



IDRM Building, Old Road Campus, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

April 2019

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IDRM Building, Old Road Campus, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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With illustrations by Diana Chard and Charles Rousseaux

Contents

Summary	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Scope of work	1
1.2 Location, topography and geology	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY	4
2.1 Aims	4
2.2 Methodology	4
3 RESULTS	5
3.1 Introduction and presentation of results	5
3.2 General soils and ground conditions	5
3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits	5
3.4 Trench 4 (Figs 4 and 6)	5
3.5 Trench 5 (Figs 4 and 6)	6
3.6 Trench 6 (Figs 4 and 6)	6
4 DISCUSSION	7
4.1 Reliability of field investigation	7
4.2 Interpretation (Figs. 3-6)	7
4.3 Significance	7
APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY	8
BIBLIOGRAPHY	11
APPENDIX B SITE SUMMARY DETAILS	12

List of Figures

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Fig.1 | Site location map |
| Fig.2 | Archaeological trench plan |
| Fig.3 | Trench Plan (1-3) |
| Fig.4 | Trench Plan (4-7) |
| Fig.5 | Representative sections of Trench 1 and 2 |
| Fig.6 | Sections of features in Trenches 4-6 |

Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Oxford University Estates Services, through Ridge and Partners, on behalf of Oxford University Fixed Assets Limited to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of IDRM Building, Old Campus Road, Oxford. The works were undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of the submission of a Planning Application.

The site is situated in the University of Oxford's Old Road Campus (NGR SP 54460 60255).

The evaluation, which was undertaken over three days during April 2019, consisted of seven 10m by 1.80m trenches. These ranged in depth from 0.39m to 1.90m below ground level.

Five undated features were uncovered, consisting of a ditch and four shallow pits. It is possible that the undated features, such as the ditch, could relate to the area being used for agricultural purposes during the late post-medieval period.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Oxford University Estates Services, through Ridge and Partners, on behalf of Oxford University Fixed Assets Limited for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Ben Ford, MCIFA. The fieldwork was directed by Adam Fellingham, who was supported by Simon Batsman. Survey and digitizing were carried out by Diana Chard and illustrations were done by Charles Rousseaux. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Oxford University Estates Services through Ridge and Partners on behalf of Oxford University Fixed Assets Limited to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of IDRM Building, Old Campus Road, Oxford (SP 54460 06255).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of a submission of a Planning Application (18/03168/PAC; pre-application). A brief/specification (OCC 2019) was set by David Radford, City Archaeologist, and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA (OA 2019) detailing the Oxford City Council's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process the planning condition. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is situated in the University of Oxford's Old Road Campus approximately 1.3km south of the historic core of Headington, which is now a suburb of Oxford (Figure 1). The site measures 0.5 hectares (ha) and is on the southern side of Old Road. It is defined by Churchill Road to the east, Roosevelt Drive to the south, a recently constructed Amenities Building to the west and a large detached property that was formerly Highfield House to the north. The southern two-thirds of the site comprises a current car park. The north-western part is grass and the north-eastern area is a small vacant car park.
- 1.2.2 The site topography is characterised by two flat terraces, separated by a sharp elevation in the terrain. The northern grassed area is at a height of 99m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), and the ground level in the southern car park area is at c 97.5m aOD.
- 1.2.3 The underlying bedrock geology is recorded as being of the Beckley Sand Member, a sedimentary sandstone formed between 163 and 157 million years ago during the Jurassic period (BGS, 2019).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in a desk-based assessment (DBA) produced by Oxford Archaeology (OA 2018). The following background is reproduced from the WSI (OA 2019).
- 1.3.2 The site is situated on a hill formation known as the Corallian Ridge, surrounded by floodplains with the River Cherwell/Ray in the north, the Thames to the west and River Tame to the south. It is favourably positioned on the southern slope of small valley separated by the stream Boundary Brook and close to the east-west orientated and probably Roman ridge-way (present day Old Road).
- 1.3.3 Most of the prehistoric remains have been documented in the alluvial flood-plains and on the north-south orientated Summertown-Radley gravel terrace between the River Thames and Cherwell. Accordingly, there are no records of prehistoric finds and

features in the vicinity of the site. Prehistoric finds included Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age flints and Iron Age pottery have been recovered at Manor Ground, 850m north of the site.

- 1.3.4 Up until the late Bronze Age, the Thames floodplain would have been dryer than subsequently, when a rise in the water table led to the onset of seasonal flooding by the middle of the Iron Age. Although there is evidence for continuing use of the floodplains in the Oxford area, there are several more findings of settlement activity on the Corallian Ridge dating to the Iron Age and later periods. The Manor Ground, Headington School (850m north-west of the site) and Warneford Meadows (580m south-east of the site) are examples of such Iron Age settlements in the vicinity of the site.
- 1.3.5 There is considerably more evidence for Roman activity on the Corallian Ridge. Beside the east-west ridgeway (mentioned above), the north-south orientated Silchester to Alchester road ran approximately 1.5km to the east of the site. An extensive pottery manufacturing industry has been identified on the ridge, from Barton through Cowley to Rose Hill and Blackbird Leys. The industry is thought to have encompassed an area almost 5 km wide. A kiln site at Churchill Hospital (460 m to the south of the site) is the earliest evidence of the Romano-British pottery industry so far identified within Oxford. Further pottery kilns have been identified to the north-east of the Churchill Hospital site and 430 m south-east of the site. A large quantity of Romano-British pottery sherds indicates the presence of another kiln site at Nuffield Hospital (375 m north-east of the site). A ditch found at 72 & 74 Old Road likely relates to a settlement and pottery production site and residual Romano-British pottery was found during an evaluation at 86 Windmill Road.
- 1.3.6 The development of the landscape during the Middle Ages is influenced by the expansion of Oxford, from an Anglo-Saxon river crossing to a large and important city and university. Documentary and archaeological sources provide clear evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlements in the Oxford area a handful of which were located on the Corallian Ridge. Old Headington, situated c. 1.3km north-east of the site, might have been the nucleus of a Saxon royal manor. The name Headington is itself derived from a Saxon personal name Hedena and a charter dating to the reign of Ethelred (AD 1004) refers to a royal residence or estate at the settlement. In Domesday Book (AD 1086) it is recorded as a substantial settlement with 44 households. Written records also refer to the Ridgeway as a *streat* in AD 956 (which suggest a Roman origin) and later describe it a part of the *London Weye*. Davis' Map of Oxford published in 1797 shows the site at the northern end of Bullington Green. This area of common was likely used for pasture and was a likely continuation of the medieval land use.
- 1.3.7 The Bullington Green common was unenclosed at the end of the eighteenth century. The Inclosure Map of 1802 shows the site within parts of three fields. These same fields were depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey map published in 1880. A north-south oriented field boundary is shown in the eastern part of the site which connected with the east-west orientated boundary in the south-east corner. By 1899 the western field had been absorbed into parkland surrounding the newly built Highfield House.

1.3.8 The topography and heritage records suggest high potential for preserved archaeological remains in the proposed developing area. This refers primary to the Roman period and activities related to the pottery industry. Earlier undated archaeological features on and the immediate vicinity of the site may have been a parts of the pottery production or adjacent settlements. However, the change in landscape use from the middle of the Iron Age and onwards, caused by the more increased flooding of the river plains, and scattered evidence of settlement activities in the vicinity of the site, also indicate possibilities for Iron Age remains to be preserved in the area.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of archaeological remains within the area to be impacted by the proposal (Fig. 2).
- 2.1.2 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:
- i. To determine the general nature, by sample trench excavation, of archaeological remains that may be present within the area of proposed impact, especially relating to the Roman period
 - ii. To avoid excavation in areas where there are known existing services
 - iii. To avoid, where possible, excavation, machine-tracking and spoil storage in Root Protection Areas (RPAs)
 - iv. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence
 - v. To produce useful technical and archaeological information to inform the planning process

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 A total of seven archaeological evaluation trenches (Trenches 1-7) were located within the site. Their positions were designed to investigate areas of potential archaeological remains within the area of proposed development, whilst avoiding services, RPAs and providing coverage to realise the above aims.
- 2.2.2 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be in the Appendix A of the WSI including standard methodologies for geomatics and survey.

Site specific methodology

- 2.2.3 Site specific methodologies were as follows:
- All trenches were marked out according to the locations and dimensions as shown on Fig.2 of the WSI, and were positioned to avoid the Root Protection areas (RPSs). In addition, Trenches 1 and 2, were widened to allow safe working conditions as it was necessary to excavate beyond 1m below existing ground level.
 - The evaluation trenches were machined by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision. Machining continued, in spits, down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology or the first archaeological horizon, depending upon which was encountered first. Once archaeological features were exposed, further excavation was undertaken by hand.
 - Once completed, the evaluation was signed off by David Radford, and the trenches were backfilled in reverse order of excavation and compacted.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of those trenches which contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of excavated deposits can be found in Appendix A and detailed trench plans in Figs. 3-4.
- 3.1.2 None of the archaeological features that were hand excavated contained any datable material and the fills were not suitable for environmental sampling.
- 3.1.3 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated, for example ditch 404 was a feature uncovered in Trench 4, while pit 504 was a feature within Trench 5.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence between Trenches 1 and 2 was fairly uniform. The natural sand geology was overlain by a deposit of mixed disturbed natural redeposited natural containing modern brick and concrete. This was overlain by rubble demolition that constituted the upper terrace of the site, which in turn was overlain by topsoil. The natural geology of yellow sand was encountered in Trenches 1 and 2, at depths of between 1.60m and 1.90m below ground level (b.g.l), (Fig. 5). Trench 3 demonstrated natural sandstone geology surviving at a depth 0.66m b.g.l.
- 3.2.2 The soil sequence between Trenches 4-7 was fairly uniform. The natural sandstone geology was overlain by a compacted carpark surface and made ground. The natural was encountered at depths between 0.39m and 0.57m b.g.l.
- 3.2.3 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the trenches remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 Archaeological features were present in three of the seven trenches (4-6, Fig. 4). The other trenches (1-3 and 7) contained only modern features and are not discussed further (Fig. 3-5). Representative sections from Trenches 1 and 2 can be seen in Fig. 5 are for reference purposes only.

3.4 Trench 4 (Figs 4 and 6)

- 3.4.1 The trench contained two undated archaeological features that truncated the sandstone natural, which was the earliest deposit encountered (409).
- 3.4.2 In the northern end of the trench a ditch (404) was recorded, containing a single fill (403). The ditch (404) was aligned N-S and measured 0.79m wide and 0.18m in depth with steep sides and a concaved base. Ditch (404) is most likely a minor field boundary from the late Post-medieval period when the site was used for agricultural purposes. This was truncated by a modern feature (402) along its western extent.

3.4.3 A shallow pit (406), with gradual sides and a flat base measured 1.10m long, 0.90m wide and 0.06m in depth, contained a single fill (405).

3.5 Trench 5 (Figs 4 and 6)

3.5.1 The earliest deposit encountered within the trench was the sandstone geology (505), which was cut by a pit (504) in the western area of the trench. The pit had moderately steep sides and a concaved base and measured 0.78m wide and 0.28m in depth. It contained a single undated fill (503).

3.6 Trench 6 (Figs 4 and 6)

3.6.1 The earliest deposit encountered within the trench was the sandstone geology (607) which was truncated by two undated features (604 and 606).

3.6.2 In the southern area of the trench the small pit (604) contained a single fill (603). It had moderately steep sides with a concaved base and measured 0.71m wide and 0.24m in depth.

3.6.3 The second feature, pit 606, had moderately steep sides and a concaved base and measured 0.70m long, 0.70m wide and 0.10m in depth. This contained a single fill (605).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The distribution of trenches covered an appropriate sample of the area to be affected by impacts from the proposed development. Within the trenches the stratigraphic sequences were well understood, the only issue being the lack of artefactual material to provide secure dates for the excavated features. This evaluation has shown that areas of significant modern disturbance have removed any surviving archaeological remains and deposits, especially within Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig. 5).
- 4.1.2 Areas away from the significant modern disturbance has shown that at least deeply cut archaeological remains have survived. The trenches in the southern area revealed features that were relatively easy to identify against the underlying geology.

4.2 Interpretation (Figs. 3-6)

Natural

- 4.2.1 Berkley Sand Member, a sedimentary sandstone, was encountered in Trenches 3-7 ranging in depth of 0.39m and 0.66m b.g.l. Trenches 1 and 2 revealed a yellow sand at depths 1.60m and 1.90m b.g.l.

Undated Features

- 4.2.2 Trenches 4-6 revealed five undated archaeological features ditch (404), and four shallow pits (406), (504), (604) and (606). It is possible that the undated features, in particular ditch (404), could relate to the area being used for agricultural purposes during the post-medieval period. The ditch may have been a boundary or drainage feature.

Modern

- 4.2.3 Historic maps show the area to be essentially open undeveloped land until the modern era. The north-western part of the site, Trenches 1 and 2, appears to have been disturbed during the 1970s development (OA, 2018).
- 4.2.4 The rubble deposits (101) and (102) encountered in these trenches are brick and concrete rich demolition related to the destruction of the 1970 extension to Highfield House.
- 4.2.5 Across Trenches 3-7 several modern features were recorded as either pits or tree throws, none of which are of significance.

4.3 Significance

- 4.3.1 Despite modern truncations, the results indicate that archaeological remains of an unknown date are preserved in the area. The documentary evidence shows that the site during the post-medieval period was located within enclosed fields since 1802. It is possible that the undated features, such as ditch (404), recorded within the site could relate to the area being used for agricultural purposes during the post-medieval period.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil, rubble leveling/demolition and modern features with a natural geology of silty sand.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	4.20
					Avg. depth (m)	1.60
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.10	Topsoil	-	-
101	Void	-	-	Number missed on register	-	-
102	Layer	-	1.50	Rubble leveling/demolition	-	-
103	Layer	-	0.23	Buried soil horizon	-	-
104	Structure	-	-	Brick manhole	-	-
105	Cut	-	-	Construction cut	-	-
106	Fill	-	-	Manhole fill	-	-
107	Cut	-	-	Modern Pit	-	-
108	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
109	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil, rubble leveling/demolition and redeposited natural, overlying natural geology of silty sand.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	5.40
					Avg. depth (m)	1.90
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.10	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.90	Rubble leveling/demolition	-	-
202	Layer	-	1	Redeposited natural with brick and concrete	-	-
203	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil, rubble leveling/demolition and modern features with a natural geology of sandstone.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1.80
					Avg. depth (m)	0.66
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.06	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.60	Rubble leveling/demolition	-	-
302	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
303	Cut	-	-	Modern cut feature	-	-
304	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
305	Cut	-	-	Modern cut feature	-	-

306	Fill	-	0.10	Fill of tree rooting	-	-
307	Cut	-	0.10	Tree rooting cut	-	-
308	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench contained two undated archaeological features. Consists of carpark surface and made ground overlying natural geology of sandstone.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1.80
					Avg. depth (m)	0.56
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.56	Carpark surface and made ground	-	-
401	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
402	Cut	-	-	Modern pit	-	-
403	Fill	0.79	0.18	Mid greyish brown clayey silt fill	-	-
404	Cut	0.79	0.18	Possible ditch	-	-
405	Fill	0.90	0.06	Mid greyish brown clayey silt fill	-	-
406	Cut	0.90	0.06	Shallow pit	-	-
407	Fill	-	-	Tree throw fill	-	-
408	Cut	-	-	Tree throw cut	-	-
409	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench contained one undated archaeological feature. Consists of carpark surface and made ground overlying natural geology of sandstone.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1.80
					Avg. depth (m)	0.57
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.57	Carpark surface and made ground	-	-
501	Fill	-	-	Tree throw fill	-	-
502	Cut	-	-	Tree throw cut	-	-
503	Fill	0.78	0.28	Light yellowish brown silty clay fill	-	-
504	Cut	0.78	0.28	Pit	-	-
505	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench contained two undated archaeological features. Consists of carpark surface and made ground overlying natural geology of sandstone.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1.80
					Avg. depth (m)	0.39
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date

600	Layer	-	0.39	Carpark surface and made ground	-	-
601	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
602	Cut	-	-	Modern cut	-	-
603	Fill	0.71	0.24	Mid yellowish brown silty clay fill	-	-
604	Cut	0.71	0.24	Small pit	-	-
605	Fill	0.70	0.10	Mid yellowish brown silty clay fill	-	-
606	Cut	0.70	0.10	Possible pit	-	-
607	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of carpark surface and made ground overlying natural geology of sandstone.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1.80
					Avg. depth (m)	0.39
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.39	Carpark surface and made ground	-	-
701	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
702	Cut	-	-	Modern service trench		
703	Fill	-	-	Modern fill	-	-
704	Cut	-	-	Modern pit		
705	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

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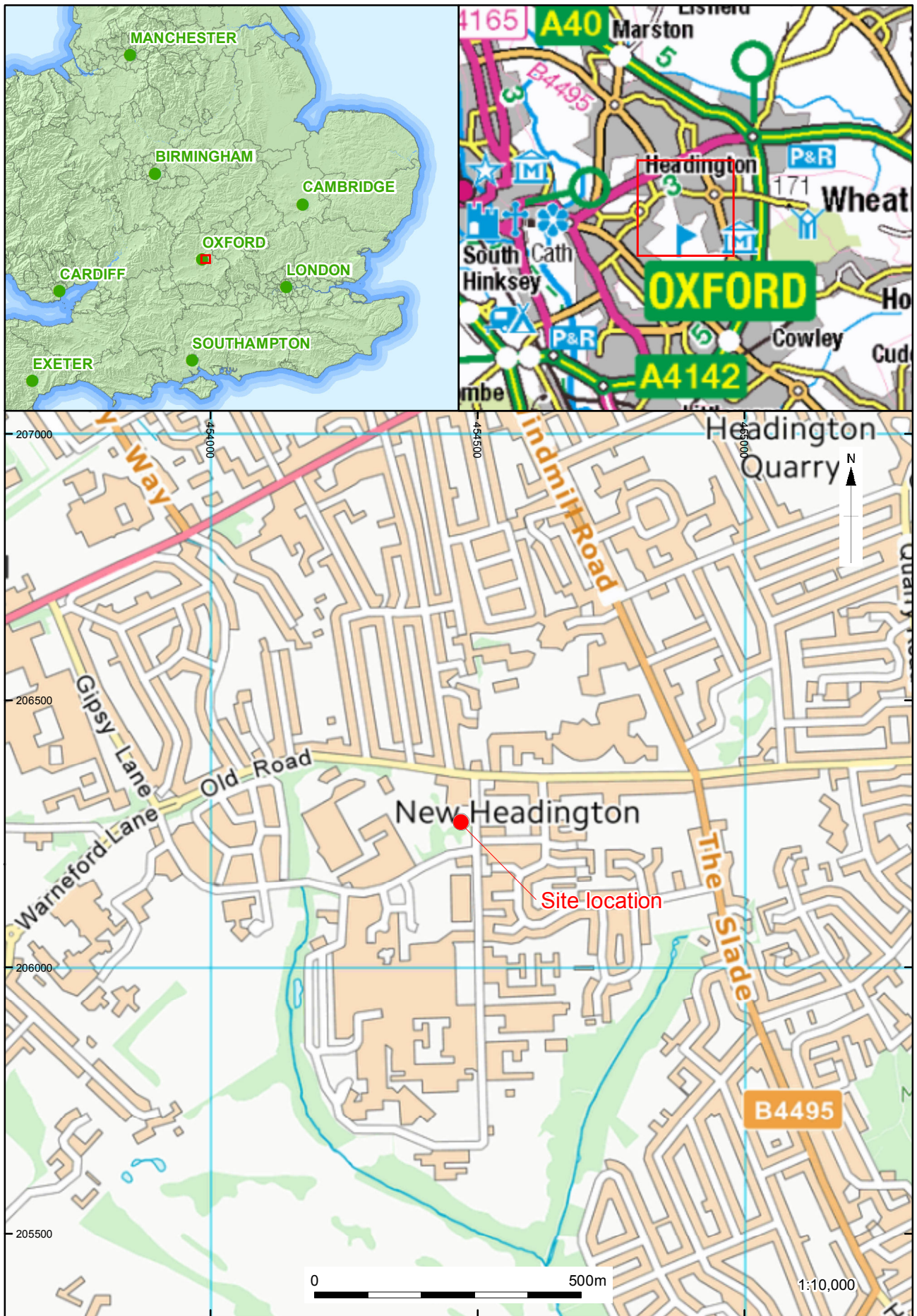
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OA, 2019, Oxford IDRM Building, Old Road Campus, Oxford, Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation, Oxford Archaeology unpublished client document

Oxford City Council (OCC), 2019, Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation Project: Old Road Campus, Oxford City Council Design, Heritage and Tress.

APPENDIX B**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	IDRM Building, Old Road Campus, Oxford
Site code:	OXIDRM19
Grid Reference	SP 54460 06255
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	April 2019, 3 days
Area of Site	0.5 ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Services in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS: 2019.48
Summary of Results:	<p>Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Oxford University Estates Services, through Ridge and Partners, on behalf of Oxford University Fixed Assets Limited to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of IDRM Building, Old Campus Road, Oxford. The works were undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of the submission of a Planning Application.</p> <p>The site is situated in the University of Oxford's Old Road Campus (NGR SP 54460 60255).</p> <p>The evaluation, which was undertaken over three days during April 2019, consisted of seven 10m by 1.80m trenches. These ranged in depth from 0.39m to 1.90m below ground level.</p> <p>Five undated features were uncovered, consisting of a ditch and four shallow pits. It is possible that the undated features, such as the ditch, could relate to the area being used for agricultural purposes during the late post-medieval period.</p>



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Figure 1: Site location

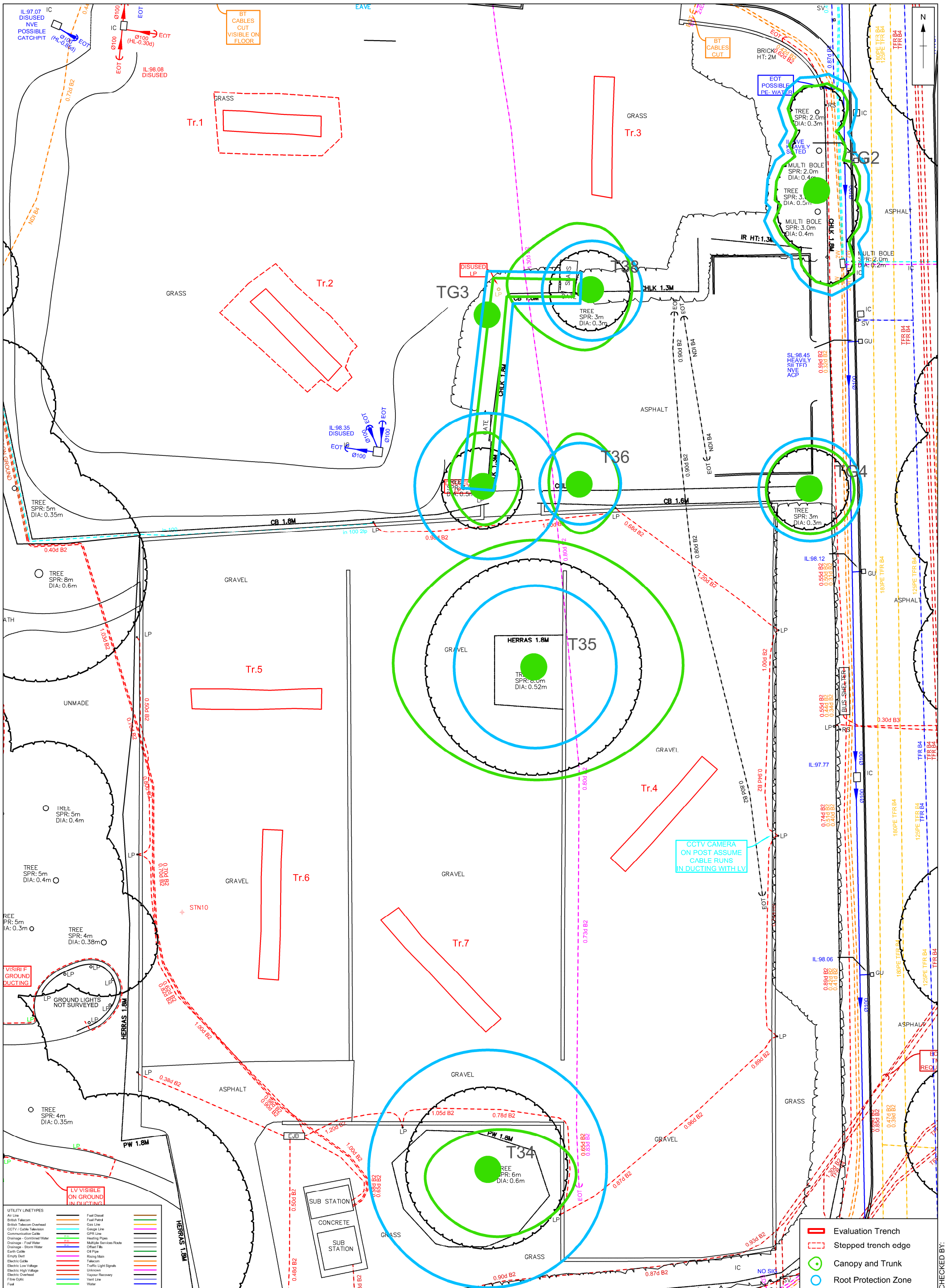
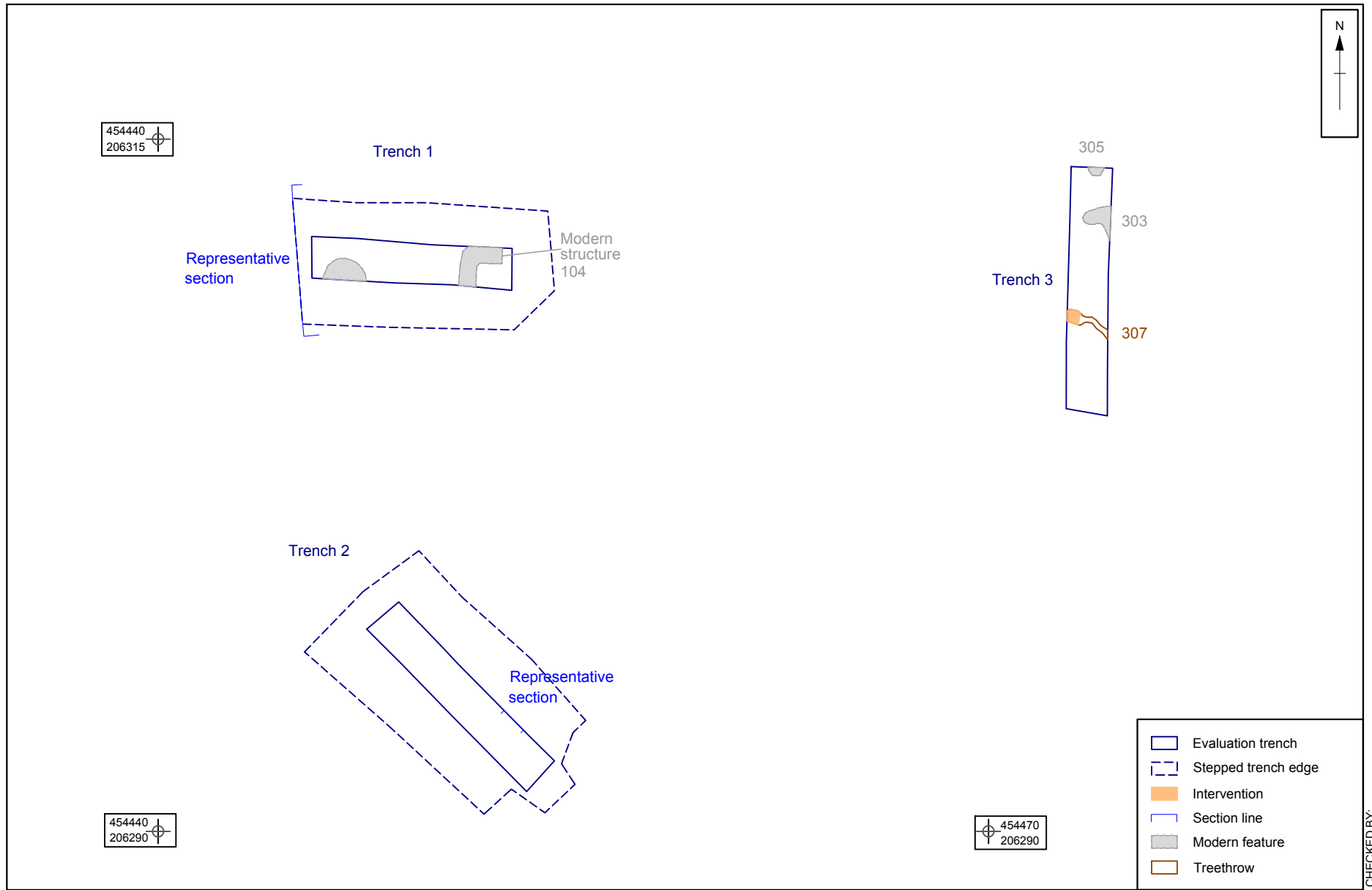


Figure 2: Archaeological Trench Plan



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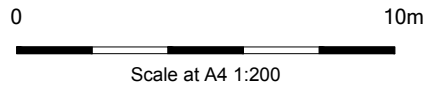
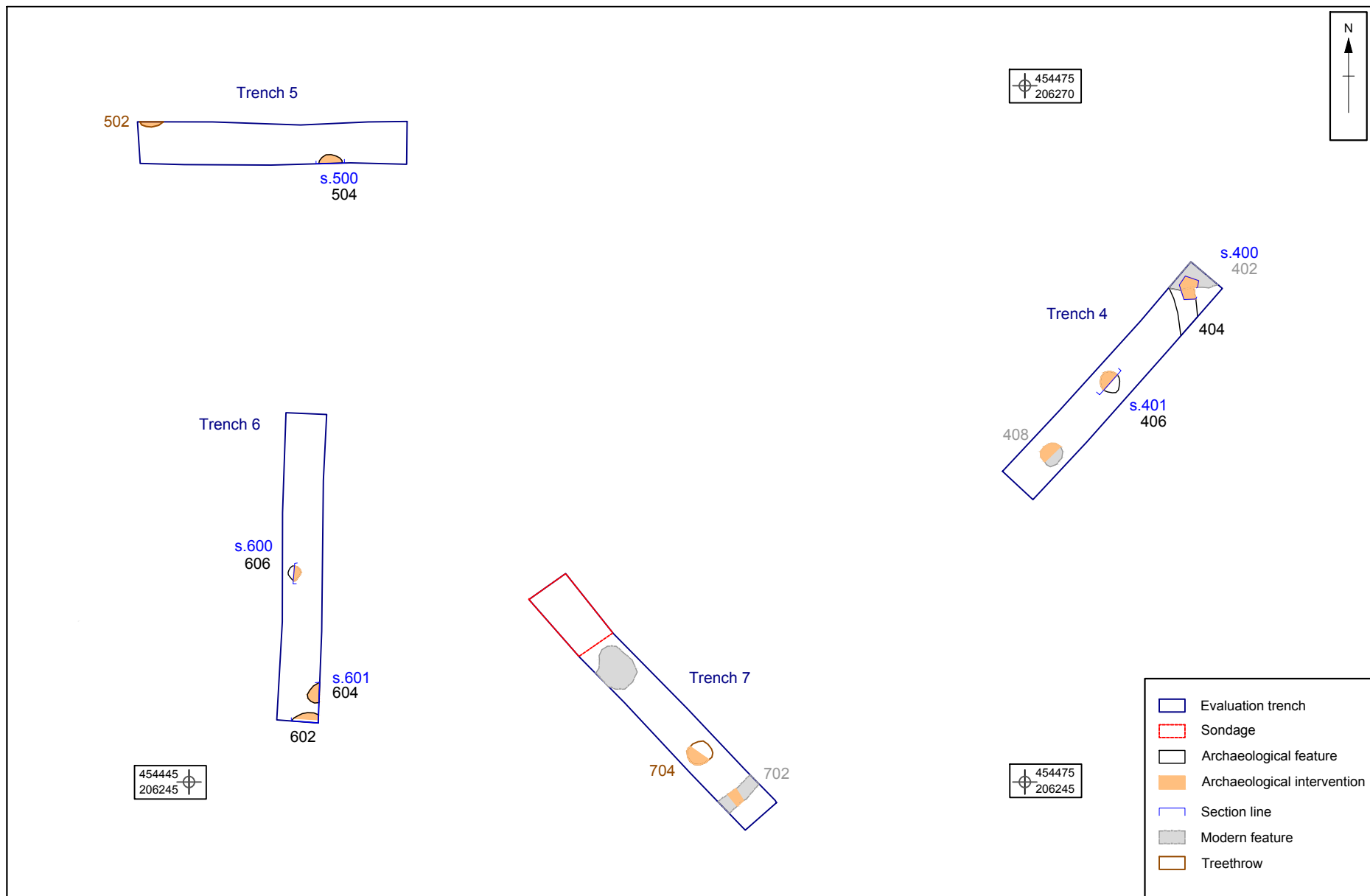


Figure 3 - Trench plan (1-3)

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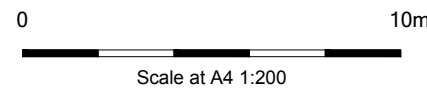


Figure 4 - Trench plan (4-7)

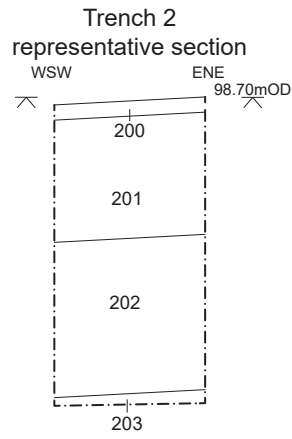
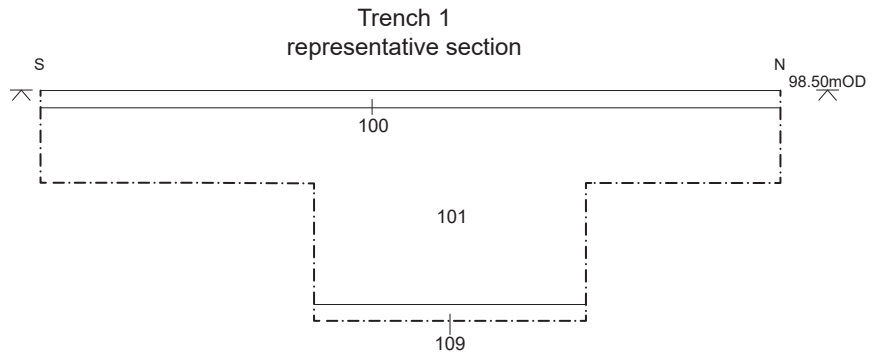


Figure 5: Representative section of Trench 1 and 2

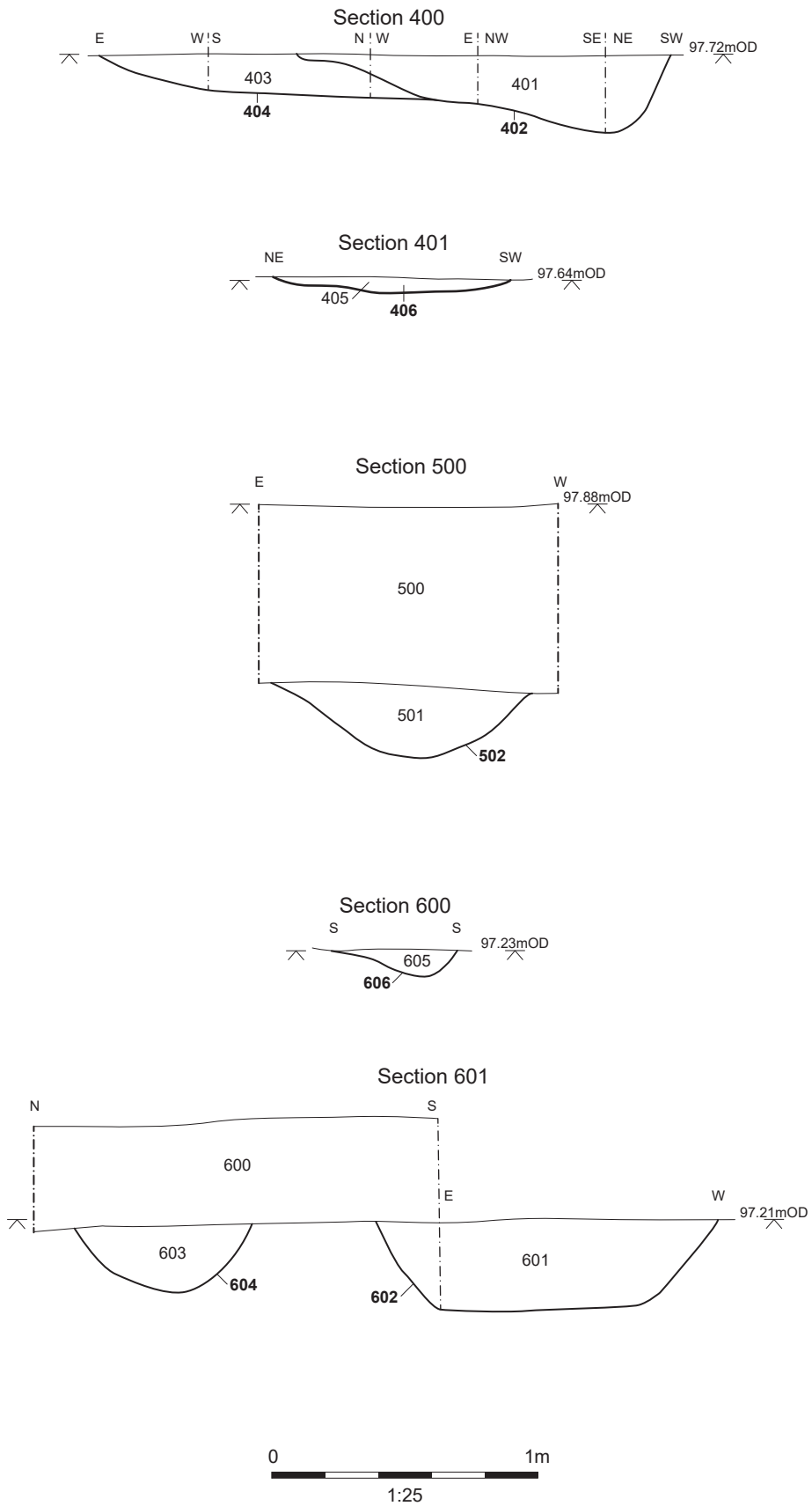


Figure 6: Sections of features in Trench 4-6



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