

The Court Lawn Ha Ha Croome Landscape Park Worcestershire

Archaeological Evaluation



Oxford Archaeology

8th August 2002



THE NATIONAL TRUST

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1435

NGR: NN SO 0883 4477 - SO 0886 4479

Client Name: The National Trust
Client Ref No:
Document Title: The Court Lawn Ha Ha, Croome Landscape Park,
Worcestershire

Document Type: Evaluation

Issue Number: 1

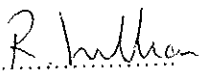
National Grid Reference: NN SO 0883 4477 - SO 0886 4479
Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 1435
Site Code: CROPK 02
Invoice Code: CROPK EV
Receiving Museum
Museum Accession No: National Trust: CROPK02

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Document File Location V:\jon.hiller\OA\oa\WBEV\Worcs\CroomeParkEval2002
\CROPK 02 eval report.doc
Graphics File Location Server10/OAUpubs/AllDrawings/*CourtLawnHaHa/Wor
cs*/LK
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The National Trust

**The Court Lawn Ha Ha
Croome Landscape Park
Worcestershire**

NGR SO 0883 4477 - SO 0886 4479

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

A targeted archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology (OA) on the Court Lawn ha ha within the Croome Landscape Park, on behalf of the National Trust, on the 25th July, 2002. Two trenches were machine excavated across the line of the ha ha. Both revealed a broad flat-bottomed ditch, which had been infilled with brick and stone rubble. There was no evidence for a revetment wall or fence barrier associated with the ditch. A further trench was excavated through alluvial soil deposits to the immediate south of the ha ha, before it was located in the other trenches.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and Scope of Work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook out a field evaluation of the Court Lawn ha ha at Croome Landscape Park, Worcestershire on 25th July 2002 on behalf of The National Trust (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 A project design was produced by OA in accordance with the brief set by the National Trust's archaeologist, Rob Woodside, prior to the evaluation. Oxford Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 Croome Park can be divided into three broad topographical zones; the central low lying belt, the eastern scarp slope and the more gentle western hill slopes. The central area consists of low-lying (15-20 m OD) relatively flat ground running roughly north-south. The eastern scarp slopes are relatively steep and rise to c 33m OD and define the eastern horizon for the core of the park.
- 1.2.2 The Court Lawn ha ha is located at the base of the eastern scarp and extends in an arc towards the central zone around the house. The eastern scarp slope then curves towards the west along the northern boundary of the park. The western hill slopes are gentler in form and rather less well defined than the eastern scarp slopes, the western hills rise to a gentle summit at c 50 m OD on Knights Hill.
- 1.2.3 The geology is broadly related to the topography, with each topographic zone being defined by a dominant geological type. The central valley area is based on mudstones overlain with deposits of alluvium, gravel and clay. The eastern scarp slopes mark the extent of the limestone plateau; this plateau also includes significant strata of shale and clay. Finally the western hills slopes are based on sandstone deposits. The trenches across the ha ha ditch are located on the edge of the valley floor at the base of the eastern scarp within a thick alluvial sequence of deposits overlying clay.
- 1.2.4 The soils also vary across the site in approximate accordance with the geological areas. The central area is primarily covered with heavy clay soils although the gravel

terrace areas contain lighter soils. The eastern slopes contain limey clayey shales whilst within the eastern area there are fine silty loams.

1.3 Historical Background

- 1.3.1 Croome Park was the first complete landscape designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, who began work at the site in c 1751 and maintained a level of involvement until 1782. The entire park was laid out from 1747 to 1810 and included work by other designers such as Robert Adam, James Wyatt and Sanderson Miller.
- 1.3.2 The landscape contains numerous architecturally significant buildings and structures including the Temple Greenhouse by Robert Adam (Grade I listed), the Park Seat by Robert Adam (Grade II* Listed), the Dry Arch Bridge by James Wyatt (Grade II Listed) and the Grotto by Capability Brown (Grade II Listed). The landscape design has survived relatively intact primarily due to the absence of any reworking of the parkland landscape since its completion in the early 19th century and the death of the then owner, the 6th Earl of Coventry, in 1809.
- 1.3.3 The National Trust is seeking to re-establish the landscape park to its condition described in the Croome Guide Book of 1824, and has adopted a policy of informing the restoration process through archaeological investigation and research (National Trust 2001, Project Brief - Appendix A). Following this approach the Trust is planning to re-open the line of the Court Lawn ha ha as part of the restoration programme. The roughly semi-circular ha ha was laid out by Brown and it delimited the lawn area to the north front of Croome Court. The ha ha was in-filled after WW II when the field was used for agriculture. The line of the ha ha now largely exists under the cultivated soils within an area of set aside rough pasture with its western extent remaining partly under agricultural cultivation.

1.4 Archaeological Assessment Background

- 1.4.1 The history and development of the Croome Park landscape has already been covered by the Conservation Plan (National Trust 1998) and the Historic Landscape Survey (Phoenix Consulting 1997). In addition to a number of archaeological investigations in the park since it was acquired by the Trust in 1987, OA was commissioned by the National Trust in 2001, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), to undertake a programme of archaeological investigations at Croome Park. The results of previous fieldwork has been reported (OA 2001a-e, 2002), though the Court Lawn ha ha was not included in those phases of fieldwork.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 The evaluation sought to assess the details of the ha ha construction, its exact alignment and its current state of preservation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of Fieldwork

- 3.1.1 In total three trenches were excavated using a mini-digger fitted with a toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision (Fig. 2). These varied between 15 m and 6 m in length.
- 3.1.2 The evaluation was initially to consist of a single targeted trench to locate and excavate the ha ha feature. The location of this trench was agreed upon between OA and the National Trust's representative (Jamie Whitehouse). A line of stakes representing the line of the ha ha on Snape's map had previously been laid out on the ground based upon a rectified image thought to be accurate. Auger sampling had also produced brick along the plotted line.
- 3.1.3 However, it was subsequently suggested that the line of the ha ha was 18 m to the south of that plotted on the ground. As a result the first trench was excavated accordingly and failed to locate the ditch. A further trench was excavated where the original plot and augering had defined the ha ha and located the ditch. Following further consultation with Jamie Whitehouse, he requested an additional trench through the line of the ha ha across its eastern extent to confirm its alignment and morphology.

3.2 Fieldwork Methods and Recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches and ha ha backfill deposits were machine excavated to determine its exact alignment and dimensions. Brick samples and finds were recovered from the surface of the deposits during machine excavation and from the resultant spoil. Each trench was planned at a scale of 1:50 and relevant sections drawn at 1:20. A photographic record using colour slide and black and white print film was taken of each excavated trench and recorded section. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and labelled by context. Due to the quantity of brick material within the ha ha backfill, only a representative sample of the brick types was recovered for analysis.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

Trench 25

- 4.1.1 Located approximately 18 m to the south of the ha ha, Trench 25 was excavated through a sequence of alluvial layers to confirm their origin and pre-landscape date (Fig. 3). Compact red clay natural (2508) was revealed in the base of a machine excavated section within the trench at 1.4 m deep from the current surface level. A thin layer of sand and gravel (2507) with a maximum depth of 0.12 m sealed the natural clay separating it from the alluvial sequence. Layers 2506-2503 comprise a

series of silty clays representing an alluvial sequence 1.1 m deep. These varied from reddish brown silty clays to greenish grey sandy clays defining separate episodes of alluvial deposition. An alluvial derived lower ploughsoil (2502) containing occasional brick fragments sealed the alluvial sequence to a maximum depth of 0.1 m, which in turn was sealed by the existing ploughsoil (2501) to a depth of 0.3 m.

Trench 26

- 4.1.2 The ha ha was located in Trench 26 as indicated by the line of stakes (Fig. 4). Machine excavation revealed a 5 m wide flat-bottomed ditch, 2.4 m wide at the base and 0.6 m deep (2604). This was primarily backfilled with a redeposited clayey soil (2603) in the lower part of the ditch and finally levelled with mixed building material (2602) (Plate 1). The building material, presumably demolition debris, consisted of bricks, worked and dressed masonry and mudstone. The bricks suggest much of the material derived from an 18th century building. Ploughsoil sealed the backfilled ha ha although the line of this was evident at surface level as a shallow depression following the line of stakes. No evidence existed in the base of the ditch for a suggested fence line that would have been required to keep livestock out of the lawn area.

Trench 27

- 4.1.3 Subsequently, in accordance with the wishes of Jamie Whitehouse, an additional trench was excavated to the east to confirm the alignment of the ditch and the backfill sequence (Fig. 5). This exposed the ha ha on the line marked by the stakes. Partial excavation exposed the base and southern side of the ditch (2704). Again this was infilled with redeposited soil (2703) and levelled with demolition debris (2702). No features were identified in the base of the ditch.

4.2 Finds

- 4.2.1 Samples of building material were recovered from the rubble debris backfill (2602) in Trench 26. The two bricks retained both date to the 18th century. The pottery sherds are of late 19th – early 20th century date and are broadly consistent with the known infill date of the ha ha just after World War II.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Overall Interpretation

- 5.1.1 The ha ha was located in the position suggested by previous fieldwork. It remains well preserved as a single phase, shallow, wide and flat-bottomed ditch which held a sunken fence (probably cleft post and rail) that divided the lawn in front of the house from the grazed pasture in the park. This feature is readily recognisable at surface level as a shallow depression corresponding to the stakes already in position.
- 5.1.2 The ha ha was backfilled following World War II, when areas of the park were turned over to agriculture. Much of the building debris backfilling the ditch appears to derive from a building constructed in the 18th century although it is not clear which building this may represent in the existing grounds of the landscape park.

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>Date</i>
25							
	2501	Layer			Modern ploughsoil		
	2502	Layer			Buried ploughsoil		
	2503	Layer			Alluvium		
	2504	Layer			Alluvium		
	2505	Layer			Alluvium		
	2506	Layer			Alluvium		
	2507	Layer			Natural gravel		
	2508	Layer			Natural clay		
26							
	2601	Layer			Modern ploughsoil		
	2602	Fill			Brick, slate, sandstone and mudstone rubble backfill	Brick, Pottery	18 th C Late 19 th - early 20 th C
	2603	Fill			Mixed clay and mudstone backfill		
	2604	Cut			Ha Ha ditch		
	2605	Layer			Alluvium		
	2606	Layer			Alluvium		
27							
	2701	Layer			Modern ploughsoil		
	2702	Fill			Brick, slate, sandstone and mudstone rubble backfill		
	2703	Fill			Mixed clay and mudstone backfill		
	2704	Cut			Ha Ha ditch		
	2705	Layer			Alluvium		
	2706	Layer			Alluvium		

APPENDIX 2 POTTERY DATING

5.1.3 Four sherds of pottery were recovered from fill 2602. Three are blue and white printed wares from two different vessels dating from the late 19th and early 20th century. A further sherd of 19th century red garden plant pot was also recovered.

APPENDIX 3 BUILDING MATERIAL

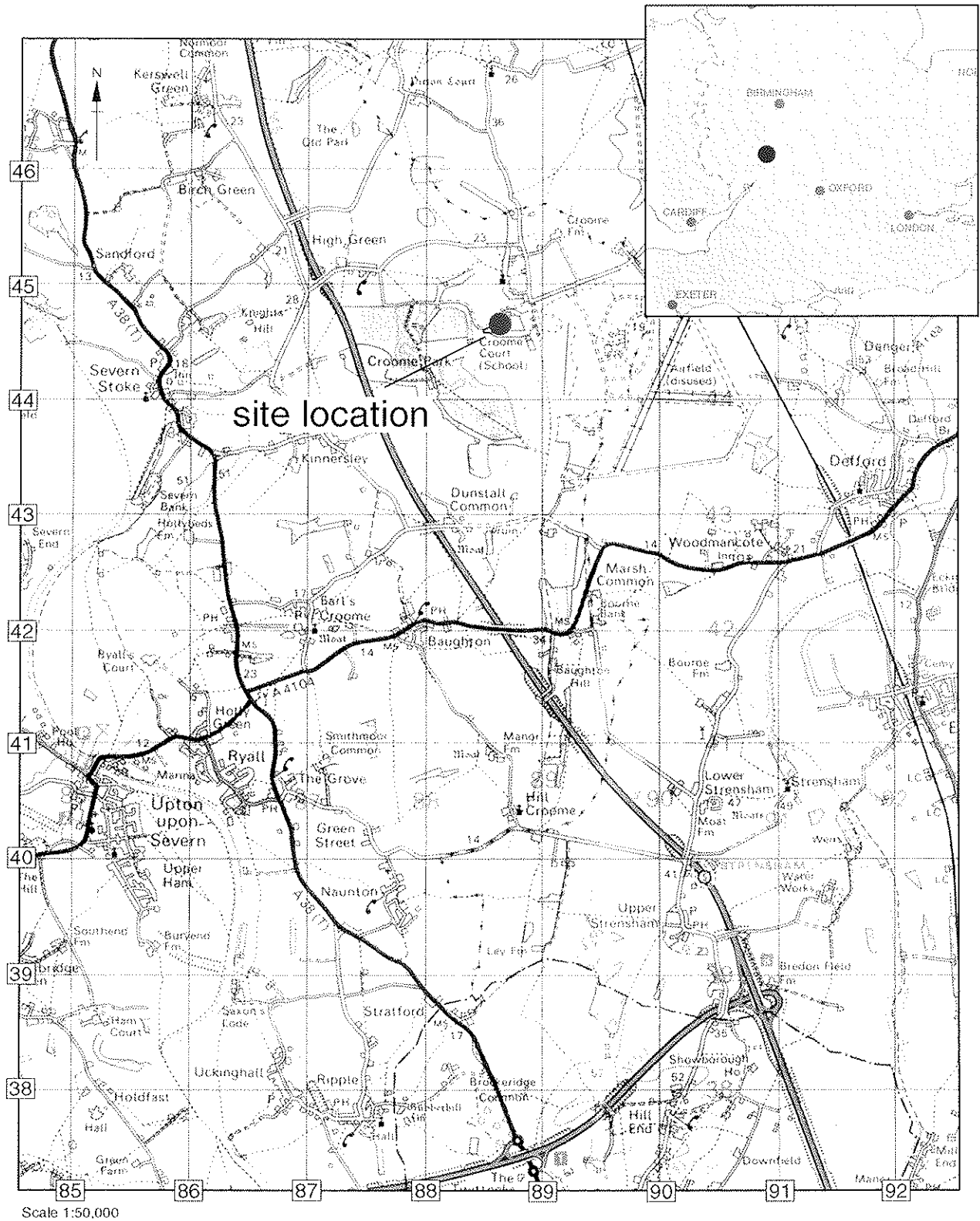
5.1.4 Two bricks were selected as a representative sample of those encountered in rubble backfill 2602. These both date to the 18th century. Dressed masonry was noted during the evaluation but not retained. This material largely comprised simple dressed pieces but also included architectural fragments from windows that displayed chamfered edges.

APPENDIX 4 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------|--|
| National Trust | 1998 | <i>Croome Park, Worcestershire. Conservation Plan First Draft</i> |
| National Trust | 2001 | <i>Brief for Tender: Croome Park, Worcestershire</i> |
| Phoenix Consulting | 1997 | <i>Croome Park Historic Landscape Survey</i> |
| OA | 2001a | <i>Croome Park, Worcestershire. Targeted Historic Landscape Investigation Programme</i> |
| OA | 2001b | <i>Building Assessment Report: Croome Park</i> |
| OA | 2001c | <i>Landscape Features Report: Croome Park</i> |
| OA | 2001d | <i>Grotto Report: Croome Park</i> |
| OA | 2001e | <i>Ha-Ha Report: Croome Park</i> |
| OA | 2002 | <i>Archaeological Excavations and Landscape Assessment of Parkland Landscape Features. Croome Park, Worcestershire</i> |
| Wilkinson, D (ed.) | 1992 | <i>Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual</i> |

APPENDIX 5 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: The Court Lawn Ha Ha, Croome Landscape Park, Worcestershire
Site code: CROPK 02
Grid reference: SO 0883 4477 – SO 0886 4479
Type of evaluation: 3 evaluation trenches
Date and duration of project: 25th July (1 Day)
Summary of results: Line of Ha Ha traced in two trenches. Plain flat-bottomed ditch, infilled in 20th century
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES and will be deposited with The National Trust in due course.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

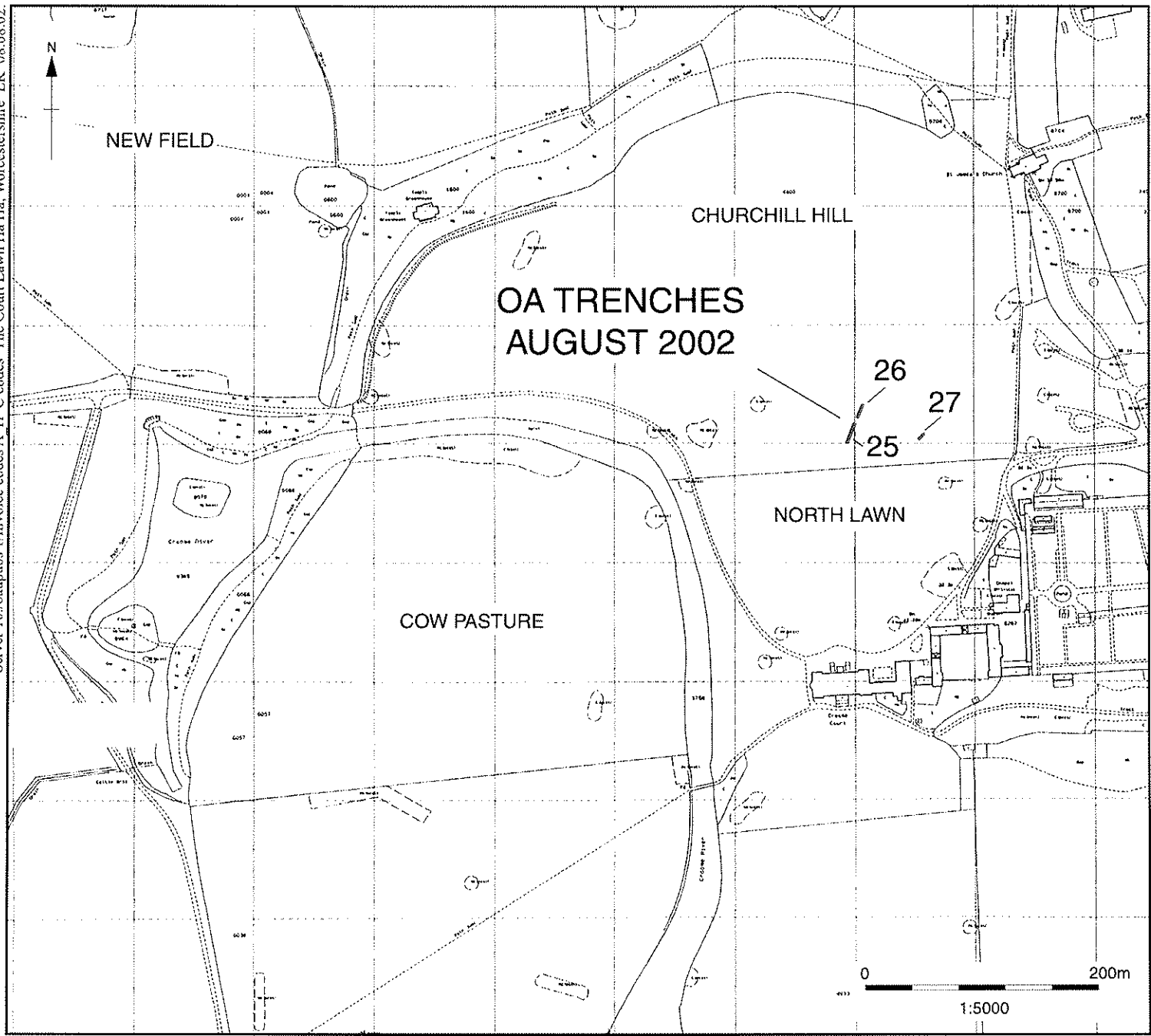


Figure 2: Trench location

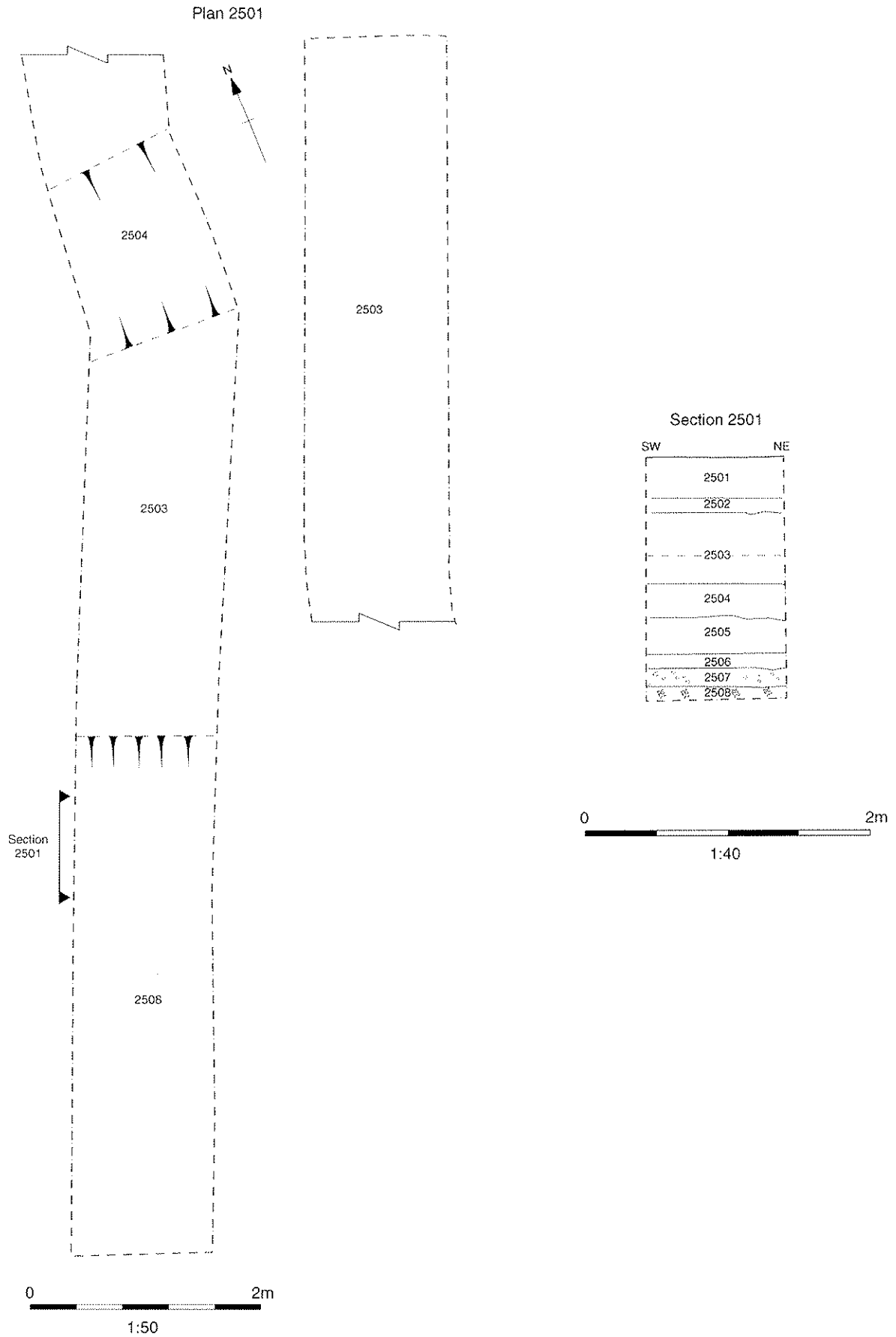


Figure 3: Trench 25, Plan and section

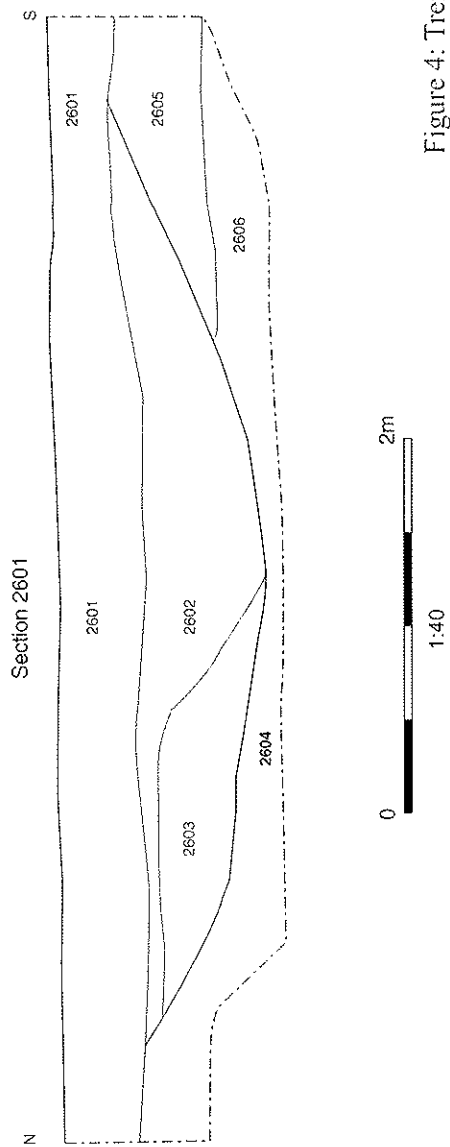
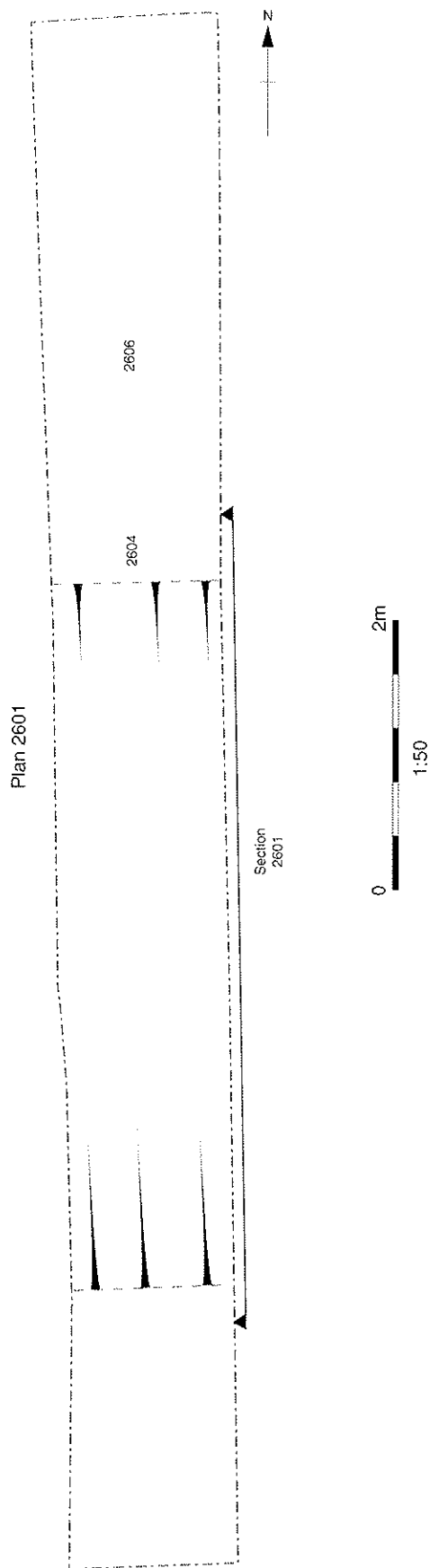


Figure 4: Trench 26, Plan and section

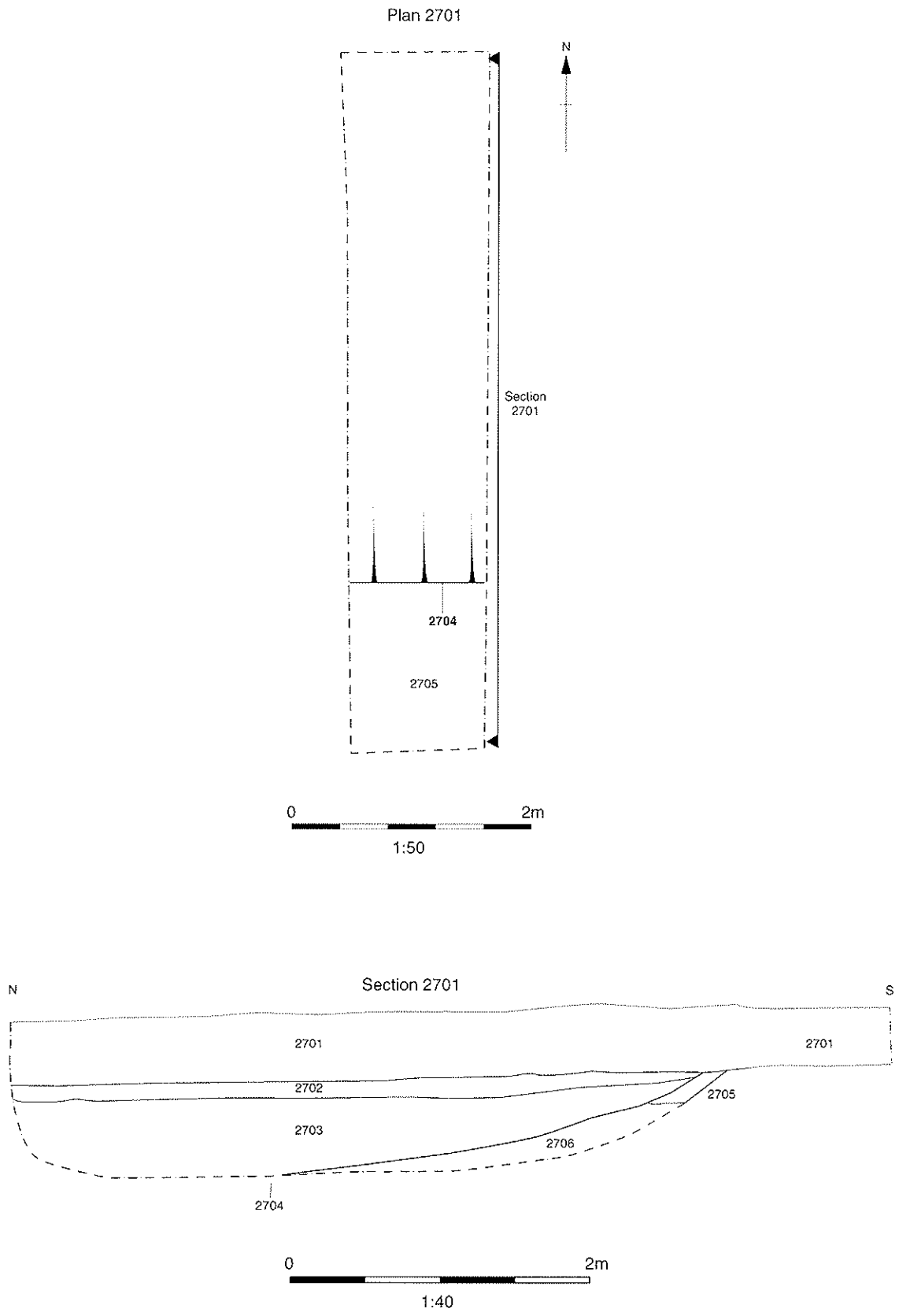
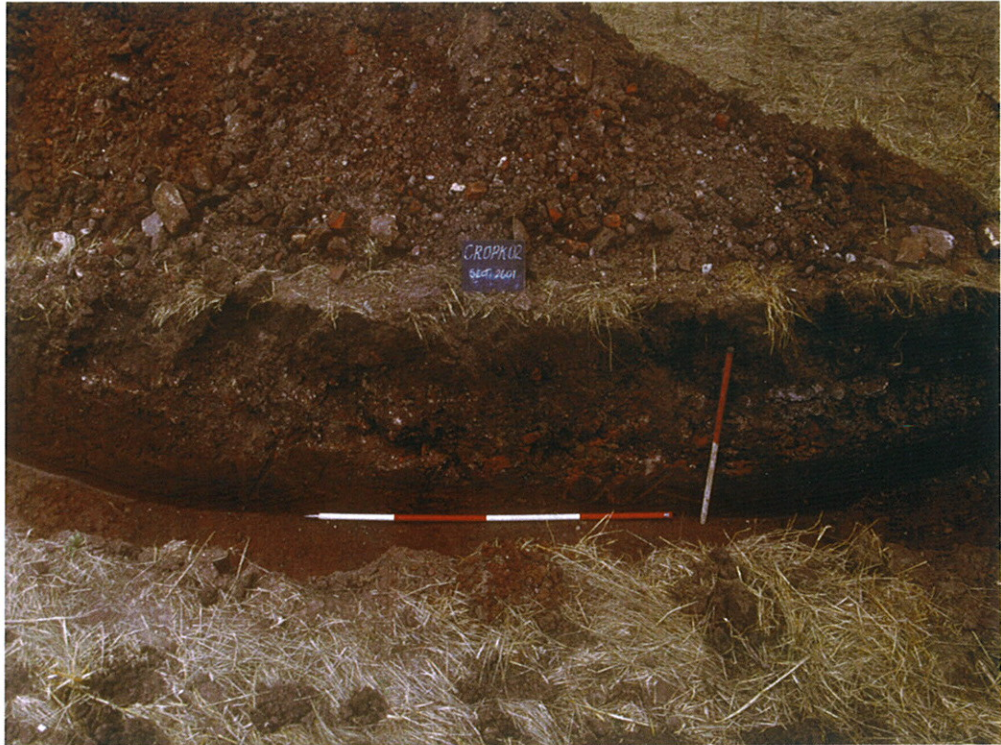


Figure 5: Trench 27, Plan and section





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