

**Land Adjacent to Church Road and Church Lane,
Chinnor, South Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Rectory Homes**

by Jez Fry

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Site Code CRC98/51

August 1998

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Report 98/51

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land immediately to the south-west of the junction between Church Road and Church Lane, Chinnor, Oxfordshire (SP 47560 20085) (Fig 1).

Planning permission was sought from South Oxfordshire District Council for the construction of six residential dwellings, on the 0.19 hectare plot of land adjacent to the junction of Church Road and Church Lane, and was granted on appeal. Prior to the granting of the permission, a field evaluation had been carried out in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16, 1990) and the District policies on archaeology. This evaluation (Durdin 1995) located a number of archaeological deposits of Roman date and the planning permission (P93/ N0711/0) was subject to a condition requiring that all intrusive groundworks, undertaken during the construction of house Plots 5 and 6, were to be monitored by a qualified archaeological contractor. The archaeological watching brief was undertaken to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jez Fry, between the 21st of July and the 26th of August 1998, and the site code is CRC98/51. This report has been compiled by Jez Fry.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located to the south-west of the junction between Church Road and Church Lane, immediately adjacent to the western boundary of St Andrew's Church, Chinnor (Figs 1 and 2). The site was previously vacant and lay under grass, scrub and trees. The development area lies on the southern edge of the wide well-drained floodplain of the River Thame, and the ancillary drainage channels, at approximately 122 m above Ordnance Datum. The only change in ground height is the gradual slope of the site from the south, as the

ground level falls from the steep outcrop of Chinnor Hill, to the north where the land meets the road corridor of Church Road.

The site lies within the Icknield Belt at the base of an outcrop of Upper and Middle Chalk, part of the Chilterns escarpment, on the southern edge of Lower Chalk deposits (BGS 1982). The geology witnessed within the trenches monitored was comprised of a grey chalk and marl mixture containing flint nodules.

Archaeological Background

The site lies to the south-west of the historic core of Chinnor between the Upper and Lower Icknield Way. The site is immediately adjacent to the parish church of St Andrews, which originally dated to the 13th century. An archaeological evaluation of the site, undertaken by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in June 1995 (Durden 1995), comprised four trenches which revealed a number of features. The majority of the features, consisting of three shallow gullies and two possible postholes, were located within Trench 1 in the north of the site. One of the gully features contained pottery attributed to the Roman period, of 2nd to 4th century AD date. The features were found to be overlain by over a metre of overburden consisting of layers of topsoil, subsoil and colluvium. The layer of colluvium is thought to have been the result of erosive material being deposited against a field boundary following cultivation of the lower slopes of the Chilterns escarpment during the Medieval period.

Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe all intrusive groundworks, such as the insertion of footings and service trenches, during the initial phases of the proposed development and to record any archaeological features and deposits encountered.

Results

The initial phase of the watching brief comprised the monitoring of eight machine excavated trenches that formed the foundations within the footprint of house Plots 5 and 6 within the proposed development of six residential dwellings (Fig 3). All of the trenches were excavated using a 360° type excavator with a 0.80 m

wide toothed ditching bucket and were between 1.20 m deep (on the south-east side of the building footprint) and 1.50 m deep (on the north-west side). There were also four trenches (Fig 3, 6a, 6b, 7a and 7b) excavated for small square structures located at the front of each of the plots.

All of the trenches revealed a similar stratigraphic sequence (Figs 4 and 5): a layer of topsoil (53); a layer of subsoil (54); and a layer of colluvium (55); overlying the solid geology of the grey chalk and marl natural (56). Topsoil layer 53 was a grey-brown silt loam containing frequent flint gravel and red brick inclusions, varying in depth from 0.2–0.3 m. Subsoil layer 54 was a darker greyish brown silt loam containing frequent flint gravel inclusions also varying in depth from 0.2–0.3 m. Colluvium layer 55 was a dark brown silty clay with a high density of chalk fragment inclusions which was 0.3–0.4 m thick, increasing in depth towards the north-west of the site. The density of the chalk inclusions increased towards the base of layer 55, especially above the occasional lenses of orangey brown clay that filled slight depressions within the surface of the solid chalk (56). Within Trench 3 there was also a 0.2 m thick layer of a mixed soil which was probably upcast from the groundworks associated with Plots 1–4.

Located within the south-western half of Trench 1, and running along the south-easterly extent of Trench 5, was feature 1. This was linear in plan and was traced for a length of 3.80 m and terminated in Trench 5. The single fill of this feature was an orange brown clay containing a high density of flint gravel inclusions without any artefacts or charcoal. It is most probable that this feature is of periglacial origin.

Located within the north-eastern half of Trench 1, and continuing into Trenches 8 and 3 to the north-west, were features 2 and 3. Both of these were linear in plan and extended across the full 11 m width of Plots 5 and 6. Feature 2 was a ditch or gully 1 m wide and 0.4 m deep, orientated north-west to south-east and containing deposit 51. Fill 51 was a mid-brown silty clay with a very high density of flint gravel inclusions. Feature 3 was a ditch 1.7 m wide and approximately 0.75 m deep which truncated the north-easterly side of ditch 2. Ditch 3 had the same orientation as ditch 2 and contained a single layer (52) which was an orangey-brown stiff clay with occasional flint gravel inclusions. No artefacts were recovered from either of the features although the regularity and intercutting nature of ditches 2 and 3 suggests these are not natural deposits.

The second phase of the watching brief comprised the monitoring of a further five trenches that formed the foundations of the garage buildings for Plots 5 and 6 adjacent to the north-west corner of Plot 6. These trenches were 0.50 m wide and were mostly 1.6–1.7 m in depth, although Trench 13 was 2.10 m deep in part as it was necessary to remove the fill of a feature to create a firm base for the footings. These trenches showed a

similar sequence and thickness of topsoil, subsoil and colluvium (53–55) overlying the chalk marl natural (56). The only exception was Trench 9 which contained a 1 m depth of a loose mixed deposit which is likely to be the backfill of evaluation trench 1, excavated in 1995. There was also a localised depression within the surface of the natural chalk geology, layer 56 in Trench 13.

Located within Trench 9, and continuing into Trenches 13 and 11 to the south-east, were features 4 and 5. Both of these were linear in plan and extended across the full 6 m width of the garages for Plots 5 and 6. Feature 4 was a gully 0.4 m wide and 0.15m deep orientated north-west to south-east and containing deposit 57. Fill 57 was a dark yellowish brown silty clay with occasional flint gravel inclusions. Feature 5 had a maximum width of 0.6 m and was 0.5 m deep. The linear feature appeared to be a gully within Trench 9 but as the feature was traced to the south-east, within Trench 13, the gully 5 became deeper and resembled a ditch. It is possible that the section of ditch 5 within Trench 9 was near the terminal of the feature or, alternatively, the undulating geology has been truncated and levelled since the ditch was originally excavated. Ditch 5 was on the same orientation as ditch 4, and contained a single layer (58) of dark yellowish brown silty clay with occasional flint gravel inclusions, suggesting the two linear features are broadly contemporary. No artefacts were recovered from either feature 4 or 5, although both features would appear to be the same as gullies 4 and 3 respectively, found within Trench 1 of the evaluation of the site in 1995 (Durden 1995, fig 4). This would date one of the features, ditch 5, to the Roman period (2nd–4th century AD).

Within Trench 13, ditch 5 cut the surface of the south-west side of a circular feature 6. Feature 6 was approximately 1.60 m in diameter and would appear to be a pit cut containing a single fill (59). Deposit 59 was a 1.25 m deep layer of dark greyish brown silty clay with frequent flint gravel inclusions; it contained no associated artefacts. The truncation of the surface of the layer by ditch 5, which is possibly of Roman date, suggests that pit 6 is either Roman or earlier in date.

The third, and final, stage of the watching brief comprised the monitoring of two trenches excavated for the services associated with Plots 5 and 6. Both trenches were 0.50 m wide and between 0.8 m and 0.9 m deep. The depth of the trenches was insufficient to expose the natural geology and only topsoil, subsoil and colluvium layers were visible. No further archaeological deposits or features were witnessed within this final phase of monitoring.

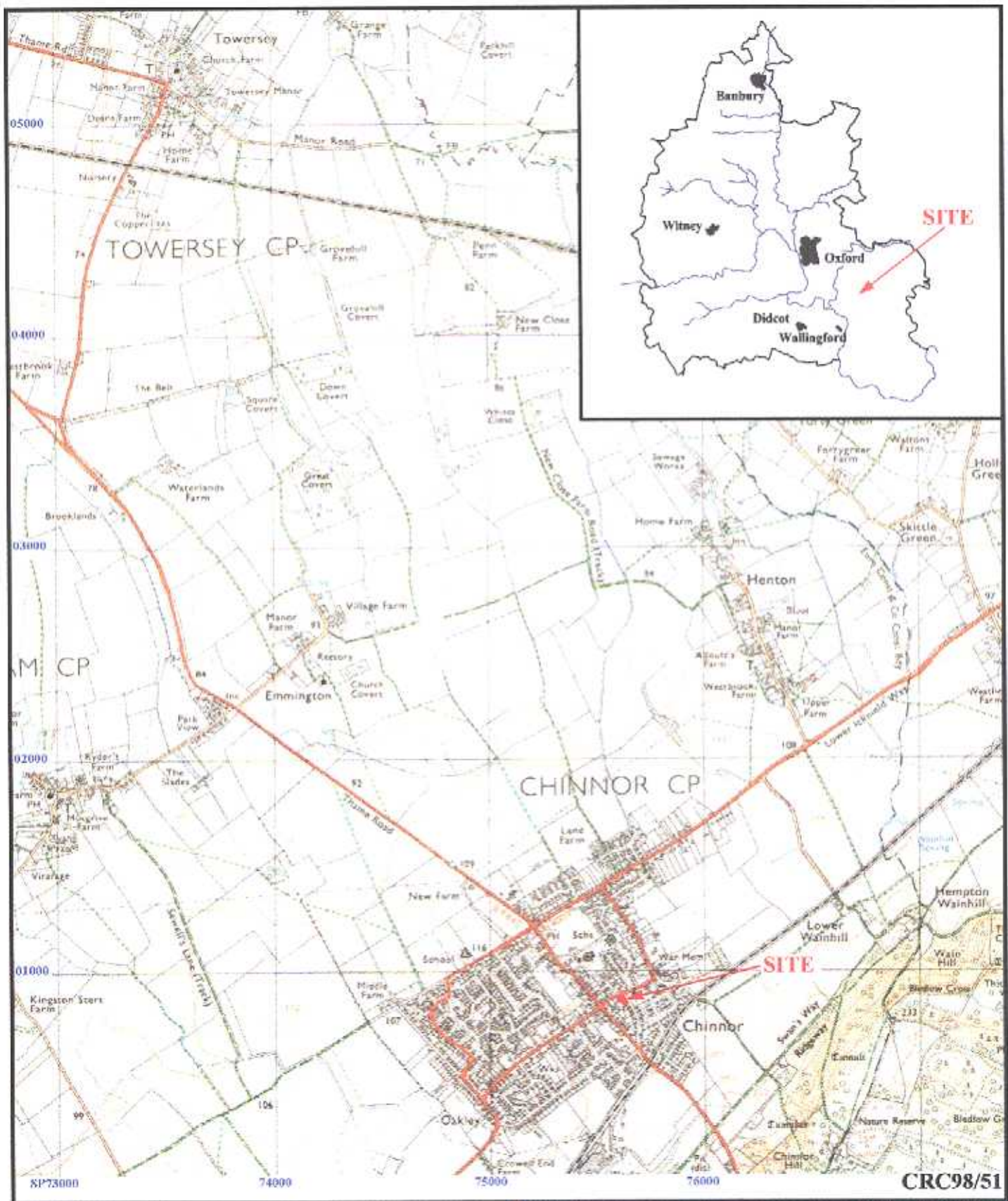
Conclusion

The watching brief monitored the groundworks for the construction of Plots 5 and 6 and the associated garage buildings and revealed a limited number of new archaeological deposits. Gully 4 and ditch 5 are the same as features 4 and 3 found during the earlier evaluation and, taken together, their orientation can be better defined. No finds were recovered during the watching brief to add to those from the evaluation and this would suggest that these features are boundary features, such as field ditches. The digging of ditch 5 could possibly indicate the reinforcement and consolidation of an existing boundary represented by gully 4. This boundary may have been augmented by ditches 2 and 3, towards the western edge of the site. A small pit (6) was also found but this too contained no finds and remains undated.

The watching brief has indicated a small number of deposits additional to those found during the evaluation but the lack of a great density of deposits and the recovery of no artefacts, either from the observed features or as stray finds, indicates that this location was not close to the core of an occupied area in Roman times.

References

- BGS 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50 000, Sheet No 236, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Durden, T, 1995, Land Adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, An Archaeological Evaluation, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 95/39, Reading
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO



**Land Adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor,
Oxfordshire, 1998**

Figure 1. Location of site within Chinnor and
Oxfordshire.

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Land Adjacent to 8 Church Street, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, 1998

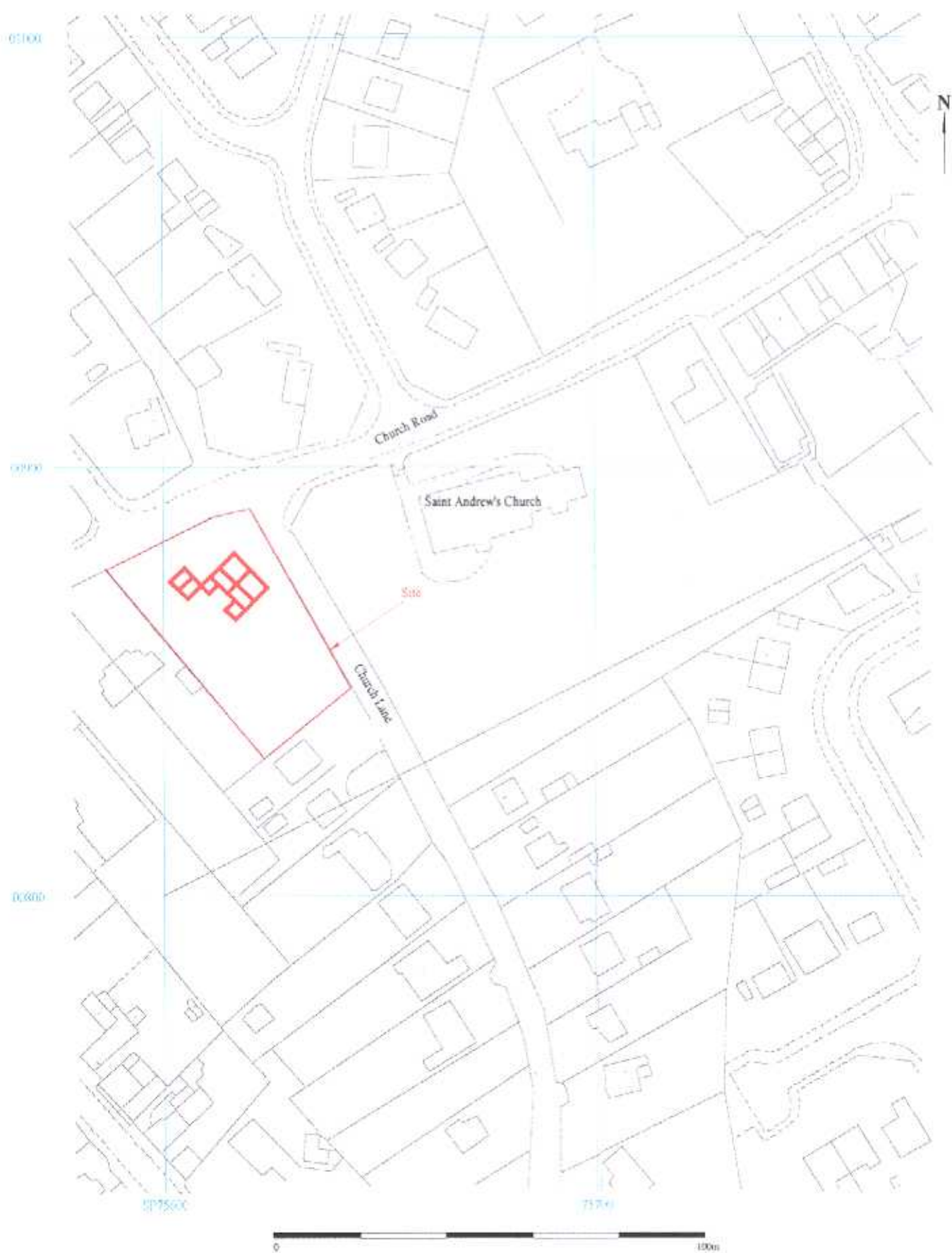


Figure 2. Location of site.

Land adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, 1998.

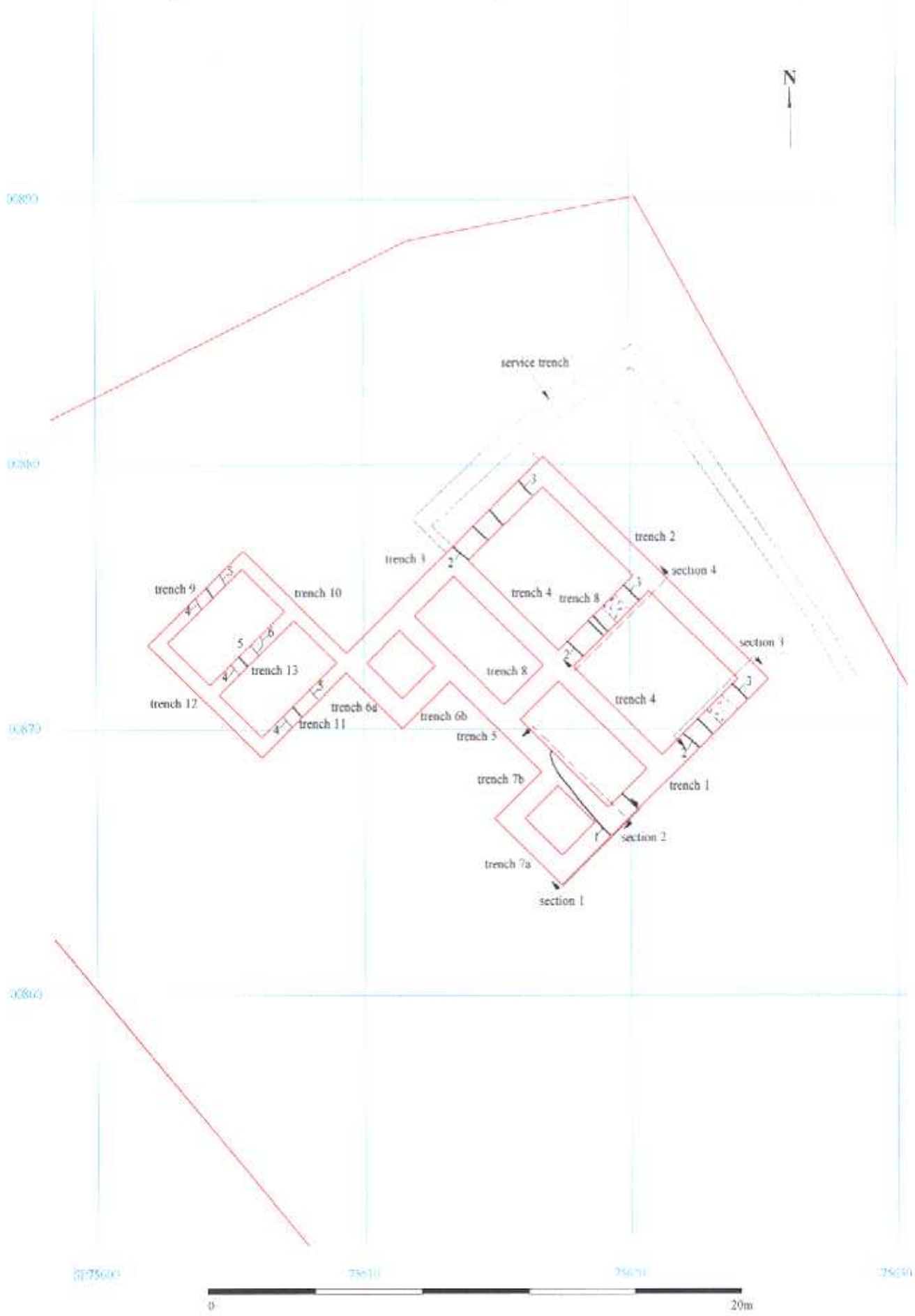


Figure 3. Showing foundation trenches and all archaeological features.

Land adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, 1998

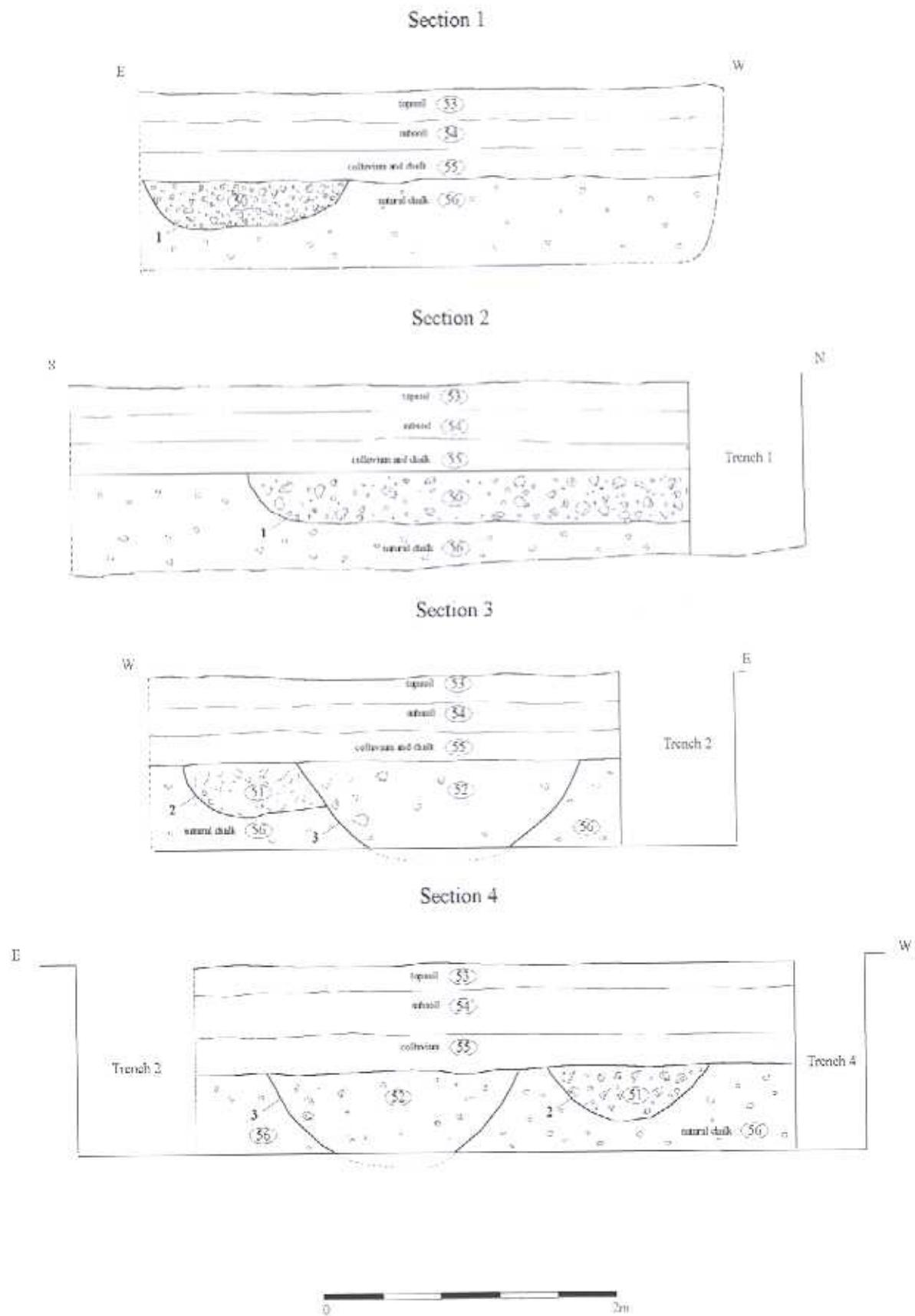


Figure 4. Sections 1-4.

Land adjacent to 8 Church Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, 1998

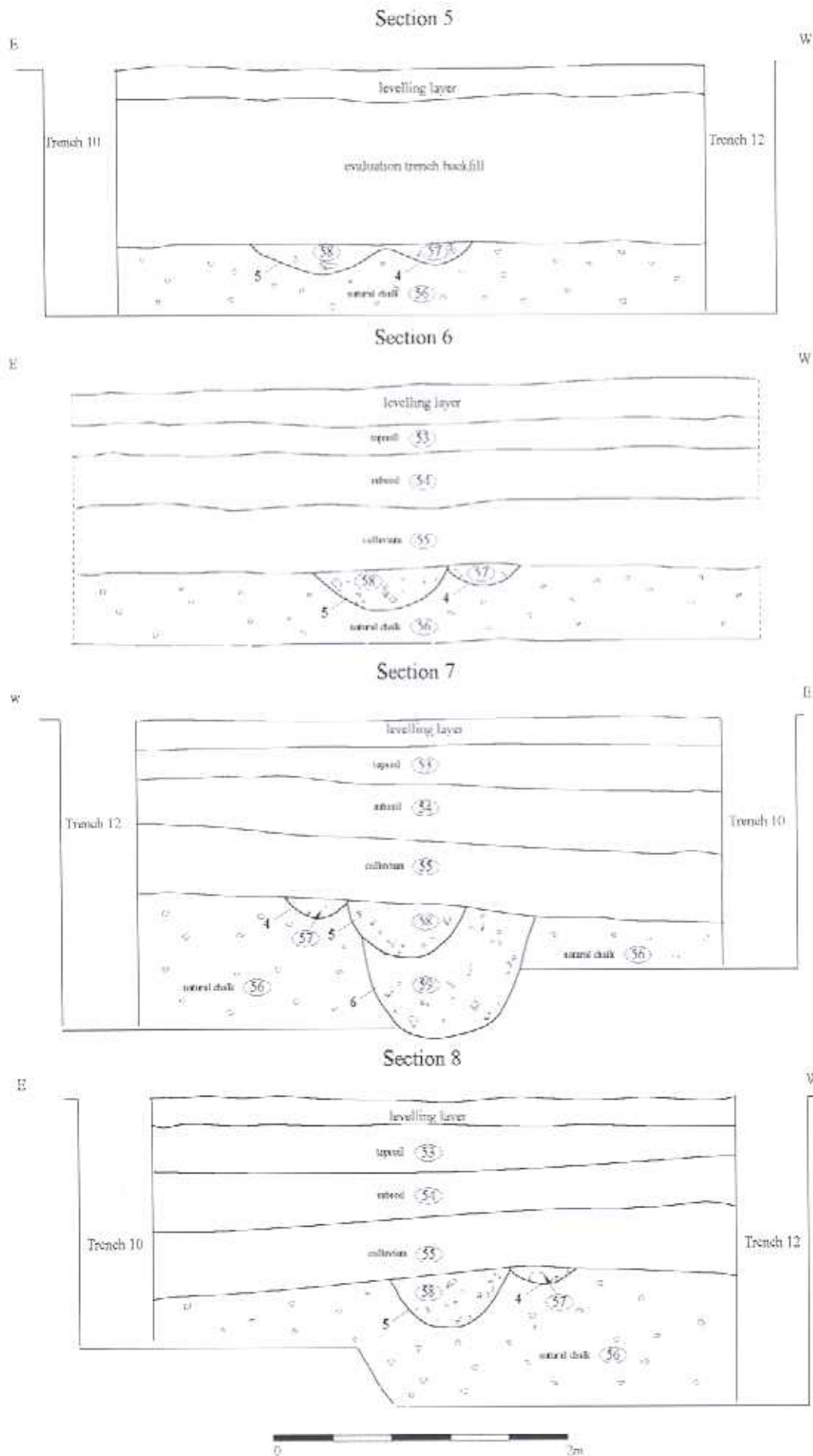


Figure 5. Sections 5-8