

# St Catherine's College Manor Road Oxford

## Student and Teaching Accommodation



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

23rd January 2003

**Client Name: St Catherine's College/  
Hodder Associates**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1

OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 3963

Planning Ref N<sup>o</sup>: 00/1459/NFZ

NGR: SP 5220 0690



**Client Name:** St Catherine's College/Hodder Associates  
**Client Ref No:** N/A  
**Document Title:** St Catherine's College, Manor Road, Oxford. Student and Teaching Accommodation  
**Document Type:** Evaluation  
**Issue Number:** 1  
**National Grid Reference:** NGR SP 5220 0690  
**Planning Reference:** 00/01459/NFZ  
**OA Job Number:** 3963  
**Site Code:** OXCAT02  
**Invoice Code:** OXCATEV  
**Receiving Museum:** OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM  
**Museum Accession No:** OXCMS 2002.232

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**Date:** 16th January 2003

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**Date:** 22nd January 2003

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**Document File Location** X:\projects\oxcat\evalrep  
**Graphics File Location** \\server10\oapubs1\_ItoQ\O\_codes\*oxcatev\*  
**Illustrated by** Amy Tucker

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# St Catherine's College, Oxford

## Student and teaching accommodation

NGR SP 522 069

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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# St Catherine's College, Oxford Student and teaching accommodation

Ref: OXCAT02

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

10/01/03

The purpose of this report is to provide an archaeological evaluation of the proposed student and teaching accommodation at St Catherine's College, Oxford. The site is located on the east side of the college, bounded by the River Cherwell to the north and the college buildings to the south. The proposed development consists of a new building of approximately 10,000 sqm, to be constructed on a plot of land measuring approximately 100m by 50m. The site is currently occupied by a mix of grass, trees, and some existing structures. The report details the results of a desk-based assessment and a field-based evaluation, including a geophysical survey and a trial excavation. The desk-based assessment identified a number of potential archaeological features, including a possible Roman or medieval enclosure, a possible 17th-century building, and a possible 19th-century building. The field-based evaluation confirmed the presence of a Roman or medieval enclosure, a possible 17th-century building, and a possible 19th-century building. The geophysical survey identified a number of potential archaeological features, including a possible Roman or medieval enclosure, a possible 17th-century building, and a possible 19th-century building. The trial excavation identified a number of potential archaeological features, including a possible Roman or medieval enclosure, a possible 17th-century building, and a possible 19th-century building.

APPENDIX 1

1.1	Introduction
1.2	Background
1.3	Methodology
1.4	Results
1.5	Conclusions
1.6	Recommendations



## SUMMARY

*Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December 2002 on land belonging to St Catherine's College, Oxford (NGR SP 5220 0690) on behalf of the college and architects Hodder Associates. Five trenches were excavated and the work revealed a former land surface and ditch dated to the late 18th century in one of the trenches. A trench excavated across the line of a raised trackway produced no dating evidence for its construction, while the remaining three trenches were devoid of archaeological features. Within these alluvial deposits formed on the River Cherwell floodplain were identified, sealed beneath over 1 m of raised ground formed when the college buildings were erected on the site.*

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In December 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation on land belonging to St Catherine's College, on behalf of the college and architects Hodder Associates.
- 1.1.2 The evaluation was undertaken in respect of a planning application for the construction of new teaching and student accommodation buildings (Planning Ref: 00/01459/NFZ).
- 1.1.3 An advice note was prepared regarding the requirement for archaeological works in advance of the development by Brian Durham, Oxford City's Archaeologist.
- 1.1.4 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would undertake the evaluation of the site (OA 2002).

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is situated to the north of St Catherine's College within the ancient parish of Holywell or St Cross, immediately north-east of the historic city of Oxford (NGR SP 5220 0690). It lies on a floodplain between the River Cherwell to the east, and Holywell Mill Stream to the west. The geology is alluvium, which overlies River Gravels (BGS 1982).

### 1.3 Archaeological background

- 1.3.1 The background is summarised from a desk-top survey and sites gazetteer prepared by OA in 2000 (formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit, OAU, 2000) and included in the WSI. The following is an abridged version of the archaeological and historical background contained in those documents.
- 1.3.2 The area of the current evaluation (Fig. 1) has seen a number of archaeological investigations. These comprise: 1996, an OAU evaluation c 350 m to the north-west of the area of proposed development revealed two medieval ditches (OAU 2). In 1983 OAU evaluation beside Holywell manor house, c 150 m south-west of this site revealed medieval and post-medieval ditches (OAU 4). An OAU evaluation at



Holywell Mill in 1993 identified four earlier phases of the mill (OAU 6). In 1994 OAU carried out an evaluation of St Cross Road, *c.* 300 m south-west of the Site (OAU 7). The investigation revealed medieval and post-medieval ditches close to the road. It is thought that small-scale quarrying activity from the medieval period may have removed evidence of structures along the road.

1.3.3 In 1998 OAU carried out a watching brief prior to development, *c.* 200 m west of this site, which revealed a large ditch that was believed to be part of the Civil War defences (OAU 13). In 1993 OAU carried out an evaluation at Jowett Walk, *c.* 35 m to the south-west of this site (OAU 14), which revealed an area of late 12th to early 13th century buildings and 14th century pits, medieval ploughsoils, post-medieval pits and garden walls. The area is likely to have lain within the medieval suburb of Holywell. In 1994 OAU undertook an evaluation of Master's Field, *c.* 400 m south-west of the proposed development site (OAU 15). The investigation revealed a large north-east to south-west aligned ditch, believed to form part of the Civil War defences. Most recently, evaluation at this site (OA 2002) revealed further possible prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval features.

1.3.4 The desk-top assessment concluded that there was limited potential for prehistoric, Roman and early medieval archaeology on the site. The potential for post-medieval archaeology was considered good, based on 18th century map evidence that depicted a building and a well marked 'Holywell' in the west part of the area of proposed development.

#### 1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OA is grateful to Hodder Associates for providing plans of the site and the development.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, and state of preservation of any archaeological remains surviving on the site. Attention was to be given to remains of all periods, including evidence for past environments, with provision for environmental sampling included.

2.1.2 The evaluation sought to clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site, and the depth of alluvial overburden across the site that could have masked archaeological features.

2.1.3 Specific aims were to excavate a trench to characterise the nature of a bank at the north boundary of the site that may have had Civil War associations. A trench was positioned in order to find traces of the traces of the building marked on 18th century maps and associated with a wellhead at the west corner of the development site. Further trenches were excavated to elucidate the depth of alluvium across the site.



### **3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Fieldwork Methods and Recording**

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised the excavation of five machine-dug trenches (Fig. 2). All of the trenches were 1.6 m wide. The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision by a JCB excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket.
- 3.1.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent, nature and date. All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording took place in accordance with established OA practices as detailed in the OA Fieldwork Manual (OA 1992). All contexts, and any small finds and samples from them were allocated unique numbers. Bulk finds were collected by context. Colour transparency and black-and-white negative photographs were taken of all trenches and archaeological features. Trench plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50. Section drawings were drawn at a scale of 1:20.
- 3.1.3 One of the college car parks occupied the area where Trench 1 was located. Trench 2 was located across a raised footpath (to be evaluated for its archaeological potential) running SW-NE along the northern limit of the proposed development. Trenches 3, 4 and 5 were located in an area of maintained grassland and young trees to the north and south of the college tennis courts.

#### **3.2 Finds**

- 3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

#### **3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence**

- 3.3.1 Thirteen deposits were bulk sampled on-site, of which seven were selected for further detailed environmental analysis. The result of this analysis is described below.

#### **3.4 Presentation of results**

- 3.5.1 In the following sections the deposits are described by trench. There is additional comment on the finds and the reliability of the results. A context inventory, including finds lists, is included in Appendix 1. The stratigraphy of each trench is described individually and a discussion and interpretation of the results then follows.

### **4 RESULTS: GENERAL**

#### **4.1 Soils and ground conditions**

- 4.1.1 The soils consisted of silty and organic loams overlying alluvial deposits. The soils became more clayey to the north-west part of the evaluation area.

### **5 RESULTS: TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS**

#### **5.1 Description of deposits**



### **Trench 1**

- 5.1.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3) was orientated east-west and was reduced in length from 20 m to two 2.5 m long test pits. This was due to the depth of made ground (up to 2 m in depth) encountered beneath the surface of the car park. Both test pits were excavated to a maximum depth of 2.1 m below ground level. Both test pits contained the same sequence of soil layers. Test Pit 1 is described here where an additional feature was located.
- 5.1.2 The lowest deposit was encountered at a depth of 2.1 m (54.34 OD) and consisted of a heavily disturbed yellow-grey clay silt containing gravel (107). This layer was cut by a NE-SW orientated ditch (105), which was 0.75 m wide. The ditch was filled with a mid-brown clay silt (106). Pottery of late 18th century date was retrieved from the surface of this fill (see Appendix 1).
- 5.1.3 A layer of mid-yellow silt clay (104) overlay the fill (106) of the ditch. It was 0.25 m thick and devoid of finds. This layer was overlain by a garden soil (103), 0.35 m thick, that contained two glass bottles dating to the 19th century.
- 5.1.4 A further layer of garden soil containing brick rubble (102) overlay the earlier soil (103) and was 0.75 m thick, in turn overlain by 1m of make-up comprising small limestone pieces (101). This was capped by 0.15 m of tarmac (100)

### **Trench 2**

- 5.1.5 Trench 2 (Fig. 4) was orientated NW-SE and was 3.5 m long, 1.8 m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2 m. The trench was located in order to evaluate the nature of a low bank running east to west along the northern edge of the proposed development area. A number of large trees and a water filled ditch to the north prevented the excavation of the full extent of the trench as proposed in the WSI.
- 5.1.6 The lowest deposit (207) was revealed at 1.2 m (54.62 m OD) and consisted of a mixed red-brown sandy clay with gravel, overlain by a 0.5 m thick layer of yellow-brown silty clay (206). A deposit of slightly mixed dark yellow-brown re-deposited silty clay (205) that was 0.4 m thick overlay 206 to the north part of the bank. A similar deposit (204), 0.35 m thick overlay 205 to the south.
- 5.1.7 A layer of mid-brown silty clay (203) that was 0.5 m thick comprised the make-up material for the majority of the bank. This was overlain by a deposit of yellow-brown silty clay and gravel (202) that was 0.15 m thick and was possibly a purpose made surface. A thin layer of topsoil (201) formed the top of the bank; the highest point of the bank lay at 56.12 m OD.

### **Trench 3**

- 5.1.8 Trench 3 (Fig. 5) was 10 m long and orientated east-west. It was excavated to a general depth of 1.2 m with two 2.5 m long sondages excavated to a depth of 2.2 m at each end of the trench.
- 5.1.9 Natural gravel and clay (307) was revealed at a depth of 2.1 m bgl (c 54.6 m OD). This was overlain by a 0.2 m thick layer of mid-brown silt clay (306), in turn sealed



by a layer of mixed blue-grey and brown silt clay (305) that contained a substantial organic content and was up to 0.6 m in thickness. Layer 305 was overlain by a 0.35 m thick layer of clearly re-deposited material (304) used to raise the ground level. This material consisted of mixed silt clay, brick rubble and other modern refuse.

- 5.1.10 A further layer of similar material (303) containing large quantities of modern bricks to a depth of 0.56 m thick overlay 304 and was covered by topsoil (302) and turf (301).

#### **Trenches 4 and 5**

- 5.1.11 Trenches 4 and 5 contained similar stratigraphic sequences to Trench 3. Both trenches were excavated to a depth of 1.2 m with additional sondages excavated to a depth of 2 m at the trench ends. Natural clay and gravel was revealed at 2 m (at 54.70 m OD) overlain by up to 1 m of archaeologically sterile alluvium. This was sealed in both trenches by c 0.8 m of made ground followed by topsoil and turf.

#### **5.2 Finds**

- 5.2.1 A single sherd of pottery dating to the post-medieval period and a fragment of floor tile of medieval date were recovered from context 106 in Trench 1. These were have been assessed by OA pottery specialist Edward Biddulph. Further comments can be found in Appendix 2.

- 5.2.2 Context 103 in Trench 1 contained two glass bottles and three fragments of clay pipe stem dating to the late 19th century.

#### **5.3 Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 5.3.1 A bulk sample was submitted for further lithological and biogenic examination. The sample derived from a layer of disturbed silty clay, identified in the majority of trenches, directly beneath the modern made ground (304) (see Appendix).

### **6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

- 6.1.1 Very little of archaeological significance was revealed during the evaluation and Trenches 3, 4, and 5 were entirely devoid of archaeological remains. It was clear that up to 1.5 m of clay and brick rubble has been deposited over the entire area of the proposed development in order to raise the ground level prior to the construction of the present college buildings in the 1960s. This exercise was presumably undertaken to alleviate the problem of flooding from the nearby River Cherwell.

- 6.1.2 In Trench 1 a former ground surface was identified 2.1 m below ground level sealed beneath deposits raising the land level. A possible ditch was revealed but was not excavated as it was below the level of impact expected by the proposed development. The ditch did not appear to be truncated and finds were retrieved from the surface of the fill of the ditch giving a date in the 18th century for the fill of the feature. It is possible that ditch and the associated ground surface level probably relate to the Holywell building.

- 6.1.3 The trench through the bank in Trench 2 revealed that it had been made up with

imported clay deposited directly onto the alluvial horizon. No evidence for a former land surface associated with the structure was revealed and no dating evidence was recovered to date the bank. The bank appeared to be relatively insubstantial and is probably post-medieval date. It is possible, but not proved by excavation, that it formed part of the civil war defences, which were erected c 1642 and formed a walkway across waterlogged meadows to a mill to the eastern (in Kingsmill Lane).

- 6.1.4 Approximately 1 m of alluvium was revealed immediately below the made-up ground in Trenches 3, 4 and 5. The alluvium directly overlay natural gravel.



## ■ 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		0.14	Tarmac			
001	101	Layer		1.00	Make-up			
001	102	Layer		0.68	Garden soil			
001	103	Layer		0.40	Garden soil	Glass clay pipe		20th C
001	104	Layer		0.22	Alluvium			
001	105	Cut			Ditch			
001	106	Fill			Silt Clay	Pot CBM		L 18th C
001	107	Layer			Disturbed natural			
002	201	Layer		0.01	Layer			
002	202	Layer		0.12	Made ground (bank)			
002	203	Layer		0.50	Bank			
002	204	Layer		0.35	Make-up			
002	205	layer		0.40	Alluvium			
002	206	Layer		0.50	Alluvium			
002	207	Fill			Natural			
003	301	Layer		0.15	Topsoil			
003	302	Layer		0.20	Natural cornbrash			
003	303	Layer		0.56	Made ground			
003	304	Layer		0.35	Original surface			
003	305	Layer		0.85	Alluvium			
003	306	Layer		0.20	Alluvium			
003	307	Layer			Natural			
004	401	Layer		0.15	Topsoil			
004	402	Layer		0.20	Make-up			
004	403	Layer		0.55	Make-up			
004	404	Layer		0.35	Alluvium			
004	405	Layer		0.25	Alluvium			
004	406	Layer			Natural			
004	407	Layer		0.30	Make-up			

<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>
004	408	Layer		0.80	Alluvium			
005	501	Layer		0.15	Made ground			
005	502	Layer		0.15	Subsoil			
005	503	Layer		0.28	Colluvium			
005	504	Layer		0.42	Natural cornbrash			
005	505	Layer		0.40	Topsoil			
005	506	Layer			Made ground			



## APPENDIX 2 POTTERY AND TILE SPOT DATES

### *Post-medieval pottery by Edward Biddulph*

A single sherd (weighing 4 g) of Staffordshire-type mottled brown ware, probably belonging to a bowl, was retrieved from context 106. The ware appears regularly in Oxford, albeit in relatively small quantities, and is likely to date from the early 18th century.

### *Tile by Edward Biddulph*

Context 106 yielded a 'two-colour' floor tile fragment (104 g). The fabric is oxidised and sand-tempered. Both upper and lower surfaces and an edge survive. The upper surface has an overall yellow-brown glaze, with an inlaid yellow glazed decorative pattern. The design is uncertain, but seems to represent an animal or floral motif. The tile corresponds with the so-called 'Wessex' type, which, together with the decorative technique, suggests a late 13th or early 14th century date, probably not exceeding c 1350 (CF Green 1988).

## APPENDIX 3 ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

### *Sample from layer 305 by E C Stafford*

#### **Introduction**

A bulk sample <No. 100> of 40 litres was submitted for further lithological and biogenic examination. The sample came from a layer of disturbed silty clay (305), identified in the majority of trenches, directly beneath modern layer 304. The deposit overlay a similar silty clay (306) that appeared to be undisturbed and *in situ*, probably representing a flood deposit. Context (306) in turn overlay terrace gravel. The purpose of the examination was to ascertain if context (305) represented overbank alluvium that had been recently disturbed during the deposition of the made-ground, or whether the disturbance was caused by earlier channel erosion. The sample was also assessed for the presence and potential of environmental indicators.

#### **Sediment description**

The deposit was not observed by this author *in situ*. However the morphology of the section drawings indicate this deposit existed across the site at similar levels and in thickness. Prior to processing, an examination of the disturbed bulk sample was made. The deposit was gleyed, consisting of tenacious mid-blue/grey silty clay mixed with occasional clasts of greyish brown silty clay. It also contained occasional clasts of subangular-subrounded medium sized pebbles and more frequent granules. Frequent roots and fine plant fibres were noted, along with charcoal flecks, and fragments of brick and mortar type material.

#### **Environmental Indicators**

The deposit was subsampled, disaggregated in water, and floated onto 200 micron mesh. The residue was then sieved through a 500micron mesh. The resultant flot and residue were then scanned under a low power binocular microscope by Dr Mark Robinson at the Oxford University Museum.



Waterlogged remains did not appear to be well preserved. The flot was small, consisting largely of modern roots. A recently dead earthworm cocoon was also noted. Very occasional seeds were noted including *Atriplex sp.* The charred remains consisted of small amounts of very fragmented charcoal to small to identify. The residue was also very small and consisted largely of medium sand sized clasts of quartz/feldspar, along with occasional ceramic building material, probably brick fragments, and coal/slag.

### Summary

Waterlogged and charred remains were not well preserved within this deposit, which offers no archaeological potential for further work. The presence of substantial amounts of modern material i.e. roots, brick, and coal fragments suggests disturbance of the alluvium probably occurred quite recently and may well be related to the activity associated with the deposition of the overlying made-ground.

## APPENDIX 4 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

British Geological Survey 1982 1:25,000

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

OAU, 2000 *St Catherine's College, Oxford Archaeological Desk Based Assessment*

OA, 2002 *St Catherine's College, Oxford Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation*

## APPENDIX 5 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** St Catherine's College, Oxford

**Site code:** OXCAT02

**Grid Reference:** SP 5220 0690

**Type of evaluation:** Five trenches

**Date and duration of project:** 09-11/12/02

**Summary of results:** Section through bank/raised walkway of ?Civil War date. Ditch and former surface of late 18th century date

**Area of Site:** 1.5 ha.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum in due course under the following accession number: OXCMS 2002.232.



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Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



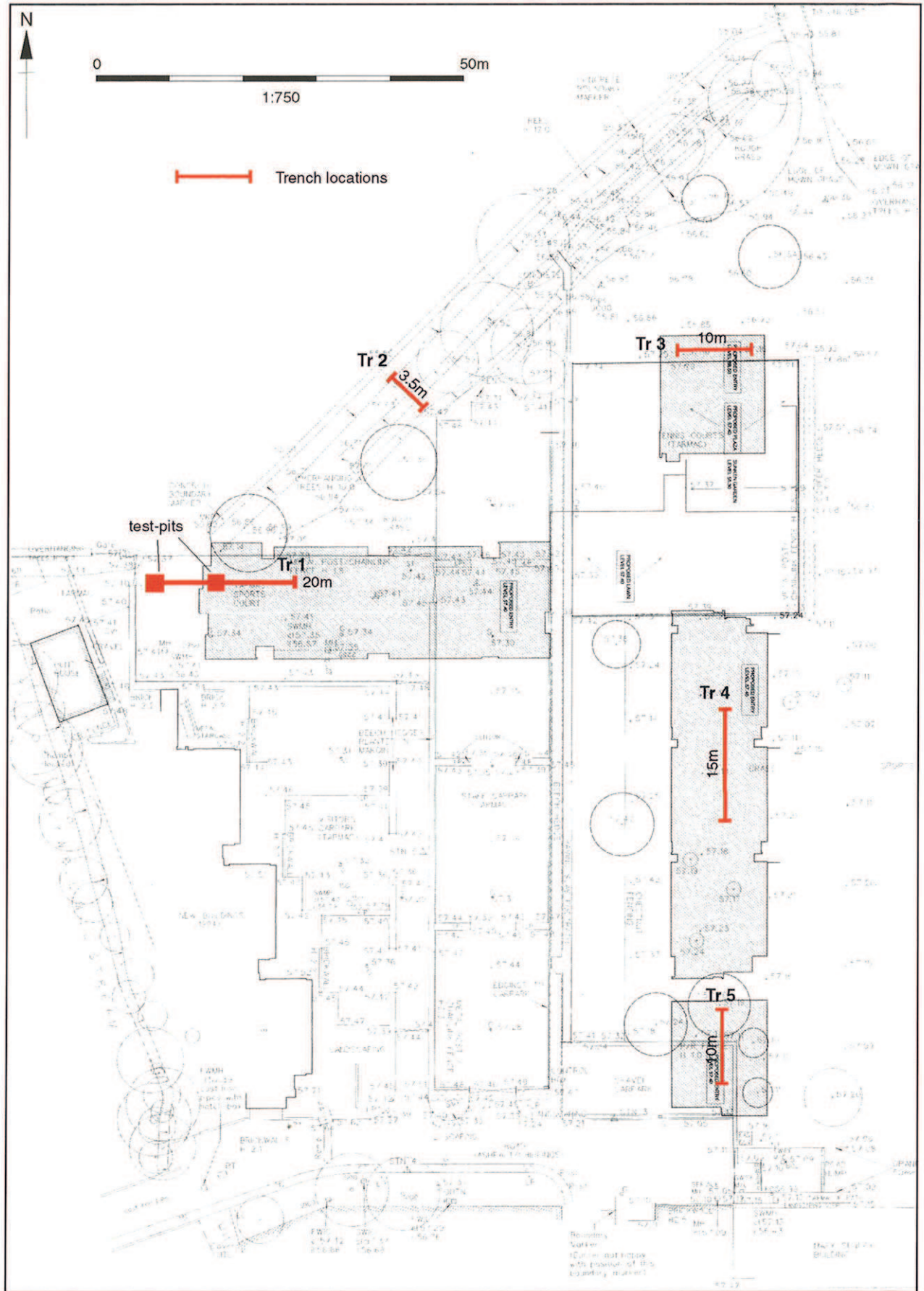


Figure 2: Trench locations

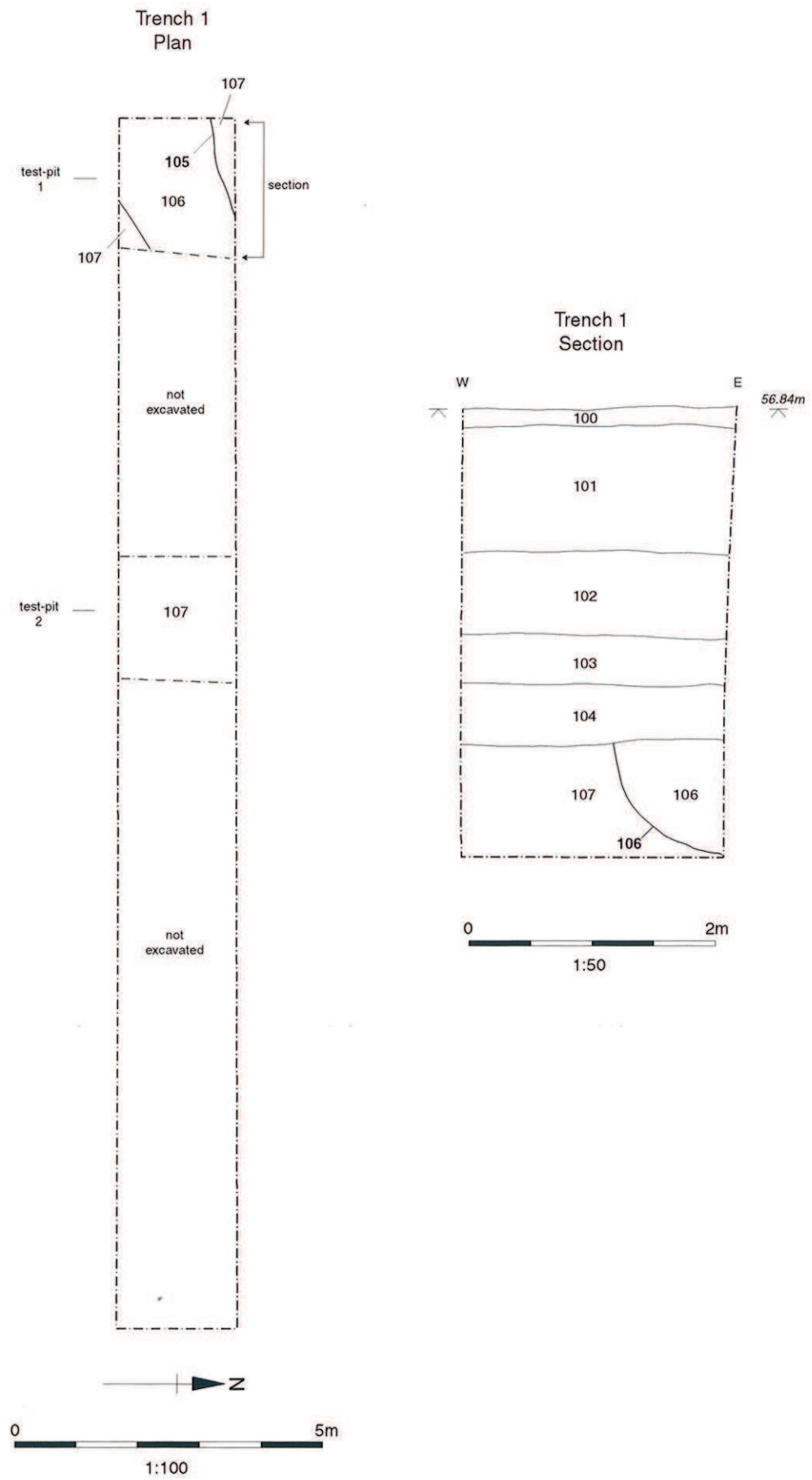


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and section

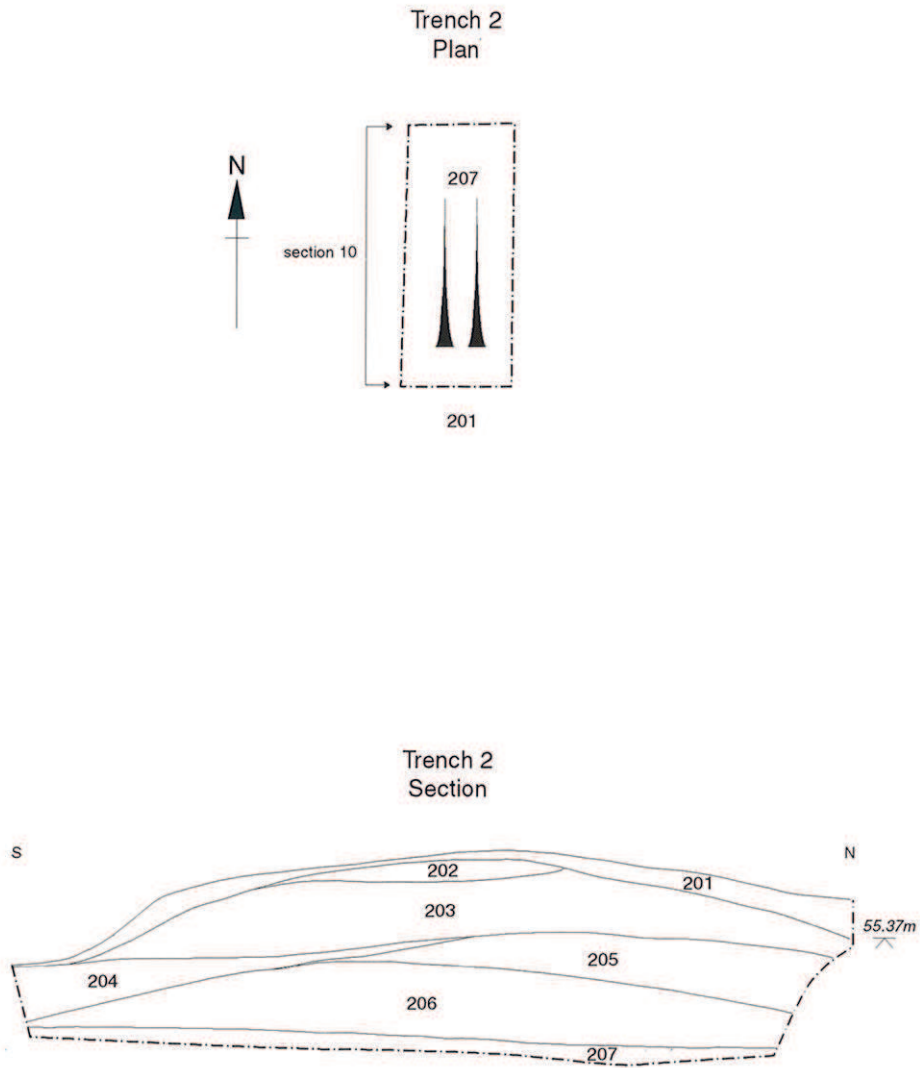


Figure 4: Trench 2, plan and section

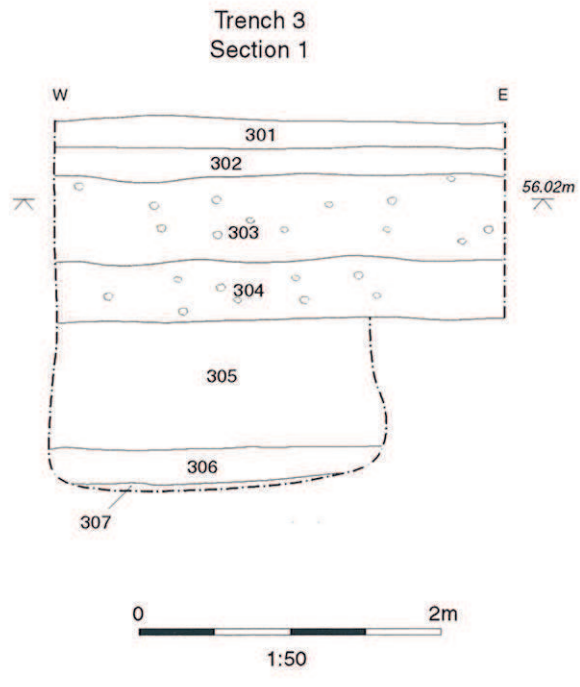
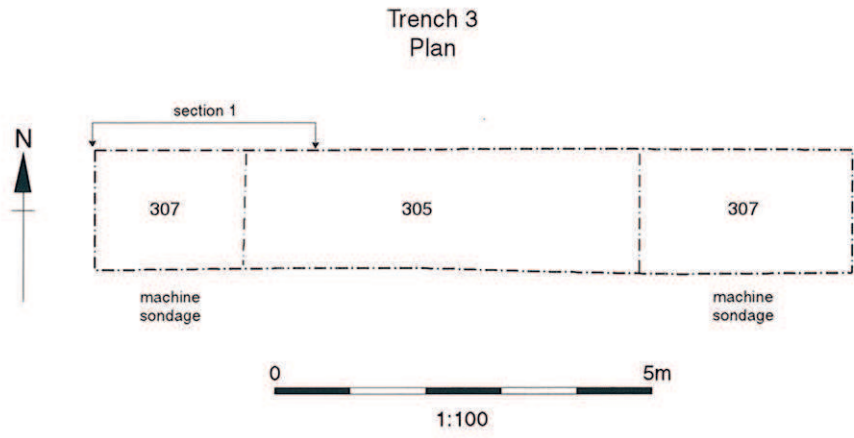


Figure 5: Trench 3, plan and section



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