

REPORT FOR Soha Housing Ltd
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JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

94 ABINGDON ROAD, DIDCOT

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 5375 9054

On behalf of

SOHA HOUSING LIMITED

SEPTEMBER 2008

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation on land at Abingdon Road, Didcot. The evaluation revealed possible evidence of palaeohydrological activity, in the form of rivulets, but this could not be associated with any archaeological data. Truncation on the west side of the site had removed any potential archaeological deposits.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located on the northeast side of Didcot, north of the railway line (NGR SU 5375 9054). The geology is alluvium over Upper Greensand and Gault Clay and the site lies at approximately 55m OD. The site was previously a dwelling and garden.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the erection of nine new dwellings and associated garages (P07/W0414). Due to the potential for archaeological remains within the environs of the development, a planning condition requiring the implementation of a staged programme of archaeological recording was attached to the permission. This is in accordance with PPG16 and South Oxfordshire Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was submitted and accepted which proposed a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Immediately to the north of the site evidence for prehistoric and Roman agriculture was uncovered ahead of development in the form of field systems and associated trackways (PRN 16399; NGR SU 5386 9060). The evaluation also recorded a buried soil layer beneath the alluvium representing a Romano British ground surface which was cut by the field system ditches.

Continued evidence of this field system and the Romano British ground surface was recorded during a larger evaluation in fields 1km to the west of the proposed site (PRN 16146; SU 5286 9136). This evaluation revealed further field enclosures, trackways and pits across the site with the greatest concentration towards the northwest of the area, adjacent to this proposal site. It is clear that the buried ground surface covers a large area and therefore it is likely that further aspects of this and the field system might be disturbed by any development.

Another excavation 600m to the south of the site recorded features of pits, postholes and ditches, as well as prehistoric pottery and struck flints which suggest a site of Bronze Age date (PRN 15646; SU 5390 8989).

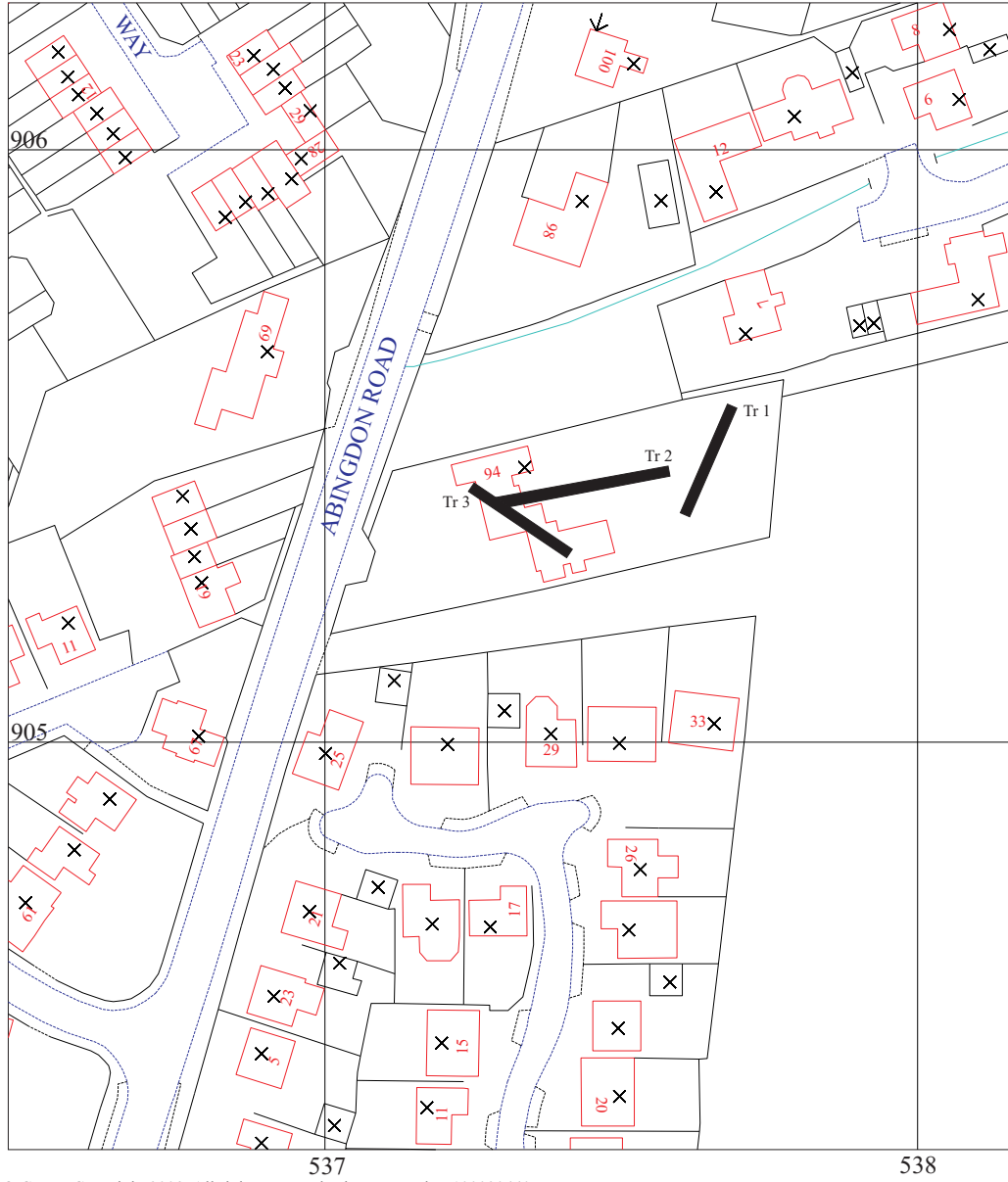


Figure 1. Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains.
- 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 determine whether there is any prehistoric activity on this site
- to determine whether the buried Romano British ground surface is present and whether there is evidence of agricultural or other types of activity present

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by OCAS, John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) prepared a scheme of investigation and carried out the work, which comprised the excavation of three trenches across the site (Fig. 1) on Tuesday, 12th August 2008.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with OCAS. 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

The proposal site was subject to evaluation through the machine excavation of three trenches supplemented by limited hand investigation of any archaeological deposits. The trenches were laid out 20m long and 1.6m wide. Trench 2 was subsequently extended to 28m, as far as Trench 3, to investigate the relationship between the alluvium and the Upper Greensand. Excavation was by JCB equipped with a ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation was taken down to the top of “natural” deposits.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Fieldwork

Trench 1 (Figs. 2 & 3)

Trench 1 was located on the east side of the application site. The trench was oriented north by northeast/south by southwest. The top of the trench was between 54.88m OD (southwest) and 54.79m OD (northeast); the base was at approximately 53.88m OD.

The natural Gault Clay (1/04) was stiff mid grey orange mottled clay, which was overlain by a firm mid yellowish green clay (1/05). This alluvial deposit appeared to fill undulations visible in section in the natural. The natural (1/04) and the overlying yellowish green clay (1/05) were sealed by an alluvial deposit of mid grey clay with orange mottling (1/03). A subsoil, (1/02) mid grey brown silty clay with occasional small stone sealed (1/03). The topsoil (1/01), a dark brown clay loam sealed the subsoil.

The natural (1/04) seemed to be cut by a series of possible rivulets, filled with (1/05). It was not clear that these were anthropogenic; rather it appeared that these were natural features. No dating material was found from the trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located west of Trench 1. The trench was oriented west/east. The top of the trench was between 54.74m OD (west) and 54.93m OD (east); the base was between 54.34m OD (west) and 54.02m (east), with a dip in the centre of the trench to 53.94m OD.

The natural (2/04) within the eastern 21m of the trench was the same as (1/04). This was overlain by (2/07), which was the same alluvial deposit as (1/05), if somewhat darker and less yellow in hue. This was overlain by (2/03) – the same grey clay with orange mottling observed in Trench 1 as (1/03). This was cut by a sub-oval and very shallow feature [2/05], measuring 0.8m by 0.7m by 0.1m (lbd), which was filled with loose dark grey clay. No finds were recovered from the fill. This feature, which may well have been related to planting within the former garden, was not visible within the subsoil (2/02), which was sealed by the topsoil (2/01), both of which were as observed in Trench 1. Trench 2 was extended to the west to ascertain the relationship between the alluvial deposit (2/07) and the deposit (3/03) in Trench 3. The alluvium overlay the Upper Greensand (2/08) within the western 7m of the trench.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was located west of Trench 2 and was oriented southeast/northwest. The top of the trench was between 54.85m OD (southeast) and 54.60m OD (northwest); the base was approximately 54.3m OD although boxes excavated into the Upper Greensand were c. 53.5m OD deep.

The Upper Greensand (3/03), a bluish green sandy clay was sealed by a layer of redeposited Greensand and rubble (3/02). A layer of topsoil, mid grey brown clay loam (3/01) sealed the demolition and redeposited Greensand.

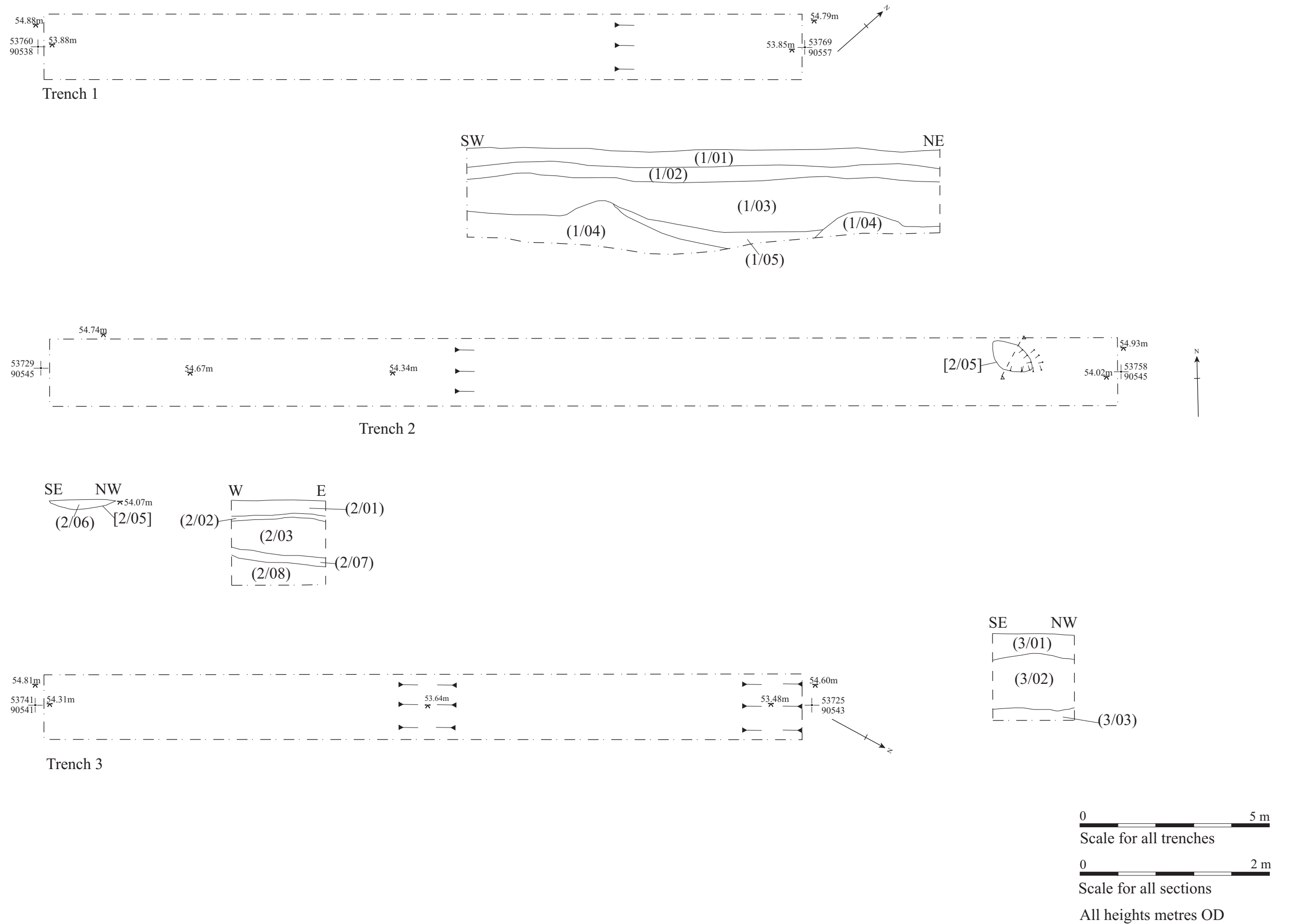


Figure 2. Trenches 1-3 and Sections

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place during largely dry and frequently overcast weather. The work was monitored by Richard Oram on behalf of OCAS.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Finds

No finds were recovered during the evaluation.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation indicated that the site was truncated in the area of Trench 3, which was nearest to the Abingdon Road.

The two other trenches, which were located on the east side of the application site yielded no evidence of archaeological remains. The site would appear to have lain between the late prehistoric/Roman sites to the north, to the south and to the west of the application site, and appears to have been a peripheral area.

The alluvial data was undated. The deposits of green clay seen in Trenches 1 and 2, associated with possible rivulets, may pre-date the prehistoric period or relate to the later prehistoric or Roman periods when tree clearance caused more surface run-off. No Roman British soil horizon was identifiable as seen elsewhere in the area.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations*

APPENDIX I**CONTEXT TABLE****APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Interpretation
Trench 1							
1/01	Layer	Friable dark brownish black clay	0.25m	Trench	Trench	-	Topsoil
1/02	Layer	Friable mid grey brown silty clay	0.15m	Trench	Trench	-	Subsoil
1/03	Deposit	Firm mid grey clay with orange mottling	0.50m	Trench	Trench	-	Layer of alluvium
1/04	Natural	Firm mid grey clay with occ. orange mottling	0.20m	Trench	Trench	-	Natural Gault Clay
1/05	Deposit	Firm mid yellowish green clay	0.1m	Trench	c.2m	-	Layer in natural 'rivulet'. Possibly same as alluvium (1/03).
Trench 2							
2/01	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown clay	0.15m	Trench	Trench	-	Topsoil
2/02	Layer	Friable mid bluish grey silty clay	0.15m	Trench	Trench	-	Subsoil
2/03	Deposit	Firm mid grey clay with orange mottling	0.40m	Trench	Trench	-	Alluvium.
2/04	Natural	Firm mid grey clay with orange mottling	-	Trench	Trench	-	Natural Gault Clay
2/05	Cut	Sub oval cut	0.10m	0.70m	0.80m	-	Cut of pit
2/06	Fill	Loose dark grey-brown clay	0.10m	0.70m	0.80m	-	Fill of pit
2/07	Deposit	Compact dark green grey clay	0.20m	Trench	Trench	-	Alluvium
2/08	Deposit	Firm mid greyish clay with orange mottling	0.30-0.40m	Trench	Trench	-	Natural Greensand
Trench 3							
3/01	Layer	Loose mid grey brown silty clay	0.10m	Trench	Trench	-	Topsoil

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	 Finds	 Interpretation
3/02	Deposit	Firm mid bluish green clay	0.50-0.60m	Trench	Trench	-	Disturbed green sand with brick and rubble. Possibly associated with destruction of house.
3/03	Natural	Firm mid bluish green clay	-	Trench	Trench	-	Natural Greensand