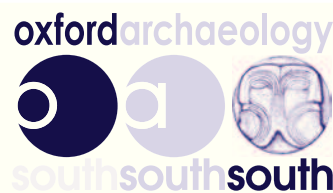


# The 'George and Dragon' and Village Hall sites, Fritwell



**Archaeological  
Evaluation Report**



**August 2015**

**Client: Leywood Estates Ltd.**

Issue No: 1


OA Job No: 3442

NGR: SP 52829 29338





Client Name: Leywood Estates Ltd.  
Client Ref No: N/A  
Document Title: The 'George and Dragon' and Village Hall Sites, Fritwell, Oxfordshire  
Document Type: Evaluation Report  
Issue/Version Number: Version 1  
Grid Reference: SP 52829 29338 (George and Dragon) and SP 52833 29237 (Village Hall)  
Planning Reference: 14/01757/F  
Site Code: FRGD15  
Invoice Code: FRGDEV  
Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum  
Museum Accession No: OXCMS: 2015.111

Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
1	Mike Sims Supervisor	Lisa Brown Senior Project Manager	Stuart Foreman Senior Project Manager	

Document File Location \\Server1\projects\FRGDEV\_Fritwell\_village\_hall\002Reports\INVOIC  
ECODE\_StageOfWork\001PDFs\Documents\_and\_Reports  
Graphics File Location \\Servergo\invoice codes a thru h\F\_invoice codes\FRGDEV  
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# THE 'GEORGE AND DRAGON' AND VILLAGE HALL SITES, FRITWELL, OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

WRITTEN BY LISA BROWN AND MIKE SIMS

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM JOHN COTTER, CYNTHIA POOLE, IAN SCOTT, RUTH SHAFFREY  
AND LENA STRID

ILLUSTRATED BY GARY JONES AND VICTORIA HOSEGOOD

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## **Summary**

*Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned to undertake an archaeological trench evaluation of two adjacent plots of land in Fritwell, Oxfordshire, comprising the village hall (SP 52829 29338) and the George and Dragon public house (SP 52833 29237). In total six narrow trenches were excavated, three in the car park of the George and Dragon public house and three in the grounds of the village hall. Archaeological traces were encountered only in Trench 4 and Trench 6, close to the village hall. Two shallow ditches on a north-south alignment were exposed in Trench 4 and three ditches on a broadly similar alignment and one on a slight curve, were found in Trench 6. An iron arrowhead of 13th – 14th century date was recovered from the lower fill of ditch 407 in trench four, and pottery dated to between 900 and 1300 was present in the fills of the three ditches in Trench 6, indicating that all of the ditches, which were probably field ditches or drains, were filling during the medieval period.*







## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 The area of proposed development is 0.3ha in extent and consists of two properties located on opposite sides of Fewcott Road, in Fritwell village (Fig. 1). The George and Dragon public house is located to the east of East Street and to the north of the existing village hall (SP 52829 29338). The village hall site is located south of Fewcott Road and east of East Street.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on a limestone plateau of the Great Oolite Group, at 127.6m OD (British Geological Survey, Geology of Britain Viewer)

[<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/DiscoveringGeology/GeologyofBritain/Viewer.html>]. The soils in the area are characterised as freely draining lime-rich loamy soils, with moderate-high fertility. The area is currently used predominantly for arable crops, with pasture at higher elevations (Cranfield University, Soilscales Viewer).

[<http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscales/>]. No woodland is currently present and none was recorded in Fritwell in the Domesday Book (VCH 1959). The nearest historic market town of Bicester lies 9km to the south-east.

1.2.2 A small stream, which rises at several springs in the village, forms the southern parish boundary before flowing eastwards to join the River Great Ouse. The River Cherwell lies 2.5km to the west of Fritwell village and the Ockley Brook, a tributary of the Cherwell, forms the northern boundary of Fritwell parish, 2.3km north of the village.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Aves Ditch is a major earthwork or dyke, of uncertain date, thought by some to represent a pre-Roman Iron Age tribal boundary between the *Catuvelluni* to the east and the *Dobunni* to the west. The dyke lies c 1km east of Fritwell on a NNE-SSW alignment, broadly parallel to the Cherwell (Henig and Booth 2000, 28; Sauer 1999).

1.3.2 No remains pre-dating the medieval period have been recorded in or near the village centre. A barrow on Ploughley Hill, 1.6km north of the village and just inside the northern boundaries of Fritwell Parish, Ploughley Hundred and the County of Oxfordshire, lay at the junction of several routes, including the possibly pre-Roman



Portway and Aves Ditch (VCH 1959). This monument was the traditional meeting place of Ploughley Hundred during the early medieval period. There are no recorded Saxon archaeological remains in the vicinity of the development but the site lies within the historic core of Fritwell and is likely to have been occupied during the late Saxon period. Fritwell is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086) as *Fertwelle* (Williams and Martin 2002). The place-name means 'a spring used for divination' or 'wishing well' (Alexander 1912).

- 1.3.3 According to the Domesday Book Fritwell was held by William FitzOsbern, Earl of Hereford in 1086. Those lands descended to the De Lisle family in the late 13th century (VCH 1959). The parish seems to have been divided from an early date between two manors, around which separate settlements developed, comprising De Lisle manor to the north (along North Street) and Ormond's to the south-east (along East Street). The parish church was built between the two settlements (340m west of the George and Dragon). The earliest extant elements of the church are of 12th century date, but its dedication to St. Olave, the early 11th-century king of Norway, suggests that a church is likely to have been present on the site prior to the Norman conquest (VCH 1959).
- 1.3.4 An archaeological watching brief in the plot immediately to the west of the village hall (19 East Street) revealed part of an east-west aligned ditch, from which 50 sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered (Mundin 2011). The earliest pottery in this collection dates from the 11th -14th century, and the largest assemblage comprised 40 sherds of Brill/Boarstall ware, broadly dated to the 12th–16th centuries. Medieval pottery and associated features were also identified during the Fritwell Sewerage Pipeline scheme, 220m west of the village hall (Oram 2010).
- 1.3.5 Many of the historic houses in the village date wholly or in part from the 17th century. The 'Rag-house', c 70m to the west of the village hall, was an 18th –19th century textile manufacturing building. North Oxfordshire was known for its textile and lacemaking industry during this period (VCH1959).

## 1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA would like to thank Simon Funnell of Leywood Estates Ltd for commissioning the work, and also Vinay Mistry of David Parker Architects Ltd. Thanks are also due to Richard Oram, the Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council for his advice and assistance. The fieldwork was conducted by Mike Sims and Jerry Stone



under the management of Stuart Foreman, Senior Project Manager and overseen by OA's Head of Fieldwork, Dan Poore.



## 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The Oxfordshire County Council brief (OCC January 2015) stated that:

- This field evaluation is required in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012) because of the presence of known sites of archaeological interest within the immediate vicinity of the development. Should important archaeological remains be revealed, this evaluation will form the first stage of a mitigation procedure.
- The evaluation should aim to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within those areas affected. The evaluation report produced will present a digest of information on the character and significance of the deposits under review and this report will form the basis of any proposals for appropriate further action. The evaluation should also aim to define any research priorities that may be relevant should further field investigation be required.
- Any mitigation resulting from the evaluation report will seek to limit the damage to significant archaeological deposits. The developer will be responsible for accommodating the archaeological remains by:-
  - a) Physical preservation *in situ*, which can often be achieved through design changes, or, if this is not possible;
  - b) By preserving the archaeology on record through a full recording action. Less significant archaeological deposits may be dealt with through a monitoring and recording exercise carried out during the construction programme.

### 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 An array of 6 trenches of variable length, as required to achieve 4% coverage of the site area (120m<sup>2</sup>) were positioned predominantly within the footprints of proposed new buildings, and to avoid known buried services (Figs 1 and 2).

2.2.2 OA's standard approach to excavation and recording, and methodologies for geomatics and survey, environmental evidence, artefactual evidence and burials were adhered to



during the fieldwork. The trench layout was agreed with Richard Oram (OCC Archaeological Services) prior to commencement of work and provision made for collecting environmental/organic samples where appropriate. Excavation was taken down to the top of 'natural' or the top of any significant archaeological level, whichever was the higher, under archaeological supervision. The surfaces of exposed archaeological horizons were cleaned for the purpose of clarifying the remains, and archaeological features sampled sufficiently to characterise and date them. Care was taken not to damage archaeological deposits through excessive use of mechanical excavation. Due to the need to maintain access to the village hall, Trench 4 was excavated, recorded and reinstated with tarmac in a single day.



## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Introduction

Six trenches were opened, all of them measuring 10m long by 1.6m wide, apart from Trench 3, which was 20m long and Trench 6, which was 14.80m long (Fig. 2) No archaeological remains were found in trenches 1-3 and 5. Descriptions of the archaeological findings are described below by trench.

### 3.2 Trench 1

3.2.1 Trench 1 was located in the car park of the George and Dragon Public House. The top of natural, a weathered fragmented limestone, was encountered at a depth of 0.6m, sealed by a subsoil of yellowish-brown silty clay 0.10m thick (103). No archaeology was encountered.

### 3.3 Trench 2

3.3.1 Trench 2 was sited behind the public house. The top of natural, weathered limestone fragments in orange-brown silty clay, was encountered at 0.5m, below a yellowish-grey silty clay subsoil (302). No archaeology was encountered.

### 3.4 Trench 3

3.4.1 Trench 3 was located close to Trench 2 and roughly perpendicular to it. The top of natural, weathered limestone fragments in orange-brown silty clay, was exposed at 0.56m below a similar subsoil (302) to that exposed in Trench 2. The only archaeological remains exposed in this trench were a few small, abraded fragments of ceramic building material lying within the subsoil.

### 3.5 Trench 4

3.5.1 Trench 4 was set out to the north of the Village Hall. Natural (411) was encountered at 0.6m below a subsoil (403) of yellowish-brown clayey silt 0.25m thick. Two north-south aligned parallel ditches (407 and 410) which ran diagonally across the trench were investigated (Fig. 3). Both ditches cut through a buried soil (404) of greyish-brown silty clay 0.15m thick, possibly a relict medieval ploughsoil. This and the upper fills of the ditches were sealed by a yellowish-brown clayey silt (403) 0.25m thick. The sequence above this was a 0.12m thick buried topsoil (402) of very dark grey silty loam, sealed by compacted limestone hardcore and CBM (401) underlying the tarmac car park surface.



3.5.2 Ditch 407 was 1.6m wide and was excavated to a depth of 1.10m below ground level (c 0.70m from the surviving ditch edge), but was not bottomed. The upper sides were sloping, probably as a result of erosion, but steeper at a lower depth (Fig. 6, Section 400). The lowest excavated fill (406), probably the primary silted fill, was at least 0.25m thick, consisting of a compact yellowish-brown clayey silt with abundant sub-angular fragments of limestone averaging 0.10-0.15m in size. An iron arrowhead dated to the 13th – 14th century was recovered from this deposit. The upper fill (405) was 0.35m thick, a dark yellowish-brown clayey silt incorporating occasional fragments of limestone, mostly under 0.20m in size. This deposit appeared to have accumulated naturally and it contained no finds.

3.5.3 Ditch 410 was 1.3m wide and 0.42m deep with sloping sides and a wide, flat base (Fig. 6, Section 401). The primary fill (409) was a 0.20m thick compact orange silty clay with frequent limestone fragments averaging 0.10m in size. Above this was a slightly paler but otherwise similar deposit. Both fills appeared to have accumulated through gradual infilling, and yielded only a small quantity of animal bone.

### **3.6 Trench 5**

3.6.1 The original Trench 5 exposed an unmarked ceramic salt glaze drain running the length of and down the centre of the trench. The trench was abandoned and relocated directly alongside to the north-west of the original trench. In this new trench two unmarked plastic drains were exposed at a depth of 0.35m running obliquely across the trench, and so this was also abandoned. No archaeological remains were found.

### **3.7 Trench 6**

3.7.1 Three ditches and a single posthole were exposed below subsoil layer 601, a greyish-orange clayey silt 0.16m thick, incorporating frequent sub-angular fragments of limestone. They cut subsoil 602, a brownish-orange silty clay that directly overlay the natural. The ditches ran on a similar north-south alignment across the trench, so only short lengths were exposed (Fig. 4).

3.7.2 Ditch 612 was curvilinear, c 1.70m wide and 0.90m deep with stepped sides, probably created by natural erosion, descending to near vertical at 0.60m from the base. Five distinct fills were recorded. Primary fill 611 was 0.20m thick, a compact greyish-brown clayey silt with thin lenses of yellowish silt and frequent fragments of small angular limestone. Above this was a 0.10m thick firm yellowish-orange calcareous silt (610) with frequent small to medium angular limestone fragments. The tertiary fill (609) was a



loose light grey clayey silt mottled with orange and yellow incorporating small limestone fragments, probably repositioned natural, 0.15m thick. This was sealed by a compact dark grey clayey silt with occasional small limestone fragments (608), which yielded a few sherds of pottery dating to the 10th – 13th century. The uppermost fill of the ditch (607) was a compact dark brownish-orange clayey silt with a moderate quantity of small to medium angular limestone fragments. This relatively thick deposit, 0.40m thick, produced small quantities of animal bone and three small sherds of medieval pottery. It was sealed by subsoil layer 60, a greyish orange clayey silt.

- 3.7.3 Ditch 615/619 was a linear ditch c 0.70m wide and 0.69m deep at most (Figs 4 and 5: Fig. 6, Sections 601, 602 and 604). The double number was assigned to accommodate the variable depth observed along the base, reflecting either opposing termini, ends of gang-work segments, or perhaps the presence of postholes. The primary fill within ditch 615, recorded in the north baulk of the trench (Fig. 5) was a very loose dark grey silt mottled with red and orange clay (614). The soil was flecked with charcoal and sand and small angular limestone fragments were scattered throughout. Fired clay fragments and a lamb and a pig mandible were recovered from this 0.57m thick deposit, which is dated to 1050 – 1250 on the evidence of two pottery sherds. The upper fill seen in this sequence was a compact greyish-brown clayey silt with a moderate scatter of limestone fragments (613), which yielded no finds.
- 3.7.4 The primary fill of ditch 619 was a thin deposit of compact light-yellowish-grey clayey silt with a few small limestone fragments and grit (618). It produced no finds. A 0.55m deposit of similar but more friable material (617) that had accumulated above the primary fill also yielded no finds. This was sealed by a layer 0.28m thick (616) that corresponded to fill 613 in the top of 615.
- 3.7.5 The westernmost of the three ditches (624) was 1.6 -1.8m wide and 0.86m deep with a slightly stepped profile and an uneven but essentially flat, wide base (Fig. 6 Section 604). The deepest part of the ditch was filled with a firm grey clayey silt incorporating a moderate scatter of small angular limestone pieces (623). No finds were recovered but the fill was flecked with charcoal and crumbs of fired clay suggesting domestic activity in the vicinity when the ditch was filling. Above this was a deposit 0.17m thick of dark grey silt with small angular limestone fragments (622), flecked with charcoal but containing no finds. The main ditch fill (621) was a 0.40m thick deposit of greyish-brown clayey silt with thin lenses of yellow and orange silt and gritty sand with frequent angular limestone fragments, some quite large. The soil was flecked with charcoal and





fired clay and produced a small quantity of animal bone and a single sherd of St. Neots ware, dated to 900 – 1100. The uppermost fill (620) was a compact brownish-orange clayey silt 0.33m thick, with frequent small angular limestone pieces, some burnt, and rare crumbs of fired clay.

- 3.7.6 A small, shallow feature (606), possibly a posthole, was partially exposed against the north baulk of the trench between ditches 612 and 615/619. It was 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep, filled with a compact grey/orange brown clayey silt with a few angular limestone fragments and sparse charcoal flecking. Like the ditches, it cut subsoil 602 and was sealed by 602, and it may have been associated in some way with curvilinear ditch 612.

### 3.8 Finds Summary

#### *Pottery - by John Cotter*

- 3.8.1 Eight sherds of medieval pottery (53g) were recovered from the evaluation, all from Trench 6 ditch fills. Fills 607 and 608 of ditch 612 produced sherds of Oxford ware and St. Neots ware, dated to 1050 – 1300. The lowest fill (614) of ditch 615 yielded a single sherd each of Oxford ware and Cotswold ware, dated to 1050 – 1250. Fill 621 of ditch 624 contained a single sherd of St. Neots ware, dated to 900 – 1100. Although small sherds from ditch fills do not precisely date the deposits from which they were recovered, the combined evidence indicates that these three ditches were filling during the 10th to 2th centuries.

#### *Fired Clay - by Cynthia Poole*

- 3.8.2 Nine fragments (57g) of fired clay were recovered from the fills of ditches 615 and 624. They were made in a sandy micaceous clay fabric containing mixed quartz, limestone and shell sand fired to light or mid pinkish brown, red, dark reddish brown or grey. The fabric is typical of those found in this area of the Thames Valley and probably utilised local alluvial clays. The fragments are all undiagnostic and it is not possible to identify a function or suggest a date for the material. However they are most likely to derive from structures used for domestic or agricultural processes, rather than industrial or craft activities.
- 3.8.3 One piece from ditch 615 (fill 614) was essentially a lump of limestone with a thin coating of fired clay on one side, suggesting that it had been embedded in the base of an oven or hearth structure. Another fragment from this deposit had a smooth, flat moulded surface fired to a light buff colour. Another piece had numerous organic impressions throughout



the fabric from the addition of organic inclusions, probably crushed straw. The fired clay from fill 621 of ditch 624 was amorphous apart from one piece which retained part of a rough surface covered in organic impressions of chaff or broken straw.

*Metalwork - by Ian R Scott*

- 3.8.4 A single metal object was recovered from the excavations, a small iron socketed point, probably an arrowhead, from fill 406 of ditch 407 in Trench 4. The socket is split rather than welded and contains mineral preserved wood. The narrow point is encrusted but is clearly tapered and of square cross-section (Length: 55mm; Depth of socket: 11mm). It is probably an arrowhead of Jessop form M5, Ward-Perkins type 7, and could date to the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century or possibly as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Both Jessop (1996, 198, fig. 1, M5) and Ward-Perkins (1940, 68, fig.16, no. 7, fig. 17, no. 9) dated the form to the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century.

*Animal Bone - by Lena Strid*

- 3.8.5 Ten fragments of animal bone were recovered. The lower fill (406) of ditch 407 produced a fused phalanx of a sheep/goat and a fragment of a long bone of a large mammal. The lower fill (409) of ditch 410 yielded only a small fragment of a cattle radius. The upper fill (607) of ditch 612 contained a sheep/goat mandible and the fused right scapula of a cow. Lower fill 614 of ditch 615 yielded a mandible of a newborn lamb and the left mandible of an approximately two year old pig. Fill 621 of ditch 624 produced a single sheep/goat metatarsal, the rib of a medium sized mammal, a cattle tooth and an indeterminate fragment. The assemblage is too small to justify interpretation.



## 4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The evaluation produced sufficient information to indicate the presence of activity in the vicinity dating to the 10th – 13th or 14th century, but nothing of exceptional significance for the region or the period to warrant further mitigation.
- 4.1.2 Of the six trenches excavated in the course of this evaluation, only two revealed archaeological evidence, both in the form of shallow ditches dated to the medieval period on the evidence of pottery and a single metal arrowhead. The ditches probably related to agricultural boundaries and/or drainage activity during the 10th – 13th century.
- 4.1.3 A watching brief carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd in 2011 identified the edge of a ditch of similar dimensions to those in Trenches 4 and 6, in house foundation trenches to the west of the village hall. This produced a relatively large assemblage of 51 sherds of pottery, mostly dating to the 13th and 14th centuries (Mundin 2011), and so broadly contemporary with the arrowhead found in Trench 4. The ditch is likely to have been part of the same medieval field arrangement found in the present evaluation.



## APPENDIX A. CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Date
Trench 1			
100	Surface	Tarmac	
101	Deposit	Crushed limestone and CBM hardcore	
102	Deposit	Buried soil - clayey loam with charcoal flecks	
103	Deposit	Subsoil	
104	Natural	Weathered limestone	
Trench 2			
200	Deposit	Made ground – grey clayey loam	
201	Deposit	Buried topsoil – greyish-brown silty loam and limestone fragments	
202	Deposit	Subsoil	
203	Natural	Weathered limestone	
Trench 3			
300	Deposit	Made ground	
301	Deposit	Buried topsoil	
302	Deposit	Subsoil	
303	Natural	Weathered limestone	
Trench 4			
400	Deposit	Tarmac	
401	Deposit	Hardcore	
402	Deposit	Buried topsoil	
403	Deposit	Subsoil	
404	Deposit	Buried soil – greyish-brown silty clay	
405	Fill 407	Yellowish-brown clayey silt	
406	Fill 407	Yellowish-brown clayey silt	13th – 14th C
407	Cut	Ditch	
408	Fill 410	Yellowish-brown clayey silt	
409	Fill 410	Orange clayey silt	
410	Cut	Ditch	
Trench 5			
500	Deposit	Grey silty loam	
501	Deposit	Subsoil	
Trench 6			
600	Deposit	Topsoil	
601	Deposit	Subsoil	
602	Deposit	Subsoil/natural interface	
603	Deposit	Brash	
604	Natural	Weathered limestone	
605	Fill 606	Brownish orange clayey silt	
606	Cut	?Posthole	
607	Fill 612	brownish-orange clayey silt	AD 1050-1300
608	Fill 612	Grey clayey silt with limestone frags	AD 1050-1300
609	Fill 612	greyish-orange clayey silt with small limestone frags	



610	Fill 612	yellowish-orange calcareous silt with limestone frags	
611	Fill 612	greyish-brown clayey silt with limestone frags	
612	Cut	Ditch	
613	Fill 615	Greyish-brown clayey silt with limestone frags	
614	Fill 615	Loose grey mottled silt with charcoal flecks	AD 1050-1250
615	Cut	Ditch	
616	Fill 619	Greyish-brown clayey silt with limestone frags	
617	Fill 619	Loose dark grey silt	
618	Fill 619	Friable light greyish yellow clayey silt with limestone frags and grit	
619	Cut	Ditch	
620	Fill 6624	Brownish-orange clayey silt with limestone frags	
621	Fill 624	Loose grey silt with yellow lenses and frequent limestone frags	AD 900-1100
622	Fill 624	Loose dark grey silt with charcoal flecks and limestone frags	
623	Fill 624	Grey clayey silt with charcoal flecks and limestone frags	
624	Cut	Ditch	



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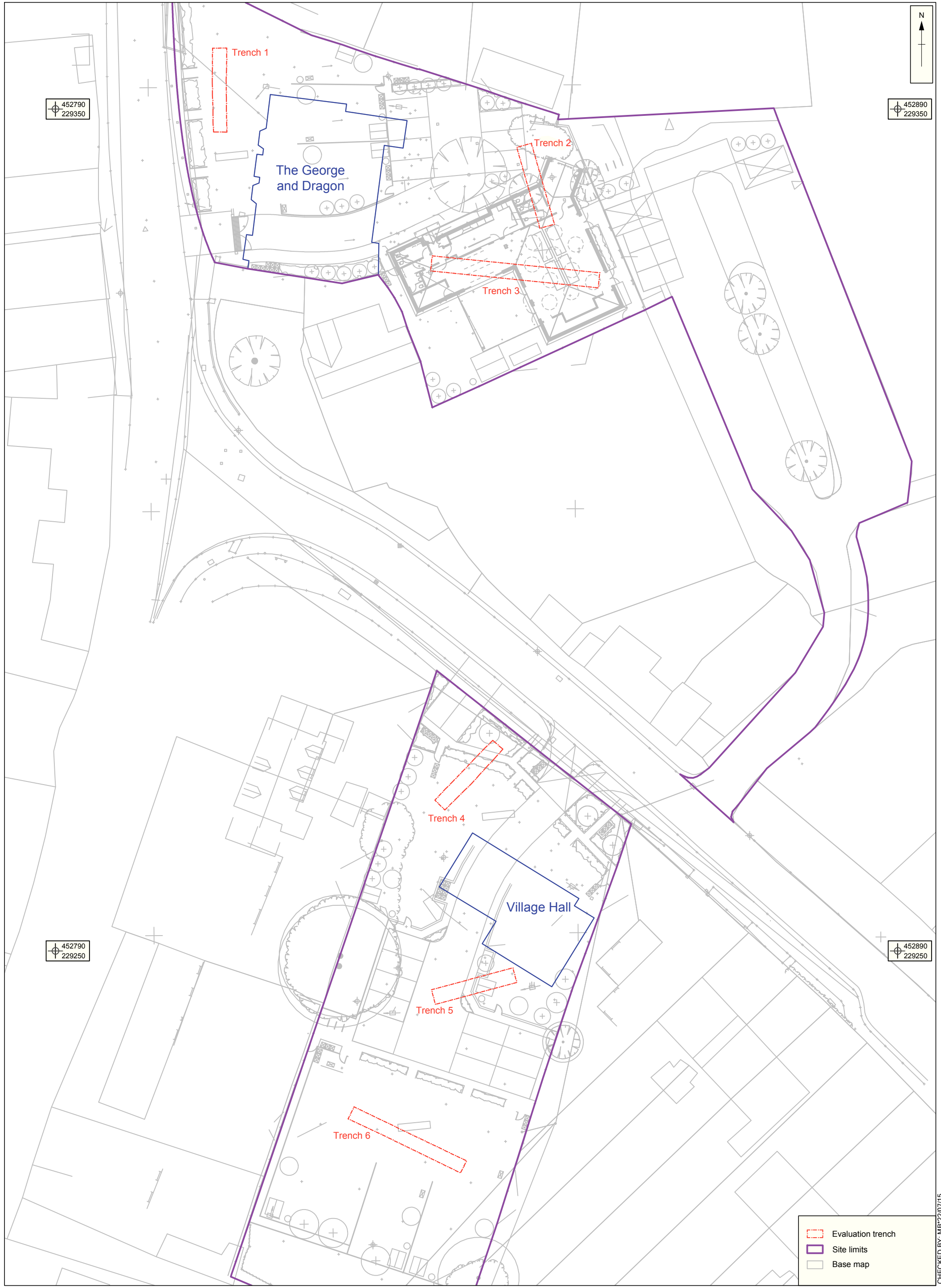
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Figure 1: Site location



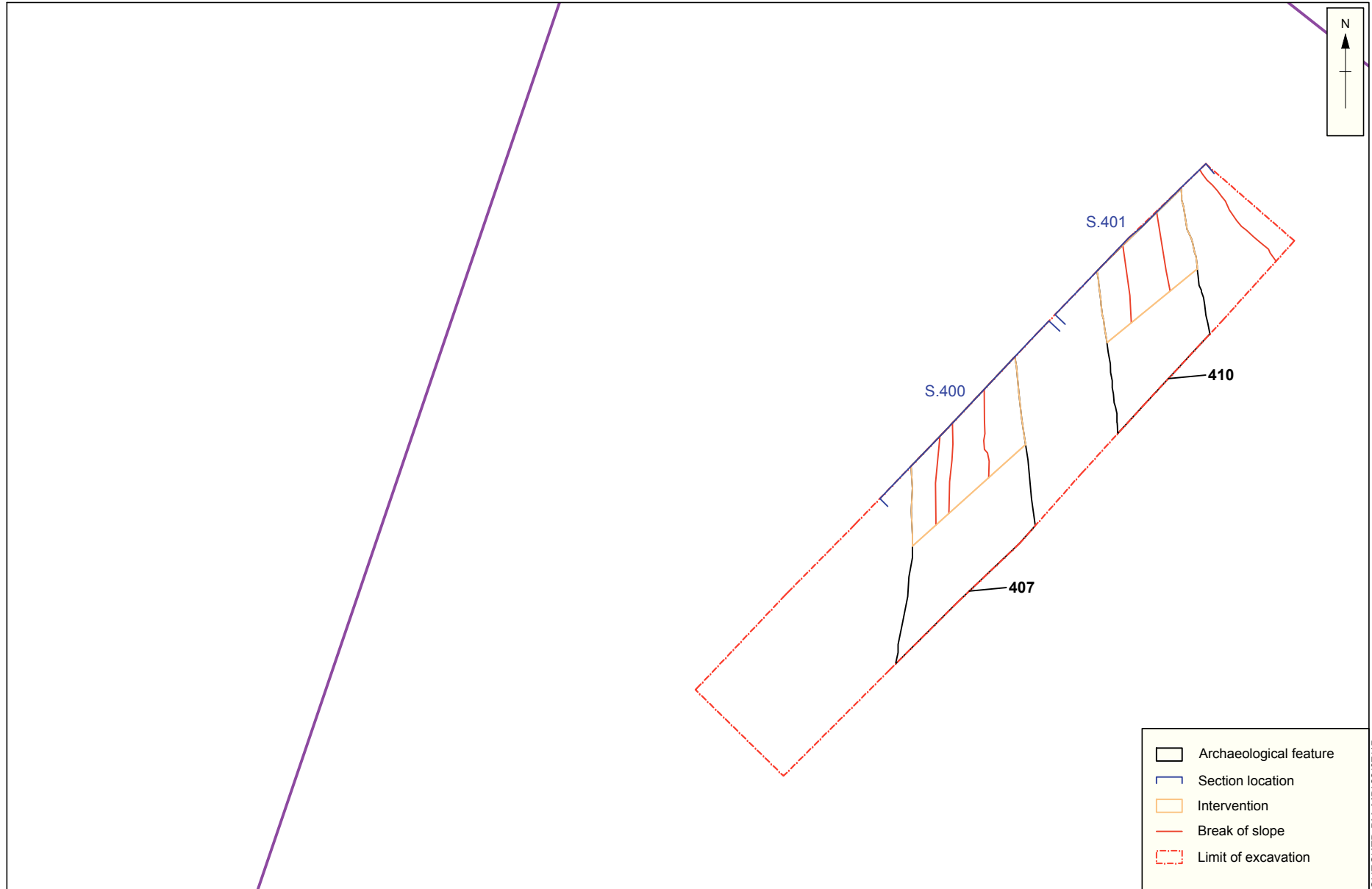




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Figure 2: Trench location plan showing position of Trenches 1 – 6 in relation to George and Dragon Public House and the Village Hall



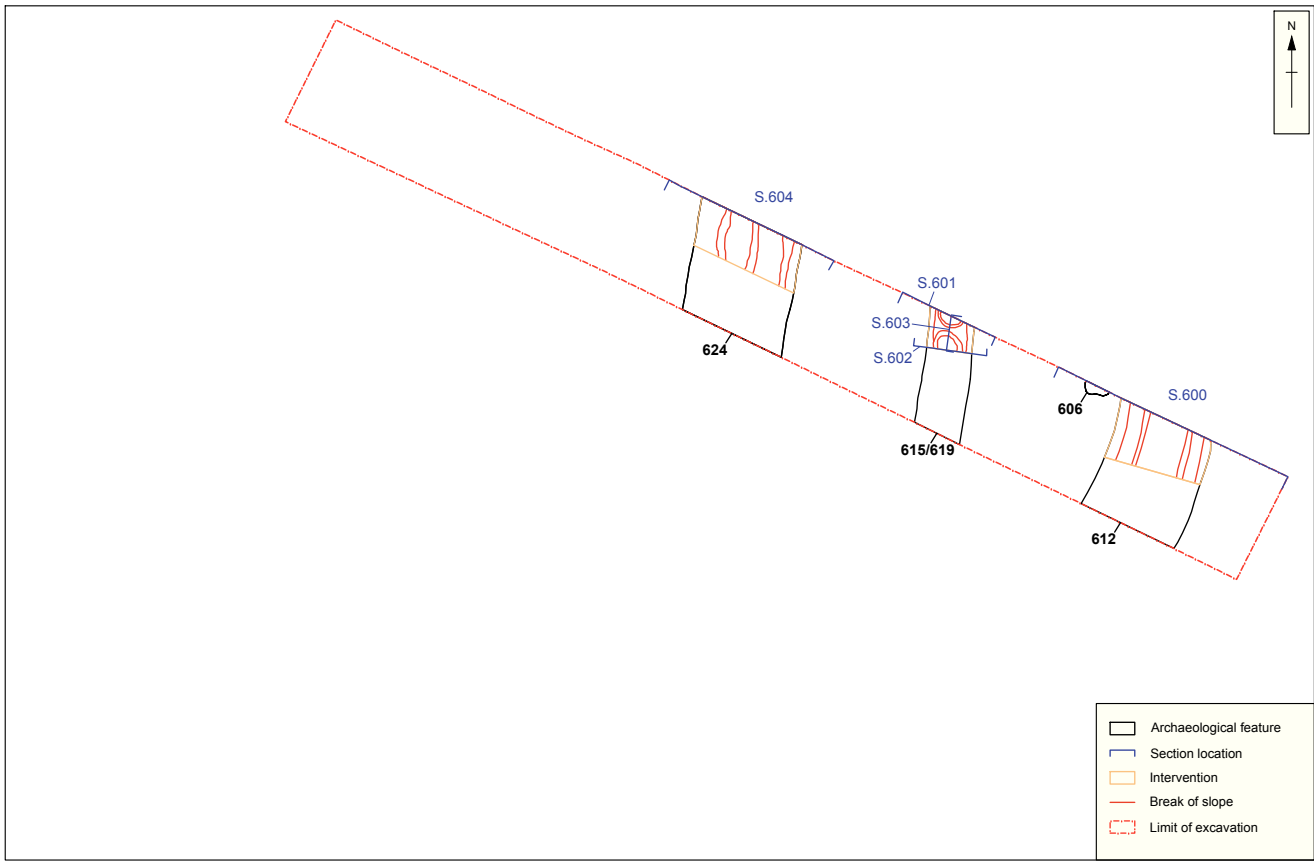


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Figure 3: Plan of Trench 4 showing ditches 407 and 410

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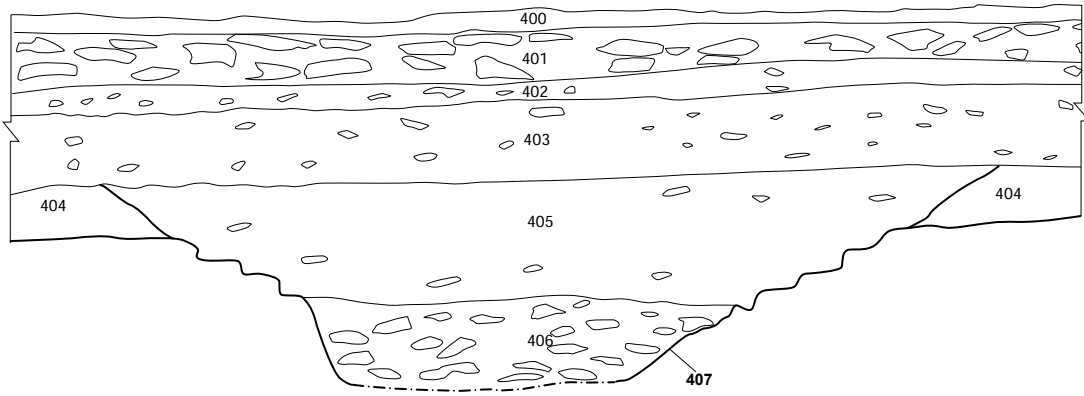






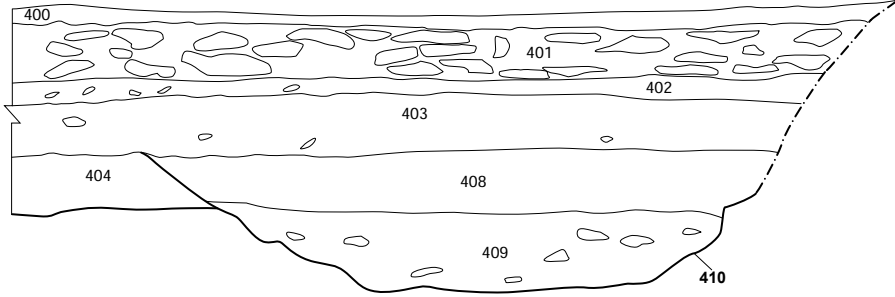
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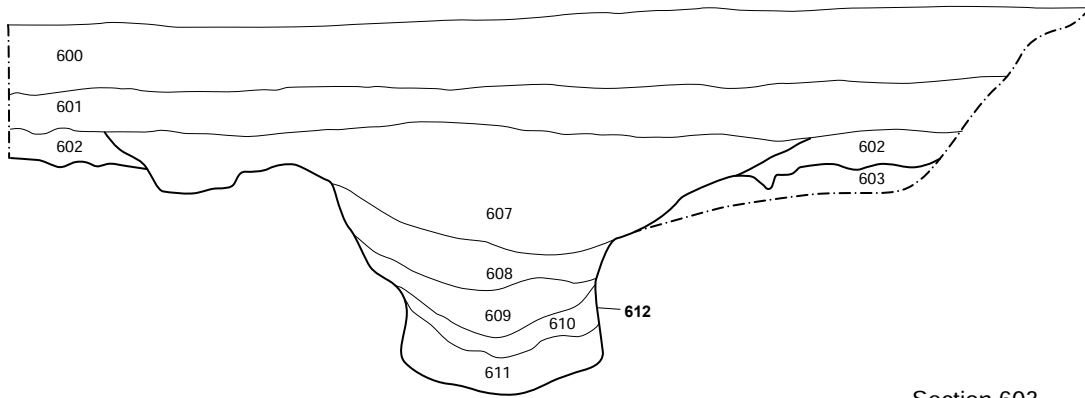
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Section 600  
NW ↗

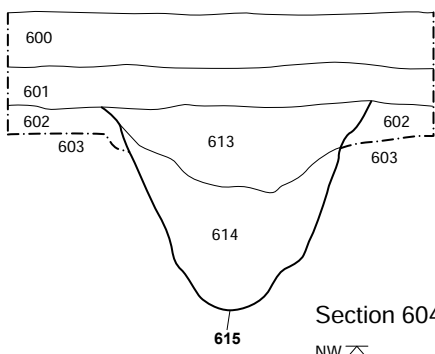
↖ SE



Section 601

NW ↗

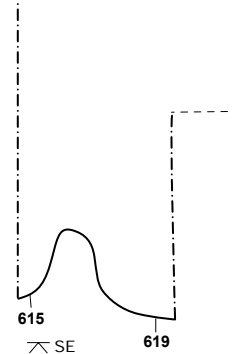
↖ SE



Section 603

NW ↗

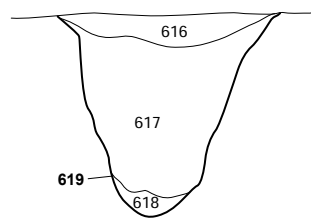
↖ SE



Section 602

SE ↗

↖ NW



Section 604

NW ↗

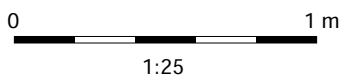
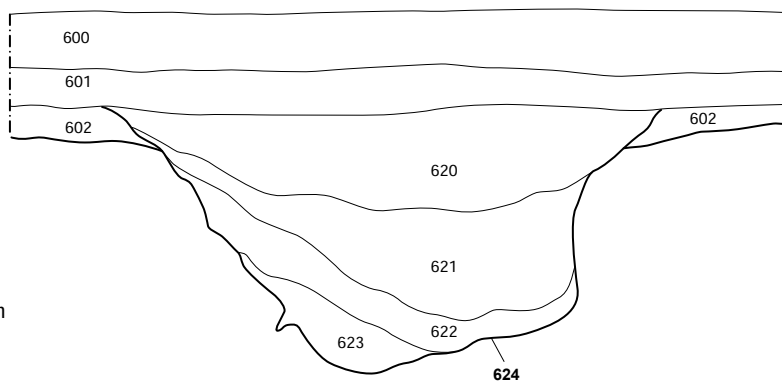


Figure 6: Selected sections of features in Trenches 4 and 6: ditches 407, 408, 612, 615, 619 and 624



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