



# St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Oxford

## Archaeological Evaluation Report

March 2019

**Client: Eddie Johnson**

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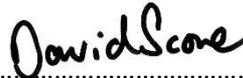


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## St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Oxford

### *Archaeological Evaluation Report*

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*With contributions from Leigh Allen, Martyn Allen, John Cotter and Geraldine Crann, and illustrations by Magdalena Wachnik*

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## Summary

On the 7th and 8th March 2019, Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation at St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Oxford. The works comprised the excavation of one trench measuring 6m by 1m and a trench measuring 1.5m by 1.5m

The trenches exposed four undated pits and part of an undated mortar surface, overlain by a series of post-medieval leveling deposits.

## Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Eddie Johnson for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford, who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council, for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was directed by Paul Murray. Digitizing was carried out by Magdalena Wachnik. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen and 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 Eddie Johnson to undertake a trial trench evaluation at St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority as part of the submission of a planning application. A brief was set by David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist, and a written scheme of investigation (OA 2019) was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

### **1.2 Location, topography and geology**

- 1.2.1 The site lies c 3.5km south-east of the centre of Oxford within the suburb of Cowley (Fig. 1; NGR: SP 53994 03851)
- 1.2.2 The area of the proposed development consists of the former St James' School, which is to be refurbished and converted into a residential property. It is bordered to the east by Beauchamp Lane, to the south by St James' church, its associated cemetery to the west, and Cowley Rectory to the north. The area of investigation is split across two levels. The southern half of the site lies at 78.5m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) – there is then a vertical drop into the northern half, which lies at 77.34m aOD.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Beckley Sand Member sandstone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 157 to 164 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (BGS Online)

### **1.3 Archaeological and historical background**

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in the archaeological desk-based assessment (TVAS 2018) and will not be reproduced here. The following summary is provided to place the results of the evaluation in context.
- 1.3.2 No heritage assets have been previously recorded within the site, although five Grade II listed buildings, including the medieval church of St James, are located in the immediate vicinity of the site, which lies within the Beauchamp Lane Conservation Area.
- 1.3.3 Extensive Roman pottery production is recorded in the landscape around the site, with the closest known site located c 400m to the east in St Luke's Road. Pits, ditches and burials dated to the Roman period have also been recorded in the vicinity.
- 1.3.4 The evolution of Cowley during the Saxon period is poorly understood, with limited evidence available. A sunken featured building and associated remains were recorded at Oxford Academy c 1km to the south of the site. St James' Church is recorded in the 12th century but is suspected to have earlier origins.
- 1.3.5 Pits and building footings of medieval date were identified during an archaeological watching brief at the Rectory Farmhouse, which is located 20m east of the site on the

opposite side of Beauchamp Lane. The desk-based assessment indicates that the site lies within an area rich in medieval activity.

- 1.3.6 Jefferies's map of Oxfordshire from 1770 shows a structure lying immediately to the north of St James' church, within the proposed development area. The location of the church is marked on the 1840 Cowley enclosure map, although no structures are shown to the north.
- 1.3.7 Two structures, an irregular building fronting Beauchamp Lane and a rectangular building along the southern edge of the site, are shown on the 1864 Cowley tithe map. The presence of a school within the site is first recorded on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1878. Later editions of the Ordnance Survey map dating to the 19th and 20th centuries depicted the development of the school, including the replacement of a small cluster of buildings located in the north-eastern corner of the site with two larger structures.

## **2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 General Aims**

2.1.1 The general aims of the evaluation were to record the presence or absence of archaeological deposits and features and report on the findings to inform the planning process.

### **2.2 Specific aims and objectives**

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive;
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains;
- iii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means;
- iv. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains;
- v. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy;
- vi. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape;
- vii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive;
- viii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity;
- ix. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

### **2.3 Methodology**

2.3.1 Due to on-site constraints the trench locations were altered from those proposed in the written scheme of investigation, Trench 2 being reduced in length from 6m to 1.5m as the mechanical excavator could not safely access the excavation area (Fig. 2).

2.3.2 Trench 1 was excavated using a 0.8 tonne tracked excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. Trench 1 was excavated by hand.

2.3.3 The arising were stockpiled next to the excavation areas. The trenches were backfilled once all excavation and recording was completed and upon agreement with David Radford, City Archaeologist for Oxford, with the arising in reverse order of excavation.

2.3.4 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers and context recording was in accordance with established best practice and the OA Fieldwork Manual (Wilkinson 1992). Bulk finds were collected by context.

2.3.5 Digital photos were taken of all archaeological features, deposits, trenches and evaluation work in general.

2.3.6 Plans and sections were produced at a scale of 1:20. All section drawings were located on the appropriate plan(s). The absolute height (m aOD) of all principal strata and features, and the section datum lines, was calculated and is indicated on the drawings.



## **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 both trenches. The full details, with dimensions and depths of all deposits, can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.
- 3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated e.g. pit 102 is a feature within Trench 1, while layer 202 is a deposit within Trench 2.

### **3.2 General soils and ground conditions**

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence varied across the site. Trench 1 was located in a tarmacked area which formed the playground of the school. Natural geology was exposed at c 76.92m aOD and consisted of a mid-yellow sand. All archaeological features within Trench 1 were cut into the natural geology and were sealed by a leveling deposit (115) that in turn was overlain by a bedding layer for the tarmac and the tarmac surface itself.
- 3.2.2 Trench 2 was located to the south of Trench 1 on an area of grassland c 0.8m higher than the of tarmac surface. Due to health and safety constraints, the trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.15m but natural geology was not exposed.
- 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 A series of levelling deposits were recorded in Trench 1. Archaeological features were present in Trench 2.

### **3.4 Trench 1**

- 3.4.1 Aligned north-south, Trench 1 measured 6m long by 1.5m wide and contained five pits (101, 103, 105, 107 and 111; Fig. 3; Plate 1). All four pits were cut into the natural geology (100). They ranged from 0.6m to 2.2m in diameter and from 0.08 to 0.5m in depth (Fig. 3 sections 101, 102 and 104; Plates 2 and 3). No artefactual evidence was recovered from any of the pits.
- 3.4.2 The pits were all sealed by a leveling deposit (115). Post-medieval brick fragments were present within this deposit, but they were not retained.
- 3.4.3 Pits 103 and 111 were cut by a modern service trench (113). Pit 107 was also truncated by a modern feature (116), however, the function / origin of this truncation is unclear. Both modern truncations also cut the levelling deposit.

### **3.5 Trench 2**

- 3.5.1 Trench 2 measured 1.5m by 1.5m. No archaeological features were recorded within the trench. A compacted mortar surface (205) was exposed at c 1.15m below ground level (77.35m aOD) (Fig. 3 section 201; Plate 4). This was overlain by a series of levelling

deposits (202-204), which varied in thickness from 0.22m to 0.32m. A small assemblage comprising four sherds of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the middle of the three deposits (203), along with a copper alloy thimble, a slate pencil and an ankle bone from a cow. The levelling deposits were overlain by topsoil.

### **3.6 Finds summary**

- 3.6.1 Artefactual evidence recovered was limited to the material from leveling deposit 203 in Trench 2. Three pottery sherds dated to the post-medieval period were recovered along with a copper alloy thimble, a slate pencil and ankle bone from a cow.

## **4 DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Reliability of field investigation**

4.1.1 The results of the evaluation can be considered to give a reliable assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. Although reduced in size, Trench 2 provides sufficient information to assess the impact of the proposed development on archaeological remains within this area of the site.

### **4.2 Evaluation objectives and results**

4.2.1 The aims and objects of the evaluation are detailed above in section 2. The identification of archaeological features in Trench 1 and levelling deposit in Trench 2 demonstrated that the broad aims, to identify the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, were achieved. Unfortunately, no dating evidence was recovered from the pits in Trench 1. The absence of finds would suggest the pits were not used for refuse but for sand extraction, possibly associated with the construction of the school. However, the dating of the pottery from the levelling deposits sealing these pits may suggest the pits pre-date the school.

4.2.2 The varying ground level between Trenches 1 and 2 suggest there has been significant alterations to the landscape to create a terrace within the site. Levelling deposits recorded in Trench 2 indicate this area has been raised to create the artificially level area. Material recovered from these levelling deposits indicates a post-medieval date for the creation of this area. Again, it is possible that this activity is associated with the development of St James' School but this is not known for certain. Although undated, the form of the mortar surface recorded as the base of Trench 1 is unlikely to significantly pre-date the levelling deposits.

4.2.3 The presence of archaeological features below the levelling deposits in the northern half of the site indicates the potential for archaeological features to survive within the proposed development area. However, the presence of the levelling deposit does indicate a certain level of truncation has occurred across the site. Substantial, more modern truncations was also evident in Trench 1 which will have further impacted the preservation levels of any archaeological remains within the area. The proposed development involves the reduction of the raised southern area to enable the construction of a garage at the level of the lower, tarmac area. As such, its likely this work will only impact on the post-medieval levelling deposits.

## APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench contained four pits and two modern service trenches. Consists of tarmac and leveling deposits overlying the natural geology of sand.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.30
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
101	Cut	0.60	0.08	Pit sub circular in plan with moderate sides and rounded base	-	-
102	Fill	0.60	0.08	Fill of pit 101 – soft, mid grey silty sand with limestone and charcoal inclusions	-	-
103	Cut	1.30	0.40	Pit, flat base and near vertical sides.	-	-
104	Fill	1.30	0.40	Fill of pit 103, moderately compact mid-dark greyish brown silty sand with sandstone inclusions.	-	-
105	Cut	0.80	0.22	Pit, only partially observed, circular in plan with vertical sides	-	-
106	Fill	0.80	0.22	Fill of pit 105, soft mid-dark grey sandy silt with limestone and charcoal inclusions	-	-
107	Cut	2.00	0.60	Pit, sub-rectangular in plant with steep sides and flat base	-	-
108	Fill	0.60	0.34	Fill of pit 107, soft mid grey silty sand with charcoal flecks	-	-
109	Fill	0.60	0.10	Fill of pit 107, soft dark grey silt	-	-
110	Fill	0.82	0.30	Fill of pit 107, soft mid-dark greyish brown sandy silt	-	-
111	Cut	2.20	0.50	Pit, only partially observed, steep sides and flat base	-	-
112	Fill	2.20	0.50	Fill of pit 111, moderately compact mid brown sandy silt	-	-
113	Cut	-	-	Modern service trench	-	-
114	Fill	-	-	Fill of modern service trench 1113	-	-
115	Layer	-	0.32	Leveling deposits	-	-
116	Cut	3.20	1.30	Modern service cut	-	-

117	Fill	3.20	1.30	Fill of modern service cut 116	-	-
118	Layer	-	0.08	Bedding deposit for tarmac surface	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench comprised a series of leveling deposits overlying a mortared surface. Natural geology was not exposed.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.30
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
201	Layer	-	0.34	Topsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.32	Redeposited natural - levelling deposit	-	-
203	Layer	-	0.22	Levelling deposit	Potter, copper alloy thimble, slate pencil and animal bone	1550-1770
204	Layer	-	0.22	Levelling deposits	-	-
205	Layer	-	-	Compacted mortar surface - unexcavated	-	-

## APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

### B.1 Pottery

*Identified by John Cotter*

Context	Description	Date
203	3 sherds: 1 rim sherd from an ointment jar in English tin-glazed ware(TGW); 1 rim sherd from a dish in high quality Chinese porcelain (CHPO); 1 body sherd in green-glazed Surrey/Hampshire Border ware (BORDG). 17g	1550 - 1770

### B.2 Copper alloy

*Identified by Leigh Allen*

Context	Description	Date
203	Small, straight-sided thimble with plain band and machine applied indentations. H: 15mm, 2g	Post-medieval

### B.3 Stone

*Initial identification by Geraldine Crann*

Context	Description	Date
203	A single slate pencil, 19mm long, 3g	-

## APPENDIX C ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

### C.1 Bone

*Identified by Martyn Allen*

Context	Description	Date
203	Single cow naviculo-cuboid (ankle) bone, 25g	-

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## APPENDIX D      BIBLIOGRAPHY

BGS Online, British Geological Survey online viewer, accessed December 2018,  
<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

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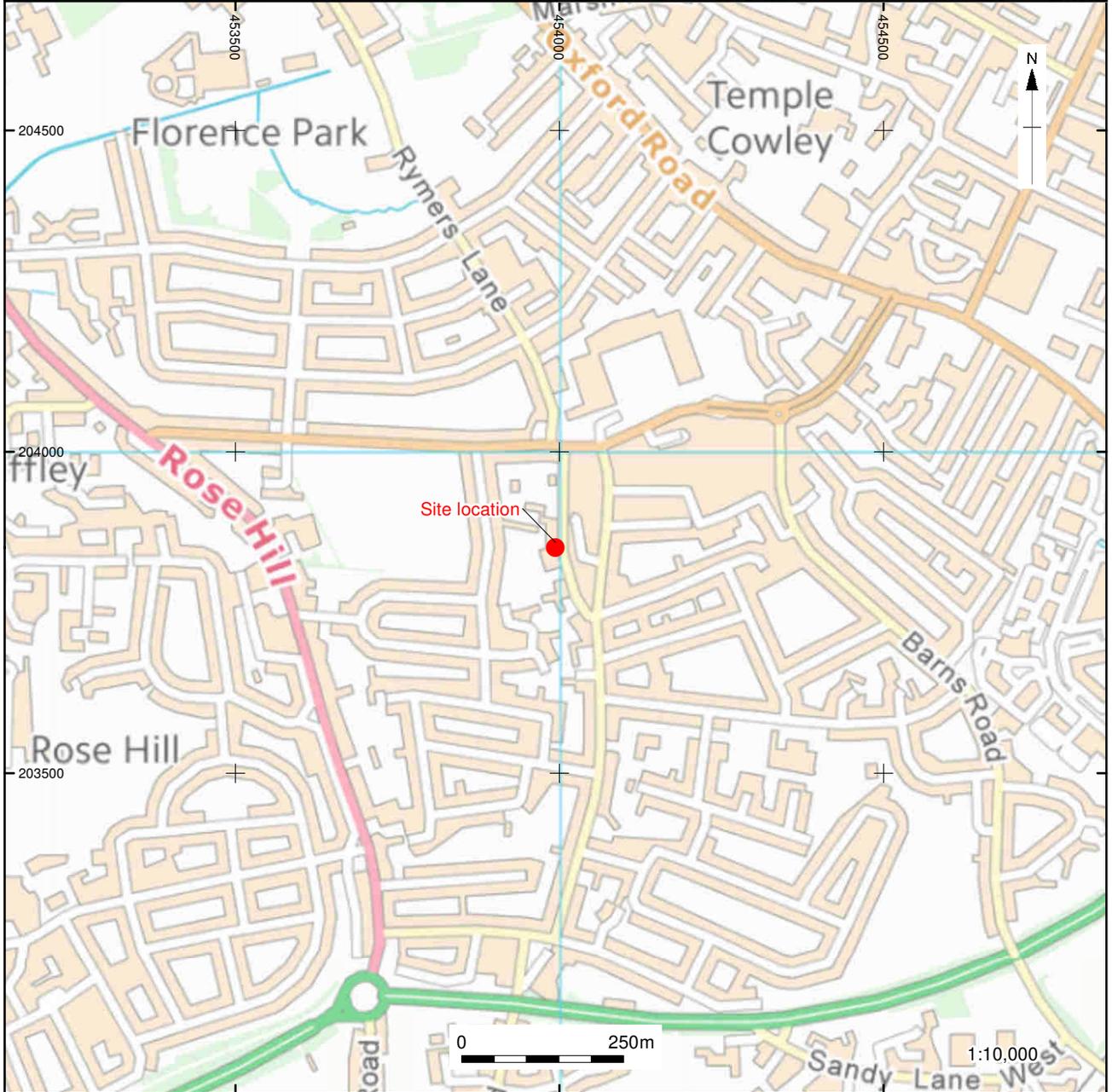
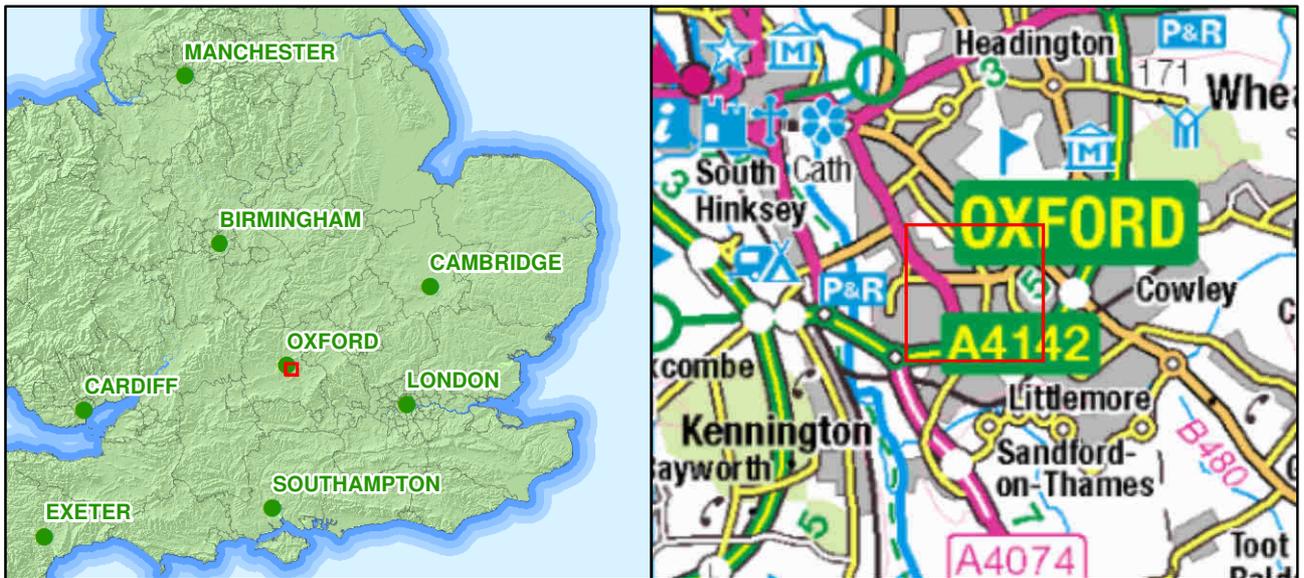
TVAS, 2018 Former St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Cowley, Oxford: archaeological desk-based assessment, Thames Valley Archaeological Services unpublished client report

Wilkinson, D (ed.), 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit fieldwork manual, Oxford Archaeology unpublished document

## APPENDIX E      SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

<b>Site name:</b>	St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Oxford
<b>Site code:</b>	OXJIM19
<b>Grid Reference</b>	SP 53994 03851
<b>Type:</b>	Evaluation
<b>Date and duration:</b>	2 days (7th and 8th March 2019)
<b>Area of Site</b>	c 800m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Location of archive:</b>	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2019.43 .
<b>Summary of Results:</b>	<p>On the 7th and 8th March 2019, Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation at St James' School, Beauchamp Lane, Oxford. The works comprised the excavation of one trench measuring 6m by 1.m and a trench measuring 1.5m by 1.5m</p> <p>The trenches exposed a series of post-medieval leveling deposits and four undated pits.</p>





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Figure 1: Site location

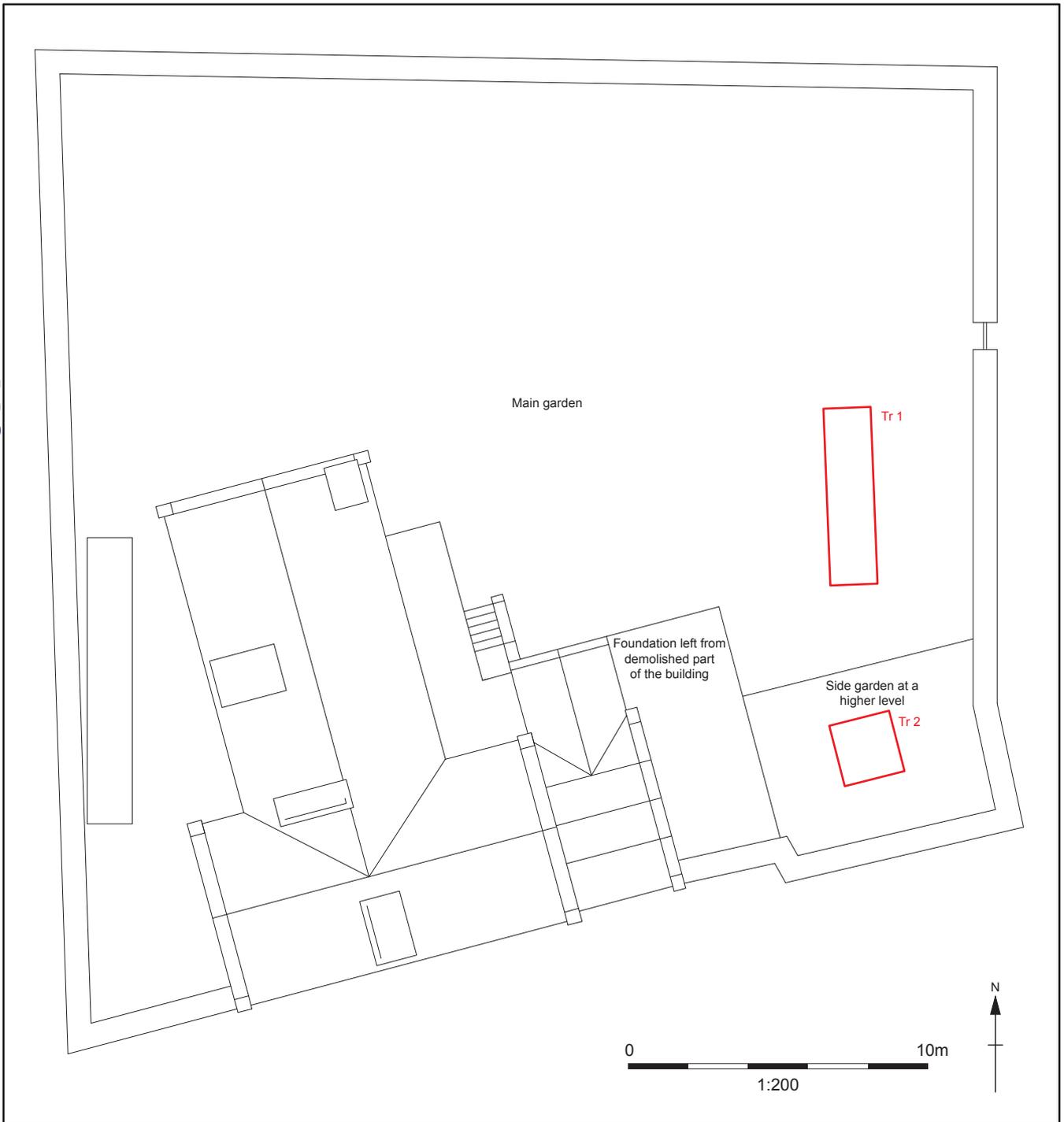


Figure 2: Trench locations

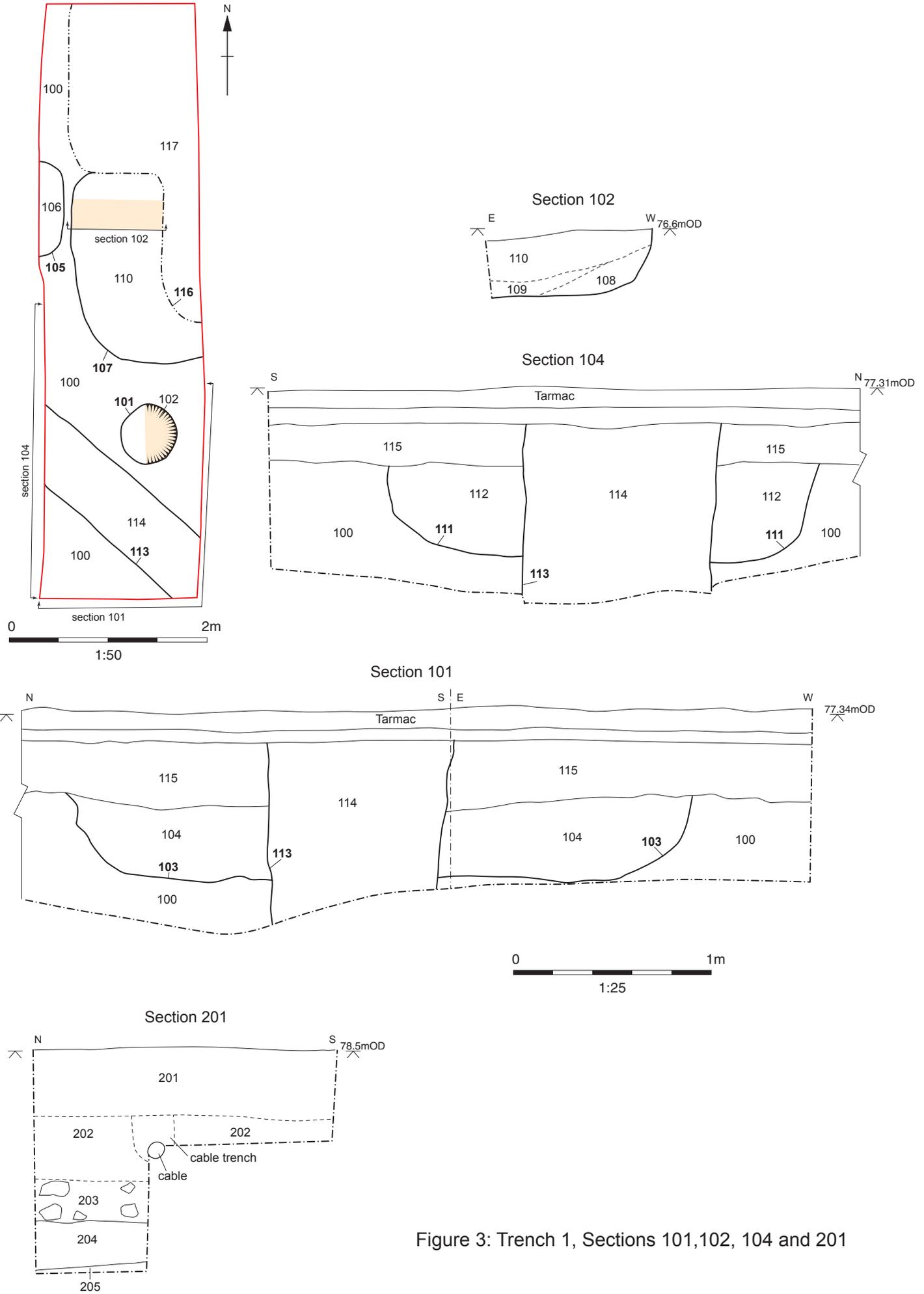


Figure 3: Trench 1, Sections 101,102, 104 and 201



Plate 1: Trench 1, view to north



Plate 2: Trench 1 - Pit 103, view to west



Plate 3: Trench 1 – Pit 107, view to south



Plate 4: Trench 2, view to east



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