

# Rectory Farm Stanton St. John Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

10th June 2003

**Client: Thomas & Co.**

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**Rectory Farm, Stanton St. John  
Oxfordshire**

NGR SP 5765 0944

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## Summary

*In May 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Rectory Farm Stanton St. John, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 5765 0944) on behalf of Thomas & Co. Five trenches were opened in the course of the work. No archaeological findings were made in Trenches 1, 2 and 3. A 19th-century metalled surface was found in Trench 4. The most significant archaeological feature was a north-south aligned ditch found at the south end of Trench 5. The upper fill of the ditch has been dated to the post-medieval period, however no dating evidence was discovered from its primary fills. Nonetheless, its orientation and proximity to the nearby church suggests that it could be the remains of a previous boundary. No evidence associated with the ditch was found in the other trenches.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In May 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Rectory Farm Stanton St. John, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1) on behalf of Thomas & Co. The work was carried out in respect of a planning application for the erection of 6 new dwellings, and the conversion of a stone barn together with a new access road (Planning Application No. P99/No 659).
- 1.1.2 A brief was set by set by Paul Smith, Oxfordshire's County Archaeologist (OCMS 2002) and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would implement the requirements of the brief (OA 2002).
- 1.1.3 The development site is situated immediately west of St. John the Baptist's Church at Pound Lane, in the centre of the village (NGR SP 5765 0944 - Fig. 2).

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The modern parish of Stanton St John lies a few miles east-north-east of Oxford (Fig. 1) and straddles the Upper Jurassic Corallian ridge of the 'Oxford Heights' at approximately 104 m above OD (BGS, 237). To the north-east, the parish includes an extensive area of low-lying clay vale, above which the lower slopes of the ridge are occupied by a belt of woodland. To the south-west, a local outcrop of Beckley Sand of the Corallian series is located.
- 1.2.2 The ridge is capped by Wheatley Limestone, including shelly freestone interspersed with much harder Coral Rag. Much of the village below the ridge to the south lies on calcareous sandstone close to the 100 m OD spring-line. Rectory Farm was immediately west of St John the Baptist church, the core of the early settlement. Prior to demolition, the land was in use as a farm yard with outbuildings.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The account presented here is derived from Volume V of the Victoria History of the County of Oxford and a forthcoming publication by Gilmour on a study of the



medieval manor of Stanton St John. The majority of the information has been presented in the WSI and is only summarised here.

- 1.3.2 Domesday records a settlement with a place name derived from the Old English “stan-tun”, meaning “the homestead of stony ground”. The record makes reference to a ten-hide estate which has been suggested by Gilmour to indicate that it was still in its original form, created as a grant of land from part of the great Saxon royal estate of *Hedanadun*. Although there is no direct dating evidence, this process elsewhere in England appears in significant number from the end of the 9th century and increasingly during the early 10th century. Gilmour goes on to suggest that although Stanton’s church cannot be traced further back than its 12th century documentary and structural evidence, there is a good reason to believe that, along with a considerable number of others, it occupies the site of an early 10th century church.
- 1.3.3 To the north is Woodperry and Woodperry farm. In 1716, Thomas Hearne noted that Woodperry was formerly a town, and that the foundations of buildings were often discovered. Excavations in 1838 revealed the site of Woodperry’s medieval church. Excavations begun in 1953 revealed Roman occupation evidence and medieval material. Stowford Farm to the south-west of Stanton may represent the site of another lost hamlet, recorded in the Hundred Rolls of 1279.
- 1.3.4 Recent studies at the manor house (Manor Farm) at Stanton St. John, on the opposite side of Pound Lane north of the development area, have identified three 14th century ranges, including an inner gatehouse and two connected two-storey chamber blocks. All are set within an earlier layout, with parts of the barns and stables surviving, having been rebuilt at various times. The standing building at Manor Farm dates to the 16th-17th century and was the capital messuage of the manor; the Stanton St. John Rectory is now demolished. The George Inn dates to the 17th century while the Mill House to the east of the development site has its origins in the 16th-17th century.

#### 1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Thomas and Co. for providing plans of the development and Dr Gilmour for providing a draft text of a forthcoming publication on study at the medieval manor of Stanton St John.

### 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features and to make available the results of the investigation through a report

### 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of five trenches each placed within the centre line of the footprint of the proposed development units (Fig. 3). Trenches measured 20 m x 1.8

m and together represented 100 sq. m of the total development area - a 1.8% sample. A contingency for a further 10 sq. m of trenching was proposed to clarify points of detail if required, but was not used.

- 3.1.2 The overburden within each trench was excavated by mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a toothless bucket under close archaeological supervision. Thereafter, a limited amount of hand excavation of archaeological deposits was undertaken.
- 3.1.3 The trenches were excavated to the top of the 'natural' or to the top of any significant archaeological level, whichever was the higher. The exposed archaeological horizons were cleaned to identify and assess their status. Negative archaeological features were sampled with an aim of characterising and dating them.

#### 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

##### 4.1 Description of deposits

###### *Trench 1*

- 4.1.1 Trench 1 measured 20 m long and was aligned north-west/south-east parallel to Pound Lane. It was positioned in the centre of the proposed footprint of units 4 to 6 (Fig. 4).
- 4.1.2 The natural Wheatley Limestone bedrock (104) was identified throughout the trench between 104.96 and 104.80 m OD. A tenacious mid-orange brown sandy clay (103) subsoil overlay bedrock and was typically 0.1 m thick. The next deposit in sequence was a friable mid-brown clay loam (102) varying in thickness, probably due to truncation, between 0.05 m and 0.08 m. This was the remains of a previous topsoil that had been levelled in advance of the construction of the modern yard surface.
- 4.1.3 A rubble and sand make-up layer (101) 0.3m thick formed the bedding for the modern concrete surface (100) recorded here between 105.55 and 105.96 m OD.

###### *Trench 2*

- 4.1.4 Trench 2 (not illustrated) measured 20 m long and was aligned north-east/south-west adjacent to the site access. It was positioned in the centre of the proposed footprint of units 3 (Fig. 3). The natural Wheatley Limestone bedrock (203) was identified throughout the trench at a height varying between 104.92 and 104.36 m OD. This was overlain by a tenacious mid-yellow brown sandy clay subsoil (202) that was 0.44m thick.
- 4.1.5 This layer had probably been levelled in advance of the construction of the modern yard surface. A rubble and sand make-up layer (201), 0.3m thick, overlay the subsoil and formed the bedding for the modern concrete yard surface (200) found at a height between 105.11 and 105.67 m OD from end to end.



### *Trench 3*

- 4.1.6 Trench 3 (not illustrated) was 20 m long and aligned approximately east- west. It was positioned in the centre of the proposed footprint of the south wing to unit 2, adjacent to the southern perimeter of the development site (Fig. 3).
- 4.1.7 A natural sandy clay and Wheatley Limestone bedrock (304) was identified throughout the trench (although not exposed where service lines crossed) at a height varying between 104.65 and 103.22 m OD. This was overlain by a tenacious light yellowish brown silty clay subsoil (303) typically 0.14 m thick that formed the base for the construction of the modern yard surface. A loose light grey sandy silt (302) make-up deposit that comprised 40% broken ceramic material overlay subsoil.
- 4.1.8 This was below a further rubble make-up deposit (301), 0.4m thick, which created the platform for the modern concrete yard surface (300). The modern surface was recorded between 105.4 and 104.22 m OD from end to end.

### *Trench 4*

- 4.1.9 Trench 4 (Fig. 5) was 12 m long and aligned approximately north-east/south-west (Fig. 3). It was dug between the survey points for the east end of trench 5 and 3, positioned slightly askew of the centre of the proposed footprint of the eastern section of units 1 and 2. St John the Baptist's churchyard was adjacent to the garden plots of these proposed residential dwellings. A mid-orange brown sandy clay natural (407) was identified at the base of the stratigraphic sequence and was cut by a north-east/south-west aligned feature, at least 8.3m wide. Only the southern boundary of the shallow cut was within the trench excavation.
- 4.1.10 A metalled yard surface (405) made from limestone fragments was found at the base of the excavation within cut 406 at approximately 103.25m OD. This was probably contemporary with the cut - perhaps an attempt to consolidate ground in the farmyard. A dark grey sandy silt (404) about 0.15m thick had accumulated on the surface and contained wood fragments. It was overlain by a loose mid-brown clay loam (402) that contained about 10% limestone rubble and was 0.4 m deep at the north end and 0.10m at the south end of the trench. This deposit levelled the area in advance of the construction of the modern surface that comprised a make-up platform of brick rubble (401) below the modern concrete yard surface (400). The modern surface was recorded at 104.24m OD.

### *Trench 5*

- 4.1.11 Trench 5 (Figs 6 and 7) was 20 m long and aligned north-west/south-east (Fig. 3). It was positioned in the centre of the proposed footprint of the north wing to unit 1, adjacent and parallel to Pound Lane. The natural Wheatley Limestone bedrock (510) was identified throughout the trench at approximately 104 m OD.
- 4.1.12 A mid-yellowish brown subsoil derived deposit (502) overlay bedrock and was typically 0.7m thick. At the southern end of the trench, a north-south aligned ditch (504) with a flattened U-shaped profile cut through layer 502 (figure 3). The ditch or channel was 4.7 m wide and 1.7 m deep. Its primary fill (511) was a mid-greenish grey sandy silt about 0.08m thick that contained no finds. A laminated grey organic

silt (505) overlay the primary fill and contained wood and plant remains. An iron nail and fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) were the only artefactual evidence recovered here.

- 4.1.13 Layer 505 was overlain by a mixed light grey and light yellowish brown silt (506) that contained large stones and was 0.8m deep. It is possible that this accumulated after the disuse of the original feature. A dark grey silt (507) was stratigraphically above fill 506 to the south and itself overlain by a firm very dark brown silt with fragments of CBM further to its south. Ditch fills 506, 507 and 509 were sealed by a firm very dark grey brown silt (508), 0.4m thick, which contained large stones. Glass, CBM and a residual flint object were identified in this fill, which is believed to date to the post-medieval period.
- 4.1.14 This was overlain by a levelling layer (503) of dark greyish brown silt that contained rubble that had been used as the platform for the modern concrete yard surface (501). The modern surface was recorded at 104.04 m OD.

## 4.2 Finds

- 4.2.1 Few finds were recovered during the evaluation and only those identified in trenches 4 and 5 were retained. Pottery associated with the metallised surface identified in trench 4 (405) has been dated to the 19th century. No secure dating evidence has been obtained from the original fills (511 and 505) of ditch 504. Artefacts from the upper fill of the ditch date to the post-medieval period.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 5.1.1 The trench excavations have targeted the areas of greatest impact within the development area and the profile of the archaeological remains that has been ascertained is thought to be reliable.
- 5.1.2 Few archaeological features have been identified and this may be due to truncation caused by the landscaping and resurfacing of the farm yard surface during the course of its use.
- 5.1.3 No archaeological findings were identified in Trenches 1, 2 and 3. A 19th century metallised surface was cut into the natural geology in trench 4, possibly to consolidate the ground. At the southern end of trench 5, a north-south aligned ditch (504) was found (figure 3). Although the upper fill (508) of the ditch can be dated with confidence to the post medieval period, no reliable dating evidence has been obtained within its primary fills to provide an indication of the date of its origin.
- 5.1.4 The orientation of the feature and its proximity to the church suggests that it could represent a previous boundary, dividing the property of Rectory Farm from St John's the Baptist's Church. However, without dating evidence an earlier date that pre-dates the medieval origins of the settlement, like those excavated at Woodperry for example, cannot be ruled out. No evidence associated with the ditch was found in either trench 3 or 4.



- 5.1.5 The significance of the discovery of ditch 504 can currently be classified as low to medium, although this cannot be satisfactorily determined without dating evidence.

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| Trench | Ctxt No | Type  | Width (m)     | Thickness (m) | Comment               | Finds          | Date          |
|--------|---------|-------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1      | 100     | layer | trench width  | 0.1 m         | concrete              | N/A            | modern        |
| 1      | 1011    | layer | trench width  | 0.3 m         | make-up               | N/A            | modern        |
| 1      | 102     | layer | trench width  | 0.05-0.08 m   | previous soil         | N/A            | post-medieval |
| 1      | 103     | layer | trench width  | 0.1 m         | sub soil              | N/A            | geological    |
| 1      | 104     | layer | trench width  | N/A           | natural               | N/A            | geological    |
| 2      | 200     | layer | trench width  | 0.1 m         | concrete yard surface | N/A            | modern        |
| 2      | 201     | layer | trench width  | 0.3 m         | make-up               | N/A            | modern        |
| 2      | 202     | layer | trench width  | 0.4 m         | subsoil               | N/A            | geological    |
| 2      | 203     | layer | trench width  | N/A           | natural               | N/A            | geological    |
| 3      | 300     | layer | trench width  | 0.1 m         | concrete yard surface | N/A            | modern        |
| 3      | 301     | layer | trench width  | 0.4 m         | make-up               | N/A            | modern        |
| 3      | 302     | layer | trench width  | 0.1 m         | make-up               | N/A            | modern        |
| 3      | 303     | layer | trench width  | 0.14 m        | subsoil               | N/A            | geological    |
| 3      | 304     | layer | trench width  | N/A           | natural               | N/A            | geological    |
| 4      | 400     | layer | trench width  | 0.18 m        | concrete yard surface | N/A            | modern        |
| 4      | 401     | layer | trench width  | 0.2 m         | make-up               | N/A            | modern        |
| 4      | 402     | layer | trench width  | 0.4           | levelling layer       | N/A            | post-medieval |
| 4      | 403     | layer | 8.3 m         | 0.1 m         | re-deposited subsoil  | N/A            | post-medieval |
| 4      | 404     | layer | 7.1 m         | 0.15 m        | silt accumulation     | N/A            | post-medieval |
| 4      | 405     | fill  | 2.7 m         | 0.08          | limestone surface     | Pottery        | 19th century  |
| 4      | 406     | cut   | 8.3 m         | 0.4 m         | Construction cut      | N/A            | post-medieval |
| 4      | 407     | layer | N/A           | N/A           | Natural               | N/A            | geological    |
| 5      | 501     | layer | trench width  | 0.18 m        | concrete yard surface | N/A            | modern        |
| 5      | 502     | layer | trench width  | 0.7 m         | re-deposited subsoil  | N/A            | unknown       |
| 5      | 503     | layer | trench width  | 0.45 m        | levelling layer       | N/A            | post-medieval |
| 5      | 504     | cut   | 4.7 m         | 1.7 m         | Ditch                 | N/A            | Unknown       |
| 5      | 505     | fill  | base of ditch | 0.05-0.25 m   | primary fill          | Iron nail, CBM | Unknown       |

|   |     |       |               |        |                |                   |               |
|---|-----|-------|---------------|--------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 5 | 506 | fill  | within ditch  | 0.8 m  | secondary fill | N/A               | Unknown       |
| 5 | 507 | fill  | within ditch  | 0.2 m  | secondary fill | CBM               | Unknown       |
| 5 | 508 | fill  | within ditch  | 0.4 m  | Upper fill     | Flint, glass, CBM | post-medieval |
| 5 | 509 | fill  | within ditch  | 0.2 m  | secondary fill | CBM               | Unknown       |
| 5 | 510 | layer | trench width  | N/A    | natural        | N/A               | geological    |
| 5 | 511 | layer | base of ditch | 0.08 m | primary fill   | N/A               | Unknown       |

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

*British Geological Survey, 237, 1995*

Gilmour, B *A study of the medieval manor of Stanton St. John, Oxfordshire. Oxoniensia, forthcoming*

OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual (First edition, ed. D Wilkinson August 1992)*

OA 2002 *Rectory Farm, Stanton St. John, Oxfordshire. Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation*

OCMS 2002 *Rectory Farm, Stanton St. John, Oxfordshire. Design brief for an archaeological evaluation*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Rectory Farm, Stanton St. John, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** SSJRF 03

**Grid reference:** NGR SP 5765 0944

**Type of evaluation:** 5 trenches, 1.8% sample

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

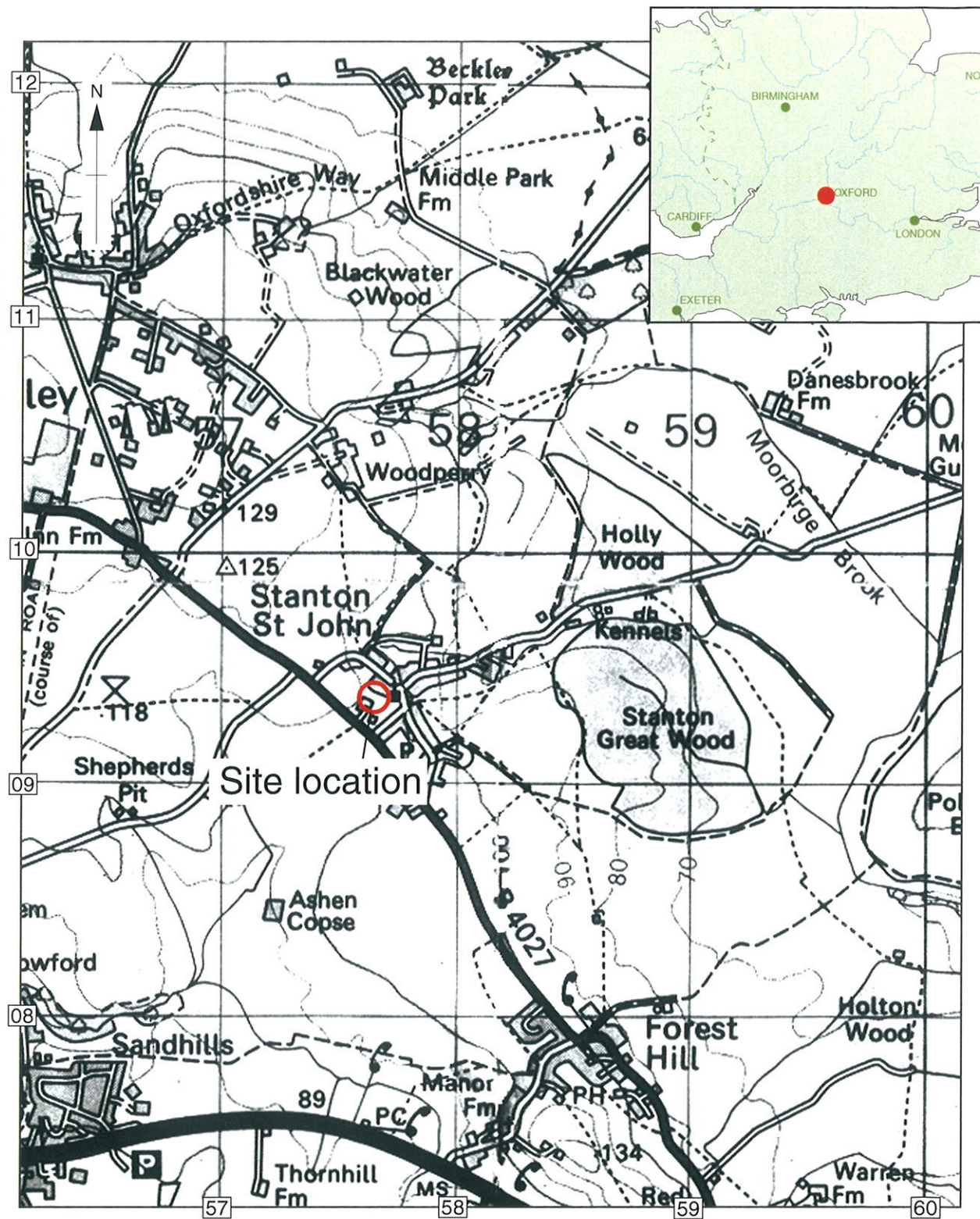
**Area of site:** 1ha

**Summary of results:** A single ditch of probable post-medieval date and a 19th century former yard surface were the only significant finds.

**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: OCMS 2002.54







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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Area of development



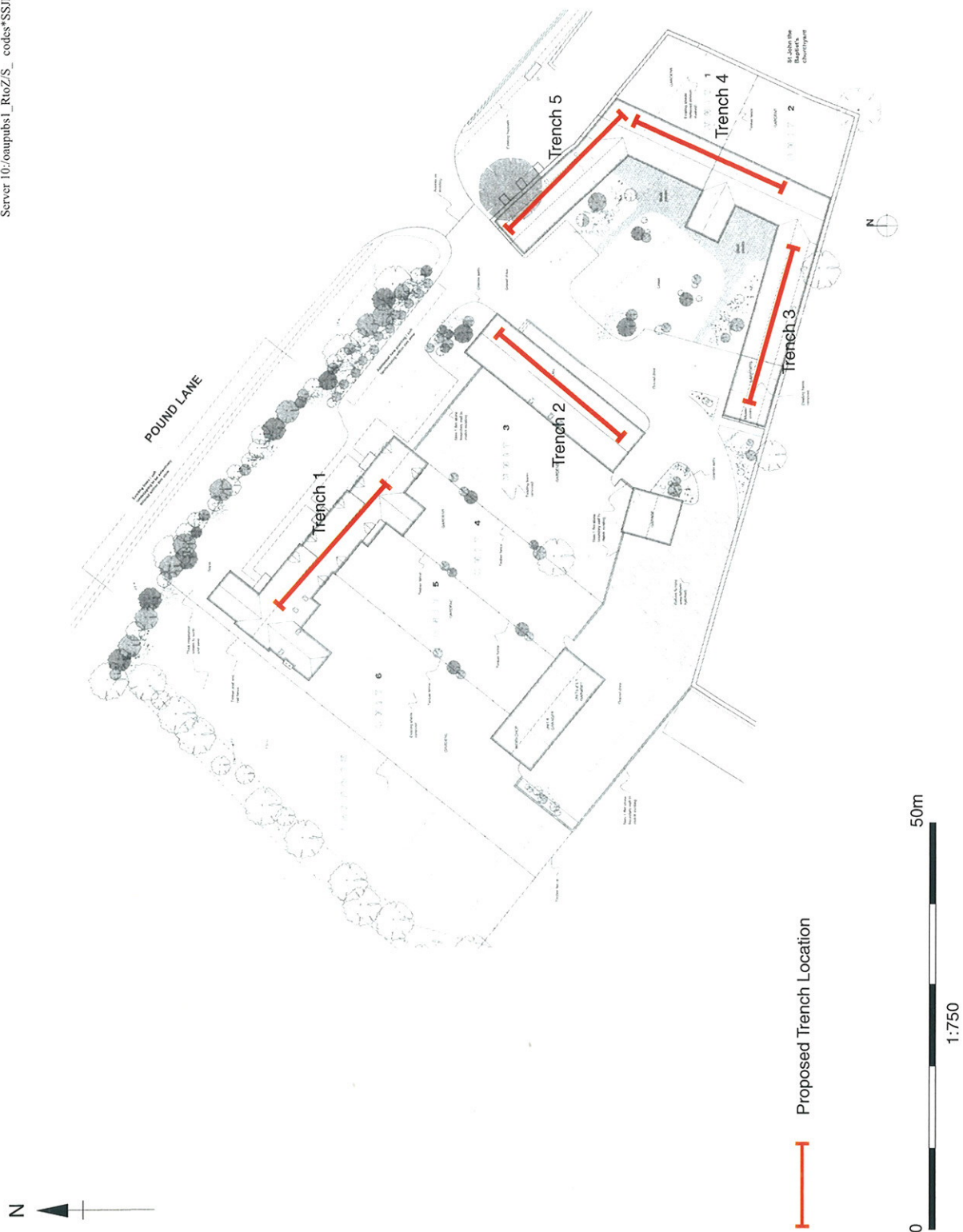


Figure 3: Trench location plan and proposed development

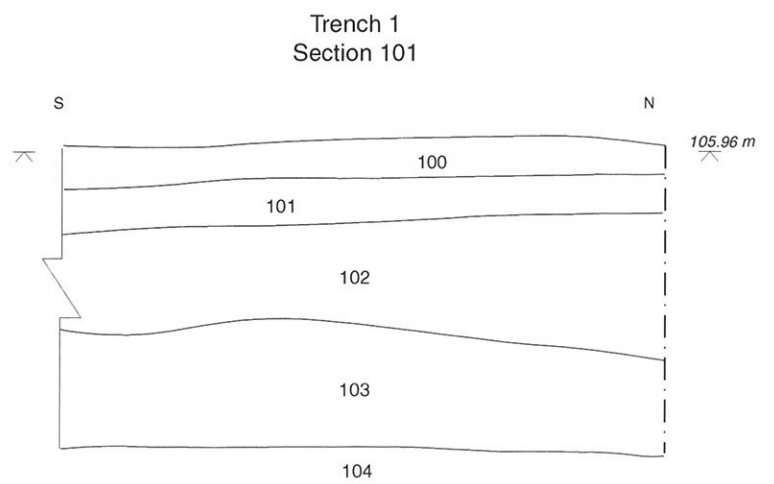
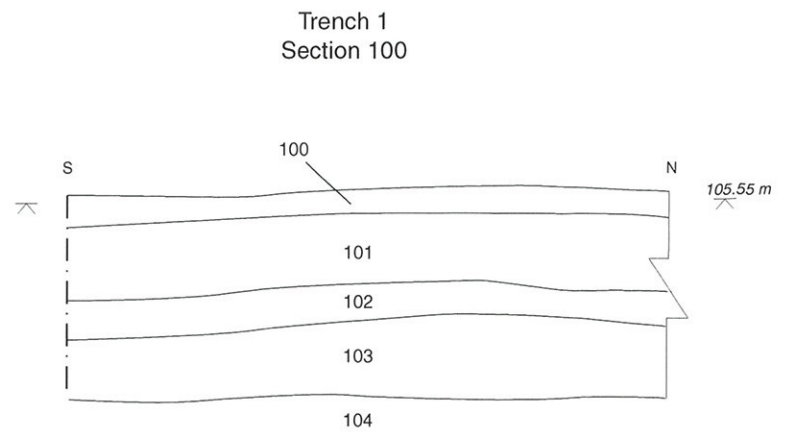
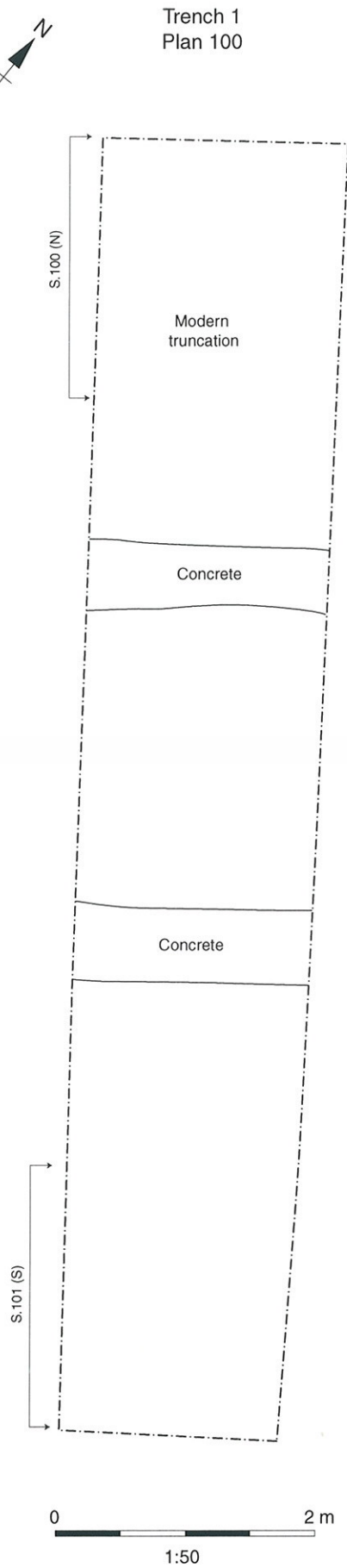
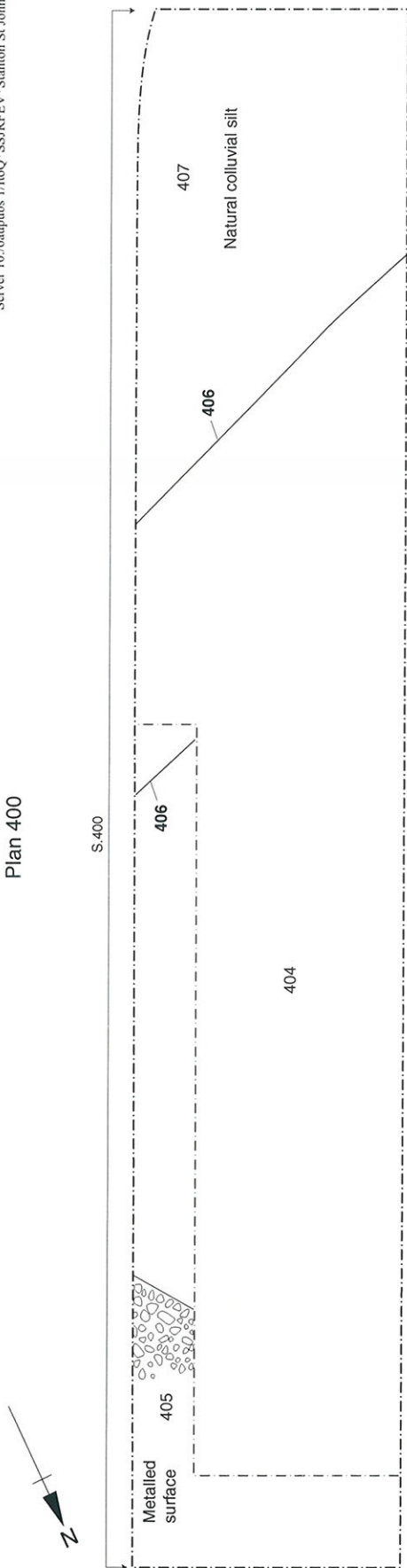


Figure 4: Trench 1, plan and section

# Trench 4 Plan 400

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# Trench 4 Section 400

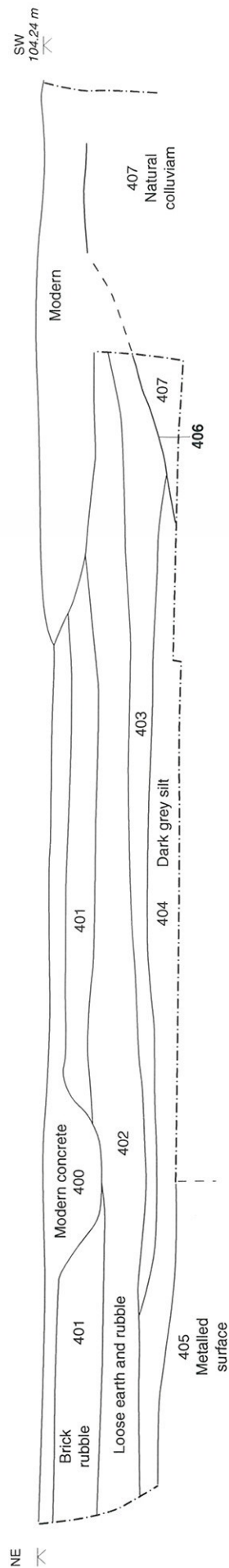
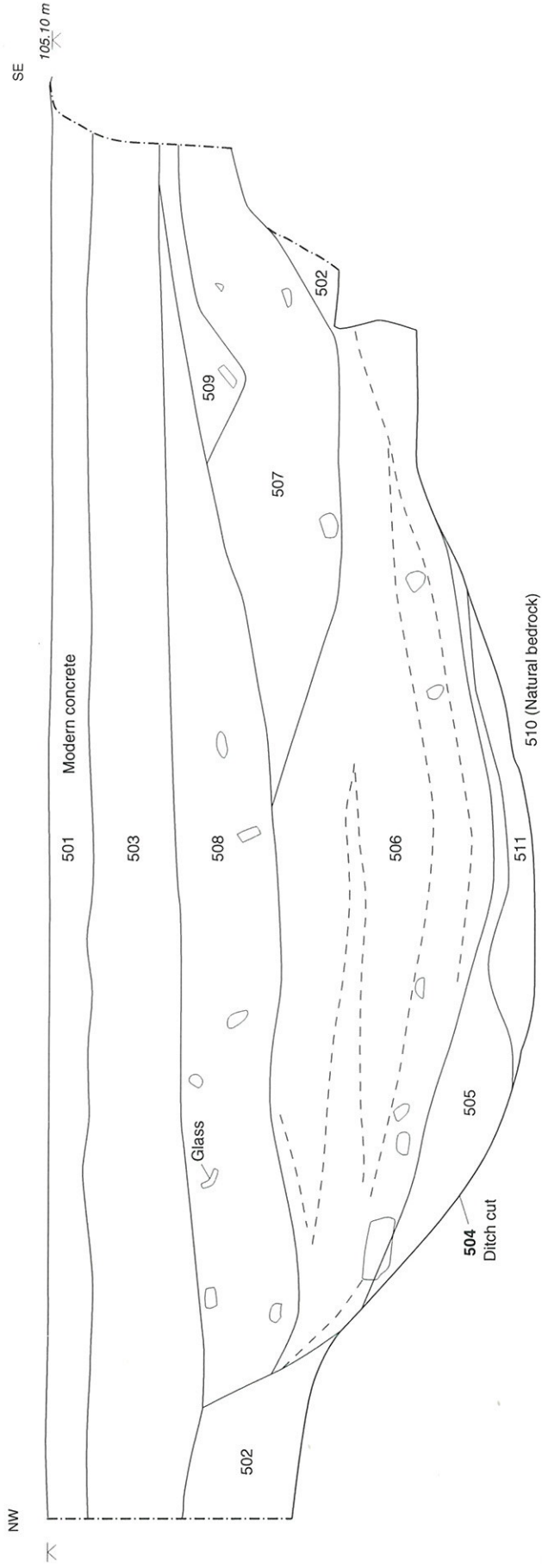


Figure 5: Trench 4, plan and section



Trench 5  
Section 500



Trench 5  
Section 501

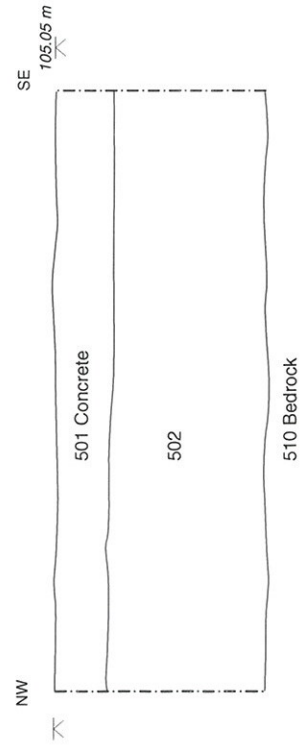


Figure 6: Trench 5, section 500 and 501

Trench 5  
Plan 500

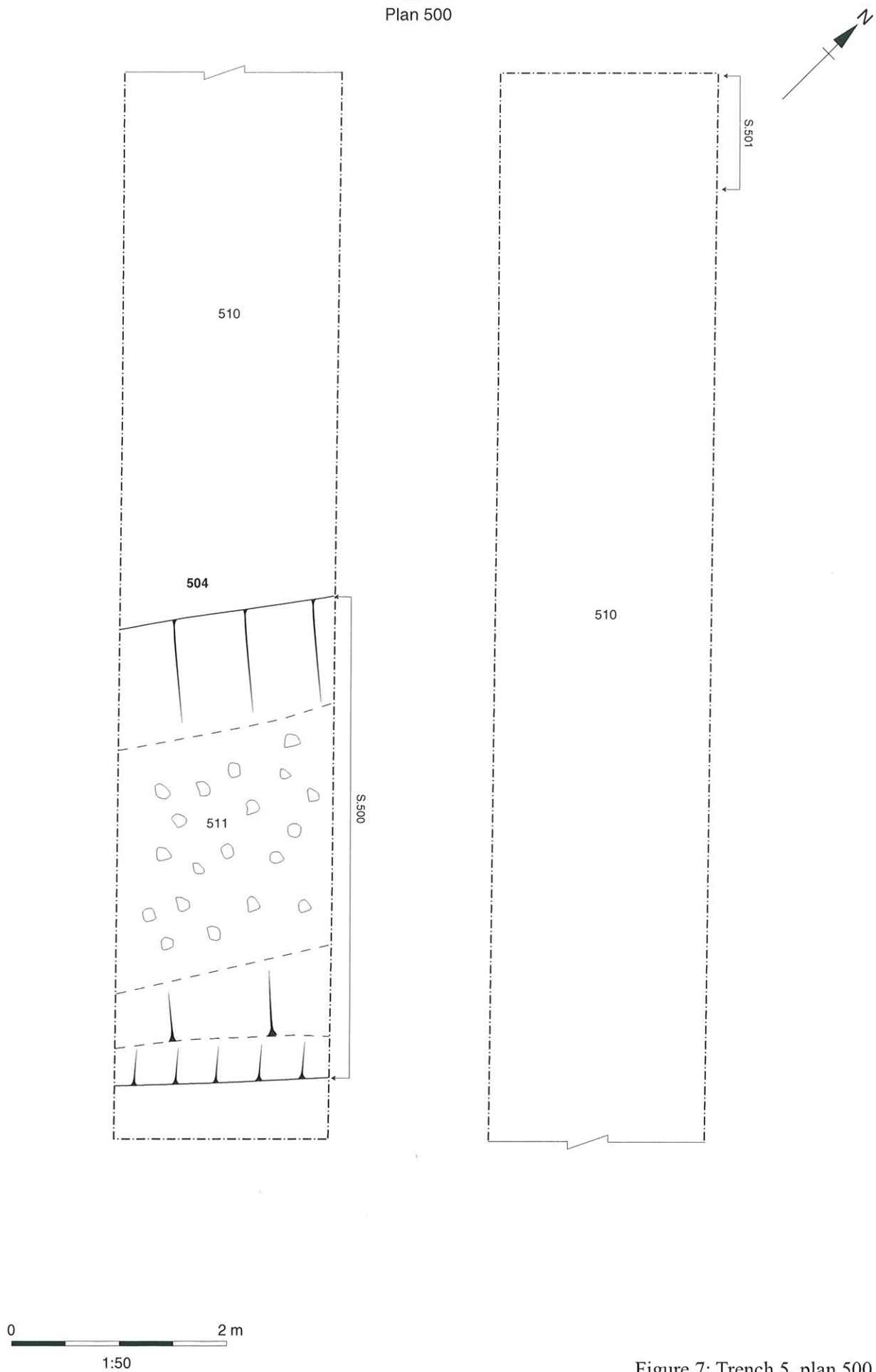


Figure 7: Trench 5, plan 500



Section line and number



Interior section line and number



Limit of excavation



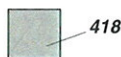
Sondage / Interior limit of excavation



Fill line and number



Cut line and number



Structure number



Unclear boundary



Stones



Hachures indicate inclination of slope  
inside excavated feature



Levels



Grid point





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