

Land adjacent to Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford



Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeology

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Land Adjacent to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

In February 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation adjacent to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (NGR SP 5152 0693), on behalf of Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd.

The trenches revealed a layer of buried 'supernatural' red/brown subsoil above the natural gravel, a common feature of Oxford sites. Above the natural in both trenches lay buried garden/orchard soils of post-medieval date. A Victorian quarrying pit was observed as well as modern 20th century services. No significant archaeology was identified within the trenches.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of Work

- 1.1.1 In February 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at land adjacent to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (NGR SP 5152 0693) on behalf of Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 Discussions took place between Brian Durham of Oxford City Council, McAlpines and Oxford Archaeology regarding an archaeological investigation of the site prior to the determination of the final mitigation strategy for the construction of a new building here.
- 1.1.3 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) outlining how it proposed to investigate the depth of natural deposits and the potential for archaeological remains on the site (OA 2005 - see Aims section 2), in the light of the known archaeology of the general area (Fig. 3). The proposed strategy for the evaluation involved the excavation of 2 trenches measuring 2 m by at least 5 m, placed to give a 2% sample of the area of the proposed development (Fig. 2).

1.2 Location, Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The area of proposed development lies within the University Science Area, south of University Parks and is bounded on the west by Parks Road with South Parks Road to the south. This area lies within the historic parish of Holywell.
- 1.2.2 The Rivers Thames and Cherwell both run within 1 km of the area of proposed development, which is situated on the edge of the Summertown-Radley gravel terrace. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay. South Parks Road, on the south side of the area of proposed development, is at 62.2 m OD. There is a slight upward slope towards the development site.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate extensive desk-based study (OA 2004, Impact Assessment), the results of which are summarised below. A Gazetteer (OA Nos. 1 - 39) used in the Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix 2.

Prehistoric (500,000 BP – 43 AD)

- 1.3.2 No archaeological finds or sites had been identified from within the area of proposed development. Within University Parks, aerial photographs show cropmarks including ring ditches or barrows (OA 36). Excavation has produced evidence for such features nearby (OA 3, OA 2). Ring ditches have been found in St Michael's Street and at the Sackler Library to the west. Neolithic and Bronze Age pits and Iron Age activity are known locally (OA 10, OA 14, OA 16, OA 12)

Roman Period (43 AD – 410 AD)

- 1.3.3 The clearest evidence for settlement comes from archaeological excavations to the west of Mansfield Road (OA 14), where two phases of ditched enclosure were found, (Booth & Hayden 2000, 291). The New Chemistry Laboratory site, 130 m to the south-east, contained ditches, gullies and an inhumation burial was also found (OA 16). Finds of Roman material have been recorded across the Study Area from the 19th century onwards (OA 7, OA 6, OA 27, OA 30, OA 32 and OA 37).

Saxon and medieval

- 1.3.4 Evidence for activity during the early Saxon period has been found at a number of locations across Oxford, including barrow burials at the Radcliffe Infirmary, c 750 m north-west of the area of proposed development. In the medieval period, the development site lay probably within the manor of Holywell, with which it was associated until the 19th century (Hibbert 1988, 315). It is probable that it was a mixture of arable land and meadow, the situation known to have existed during the later medieval and post medieval periods. Historic maps such as Loggan (1675) and Faden (1789) appear to confirm that the area of proposed development was farmland at this period. Loggan shows it as a mixture of arable and pasture, Faden as arable.

Post-medieval and later

- 1.3.5 In 1642-4 a series of defences were constructed around Oxford (OA 1). The area of proposed development is thought to have lain on the line of the outer defences. This is shown on Loggan's Map of Oxford, which marks surviving stretches of the earthworks. Archaeological excavations, most recently at the New Chemistry Laboratory (OA 16) have demonstrated the outline of these defences. In 1855-60 the University Museum was constructed and buildings for the various science faculties followed, establishing the Science Area on the north side of South Parks Road. On the south side of the road a number of villas were built for senior members of the University (Hibbert 1988 436). The 1st Edition OS Map of 1876 shows the first phase of these developments with the area of proposed development occupying part of the grounds to the rear of the new museum.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To locate the level of the natural gravel horizon where it was known that archaeological features might be expected, based on evidence recorded elsewhere in the area of the Museum.

- 2.1.2 To elucidate the nature, depth and profile of any features relating to the Civil War defences that were thought to pass through the site, in order to inform on the construction process and avoid any 'soft spots' during construction.
- 2.1.3 As a by-product of 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, to establish the presence/absence of any other archaeological remains within the proposal area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains that may affect further need for mitigation during the construction process.
- 2.1.4 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological deposits and features and to make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of Fieldwork

- 3.1.1 Two trenches were excavated by a mechanical excavator (JCB). The two trenches measured 6 m in length by 1.5 m to 1.8 m in width, and were located as indicated on the attached site plan (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.2 The trenches were targeted at foundation impacts for the new buildings and suspected areas of archaeological potential, specifically the supposed line of the Civil War entrenchments.
- 3.1.3 Trench 2 was moved from its proposed location in the WSI around a metre to the east due to adjacent structures, and again by about 0.5 m eastwards to avoid below ground services during excavation.

3.2 Fieldwork Methods and Recording

- 3.2.1 The evaluation trenches were machined under close archaeological supervision to the top of the first archaeological horizon or the natural geology, whichever was encountered first. Excavation of features and deposits was undertaken by hand.
- 3.2.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with the established *OA Field Manual* (OAU 1992). All contexts were allocated unique numbers. Colour transparency and black-and-white negative photographs were taken of all trenches and archaeological features. Trench plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50, which was appropriate for the level of archaeological remains encountered. Section drawings of features and sample sections of trenches were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. No finds of special interest were found during the evaluation.

3.4 Palaeo-Environmental Evidence

- 3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered during the course of works in this area.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

- 4.1.1 There was no evidence of significant or early archaeology within the study area. Both trenches revealed the same layer of 'supernatural' subsoil, which remained undisturbed except for late truncations from a tree bole and a large gravel quarry pit. This layer was thinner in Trench 1 and thickened in Trench 2 further to the west.
- 4.1.2 Garden/orchard soils were found in both trenches, however in Trench 2 they were heavily truncated by modern services.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1

- 5.1.1 Trench 1 was oriented roughly north-east/south-west (Figs 2 and 4) and measured 6.2 m in length, 1.8 m in width and 1.2 m to its maximum depth. The natural was found 0.9 m from the surface at the east end and at 0.98 m at the west end of the trench.
- 5.1.2 A layer of red/brown subsoil (102) overlay the natural gravel (109). This subsoil was an average of 0.14 m in thickness and was cut by a root disturbance (107) filled by sand 106 (Fig. 4, Section 1)
- 5.1.3 A thick layer dark brown loam (101) overlay 102 and the root disturbance and is interpreted as a garden or orchard soil of 19th century date (see Appendix 1 and section 5.2).
- 5.1.4 Cutting layer 101 was a substantial feature interpreted as a gravel quarry pit (104). It measured c 5 m in diameter and was at least 1.2 m in depth. It was filled by mixed gravely fills (103, 105 and 108 - which was seen in plan only - Fig. 4, Section 1) of which 105 contained pottery of 19th century date and a glass bottle. Fill 108 contained pottery and ceramic building material of 19th century date (see Appendix 1 and Table 1). The fills of the pit (104) and layer 101 were sealed by 0.3 m of modern overburden (100).

Trench 2

- 5.1.5 Trench 2 was aligned roughly north-south (Figs 2 and 5) and measured 6 m in length, 1.5 m in width and 1.35 m to maximum depth. The natural gravel was found 0.97 m from the ground surface at the north end and 0.84 m at the south end of the trench.
- 5.1.6 The trench contained 0.5 m of modern overburden including 0.05 m to 0.1 m of tarmac (200) and 0.4 m of made ground (201). Modern intrusions included two drains (204-206 and 210-211, Fig. 5).
- 5.1.7 Drain 204 truncated a tree-hole (207), which cut through the natural subsoil (202) and a buried garden/orchard soil (208), similar to the deposits in Trench 1.

5.2 Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

5.2.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 7 sherds with a total weight of 434 g. It was all of 19th century date. The group was recorded utilising the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXEST: English Stoneware, 1680+. 1 sherd, 167 g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19th - 20th centuries. 3 sherds, 97 g.

5.2.2 In addition, 3 sherds (170 g) of 19th century flower-pots, recorded in Table 1 as HE, were also noted. The fragment of English Stoneware is a late type, from a Seltzer bottle, and of 19th century date. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (g.) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	OXEST		WHEW		HE		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
101	1	167			1	14	19thC
105			3	97	1	132	19thC
108					1	24	19thC
Total	1	167	3	97	3	170	

Other finds by Leigh Allen (OA)

5.2.3 A glass medicinal bottle of Victorian date was recovered from context 105 and two pieces of post-medieval tile were found within 109. Context 208 contained two pieces of animal bone and an oyster shell and 209 a single piece of Victorian tile.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 Conditions for the work were good. Both trenches obtained a clear view of the natural gravel and of the natural subsoil.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 The natural gravel was found at 0.9 m to 0.98 m below ground in Trench 1 and at 0.84 m to 0.97 m below ground in Trench 2. Capped by a natural red/brown subsoil, the site appears to consist of cultivated soils into the 19th century, presumably predating the construction of the museum and buildings here in the later 19th century.

- 6.2.2 The survival of the natural subsoil indicates that there has not seen major truncation by features nor by modern services in the area evaluated. The gravel quarry pit may be associated with building activities on the site in the 19th century.
- 6.2.3 There was no evidence of prehistoric features or civil war activity in either trench. Based on these two trenches, the evidence thus far revealed suggests that archaeological significance of the site is low and the impact of any development in this area in terms of damage to the archaeological record would be minimal.
- 6.2.4 It is possible, nonetheless, that features of any period may exist on site, based on the known prehistoric remains in the University Parks and similar features nearby along the South Parks Road. The possibility of encountering Civil War here, features based on the historic map evidence, should likewise not be totally discounted.

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>No./ wt</i>	<i>Date</i>
001								
	100	Layer		0.30	Modern Overburden			Modern
	101	Layer		0.60	Buried Garden soils	Pot	3	19th C?
	102	Layer		0.14	'supernatural' subsoil			
	103	Fill		0.10	Fill of 104			
	104	Cut	6.0 in diameter	1.20	Gravel quarry cut			
	105	Fill		0.30	Fill of 104	Pot Glass bottle	3 1	19th C?
	106	Fill		0.08	Fill of 107			
	107	Cut	0.50	0.10	Root disturbance			
	108	Fill		0.70	Fill of 104	Pot CBM	1 1	19th C?
	109	Layer			Natural Gravel			
002								
	200	Layer		0.10	Tarmac			Modern
	201	Layer		0.38	Made Ground			Modern
	202	Layer		0.50	'supernatural' subsoil			
	203	Layer			Natural Gravel			
	204	Cut	0.30	0.50	Services Cut			Modern
	205	Fill			0.20 drainpipe			Modern
	206	Fill		0.15	Fill of 204			Modern
	207	Cut	1.80 in diameter	0.83	Tree-hole			19th C?
	208	Layer		0.20	Buried Garden soils	Bone Shell	2 1	
	209	Fill		0.83	Fill of 207	CBM	2	19th C?
	210	Cut			Services Cut			Modern
	211	Fill		0.50	Fill of 210			Modern

APPENDIX 2 GAZETTEER OF SITES WITHIN THE VICINITY OF DEVELOPMENT

Map with location of sites can be seen in figure 3

OA Number	Description
1	Civil War defences, line of. New fortifications were erected in 1642-4. Their line is based on a plan by De Gomme, and has been confirmed at several locations during archaeological excavation.
2	Ring ditch from Bronze Age barrow. Identified by OA during excavations at the new Gene Function Centre in 2002. Four inhumations were found.
3	Ring ditch from Bronze Age barrow. Cremation found at centre. Excavated by OAU at the Rex Richards and Rodney Porter Buildings between 1982 and 1993.
4	Construction work at New College School in 1959 uncovered sections of a Civil War ditch.
5	Excavations in the University Science Area in 1959 located a Civil War ditch.
6	Construction of University Museum in 1855-60. Artefacts including Roman pottery, jewellery and coins were found. The Civil War defences may have been uncovered.
7	Roman material, including quern and mortar fragments, were found at 2 South Parks Road in 1862-71.
8	Construction of University Observatory in 1876. Vase, possibly Roman, but probably 16th century, was found.
9	Roman vases and other artefacts were found during construction of Mansfield College in 1887.
10	Iron Age pottery and ditches, Roman coins and animal bone were found in excavations at the Rex Richards Building in 1993.
11	Medieval ploughsoils and a sherd of Iron Age pottery were found at the Sir William Dunn Laboratory during excavations in 1995-6.
12	Excavations at Mansfield College in 1992 targeted the likely line of the Civil War defences. A large ditch was found.
13	Evaluation by OAU behind 6-8 South Parks Road in 1996 found some medieval pottery and post-medieval material.
14	Excavations by OAU in 1998-9 on the Institute for American Studies site found a Neolithic pit, evidence for Roman occupation and the Civil War defences.
15	Excavations in Parks Road found ditches and a skeleton with Romano-British pottery.
16	Excavations on the New Chemistry Laboratory site in 1999-2002 found Neolithic/Bronze Age pits, evidence for Roman agriculture and the Civil War defences.
17	Roman urn and fibula found during construction of the Physiology Building in 1885.
18	Excavations in South Parks Road in 1970-1 near the Radcliffe Science Library found a number of ditches that appeared to be prehistoric in date.
19	Excavations in Parks Road in 1970-1 found two undated ditches, which lay on the supposed line of the Civil War defences.
20	Medieval seal from a garden in South Parks Road in 1862.
21	Medieval pottery from the University Parks was added to the Goldie Collection in the 19th century.
22	Undated skeleton found in South Parks Road, near Rhodes House in the 19th century.
23	Landscaped bank on east side of Rhodes House garden, excavated in 1979, may have formed part of Civil War defences.

24	Post medieval pottery and clay pipe was found at Manchester College in 1913 when Arlosh Hall was built.
25	17th century jug found near the Observatory in 1877.
26	Brass token, Edward Witts 1666, found in the University Parks in 1879.
27	Excavations in 1970-1 for an extension to the Radcliffe Science Library ditches and human remains. Romano-British pottery was also recovered.
28	Excavations at Keble College in 1971 found Romano-British pottery, but not the Civil War defences.
29	Excavations by OAU at St John's College in 1992 found 17th century deposits associated with quarrying. When the original buildings were constructed post-medieval pottery and clay pipes were found.
30	Excavations for a basement at the Department of Earth Sciences in 1990 found a ditch, thought to be prehistoric or Roman in date.
31	Excavations at the Clarendon Laboratory in 1872 found a large ditch. In 1908 three ditches were mapped in that location.
32	Excavations at the Radcliffe Science Library in 1933 found ditches, possibly Roman.
33	Excavations at the new Geology Department in 1946 uncovered a ditch at the SW corner, believed to be part of the Civil War defences.
34	Excavations for the Clarendon Laboratory in 1937-8 uncovered trenches which were probably part of the Civil War defences.
35	Excavations for a gas main in Parks Road in 1984 found an undated human femur.
36	Aerial photography in the University Parks has revealed a complex of cropmarks, representing enclosures, trackways and ring ditches.
37	Excavations between the Physiology and Zoology Departments in 1949 found Roman pottery and animal bone.
38	Excavations at the Clarendon Laboratory in 1956 found a pit containing Belgic pottery and animal bone.
39	Excavations in Museum Road in 2004 found a series of post-medieval quarry pits.

APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Land Adjacent the Pitt Rivers Museum

Site code: OXPRM05

Grid reference: SP 5152 0693

Type of evaluation: 2-Trench evaluation

Date and duration of project: 10th-11th of February, 2005

Area of site: 0.3 ha

Summary of results: The trenches revealed limited archaeological remains, all of post-medieval date. Natural gravel was sealed by a red-brown subsoil, in turn covered by thick cultivated soil layers. A quarry pit dating to the late 19th century and modern service trenches cut the garden soils.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Ashmolean Museum in due course.

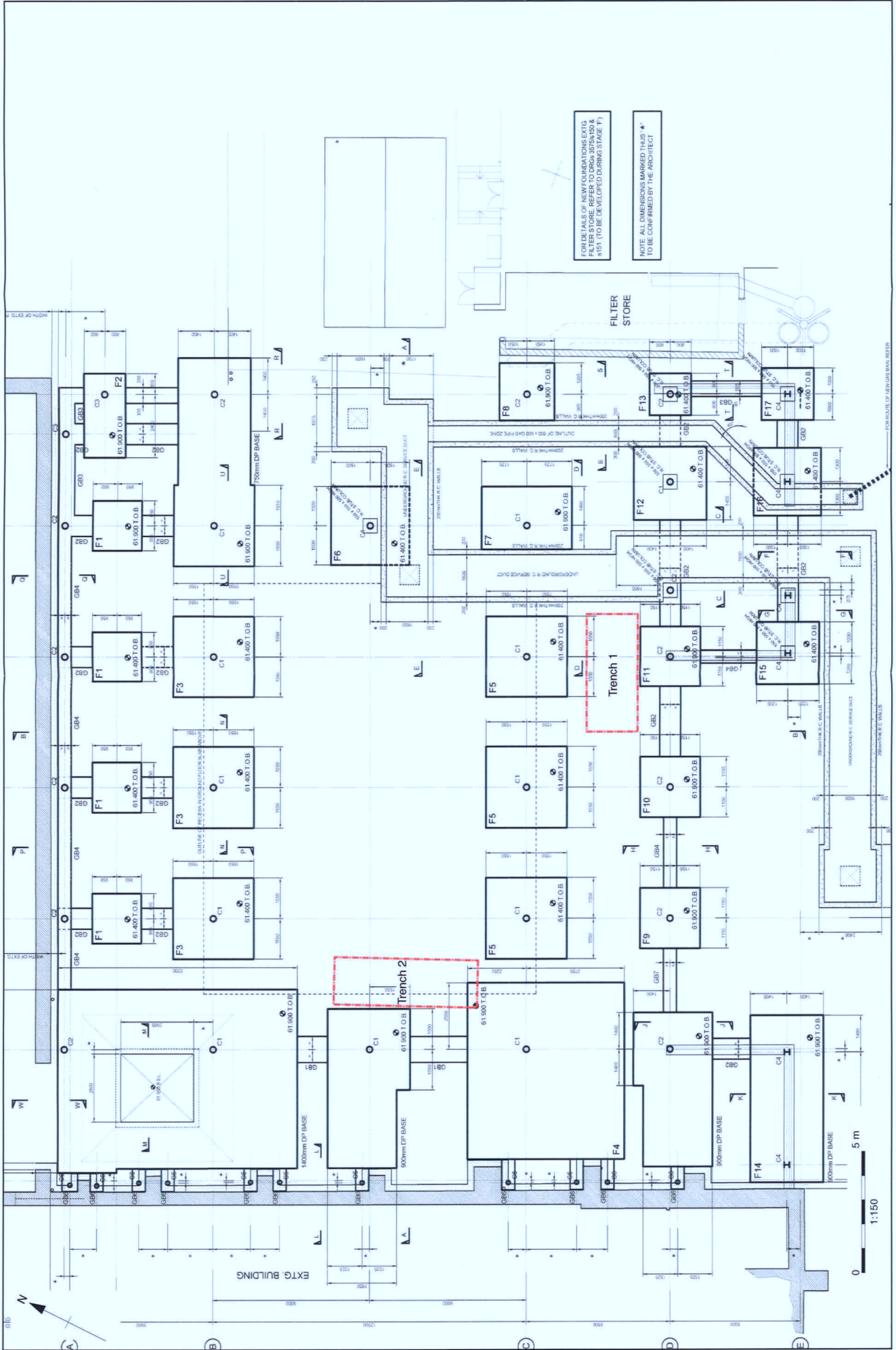
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Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



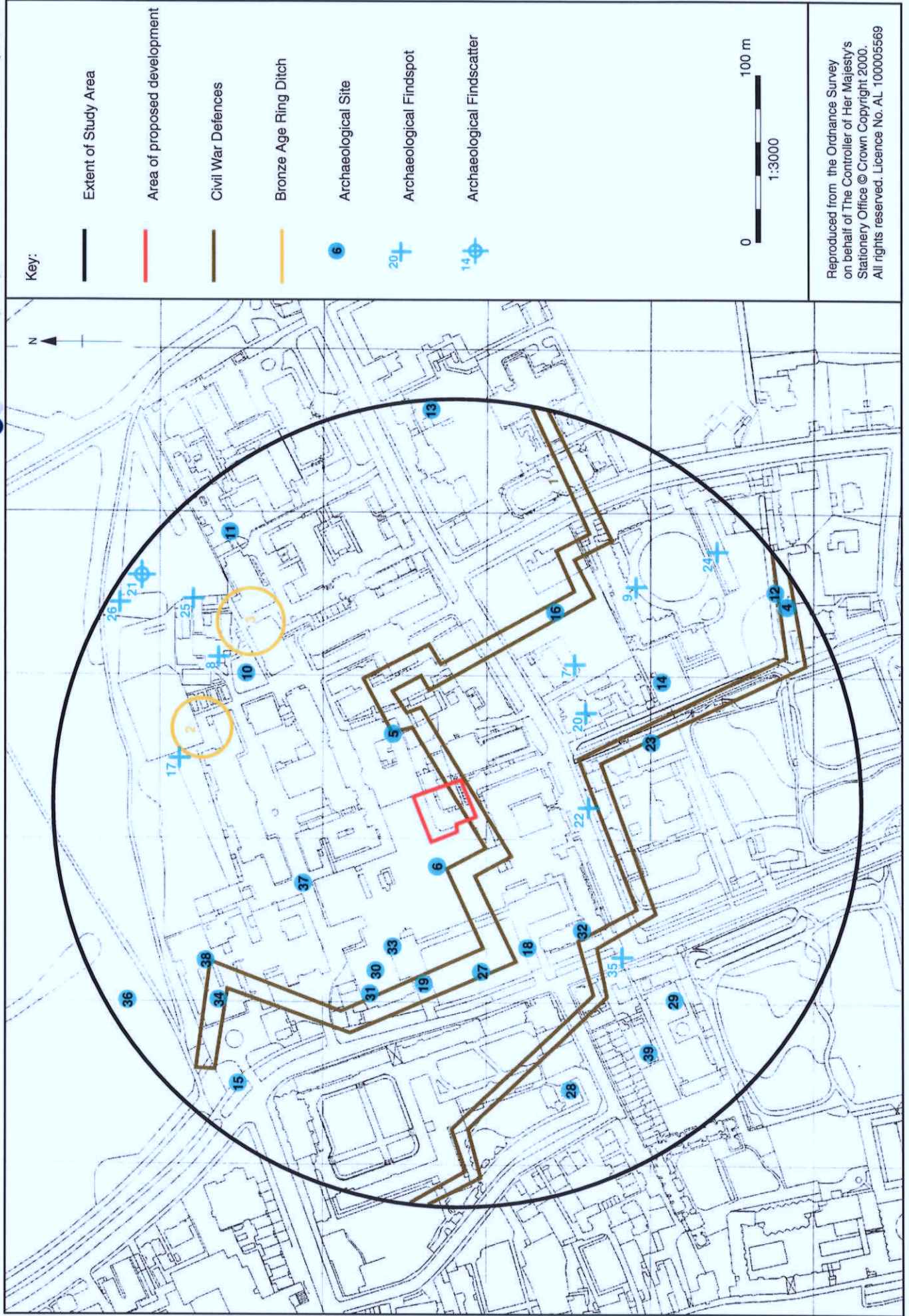


Figure 3: Archaeological Features Map

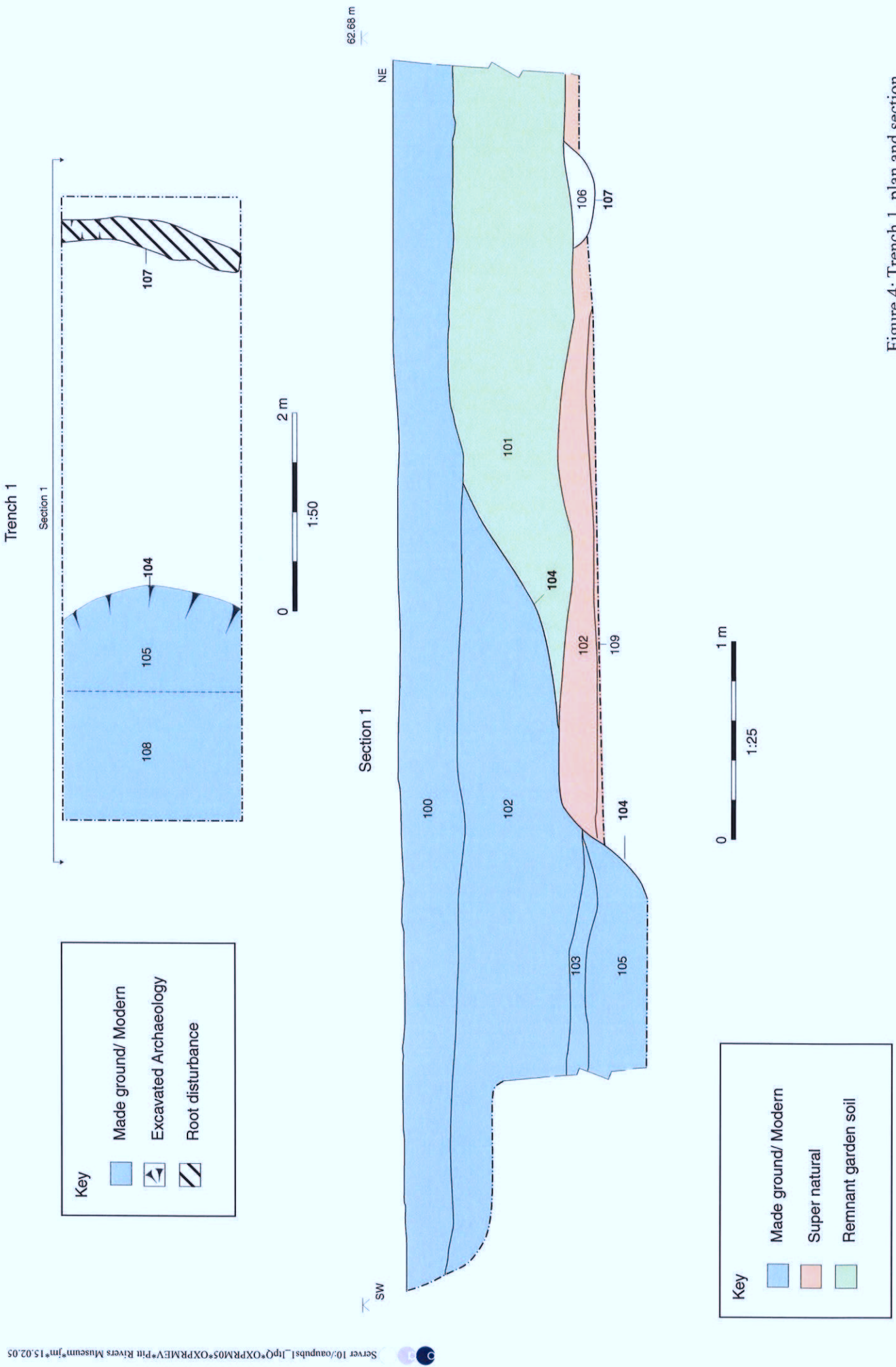


Figure 4: Trench 1, plan and section

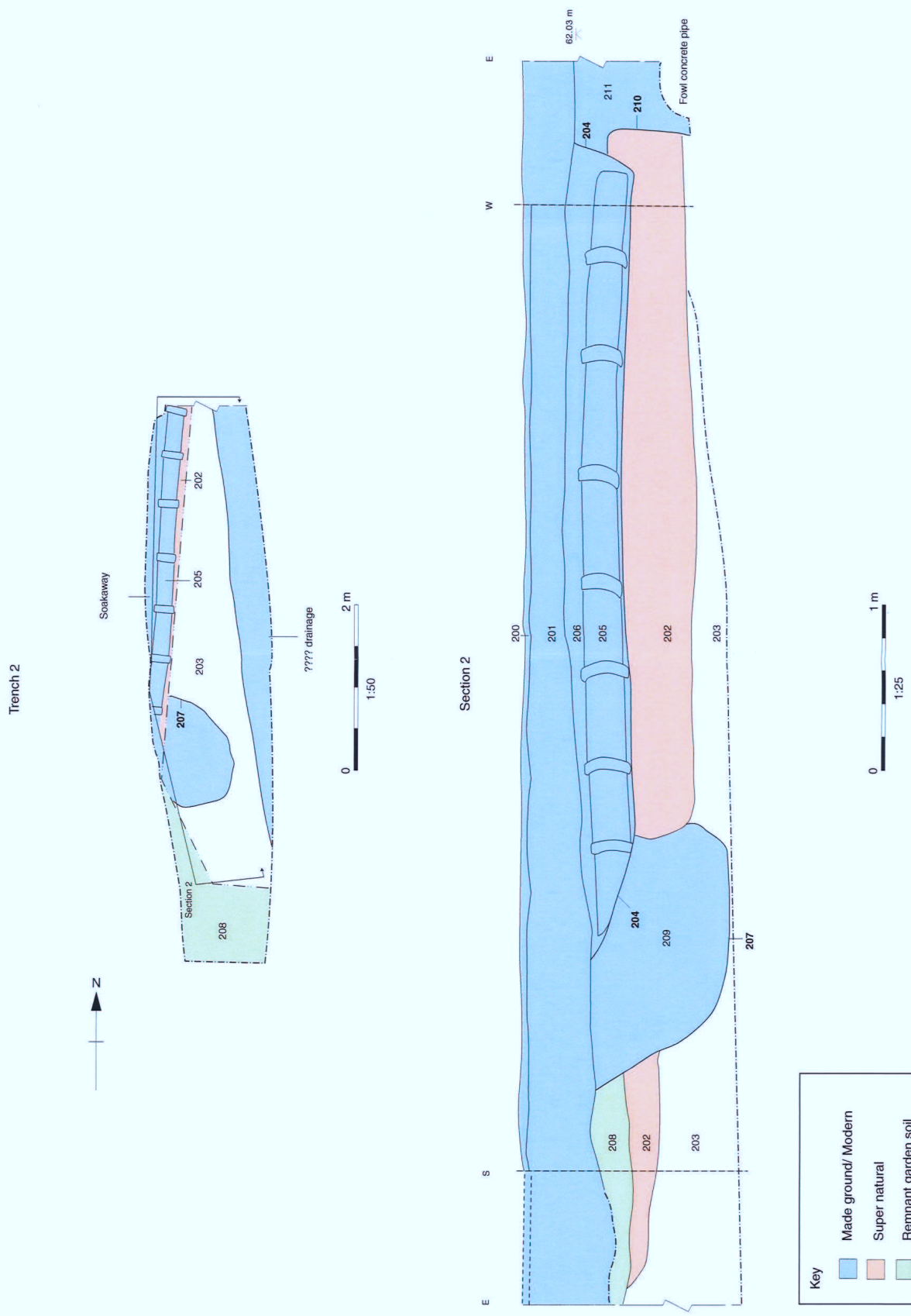


Figure 5: Trench 2, plan and section



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