

Berkeley Homes Ltd

Oakwood Hospital, Maidstone, Kent

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR TQ 735 554

Planning Ref MA/ 96/ 0333

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

September 1998

Berkeley Homes Ltd

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Planning Ref MA/96/0333

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

An archaeological field evaluation and watching brief was carried out by the OAU on a strip of land east of Oakwood Hospital and west of Queen's Road, Maidstone, Kent on behalf of Berkeley Homes Ltd. The work was carried out in advance of the construction of a housing development.

No significant archaeological features or deposits were located but evidence of 19th- and 20th-Century activity associated with the hospital was located. Occasional struck flints and sherds of prehistoric pottery were recovered from secondary contexts.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between 3rd August and 14th August 1998, the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation and watching brief at Oakwood Hospital, Maidstone, Kent (NGR TQ 735 554) on behalf of Berkeley Homes. The work was carried out in respect of a planning application for housing development (Planning Application No. MA/ 96/ 0333). The evaluation work was carried out in accordance with a WSI agreed with Kent County Council. The watching brief work was carried out in accordance with a specification set by Kent County Council. The development site lies within the parish of Barming, west of Maidstone, and is 1.6 hectares in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on the sandy limestone and calcereous sand of the Hythe Beds laid down in the Cretaceous period.

1.2.2 The site is situated on a slight slope rising gently to the west, at a height of c. 76 m above OD. The site forms part of the grounds of Oakwood Hospital and has been rough grassland for some years.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate desk top study (OAU June 1998, Queen's House Oakwood Hospital, Maidstone), the results of which are summarised below.

1.3.2 The site lies to the west of the historic centre of Maidstone on land which had previously been common heathland, known as Barming Heath (Fig. 1). While archaeological sites and finds of all periods have been found in the Maidstone area, the site itself has produced no significant archaeological evidence. However, a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age cup was found within 100m of the site, numerous finds of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman date have been made at Hermitage Farm, to the north, and Roman material has been found at Glebe Farm, to the south

1.3.3 The hospital was commissioned in 1828 and the first of the buildings was built on a 37-acre site of former heathland. Numerous extensions were added to the hospital throughout the 19th- and earlier part of the 20th-centuries.

2 AIMS

2.1 The following aims for the evaluation were set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation:

2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area (Queen's House and Queen's Road).

2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.

- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area affected by the access road.
- 2.1.5 To make available the results of the investigation.
- 2.2 The following aims for the watching brief were set out in the specification produced by Kent County Council:
 - 2.2.1 To observe and record any archaeological remains which are affected by the construction of the access roads, temporary site compound and sewer works.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork (Fig. 2)

- 3.1.1 Six evaluation trenches, each measuring 30 m by 1.60 m, were excavated within the proposed housing development area. This represents a 2% sample of the total area.
- 3.1.2 In addition, a watching brief was carried out prior to the construction of access roads and a temporary site compound, and during the excavation of service trenches.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and the overburden closely monitored for archaeological finds. The trenches were hand cleaned and recorded in plan and section. A colour and black and white photographic record was made. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).
- 3.2.2 A watching brief was carried out during the contractor's topsoil stripping operation in two areas. In addition, a new service trench was monitored at several stages during its excavation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The general soil type was a mid greyish-brown sandy silt and the underlying geology was a fragmented limestone (ragstone) in a silty clay matrix.

4.2 Presentation of Results

- 4.2.1 Trench descriptions are given in Section 5. A detailed tabulation of finds and context data may be found in Appendix 1.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 4)

5.1.1 The clay-silt and limestone bedrock (105) was reached at a depth of 0.70 m (76.14 m O.D) from the present surface and was overlain by two layers of dark orangey-brown clay silt (104 and 103). These layers filled a hollow in the bedrock and probably represent the gradual silting of a solution hole. Layer 103 was overlain by a layer of dark orangey-brown sandy silt (102) which produced a struck flint tool, a sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery and several sherds of 19th-century pottery.

5.1.2 Layer (102) was cut by a linear feature (106), aligned north to south, which contained an ashy fill (107) with lenses of mortar. Five sherds of 19th-century pottery were recovered from Fill 107. The feature was overlain by a mid greyish-brown topsoil (101).

5.2 Trench 2

5.2.1 The clay silt and limestone natural (203) was reached at a depth of 0.55 m from the present surface (76.13 m O.D) and was overlain by a layer of dark orangey-brown clay silt (204), which filled a hollow, probably a solution hole, in the centre of the trench. This was sealed in turn by a layer of sandy silt sub soil (102). This was capped by a mid greyish-brown sandy silt topsoil (201).

5.3 Trench 3

5.3.1 The clay silt and limestone natural (307) was reached at a depth of 0.65 m from the present surface (76.88 O.D) and was overlain by a layer of mid orangey-brown sandy silt (302) subsoil. This layer was cut by a modern pipe trench (308). Layer 302 also was cut by a wall foundation trench (304) which contained concrete base (305), brick wall (306) and fill (310). This was capped by a mid greyish-brown sandy silt (301).

5.4 Trench 4

5.4.1 The clay silt and limestone natural (403) was reached at a depth of 0.60 m (76.64 m O.D) from the present surface and was overlain by a mid orangey-brown sandy silt sub soil (402). This was capped by a mid greyish-brown sandy silt top soil (401).

5.5 Trench 5

5.5.1 The clay silt and limestone natural (501) was reached at a depth of 0.60 m (76.20 m O.D) from the present surface and was overlain by a mid orangey-brown sandy silt (502) sub soil. This was capped by a mid greyish-brown sandy silt (501) top soil.

5.6 Trench 6

5.6.1 The clay silt and limestone natural (603) was reached at a depth of 0.60 m (76.36 m O.D) from the present surface and was overlain by a dark orangey-brown clay silt (603) which filled a hollow, probably a solution hole, in the western part of the trench. This

was in turn overlain by a mid orangey-brown sandy silt sub soil (602). This was capped by a mid greyish-brown sandy silt top soil (601).

5.7 Watching brief

- 5.7.1 No archaeological features or deposits were recovered during the watching brief. Nineteenth- and 20th-century pottery was recovered from topsoil contexts but not retained.

5.8 Finds

Worked Flint

- 5.8.1 Two pieces of worked flint were recovered during the evaluation. A side and end scraper of Neolithic or early Bronze Age date was retrieved from Layer 102 in Trench 1. An undiagnostic flake was retrieved from Layer (201) in Trench 2.

Prehistoric pottery

- 5.8.2 Two sherds of prehistoric pottery were recovered during the evaluation, both from Trench 1. A sherd of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery was recovered from Layer 102 and a sherd of probable Iron Age pottery was recovered from Layer 103.

Post-medieval pottery

- 5.8.3 Nineteenth-century pottery was retrieved from Layers 101, 102 and 107 in Trench 1, from Layer 502 in Trench 5 and from Layer 602 in Trench 6. Nineteenth- and 20th-century pottery was recovered from topsoil contexts in the watching brief areas.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 6.1 The field evaluation did not locate significant archaeological features, deposits or finds. Substantial hollows, filled with sterile silt deposits, in the surface of the natural bedrock in Trenches 1, 2 and 6, are interpreted as swallow or solution holes.
- 6.2 The few prehistoric artefacts that were found are all residual in context and only indicate a low level of prehistoric activity within the area.
- 6.3 In Trench 1, a north to south aligned path was located. The path is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1897. In Trench 3, a concrete and brick footing was located which relates to a hospital building which first appears on Ordnance Survey mapping of 1932.

Bibliography and references

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- Hasted, E, *The History of the County of Kent* (Vol. IV 1798)
- OAU *Queen's House Oakwood Hospital, Maidstone. Archaeological Desk Based Assessment* (OAU. June 1998)
- V.C.H. *Victoria History of the County of Kent* (Vol. III. 1932)
- Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
	503	Layer			Natural			
600								
	601	Layer		0.25	Top soil			
	602	Layer		0.35	Sub soil	Pot	11	19 C
	603	Layer			Natural			
	604	Layer	6 m	0.28	Silting of solution hole			

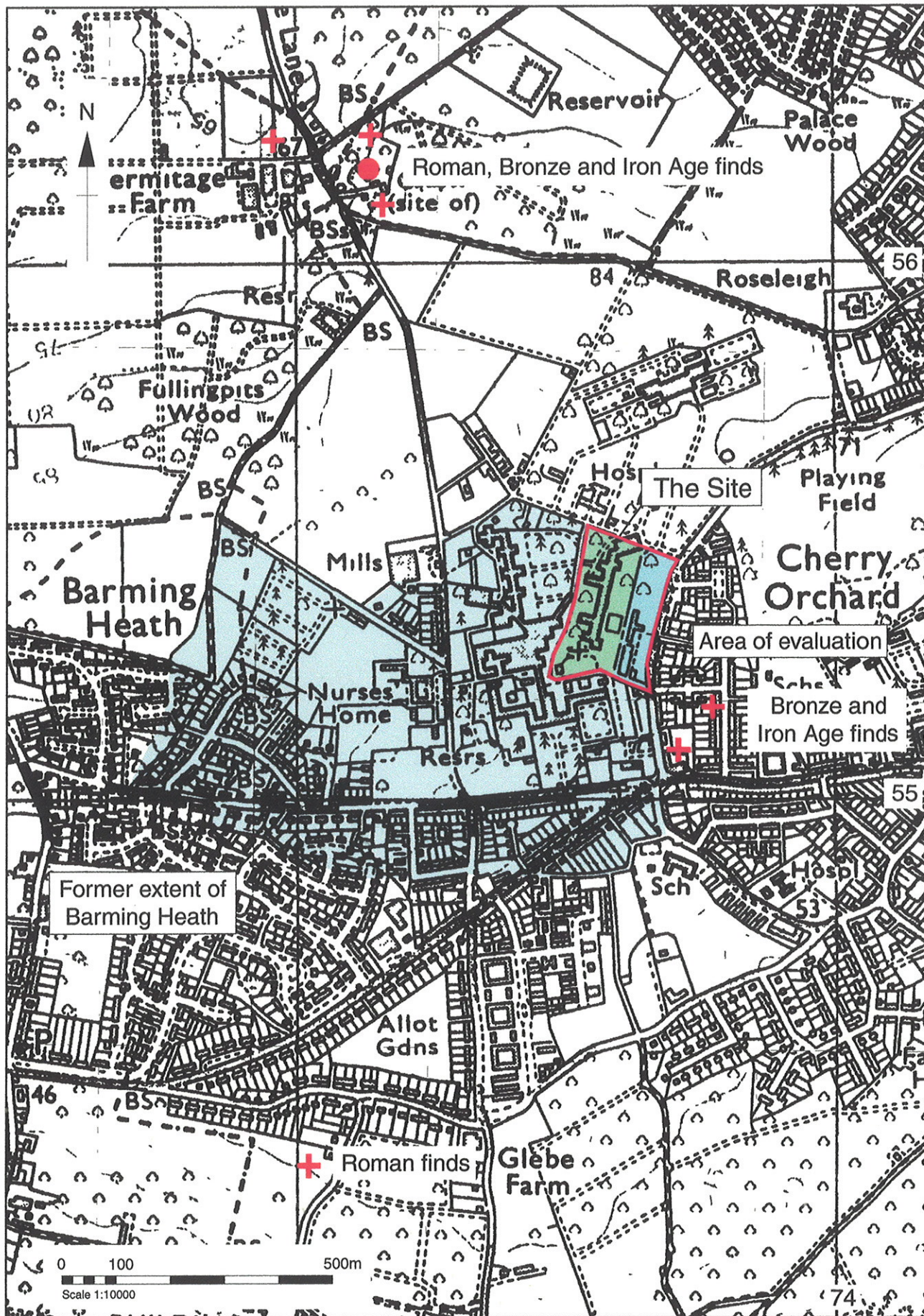


Figure 1: Site location plan

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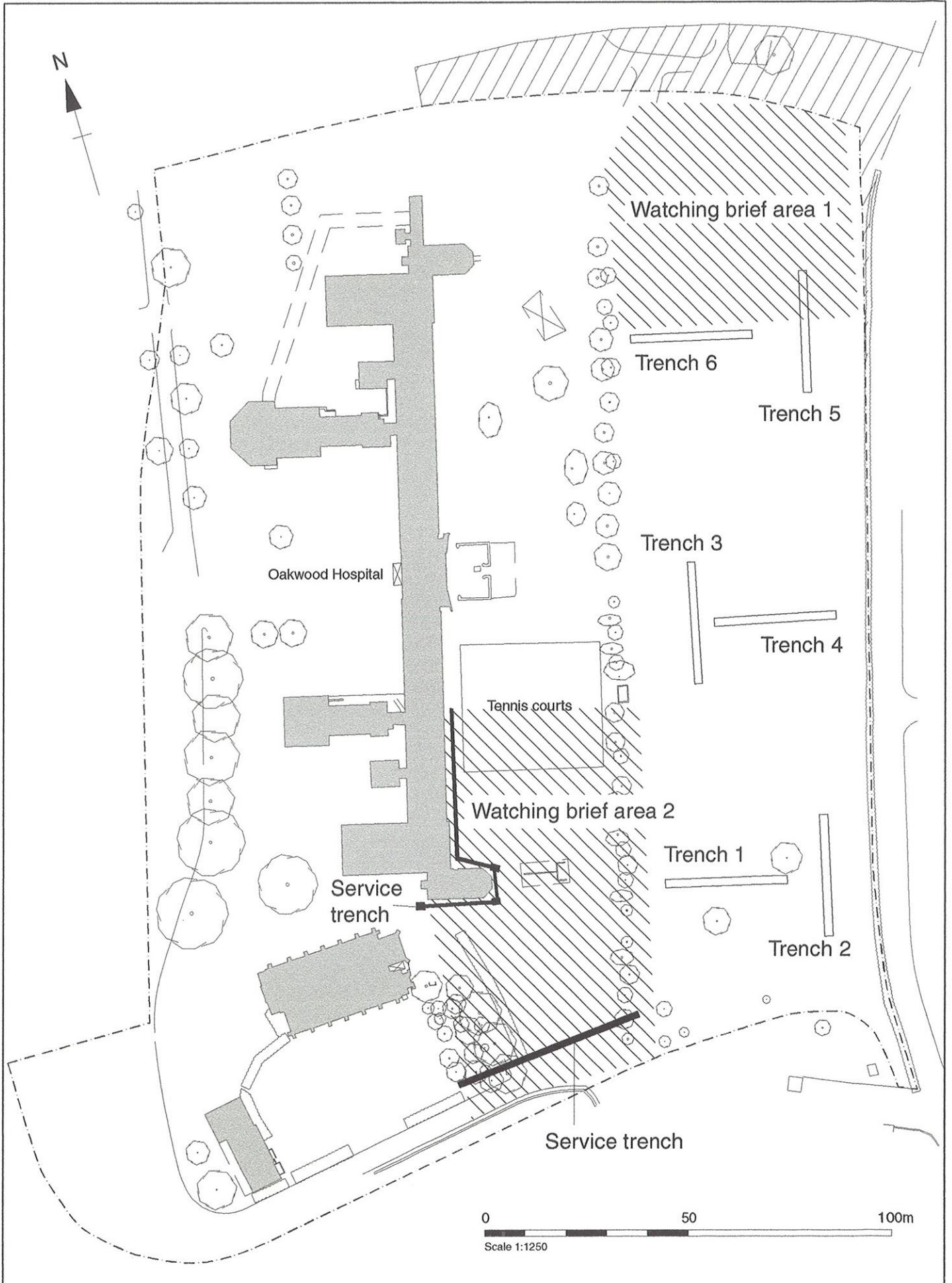


Figure 2: Trench location plan

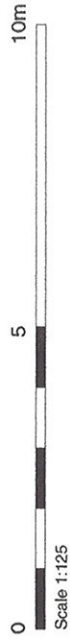
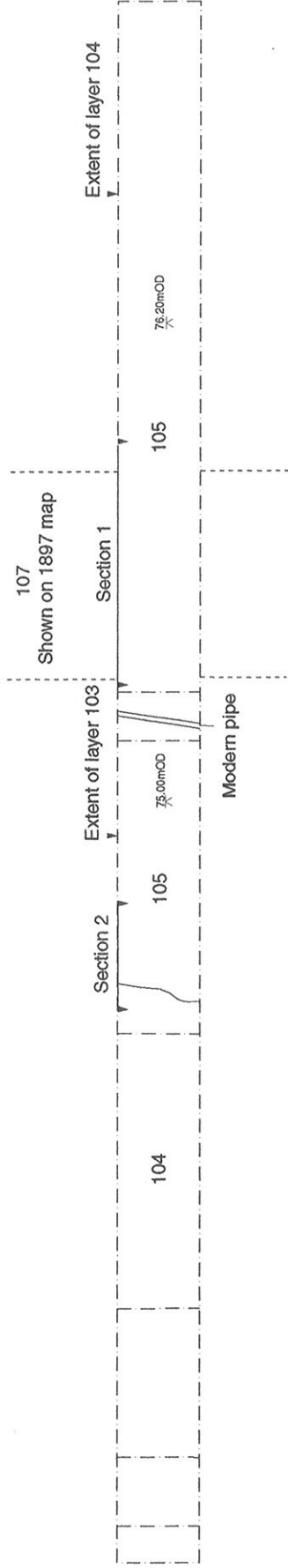


Figure 3: Plan of trench 1

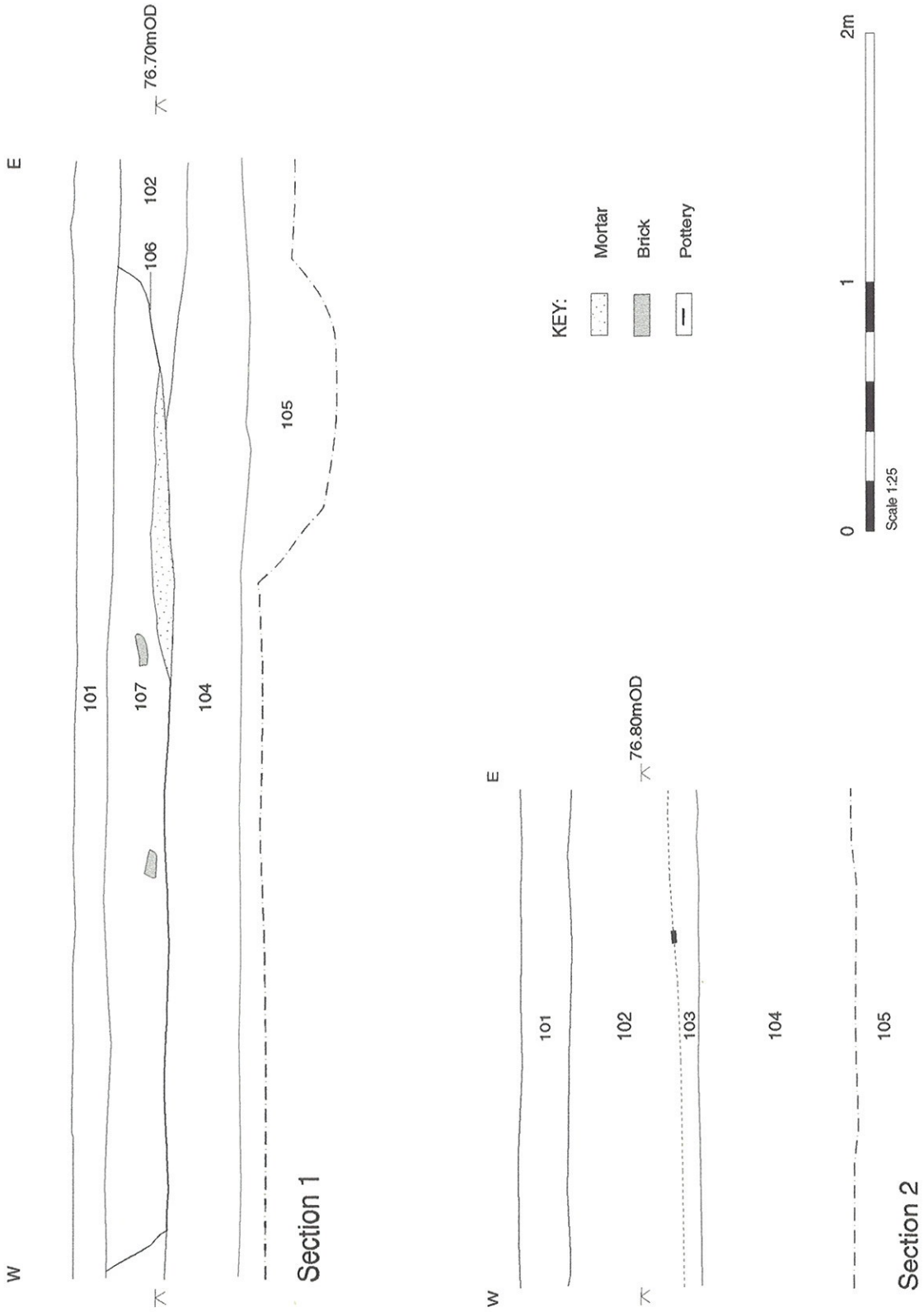


Figure 4: Trench 1, sections 1 & 2

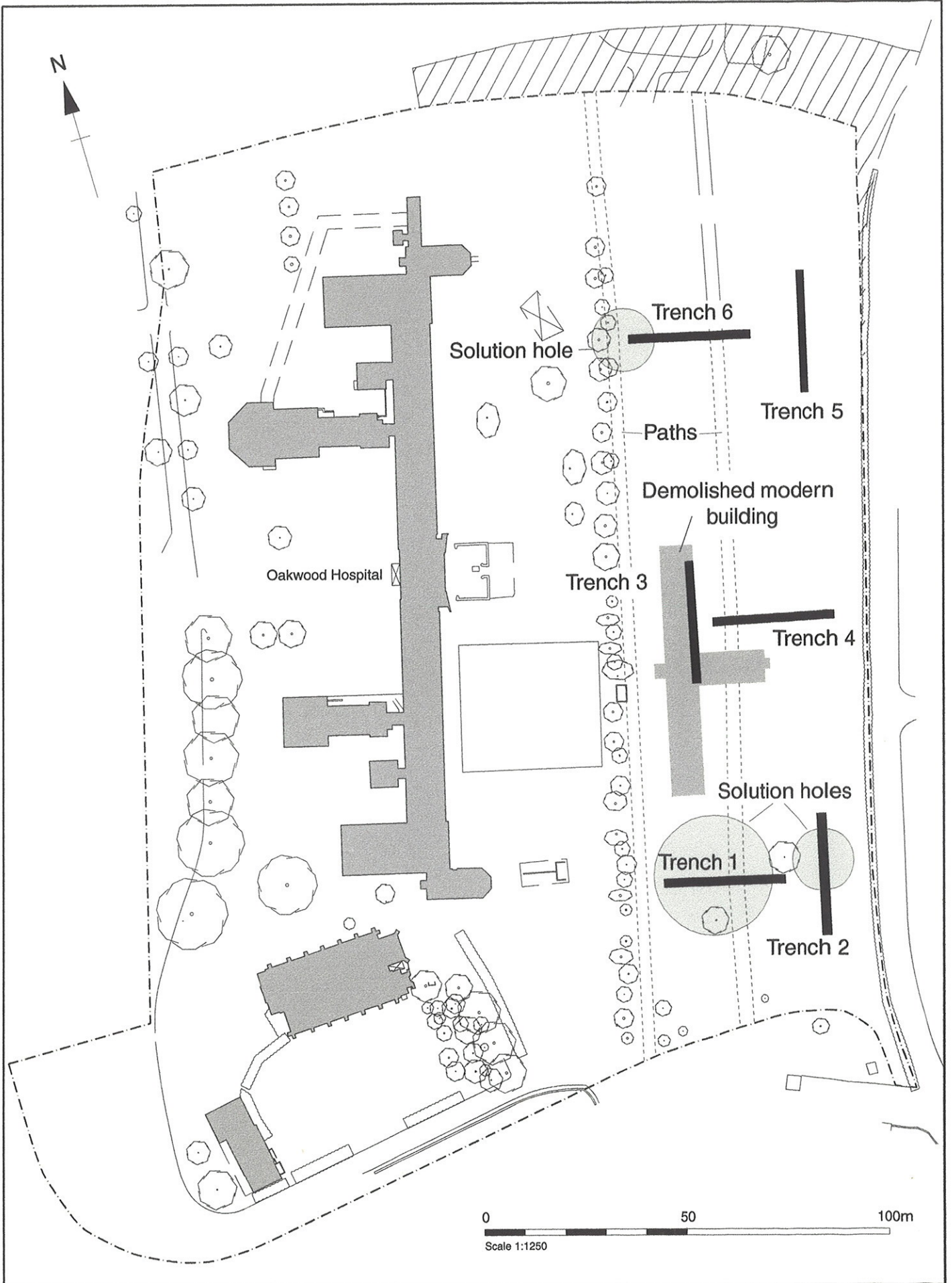


Figure 5: Interpretative plan



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