

**The Cottage, High Street, Aston,
near Bampton, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for ENC Oxford Ltd**

by Sean Wallis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HSA 05/75

August 2005

Summary

Site name: The Cottage, High Street, Aston, near Bampton, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 3397 0306

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 1 August 2005

Project manager: Stephen Ford

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: HSA 05/75

Area of site: *c.* 0.11ha

Summary of results: Two ditches, one possibly Roman and the other medieval, were found, along with several 19th and 20th century features.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Jo Pine✓ 16.08.05 Steve Preston✓ 16.08.05
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The Cottage, High Street, Aston, near Bampton, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Sean Wallis

Report 05/75

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at The Cottage, High Street, Aston, near Bampton, Oxfordshire (SP 3397 0306) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Joseph McDermott of ENC Oxford Ltd, 1 Rolf Place, Harberton Mead, Headington, Oxford.

Planning permission has been sought from West Oxfordshire District Council to build four new houses and an access road from the High Street with refurbishment of an existing structure. Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services advised that, due to the considerable archaeological potential of the site, a programme of field evaluation was required, in order to inform the planning process.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeological Officer with Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Colls and Sean Wallis on 1 August 2005 and the site code is HSA05/75. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is a relatively flat, L-shaped plot of land, currently used as gardens. It is located on the north side of the High Street, near the centre of the village of Aston. The underlying geology, according to the British Geological Survey, consists of second terrace gravel, and this was observed in both trenches (BGS 1982). The site lies at a height of approximately 69m AOD.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief provided by Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (Coddington 2005). The village of Aston is first documented in late Saxon land charters of AD 958 and 984 and was a large and thriving settlement in medieval times, although not mentioned by name in Domesday Book (although the place name was a common one). It is probable that the

current site lies within the historic core of the village. Various earthworks have been noted to the south-west and north, in the form of holloways, enclosures and building platforms, which are thought to reflect deserted elements of the medieval village. Extensive crop marks, all around Aston, appear to be prehistoric and Roman in origin (Coddington 2005).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

Specific aims of the evaluation were;

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To determine if archaeological deposits representing late Saxon or medieval occupation are present.

The County Archaeological Officer's brief requested the equivalent of one trench 30m x 1.5m, and we proposed to dig 2 trenches 15m long. However, due to the presence of a large stone wall, one trench could not be dug to its full intended length, although it was deemed to be of sufficient length to determine the nature of the site by Mr Coddington. The trenches were dug by a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. All spoilheaps were monitored for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Trench 1 (Pls 1 and 2)

Due to the presence of a large stone wall, this trench could not be dug to its full extent, and it eventually measured 6.5m in length. The ground had been heavily disturbed by relatively modern truncations, dumps of stone and building materials, and garden features. Where the ground was less disturbed, it was noted that 0.32m of turf and topsoil overlay a brown sandy silt subsoil up to 0.24m thick which in turn overlay the natural sand and gravels. The base of a probable pit (6) was investigated at the western end of the trench, which produced no finds. However, it was apparent from the section that this feature was cut from quite high up and was therefore relatively modern. Fragments of brick and tile, visible in the section (but not retained), confirmed this.

A ditch (7) was located between 3.6m and the eastern end of the trench. A small slot, 0.45m wide, was dug through this feature which revealed a fill of dark brownish grey sandy silt (58); the entire width of the ditch was not revealed (Pl. 2). Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from this deposit, along with one residual Roman sherd and a small piece of animal bone. Towards the eastern end of the trench, ditch 7 was disturbed by a post-medieval truncation. Whilst this feature was not excavated, glass and post-medieval pottery were noted on its surface, but not retained.

Trench 2 (Pls 3 and 4)

This trench was 14.6m long and 1.6m wide. Turf and topsoil, 0.24m thick, overlay a brownish grey sandy silt subsoil up to 0.46m thick which lay directly above the natural sand and gravels.

A possible ditch (1) was investigated between 11.8m and the northern end of the trench. A 0.5m wide slot through this feature showed it to be at least 2.6m wide and 0.35m deep, filled with a brownish grey sandy silt (52)(Pl. 4). Two sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from this fill. The rather pitted base of the feature suggested that it may in fact be an old hedgeline. It is not clear if the pottery should date the feature, or is residual like the Roman pottery in ditch 7.

Two shallow features (2 and 3) were excavated at 5.8m and 7.4m, which produced no finds. However, it was clear from the section that 3 truncated a 19th- to 20th-century pit (4), and was therefore relatively modern. No finds were recovered from its greyish brown sandy silt fill (54). Feature 2 was quite irregular in nature and was interpreted as a natural hollow filled with sandy silt subsoil (53). Pit 4 contained pottery and animal bone, but was not fully excavated once it was clear, from sherds of china recovered from its dark brownish grey sandy silt fill (55), that it was 19th – 20th century in date. A small pit (5), approximately 0.4m in diameter was located at 0.3m. This contained the articulated burial of a cat (56), which was not removed.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

Five sherds of pottery weighing 30g from were recovered two features.

Feature 1 yielded a base and bodysherd in grey wheelmade sandy wares typical of the Roman period. In the absence of any diagnostic features these sherds cannot be closely dated but are local wares typical of the Oxfordshire region from the 2nd to 4th centuries.

Feature (7) produced three bodysherds, two small pieces with an oolitic limestone and sand tempered fabric typical of the medieval period (11th to 13th centuries) and one sherd of grey grog-tempered ware datable to the Roman period. The latter similarly would date from around the 2nd century and would appear to be residual.

Post-Medieval Pottery

Three sherds of 19th – 20th century pottery, weighing 8g, were retained from pit 4.

Animal Bone

Two features produced finds of animal bone, in addition to the cat skeleton found in pit 5, which was not excavated. Two pieces of bone, weighing 70g, were recovered from pit 4, one of which showed clear signs of butchery. A small fragment of bone, weighing 2g, was found in ditch 7.

Conclusion

The evaluation located two probable ditches, one perhaps Roman and the other medieval, along with several modern features. None of the features was well-preserved, despite being relatively deeply buried, and finds were few. It seems likely, especially from trench 1, that parts of the site have been landscaped or disturbed in the relatively recent past, probably during its use as rear gardens. Considering its location near the core of a prosperous medieval settlement, the archaeological potential seems low. The effects of the proposed development on potential archaeological deposits will also depend on the amount of ground reduction necessary and the depth of foundation trenches.

References

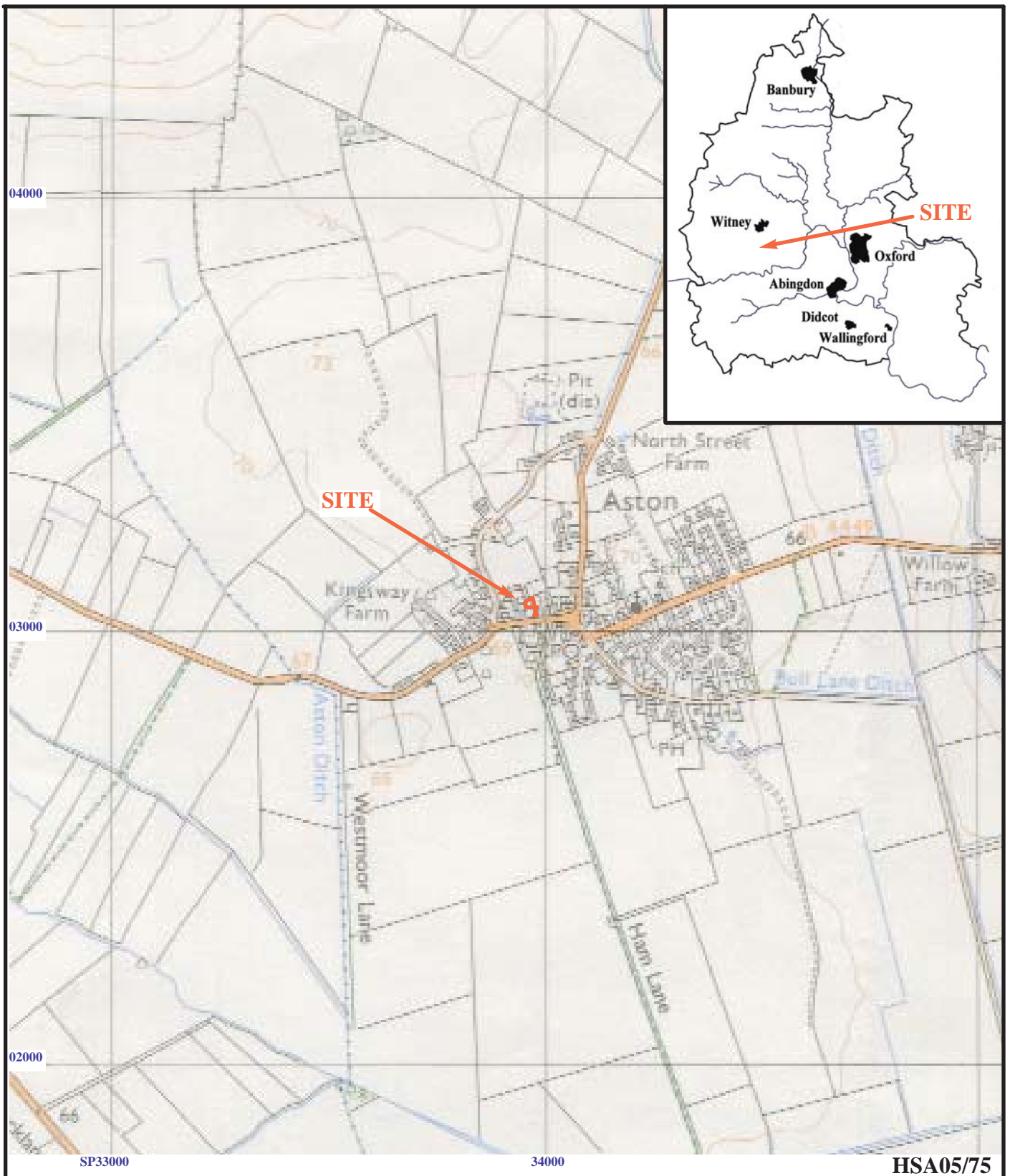
BGS, 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 236, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
Coddington, H, 2005, 'The Cottage, High Street, Aston, Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation', unpubl, Oxford
PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	6.50	1.60	1.08	0.00-0.32m topsoil; 0.32-0.56m subsoil; 0.56-1.08m natural sand and gravels. Pit 6 and ditch 7.
2	14.60	1.60	0.83	0.00-0.24m topsoil; 0.24-0.70m subsoil; 0.70-0.83m natural sand and gravels. Ditch 1, natural hollow 2, modern linear 3, pit 4, and cat burial 5.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
2	1	52	Ditch	Roman	Pottery
2	2	53	Natural hollow	N/A	None
2	3	54	Possible linear	19th-20th century	None
2	4	55	Pit	19th-20th century	Pottery
2	5	56	Pit	Unknown	None
1	6	57	Pit	19th-20th century	Brick and Tile
1	7	58	Ditch	Medieval	Pottery
		50	Topsoil		
		51	Subsoil		



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Figure 1. Location of site within Aston and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site within Aston.

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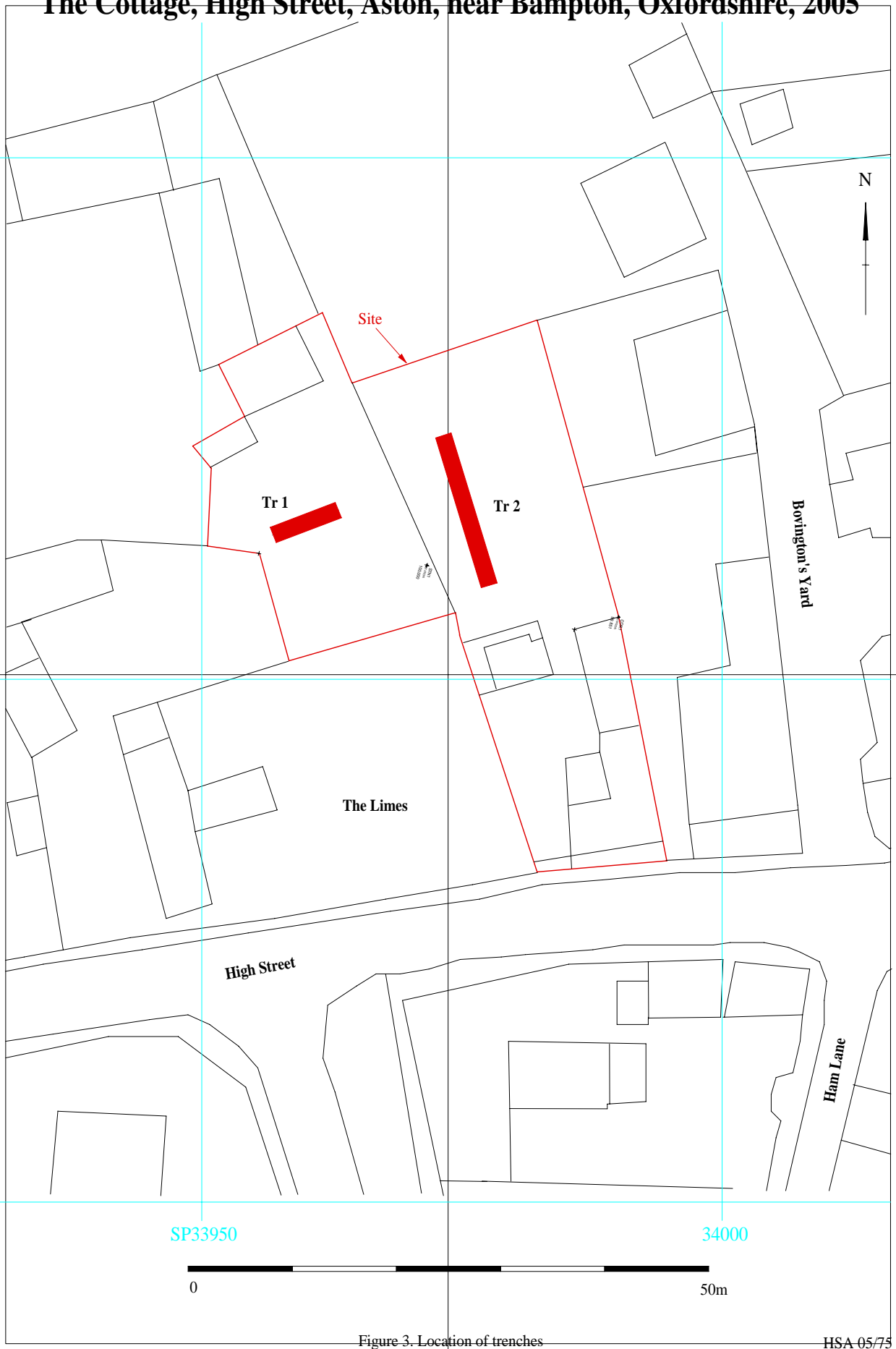


Figure 3. Location of trenches

The Cottage, High Street, Aston, Oxfordshire, 2005

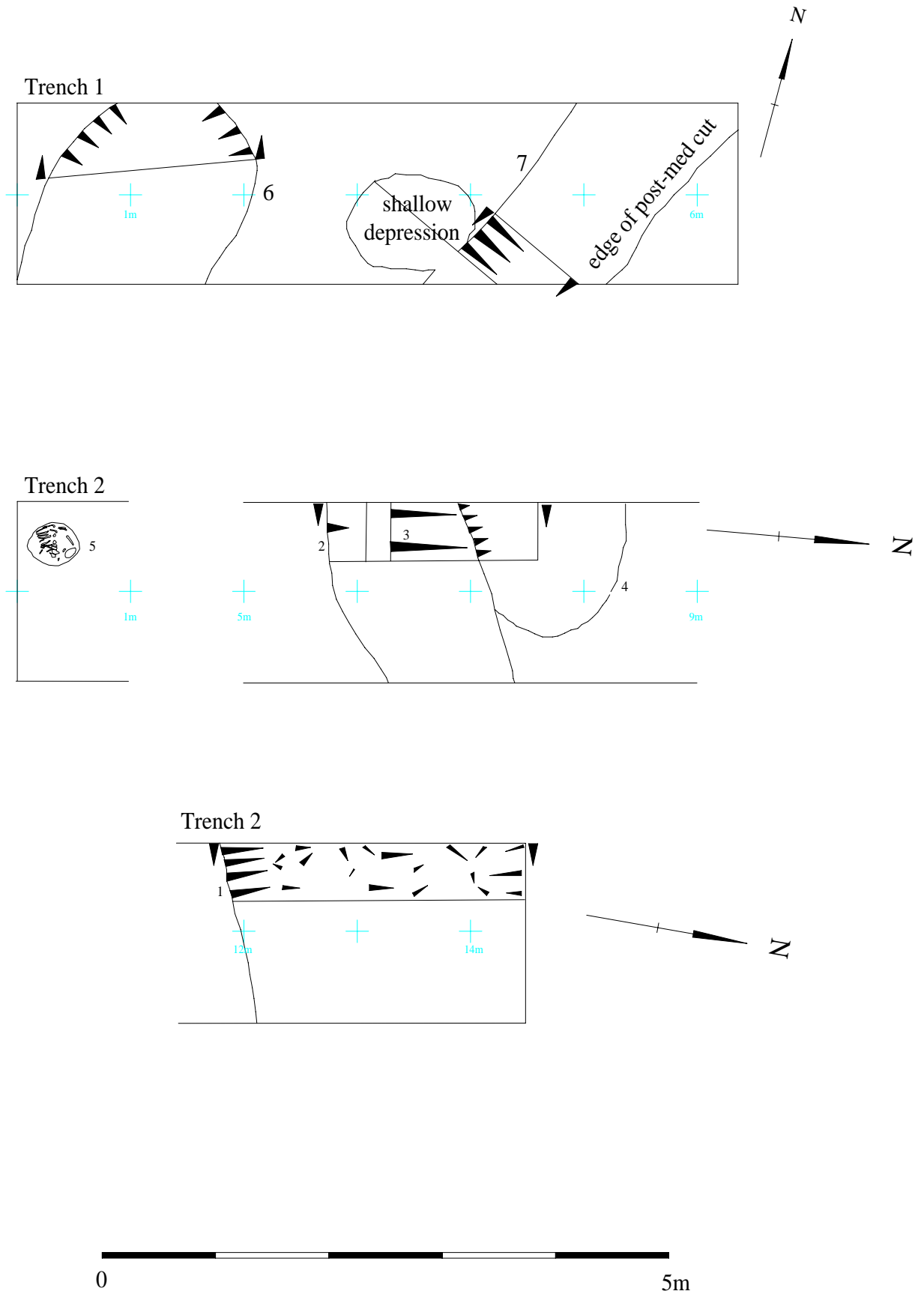


Figure 4. Plans of trenches

The Cottage, High Street, Aston, Oxfordshire, 2005

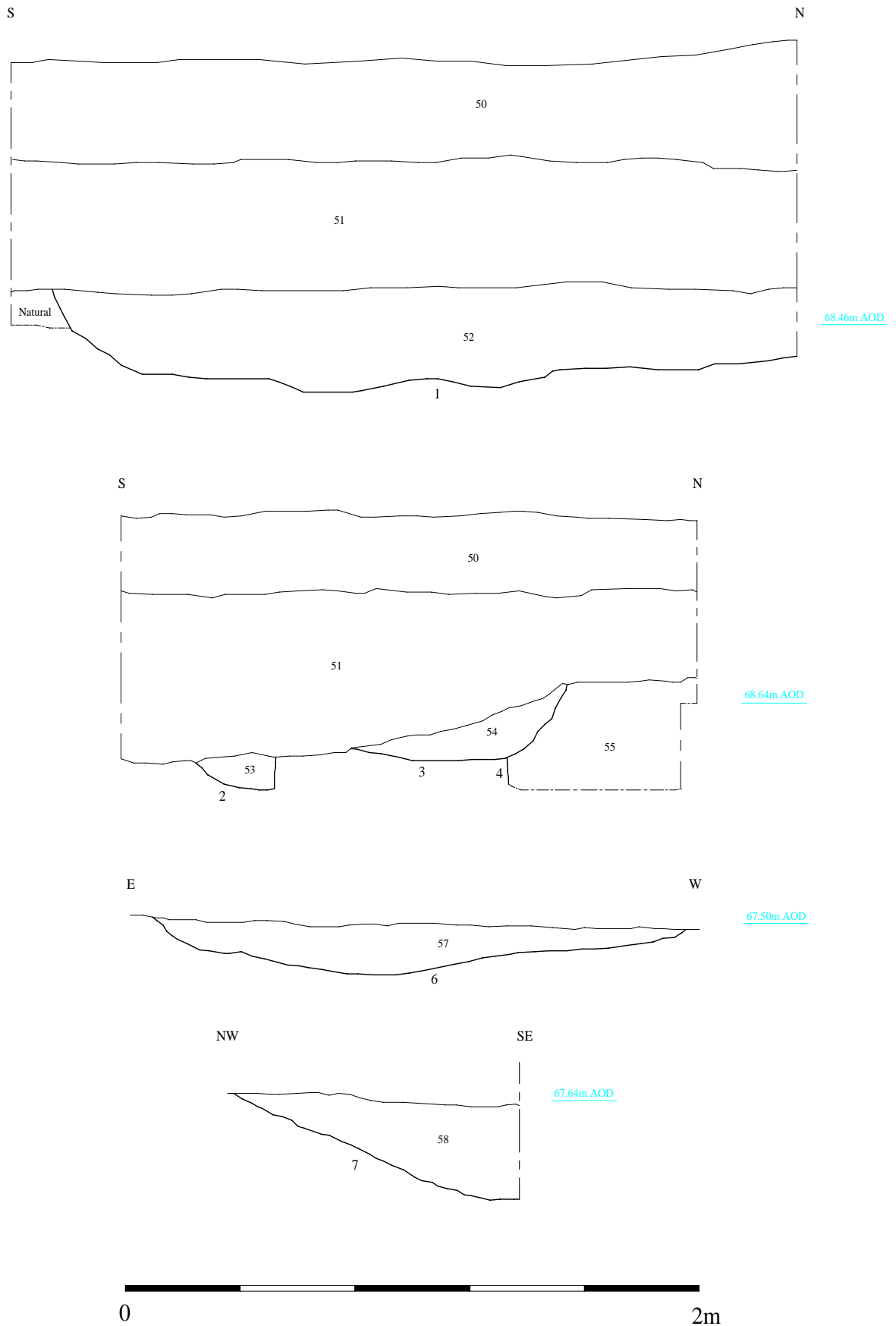


Figure 5. Sections



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking east, 1m and 2m scales



Plate 2. Trench 1, ditch 7 looking south, 1m and 2m scales.



Plate 3. Trench 2 looking north, 1m and 2m scales.



Plate 4. Trench 2, ditch 1 looking west, 1m and 2m scales.