

# Air Balloon Public House Ock Street Abingdon Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

5th June 2003

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# Former Air Balloon Public House, Ock Street, Abingdon Oxfordshire

NGR SU 4896 9698

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*In May 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the former Air Balloon Public House at Ock St, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 4896 9698). The work was undertaken on behalf of Thomas and Co, architects of Hungerford. The evaluation revealed a concentration of early medieval pits and a linear ditch.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In May 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the former Air Balloon Public House at Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 4896 9698).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken on behalf of Thomas and Co, architects of Hungerford, in respect of a planning application for the conversion of the existing property into two dwellings together with further apartments and town houses (Planning Application No. ABG/4771/6).
- 1.1.3 A project brief was set by Mr Hugh Coddington, representative for the Vale of White Horse District Council and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation prior to the fieldwork being undertaken.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on first terrace gravel at approximately 52 m above OD. The development site is situated to the rear of the standing property, on the north side of Ock Street and is 0.12 hectares in area. The ground surface at the time of the evaluation comprised tarmac.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 East of the proposed development site, archaeological excavations on the north side of Ock Street have established the presence of medieval buildings of timber-frame construction, with evidence for light industrial and domestic activities to the rear. Ock Street appears to have been an important thoroughfare in the medieval period but it remains unclear how far west along the street the medieval town extended.
- 1.3.2 South-west of the development site is Ock Bridge that dates to the 15th century; a bridge is documented here from the 11th century and it was also the site of the medieval hospital of St Mary Magdalen (OCAS 2003).
- 1.3.3 To the north and the north-west there is evidence for extensive prehistoric and Romano-British settlement, and recent excavations at Spring Road, just north of Ock Street, suggest a small Saxon site with sunken featured buildings lies within the site of the municipal cemetery (OA, forthcoming).

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 These were to determine the location, extent, date, character and state of preservation of any archaeological remains surviving on the site.
- 2.1.2 To determine the presence/absence of environmental material and where necessary to recover samples for analysis.
- 2.1.3 To clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The fieldwork was originally to comprise three trenches each 1.6 m wide with a combined length of 30 m. Trench 1 was abandoned after consultation with Mr Coddington, owing to the presence of a 19th century standing building.
- 3.1.2 The final trench layout is shown on figure 2.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted, initially, with a breaking tool, and then with a toothless, bladed ditching bucket. The mechanical excavation was carried out to the top of the first archaeological horizon from where all subsequent excavation was carried out by hand.
- 3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20.
- 3.2.3 All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed 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 bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No deposits of palaeo-environmental significance were encountered during the fieldwork.

## 4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 4.1 Description of deposits

#### *Trench 1*

- 4.1.1 This trench was not excavated due to obstructions within this area of the courtyard.

#### *Trench 2*

- 4.1.2 Trench 2 was located centrally in the area designated for development (Fig. 1). This trench was 'L'-shaped and measured 10 m north to south and 8 m east to west. The trench had a maximum depth of 1.2 m. Natural gravel and sand (208) was encountered at 1.2 m.
- 4.1.3 The natural (208) was cut by two pit features (Fig. 2). The largest of the pits (206) was located at the north end of the trench. This pit was elliptical in shape and was 3 m wide. Although the full length of the feature was not exposed, 1.6 m of the length (probably about half of the pit) was visible in the trench. The sides of the pit were steep and may have been stepped although later truncation had removed much of the evidence. The pit had a flat base and a total depth of 1.9 m and has been interpreted as a gravel quarrying pit. It was filled by a single fill (207) comprising a mid yellow-brown silty loam. This deposit contained medieval pottery sherds dating from late 11th century AD.
- 4.1.4 A second pit (204) was located to the centre of Trench 2 and exhibited signs of truncation. The feature was sub-circular in plan with a projected diameter of 1.75 m. The fill (205) was not excavated but closely resembled that of pit 206.
- 4.1.5 A large linear feature (202), possibly a ditch or a large pit filled most of Trench 2. This feature was at least 2 m and cut the fills of pits 204 and 206. The feature had gently sloping sides but the base was not exposed, as its depth exceeded 1.2 m. Feature (202) has been interpreted as a quarry pit. It was filled by a single bulk fill (203), a dark grey-brown silty loam that resembled a garden soil. No finds were recovered from this feature.
- 4.1.6 The features in the trench were sealed beneath a layer of modern material up to 0.3 m thick (201) comprising hardcore, crushed brick, tile and stone rubble. This layer formed the base for the overlying tarmac surface (200).

#### *Trench 3*

- 4.1.7 Trench 3 was located in the south-east corner of the development area (Fig. 3). The trench was orientated east-west and measured 10 m in length and 1.6 m in width. Natural geology (312) was encountered at 0.5 m below ground level.
- 4.1.8 The natural (312) was cut by five pits and a possible ditch feature. A large linear feature (305), possibly a ditch was revealed at the eastern end of the trench. Only its western edge was visible and although the feature was not excavated, it measured over 1.5 m wide and contained a mid-grey brown silty clay (306) which produced 19th century pottery sherds, glass and animal bone.



- 4.1.9 At the centre of the trench, a large pit (307) measuring 1.75 m in diameter was found. This was filled by a dark grey brown sandy clay (308) which was not excavated but contained pieces of slate of likely post-medieval or modern date.
- 4.1.10 In the north-western corner of Trench 3 were two pit like features. Pit 309 appeared roughly circular measuring 1.5 m in diameter and was filled by a light brown silty sand deposit (310) containing pottery of possible medieval date. Overlying this deposit was what appeared to be a dump of large stone (311), which although clearly randomly placed, may have acted as pad or packing for a post. Cutting this pit to the west was an irregular square shaped pit (313) measuring 1.2 m in length by 1 m in width were visible. This pit was filled by a mid grey brown sandy loam containing occasional flecks of charcoal and pottery dating it to the 19th century.
- 4.1.11 A further two small pits were revealed in the south-western end of this trench, opposite pits 309 and 313. Pit 315 was sub-rectangular in shape, featuring concave sides and measuring 1.1 m by 0.55 m and 0.4 m deep. The shape of this pit suggests it was used to support a large post, though no evidence of a secondary post-pipe fill was found. The pit contained a single mid brown silty clay fill which produced bone, rusted metal and pottery which was dated to the 11th century. This feature was later cut by another sub-rectangular shaped pit (317) with concave sides and measuring 0.45 m by over 0.25 m were visible. It was filled by a mid yellow brown silty clay which produced no dating evidence.
- 4.1.12 All features revealed in Trench 3 were overlain by clay deposits (303 and 304) indicative of garden soils measuring 0.35 m in total. These deposits were then overlain by modern deposits of sand (302 and 301) measuring up to 0.30 m deep, used as a bedding layer for the tarmacadam courtyard surface (300).

## 4.2 Finds

### *Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn*

- 4.2.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 28 sherds with a total weight of 944 g. All the pottery was either early medieval or modern. The early medieval assemblage comprised a small number of generally large sherds, including the full profile of a jar from context 207. The vessel was sooted, and indicates that there is well-preserved medieval remains in the immediate vicinity of the excavations.
- 4.2.2 The assemblage was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:
- OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 11 sherds, 599 g.
  - OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 3 sherds, 78 g.
  - OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 2 sherds, 171 g.
  - WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> C. 12 sherds, 96 g.

- 4.2.3 The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1 General

- 5.1.1 Given the evidence of medieval timber framed buildings, light industrial and domestic activities identified from previous excavations further to the east of this site on the north side of Ock Street, the spread of early medieval pits found in Trenches 2 and 3 support the idea that this site was used for quarrying and other domestic functions such as waste pits. The presence of some possible post holes may also indicate an earlier timber structure, as found at the north side of Ock Street, though whether it was a structure such as a house or barn, or simply more quarry or domestic pits is at this stage not possible to determine. Clearly the remains of timber houses found in the north of Ock Street are not present on this site, although evidence of such structures could have been removed in later periods. The evidence would therefore suggest the site was an open area during the early medieval period and when combined with evidence from the previous investigations in Ock Street, helps build a broader picture of early medieval activities in 11th century Abingdon.
- 5.1.2 The presence of 19th century pottery sherds found in the top fills of pits in Trench 3 may suggest activity from this period, however the fact that these pits (bar pit 315) were not excavated means that these finds may be intrusive from the later garden soil deposits and would therefore mean all features had their origins in the medieval period.

### 5.2 Reliability of field investigation

- 5.2.1 Although Trench 1 was not excavated due to obstructions, Trenches 2 and 3 provided a good coverage of the available area to be evaluated. The concentration of archaeological remains found within these trenches also give a good representation of the archaeological potential of the site.

### 5.3 Overall interpretation and Significance

- 5.3.1 There was no evidence for prehistoric or Roman remains on the site other than from the 11th century AD. The notable concentration and nature of pits and singular ditch revealed indicates that this site is likely to have been the focus of light industrial and domestic activity which helps confirm early medieval land use of this area and while not of national or regional significance, is of local importance to our understanding of early settlement in Abingdon.

#### *Summary of results*

- 5.3.2 Concentration of medieval pits, possible post holes and linear ditch feature dating to the early medieval period with evidence of 19th century pottery in some pits likely to have come from the Victorian garden soil overlying and sealing these features.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench No.	Context No.	Width	Thickness	Type	Description	Finds/Date
2	200	1.6	0.05	Dep	Tarmac	
2	201	1.6	0.3	Dep	Made Ground	
2	202	5	1.2	Cut	Fill	
2	203	0.8	1.2	Dep	Garden Soil	
2	204	1.75	Unexcavated	Cut	Pit	
2	205	1.75	Unexcavated	Dep	Fill	
2	206	2.5	1.9	Cut	Quarry Pit	
2	207	2.5	1.9	Dep	Fill	L11thC
2	208	N/A	N/A	Dep	Natural	
3	300	1.6	0.1	Dep	Tarmac	
3	301	1.6	0.1	Dep	Sand	
3	302	1.6	0.2	Dep	Sand	
3	303	1.6	0.15	Dep	Garden Soil	
3	304	1.6	0.2	Dep	Garden Soil	
3	305	1.5	Unexcavated	Cut	Linear	
3	306	1.5	Unexcavated	Dep	Fill	19thC
3	307	1.75	Unexcavated	Cut	Pit	
3	308	1.75	Unexcavated	Dep	Fill	
3	309	1.5	Unexcavated	Cut	Pit	
3	310	1.5	Unexcavated	Dep	Fill	L11thC?
3	311	1.7		Dep	Boulders	
3	312	N/A	N/A	Dep	Natural	
3	313	1	Unexcavated	Cut	Pit	
3	314	1	Unexcavated	Dep	Fill	19thC
3	315	0.55	0.4	Cut	Pit	
3	316	0.55	0.4	Dep	Fill	L11thC
3	317	0.25	Unexcavated	Cut	Post Hole	
3	318	0.25	Unexcavated	Dep	Fill	

## APPENDIX 2 POTTERY DATING INVENTORY

*Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type.*

	OXBF		OXY		OXDR		WHEW		
Context	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
207	4	459	1	32					L11thC
306					2	171	8	46	19thC
310			1	39					L11thC?
314							4	50	19thC
316	7	140	1	7					L11thC
Total	11	599	3	78	2	171	12	96	

**APPENDIX 2    BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

Hassall et al, Excavations at St Ebbe's *Oxoniensia* 49, 181-219.

Mellor, M, 1984 A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century in TG

Mellor, M, 1994 Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region    *Oxoniensia* 59, 17-217

OA, forthcoming *Prehistoric, Roman and Saxon discoveries at Spring Gardens Municipal Cemetery, Abingdon*, by Tim Allen, Jonathan Hiller and Zena Kamash (Oxford Archaeology Monograph Series, forthcoming, 2003)

**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Former Air Balloon Public House, Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** ABABPH 03

**Grid reference:** SU 4896 9698

**Type of evaluation:** 2 trial trenches

**Date and duration of project:** May 2003 - 2 days

**Area of site:** 0.12 hectares

**Summary of results:** Concentration of early medieval quarry and waste pits and linear ditch

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

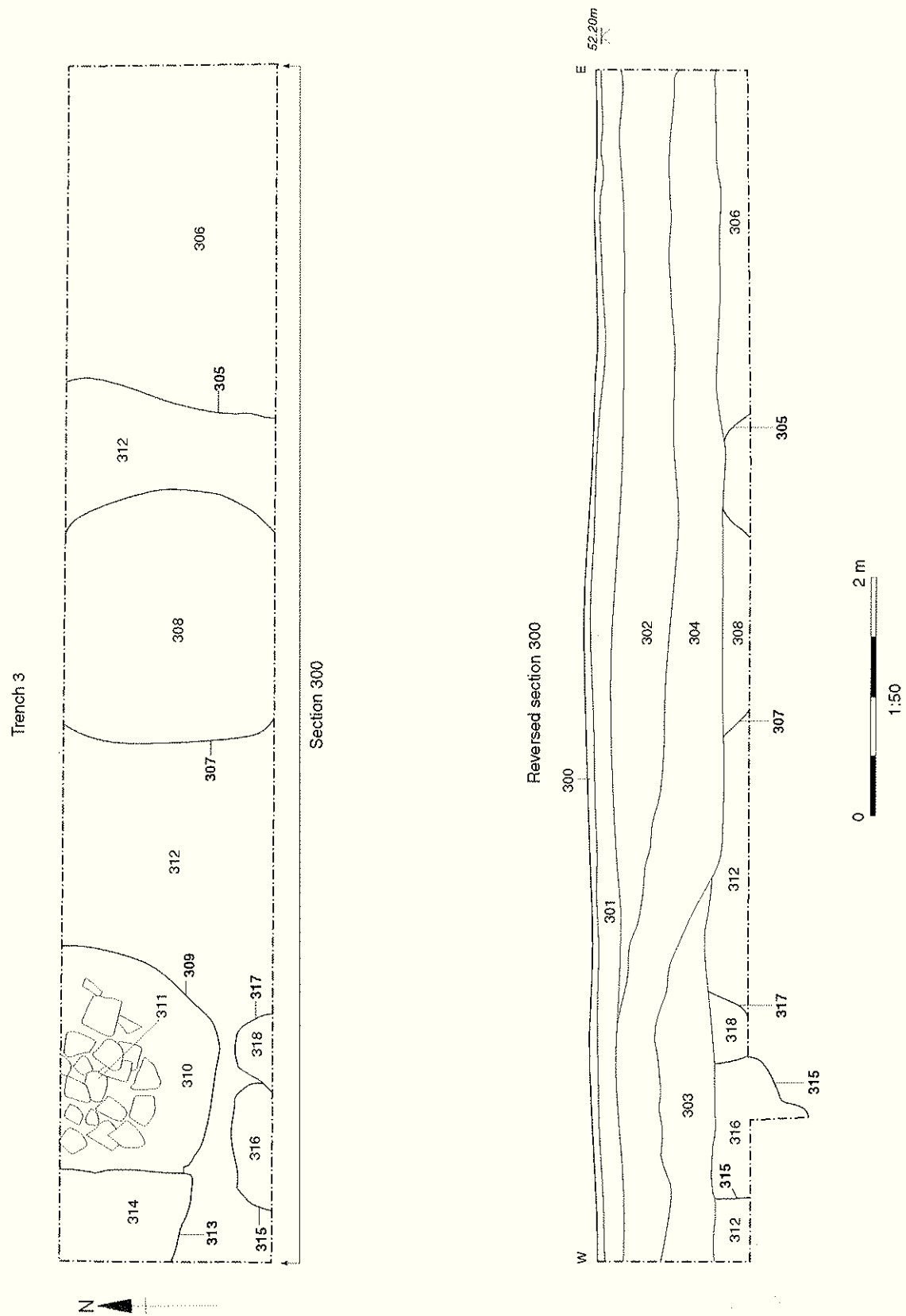


Figure 3: Trench 3-Plan and Section

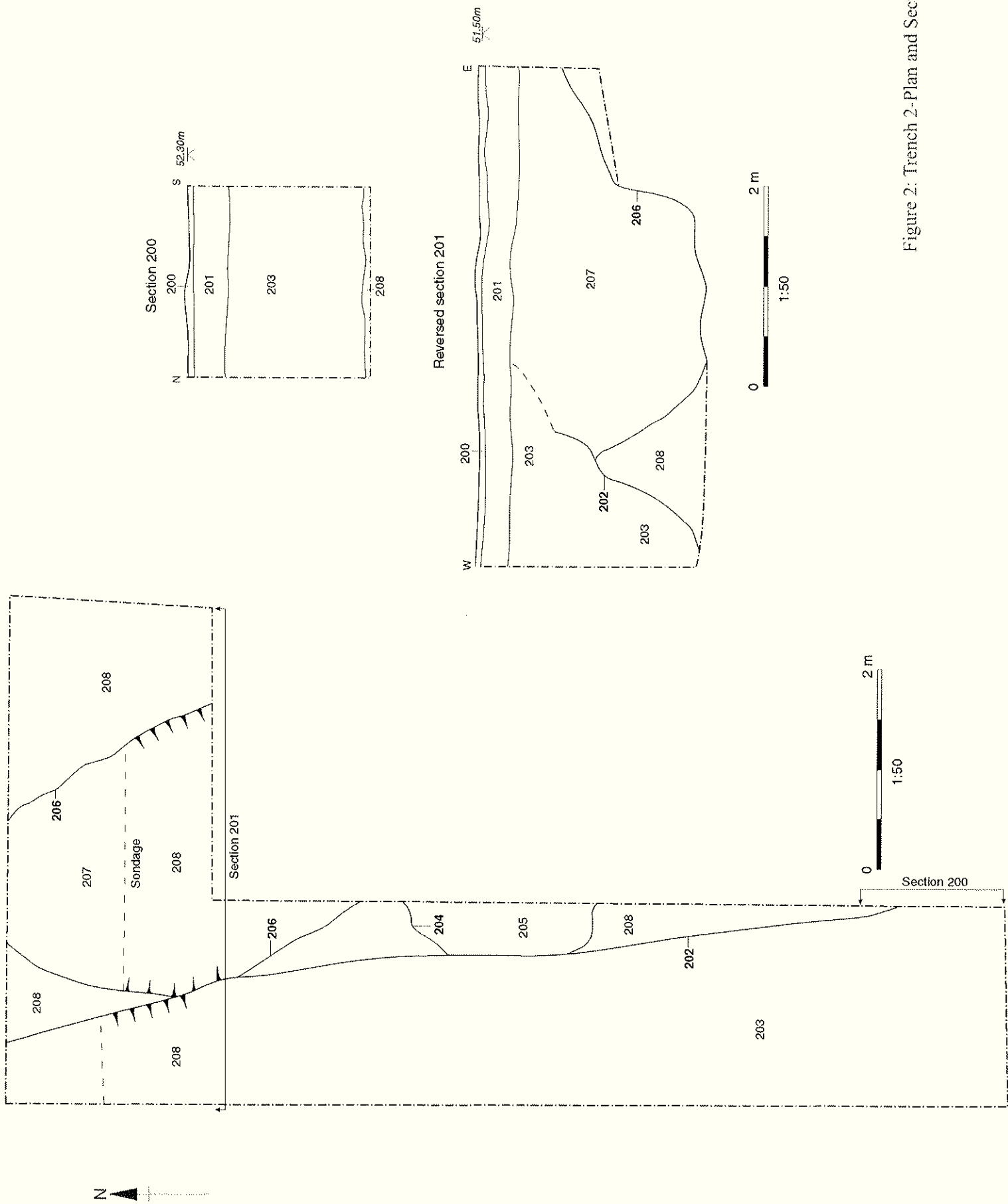


Figure 2: Trench 2-Plan and Sections



Figure 1: Site Location