

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**OF THE**

**LAND SOUTH OF LAMMAS EYOT, HIGH STREET,  
LONG WITTENHAM, OXFORDSHIRE**

**SU 5433 9361**

*On behalf of*

*Cranbourne Homes Ltd*

**MAY 2006**

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## **Summary**

*A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the ground work for a new dwelling and garage on land south of Lammas Eyot, High Street, Long Wittenham. The investigation revealed several Saxon boundaries ditches and evidence of later Medieval activity. A great deal of the site had been subjected to modern disturbance and many horticultural features were revealed during the watching brief.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The development site lay on the north side of the High Street, Long Wittenham at NGR SU 5433 9361. The previous use of the site was as a residential garden. The site lies at about 51m OD and the underlying geology is First Terrace (Floodplain) Thames River Gravels with alluvium overlying this to the rear of the property. The site area is about 0.08ha.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Planning permission had been granted for the erection of a dwelling house and detached garage with new access and driveway (previously given outline planning approval by application P04/W0126/O). The new building was situated on the street frontage. Due to the archaeological sensitivity of the historic core of Long Wittenham, and previous archaeological finds on the adjacent property, a condition was attached requiring an archaeological watching brief to be maintained during the period of groundworks. This was in line with PPG 16 and South Oxfordshire Local Plan Policies.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The development site lies within an area of some archaeological potential. A 10<sup>th</sup> century Viking bracelet (HBSMR 2865) has been recovered from the immediate vicinity of the site, being found in a garden between ‘Lammas Eyot’ and the High Street in the 1950s.

A previous watching brief (HBSMR Event OX976/Monument 16548) maintained during construction of a single detached dwelling (now called ‘Lammas Cottage’) on land adjacent to Lammas Eyot in 2002 produced evidence of a north-west/south-east orientated ditch at least 2.4m wide and 1m deep. The fill of the ditch contained occasional animal bone, pottery, oyster shell and frequent flecks of charcoal. It clearly relates to settlement activity, and is probably a boundary ditch. The pottery evidence appears to suggest that this feature is of late Saxon to Saxo-Norman date. Earlier, probable 10<sup>th</sup> century pottery was also found, but this was not *in situ*. However it does indicate activity at this time, and also ties in with the dating of the bracelet found on this site. In addition, a flint flake, probably of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date, also indicates activity of this period in the general area (JMHS 2002).

An extensive, high status Saxon cemetery has been recorded about 200m to south east of the application area. Other significant prehistoric and Romano-British archaeological remains have also been found in Long Wittenham.

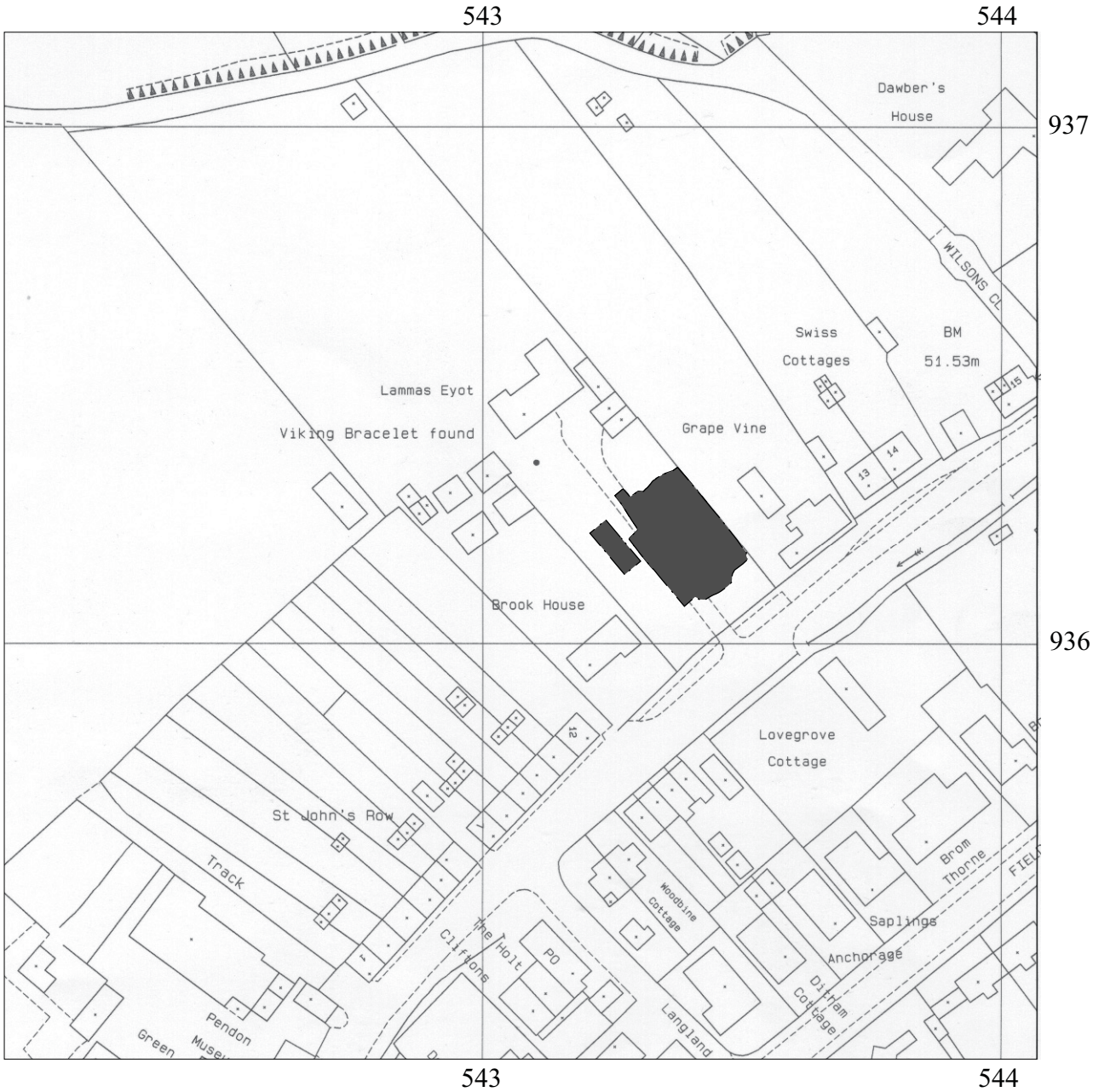


Figure 1. Site location.

Since 1949 the site has been used as a market garden and later for growing fir trees for Christmas.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

- to record any further evidence of late Saxon/early medieval settlement activity
- to record any further evidence of prehistoric activity

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

### **3.2 Methodology**

The ground reduction for the house and excavation of the foundation trenches for the garage was monitored. This work was conducted using a tracked 360° excavator. The ground reduction was carried out using a toothless ditching bucket.

Where deemed appropriate and when time allowed, individual features were partially excavated by hand.

## 4 RESULTS

Where possible, features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and the fill for pits, unless the feature was sample excavated by hand. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. A general description of the feature fills is given. Due to time constraints, features that appeared to be modern in nature (for example when a number of modern pottery sherds were encountered in the top fill) they were not usually excavated or allocated individual context numbers.

The upper-most deposits and the natural observed across the site were deemed to be very similar in appearance and dimension to the deposits observed at a watching brief conducted to the north-west of this site (JMHS 2002). These deposits (01, 02 and 03) are summarised below:

The earliest deposit encountered across the site was a loose light brownish yellow sandy gravel (03), the First Terrace Gravel. This was encountered at about 0.60-1.30m below existing ground level across the site. Overlying this was a firm mid-brownish red sandy clay (02) varying from 0.40 to 0.60m in thickness. This deposit contained occasional small sub-rounded gravel. Root and animal action was visible throughout the deposit. This was interpreted as an earlier ploughsoil which overlays the natural gravels. Overlying these deposits was the topsoil, a soft dark greyish brown silty clay (01) which contained occasional small sub-rounded gravel, occasional small fragments of charcoal and occasional small brick fragments. This deposit was c. 0.46m thick and the boundary with the sub-soil below was often very diffuse.

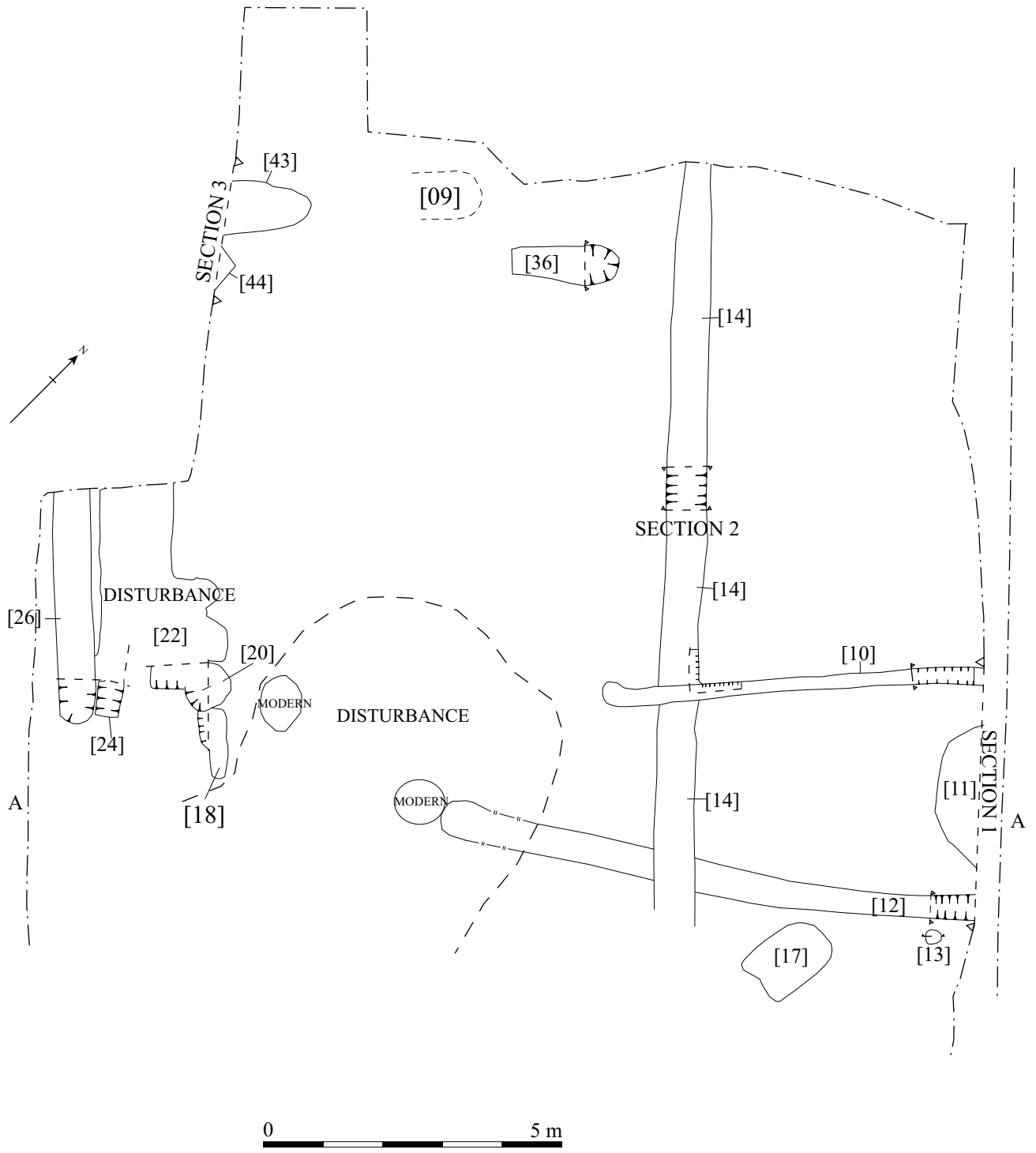
With the removal of the top-soil and sub-soil from site, many features were observed to cut the natural.

### **Linear features** – *See Figures 2, 3 and 4*

The rounded terminus of a linear feature and its fill [09] was observed in the north of the main site, aligned roughly north-east/south-west. This was a shallow feature c. 0.1m deep, 0.80m wide and 1.0m in length as seen. The fill was a light grey sandy silt with some charcoal flecks and about 20% gravel.

Further south, two small ditch features [10] and [12] were also observed orientated roughly north-east/south-west. Both of these ditches terminated within the confines of the site to the west and continued to the east across the site boundary. [10] was 0.24m deep, 0.35m wide and about 7.0m in length. The sides and base of this feature were concave and the fill was mid grey-brown sandy silt with 10% small gravel. [12] was a 'U' shaped ditch, 9.0m in length but heavily disturbed at its eastern end. It was 0.55m wide and 0.20m deep, its single fill was a compact dark brown sandy loam. Neither [10] nor [12] were entirely straight in plan. The terminus of [10] was notably bulbous in nature, whilst the terminus of [12] was slightly rounded.

Aligned north-west/south-east across most of the site, was ditch feature [14] which was filled non-uniformly by (15) and (16). [14] was 'U' shaped, 0.50m wide, about 0.40m deep and 20m long (Figure 4). This ditch was cut by north-east/south-west ditch [10] but appeared to cut the north-east/south-west ditch [12]. This feature also appeared to



‘A’ delineates where  
Figure 2 and Figure 3 join.

Figure 2. Plan of northern area of site



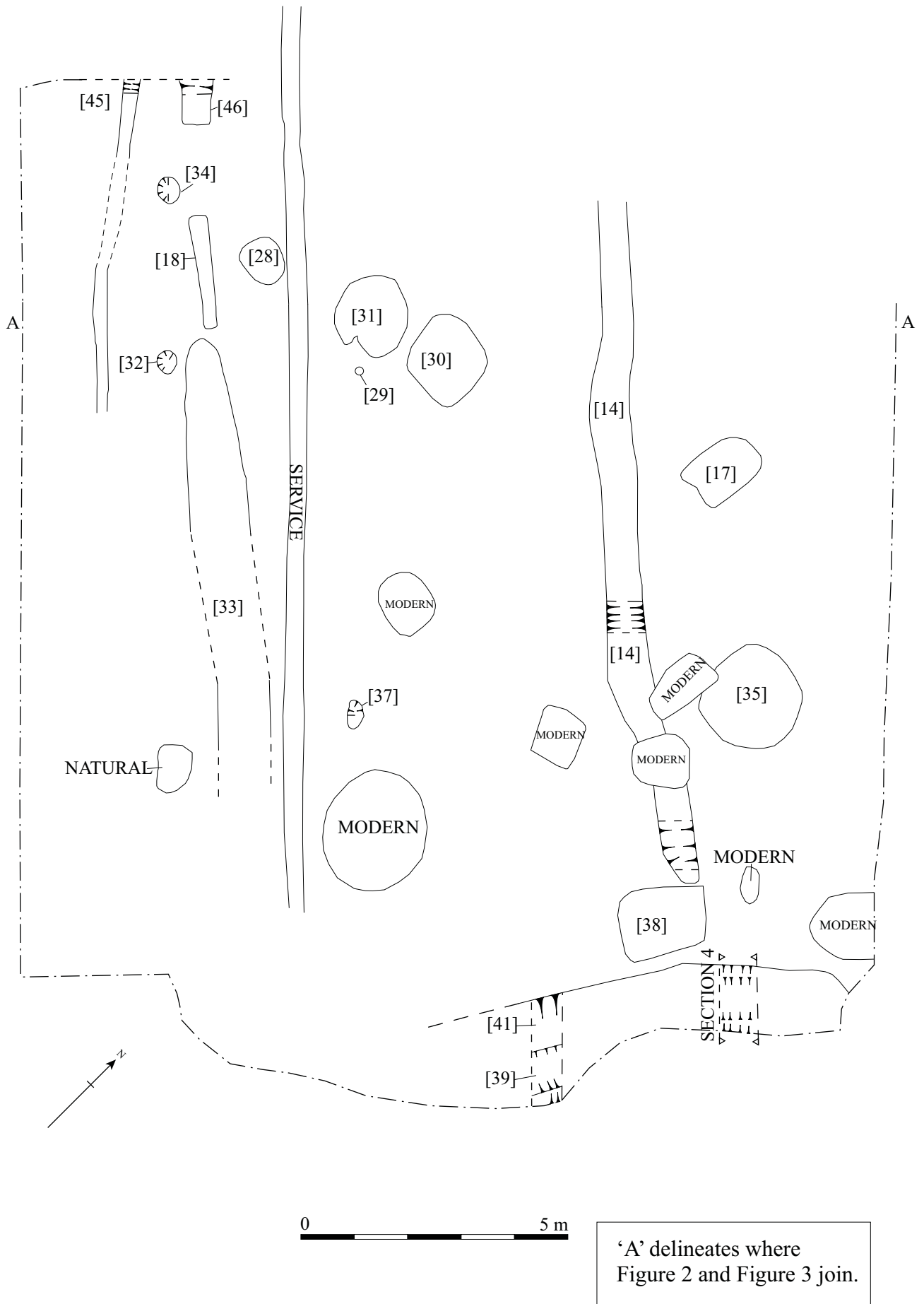


Figure 3. Plan of southern area of site

narrow and then terminate in a flat edge to the south of the site, but continued across the northern site limit. Lower fill (15) and upper fill (16) were both compact silty sands with moderate amounts of fine gravel, the former light brown and the latter grey-brown in colour.

At the southern limit of excavation, a large ditch [41] re-cut a smaller ditch [39] (Figure 4). These both ran in a north-east/south-west direction for approximately 2.0m before veering south. Both were disturbed by modern activity to the west and terminated just before the eastern site limit. The earlier ditch [39] was slightly bell shaped in profile, 0.80m wide and 0.40m deep. Its fill (40) was a compact yellow brown silty sand with 15% gravels and 10% large stones. The later linear [41] was a broad ditch with concave moderate sides and a flat base. Its southern edge continued outside the limit of excavation and it measured c. 1.96m wide and 0.42m deep as seen. Its fill (42) was a fairly compact grey-brown sandy loam with a small amount of fine gravel.

In an area on the western site limit, a number of intercutting features were found in a area of disturbance. A shallow gully [18], aligned north-west/south-east and measuring c. 1.0m in length, 0.40m wide and 0.15m deep filled with (19) a compact greyish brown silty sand. This gully was found to be cut by pits [20] and [22]. The fills (21) and (23) respectively, of these circular concave based pits were indistinguishable from the fill of [18]. Two linear features terminated in this area. [24] was aligned north-west/south-east and shallow 'U' shaped in profile, with a square terminus. Its length was about 4.0m, but to the north its form and dimensions were obscured by modern disturbance. It was 0.30m wide and 0.15m deep, filled with a dark yellow brown very sandy loam. To the west of this feature, running along side it, was another shallow ditch [26]. This feature was aligned north-west/south-east, c. 4.0m in length, 0.40m wide and 0.10m deep. The fill (27) was a dark yellow brown very sandy loam.

On further removal of deposits in this area, two more linear features emerged roughly aligned in a north-west/south-east direction. [45] was a shallow ditch measuring over 6.0m in length, 0.38m wide and 0.14m deep. This feature was heavily disturbed. [46] was a deeper 'U' shaped ditch, which appeared to terminate or be obscured by modern disturbance in this area. Its measurements were 0.80m in length, 0.50m wide and 0.26m deep. A linear or cigar shaped feature [33] with a rounded terminus was found to run north-west/south-east to the centre of the site. This was highly disturbed, but appeared to be about 9.0m in length and 1.30m wide. It was not excavated as it was initially thought to be modern due to intrusive modern finds. However, subsequent analysis has indicated that it may have continued to the north as ditch [46]. The small ditch [18] may have been a later addition on the same alignment – as it would have blocked the gap created by the termini of [46] and [33].

#### **Pit features – See Figures 2, 3 and 4**

A tree bole [11] was observed in the east part of the site and measured c0.80m in width and c. 0.78m deep. This tree bole disturbed a modern refuse pit [47] which contained animal bone, ceramic building material (CBM) and modern pottery and measured about 0.80m in length and 0.64m deep as seen in section (Figure 4).

A posthole [13], measuring 0.38m EW and 0.30m NS and 0.23m deep was found just to the south of ditch [12]. Its fill was a red-brown sandy silt with 15% very fine gravel.

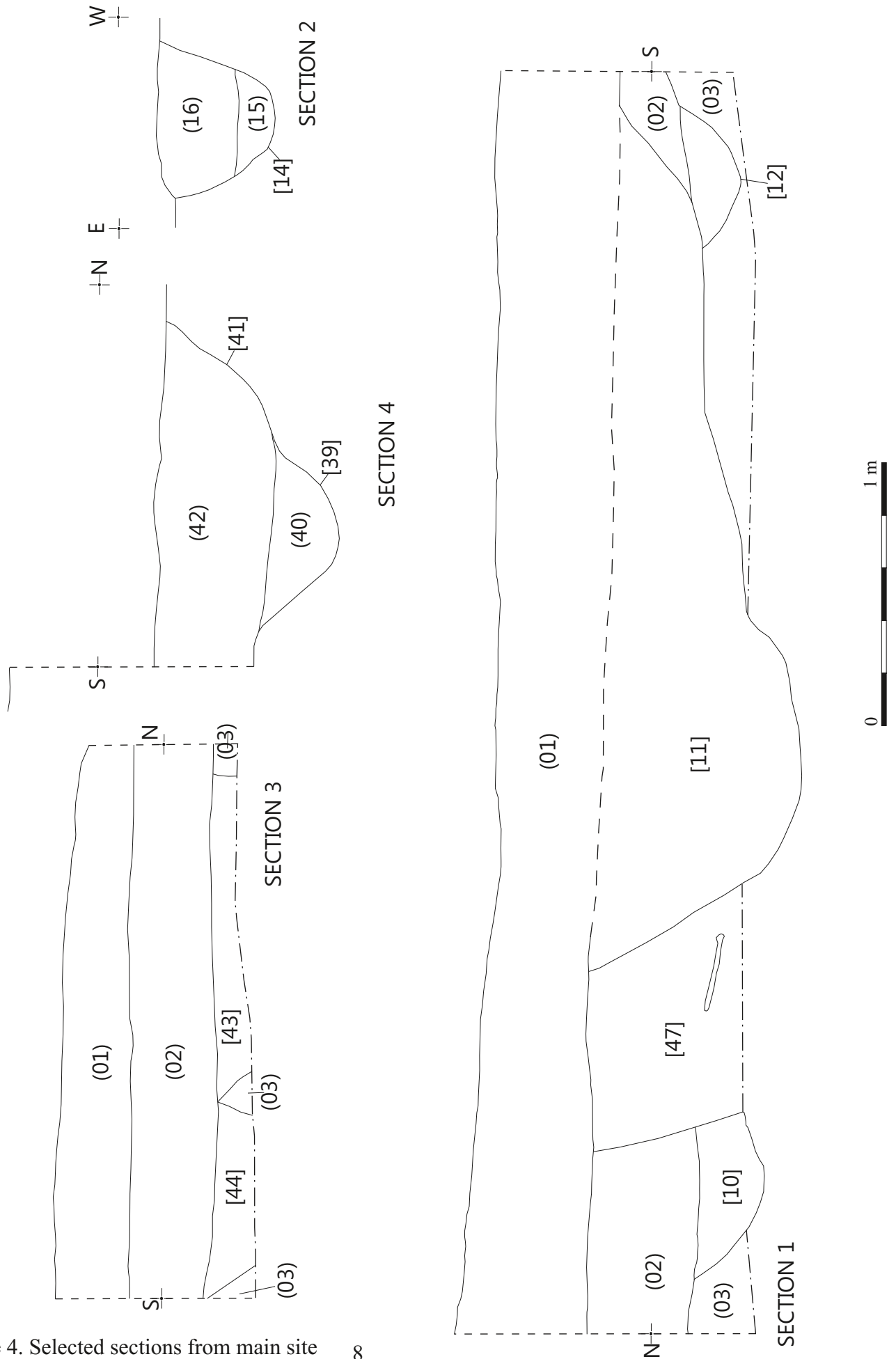


Figure 4. Selected sections from main site

Towards the centre of the site, an irregular pit [17] measured about 2.0m across with a dark yellow-brown to grey-brown silty sand fill. This feature contained moderate amounts of brick and sherds of residual Neolithic and Medieval pottery. In the south of the site, large 2.0m pits like [35] and [38] were discovered. These, like several other features in the area was found to contain modern ceramic building material and were not excavated. A 0.20m circular pit, [37] was revealed in the south-west of the site and was also modern.

Other modern features recorded specifically for finds recovery but not fully excavated were pits [28], [29], [30], [31], [32] and [34] which were all discovered towards the west of the site in an area of modern disturbance. Ranging between 0.15m to 1.50m in diameter and sub-circular or sub-rectangular in form, all contained obvious modern material.

To the north of the site, a large rectangular pit [36] with a rounded eastern end measuring 2.2m in length, 0.8m at its widest and 0.42m deep was discovered to contain a few fragments of unidentifiable bone. Its fill was a very compact light grey-brown sandy silt with 10% gravel and some charcoal flecks. This pit was aligned north-east/south-west.

In the north-west corner of the site, two features were partially revealed. [43] is a possible ditch terminus or oval pit feature. It appeared to be aligned north-east/south-west and measured about 1.50m long, 1.10m at its widest and more than 0.15m deep. [44] appeared as a corner of a feature, measuring 0.74m as seen in north-south section, 0.20m in plan and at least 0.16m deep. Both of these features were cut into the natural (03) and appear under subsoil (02) (Figure 4).

#### **Garage area – See Figure 5**

The topsoil in this area had been removed prior to excavation of the garage foundation trenches. All features observed in this area cut through the natural material (03) and were beneath the subsoil (02).

The removal of the garage foundations yielded a number of pits and possible linear features. An ovoid pit [48], with moderate regular sides and a concave base was observed in section, in close proximity to a similar pit [50]. These appeared to share the same fill (49) a red-brown silty sandy clay. A probable pit cut [51] was observed in the northern garage foundation trench. This pit at its widest was 1.36m and its depth was 0.48m. The fill (52) was a light orange-brown, loose silty loam with a few small charcoal flecks, some larger charcoal fragments and a few small stones.

Two small ‘U’ shaped features [53] and [55] were observed to be very similar in size and shape. The depth of these features was 0.36m and 0.30m and the width of both was 0.30m. The fills, (54) and (56) respectively, were both orange-brown clays with gravel inclusions at the base of the feature. The location of these features suggests that they may be sections of a north-east/south-west linear about 3.0m in length. Finally, a small shallow pit [57] was observed in the west-facing section of the eastern garage foundation trench which measured 0.46m x 0.20m. Its fill (58), was an orange-brown sandy clay with gravel inclusions towards the base of the feature.

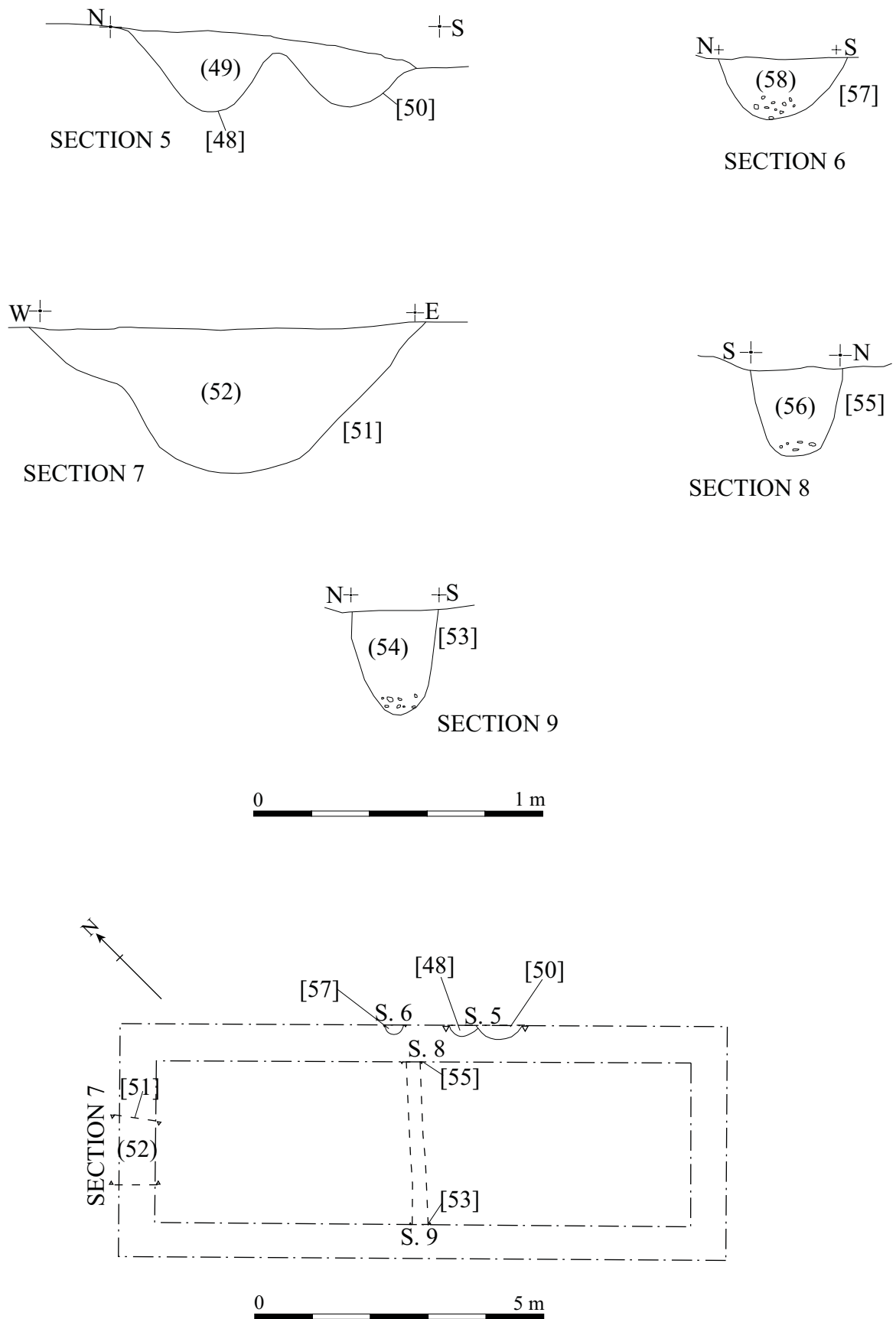


Figure 5. Plan and sections of garage area to the west of the main site

## 5 FINDS

### 5.1 Pottery (By Paul Blinkhorn)

The pottery assemblage comprised 37 sherds with a total weight of 635g. It consisted of a mixture of Neolithic, early and late Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval wares.

#### Fabric

A single sherd (7g) from the rim of a decorated Neolithic vessel, in a fabric comprising moderate lumps of white flint up to 5mm, was noted in context 17. In addition, four sherds (12g) of early Saxon hand-built pottery were present in context 14. All were quartz-based fabrics, with one also having moderate chaff. Such fabrics are typical of the region. One of the sherds had curvilinear decoration. Myres (1977) has suggested that such pottery is amongst the earliest Anglo-Saxon pottery known in England, and may date to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century.

The late Saxon and later pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXR: *St. Neots Ware type*, AD850-1100. 1 sherd, 3g.

OXAC: *Cotswold-type ware*, AD975-1350. 2 sherds, 15g.

WA27: *Wallingford ware*, AD1050 – 1250. 1 sherd, 22g.

OXBF: *North-East Wiltshire Ware*, AD1050 – 1400. 6 sherds, 75g.

OXAG: *Abingdon ware*, mid/late 11<sup>th</sup> – mid 14<sup>th</sup> century. 1 sherd, 13g

OXAM: *Brill/Boarstall ware*, AD1200 – 1600. 7 sherds, 134g.

OXDR: *Red Earthenwares*, 1550+. 2 sherds, 68g.

WHEW: *Mass-produced white earthenwares*, mid 19th - 20th C. 12 sherds, 286g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

The range of medieval and later fabrics is typical of sites in the region. One context was of late Saxon date, the rest medieval or post-medieval. Very little medieval pottery was dateable to later than the 13<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that there may have been an hiatus in activity at that time, although this may be a slightly false picture due to the relatively small assemblage size.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	Neolithic		E/MS		OXR		OXAC		OXBF		WA27		OXAG		OXAM		OXDR		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1							1	4									1	9	1	4	19thC
10									1	22					5	116					15thC
14			4	12	1	3															10thC
17	1	7							1	21	1	22	1	13							L11thC
23																		1	158		19thC
25							1	11	1	4											M11thC
30																			1	7	19thC
31																			5	50	19thC
32																			1	2	19thC
33																			3	65	19thC
35														1	15						13thC
37														1	3						13thC
38																	1	59			M16thC
40									1	4											M11thC
42									2	24											M11thC
Total	1	7	4	12	1	3	2	15	6	75	1	22	1	13	7	134	2	68	12	286	

## 5.2 Other finds

Contexts [10], [11], [12], [14], [23], [35], [36], [40], (42) and [47] yielded several fragments of animal bone each, some of which showed signs of butchery. An octagonal clear glass ink bottle marked 'HYDE LONDON' was found in pit [38]. A small fragment of clay pipe stem was recovered from pit [31]. Two fragments of corroded iron were found in pit fill [33] and a corroded 13cm square head iron nail from pit [42]. A small quantity of red brick and tile fragments were retained from (23), [28], [30], [33], [35], [36] and (42).

## 6 DISCUSSION

A single sherd of decorated Neolithic pottery from the modern feature [17] is residual but may indicate some level of earlier activity in the area. Ditch [14] running north-west/south-east across most of the site contained four sherds of 10th century or earlier Saxon pottery. On the same alignment, the shallow ditch [24] to the west of the site contained two sherds of mid-11<sup>th</sup> century or slightly later pottery. Significantly, these ditches lie on the same alignment as a ditch discovered in the nearby Lammas Eyot site which was similarly dated to the late 10<sup>th</sup> to mid-11<sup>th</sup> centuries (JMHS 2002).

The north-west/south-east boundaries appear to be land divisions stretched back from the line of the present High Street (although this may be a super-imposed feature) and on the same alignment as the present property divisions. The large ditch (2.4m wide) found to the north and west of the site in 2002 is much more substantial than those found in this watching brief. The gullies/ditches [18], [24], [26], [33], and [46] are likely to represent the recutting of one of these boundaries. The boundary ditch found in 2002 is about 20m to the east of these features and the ditch [14] is c. 10m to the west of these. The eastern part of the site also appears to have been divided laterally. Ditch [12] which is Saxon or earlier in date is possibly associated with ditch [33] with an entrance left between them when the area east of [33] and [46] was not subdivided north-south. Similarly, an entrance may have been left between [33] and [46] before being blocked by [18] when a north-west/south-east boundary [14] was laid out. This later boundary is then replaced by a north-east/south-west boundary [10].

At the southern site limit, at a right angle to ditch [14], lay the re-cut ditch [39] and [41]. Both cuts of this feature contained pottery dating from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This may be a roadside ditch along the line of what is now the High Street. It is possible they replaced an earlier ditch further south, contemporary with the original layout of the land division in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The ditches on this site appear to have been truncated (probably heavily) by later agricultural and horticultural activity. The boundaries appear to have been laid out in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries although earlier activity is indicated by earlier pottery.

The later Saxon occupation continues into the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries before a break in activity when there appears to be some limited 15<sup>th</sup> century activity. It is possible that evidence for timber buildings has not survived, leaving only more substantial features like boundary ditches visible. Later Medieval use of the site is indicated by two features and the presence of Medieval pottery in residual contexts. A small pit or post-hole [37] to the south of the site contained one sherd of probable 13<sup>th</sup> century pottery. The north-east/south-west linear [10] which cuts the early Saxon ditch [14]



contained five sherds of 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century pottery. This ditch may be evidence of a return to dividing the land north-east/south-west direction.

Unsurprisingly, many features contained sherds of mass produced 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery. These include pits [22], [30], [31] and [32]. In addition, CBM was discovered and retained for features [28] [33] and [36] indicating that these features were modern in date or recently disturbed. Modern features identified on-site include [47] and [29]. Many unnumbered features contained similar pottery and CBM which was not retained. It is likely that many of these modern features relate to the market-garden and nursery activity on the site in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Small fragments of CBM and an iron nail retrieved from the fill of [41] and similar finds from [33] have been identified as intrusive due to the modern disturbance in the areas of this features. Some features remain undated, such as linear [46] and the nearby pit [20] although a modern origin is likely. Possible linear [09] and posthole [13] cannot be securely dated. It is also difficult to date features [43] and [44], but as they appear in section below the subsoil (02) they are unlikely to be modern in origin.

The foundation trenches removed for the construction of a garage to the west of the main site revealed no datable features. A possible north-east/south-west linear feature [53]/[55] was observed running across the garage area measuring about 3.0m. A few small pit like features [48], [50] and [57] were revealed in the eastern foundation trench and one much larger pit [51] was observed in the northern trench. However, none of these could be directly related to discoveries in the main part of the site.

## 6.1 Conclusions

The archaeology revealed by this watching brief consists primarily of three or more Saxon ditches across the site, which appear to be aligned with a similarly dated ditch feature to the north of the site (JMHS 2002). A collection of small gullies and ditches in the west of the site may be a series of recuts for a larger ditch. This may indicate continuous site use – probably settlement or agriculture – over an area larger than the present site. Earlier site use is indicated only by two undated ditches which are Saxon or earlier in date and one sherd of residual Neolithic pottery. Later site use is indicated by a 15<sup>th</sup> century Medieval ditch, a possible 13<sup>th</sup> century pit and several sherds of Medieval pottery discovered across the site, often appearing redeposited in modern garden features. Ultimately however, much of the site is characterised by later post-Medieval site use and modern disturbance.

## 7 ARCHIVE

### Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

#### Paper record

The project brief  
Written scheme of investigation  
The project report  
The primary site records  
Finds contents list

#### Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services, before being deposited with the Oxfordshire County Council Museums Resource Centre under Museum Accession number 2006.9.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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