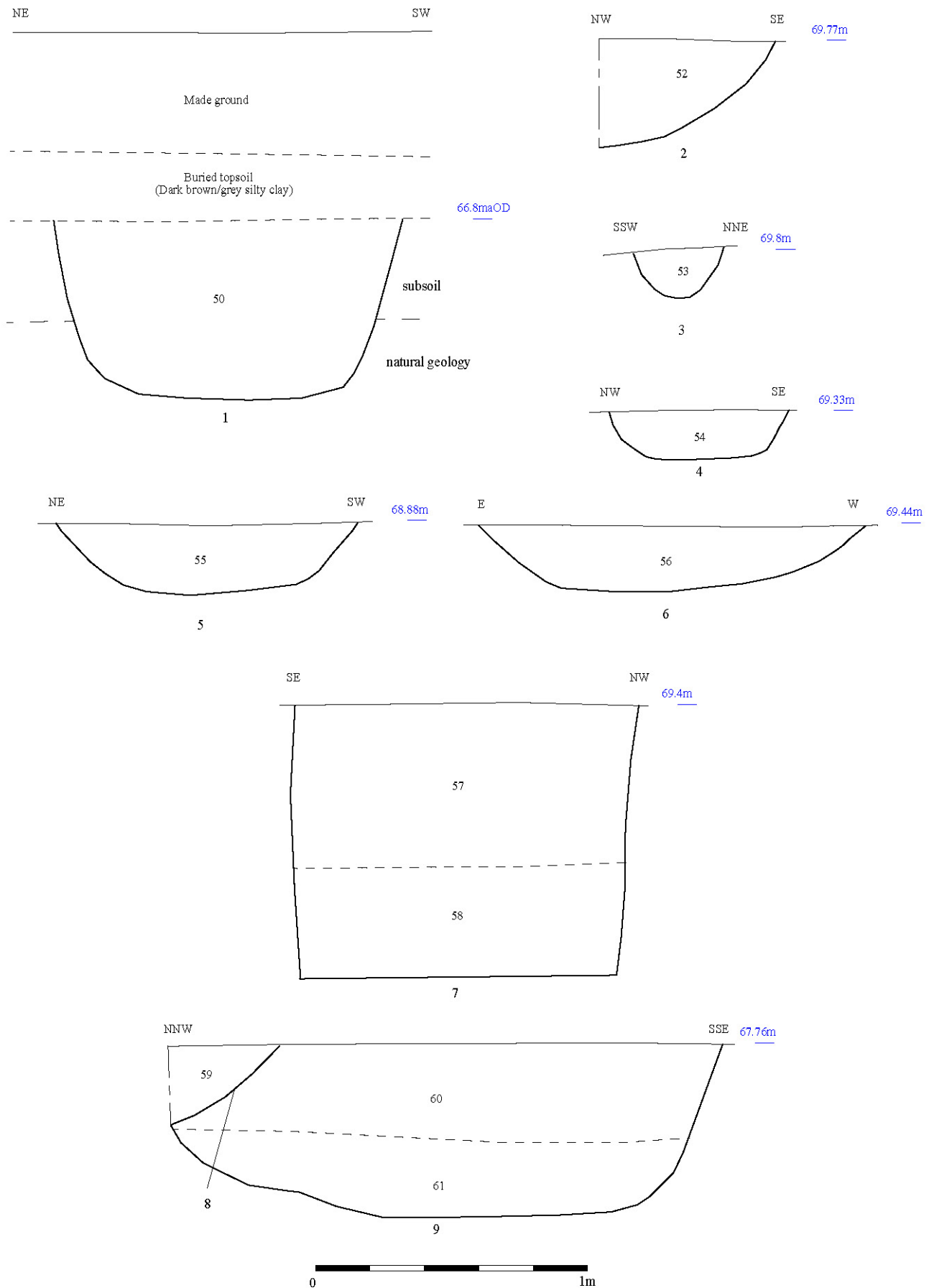


Figure 7. Sections.



Plate 1. Trench 4, looking north west, scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 9, looking north-north east, scales: 0.4m, 1m and 2m.



Plate 3. Trench 3, pit 4, looking north-east, Scales: 0.4m and 0.1m



Plate 4. Trench 4, Ditch 6, looking south, Scales: 1m and 0.4m