University Surveyors Office

Proposed Institute of Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine, Churchill Hospital, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 546 059

Planning Application No. 99/1227/NF

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Prepared by: R A Johns Date: 12/02/2000
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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 2000

Proposed Institute of Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine, Churchill Hospital, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Churchill Hospital, Oxford on behalf of the University Surveyors Office. The evaluation revealed a small area of surviving subsoil similar in nature to other soils where Roman activity has been identified. The majority of the site was truncated by the foundations of a modern building, which is shown as standing on current Ordnance Survey base maps of the area, but was encountered during fieldwork only as demolished remains beneath the present turf.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In January and February 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Churchill Hospital on behalf of the University Surveyors Office in respect of a planning application for a proposed Institute of Vaccineology and Tropical Medicine (Planning Application No. 99/1227/NF). The evaluation was completed according to a brief set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with Brian Durham of Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS). The development site is situated within the Churchill Hospital Complex to the south of Old Road, Oxford (NGR SP 546 059), and is *c.* 0.36 hectares in area (Fig 1).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on sand drift geology, overlain by a thin layer of limestone grit at 99 m OD. The site is situated on a gentle south facing slope and is currently under lawn and a concrete car park.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The site itself has produced no archaeological evidence. There are several known sites with archaeological remains in the immediate vicinity of the development site. Archaeological excavations at the Churchill Hospital between 1971 and 1973 revealed extensive remains associated with the northern production area of the Oxford region Roman pottery industry. Surface indications of such a site were first noted at the end of the 19th Century, and kilns were discovered here in 1953, 1955 and 1962. This kiln site appears to have been in use in the late 3rd and 4th Centuries AD (Young 1972). Similar kiln sites have been recorded nearby at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, Oxford school, Between Towns Road (Cowley), and at Harry Bear's Pit.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

2.1.1 The general aims of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI, were as follows:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.

- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size

3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of a single 'L -shaped' trench measuring a total of 20 m long and 1.5 m wide (Figs 2 and 3). The overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator (Mini Kubota) with a toothless ditching bucket under close archaeological supervision. Where possible the trench was machined to the top of the natural drift geology to allow the full impact of the development to be examined. The nature of the natural sands was tested by machine sondage.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed deposits were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds. All archaeological features were planned and sample 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).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Modern brick and pottery from the demolition layer, which constituted the only finds recovered during the course of the excavation, was not retained.

3.4 Environmental data

3.4.1 No environmental samples were taken during the course of the evaluation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The general soil type was sandy-clay topsoil overlying a mixed deposit of demolition material within a sandy matrix. Ground conditions were dry with no preservation of waterlogged materials.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 A red-brown colluvial subsoil survived to the west and north ends of the evaluation trench. Elsewhere the ground was mostly truncated to the level of the natural drift geology by the footings of a modern building, shown on current OS base maps as still standing (Fig 3).

4.3 Presentation of results

4.3.1 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).

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 *Trench 1* (Fig 4)

Natural pale yellow and brown sands [104] were reached at 98.5 m OD. In the western 5 m of the trench the natural sands were a red-brown colour and were encountered somewhat lower down at *c.* 98.2 m OD. Here the sands were overlain by an uneven and sporadic layer of limestone grit [102], up to 0.4 m thick. A red-brown sandy subsoil [103] overlay the natural drift geology. This survived to 0.07 m thick in the northernmost 1 m of the trench, and to the west it filled hollows formed by the limestone grit [102] and exhibited a merging boundary with the natural sands [104]. The construction cut of a modern building [106] truncated the subsoil [103] and the natural sands [104] to a depth of *c.* 97.2 m OD. Within the footprint of the building, subsoil 103 survived in small and intermittent lenses. The footings of the building consisted of a concrete foundation surmounted by a brick wall [105], and the construction cut [106] was backfilled with a mixed sandy soil [107]. All deposits in the trench were sealed beneath a demolition layer [101] up to 0.3 m thick, and the present topsoil [100], which was a maximum of 0.16 m thick.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 The sample size in this evaluation represented quite a high proportion of the open space on the site and as such was sufficient to determine the extent and nature of deposits liable to be affected by the proposed development. As with all investigations of this type, the possibility remains that features cut into the natural drift geology may survive elsewhere on the site, including the area currently under a concrete car park. This is however believed to be unlikely given the results of this work and other observations in the immediate area made during a previous watching brief (Dalton 1999).

6.2 Overall Interpretation

6.2.1 *Summary of results*

No archaeological features or artefacts were encountered during the evaluation. The difference in height and nature of the natural sands to the west of the trench may represent a periglacial feature. The survival of a colluvial subsoil overlying the natural sands suggests that truncation in this area, where outside building foundations, is not as complete as might otherwise have been anticipated. The presence of the same subsoil in small lenses within the footprint of the modern building suggests that even here the natural sands themselves have not been substantially truncated. It is likely however that the colluvial subsoil covered the area before truncation by building. The nature of this subsoil is consistent with that of a Roman date noted previously in this part of Oxford (Young, 1972).

6.2.2 *Significance*

Given the absence of cut features, little significance can be attached to the deposits encountered during the evaluation, although the survival of a buried colluvium is worthy of note.

APPENDIX 1: ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Depth (m)*	*Comment*	*Finds*	*No.*	*Date*
1								
	100	Layer		0.16	Topsoil			
	101	Layer		0.3	Demolition layer			
	102	Layer	>5	0.4	Natural limestone grit			
	103	Layer		0.4	Colluvial subsoil			
	104	Layer			Natural sands			
	105	Structure	0.6	0.5	Building footings			
	106	Cut	0.6	0.5	Construction cut			
	107	Fill		0.3	Fill of 106			
	108	Deposit	1.2	1.4	Fill of 109			
	109	Cut	1.2	1.4	Modern feature			

APPENDIX 2: BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Booth, P	1994	*Oxfordshire Ambulance Service New Management HQ Building at the Churchill Hospital*. OAU unpublished report.
Dalton, J	1999	*Centre for Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine, Churchill Hospital, Oxford*, Archaeological Watching Brief Report. OAU unpublished report.
Wilkinson, D (ed)	1992	*Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August1992). Unpublished.
Young, C J	1972	Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, 1971: Interim Report. *Oxoniensia* **XXXVII**
Young, C J	1973	Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, 1972: Interim Report. *Oxoniensia* **XXXVIII**
Young, C J	1975	Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, 1973: Interim Report. *Oxoniensia* **XXXIX**

OXCHV 00

scale1:5000

Figure 1: site location

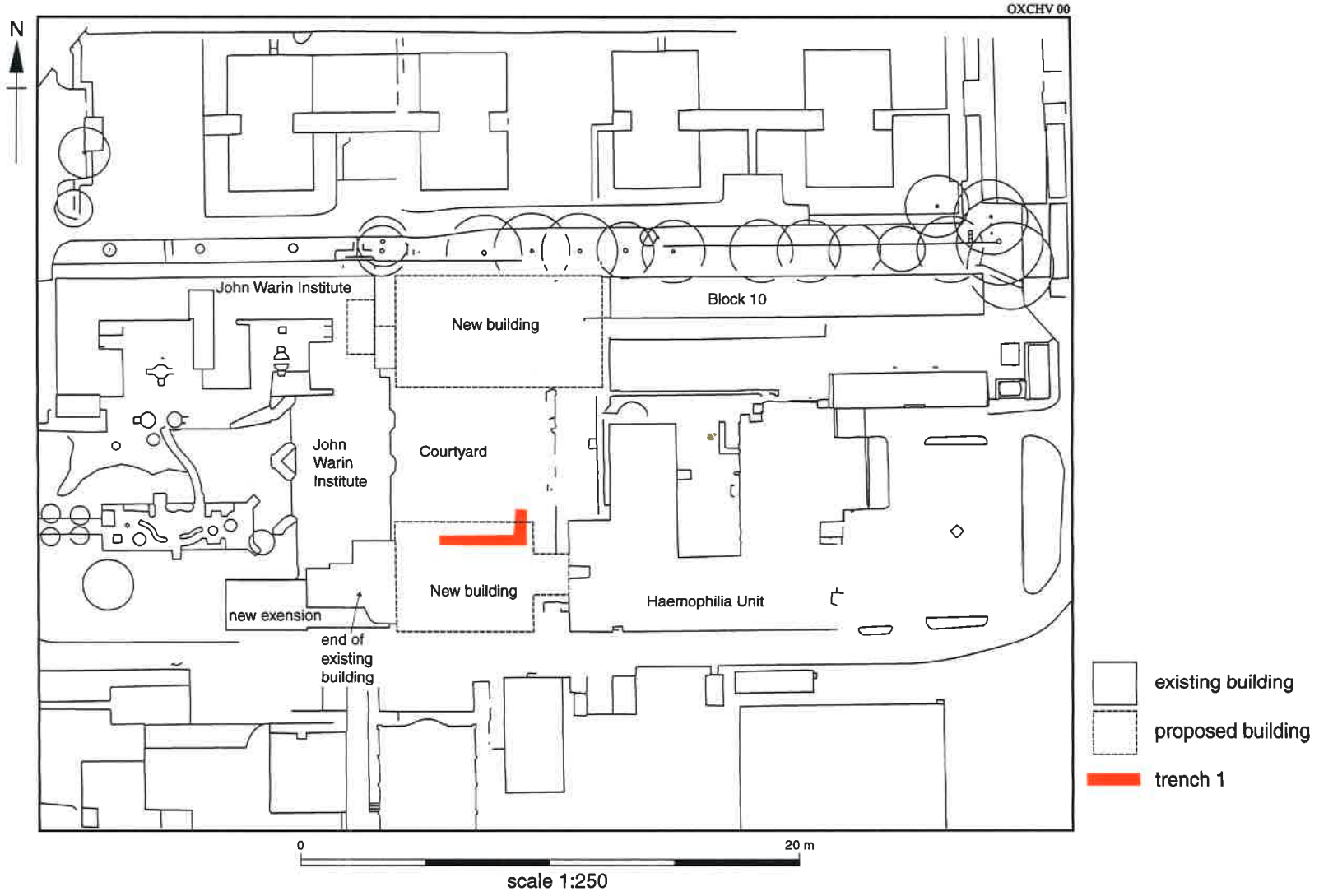
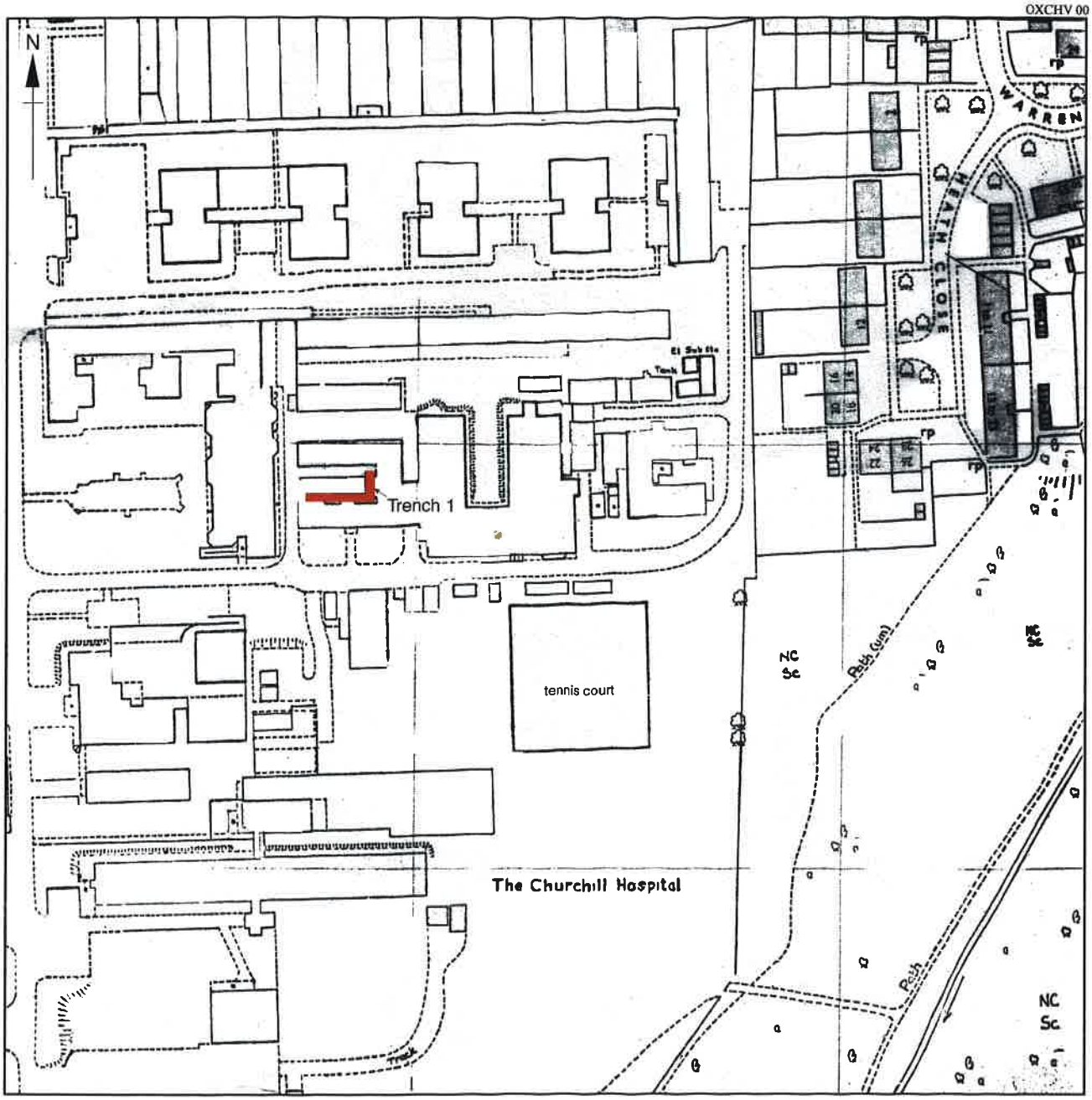


Figure 2: Trench location in relation to proposed development



scale 1: 1500

Figure 3: trench plan in relation to current OS map.

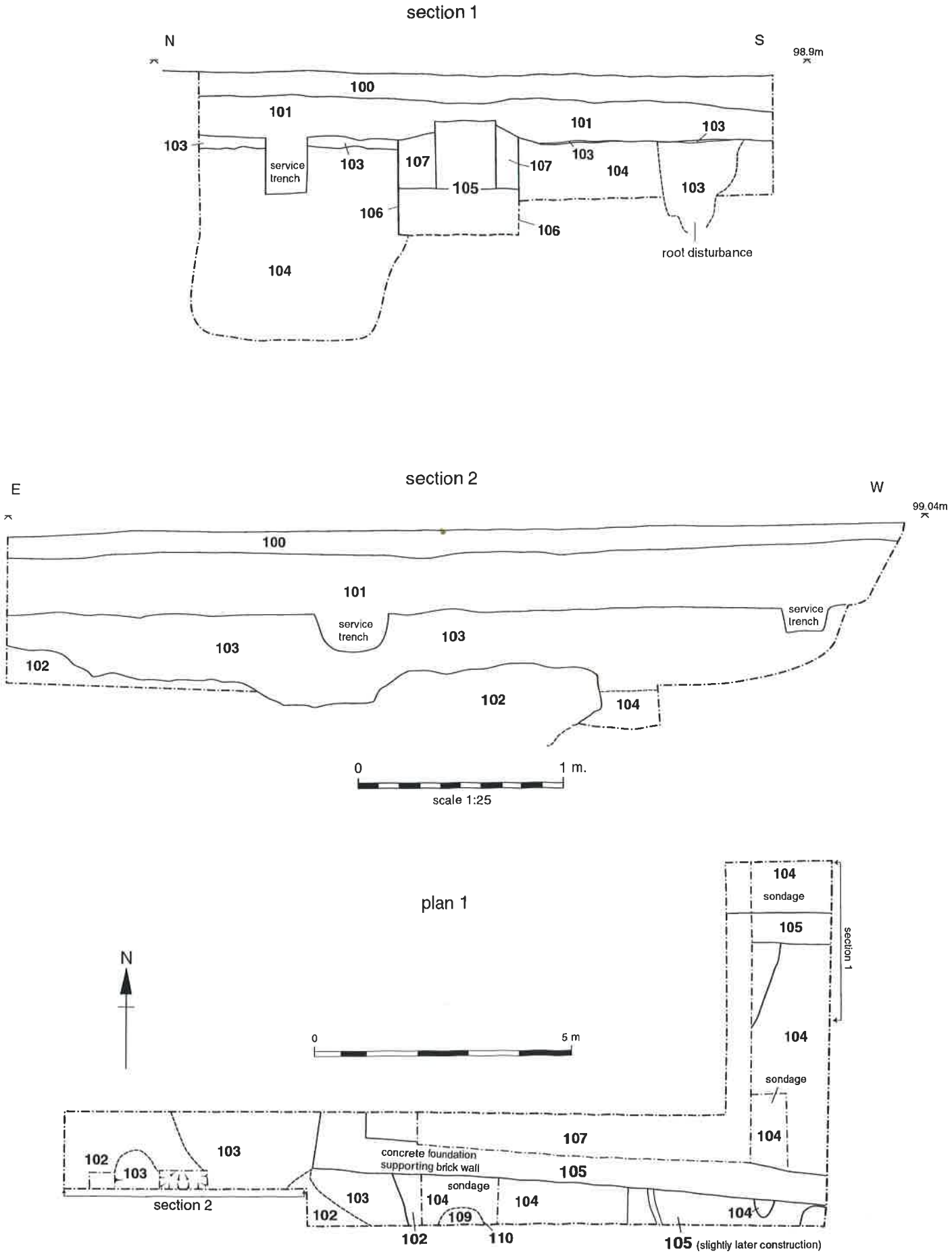


Figure 4: plan and sections.

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