

**JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
ON THE PROPOSED CEMETERY EXTENSION,  
WEST OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH,  
BLACK BOURTON.  
OXFORDSHIRE.**

**SP 2859 0421**

*On behalf of  
Carterton Town Council.*

**NOVEMBER 2002**

**REPORT FOR** Carterton Town Council.  
Town Hall,  
Alvescot Road.  
Carterton.  
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## **Summary**

*An evaluation of this site was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2002. Two trenches each measuring 15.00m x 1.65m were excavated across the proposed development area to reveal the underlying natural gravel at approximately 79.76m OD. A single large shallow cut feature of middle Saxon date was cut into this natural gravel to the north of the proposed development area. Several undated postholes were also found across the rest of the investigated area. All archaeological deposits were sealed by the subsoil, which was in turn overlain by the topsoil of the site.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The site of the proposed development is located on the west side of the Church of St Mary, Black Bourton. The church is accessed via Burford Road that runs from the B4020 between Alvescot and Clanfield (NGR SP 28590421). The underlying geology is Oxford Clay in the north part of the site with Third Terrace River Gravels in the south. The site lies at approximately 80m OD and the current land use is pasture.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Planning permission was sought from West Oxfordshire District Council to create an extension to the existing cemetery at Black Bourton. Due to the archaeological potential of the site an archaeological evaluation of the site was required prior to the determination of the application. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services had prepared a Brief for such an evaluation and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* was subsequently prepared in response to this document, which outlined a method that would satisfy the requirements of the brief. The fieldwork was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The church originally dates to the early twelfth century but was remodelled in the thirteenth century. The settlement of Black Bourton is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and would appear therefore to date to at least the later Anglo-Saxon period. To the southwest of the proposed development an Anglo-Saxon inhumation was found. Whether this was an isolated burial or part of a larger group or cemetery is not known. To the west a rectangular enclosure with possible building platforms within it has been identified on an aerial photograph. This is considered possibly to be the manorial enclosure of the Hungerford family that was demolished in or around 1800.

Figure 1. Site and trench location

Scale 1:1250

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- In particular to establish the presence/absence of further Anglo-Saxon burials
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In response to a *Brief* issued by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of a total of two trenches across the site (fig. 1).

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 of Field Archaeologists (1994).

### **3.2 Methodology**

The trenching sample of 30.0 x 1.50m specified within the brief was achieved through the excavation of two 15.0m trenches (see fig. 1). All trenches were 1.55 m wide and were excavated by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits

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. The trenches were backfilled after recording. The work was monitored by Mr. Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services. A continuous running sequence of context numbers was employed with nos. 001-019 assigned to Trench 1 and 020-031 assigned to Trench 2.

## 4 RESULTS

The lowest recorded deposit in both trenches comprised mixed mid reddish yellow to brown sand and gravel (023). This constituted the natural geology of the site and was seen to slope down very slightly from a height of 79.78m above Ordnance Datum (henceforth AOD) in the south (Trench 1) to 79.73m AOD to the north (Trench 2).

### *Trench 1 (Figure 2)*

Only three potential archaeological features were encountered within this trench. These were all located at the eastern end of the trench and comprised two possible postholes, [013], [016] and a possible pit [019] (Fig. 3). All three features displayed comparable sequences of infilling, which consisted of primary fills of dark yellow brown pea-grit- (012), (015) and (017) respectively, overlain by dark yellow brown sandy clayey silts with frequent pebbles- (011), (014) and (017) respectively. No finds were recovered from any of these fills. The remaining features in this trench were all of natural origin and include [005], [008] and [010]. Though the fills of these features were similar to those described above, these features were typified by very diffuse edges usually associated with such features as tree throws, etc.

All features were sealed by a layer of dark yellowish brown clayey silt (002) containing moderate pebbles and cobbles, occasional pot and bone. This constituted the subsoil of the site and was in turn sealed by the topsoil (001), composed of a dark brown clayey silt with moderate pebbles, occasional bone and pottery.

### *Trench 2 (Figure 4 & 5)*

This trench was seen to contain four archaeological features cut into the natural gravel: three postholes and a large but shallow sub-ovoid feature. Posthole [024] possessed a well-rounded profile (see fig. 5) and was filled with greyish brown clayey silt with frequent gravel and occasional charcoal. Postholes [026] and [028], on the other hand displayed much squarer profiles, with vertical sides and flat bases (see fig. 5). These two features may be further differentiated from [024] by their fills (027), (029) respectively which comprised mid brown sandy silts with frequent gravel and charcoal.

Posthole [028] was partially truncated by cut [031], a large irregular but shallow cut approximately 0.20m deep and filled with mid brown sandy silt with frequent gravel and charcoal (Figs 4 & 5). Partial excavation of this feature yielded a large quantity of middle Saxon pottery, butchered animal bone and a small bone comb of typically Anglo-Saxon design.

This feature was sealed by a probable plough soil of mid reddish brown silt with frequent gravel (022), which was in turn sealed by the subsoil of the site (021). Topsoil (021) sealed this layer.

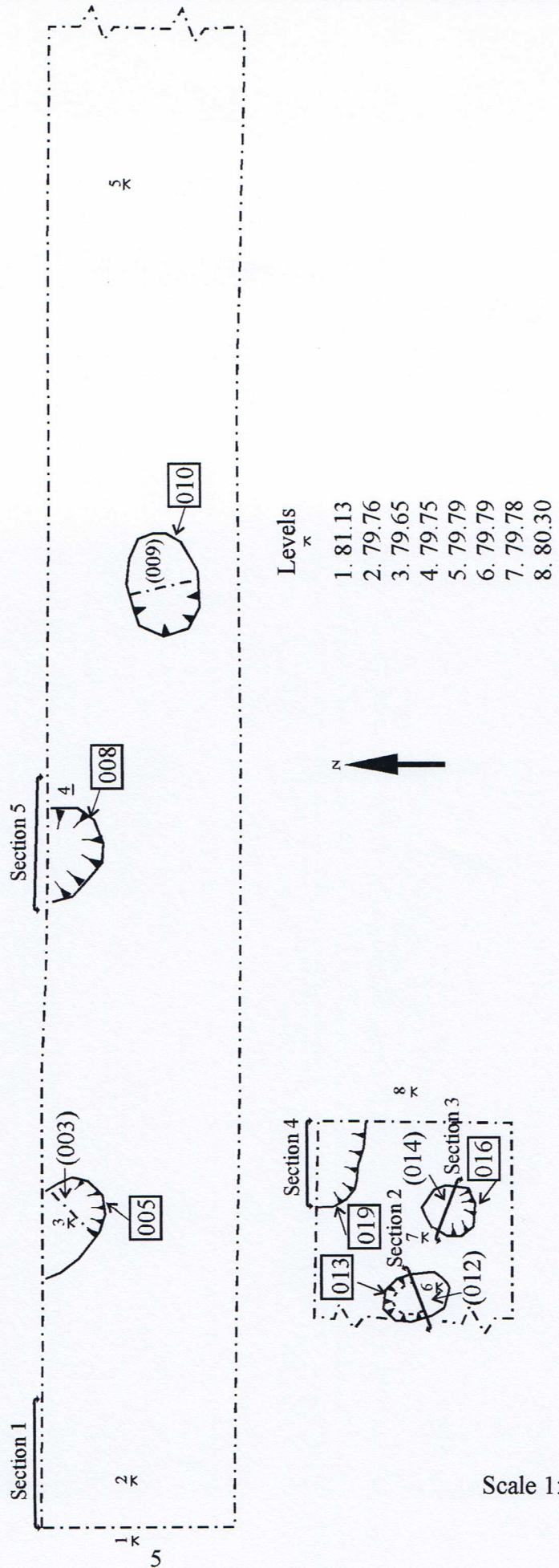


Figure 2. Trench 1 Plan

Scale 1:50



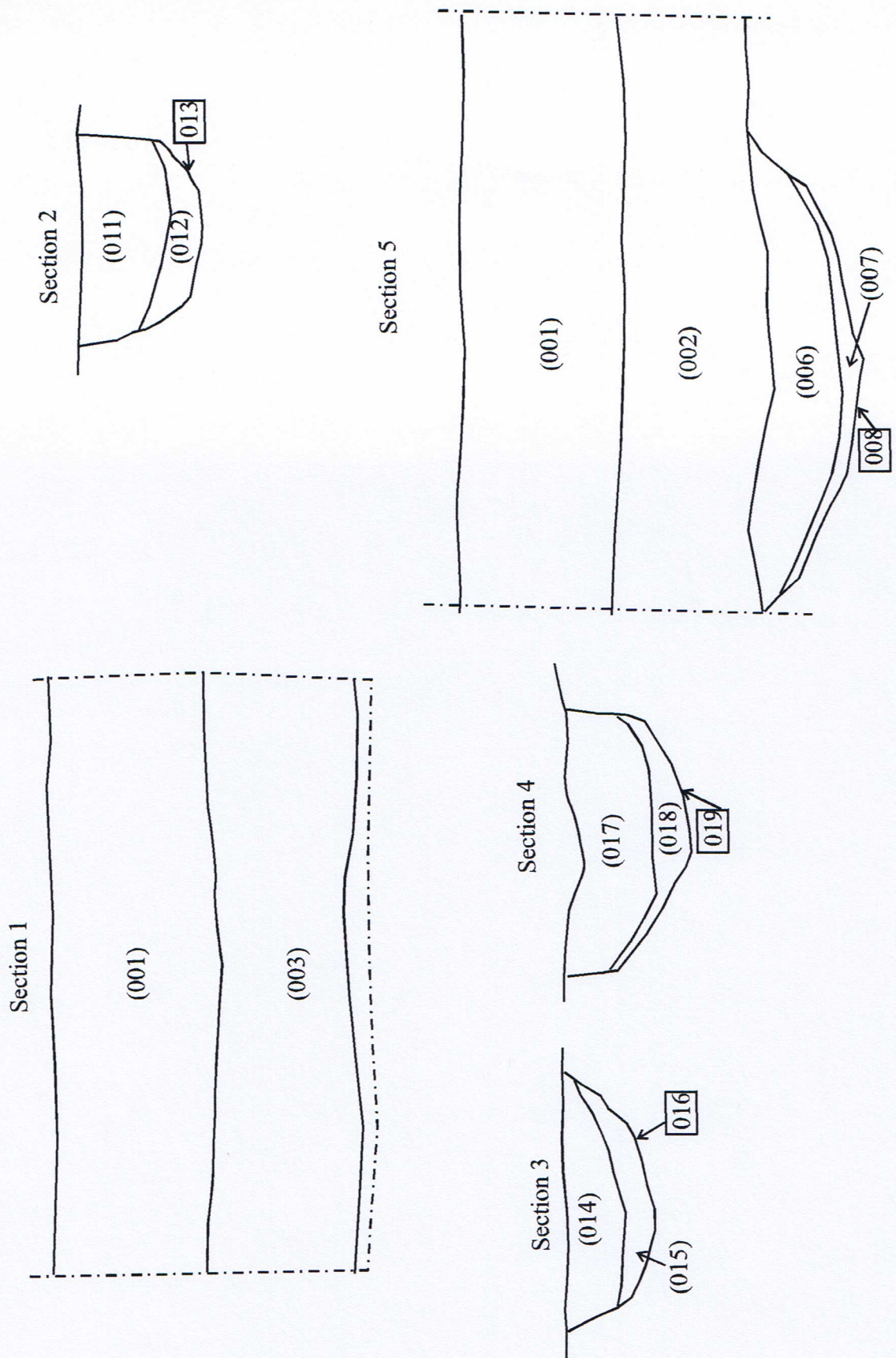


Figure 3. Trench 1 sections

Scale 1:10

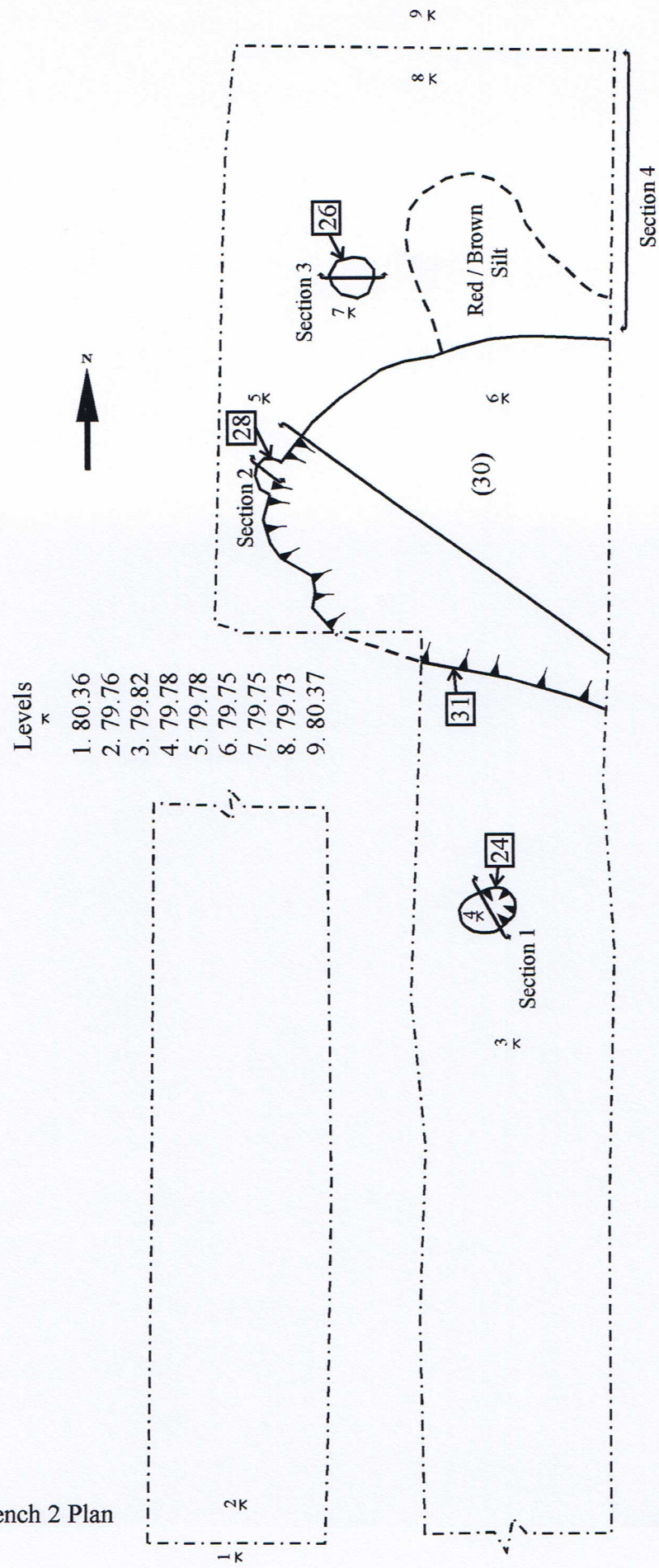


Figure 4. Trench 2 Plan

Scale 1:50

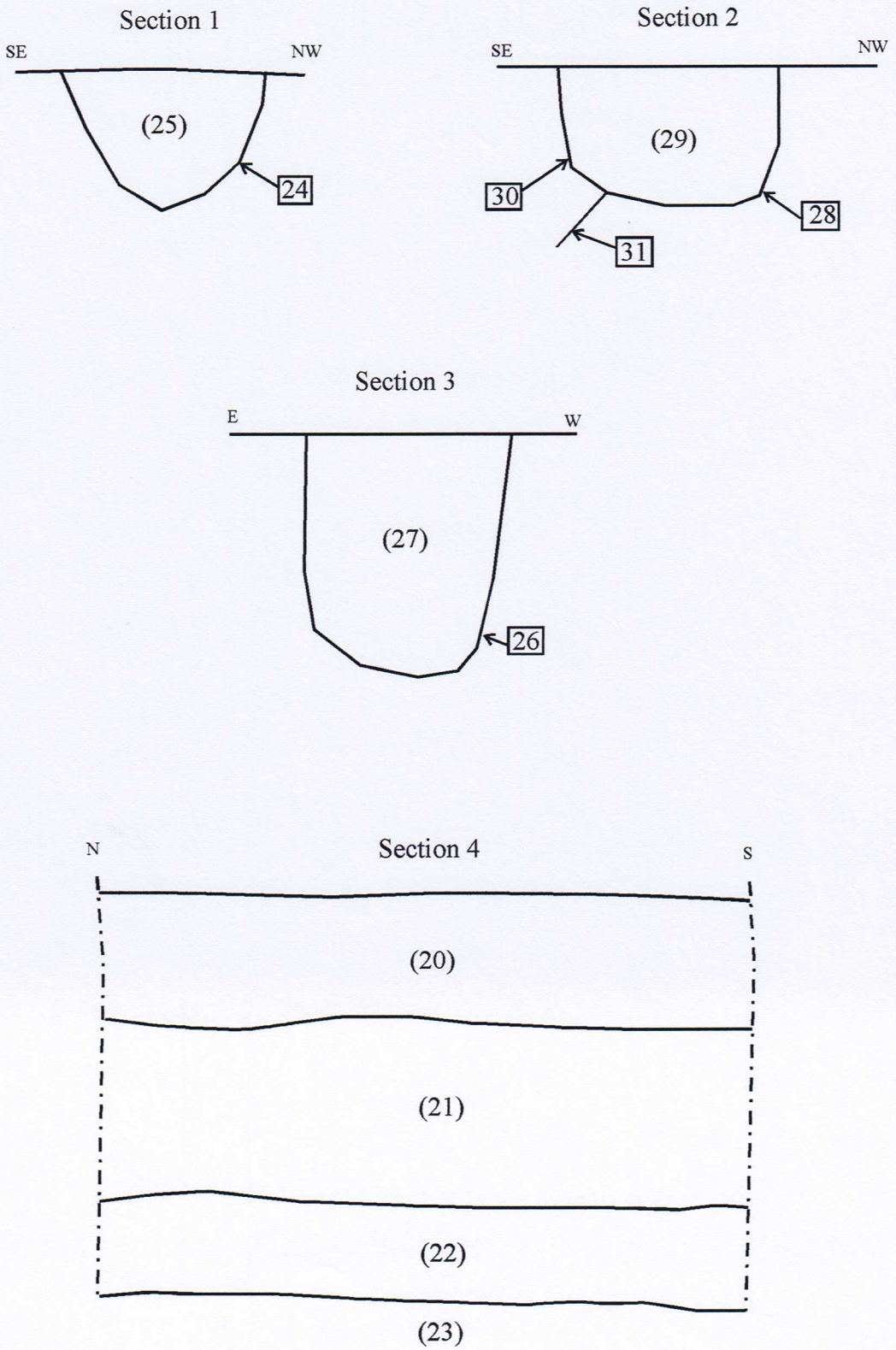


Figure 5. Trench 2 Sections

Scale 1:10

## 5 FINDS

### **Pottery** by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 30 sherds with a total weight of 203g. All the material came from context 30, and, a Romano-British rimsherd (21g) aside, was all early/middle or middle Saxon in date. The assemblage is of some significance, as it contains only the fourth group of middle Saxon Ipswich ware pottery from the county, which given the scale of the excavations, means that the site may be a settlement of some status.

### **Fabric**

The following fabrics were noted.

#### Early/Middle Saxon Hand-built wares

F1: Shelly limestone. Moderate to dense angular shelly limestone up to 2mm. 1 sherd, 7g.

F2: Limestone and chaff. As F1, with moderate chaff voids up to 2mm. 7 sherds, 44g.

F3: Quartz. Moderate sub-angular quartz up to 1mm. 1 sherd, 9g.

F4: Chaff temper. Few visible inclusions except for sparse chaff voids up to 2mm. 3 sherds, 10g.

F5: Oolitic limestone. Moderate to dense oolitic limestone up to 1mm. 10 sherds, 53g.

F6: Quartz and limestone. Sparse to moderate angular limestone up to 1mm, sparse angular quartz up to 1mm. 2 sherds, 16g.

#### Middle Saxon

*Ipswich Ware* (Hurst 1976; Blinkhorn in print a). Middle Saxon, AD725-850, slow-wheel made ware, manufactured exclusively in the eponymous Suffolk *wic*. All sherds were Group 1 fabrics: Hard and slightly sandy to the touch, with visible small quartz grains and some shreds of mica. Frequent fairly well-sorted angular to sub-angular grains of quartz, generally measuring below 0.3 mm in size but with some larger grains, including a number which are polycrystalline in appearance. Also present are flecks of mica, some small pieces of chert in the same size-range as the smaller quartz grains, a little quartzite, a few small discrete grains of feldspar, iron oxides and occasional fragments of ironstone and fine-grained sandstone. 6 sherds, 64g.

### ***Discussion***

The early/middle hand-built wares are typical of pottery of such date in the region, and can be paralleled at many sites, such as the material found during recent excavations at the Oxford Science Park (Blinkhorn 2001a). The sherds, which are all undecorated, cannot be dated other than within the broad early and middle Saxon periods, c AD450-850.

The presence of the six sherds of Ipswich Ware may be highly significant. The material is rare in Oxfordshire, with the only find-spots being the Sackler Library site in Oxford (Blinkhorn 2001b), Yarnton (Blinkhorn in print b) and Eynsham Abbey (Blinkhorn in print c). This group of material is as large as any of those from the three sites, and, as the other sherds were discovered during major excavations, the finds at this site may be highly significant.

Ipswich ware has a uniquely wide distribution amongst middle Saxon wares, having been noted as far north as York and as far south as Kent, with the most westerly find being Lechlade in Gloucestershire. While it is found at sites of all status, the more distant find-spots from Ipswich tend to be higher status sites such as monasteries. The three previous Oxfordshire finds are a possible fair site, a farmstead and a monastery respectively. Thus, this site could be of any status, but given the rarity of the material in the county of Oxfordshire, the size of the assemblage and the small scale of the excavations, suggests very strongly that there is a site of some status in the vicinity of this site. The presence of a church may be of significance, as the material is often found near such structures with middle Saxon origins, although St. Mary's is thought to be medieval. Similarly, the proximity of the site to Bampton may be a factor. Bampton is thought to have been a major middle Saxon minster (Blair 1994, 63-4), although there is little positive artefactual evidence to support this other than small quantities of hand-made pottery. However, if there was a minster at Bampton, there is likely to have been some sort of trading-centre there, as this seems to have been a common pattern in middle Saxon England (Blinkhorn 1999).

It is impossible from the small scale of these excavations to decide the type of site from which this pottery came, but the presence of such a relatively large assemblage of Ipswich ware from such a small excavation suggests that it may be of some status, and makes it imperative that the site is investigated further, as it may prove to be highly significant.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The excavation of these two trenches has provided definitive evidence of early-middle Saxon activity on the site. Given the limited exposure afforded by the evaluation trenches it is difficult to accurately characterise the nature of this activity, though it is possible to make some more generalised observations based upon the available evidence. Principally, it may be noted that no evidence of any Anglo-Saxon inhumations were encountered during the investigation; if the single Anglo-Saxon inhumation discovered to the southwest of the site is part of a larger group then it seems clear that any such cemetery does not extend as far as the subject site.

Nevertheless, it remains difficult to adequately interpret the findings of the investigation. The irregular ovoid cut [031] is reminiscent of a *Grubenhause* (a typically Saxon building type), both in shape and size, if not in morphology. Such features almost inevitably possess posts, either along the longitudinal axis of the building or at each corner and although at first glance, posthole [028] seems to fulfil

this criteria, the differences between the respective fills [029] and [030] would suggest that the term *Grubenhause* be applied with caution.

Whatever the precise form and nature of this feature, its significance is unquestionable for the pottery assemblage from fill 030 contains only the fourth group of Ipswich Ware pottery yet found in Oxfordshire. This is not in itself a reliable indicator of the status or type of site from which this group was retrieved as the other assemblages were recovered from a wide range of sites. However, given that this assemblage is comparable in size to those from major excavations, it is likely that the site lies in the vicinity of a significant middle Saxon site. The conjectured minster at Bampton would be a likely contender for the immediate supply of such pottery, though the presence of butchered animal bone within fill (030) would imply the existence of a settlement a little closer to home.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it can be seen that significant early-middle Saxon archaeology is present on the site in question. Whilst any decision regarding further work on the site must rest with Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services, it is the opinion of John Moore Heritage Services that any future development work on the site be accompanied by an appropriate mitigation strategy.

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**APPENDICES****APPENDIX 1 – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
<b>Trench 1</b>			0.50	1.65	15.00		
001	Layer	Topsoil	0.25	Tr.	Tr.	-	Modern
002	Layer	Subsoil	0.20-0.25	Tr.	Tr.	-	-
003	Fill	Fill of nat. feature	0.12	0.80	0.55	-	-
004	Fill	Fill of nat. feature	0.04	0.80	0.45	-	-
005	Cut	Rooting	0.12	0.80	0.55	-	-
006	Fill	Fill of nat. feature	0.12	0.80	-	-	-
007	Fill	Fill of nat. feature	0.03	0.80	-	-	-
008	Cut	Rooting?	0.15	0.85	0.45	-	-
009	Fill	Fill of nat. feature	0.10	0.85	0.45	-	-
010	Cut	Rooting	0.10	0.85	0.45	-	-
011	Fill	Posthole fill	0.15	0.35	0.55	-	-
012	Fill	Posthole fill	0.05	1.30	-	-	-
013	Cut	Posthole cut	0.20	0.35	0.55	-	-
014	Fill	Posthole fill	0.10	0.40	0.40	-	-
015	Fill	Posthole fill	0.05	0.40	0.40	-	-
016	Cut	Posthole cut	0.15	0.40	0.40	-	-
017	Fill	Pit fill	0.14	0.40	0.70	-	-
018	Fill	Pit fill	0.05	0.40	-	-	-
019	Cut	Pit cut	0.20	0.40	0.70	-	-
<b>Trench 2</b>			0.50-0.65	3.00 max	18.00		
020	Layer	Topsoil	0.20	Tr.	Tr.		Modern
021	Layer	Subsoil	0.28	Tr.	Tr.		Modern
022	Layer	0.15	0.25	Tr.	Tr.	-	-
023	Deposit	Natural	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	-
024	Cut	Posthole cut	0.20	0.25	0.25	-	-
025	Fill	Posthole fill	0.20	0.25	0.25	-	-
026	Cut	Posthole cut	0.40	0.30	0.30	-	-
027	Fill	Posthole fill	0.40	0.30	0.30	-	-
028	Cut	Posthole cut	0.20	0.35	0.35	-	-
029	Fill	Posthole fill	0.20	0.35	0.35	-	-
030	Fill	Fill of [031]	0.20	1.10	1.10	Pot, bone	m. Saxon
031	Cut	Shallow cut	0.20	1.10	1.10	-	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> century



