

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

AT

TRANSCO DEPOT, LAUNTON ROAD,

BICESTER, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 5910 2250

On behalf of

CgMs Consulting

MAY 2005

REPORT FOR

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27 April 2005

REPORT ISSUED

10 May 2005

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BITD 05

JMHS Project No:

1527

Oxfordshire Museums Accession No.

OXCMS: 2005.49

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out as part of a consideration of a planning application for residential development. Mechanical trenching found an undated feature pre-dating 13th century. In addition sherds of pottery from the medieval and post-medieval periods indicate that the site had been used for agricultural purposes.

1 INTRODUCTION

51.1 Origins of the Project

A planning application has been submitted for the construction of 35 dwellings with associated car parking and access (04/02756/OUT). Due to the presence of potential remains of archaeological interest in the proposal area, Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) advised that an archaeological evaluation of the application site should be undertaken prior to the determination of the planning application. OCAS prepared a *Brief* for such archaeological work. John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a *Specification* produced by CgMs Consulting and approved by OCAS. This set out the methods to be employed for demonstrating whether or not any archaeological remains survived on the site, and for establishing their significance in relation to the development proposal.

1.2 The Site (Figure 1)

The site of the proposed development lies on Launton Road, Bicester (NGR SP 5190 2250). It is c. 0.47ha and is bound by Launton Road to the west and a railway line to the east. The geology is Oxford Clay, although it lies close to the boundary with Cornbrash, and the site is at approximately 69m OD. The site is currently used as a Transco depot, primarily for the storage of gas pipes.

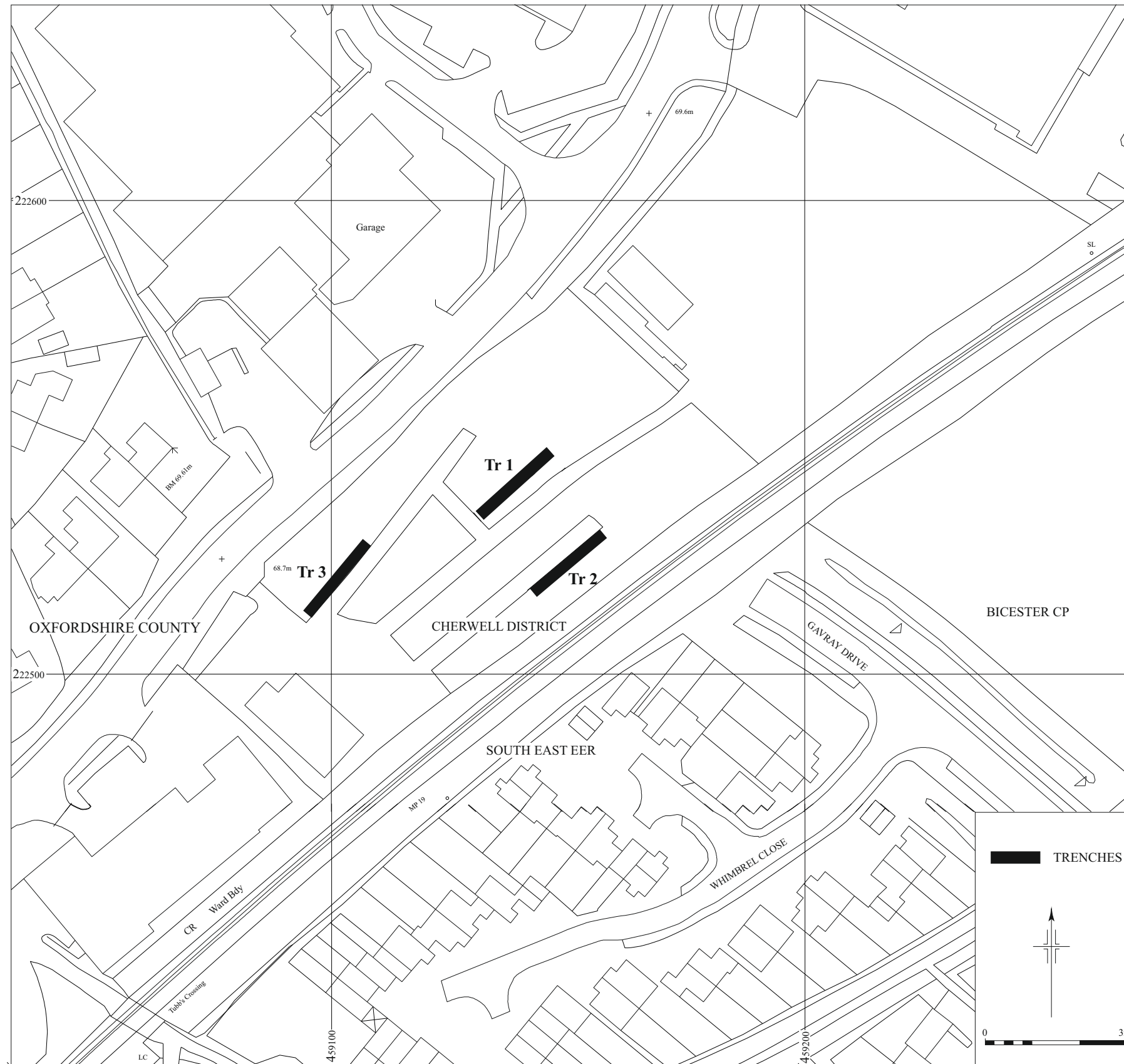
1.3 Archaeological Background

OCAS regards the area as having archaeological potential. While there are no records of archaeological remains within the site nearby investigations (i.e. Northamptonshire Archaeology in 2004 and Oxford Archaeology in 1997) have produced evidence of extensive Romano British activity comprising field systems and small farmsteads/settlements of 1st – 2nd century date.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence
- To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains
- To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present



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Figure 1. Site and trench location

- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present
- To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by CgMs Consulting and subsequently agreed with OCAS and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of three trenches.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Specification*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

The field evaluation comprised the excavation of three trenches totalling 58.5m in length (Figure 1). Trench widths varied between 2.10 and 2.35m. Trench dimensions are given in Appendix 1. The trenches were excavated using a 5 tonne mini-excavator equipped with a 1400mm wide toothless bucket. Trenches were excavated down to the natural geology under direct archaeological control. Archaeological features present were sampled by hand excavation.

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.

Ms Hannah Fluck of OCAS and Rob Bourn of CgMs Consulting monitored the works.

4 RESULTS

Deposits and fills are referred to in the text and figures in brackets: (02), cut features: [03]. Trench numbers precede deposit and cut numbers i.e. (1/02) is deposit 02 in Trench 1.

The Oxford Clay was exposed in all trenches where it consisted of pale grey and pale yellow (or pale orange)-brown clay (1/04, 2/04, 3/05). Within Trenches 1 and 2 lenses of dull orange-brown fine gravel were present.

Lying above the Oxford Clay were remnants of a ploughsoil in all trenches (1/03, 2/03, 3/04). This comprised pale grey and pale yellow-brown clay with very occasional (Trench 1) and less than 1% small gravel (Trenches 2 & 3). The thickness of the ploughsoil was as follows: Trench 1, 130mm W end to 180mm E end; Trench 2, 180mm; Trench 3, 200-220mm.

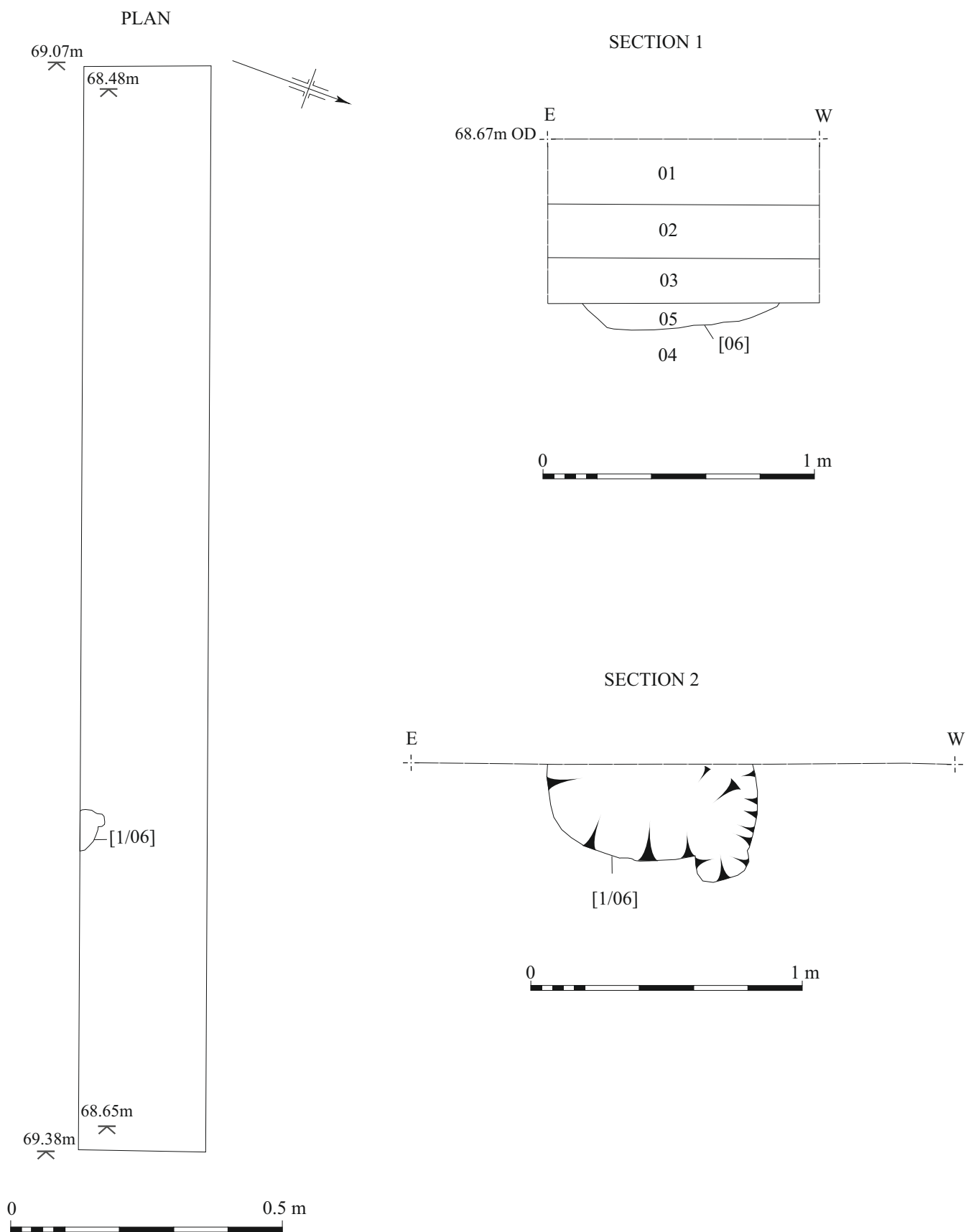


Figure 2. Trench 1 plans and section

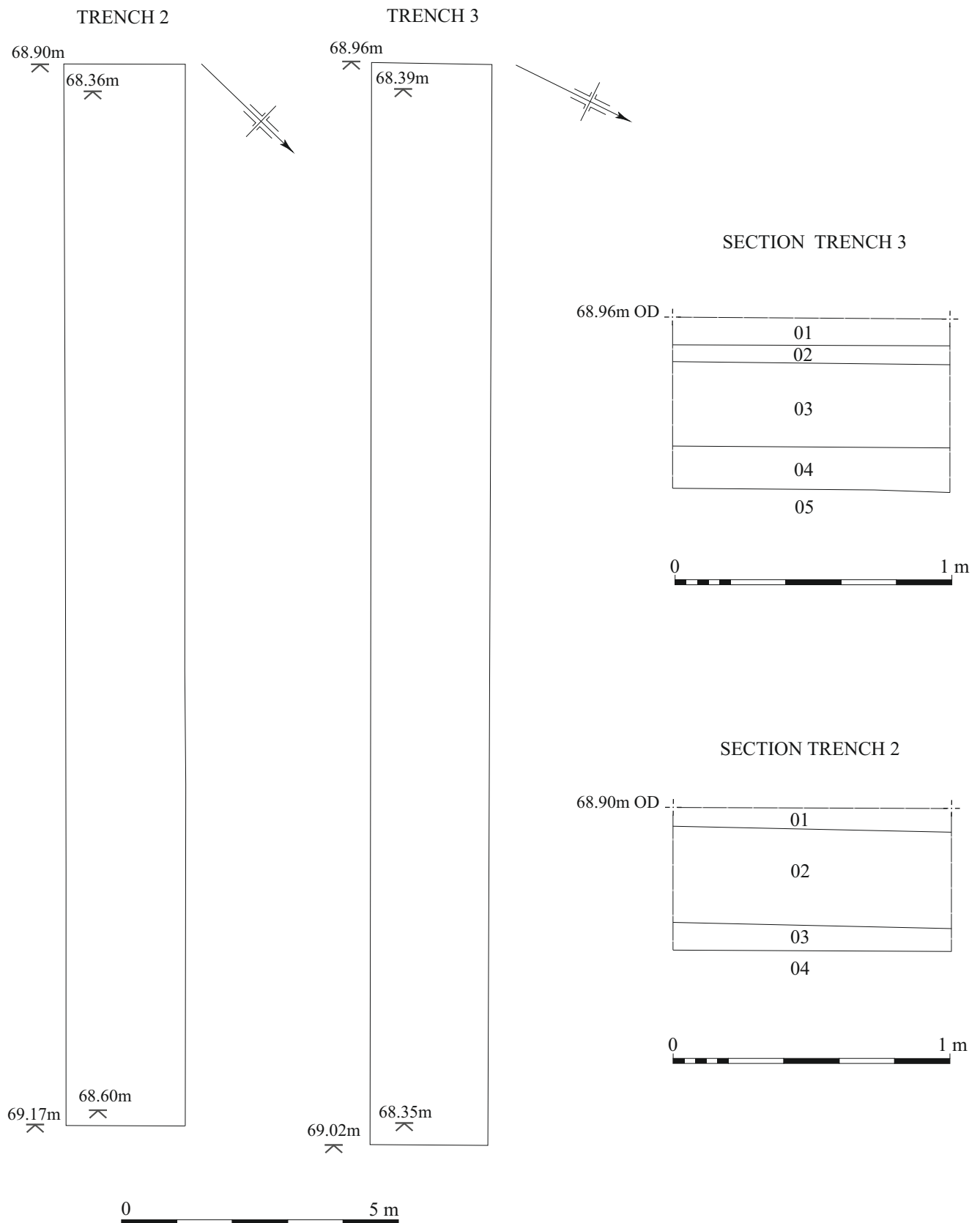


Figure 3. Trench 2 and 3 plans and sections

Above the ploughsoil in Trenches 1 and 3 was a layer of demolition rubble of broken concrete slab and occasional bricks (1/02, 3/03) 220mm thick in Trench 3 and 260-300mm thick in Trench 1. Covering the demolition rubble in Trench 3 was a layer of Type 1 stone 100mm thick (3/02). The uppermost layer in Trenches 1 and 3 was a thin layer of topsoil; 40mm thick in Trench 3 and 180mm in Trench 1 (3/01, 1/01).

Within Trench 2 the ploughsoil was covered by a 260-310mm thick layer of stone and gravel (2/02). Covering this was Type 1 stone bedded on clay some 180mm thick.

The only feature present within the trenches was in Trench 1. A small irregular feature (1/06) survived 80-100mm deep within the top of the Oxford Clay. Generally the feature was sub-circular in plan with a protuberance on the north-west side. The main part had a generally flat base with sides at an angle of 45° on the north, 60° on the east and 30° on the west. The main part was 760mm wide east west and it extended under the south side of the trench. The protuberance had sides of 80° and was 130mm deep and 190mm wide. The feature was filled by dull orange-brown clay with red and black scorched clay and a small fragment of burnt gravel. The feature was sealed by the ploughsoil (1/03).

5 FINDS

5.1 The Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 8 sherds with a total weight of 96 g. It comprised three context-specific groups, one which was entirely medieval, and the others 17th century.

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

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 5 sherds, 35g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 1 sherd, 18g.

OXRESWL: Polychrome Slipware, 17thC. 2 sherds, 43g.

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 pottery types are all well-known in the region. The entire assemblage was abraded to a greater or lesser degree, and had obviously been the subject of considerable attrition before its final stratification.

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

Tr	Context	OXAM		OXRESWL		OXDR		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	3	5	35					13thC
2	3					1	18	L17thC
3	4			2	43			17thC
	Total	5	35	2	43	1	18	

5.2 Other finds

A piece of post-medieval roof tile was recovered from the ploughsoil in Trench 2. Two pieces of animal bone came from the similar deposit in Trench 3.

6 DISCUSSION

While the feature within Trench 1 may be the remains of a shallow pit with a posthole/stakehole it is more likely to be the remains of land clearance with the burning out of roots of a tree or bush.

The finds from the ploughsoil represent manuring of fields and show that the land was in agricultural use during the medieval period (probably 13th and 14/15th centuries) before being used again in the 17th century.

Earlier recent surfaces were present in Trenches 2 (2/02) and 3 (3/02).

7 THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of the following:

- The project brief
- Specification
- The project report
- The primary site records
- The photographic and drawn records

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services. The archive will be transferred to:

Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre, Cotswold Dene, Standlake, Witney OX29 7QG under accession number OXCMS: 2005.49.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mellor, M, 1984 A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century in TG Hassall *et al*, Excavations at St Ebbe's *Oxoniensia* 49, 181-219.

Mellor, M, 1994 Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region *Oxoniensia* 59, 17-217

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (mm)	Width (mm)	Length (mm)	Finds	Date
Trench 1 20m x 2.35m							
01	Deposit	Topsoil	200	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
02	Deposit	Demolition rubble	260-300	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
03	Deposit	Ploughsoil	130-180	Trench	Trench	Pot	C 17 th
04	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	-
05	Fill	Fill of 1/06	80-100	760	350+	None	Pre C 13 th
06	Cut	Pit?	80-100	760	350+	-	Pre C 13 th
Trench 2 19m x 2.15m							
01	Deposit	Topsoil	180	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
02	Deposit	Surface	260-310	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
03	Deposit	Ploughsoil	80	Trench	Trench	cbm	C 17 th
04	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	-
Trench 3 19.5m x 2.10m							
01	Deposit	Topsoil	40	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
02	Deposit	Surface	100	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
03	Deposit	Demolition	220	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
04	Deposit	Ploughsoil	200-220	Trench	Trench	Pot, bone	C17 th
05	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	-