JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON LAND NORTH OF HOME FARM, MERTON, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR: 458971 219155

On behalf of

Smarter Energy Solutions

DECEMBER 2012

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a pre-determination archaeological evaluation in advance of new planning proposals on land north of Home Farm, Merton, Oxfordshire (centred 458971 219155). Eighteen trenches were excavated to the underlying natural geology or uppermost surface of the archaeology. The trenches were located over areas to be affected by new cable trenching and electricity invertors.

The earliest features were sealed by a layer of alluvial clay seen only in the south-western corner of the field. Although no finds were within the fills of the features it is assumed that these were late prehistoric or early Roman features. Other ditches found along the western side of the site did contain Roman pottery sherds and are considered Roman drainage or boundary ditches associated with a Roman farm close to the town of Alchester. Within Trenches 7 & 18 were features containing Saxon pottery sherds. These may have been part of two buildings. The site was used for arable agriculture from the medieval period onwards as ridge and furrow can be seen across the field on satellite images. More recently there has been modern drainage trenching and removal of previous field boundaries across the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location and Geology (Fig. 1)

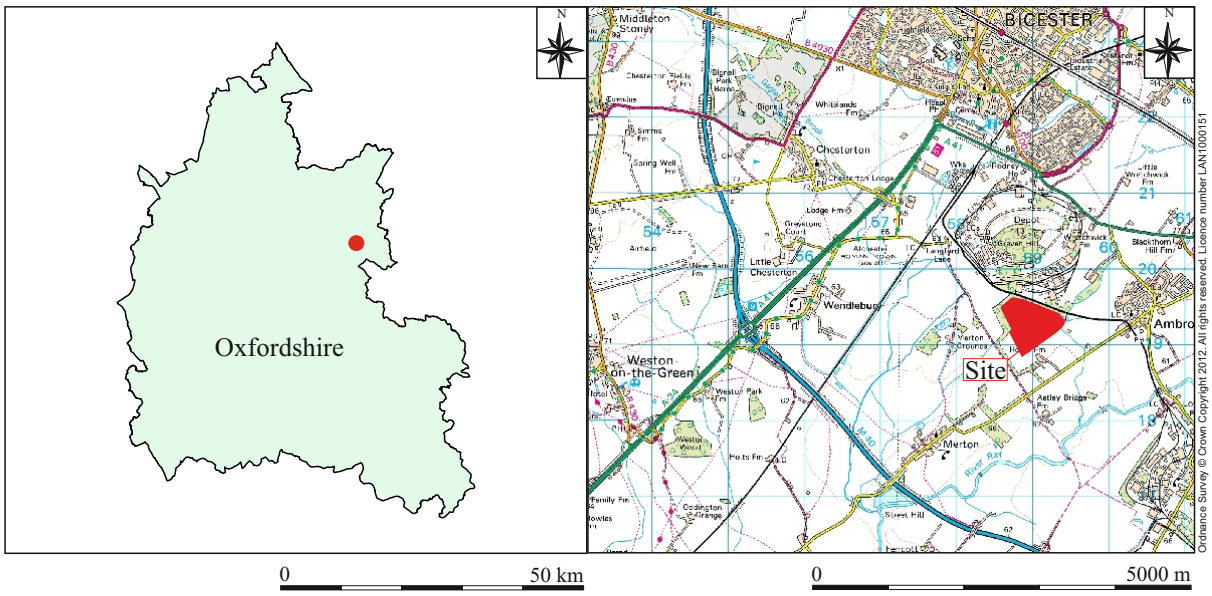
The site is located on land immediately to the north of Home Farm, Merton Road, Merton (SP 590193 centred). It lies at approximately 61m OD sloping up northwards from the south. The proposed site area is approximately 75.5 hectares and is under arable cultivation. The underlying geology of the site is alluvium overlying Lower Oxford Clay.

1.2 Planning Background

An application has been submitted to Cherwell District Council for a proposed solar development at land north of Home Farm, Merton. The proposals will involve the installation of circa 84,282 photovoltaic panels, installation of inverter and converter stations, erection of boundary fencing and CCTV cameras and connection to the existing electricity grid (12/01414/F). Due to the archaeological potential of this application site a pre-determination evaluation has been advised by the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) who prepared a Design Brief covering the requirements. John Moore Heritage Services produced a *Written Scheme of Investigation* which outlined the method by which the work would be carried out in order to achieve the aims of the evaluation in line with NPPF.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies within an area of archaeological interest. There are several known sites of known archaeological significance dating to the Roman period in the area. The Roman fortress and later civilian town of Alchester lie approximately 1km to the north-west of the proposed site (SMR 1583, SAM 18) and a Roman Parade Ground, associated with the early Roman fort at Alchester (SMR 15986) lies *c*. 500m to the north west of the site.



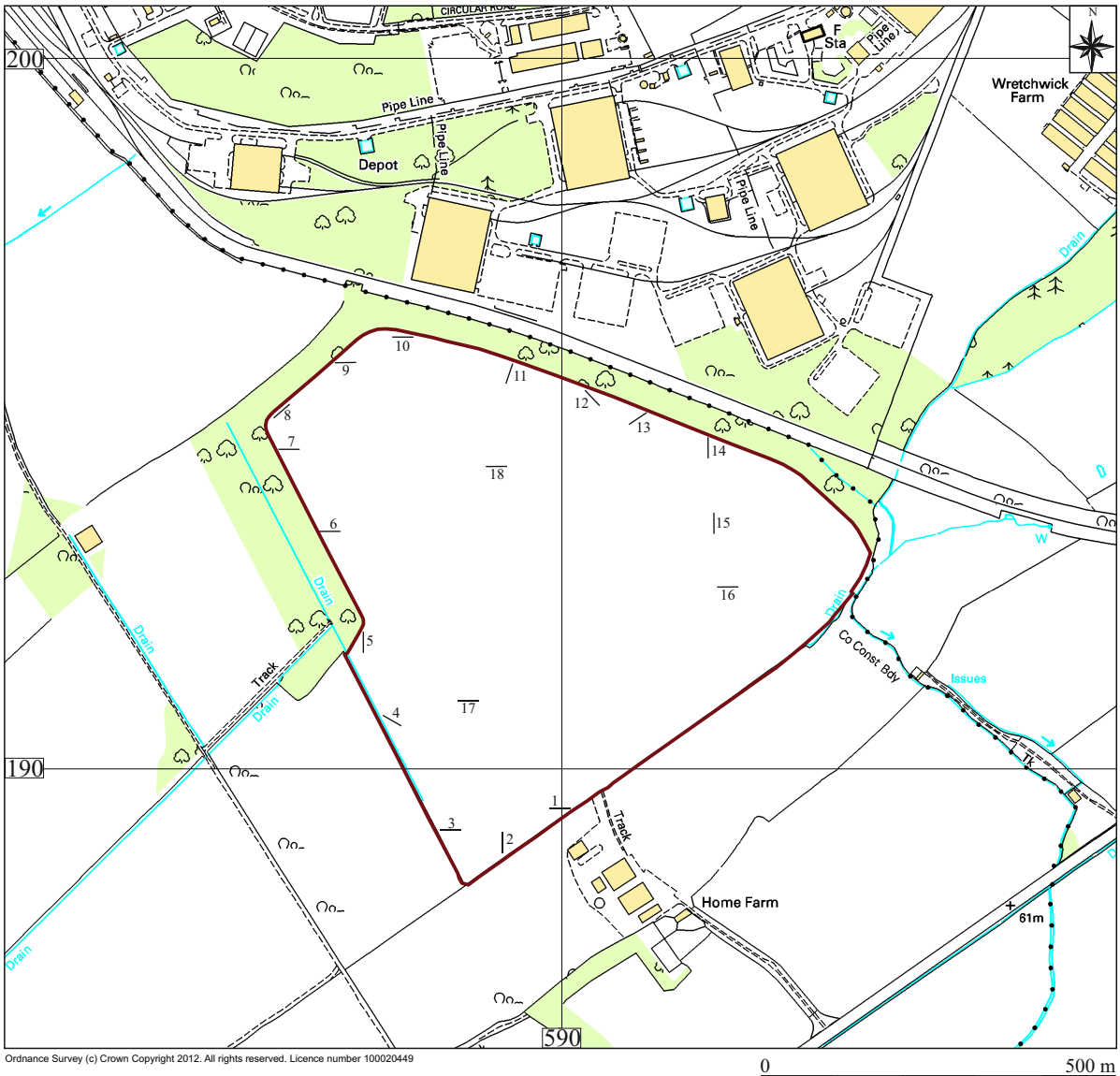


Figure 1. Site location

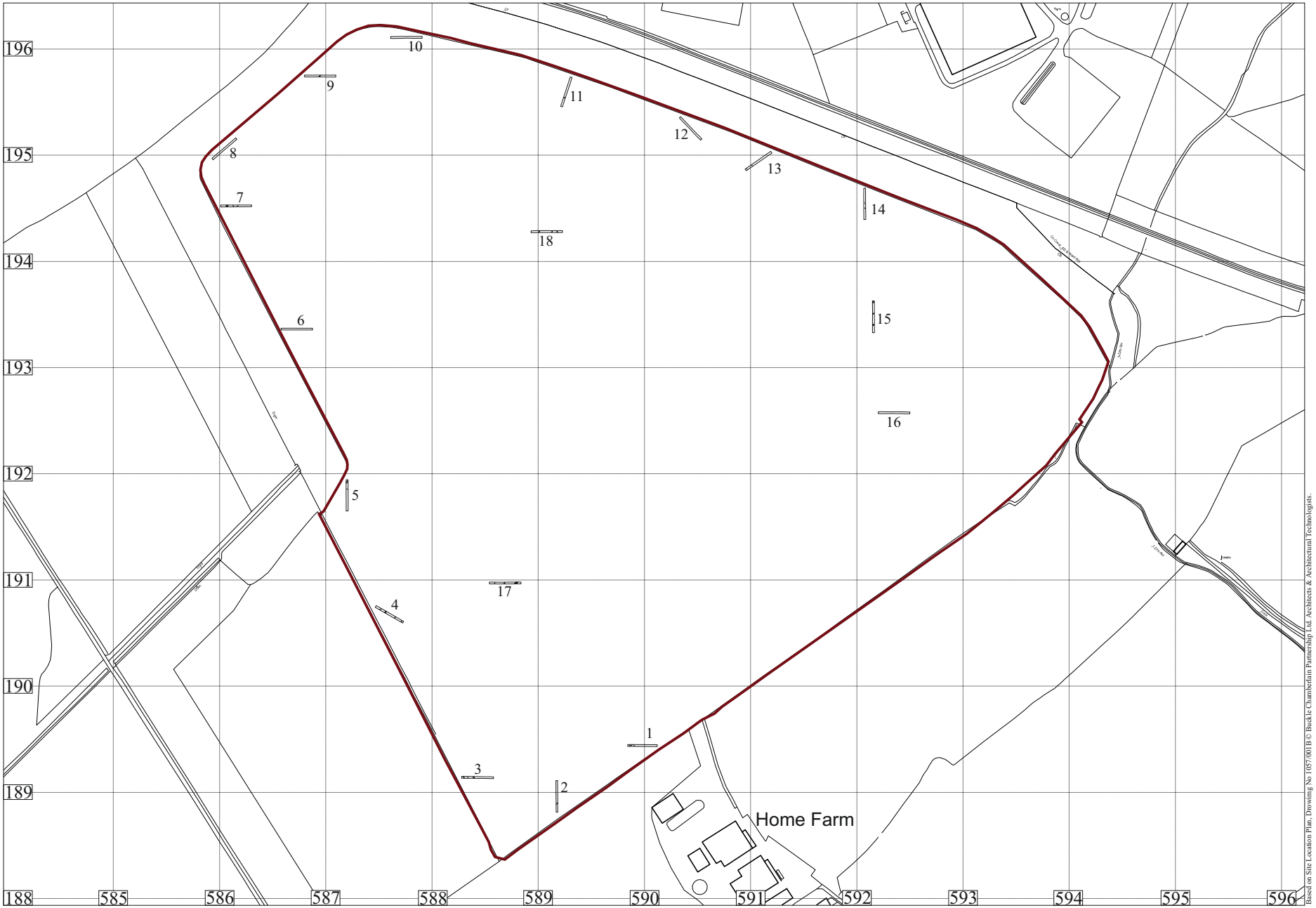


Figure 2. Site plan

The Roman road running north – south from Alchester to Dorchester lies *c*. 500m to the west of the proposed site (SMR 8923). A complex pattern of square and rectangular enclosures laid out mainly to the east of this road represent a Romano-British regular aggregate field system (SMR 12751). A second and possibly earlier Roman road was identified during a recent evaluation close to the Roman Town and is thought to pass approximately 250m east of the proposal site.

Less than 500m to the north-west of the proposal site are the remains of a Roman building with possible hypocaust and late 3rd/4th century pottery (SMR 15987). Faint cropmarks have been recorded 350m to the west of the site which show further possible Iron Age or Roman enclosures. The above was obtained from the OCAS design brief (Oram 2012) and the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2012).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

2.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.

2.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.

2.3 To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

2.4 In particular to establish whether Roman remains extend this far away from the Roman town.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the *Institute for Archaeologists* (2008) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of eighteen trenches measuring 30m long, locations shown on Figs. 1 & 2.

The trenches were excavated by a 360° type tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand (where necessary) prior to hand excavation of the archaeological deposits and features.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced using colour

transparency, black and white and digital cameras. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

No deposits were considered suitable for environmental sampling.

The work was monitored by the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority Richard Oram (Planning Archaeologist).

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts or walls; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Excavation Results (Figs. 1-6)

The trenches were set out across the general area of the proposed new development designed to evaluate the proposed overhead cable re-route and new invertor stations.

General overburden across the site
The natural (60.06-62.97m AOD) was overlain by alluvial silt(s) which varied in thickness from 0.30 in Trench 1 to 0.10m thick in Trench 4, seen in the south-western corner of field only. Across the rest of the site the natural (Lower Oxford Clay) was directly overlain by generally consistent 0.25-30m thick topsoil.

Blank trenches
Trenches 6, 8, 10, 12 & 16 did not contain any archaeological features. The lowest deposit noted within the blank trenches was natural (Lower Oxford Clay), which was reached between varying heights across the proposed development site 61.12-62.94m AOD. The blank trenches were generally shallow with only *c*. 0.30m of topsoil covering the natural geology. There was no subsoil or alluvium apparent within any of the blank trenches.

4.1.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 2 & 3)

Trench 1 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.45m (60.26m AOD) at the eastern end and 0.63m (60.08m AOD) at the western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay with irregular patches of dark grey blue clay silt (1/10) was at the base of the trench. Overlying this was 0.25m thick mid brownish yellow clay silt alluvium (1/2). The latest deposit was 0.24m thick dark greyish brown topsoil (1/1) (Fig. 3; S. 1.1).

Ditch; cut into natural (1/10)
Ditch 1/4 (Fig. 3; S. 1.2) was curvilinear on an approximate east-west direction and was 0.70m wide and 0.25m deep with shallow concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by dark greyish blue clay silt (1/7) around the base and sides. The latest fill was compact grey silty clay (1/3) with some clumps of redeposited natural and no finds. The re-deposited natural may suggest a rapid backfilling. This ditch was sealed by alluvial clay (1/2).

Other features; cut into natural (1/10)
A circular shaped posthole 1/6 0.50m wide and 0.15m deep was located adjacent to the bend of ditch 1/4. It had sharp concave sides and was deeper towards the centre of the base (Fig. 3; S. 1.3). It was filled by dark brown grey sandy clay (1/5) with no finds.

A circular shaped feature 1/9 (Fig. 3) was seen protruding from the southern baulk section (not illustrated in section). This feature was sectioned to test the irregular shaped features in this trench considered to be natural features, perhaps tree bowls. As a result of the section it was considered possible this was the shallow remains of tree bowl. It was 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep with shallow concave sides and a flat base, filled by mid greyish blue clay (1/8) with no finds.

All features in this trench were sealed by alluvial clay (1/2), indicating they are possibly prehistoric in origin.

4.1.2 Trench 2 (Figs. 2 & 3)

Trench 2 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.34m (60.59m AOD) at the southern end and 0.83m (*c.* 60.10m AOD) at the northern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay (2/5) was at the base of the trench. Overlying this was 0.25m thick mid brownish yellow clay silt alluvium (2/2). The latest deposit was dark greyish brown topsoil (2/1) (Fig. 3; S. 2.2).

Ditch; cut into alluvium (2/02)
Ditch 2/4 was 1.70m wide and 0.17m deep orientated north-east south-west and with concave sides and a gently rounded base (Fig. 3; S. 2.3). It was filled by firm grey brown silty clay mottled with orange sandy patches. The ditch was sealed by topsoil (2/1).

4.1.3 Trench 3 (Figs. 2 & 3)

Trench 3 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.64m (60.06m AOD) at the eastern end and 0.55m (60.21m AOD) at the western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural yellow clay was at the base of the trench (3/5). Overlying (3/5) only apparent in section over ditches at the eastern end of the trench was 0.15m thick alluvium (3/4) and 0.06m thick grey orange alluvial silt (3/3). Overlying this was 0.20m thick mid brown grey clay silt alluvium (3/2). The latest deposit was 0.30m thick dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (3/1) (Fig. 2; S. 3.1-3.3).

At the western end of the trench the stratigraphy was different with only one layer of alluvium (3/2), over natural clay (3/5) (Fig. 3; S. 3.4).

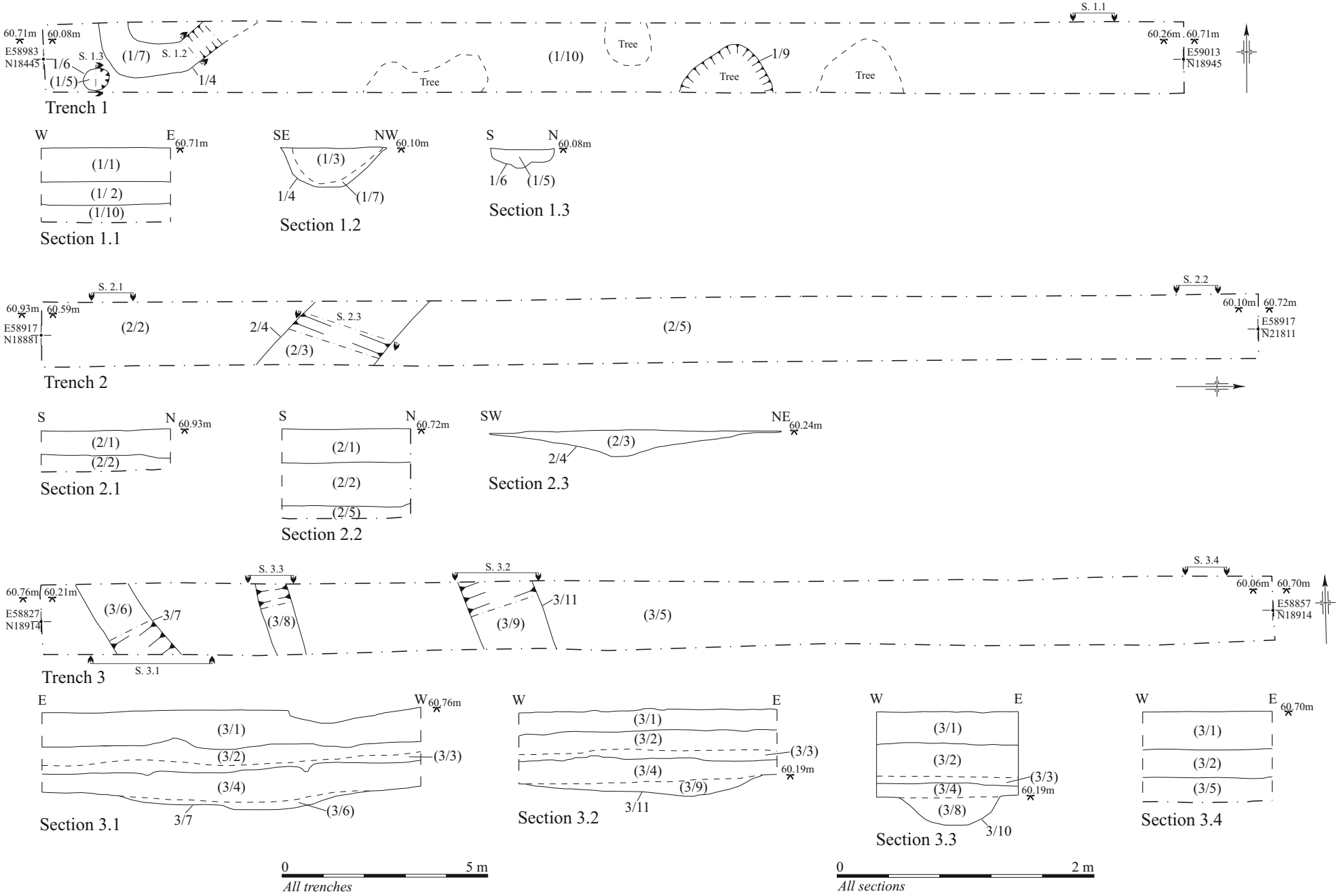


Figure 3. Plans and sections of trenches 1, 2 and 3

Ditches; cut into natural (3/5)
At the eastern end of the trench were three ditches. Ditch 3/7 was *c*. 2m wide and 0.10m deep with gradual concave sides and a gently curving base (Fig. 3; S. 3.1). It was filled by firm grey sandy clay with orange mottling (3/6) and no finds. The ditch was sealed by (3/4). What the two small depressions seen in section in the surface of (3/4) are is unknown.

Ditch 3/11 was orientated on a north-west south-east direction with shallow concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by dark grey sandy clay (3/9) with no finds (Fig. 3; S. 3.2). This ditch was sealed by the earliest alluvium (3/4).

Ditch 3/10 was 0.80m wide and 0.22m deep with sharp concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by dark brown grey sandy clay (3/8) with no finds (Fig. 3; S. 3.3). This ditch was sealed beneath the earliest alluvial layer (3/4), suggesting it has a prehistoric origin.

4.1.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 2; Fig. 5)

Trench 4 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.60m (60.41m AOD) at the north-western end and 0.41m (60.30m AOD) at the south-eastern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural yellow clay was at the base of the trench (4/12). Overlying (4/12) was 0.15m thick alluvium (4/2). The latest deposit was *c*. 0.25m thick dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (4/1) (Fig. 4; S. 4.3).

Ditches; cut into natural (4/12)
At the eastern end of the trench was ditch 4/13, 1.6m wide and a minimum of 0.70m deep (base of ditch not reached due to infilling of water) orientated on an approximate north-south direction. The ditch was primarily filled by 0.50m (minimum) dark grey blue clay silt with four sherds of late Iron Age/Roman pottery (4/11). The latest fill was *c*. 0.20m thick dark grey brown silty clay (4/3) with no finds (Fig. 4; S. 4.4). This ditch was sealed by topsoil (4/1).

Ditch 4/10 was orientated on a north-south direction and was 2.0m wide and 0.38m deep. It had a gently sloping western side and steep eastern side with a rounded base (Fig. 4; S. 4.5). The ditch was filled by mid brown grey silty clay (4/5) with no finds. It was cut by a later field drain 4/6 and sealed by (4/2).

Ditch 4/9 was *c*. 1m wide and 0.15m deep with gradually sloping concave sides and gently rounded base. It was filled by 0.06m thick dark grey blue silty clay (4/7) with no finds (Fig. 4; S. 4.2 & 4.3). The ditch was orientated on a north-east south-west direction. This ditch was sealed by layer (4/2).

Ditch; cut into (4/2)
Ditch 4/8 was orientated on a north-south alignment and was 2.1m wide and 0.25m deep with shallow concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by dark grey brown silty clay (4/4) with no finds (Fig. 4; S. 4.1). The ditch was sealed by topsoil (4/1).

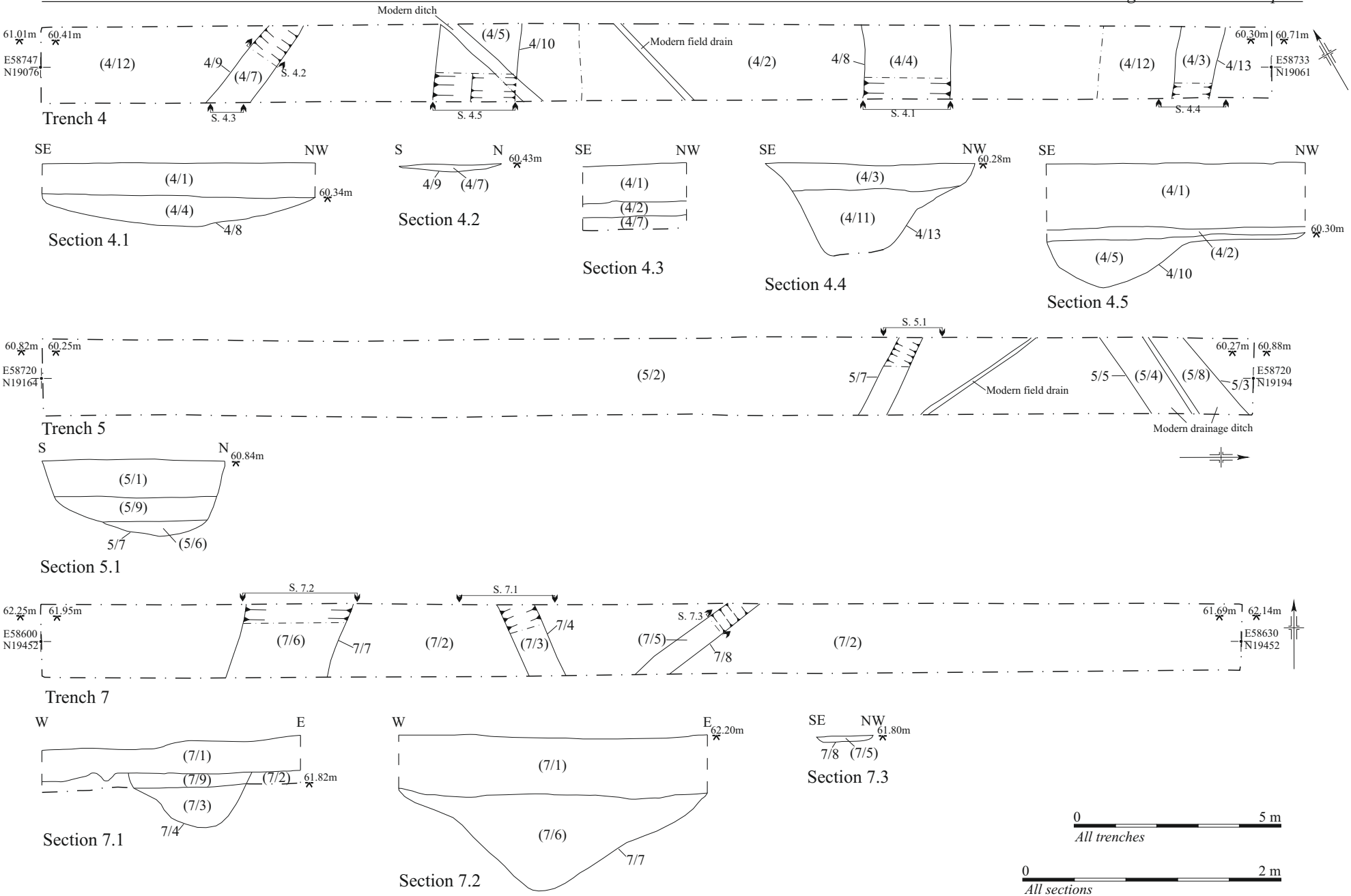


Figure 4. Plans and sections of trenches 4, 5 and 7

4.1.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 2; Fig. 5)

Trench 5 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.61m (60.27m AOD) at the northern end and 0.57m (60.25m AOD) at the southern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural yellow clay was at the base of the trench (5/2). The latest deposit was 0.30m thick dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (5/1) (Fig. 4; S. 5.1).

Ditch; cut into natural (5/2)
Ditch 5/7 was 1.2m wide and 0.30m deep orientated on an approximate east-west direction. It had sharp concave sides and a gently rounded base, filled by two distinct fills. The primary fill was 0.12m thick light brownish yellow sandy clay with one sherd of late Iron Age/Roman pottery (5/6). This was overlain by firm mid yellow clay silt with no finds (5/9) (Fig. 4; S. 5.1).

Two other ditches at the northern end of trench 5/5 & 5/3 orientated north-east south-west were investigated and proven modern containing ceramic field drains. All features were sealed by topsoil (5/1).

4.1.6 Trench 7 (Fig. 2; Fig. 4)

Trench 7 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.45m (61.69m AOD) at the eastern end and 0.30m (61.95m AOD) at the western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural yellow clay was at the base of the trench (7/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (7/1) (Fig. 4; S. 7.1).

Ditches; cut into natural (7/2)
At the western end of the trench was ditch 7/7, which was orientated on a north-east south-west direction. This was a large ditch 2.4m wide and a minimum of 0.80m deep (base not reached in hand excavated section as water table was too high) (Fig. 4; S. 7.2). The ditch had steep concave sides and was filled by one dark brown grey fill (7/6) with charcoal and burnt clay flecks but no dateable finds.

Ditch 7/4 was orientated on a north-west south-east direction and had steep sides and rounded base (Fig. 4; S. 7.1). It was filled by 0.30m thick mid brownish grey silty clay with three sherds of early Saxon pottery (7/3) at the base, overlain by 0.12m thick dark greyish brown silty clay (7/9) with no finds.

Gully 7/8 was 0.45m wide and 0.10m deep orientated on a north-east south-west direction with shallow concave sides and a flat base. It was filled by dark greyish brown silty clay with no finds (7/5) (Fig. 4; S. 7.3). All the ditches in Trench 7 were sealed by topsoil (7/1).

4.1.7 Trench 9 (Fig. 2; Fig. 5)

Trench 9 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to depths of between 0.31m (62.38m AOD) at the eastern end and 0.34m (62.38m AOD) at the western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (9/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (9/1) (Fig. 5; S. 9.1).

Ditch; cut into natural (9/2)
Ditch 9/4 (fill 9/3) was orientated on a north-east south-west direction but could not be properly hand investigated due to high water table within this trench. This ditch was sealed by topsoil (9/01).

4.1.8 Trench 11 (Fig. 2; Fig. 5)

Trench 11 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.31m (62.97m AOD) at the north-eastern end and 0.46m (62.56m AOD) at the south-western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (11/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (11/1) (Fig. 5; S. 11.1).

Ditch; cut into natural (11/2)
Ditch 11/4 was 1.2m wide and 0.22m deep with a bowl shaped profile orientated on an east-west direction. It was filled by dark blackish brown silty clay (11/3) with no finds (Fig. 5: S. 11.2). The ditch was sealed by topsoil (11/1).

4.1.9 Trench 13 (Fig. 2; Fig. 5)

Trench 13 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.20m (62.62m AOD) at the north-eastern end and 0.27m (62.40m AOD) at the south-western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (13/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (13/1) (Fig. 2; S. 13.1).

Ditches; cut into natural (13/2)
Ditch 13/4 (Fig. 5) was 0.60m wide and orientated on a north-west south-east alignment. It was filled by dark grey blue silty clay. This ditch could not be further investigated due to the high water table within the trench.

Ditch 13/6 (Fig. 5) was 0.70m and orientated on a north-west south-east alignment. It was filled by dark grey blue silty clay. This ditch could not be investigated further due to the high water table within the trench. The grey blue clay fills of these ditches would indicate they are Roman or earlier as this colour fill has been proven Roman (or earlier) elsewhere on the site. Both ditches were covered by topsoil (13/1).

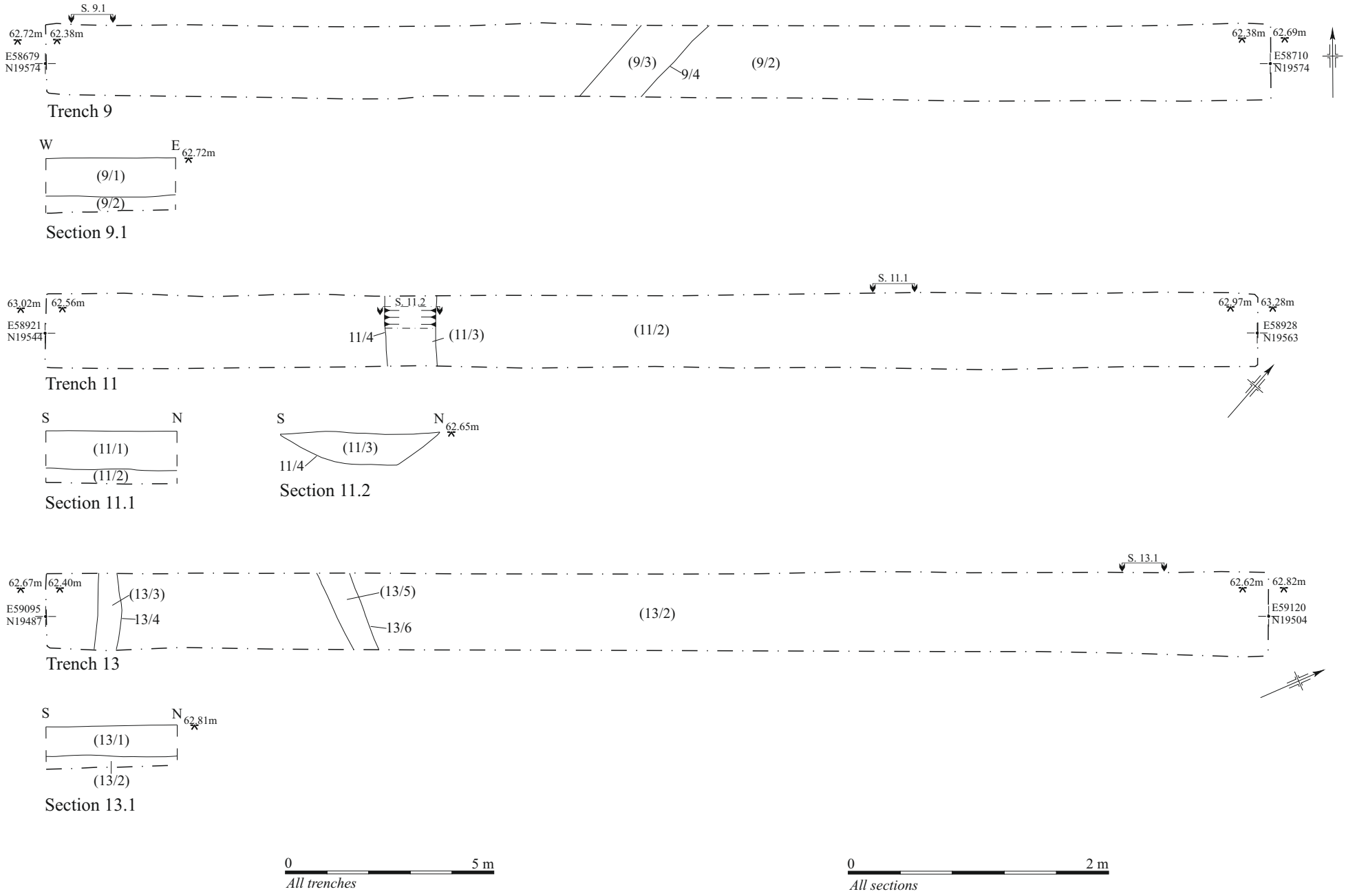


Figure 5. Plans and sections of trenches 9, 11 and 13

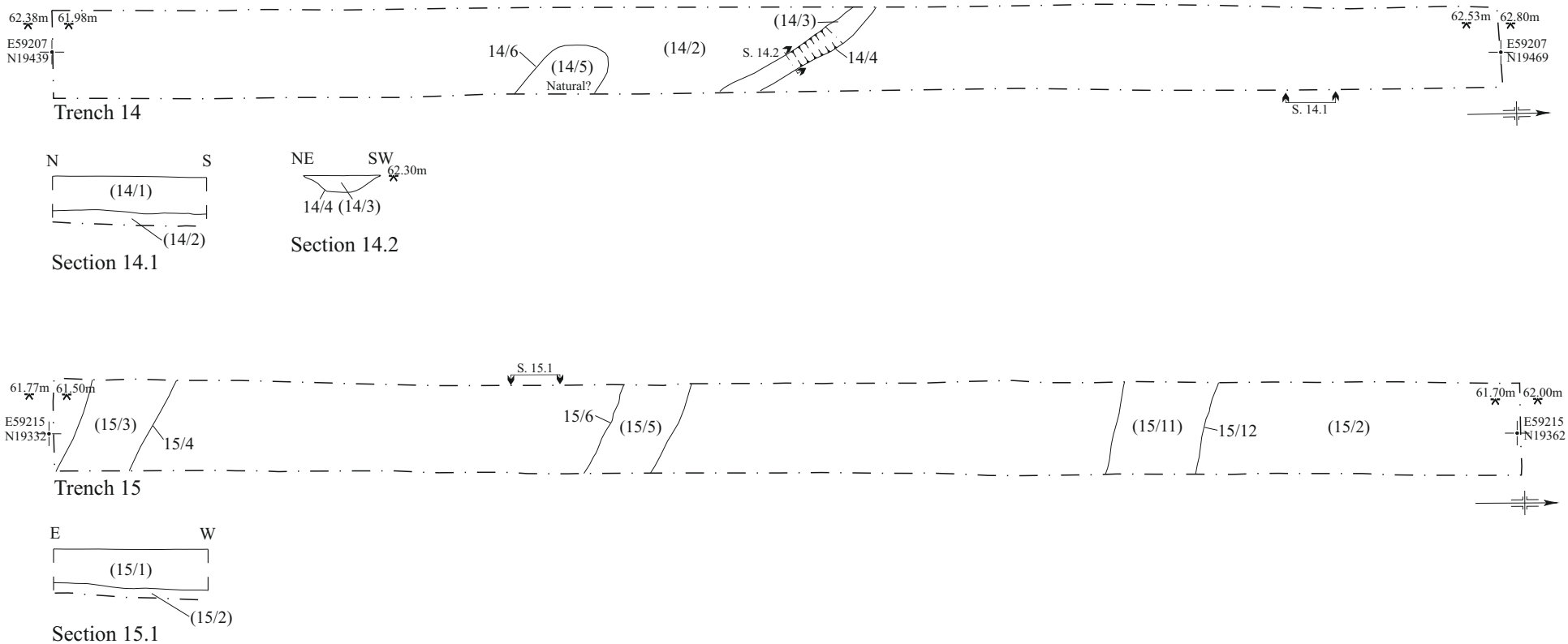


Figure 6. Plans and sections of trenches 14 and 15

4.1.10 Trench 14 (Fig. 2; Fig. 6)

Trench 14 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.27m (62.53m AOD) at the northern end and 0.40m (61.98m AOD) at the southern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (14/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (14/1) (Fig. 6; S. 14.1).

Ditch; cut into 14/2
Ditch 14/4 was orientated on a northwest south-east direction and was 0.48m wide and 0.12m deep with a bowl shaped profile. It was filled by dark brownish grey silty clay (14/3) with no finds. The ditch was sealed by topsoil (14/1) (Fig. 6; S. 14.2).

A possible feature 14/6 (fill 14/5) was investigated within the trench but was considered natural upon excavation.

4.1.11 Trench 15 (Fig. 2; Fig. 6)

Trench 15 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.30m (61.70m AOD) at the northern end and 0.27m (61.50m AOD) at the southern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (15/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (15/1) (Fig. 6; S. 15.1).

Ditches; cut into natural (15/2)
Three ditches were investigated within this trench 15/4, 15/6 & 15/12. Sections across the ditches proved them shallow and filled with dark brown silty clays (15/3), (15/5) & (15/11), indicating they were furrows, perhaps originating from a medieval field system. These ditches were matched to the furrows which can be seen on satellite image of the site (not illustrated). All the features were all sealed by topsoil (15/1).

4.1.12 Trench 17 (Fig. 2; Fig. 7)

Trench 17 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.33m (60.76m AOD) at the eastern end and 0.27m (60.77m AOD) at the western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (17/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (17/1) (Fig. 7; S. 17.1).

Ditches; cut into natural (17/2)
Ditch 17/4 was *c*. 2m wide and 0.30m deep with concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was on a north-east south-west orientation and was filled by mid greyish brown silty clay (17/3) with no finds (Fig. 7; S. 17.2). The profile suggests that it had been recut. This ditch was sealed by topsoil (17/1).

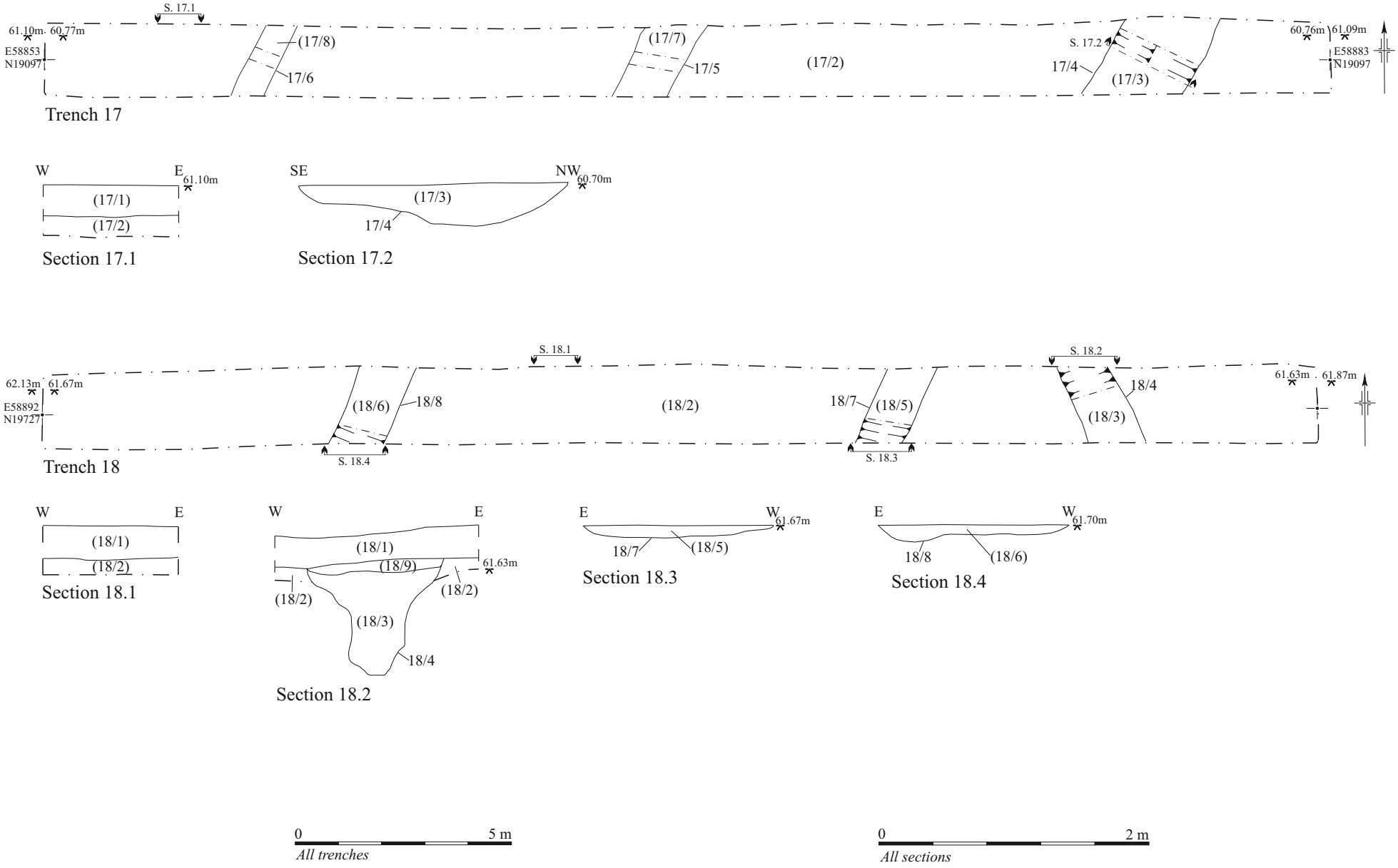


Figure 7. Plans and sections of trenches 17 and 18

There were two other ditches 17/6 & 17/5 sampled within this trench. Both had very shallow profiles and were interpreted as the very base of furrows from a medieval field system as they can be matched with furrows seen on satellite image. Both of these ditches had dark brown fills (17/8) & (17/7) with no finds and were sealed by topsoil (17/1) (Fig. 7).

4.1.13 Trench 18 (Fig. 2; Fig. 7)

Trench 18 was excavated to a length of 30m (1.8m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.24m (61.87m AOD) at the eastern end and 0.46m (61.67m AOD) at the western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay.

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural bright yellow clay was at the base of the trench (18/2). The latest deposit was dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (18/1) (Fig. 2; S. 18.1).

Ditches; cut into natural (18/2)
At the eastern end of the trench was ditch 18/4, *c*. 1m wide and 0.85m deep with sharp concave sides and rounded base (Fig. 7; S. 18.2). The ditch was orientated on an approximate north-west south-east direction and was filled by mid grey (with orange mottling) silty clay (18/3) with eleven sherds of Saxon pottery. The latest fill was 0.10m thick mid orange brown clay loam (18/9) with no finds. See discussion for further thoughts on this feature.

Ditch 18/7 was 1.4m wide and 0.10m deep with shallow concave sides and orientated on a north-east south-west direction (Fig. 7; S. 18.3). It was filled by dark brownish grey sandy clay (18/5) with no finds.

Ditch 18/8 was 1.4m wide and 0.12m deep with shallow concave sides orientated on an approximate north-east south-west direction. It was filled by dark brownish grey sandy clay (18/6) with no finds. Ditches 18/7 & 18/8 were considered to be base of furrows from a medieval field system. They were sealed by topsoil (18/1).

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The excavation of the trenches took place during winter in wet and often very cold icy conditions. For two days a freezing fog was present across the site meaning some of the photographs are not as clear as they normally are. The high water table meant some features could not be fully investigated (for example, reaching the base of a feature). In some cases the water was so high in a trench the features could not be investigated at all (Trench 13). Having said that, the water table was not as high as anticipated and mostly the trenches did not fill up with water. A confidence rating is moderate- high that the best possible results were achieved.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 The Pottery *by Jane Timby*

5.1.1 Introduction

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 18 sherds of pottery dating to the late Iron Age- early Roman and early Saxon periods. The material was accompanied by two pieces of undated fired clay.

The pottery was recovered from four defined contexts all from ditch features.

The material is of mixed preservation; the sherds are fragmented but with relatively fresh edges with some pieces coming from the same vessels. The overall average sherd size at 8.1 g is quite low but the sherds are handmade wares and not highly fired and thus the size is not atypical of disturbed rubbish material at 8.1 g.

For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to assess the likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. The resulting data is summarised in Table 1.

5.1.2 Iron Age-early Roman

Three sherds from handmade, necked, grog-tempered jars were recovered from 4/03 and 5/06. Such material is typical of the later Iron Age – early Roman period.

Accompanying the sherds from 4/03 was one small fragment of coarse fossil-shell tempered ware. The fabric would perhaps be considered more typical of the early-mid Iron Age but the small size of the sherd and lack of preserved surfaces makes any identification uncertain.

5.1.3 Saxon

Eleven sherds from a single, fine calcareous-tempered, handmade jar were recovered from 18/03. The vessel is decorated around the shoulder with pendant triangles defined by incised lines infilled with large shallow dot depressions.

Further Saxon sherds were recovered from 7/03 but in a coarse, sand-tempered fabric and again from a closed handmade vessel.

Context	Fabric	Form	No	Wt	Date
4/03	GROG	jar	2	7	LIA-early Ro
	SHELL		1	2	??Iron Age
	FCLAY		1	1	no date
7/03	SAND	jar	3	14	Saxon
18/03	CALC	jar	11	105	Saxon
5/06	GROG	jar	1	13	LIA-early Ro
7/06	FCLAY		1	5	no date
TOTAL			**20**	**147**	

Table 1; quantification of all pottery sherds

Enclosed-zone decoration comprising line-and-dot schemes are considered to be quite early in the Saxon pottery sequence by Myres (177, 24 ff). This combined with the fact the fabrics are calcareous and sandy respectively could also argue for an earlier date than the more ubiquitous organic-tempered wares which are not present here. Provisionally, therefore, the material could date to the 5th century although further material and research would be required to qualify this.

5.1.4 Potential and further work

Although the presence of decorated Saxon ware is of some significance the assemblage is too small to warrant further work unless additional material is recovered from the same locality in which case it should be added into any overview.

5.2 The Animal Bone by Paul Riccoboni

A small assemblage of animal bone was collected from the excavations (Table 2). The animal bones were fragmentary representing an assemblage of sheep/goat. All animal bones have been retained at this stage for possible inclusion in the site archive.

Context number	Number of fragments	Weight (g)
4/03	1	35
7/06	2	79
18/3	10	47

Table 2; Quantification of retrieved animal bone

6 DISCUSSION

General
The archaeological evaluation was successful in determining the archaeological potential of the site and the character of any below ground features and deposits. The excavations enabled an assessment of the depth, quality and nature of the features encountered. The archaeological features were most dense across the western side of the site. The eastern half of the field was relatively sparse in archaeological features.

The earliest features
The earliest features were probably within Trenches 1, 3 & 4 as they were sealed beneath layers of alluvium. The alluvium at this site was made up of a variety of clay silts without gravels. There was no dating evidence associated with these features or the overlying alluvial layers. The alluvial clays were only apparent within the trenches around the south-western corner of the site, closest to the River Ray. The alluvial clay petered out towards the eastern end of Trench 4 where ditch 4/13, which contained late Iron Age/early Roman pottery sherds, was located just adjacent to the alluvial layers, sealed by topsoil. This corner of the field was *c*. 2 metres lower than the other side of the site (60.06-60.59m AOD), which may explain why alluvial clays were deposited across only this area.

The site would have been marshy and in order to make the field suitable to pasture drainage ditches would have been necessary. Land reclamation would have required an extensive network of ditches due to a high water table. There were frequent ditches recorded in this area

of the site beneath alluvial clay. The drainage ditches would have also served to enclose parcels of land. The environmental sequence at the Oxford Road, Bicester site established the rise of the water table in the Iron Age with increased flooding (Mould 1996). This was followed by a very significant increase in alluvial deposition in the Roman period. Lambrick attributed this alluvial deposition to the later 1st century BC or the early 1st Century AD. At Oxford Road, Bicester 0.40m of alluvium sealed occupational evidence dated after 100/120AD (Mould 1996).

The very earliest features were perhaps uncovered beneath alluvial clay within Trench 1. Curvilinear ditched enclosures are more characteristic of the prehistoric period. The apparent tight curving ditch in Trench 1 with associated posthole may be part of an industrial or agricultural feature The other features sealed beneath the alluvium in Trenches 3 & 4 may be considered late Iron Age/Roman in origin. They may have been sealed by alluvial deposition during the same general period, if we assume a similar date of alluvial deposition to that recorded at the Oxford Road, Bicester Village site (Mould 1996).

Roman
The largest ditch encountered within the trenches was within Trench 7. This was a large enclosure or boundary ditch with steep sides. The ditch was on a different alignment to any of the modern boundaries and does not match with any of the medieval ridge and furrows seen on the satellite image of the site (not illustrated). Although there was no absolute dating evidence recovered, the consistency/colour of its fill and the small specks of burnt clay and charcoal within it indicated this ditch silted up during antiquity. The size of this ditch would suggest that it was originally instated for drainage reasons. The ditch features are likely to represent the remains of boundaries and small enclosures connected to an ancient farmstead. No evidence of actual habitation or settlement was apparent, but a larger area would need to be opened around this trench to ascertain this for definite.

The ditches were deep enough to enclose grazing cattle. The ditches would have likely had a bank on one side, perhaps with a hedgerow or fence line on the top of the bank to further enclose the cattle and keep them safe. There was no evidence for banks adjacent to the ditches at the site, as they have been ploughed away.

The ditches did not display any evidence of being re-cut with the exception of 17/4 where the profile suggested a recut, but often two ditches were found close together within a trench. This would indicate that the boundaries may have been re-established on at least one occasion, perhaps by a returning community who used the site on a seasonal basis.

The bone evidence was insufficient to show anything definite, though it is likely the area was a pastoral economy based mostly on sheep/goats. An environmental sampling strategy would be important to address during any further archaeological investigations across the site. This would help to establish whether the farmstead was used predominately for pasture or practiced a mixed economy.

Saxon
It was within Trenches 7 & 18 that early Saxon pottery was discovered within features 7/4 & 18/4. This tells us that these ditches silted up during the early post Roman period. The profile of 18/4 suggests that it may be part of a continuous foundation trench for a building and the two features 7/4 and 7/8 at right angles to each other may be similar types of features belonging to another building. This may suggest the site of an early Saxon settlement. At

Alchester itself residual Saxon pottery sherds have been discovered and the possible continuation of the late Roman cemetery indicates Saxon occupation, although its duration is uncertain. Continued occupation of Roman sites in the Saxon period across Oxfordshire is known from numerous sites (Hamerow 1999). At Whitelands Farm the Anglo-Saxons had been reusing a Roman stone lined tank (Martin 2011) and at Alchester a Roman corn dryer was re-used in the Saxon period (Hamerow 2012). A larger area would need to be opened around these trenches in order to help establish the nature of the ditches and any other associated features.

Medieval/post-medieval
The field had evidently been cultivated during the medieval period, as ridge and furrow can be seen across the entire field on aerial satellite images. The furrows were identified within trenches 15, 17 & 18, which was confirmed when the trench plan was overlain onto the satellite image. More recently land boundaries dividing this field have been removed and levelled and modern drainage instated.

Conclusion
Before this project little was known of the archaeology of this field except the obvious medieval ridge and furrow shown on satellite images. The close proximity to the Roman town of Alchester and the Roman parade ground gave the site clear archaeological potential. Recent developments around Bicester have proven the area to have been widely occupied during prehistory (Cromarty *et al* & Martin 2011). Today the site lies outside of the area at risk from extreme flooding, but water levels may have been higher during prehistory. We know that the low-lying south-western corner of the field (60.06-60.59m AOD) was subject to flooding events as successive layers of alluvial clay were apparent within Trenches 1-4. The rest of the field seems to have not been subject to any flooding and was on higher ground at *c*. 62.65-62.62m AOD. The ditches sealed by alluvium may date from the late prehistoric/Roman period. It is considered probable that the alluvial layers were also deposited during the same general time period. The other ditches within trenches 4 & 5 had definite dating evidence with actual late Iron Age/early Roman pottery sherds coming from the fills of the ditches. Perhaps the most interesting features were those containing early Saxon pottery sherds within Trenches 7 & 18, indicating that a Saxon settlement may have existed on this site.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents
The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record
The project brief
Written Scheme of Investigation
The drawn records
The project report
The primary site records

Physical record
The pottery
The animal bone

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number; awaited.

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Plate 1; Trench 18 looking west (1m scales x 2)

Plate 2; North facing section Ditch 4/13 (1m scale)

Plate 3; South facing section of Ditch 18/4 (1m scales x 2)

Plate 4; Trench 17 looking west (1m scales x 2)

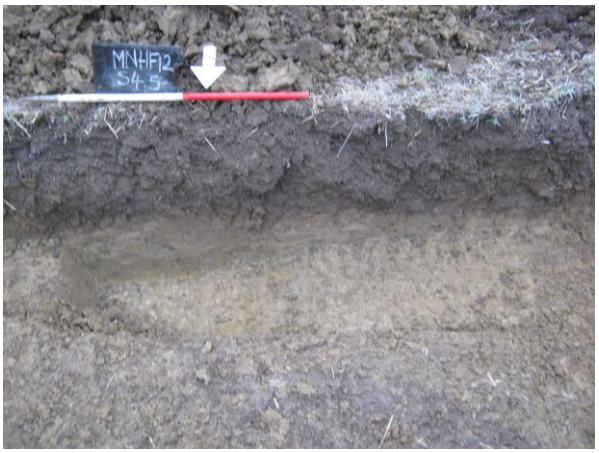

Plate 5; North facing section of Ditch 4/10 (1m scale)

Appendix 1; List of all recorded contexts

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
1	1/1	Deposit	Dark grey brown silty clay topsoil	0.35	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
1	1/2	Deposit	Light brownish yellow clay silt alluvium	0.20	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
1	1/3	Deposit	Dark brown grey sandy clay fill	0.25	0.76	*c*.5m (min)	None	/
1	1/4	Cut	Curvilinear ditch	0.36	0.82	*c*.5m (min)	/	/
1	1/5	Deposit	Dark brown grey sandy clay fill	0.15	0.50	0.50	None	/
1	1/6	Cut	Posthole	0.15	0.50	0.50	/	/
1	1/7	Deposit	Dark greyish blue silty clay fill	0.11	0.50	0.50	None	/
1	1/8	Deposit	Dark grey blue clay silt fill	0.20	0.50	n/a	None	/
1	1/9	Cut	Tree bowl?	0.20	0.50	n/a	/	/
1	1/10	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	Tr.	Tr.	/	/	/
2	2/1	Deposit	Mid grey brown silty clay loam topsoil	Tr.	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
2	2/2	Deposit	Light brownish yellow clay silt alluvium	Tr.	Tr.	0.20	/	/
2	2/3	Deposit	Mid brownish grey with orange mottling sandy clay	0.20	2.0	Tr.	None	/
2	2/4	Cut	Linear ditch	0.20	2.0	Tr.	/	/
2	2/5	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	Tr.	Tr.	/	/	Jurassic
3	3/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
3	3/2	Deposit	Mid brown grey clay loam with orange and yellow mottling	0.10	Tr.	*c*.20m	None	/
3	3/3	Deposit	Mid grey orange diffuse alluvium	0.10	Tr.	*c*.20m	None	/
3	3/4	Deposit	Dark grey clay silt alluvium	0.25	Tr.	*c*.20m	None	/
3	3/5	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
3	3/6	Deposit	Mid grey sandy clay with orange mottling fill	0.10	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
3	3/7	Cut	Ditch	0.10	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
3	3/8	Deposit	Dark brownish grey sandy clay	0.20	0.80	Tr.	None	/
3	3/9	Deposit	Dark brownish grey sandy clay	0.12	1.8	Tr.	None	/
3	3/10	Cut	Ditch	0.10	0.80	Tr.	/	/

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
3	3/11	Cut	Ditch	0.20	1.8	Tr.	/	/
4	4/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.24	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
4	4/2	Deposit	Light yellow clay silt (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
4	4/3	Deposit	Dark grey brown sandy clay fill	0.20	1.6	Tr.	Pottery	LIA/ER
4	4/4	Deposit	Dark brownish grey silty clay fill	0.24	2.0	Tr.	None	/
4	4/5	Deposit	Mid grey silty clay fill	0.36	2.0	Tr.	None	/
4	4/6	Cut	Modern ditch	0.40 (min)	0.50	Tr.	/	/
4	4/7	Deposit	Dark grey brown silty clay fill	0.06	0.80	Tr.	None	/
4	4/8	Cut	Ditch	0.24	2.0	Tr.	/	/
4	4/9	Cut	Ditch	0.06	0.80	Tr.	/	/
4	4/10	Cut	Ditch	0.36	2.0	Tr.	/	/
4	4/11	Deposit	Dark grey blue silty clay	0.50	1.6	Tr.	None	/
4	4/12	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
4	4/13	Cut	Ditch	0.20	1.6	Tr.	/	/
5	5/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.28	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
5	5/2	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
5	5/3	Cut	Modern drainage Ditch	/	1.0	Tr.	/	/
5	5/4	Deposit	Dark greyish brown fill	/	0.80	Tr.	None	/
5	5/5	Cut	Modern drainage ditch	/	0.80	Tr.	/	/
5	5/6	Deposit	Mid yellow grey sandy clay primary fill	0.12	0.80	Tr.	Pot	LIA/ER
5	5/7	Cut	Ditch	0.12	1.2	Tr.	/	/
5	5/8	Deposit	Dark greyish brown fill	/	1.0	Tr.	ceramic	Modern
5	5/9	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay fill	0.20	1.2	Tr.	None	/
6	6/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.33	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
6	6/2	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
7	7/1	Deposit	Mid-dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.24	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
7	7/2	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
7	7/3	Deposit	Mid brownish grey silty clay	0.32	0.80	Tr.	Pottery	Saxon
7	7/4	Cut	Ditch	0.40	1.0	Tr.		
7	7/5	Deposit	Mid yellowish brown silty clay	0.10	0.45	Tr.	None	/
7	7/6	Deposit	Dark brown grey silty clay	0.80 (min)	2.4	Tr.	None	/
7	7/7	Cut	Ditch	0.80 (min)	2.4	Tr.	/	/
7	7/8	Cut	Ditch	0.10	0.45	Tr.	/	/

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
7	7/9	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay fill	0.12	1.0	Tr.	None	/
8	8/1	Deposit	Mid grey brown loamy topsoil	0.28	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
8	8/2	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
9	9/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay	0.28	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
9	9/2	Deposit	Natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
9	9/3	Deposit	Dark grey brown greyish silty clay	/	1.2	Tr.	None	/
9	9/4	Cut	Ditch	/	1.2	Tr.	/	/
10	10/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
10	10/2	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
11	11/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
11	11/2	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
11	11/3	Deposit	Dark blackish brown silt y clay	0.24	1.2	Tr.	None	/
11	11/4	Cut	Ditch	0.24	1.2	Tr.	/	/
12	12/01	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
12	12/02	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
13	13/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
13	13/2	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
13	13/3	Deposit	Dark grey blue silty clay	n/a	0.60	Tr.	None	/
13	13/4	Cut	Ditch	n/a	0.60	Tr.	/	/
13	13/5	Deposit	Dark grey blue silty clay	n/a	0.70	Tr.	None	/
13	13/6	Cut	Ditch	n/a	0.70	Tr.	/	/
14	14/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
14	14/2	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
14	14/3	Deposit	Dark brown greyish silty clay	0.12	0.48	Tr.	None	/
14	14/4	Cut	Ditch	0.12	0.48	Tr.	/	/
14	14/5	Deposit	Dark brownish grey silty clay	0.05	1.2	1.0 (min)	None	/
14	14/6	Cut	Ditch	0.05	1.2	1.0 (min)	/	/
15	15/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
15	15/2	Deposit	Mid brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
15	15/3	Deposit	Dark brown silty clay topsoil	n/a	1.3	Tr.	None	/
15	15/4	Cut	Ditch	n/a	1.3	Tr.	/	/
15	15/5	Deposit	Dark brown silty clay fill	0.10	1.2	Tr.	None	/
15	15/6	Cut	Ditch	0.10	1.2	Tr.	/	/
15	15/11	Deposit	Dark brown silty clay fill	0.10	1.6	Tr.	None	/
15	15/12	Cut	Ditch	0.10	1.6	Tr.	/	/
16	16/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.28	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
16	16/2	Deposit	Light brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
17	17/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.24	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
17	17/2	Deposit	Light brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
17	17/3	Deposit	Mid greyish brown silty clay fill	0.30	2.0	Tr.	None	/
17	17/4	Cut	Ditch	0.30	2.0	Tr.	/	/
17	17/5	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay fill	0.10	1.3	Tr.	None	/
17	17/6	Cut	Ditch	0.10	1.3	Tr.	/	/
17	17/7	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay fill	0.10	0.90	Tr.	None	/
17	17/8	Cut	Ditch	0.10	0.90	Tr.	/	/
18	18/1	Deposit	Dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil	0.24	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
18	18/2		Light brownish yellow clay silt natural (Lower Oxford Clay)	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
18	18/3	Deposit	Mid brownish grey with orange mottling silty clay	0.80	1.0	Tr.	Pot	Saxon
18	18/4	Cut	Ditch	0.85	1.0	Tr.	/	/
18	18/5	Deposit	Dark greyish brown sandy clay	0.10	1.4	Tr.	None	/
18	18/6	Deposit	Dark greyish brown sandy clay	0.12	1.4	Tr.	None	/
18	18/7	Cut	Ditch	0.10	1.4	Tr.	/	/
18	18/8	Cut	Ditch	0.12	1.4	Tr.	/	/
18	18/9	Deposit	Mid orange brown clay loam fill	0.10	1.0	Tr.	None	/