

# **Sheepdrove Organic Farm, Warren Farm, Lambourn, West Berkshire**

## **An Archaeological Evaluation for Sheepdrove Organic Farm**

by Kate Taylor  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services  
Ltd

Site Code SFL01/44

**June 2001**

## Summary

**Site name:** Sheepdrove Organic Farm, Warren Farm, Lambourn, West Berkshire

**Grid reference:** SU3585 8180

**Site activity:** Evaluation

**Site supervisor:** Kate Taylor/ Jo Pine

**Date and duration of project:** 21st- 22nd May 2001

**Site code:** SFL01/44

**Area of site:** 0.5 ha

**Summary of results:** No features or finds. Much modern terracing

**Monuments identified:** None

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. It is anticipated that the complete archive will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum.

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# Sheepdrove Organic Farm, Warren Farm, Lambourn, West Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Kate Taylor

Report 01/44

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Sheepdrove Organic Farm, Warren Farm, Lambourn, West Berkshire (SU3585 8180) (Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Christopher Strang, Christopher Strang Associates, 36 Donnington Square, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 1PP on behalf of Sheepdrove Organic Farm.

A planning application has been made to West Berkshire Council for the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of new offices and conference facilities at Sheepdrove Farm. In order to provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site so as to mitigate the effects of development, a field evaluation was requested in advance of the application being determined.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16 1990). The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Veronica Fiorato, West Berkshire Heritage Officer. The fieldwork was undertaken by Kate Taylor and Jo Pine on the 21st and 22nd May 2001 and the site code is SFL01/44.

## Location, Topography and Geology

Sheepdrove Organic Farm is located on Stancombe Down in the heart of the Berkshire Downs. It lies c. 4km north-east of the village of Lambourn adjacent to Nut Wood. The land slopes down fairly steeply to the east towards Cockcrow Bottom before rising again to Mere End Down (Fig. 1). According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 1971) the underlying geology is Upper Chalk and indeed this was encountered in each of the trenches excavated. The development area itself, around the farm offices, slopes from approximately 187m above Ordnance Datum in the west to 184m in the east which is less steep than the gradient of the surrounding hills, a number of terraces, apparently cut into the slope, are visible.

## **Archaeological Background**

This site is of particular archaeological interest as, in September 1966, three Roman burials were found during building work on the farm (Reading Museum accession number 1969.139.1-5). They were examined by Hugh Carter, naturalist with the museum, who made detailed records of the skeletons and graves. A mechanical excavator had removed much of the lower half of one and the upper half of another, but the bones were recovered from the police and also examined. Unusually two of the skeletons had had their necks severed with a sharp instrument and the articulated skulls and neck vertebrae placed by the feet, perhaps following execution. Two coins of late 3rd to mid 4th century AD date and fragments of 'wood' were found in one of the graves. The skull of the third skeleton showed circular bronze stains in the orbits but no associated bronze objects were recovered. These burials were not all fully excavated at the time of discovery, the upper half of one skeleton was left in-situ, unexposed.

The area around Sheepdrove Organic Farm is extremely rich in archaeological remains. A Roman villa site is known nearby and a cemetery, to which the 1966 burials may be related is also present. Also many finds of Roman artefacts are recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record. Extensive 'Celtic' field systems underlie the modern agricultural landscape across much of the Berkshire Downs (eg Richards 1978). and many of these are now thought to be Roman in date rather than prehistoric (Bowden et al 1991-3; Gaffney and Tingle 1989). Trenches to investigate these field systems across the Downs were excavated in many locations including Nut Wood, immediately to the east of the current site. There lynchets shown to be Roman in date were examined, one overlying a Bronze Age flint scatter. There are also numerous Bronze Age round barrows in the surrounding area and contemporary settlements might be expected in their vicinity.

## **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 were to relocate, if possible, the previously discovered burials and assess their condition and the extent to which elements remain in situ; to determine whether any further Roman burials exist on the site and to determine whether there was any evidence of other Roman activity such as an associated settlement. The NGR co-ordinate given with the records of the 1966 findings is SU3583 8175 which appears to indicate that the burials were found in the area now occupied by the yard and fuel pumps, although the co-ordinate is accurate to 10m only. Nine trenches were positioned within the footprint of the proposed building and other areas to be affected by the development including two fairly near

the fuel pump area in an attempt to relocate the burials (Fig. 2). These were excavated, under constant archaeological supervision, by a JCB-type machine using a toothless ditching bucket, except for Trench 9 where the reinforced concrete of the yard was initially broken and then removed by a toothed bucket. The trenches were 1.6m wide, ranged in length from 2.8m to 21.9m and in depth from 0.17m to 1.00m. 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**

### Trenches 1-3 and 8 (Plate 1)

The four trenches in the field to the rear of the current offices revealed that the area has been landscaped in recent history. The field itself is fairly level, in comparison to the surrounding hillside, and where the road passes to the north-east of the site it can be seen to cut into the slope, forming a terrace on which the houses to the north also sit. The stratigraphy of the trenches showed a typically thin turf and topsoil layer overlying a layer of redeposited chalk which contained many brick fragments. Below this was the natural chalk. However, this level was extremely clean and solid, with no sign of weathering or root disturbance which would be expected on the natural surface of the geological chalk in such a location. It is clearly a deeper deposit, exposed by the terracing activity, which has had a small amount of chalk made ground spread on top before the replacement of the topsoil. In fact, in Trenches 1 and 2, the chalk appeared less weathered to the north-eastern ends, ie deeper into the terrace.

### Trenches 4 and 5

Behind the northern walls of the existing buildings these two trenches were excavated through thicker layers of redeposited chalk with brick rubble where the area had been built up to create a relatively level surface into which the offices had been set. However, below this the chalk was again fairly clean, indicating that the ground surface had been truncated before this dumping took place.

### Trench 6 (Plate 2)

Whilst this, the most easterly of the trenches, also showed a thin layer of redeposited chalk, it was the only trench in which a buried soil level was preserved below. This overlay the untruncated natural surface of the chalk, showing weathering and root action, however no archaeological features were observed, despite extensive hand cleaning.

### Trench 7

This trench was excavated in a small traffic island in the farmyard. A thick layer of redeposited chalk again overlay a truncated surface, presumably created during the levelling of the yard area and the construction of the present farm buildings.

### Trench 9

The concrete of the farmyard proved to overlie an earlier concrete yard surface which itself sat upon a typically truncated chalk level. This appears to represent terracing to form the level yard area.

## **Finds**

No finds were recovered from the site.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation has failed to relocate the previously recorded burials, or any other archaeological deposits. The area around the farm appears to have been extensively landscaped in recent times, including a large amount of terracing into the side of the hill and spreading of the excavated chalk to create level platforms for the farmyard and the field behind. This was confirmed by the recollections of a number of members of farm staff. It is also clear that in most places the topsoil and the upper surface of the chalk was removed prior to the spreading of the spoil, presumably being replaced on top. The exception to this was Trench 6 which showed the redeposited chalk overlying the previous soil layer.

Examination of the 1966 archives in Reading Museum has not shed much light on the whereabouts of the graves. The sketch plan relates them to farm buildings that existed at the time but which do not appear to have been incorporated into the current farm layout. No plans of the farm from that period have been found and the NGR given is not sufficiently accurate to allow the find spot to be located. If they were anywhere in the immediate vicinity of the yard and fuel tanks it seems likely, given the truncation and terracing that has occurred, that any in situ remains have been destroyed since 1966. It is however possible that a small area has survived at its original depth. Alternatively the NGR may be erroneous and the burials survive elsewhere, which might be suggested by the indication in the records that they were found when a trench was cut through topsoil rather than concrete. No current employees at the farm recall the location but further enquiries may prove more fruitful and it may be advisable for these to be made in advance of the development taking place.

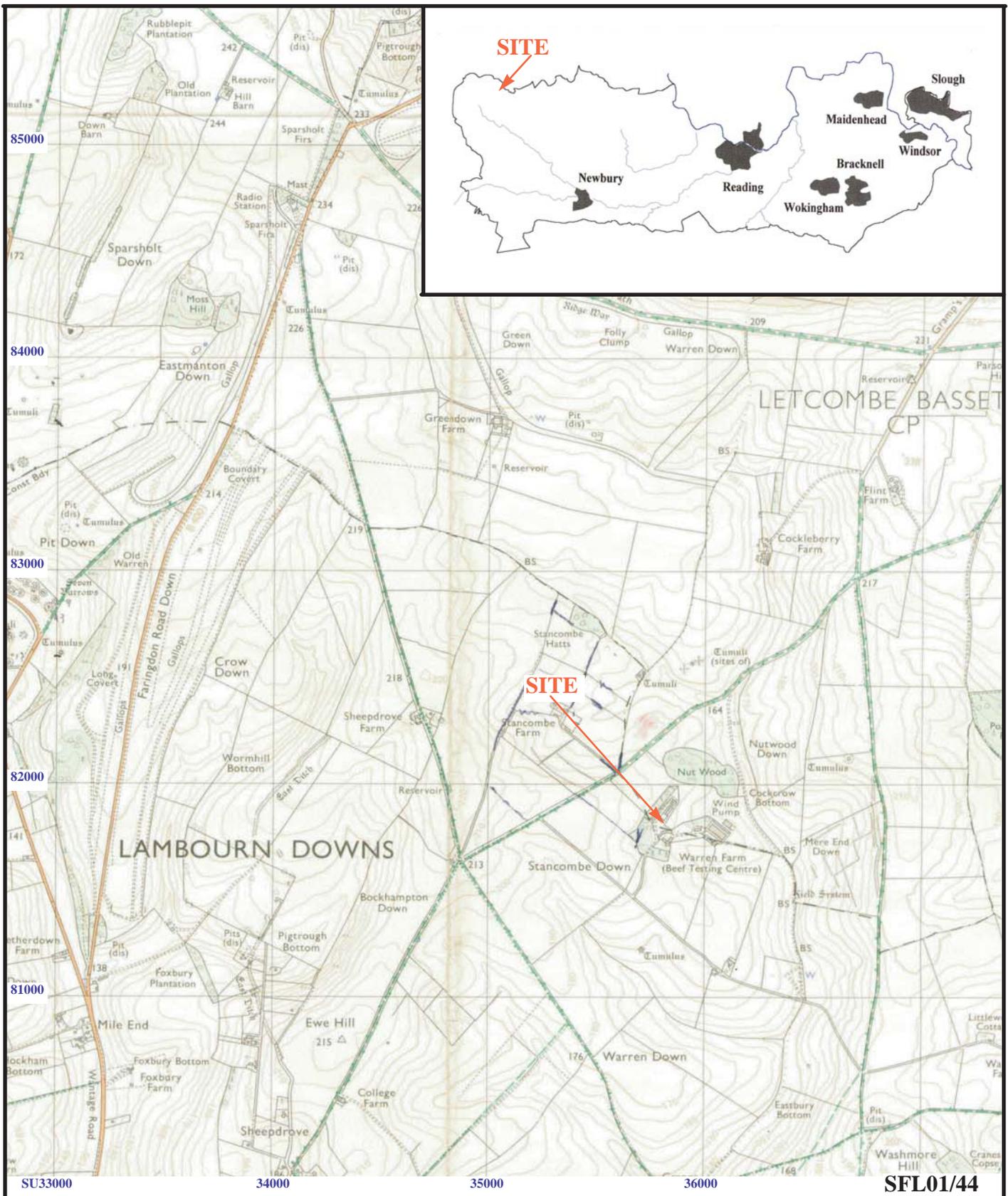
It is clear from the results of this evaluation that, regardless of the whereabouts of the 1966 skeletons, no extensive Roman cemetery or settlement exists on the site, nor indeed remains of any other period prior to the 20th century. It would appear that the proposed development will have no effect on any archaeological remains.

## References

- BGS, 1971, *British Geological Survey*, 1:63360, Sheet 253, Drift Edition, Keyworth
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- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO
- Richards, J C, 1978, *The Archaeology of the Berkshire Downs*, Berkshire Archaeological Committee no 3, Reading

## APPENDIX 1: Trench Details

<i>Trench No</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	20.0	1.6	0.18 - SE 0.35 - NW	0-0.10 topsoil; 0.10-0.20 redeposited chalk with brick fragments; 0.20+ clean natural chalk, severely truncated, more so at north.
2	21.9	0.16	0.17 - SE 0.29 - NW	0-0.10 topsoil; 0.10+ clean natural chalk, severely truncated at north end, less so at south.
3	20.6	1.6	0.21	0-0.10 topsoil; 0.10-0.20 redeposited chalk with brick fragments; 0.20+ clean natural chalk, truncated.
4	20.2	1.6	0.90 test pit 0.30 - W 0.65 - E 1.0 modern cut	0-0.20 topsoil; 0.20-0.55 chalky made ground with brick fragments; 0.55+ clean natural chalk, truncated. Made ground overlies deep modern brick-filled pit, partially machined out.
5	6.2	1.6	0.70	0-0.20 topsoil; 0.20-0.60 redeposited chalk with brick fragments; 0.60+ clean natural chalk, truncated. Electric cable, hence separation of trenches 5 and 8.
6	14.9	1.6	0.60-0.65	0-0.12 topsoil; 0.12-0.44 redeposited chalk with brick fragments; 0.44-0.59 buried topsoil; 0.59+ natural weathered chalk, not truncated.
7	10.7	1.6	0.68 - E 0.93 - W 1.1 modern cut	0-0.15 topsoil; 0.15-0.60 at E, 0.15-0.85 at W redeposited chalk with brick fragments; 0.60+ at E 0.85+ at W clean natural chalk, truncated. Made ground overlies deep modern brick-filled hole, partially machined out.
8	17.3	1.6	0.33-0.36	0-0.17 topsoil; 0.17-0.27 redeposited chalk with brick fragments; 0.71+ clean natural chalk, slightly truncated.
9	2.8	1.6	0.30-0.32	0-0.17 concrete yard surface; 0.17-0.25 made ground including gravel basal layer for yard; 0.25-0.30 concrete of previous yard surface; 0.30+ clean natural chalk, truncated.



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West Berkshire, 2001**

Figure 1. Location of site relative to Lambourn and Berkshire.

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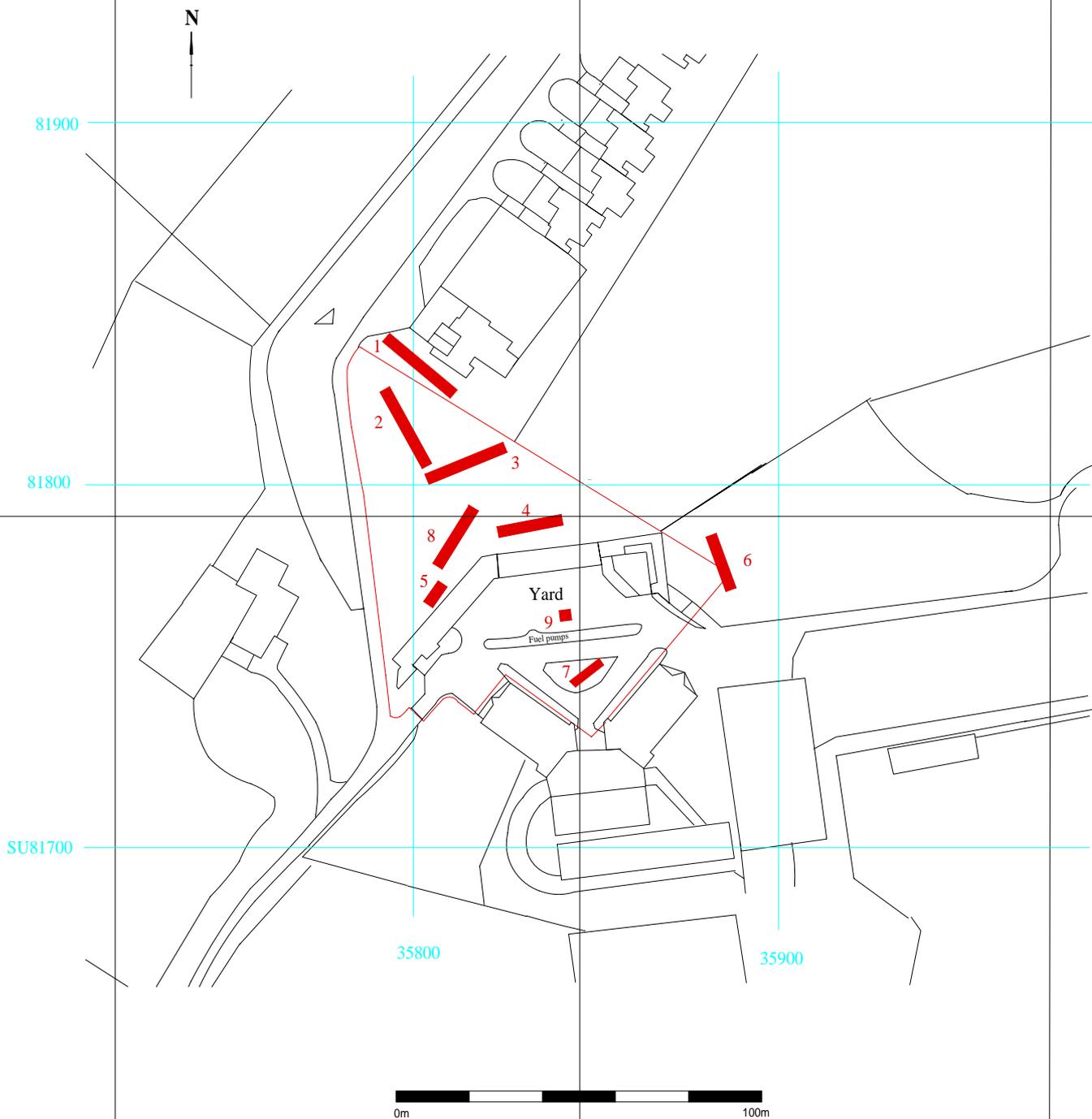


Figure 2. Location of trenches.



Plate 1. Trench 2. Looking north-west. Scales 1m, 0.5m. Terracing of hillside visible in background



Plate 2. Trench 6. Looking south-west. Scales 1m, 0.5m. Showing buried soil