

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

FOR

THE INSTITUTE OF REPRODUCTIVE SCIENCES,

ARMSTRONG ROAD,

LITTLEMORE, OXFORD

SP 5363 0221

On behalf of

MCK LLP

June 2007

REPORT FOR MCK LLP
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FIELDWORK 4th June 2007

REPORT ISSUED 28th June 2007

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JMHS PROJECT NO. 1720

ARCHIVE LOCATION Oxfordshire Museums
Accession Number OXCMS : 2007 : 27

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SUMMARY

An evaluation was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services on behalf of MCK LLP as part of the consideration of a development at Armstrong road, Littlemore Oxford. The archaeological remains observed were evidence of levelling of the site presumably as part of the laying out of the grounds of the Lunatic Asylum and possible horticultural planting beds. Finds of Roman pottery and kiln material were recovered from the topsoil, but could not be associated with any in situ archaeological activity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the south-east of Oxford, in the parish of Littlemore. It is centred on NGR SP 5363 0221 at a height of c. 62m OD, and is currently overgrown. The geology comprises Beckley Sands Member overlying Coral Rag.

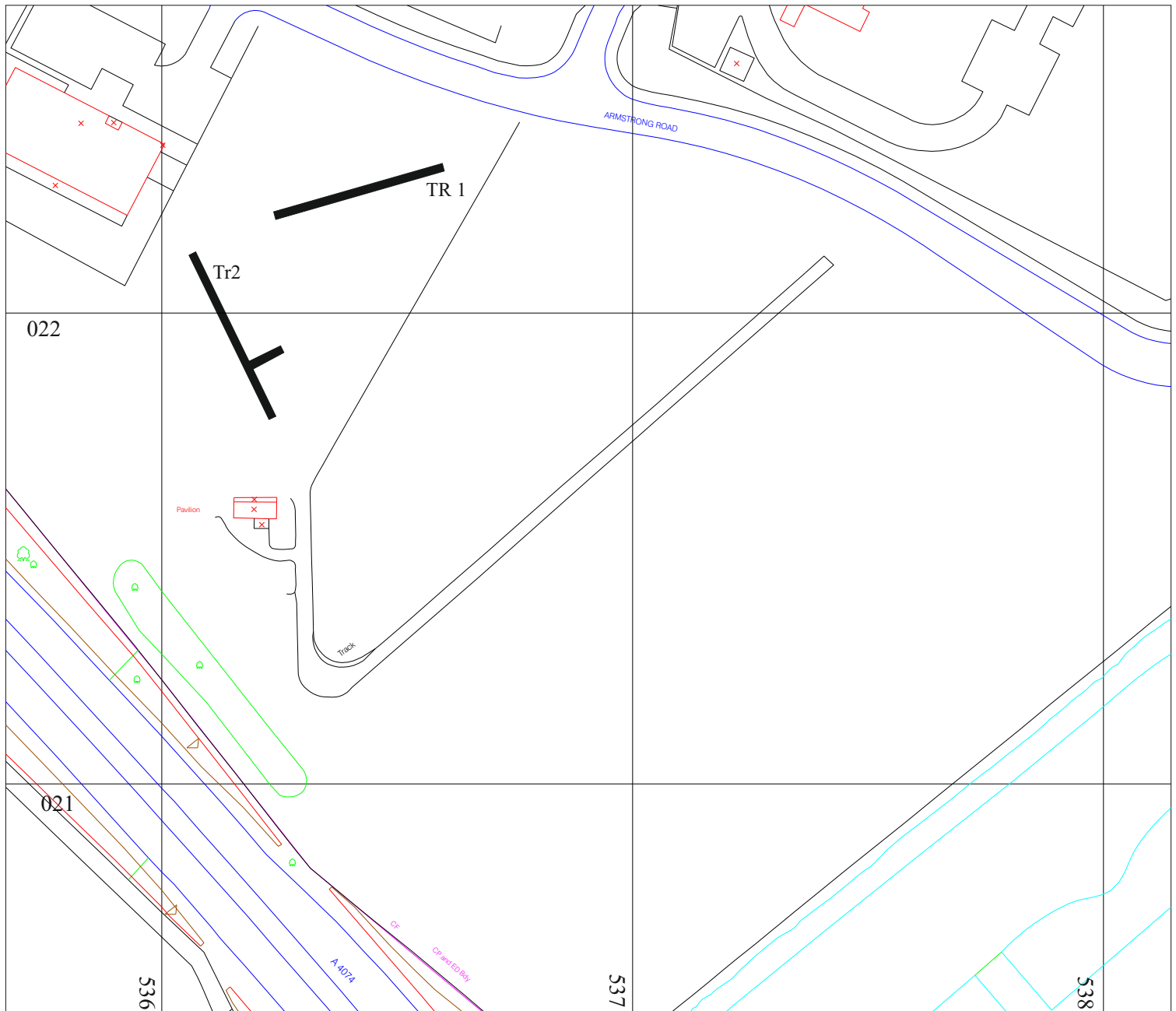
1.2 Planning Background

Prior to an application for planning permission for the development of the site at Armstrong Road as a medical research centre for The Institute of Reproductive Sciences Oxford City Council's Archaeologist requested an archaeological evaluation due to the site's potential to contain archaeological remains. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* detailing the methodology for such was agreed with Oxford City Council's Archaeologist.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The proposed development site lies within an area of considerable archaeological potential. To the east are located the excavations of the Saxon settlement beneath the Science Park (Moore, 2001), and the remains of the Benedictine priory at Minchery Farm (Pantin, 1970; Williams, 2006). To the north, west and east Roman remains have been observed since the nineteenth century. To this end the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was consulted prior to the evaluation for entries within 500m of the proposed area. The Primary Record Number (PRN) is the SMR's reference number for each record of archaeological activity.

Mesolithic flints have been reported from construction work on new buildings at the Littlemore Hospital site (Ashmolean Museum ID Number 244). Residual prehistoric sherds and flint were recorded at Oxford Science Park (PRN 16299). A limited number of features as well as residual flints and pottery were recovered during the evaluation carried out at Kassam Stadium (PRN 16787). An arrowhead found during the construction of the Eastern By-Pass (PRN 3658) and finds of Romano-British pottery and coins (PRN 1435, 1436 and 1437) were also found in close vicinity to the proposed development area. In 1954 a Roman kiln was uncovered at Littlemore Hospital (PRN 8017). More recently kilns have been excavated at Ashurst Clinic on the west side of Sandford Road (PRNs 3656 and 6191).



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Figure 1. Site and trench location

Since the 19th century, the heights east and south of Oxford have yielded a wealth of data concerning the Roman pottery kilns located between Littlemore and Cowley. These comprise the physical remains of kilns found in 1879 east of the current site (PRN 3845) and in 1893 at Rose Hill, Iffley (PRN 3656). During the late 1950s when the Eastern By-Pass was constructed David Sturdy observed evidence for possible kilns (PRN 3845).

As the Blackbird Leys site was under construction at the same time, there too evidence for Roman kilns was recorded by EH Leggatt (PRN 6143). Paul Booth supervised excavations for Oxford Archaeological Unit in the 1990s at Blackbird Leys Zone 'C' which also evidenced Roman kiln activity (PRN 15954). The land overlooking the Northfield Brook has yielded much stray finds of Roman pottery (PRN 16787, 2151, 1426, 16951).

Post-Roman and medieval remains have been found in the environs of the proposed development. These include the Saxon excavations under the current Oxford Science Park (PRN 16299), (Moore, 2001) comprising a number of sunken featured buildings and associated occupation evidence. A possibly medieval farmstead was also recorded here, which concurs with a wide spread of medieval pottery from sites in the vicinity (e.g. PRN 15837, 16966, 16965). Moreover to the east was the Benedictine Priory at Minchery Farm (PRN L/1434) – the trial excavation of which has recently (Williams, 2006) disclosed a far larger complex than envisaged by Pantin (1970), to the west existed the Templar Preceptory at Temple Farm (L/1453), and to the north Corpus Christi Farmhouse (PRN 16493).

Despite this, there is little evidence for intensive medieval activity at Littlemore. It is not mentioned in Domesday, though four hides of land at Sandford, may be a reference to the relatively new settlement – in 1086 – at Littlemore. An evaluation in 1995 (Anon. 1995) and a watching brief in 1996 (Hiller, 1996) both carried out by Oxford Archaeological Unit on land in the immediate vicinity of Littlemore Hospital revealed some medieval activity, but no features.

Post-medieval archaeology includes the tollhouse (PRN L/10353) at Sandford, the lock and turnpike, also at Sandford (PRN 1233), the watermill/papermill (PRN L/2) and of course the hospital (PRN L/6749). Map evidence is limited but indicates open fields – much of the land being owned by Oxford colleges – with a nucleated settlement at Littlemore both on Davis' map of 1794 and on the 1819 Inclosure Award map.

An evaluation carried out in 2006 (Williams, 2006a) on adjacent land to the east of the current site revealed the possibility of some background presence of Roman activity as sherds of pottery in the overburden. However, the grounds had been terraced by the Hospital authorities at the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth centuries resulting in a lack of negative features.

The proposed development lies within the grounds of the former Oxford County & City Pauper Lunatic Asylum built in 1846. The Ordnance Survey mapping shows the site as an orchard in 1876 (1:2500) and a cricket ground from 1899 until at least 1937 (1:2,500).

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.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with Oxford City Council's Archaeologist. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of two trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the Oxford City Council's Archaeologist. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

Two 1.6m wide trenches were excavated across the site. These measured 35m and 50m in total length respectively. They were excavated by a JCB with a ditching bucket. This was a 2% sample of the entire area of the site although only approximately 60% will be developed.

The trenches were excavated to the top of the archaeology or the natural, whichever occurred first. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand, where necessary, prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological 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.

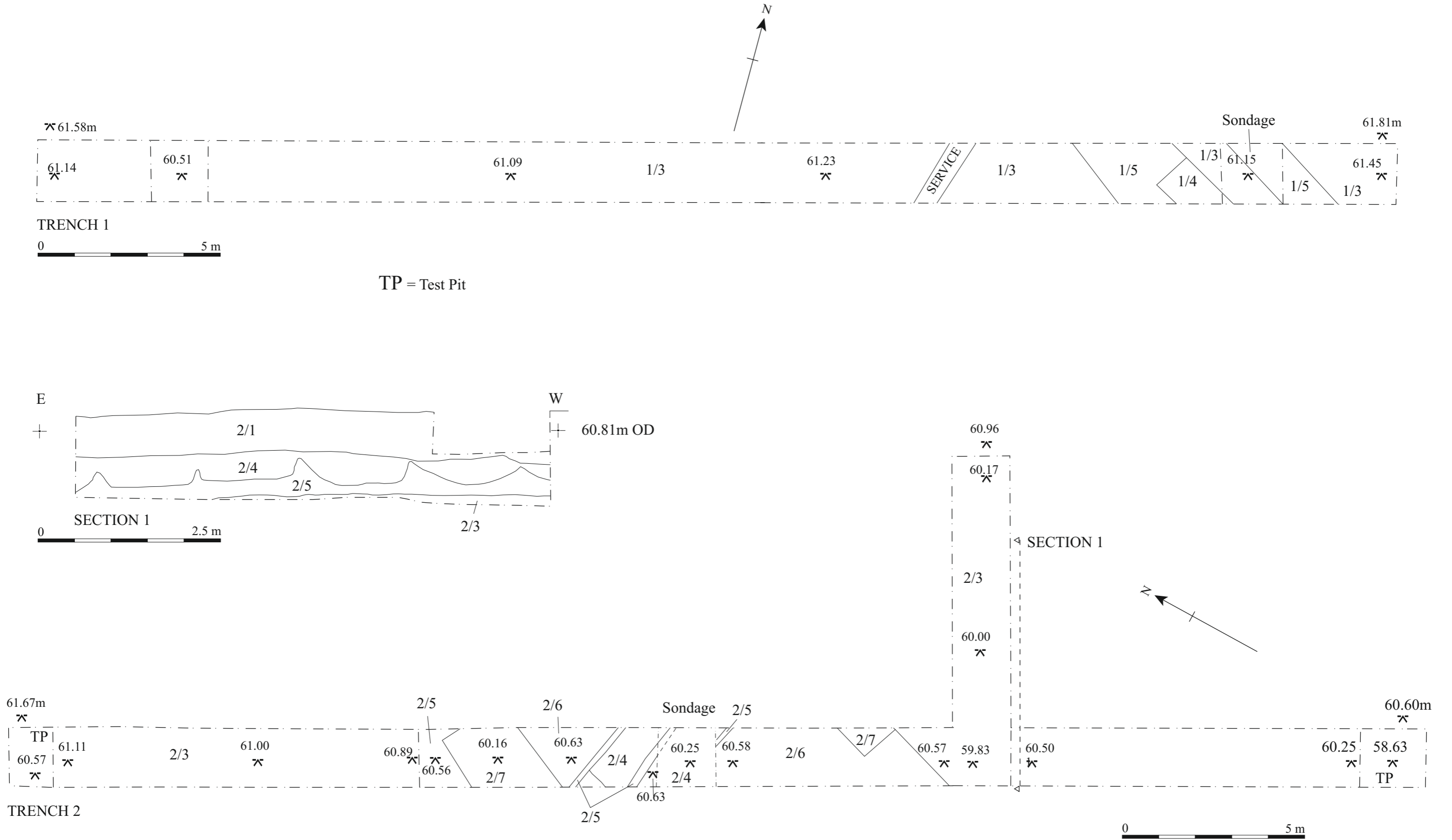


Figure 2. Trench Plans and Sections

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in square brackets - [] - indicate features i.e. cuts; while numbers in parentheses - () - show feature fills or deposits of material. All measurements are given in metres. A general description of the feature fills is given.

Trench 1 (Figure 2)

The earliest deposit observed in Trench 1 was Beckley Sand Member comprising mottled yellow/orange sand (1/3) which was observed for c. 22m along the trench, from the southwest. It was overlain by the subsoil (1/2), a light brown silty sand c. 0.1m thick, which also extended for c. 22m the length of the trench.

The final c. 8m of the trench provided evidence of excavation beds (see discussion). Although it was not easily distinguishable initially from the natural (1/3) into which it was cut, the deposit (1/5) – a friable slightly ‘dirty’ yellow silty sand, which contained no inclusions, was observed. In one place this last deposit had a rectangular deposit (1/4) dug into it, consisting of mid-dark greyish brown sandy loam with c. 1% charcoal. No finds were recovered from either deposit. These were sealed by the topsoil (1/1), a mid grey brown sandy loam with occasional charcoal through it.

Deposits (1/4) and (1/5) are interpreted as cultivation beds or occupational therapy digging.

Trench 2 (Figure 2)

The earliest deposit observed in Trench 2 was a similar mottled yellow/orange sand (2/3) to that observed in Trench 1 (1/3). This deposit appeared to slope gently to the southeast, although levelling at the eastern end of the trench had obscured the original fall of slope. This was overlain at the northwest end by a deposit of subsoil (2/2), similar to (1/2). At the southeast end the trench evidenced cultivation beds over a greater area than in Trench 1, and which consequently proved to be more complex.

In the central and south-east part of the trench levelling of the site has been carried out with the dumping of redeposited natural comprising ‘dirty’ yellow silty sand (2/5). Into this material were cut a number of excavation beds filled with differing material indicating that the beds had been laid out on more than one occasion. Some beds orientated east/west were filled with redeposited topsoil (2/4) and were 1.5 – 2m wide and between 0.25m and 0.5m deep. Others on the same alignment were filled by bright yellow sand (2/6) and were 1-2m wide and c. 0.30m deep. Cutting at least one of the last were beds at right angles filled by (2/7) similar to the re-deposited topsoil as (2/4). The beds extended from the limit shown to the north-west on Fig. 2 along the short arm of the trench to the north-east and to the south-east end of the main trench.

The deposits (2/6) (2/4) and (2/2) were sealed by the topsoil (2/1).

5 FINDS

Sherds of pottery of Roman and post-medieval date were recovered along with post-medieval tile and brick fragments from the topsoil deposit in both trenches. No finds were recovered from other deposits.

The Roman pottery was examined by Paul Booth (Oxford Archaeology). The majority of the sherds are from mortaria and other white wares, with oxidised and reduced coarse wares also present. A rim sherd in the last of these is not closely dateable. The two mortarium rims and a white ?beaker rim are all consistent with a 2nd century date, which would certainly fit with some of the other things known about Littlemore. It is probable that all of the Roman pottery is of 2nd century date, although there is the possibility that some fragments are later. The range of fabrics and forms is as expected from Littlemore.

The kiln material again was recovered from topsoil deposits in both trenches although the large majority were from Trench 2. This material consists of kiln lining and fragments of kiln furniture.

6 DISCUSSION

The south-eastern part of the site has been levelled up probably when the asylum was built. It was not possible to establish whether the purpose for the beds was for practical horticulture to partly provide the hospital with its food needs, or whether they functioned as occupational therapy or punishment for the inmates. The large amount of recutting of the beds suggests the latter. Whether this happened before the area was used as an orchard (known in 1876) or after and before the site became the cricket ground by 1899 is unknown.

The presence of Roman pottery and kiln furniture, the latter undoubtedly from a pottery kiln, is another indicator of the extent of the pottery industry. Whether the location of the kiln was on this site or in the vicinity is unknown. The large majority of the kiln material came from Trench 2 where the ground has been disturbed by 19th century digging.

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APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Interpretation
1/1	Layer	Mid brown grey sandy loam occ. charcoal	0.25m	>1.6m	>36.5m	Topsoil
1/2	Layer	Light brown silty sand	0.1m	>1.6m	>36.5m	Subsoil
1/3	Layer	Mottled yellow/orange sand	>0.15m	>1.6m	>36.5m	Natural
1/4	Deposit	Mid dark greyish brown sandy loam with c. 1% charcoal	c. 0.3m	>1.6m	>10m	Bed material
1/5	Deposit	Friable 'dirty' yellow slightly silty sand	>0.3m	>1.6m	>10m	Bed material
2/1	Layer	Mid brown grey sandy loam occ. charcoal	0.5m	>1.6m	>c. 50m	Topsoil
2/2	Layer	Light brown silty sand	0.1m	>1.6m	c. 20m	Subsoil, observed at west end of trench
2/3	Layer	Mottled yellow/orange sand	>0.15m	>1.6m	c. 28m	Natural, observed at west end of trench
2/4	Deposit	Mid dark greyish brown sandy loam with c. 1% charcoal	c. 0.3m	>1.6m	>10m	Bed material
2/5	Deposit	Friable clean bright yellow slightly silty sand	>0.3m	>1.6m	Unk.	Levelling
2/6	Deposit	Friable 'dirty' yellow slightly silty sand	>0.4m	>1.6m	Unk.	Bed material
2/7	Deposit	Mid dark greyish brown sandy loam with c. 1% charcoal	c. 0.3m	>1.6m	Unk.	Bed material