

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT THE
BERKSHIRE MASONIC CENTRE, MILL LANE,
SINDLESHAM, BERKSHIRE**

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT MILL LANE, SINDLESHAM, BERKSHIRE (NGR 7734 6982)

1.0 Introduction

Between 2nd and 4th August 2006 the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Mill Lane, Sindlesham on the site of a proposed residential redevelopment (fig 1). The programme of archaeological evaluation trial trenching was recommended by Berkshire Archaeology, on behalf of Wokingham District Council, in order to assess the potential for the survival of archaeological remains and to enable their preservation by record. The purpose of the archaeological evaluation is to inform Berkshire Archaeology as to the need for further mitigation in respect of the planning application relating to the present development site.

Berkshire Archaeology identified the site as having archaeological potential due to the number of sites noted on the Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record for this area. The general area has had little previous archaeological work undertaken, therefore the nature of any archaeological remains that may survive is unknown. Indications from the few archaeological interventions that have been undertaken in the vicinity suggest the potential survival of prehistoric or medieval remains (Thomason 2004, 1). SCAU were commissioned to undertake the archaeological evaluation by Antler Homes.

1.1 Site Location And Description

The development site at Mill Lane, Sindlesham is c0.336ha and is located on land adjacent to, and was formerly part of, the Berkshire Masonic Centre. The site is situated over valley gravel on the edge of the Loddon Valley terrace, with the River Loddon situated c500m to the north-west. The surface make-up of the site is a combination of tarmac, grass and overgrown scrub. The Ordnance Survey historical map record from 1881 to the present day indicates that the development site has remained as open grass and woodland since the late 19th century; any use of the site prior to 1881 is unknown.

1.2 Methodology

A total of 87m of trial trenching was excavated in four trial trenches using a JCB backhoe excavator with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket (fig 2). Trenches 1 and 2 were located within the area of tarmac car park, therefore the tarmac surface was removed using a toothed bucket prior to their continued excavation using the toothless ditching bucket. The agreed layout

of the trial trenching was designed to specifically sample the proposed footprints of the new buildings, access and external landscaped areas. The actual locations of the trial trenches varied slightly from their proposed locations in order to avoid existing obstacles such as lamp posts, and to minimise the impact of the trenching in the tarmac area due to its continuing use as a car park. The trenches were 20-24m in length and 1.55m wide.

The machining of the trenches was carefully watched for the occurrence of any features of archaeological interest, and the spoil heaps were scanned for any artefacts.

2. Results

A total of six features of archaeological interest, two pits and four ditches, were identified within trenches 1 and 2; nothing of archaeological interest was revealed within trenches 3 and 4. The features were excavated by hand in order to determine their date, character and extent. The stratigraphy revealed within the four trial trenches varied slightly across the site and is detailed below.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was excavated to a depth of c80cm and revealed a stratigraphy of 5cm tarmac, over 35cm rubble, over 40cm mid-grey/brown gravelly soil over the natural orange sandy gravel (fig 2). A possible piece of struck flint and a sherd of borderware pottery of 16th-18th century date were recovered from the spoil heap.

One feature of archaeological interest, ditch 111, was revealed running north-west to south-east across the trench (fig3). The ditch was sampled by the excavation of two segments (contexts 112 and 113) which revealed a relatively flat-bottomed feature with gently sloping sides and five layers of fill (112A-E). Layer 112E a yellowy-orange gravelly sand, over 112A a grey-brown gravelly sand with infrequent gravel, over 112B a grey gravelly sand, over 112C a light-grey sand with orange-brown streaks, over basal layer 112D a grey-brown gravelly sand. The western side of ditch segment 112 was stepped, suggesting the presence of a possible narrow gully (cut number 109, segment 110) contemporary with and running parallel to ditch 111 (or perhaps all part of the same ditch). The finds recovered from the ditch fill included several fragments of redware pottery, numerous fragments of brick and tile and 17th/18th century glass fragments. The finds provide a probable 18th century date for ditch 111.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was excavated to a depth of c90cm and revealed a slightly varied stratigraphy along its

length (fig 2). The first 5m of the eastern end of trench 2 was deeply disturbed by modern construction debris. On the western side of this the stratigraphy was 5cm tarmac over 15cm modern rubble, over 15cm dark grey-black soil containing late 19th century domestic debris (context 116), over a 45cm mixed layer of dark grey-brown soil with an abundance of yellow mortar fragments and crushed brick, overlying the natural orange sand and gravel. The western half of the trench was cut through the grass adjacent to the car park and revealed a slightly different stratigraphy: 10-15cm topsoil over 65cm dark grey-brown loamy soil with late 19th century domestic debris over natural orange sand and gravel.

A total of five features of archaeological interest were revealed within trench 2 (fig 3): three ditches (contexts 102, 104 and 106) and two pits (contexts 101 and 108).

Ditch 102

Ditch 102 ran NW-SE across trench 2 and was sampled by the excavation of segment 103 which revealed it to be a relatively shallow feature with a single fill of light/mid-grey silty loam (fig 3). The few finds recovered from the ditch fill included a residual sherd of late medieval Surrey whiteware of late 14th/15th century date, a sherd of redware pottery of 16th century or later date, and a handful of brick and tile fragments. The mixture of finds provides a post-medieval (16th century or later) date for the infilling of the ditch.

Ditch 104

Ditch 104, an irregular feature lying on the west side of ditch 106, was sampled by the excavation of segment 105 (fig 3). The ditch was relatively shallow and flat-bottomed with a single fill of mid grey-brown silty loam with gravel inclusions. Finds recovered from segment 105 included several fragments of brick and tile, but no pottery. Several very large irregular pieces of natural flint, one of which is c30cm long and c20cm wide, showing signs of occasional rough knapping of their cortex, were recovered from the ditch fill: their function is unknown. The recovered finds suggest a late post-medieval date for the infilling of ditch 104 which may be associated with adjacent ditch 106 (see below).

Ditch 106

Ditch 106 ran NW-SE across the western end of trench 2 on the eastern side of ditch 104, and was sampled by the excavation of segment 107 (figs 2 and 3). The ditch was revealed to have a regular profile with a flat base, with a brick culvert running along the base of the ditch. The brick culvert was constructed of two rows of unmortared bricks of 18th century date, surviving to four

courses in height either side of a 20cm wide channel draining directly into the underlying natural gravelly sand (figs 4 and 5). Three layers of fill (107A, B and C) were identified within segment 107: 107A a grey sandy loam, 107B a layer of mid-brown silty sand in the base of the channel, and 107C a mid-grey/brown sandy loam with brick and tile fragments. The ditch was sealed by layer 116, a mid-brown sandy loam which also overlay adjacent ditch 104 (segment 105). Finds recovered from the fill of ditch segment 107 included several fragments of redware pottery including sherds of Metropolitan Ware of c18th century date, numerous fragments of brick and tile and two fragments of a glass sack bottle. All of the finds, including the brick culvert, provide an 18th century date for ditch 106. A possible struck flint was also recovered from the fill of ditch 107.

Pit 101

Pit 101 lay on the eastern side of ditch 102, and excavation revealed it to be a circular feature with a bowl-shaped profile and single fill of mid-grey silty loam (fig 3). Finds recovered from pit 101 included a handful of tile fragments, a corroded Fe nail and a lump of burnt flint. The finds do not provide a definitive date for the pit, but its close proximity to ditch 102 and similarity of fill suggest a post-medieval date for the pit.

Pit 108

Pit 108 was a small oval feature cutting the western side of ditch 104, with a single fill of mid-grey silty loam. The only finds recovered from the pit were a couple of tile fragments. The fact that pit 108 cut ditch 104 provides a post-medieval date for the feature.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was excavated to a depth of 65-80cm and revealed a stratigraphy of 25cm silty dry topsoil, over 15-20cm of a mixture of crushed brick rubble, sand and gravel, over 25-40cm mid-brown loamy subsoil with occasional brick and tile fragments, over the natural orange brown silty sand with gravel patches. Nothing of archaeological interest was revealed within trench 3.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was excavated to a depth of c70cm and revealed a stratigraphy of 25-40cm dark grey-brown dry silty soil with modern rubble, overlying 20-45cm mid-brown loamy subsoil with modern rubble inclusions, over the natural orangey brown clayey sand. Nothing of archaeological interest was revealed within trench 4. The remnants of a modern concrete base

were revealed at the northern end of the trench.

3. DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

A total of six features were revealed within trenches 1 and 2 during the evaluation at Mill Lane, Sindlesham, all of which appear to be of late post-medieval (perhaps mainly 18th century) date. Ditches 104 and 106 in trench 2 appear to be on the same NW-SE alignment as ditch 111 in trench 1 (fig 2) and may well represent a single ditch feature, although the brick culvert revealed in the bottom of ditch 106 (segment 107) does not appear to continue as far north as trench 1. The brick culvert probably functioned as a drain leading away from the mid-18th century house which forms the main part of the Berkshire Masonic Centre to the south-east of the development area. The other ditches, contexts 104 and 102, may represent additional drainage features as there was evidence for iron panning and iron concretion within the lower sediments within the trenches which adhered to some of the artefacts and natural gravel pebbles suggesting a fluctuating water table in this locality which may have required some remedial action. A couple of pieces of struck flint of possible prehistoric date were recovered as unstratified finds in the spoil of trench 1 and the fill of ditch segment 107 in trench 2. The presence of the very large pieces of flint in ditch 104 (segment 105) casts some doubt upon the authenticity of the struck flint as prehistoric finds, but the possibility remains.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No features of prehistoric or medieval date were identified during the evaluation at Mill Lane, Sindlesham, and the only piece of late medieval pottery was recovered as a residual find in ditch 102 (segment 103). The post-medieval features revealed during the evaluation probably relate to the mid-18th century house (formerly Sindlesham House) that is now part of the Berkshire Masonic Centre complex of buildings. A couple of doubtful pieces of struck flint were also recovered. The 18th century drainage features are of minor interest, but further recording of them would seem to be of little value. In conclusion, it is not recommended that any further archaeological work is required on this development site.

Bibliography

Thomason, D, 2004 *Berkshire Masonic Centre, Mill Lane, Sindlesham: Brief for an archaeological field evaluation*

Context	Trench	Date	DESCRIPTION	Part of
100	all	-	Unstratified surface finds from machining	
101	2	LPM	Pit	
102	2	16th+	Cut number for shallow ditch	
103	3	16th+	Segment of ditch 102	102
104	2	LPM	Cut number for ditch	
105	2	LPM	Segment of ditch 104	104
106	2	18th	Cut number for ditch	
107	2	18th	Segment of ditch 106	106
108	2	18th+	Small oval pit cutting ditch 104	
109	1	18th	Cut number for ditch	
110	1	18th	Segment of ditch 109	109
111	1	18th	Cut number for ditch	
112	1	18th	Segment of ditch 111	111
113	1	18th	Segment of ditch 111	111
114	2	19th	Small circular pit cutting ditch 102	
115	2	19th	Dark grey brown loamy soil with late 19th century debris	
116	2	18th+	Mid brown sandy loam over 107, under 115	

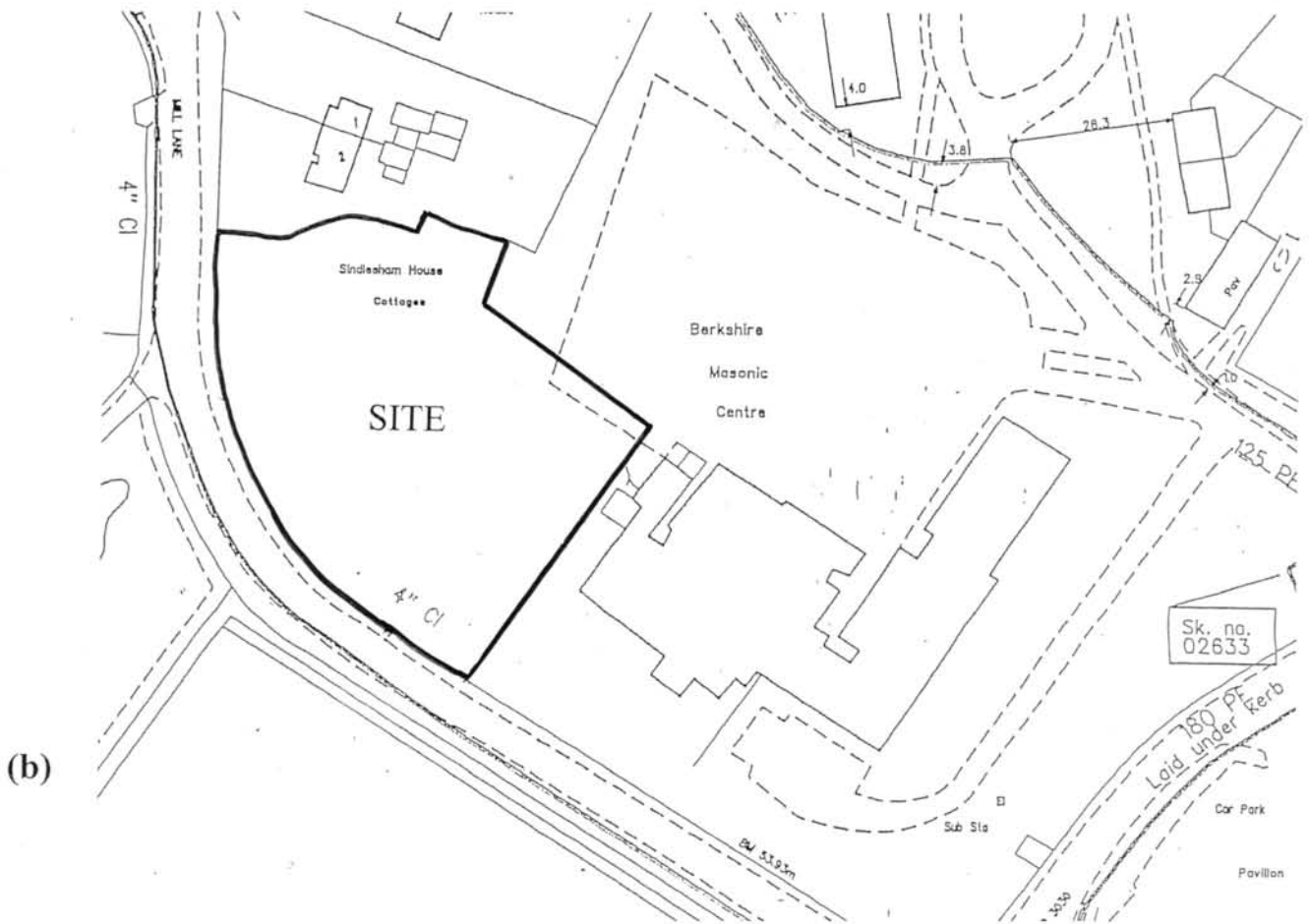
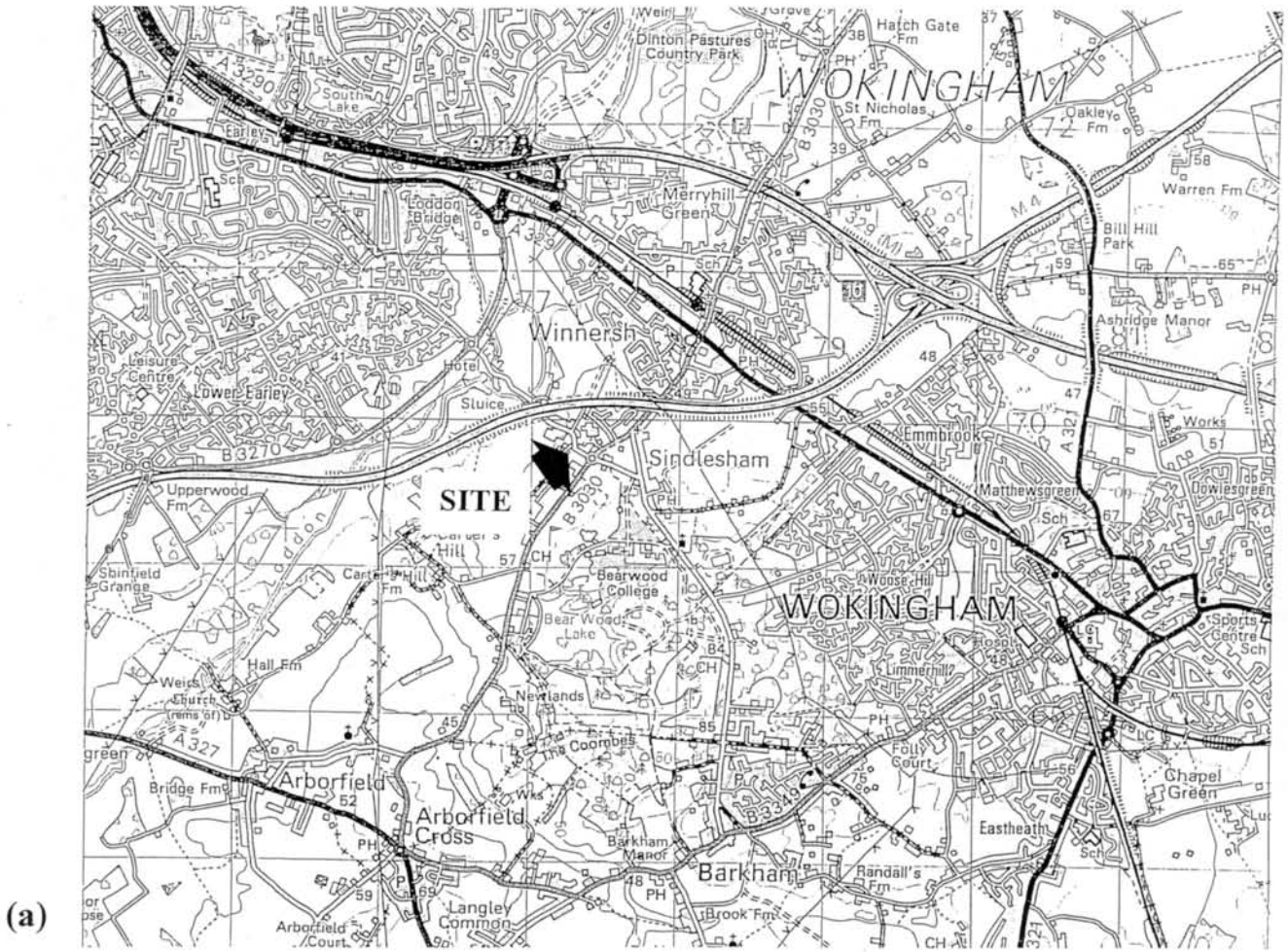


Fig 1 Site location map: (a) Ordnance Survey map at scale 1:10,000 and (b) outline of the development site (at scale 1:1250)

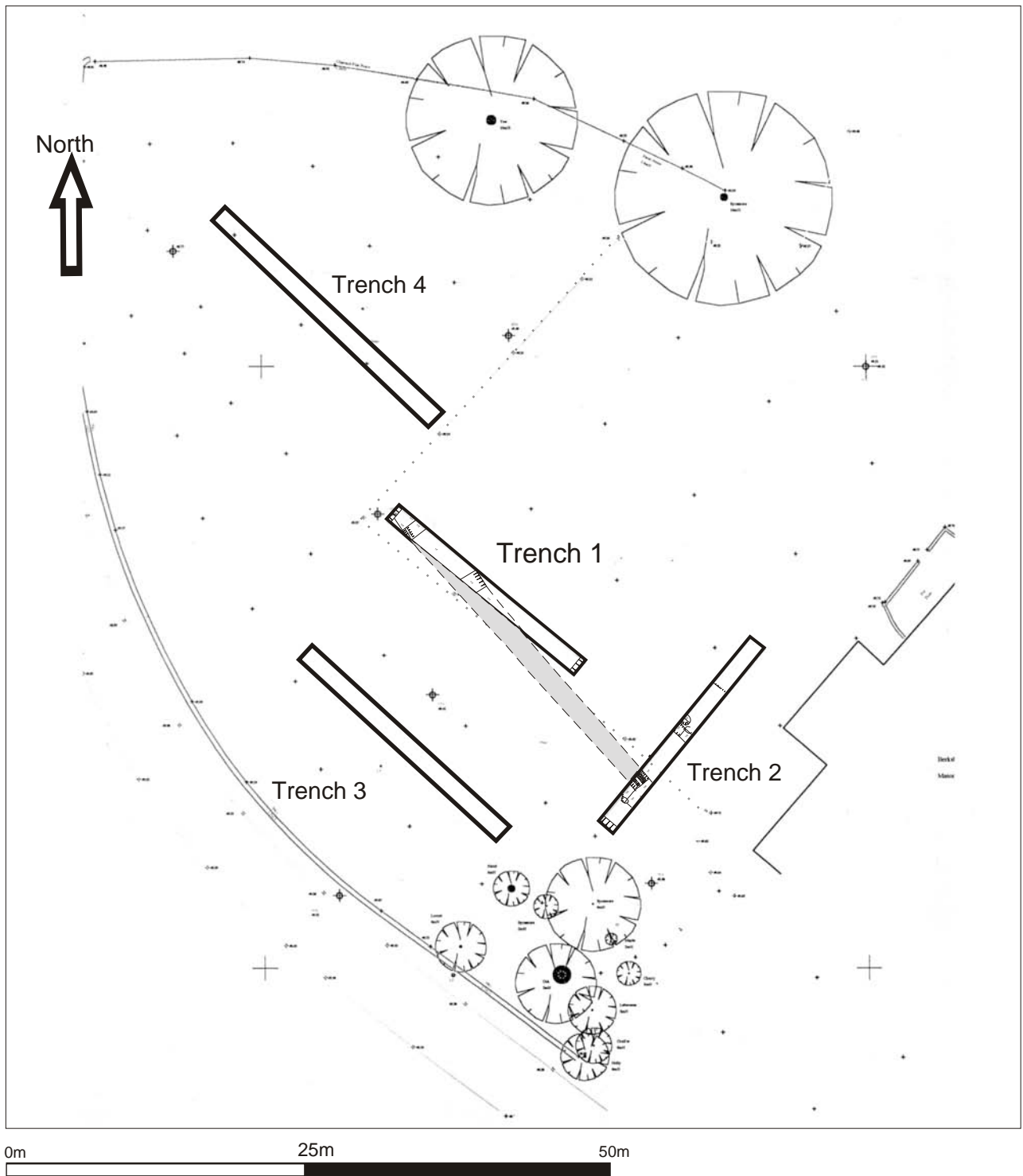


Figure 2 Mill Lane, Sindlesham: Location of archaeological trial trenches

Trench 1

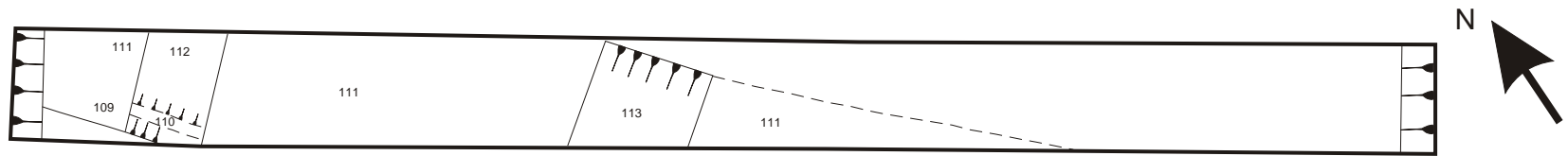
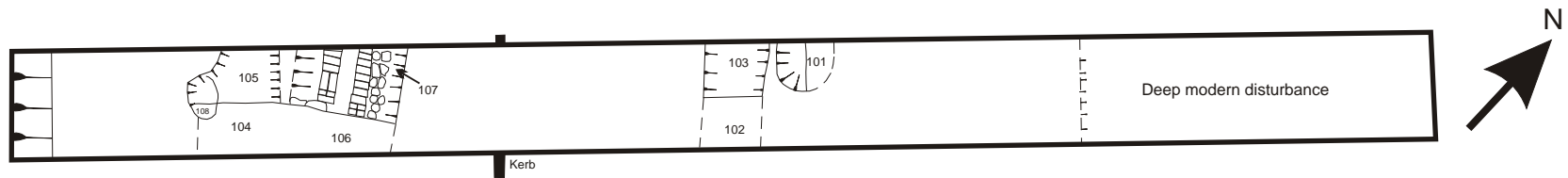


Figure 3 Mill Lane, Sindlesham - Archaeological evaluation: Plan of trenches 1 and 2

Trench 2



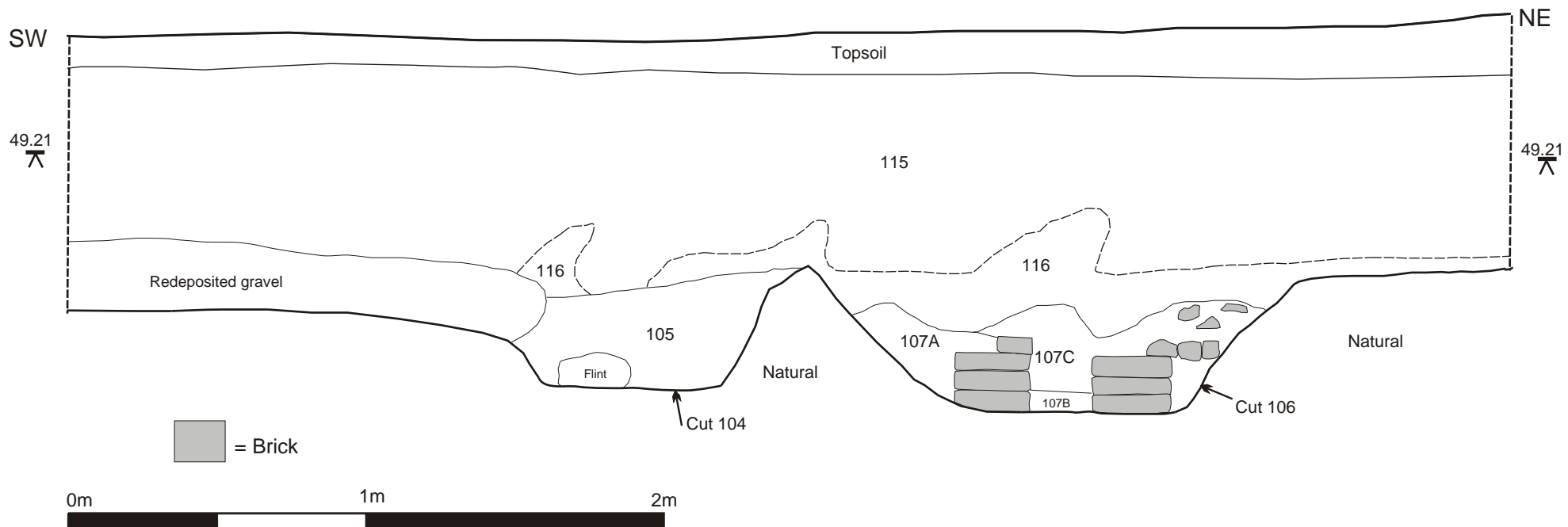


Figure 4 Mill Lane, Sindlesham: Section drawing of features 104 and 106 in trench 2



Fig 5 Mill Lane, Sindlesham: brick culvert in ditch 106 (segment 107)