



**Banner Homes PLC**

**Land adjacent to 88 Union Street, Dunstable**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT***

**NGR TL 0127 2205**

**Planning Ref: SB/TP/98/0710**

**© OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

**May 2000**

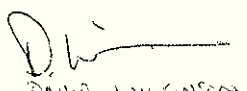
**Banner Homes PLC**

**Land adjacent to 88 Union Street, Dunstable**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT***

**NGR TL 0127 2205**

**Planning Ref: SB/TP/98/0710**

Prepared by: Andrew Norton Date: 9/5/00
Checked by: Richard Brown Date:
Approved by:  DAVID WILKINSON Date: 23/5/00

© OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

**May 2000**

**Land adjacent to 88 Union Street, Dunstable*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION*****CONTENTS**

Summary .....	1
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Location and scope of work .....	1
1.2 Geology and topography .....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background .....	1
1.4 Acknowledgements .....	2
2 Evaluation aims .....	2
3 Evaluation methodology .....	2
3.1 Scope of fieldwork .....	2
3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording .....	3
3.3 Finds .....	3
3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence .....	3
3.5 Presentation of results .....	3
4 Results: general .....	3
4.1 Soils and ground conditions .....	3
4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits .....	3
4.3 Description of deposits .....	3
5 Finds .....	5
6 Discussion and interpretation .....	6
6.1 Reliability of field investigation .....	6
6.2 Overall interpretation .....	6
Appendix 1 Archaeological context inventory .....	8
Appendix 2 Pottery assessment/ spot dating, y Paul Booth .....	11
Appendix 3 Bibliography and references .....	12

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Fig. 1 Site location map
Fig. 2 Trench location map
Fig. 3 Trenches 1-2
Fig. 4 Trench 3
Fig. 5 Trench 4
Fig. 6 Trench 5
Fig. 7 Trenches 6-8
Fig. 8 Trench 9

## SUMMARY

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at 88 Union Street, Dunstable, on behalf of Banner Homes PLC. The evaluation revealed two late Iron Age or early Roman ditches, which ran from east to west across the site and may have defined a trackway, a small pit of unknown date was also found.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In May 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at 88 Union Street, Dunstable on behalf of Banner Homes PLC. The work was carried out in mitigation of a condition attached to planning permission (Planning Application No. SB/TP/98/0710) granted for residential development of the site.
- 1.1.2 The work was carried out according to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by OAU in response to a brief set by Martin Oake, Bedfordshire County Archaeological Officer.
- 1.1.3 The development site is situated in a built up area to the north-west of Dunstable town centre, in south Bedfordshire and is c 6,500 square metres in area.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The geology of the site is middle chalk at 150 m OD. The site is situated on a disused engineering works built in the 1950s. Previously the land was a residential area.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been taken from Bedfordshire County Council's *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation on Land Adjacent to Union Street* and the desk top report for *Dunstable Priory* (Scott Wilson Resource Consultants 1998), which describe significant archaeological evidence. There are several known sites and locations with archaeological remains adjacent to the development site.
- 1.3.2 A barrow, described as a Neolithic long barrow, is recorded from the development site. It was first described in reliable antiquarian sources in the mid to late 19th century as an east-west orientated mound some 100 ft long. There are reports of human bones from the site and finds of flint artefacts. By the mid 20th century the earth work had disappeared, probably as a result of building the engineering works. It has also been suggested that the mound was used for siting a windmill during the post-medieval period. Other prehistoric barrows have also been recorded in the area.

- 1.3.3 A late Iron Age ditch was excavated during the early 1970s, c.800 m to the north-west.
- 1.3.4 There is an extensive pattern of prehistoric settlement known from the Dunstable area. This includes an Iron-Age hillfort and possible Neolithic enclosure at Maiden Bower to the west, Five Knolls round barrow cemetery to the south and the extensive occupation site at Puddleworth to the north.
- 1.3.5 The Union Street site is on the edge of the Roman town of Dunstable (Durocobrivis), centred on the cross roads of the Icknield Way and Watling Street. The town is thought to be predominantly comprised of timber buildings, forming a market and trading place and a possible military post. A Roman coin has been found to the west and a Roman ditch to the north west of the town; Roman wells, ditches, pits and burials, and post Roman buildings, have all been found within the Dunstable area.
- 1.3.6 The site is also on the edge of the medieval town that was founded in the early 12th century by a charter of Henry I.

#### **1.4 Acknowledgements**

Special thanks are extended to the present landowners, Alan and Tony Brooks, whose cooperation during the evaluation was greatly appreciated.

## **2 EVALUATION AIMS**

- 2.1.1 To determine and understand the location, nature, date, function, character and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present in order to allow the effective targeting of further investigation of the site prior to or during the early stages of the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains that are excavated during the course of the evaluation.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

## **3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Scope of fieldwork**

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of nine trenches; three measured c.30 m x 1.60 m, five measured c. 15 m x 1.60 m and one L shaped trench measured 3.5 m (north south) x 7.5 m (east west) and 1.6 m wide (Fig 2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.
- 3.1.2 A provision for a contingency of 150 square metres had been allowed for, so that further investigation of any significant features or deposits encountered may be undertaken.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992). All trenches were tied into the OS Grid.

### 3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and generally bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No environmental samples were taken. None of the deposits in the few features revealed exhibited potential for environmental analysis.

### 3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 Section 5 includes individual context descriptions, with archaeological deposits and features described from earliest to latest. Context information is summarised in the context inventory (Appendix 1).

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The site consisted of chalk natural overlain by silty clay deposits; no difficult ground conditions were encountered. There had been limited impact from the construction of the engineering works and only Trench 4 showed evidence of truncation.

### 4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 Archaeological features were encountered in the trenches to the west of the site, and in Trenches 4, 5 and 6 in the central part of the site. No archaeological features were seen in the trenches to the east.

### 4.3 Description of deposits

#### 4.3.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

The natural chalk (100) was revealed at a depth of 0.54 m below ground level (bgl) in the northwest end of the trench (149.36 m OD). In the trench two eastwest aligned ditches were seen 7.5 m apart. To the north-east of the trench was ditch 103, 0.43 m deep and over 1.60 m wide with a flat base. In the south-west of the trench was ditch 106, 0.43 m deep and 1.85 m wide with a concave base; both ditches were filled with a redeposited natural layer (104 and 107 respectively) beneath a silty clay (105 and

108/109 respectively) containing late Iron Age/early Roman pottery. A flint flake was also retrieved from fill 109. Overlying the fills of these ditches was a subsoil (101) and a topsoil (102).

#### 4.3.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

In Trench 2 natural chalk (202) was encountered at a depth of 149.61 m OD (0.32 m bgl). At the north end of the trench a ditch was seen (200) which was aligned eastwest, 0.35 m deep, 1.30 m wide and with a fairly flat base. It was filled with a silty clay (201). Above the fill 201 was a subsoil (203) and a topsoil (204).

#### 4.3.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 4)

Natural (300) was seen at c. 149.60 m OD (0.50 m bgl). The only feature encountered was an oblong pit (303), 0.22 m deep and measuring 2 x 1 m. It was filled by a redeposited natural chalk (305) and a clayey silt (304), which were sealed by a subsoil (301) and a topsoil (302).

#### 4.3.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 5)

In the north-east end of the trench the natural (400) was at 149.63 m OD (0.40 m bgl) and in the south-west at 149.72 m OD (0.60 m bgl). In the centre of the trench two eastwest aligned ditches were encountered; these were 7.5 m apart. At the south-west end of the trench was ditch 404, being 0.44 m deep, 0.89 m wide and with a flat base. To the north-east end of the trench was ditch 407 which was 0.40 m deep, 0.95 m wide, and with a concave base. Both ditches were filled with a redeposited natural chalk beneath a silty clay. In ditch 407 pottery was recovered from fill 409. The upper fills of both features were overlain by 403, a levelling layer.

#### 4.3.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 6)

Natural was seen at 149.34 m OD to the southeast (0.76 m bgl) and 149.55 m OD to the north-west (0.55 m bgl). Two eastwest aligned ditches were seen over 9.5 m apart. In the south-east of the trench was ditch 502. This was 0.40 m deep, over 0.30 m wide and with a flat base. In the northwest of the trench was ditch 604, 0.38 m deep, 0.90 m wide and had a flat base. Both ditches were filled with a redeposited natural chalk beneath a silty clay; in 504 there was a single line of unworked flint nodules (510) over the primary fill (505), and fill 509 contained bone, Iron Age and late Iron Age/early Roman pottery. Over the south-east end of the trench was an early ploughsoil (507) which was overlain by a disturbed ploughsoil and natural interface (511) between natural (506) and subsoil (501). This ran the length of the trench and spread over 507. Overlying it was 501 and then a leveling and hardstanding area (500).

#### 4.3.6 Trench 6 (Fig. 7)

In the north of the trench the natural (607) was at 148.93 m OD (1.13 m bgl) and in the south end of the trench at 149.12 m OD (0.83 m bgl). A ditch aligned north-west-south-east (604) was seen in the south end of the trench and was 0.50 m deep, over 0.90 m wide and had a flat base. This was filled by weathered natural slippage



605 and a silty clay backfill (606). Overlying 606 was a mixed ploughsoil and natural interface between 607 and ploughsoil 602 (603) which was overlain by 602 and then a buried topsoil 601. Over this was a levelling layer sealed by a tarmac surface (600).

#### 4.3.7 Trench 7 (Fig. 7)

The natural (700) was seen at 147.74 m OD (1 m bgl) in the south-east of the trench and 147.88 m OD (1.24 m bgl) in the north-west of the trench. This was overlain by a subsoil (701) over which was a buried topsoil (700), in turn overlain by modern rubble and concrete (703).

#### 4.3.8 Trench 8 (Fig.8)

The natural (800) was seen at 148.61 m OD (0.93 m bgl) in the south-west end of the trench and 148.12 m OD (1.13 m bgl) in the north-east end of the trench. This was overlain by subsoil (801), with a modern well cut through the deposit, and then made ground (800) forming a road.

#### 4.3.9 Trench 9 (Fig. 9)

The natural was seen to the south-east of the trench at 149.90 m OD (0.08m bgl) and in the north-west of the trench at 150.11 m OD (0.95 m bgl). At the north-west of the trench was a modern ditch (901) filled with weathered natural slippage (902) under redeposited topsoil (903). A dump of similar soil lies over the ditch (904) which is under a dumped subsoil (905) below topsoil 906. The ditch fills contained modern pottery, bone and fragments of modern floor material.

## 5 FINDS

### 5.1.1 Iron Age/Roman pottery, by Paul Booth

A small assemblage of 13 sherds (91 g) of late Iron Age to early Roman pottery was recovered. The pottery was examined briefly and recorded using ware and type codes in the OAU Iron Age and Roman pottery recording system. The sherds were in moderate condition, though most were very small. The material is tabulated in Appendix 2.

### 5.1.2 Post medieval pottery

A sherd of 19th/20th century porcelain and a sherd of glazed 19th/20th century tile were retrieved from the secondary fill of ditch 901 (903) and a sherd of 19th/20th century pottery from a dump of redeposited topsoil 904.

### 5.1.3 Bone

Two unidentified fragments were retrieved from the top fill of ditch 106 (109). A caprine tibia fragment and two bovine ulna fragments were retrieved from the upper fill (509) of ditch 504. A fragment of bovine metacarpal and two unidentified bone fragments were obtained from primary ditch fill 902 and a caprine rib fragment from upper ditch fill 903.

#### 5.1.4 Lithics

A single piece of irregular waste from a flint was found in the final fill of ditch 106 (109), and a flint flake was retrieved from 903, the secondary fill of ditch 901.

#### 5.1.5 Other finds

A piece of coal was retrieved from 902 the primary fill of ditch 901, and 12 pieces of linoleum were retrieved from the secondary fill 903.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The positioning of the trenches in the evaluation covered a good proportion of the site and few archaeological features have been seen. The features contain a limited amount of artefactual evidence suggesting a general lack of occupation activity in this area. There appeared to be very little truncation of archaeological deposits by the construction of the engineering works with only Trench 4 affected by ground leveling. The trenches in the east show evidence of plough disturbance but with little damage to any features. The results obtained from the evaluation appear to offer reliable evidence of low-level rural activity in the Late Iron Age /Roman period.

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

#### *Summary of results*

The archaeology encountered consisted of sections of two roughly parallel ditches running eastwest across the site. They appeared to turn south-eastnorth-west in Trenches 5 and 6, where they were spaced further apart. The argument for the two parallel ditches is based on the premise that ditches 103, 407 and 504 are part of the northern ditch and ditches 106, 200, 404, 502 and 604 form the southern ditch. The dating evidence, from the pottery retrieved, would suggest that these are late Iron Age or early Roman ditches, and given the even spacing, they may define the edges of a trackway. Ditch 407 in Trench 4 had a line of flint nodules over the primary weathered natural slippage possibly as an aid to drainage. The trackway could be associated with the Roman town of Dunstable which lies on the edge of Union Street.

A single ovoid feature was seen in Trench 3, no dating evidence was observed but the fill was very similar to that of the ditches. There is no evidence for prehistoric or medieval activity as seen in the area around the area of development or for the existence of a Neolithic long barrow recorded within the area evaluated. The only earthwork appears to be an area of modern ground make-up which was dumped over a modern northsouth aligned ditch seen in Trench 9.

***Significance***

The evaluation revealed features which could be interpreted as a late Iron Age or early Roman trackway, running approximately eastwest through the area of development, and a possible pit. The trackway can be defined as a feature of local significance.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>No./wt</i>	<i>Date</i>
001	100	Layer			natural chalk			
	101	Layer		0.20	subsoil			mod
	102	Layer		0.20	topsoil			mod
	103	Cut	>1.60	0.40	ditch			LIA/R
	104	fill		0.15	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	105	fill		0.24	secondary ditch fill	pot	14	LIA/R
	106	cut	>1.10	0.43	ditch			LIA/R
	107	fill		0.20	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	108	fill		0.20	secondary ditch fill			LIA/R
	109	fill		0.04	tertiary ditch fill	bone/flint	2/1	LIA/R
002	200	cut	1.30	0.35	ditch			LIA/R
	201	fill		0.35	ditch fill			LIA/R
	202	layer			natural chalk			
	203	layer		0.15	subsoil			mod
	204	layer		0.20	topsoil			mod
003	300	layer			natural chalk			
	301	layer		0.32	subsoil			mod
	302	layer		0.35	topsoil			mod
	303	cut	2 x 1	0.22	pit			
	304	fill		0.22	secondary pit fill			
	305	fill		0.20	primary pit fill			
004	400	layer			natural chalk			
	401	layer		0.25	subsoil			mod

	402	layer		0.10	topsoil			mod
	403	layer		0.40	make-up layer			mod
	404	cut	0.89	0.44	ditch			LIA/R
	405	fill		0.30	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	406	fill		0.18	secondary ditch fill			LIA/R
	407	cut	0.95	0.40	ditch			LIA/R
	408	fill		0.17	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	409	fill		0.27	secondary ditch fill	pot	1	LIA/R
500	500	layer		0.30	tarmac and make-up			mod
	501	layer		0.20	subsoil			mod
	502	cut	>0.30	0.40	ditch			LIA/R
	503	fill		0.15	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	504	cut	0.90	0.38	ditch			LIA/R
	505	fill		0.22	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	506	layer			natural chalk			
	507	layer		0.20	buried ploughsoil			
	508	fill		0.30	secondary ditch fill			LIA/R
	509	fill		0.20	tertiary ditch fill	pot/bone	3/3	LIA/R
	510	fill		0.20	line of flints			LIA/R
	511	layer		0.10	plough interface			
006	600	layer		0.30	make-up and road			mod
	601	layer		0.30	buried topsoil			mod
	602	layer		0.15	buried subsoil			
	603	layer		0.25	plough interface			
	604	cut	>0.90	0.50	ditch			LIA/R

	605	fill		0.20	primary ditch fill			LIA/R
	606	fill		0.35	secondary ditch fill			LIA/R
	607	layer			natural chalk			
007	700	layer			natural chalk			
	701	layer		0.50	subsoil			
	702	layer		0.25	buried topsoil			mod
	703	layer		0.60	make-up and road			mod
008	800	layer			natural chalk			
	801	layer		0.20	subsoil			
	802	layer		0.84	make-up and road			mod
009	900	layer			natural chalk			
	901	cut	>2	0.50	ditch			mod
	902	fill		0.10	primary ditch fill	pot/bone /coal/she ll	7/1/1/1	mod
	903	fill		0.25	secondary ditch fill	pot/bone /flint/lin oleum	2/1/1/12	mod
	904	layer		0.25	landfill			mod
	905	layer		0.15	dumped subsoil			mod
	906	layer		0.30	topsoil			mod

## APPENDIX 2 POTTERY ASSESSMENT/ SPOT DATING, Y PAUL BOOTH

Context	Ware Code	No. Sherds	Weight (g)	Spot Date
105	W10	7	15	LIA/R
	C10	1	8	LIA/R
409	E80	1	56	LIA/R
509	R30	2	7	LIA/R
	C10	1	3	IA
902	C10	1	2	LIA/R
<b>Total</b>		13	91	

*Wares and forms*

Wares were defined at an intermediate level of precision, which characterises the sherds but does not indicate specific sources. The ware groups present were:

W10. A buff/white ware with moderate very fine quartz sand inclusions.

E80. A coarse grog and organic tempered ware in the 'Belgic' tradition.

R30. A reduced coarse ware with moderate rounded quartz sand and iron inclusions.

C10. Shell or shell and sand tempered wares.

None of these ware groups are particularly diagnostic and a fairly local origin may be suggested for most if not all of them.

Two rim sherds were present. These were from a simple barrel-shaped jar with a very slightly beaded rim and a large everted rim storage jar; both were in ware group C10. The former is of Iron Age type and the latter could be assigned to the late Iron Age or early Roman period on the basis of both fabric and form.

*General discussion*

With the exception of the storage jar rim in context 409 the assemblage consisted of very small sherds (average weight 2.9 g) about which little can be said. The character of the material did not justify attempts at assignment to specific sources. Both fabrics and forms are for the most part consistent with a late Iron Age to early Roman date range. One jar rim was of Iron Age type but this sherd occurred in association with a fine sandy white ware fabric for which a 1st-2nd century date is most likely, and it is possible that this form continued in use through to the early Roman period.

Despite their small size the sherds were not heavily abraded. They seem likely to derive from a settlement of late Iron Age to early Roman date in the vicinity, though not located within the confines of the present site.

**APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

Bedfordshire County Council 2000 *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation on Land Adjacent to Union Street.*

O.A.U 1998 *Dunstable Priory: Desk Top Assessment* (unpublished report).

*Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992) Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992









Figure 2: Trench Plan

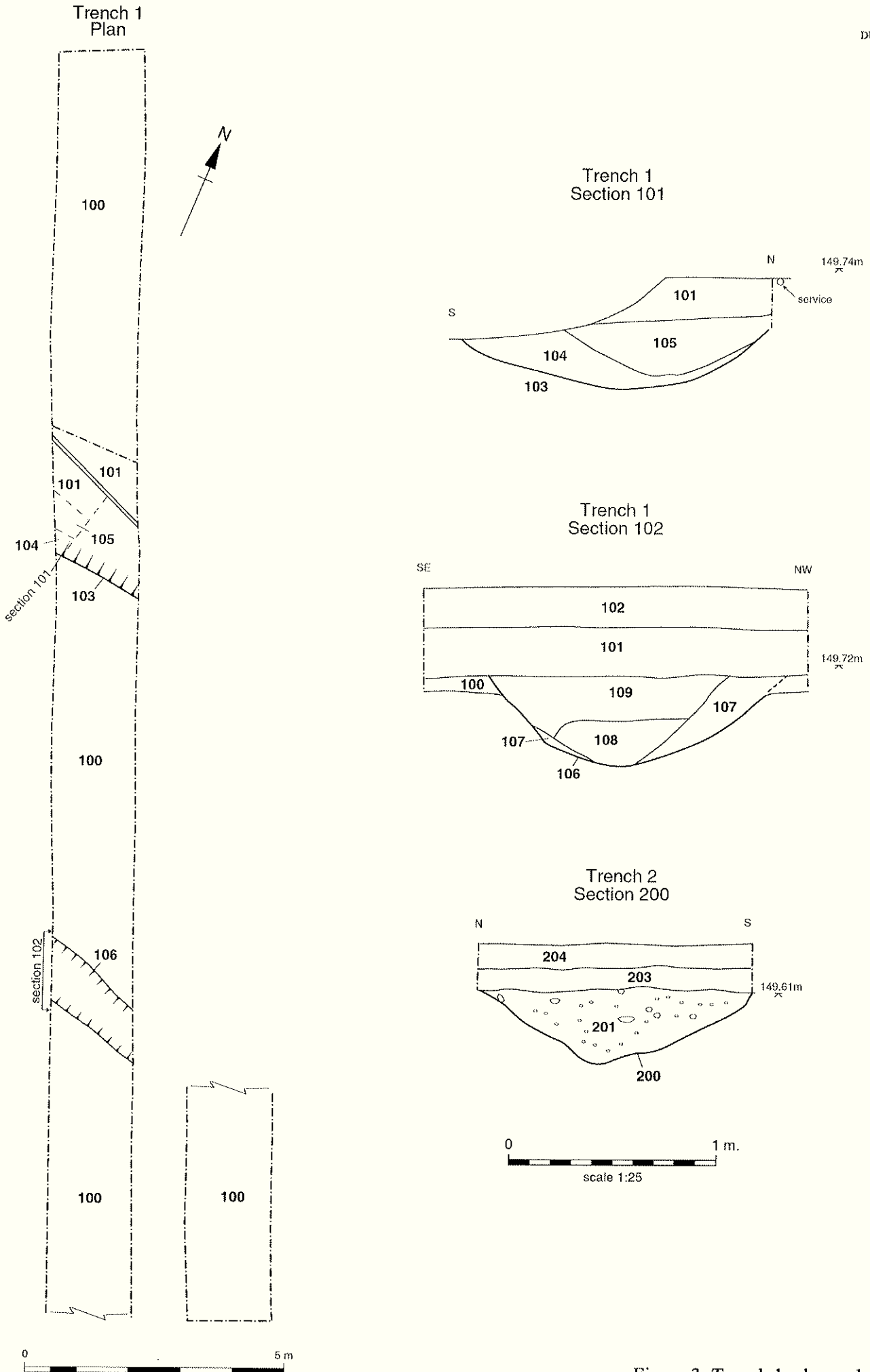


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and sections.

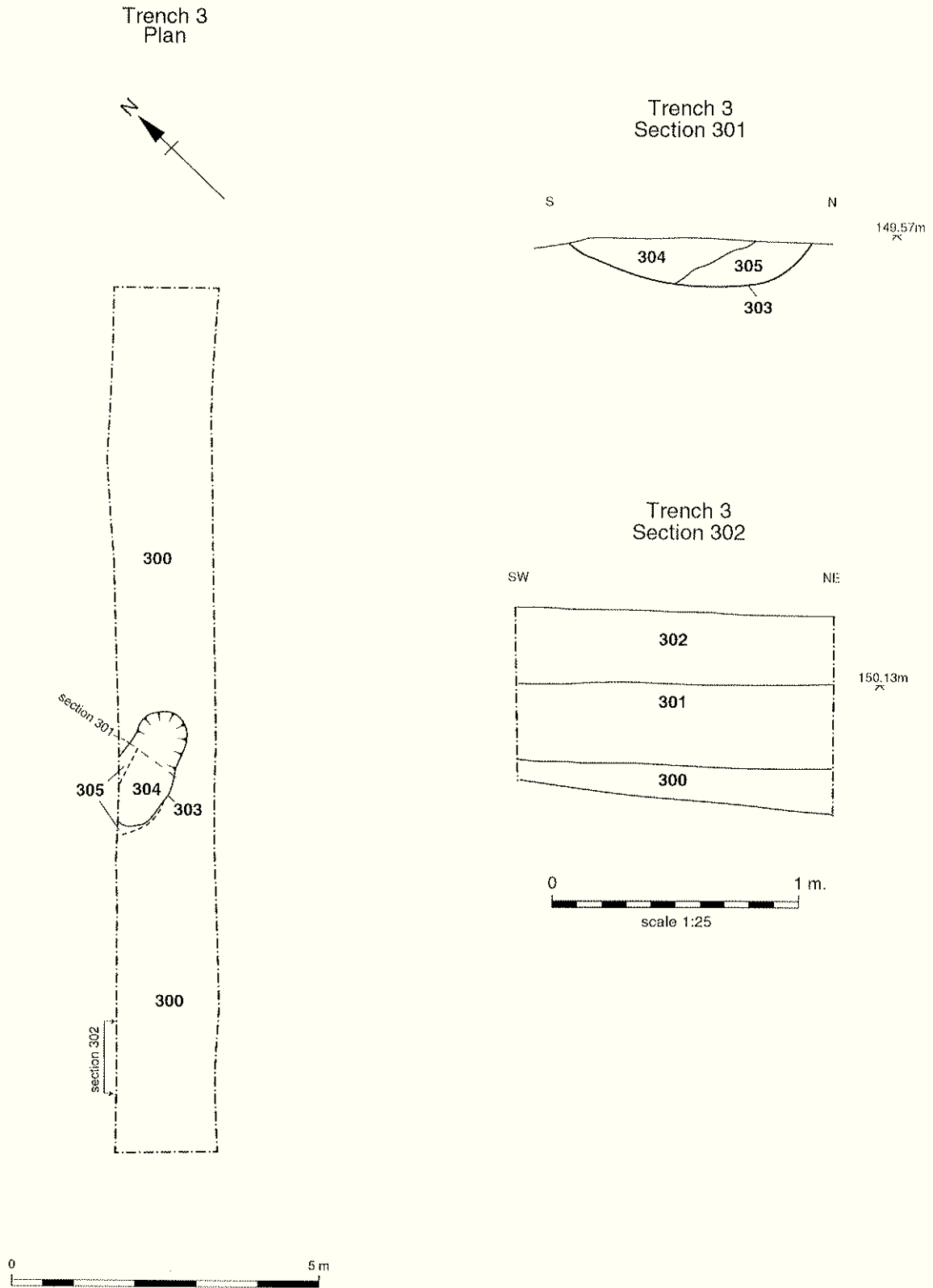


Figure 4: Trench 3, plan and sections.

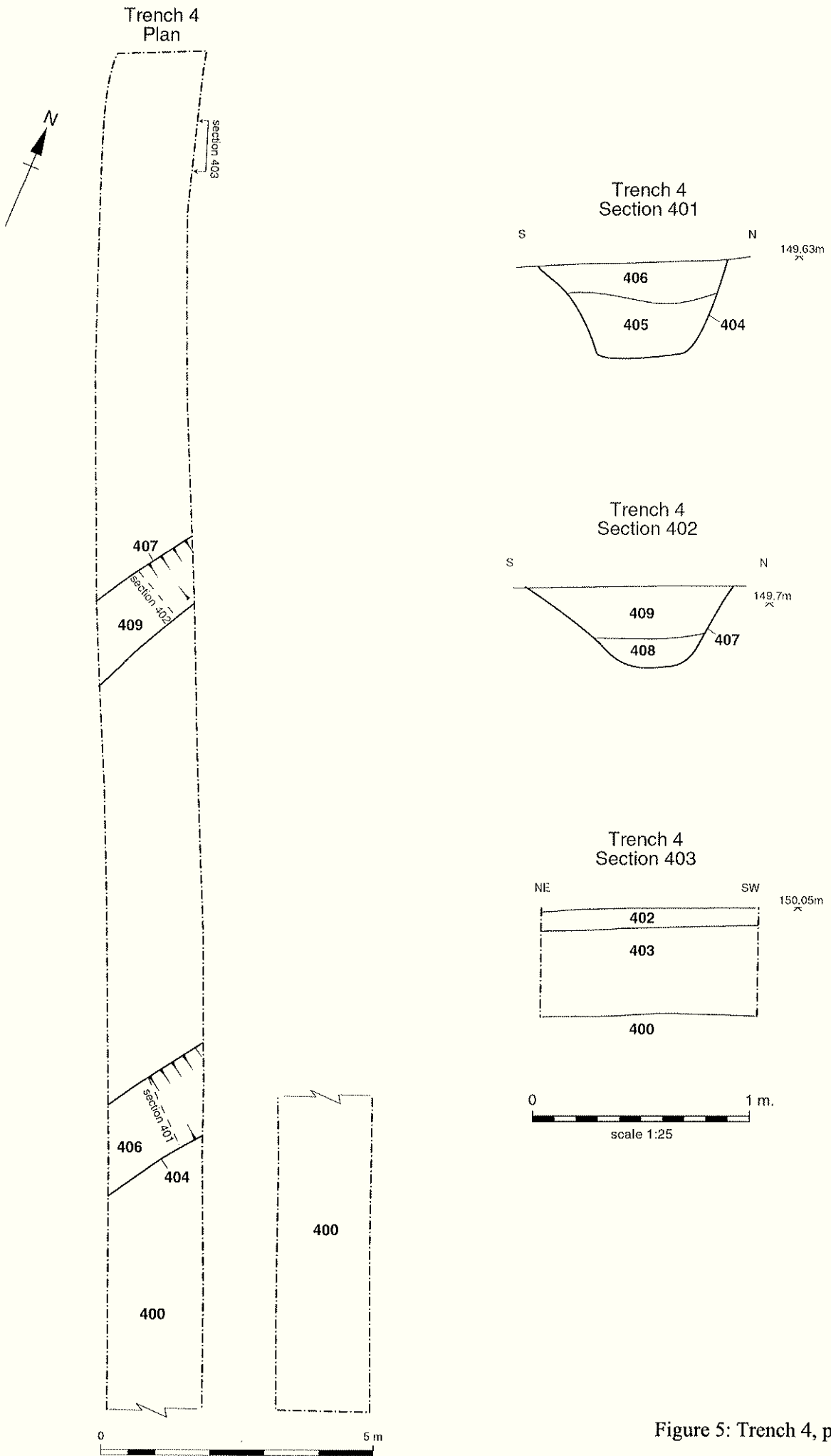


Figure 5: Trench 4, plan and sections.

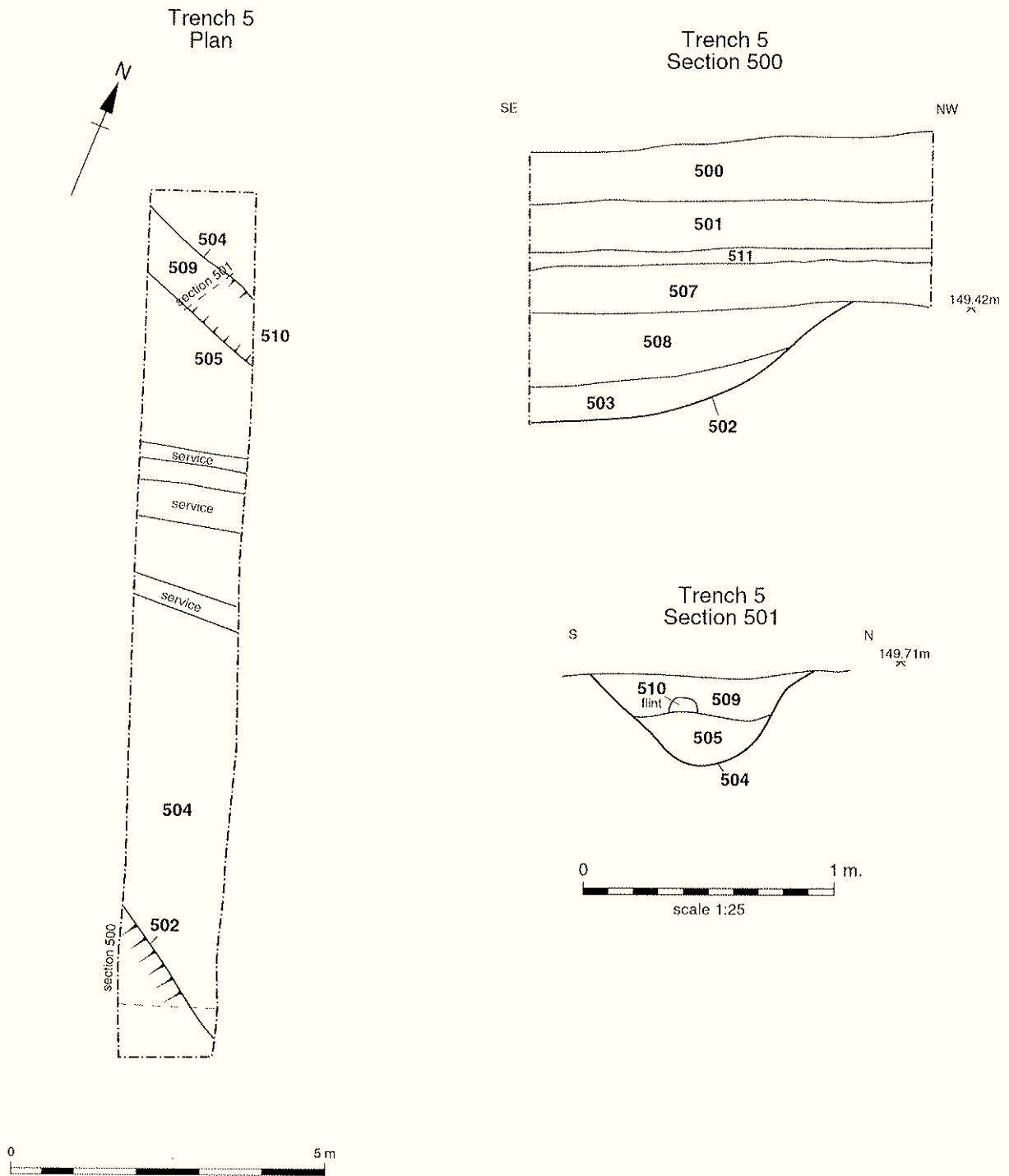


Figure 6: Trench 5, plan and sections.

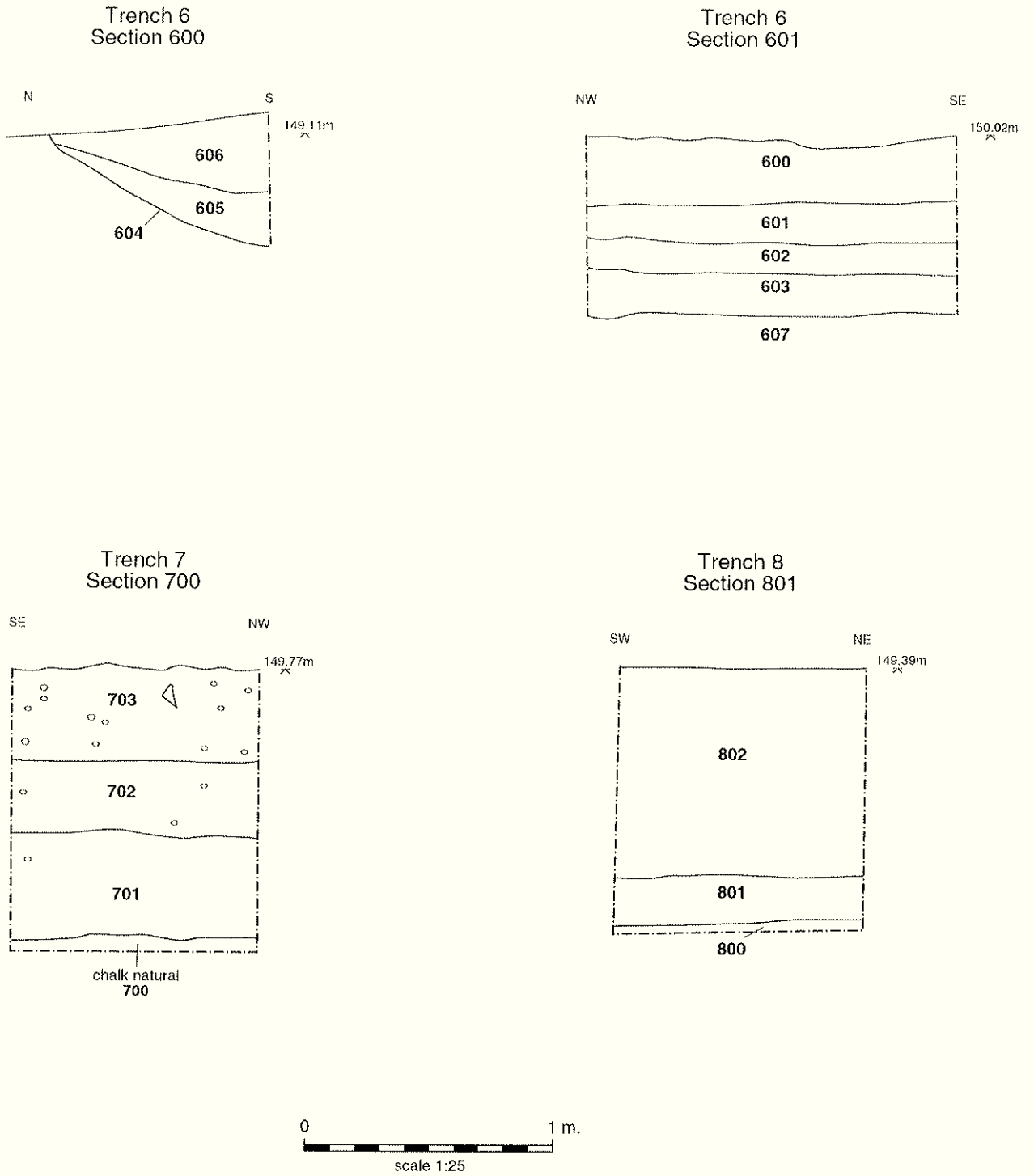
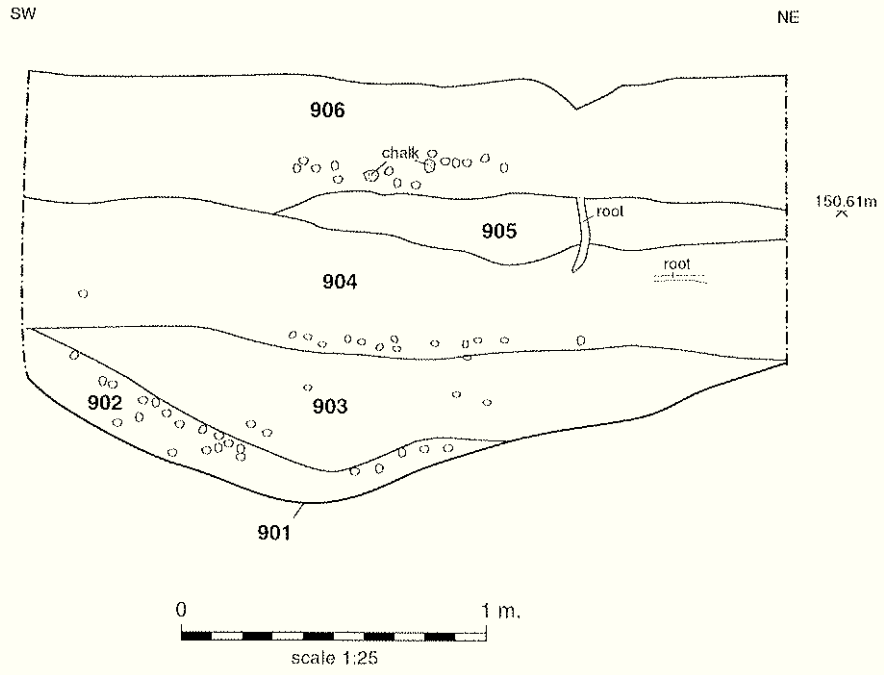


Figure 7: Trenches 6, 7 and 8, sections.

### Trench 9 Section 900



### Trench 9 Plan

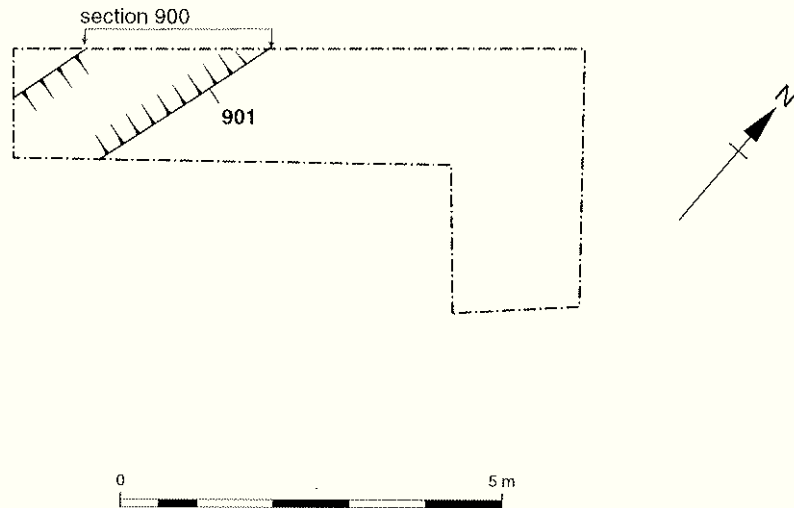


Figure 8: Trench plan and section.





## OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496  
email: [postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk](mailto:postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk)



---

Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.  
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.  
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES