



Land off Northcourt Lane, Abingdon-on-Thames Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Land off Northcourt Lane, Abingdon-on-Thames

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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*With contributions from John Cotter and Rebecca Nicholson
and illustrations by Conan Parsons and Charles Rousseaux*

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Summary

Evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology of a c. 0.35ha site located to the north of Northcourt Lane, Abingdon-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. Two 25 x 1.8m trenches were excavated. Two ditches dating to the medieval period (AD 900-1250) were identified.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Carter Jonas for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Hugh Coddington who monitored the work on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council .

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Richard Brown. The fieldwork was directed by Rachael Daniel. Survey and digitising were carried out by Conan Parsons. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the supervision of Geraldine Crann and prepared the archive under the supervision of Nichola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Carter Jonas to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of Land off Northcourt Road, Abingdon-on-Thames.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (planning ref. P18/V2449/O) to inform the planning authority in advance of a submission of a planning application. A brief (OCC 2018) was set by Hugh Coddington detailing the local authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. The work was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (OA 2019) produced by OA.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is at the southern end of the former cricket pitch adjoining Abingdon United Football Club and is to the north of Northcourt Lane. It is bounded to the west by Orchard House, leading to Northcourt Lane, and to the north by Christ Church, leading to Northcourt Road. The site consists of part of a playing field (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The geology of the area is mapped as superficial Second Gravel Terrace of the Summertown-Radley Member, overlying Amptill and Kimmeridge Clay (BGS nd.)

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in the desk-based assessment (DBA; Purcell 2019). It comprises a review of recorded archaeological remains and information from Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record pertaining to the site and a 500m buffer study area. The following brief summary derives from the DBA and provides a context for the proposed works.

1.3.2 No archaeological finds or features have been previously identified within the site. No previous archaeological work has been undertaken within the site.

1.3.3 Recorded prehistoric features in the immediate area around the site are limited to a residual piece of struck flint found during an evaluation to the north of the site at Christ Church (TVAS 2011). An extensive middle Iron Age settlement is known 1km to the south of the site. This developed into a late Iron Age and early Roman enclosed *oppidum* (Allen 1990; Brady *et al.* 2007).

1.3.4 Recorded archaeological finds and features of certain Roman date are similarly quite limited within the immediate area around the site, but may include a late Roman cemetery of c 21 inhumations c 350m to the south of the site. While late Roman pottery and a coin were associated with the burials the date of the cemetery is uncertain as a possibly related skeleton was radiocarbon dated to the early post-medieval period. However, the finds demonstrate Roman activity even if the associated material was residual in later features. Roman settlement evidence is attested in numerous locations within modern Abingdon (Brady *et al.* 2007, 110-1).

1.3.5 A former tithe barn, now Christ Church, is located c 100m to the north of the site. This dates to c 1270 and was part of Northcourt Grange, belonging to Abingdon Abbey. The abbey,

which dates from the 7th century, became one of the major religious houses in the medieval period prior to its dissolution in 1552 (Munby *et al.* 1975). Four later medieval barns are associated with the former tithe barn, and it is probable that other domestic buildings and possibly a chapel were originally also present nearby. The site of the proposed development is likely to have been in agricultural use during the medieval period, associated with the buildings to the north, but more significant activity may also have taken place on the site.

1.3.6 The probable agricultural use of the site appears to have continued into the post-medieval period, and a series of 17th century buildings, many listed as former barns, form the historic core of the hamlet near the junction of Northcourt Lane and Northcourt Road.

1.3.7 Nineteenth and early 20th century maps show that the site was not developed until the establishment of a sports pavilion in the north-east corner of the proposed development site in the mid-20th century. The majority of the site does not appear to have been subject to significant modern truncation.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- ii. To assess the artefactual and environmental potential of the archaeological deposits encountered.
- iii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iv. To inform formulation of further measures to mitigate impacts of the proposed development on surviving archaeological remains.
- v. To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Oxfordshire HER.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Two 25 x 1.8m trenches were excavated within the footprint of the proposed structure and the area of the proposed car parking (Fig. 2). The trenches were set out using GPS equipment to a sub 50mm accuracy. The trenches were excavated using a JCB fitted with a flat toothless bucket. Machining was supervised at all times by an archaeologist and continued down in spits to the top of the undisturbed natural geology or the first archaeological horizon.

2.2.2 Once the trenches had been opened, excavation of the exposed features was carried out by hand. Excavation and recording was carried out in accordance with the written scheme of investigation for the project and when complete and following consultation with Hugh Coddington (acting on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council) the trenches were backfilled.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 A summary of the key features is presented below and the full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of deposits can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in the trenches was fairly uniform. The natural geology of silt and limestone was overlain by a clayey silt subsoil, which in turn was overlain by topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site 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 There was a single archaeological feature in each of the two trenches (Fig. 2).

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 Trench 1 contained a single ditch (102) at its western end. Orientated NW-SE this ditch had a distinct v-shaped profile (Fig.3) and a single silty fill (103). Sheep and goat bones and a small amount of St Neots ware dated AD 900-1100 were retrieved from this fill.

3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 Trench 2 contained a single ditch (202) half-way along its length. The ditch was orientated NW-SE and was shallow in nature (Fig. 3). It contained a silty fill (203) similar to the fill of the ditch in Trench 1. From this fill a cattle radius and two joining pieces of Cotswold-type ware dating to AD 900-1250 were retrieved.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The weather was dry and the natural deposits and archaeological features clearly discernible. Dating evidence was retrieved from both features identified and the evaluation is considered to be reliable.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The aims as set out in 2.1.1 have been met.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 Two distinctly different ditches (in terms of their shapes) were identified but the fills and dating evidence indicate that they date to the medieval period. The relatively low level of finds and silty nature of the fills might indicate that the ditches are more likely to be associated with field or trackway features rather than being directly adjacent to occupation.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	ENE-WSW
Trench contained a single linear ditch, aligned northwest - southeast. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of silty sand.					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.06	Topsoil/turf – moderately soft dark greyish brown sandy silt.	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.39	Subsoil – moderately firm dark greyish brown silty clay. Infrequent stony inclusions.	-	-
102	Cut	0.3	0.73	Linear ditch cut, NE-SW aligned, v – shaped profile, steeply sloping straight sides and a concave base.	-	-
103	Fill	0.3	0.73	Fill of 102. Moderately firm, mid greyish orange, slightly clayey silt. Infrequent poorly sorted small stones.	Pottery and animal bone	-
104	Layer	-	-	Natural – compact, mid greyish orange silt, frequent rounded stones	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench contained a single ditch (perhaps plough furrow) aligned northwest - southeast. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of silty sand.					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.05	Topsoil/turf – moderately compact mid/ dark grayish brown sandy silt.	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.4	Subsoil – moderately firm mid/dark greyish brown clay, infrequent small stone inclusions.	-	-
202	Cut	1.07	0.12	Ditch/furrow cut – NW/SE aligned with shallow concave sides and a flattish/concave base.	-	-
203	Fill	1.07	0.12	Fill of 202. Moderately compact mid-greyish	Pottery and animal bone.	-

				brown slightly clayey silt. Infrequent moderately sorted small rounded stone inclusions.		
204	Layer	-	-	Natural - moderately compact paly orangey yellow sandy/gravelly silt with frequent cornbrash inclusions.	-	-
205	Layer	-	-	Natural - compact mid greyish brown silt, frequent mixed stone inclusions.	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

Identified by John Cotter

Context	Description	Date
103	2 small St. Neots ware (OXR) joining body sherds, 3g	900 – 1100 AD
203	2 joining Cotswold-type ware (OXAC) jar or cooking pot rim sherds, 8g	900 – 1250 AD

APPENDIX C ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

C.1 Animal bone

Identified by Rebecca Nicholson

Context	Description
103	1 x sheep/goat tibia shaft, left side, 19g
203	1 x proximal cattle radius, right side, fused (in 4 fragments - fresh breaks), 161g

In both cases the bone is in good condition, with no evidence of gnawing, butchery or pathology. The bone does not merit retention in the archive.

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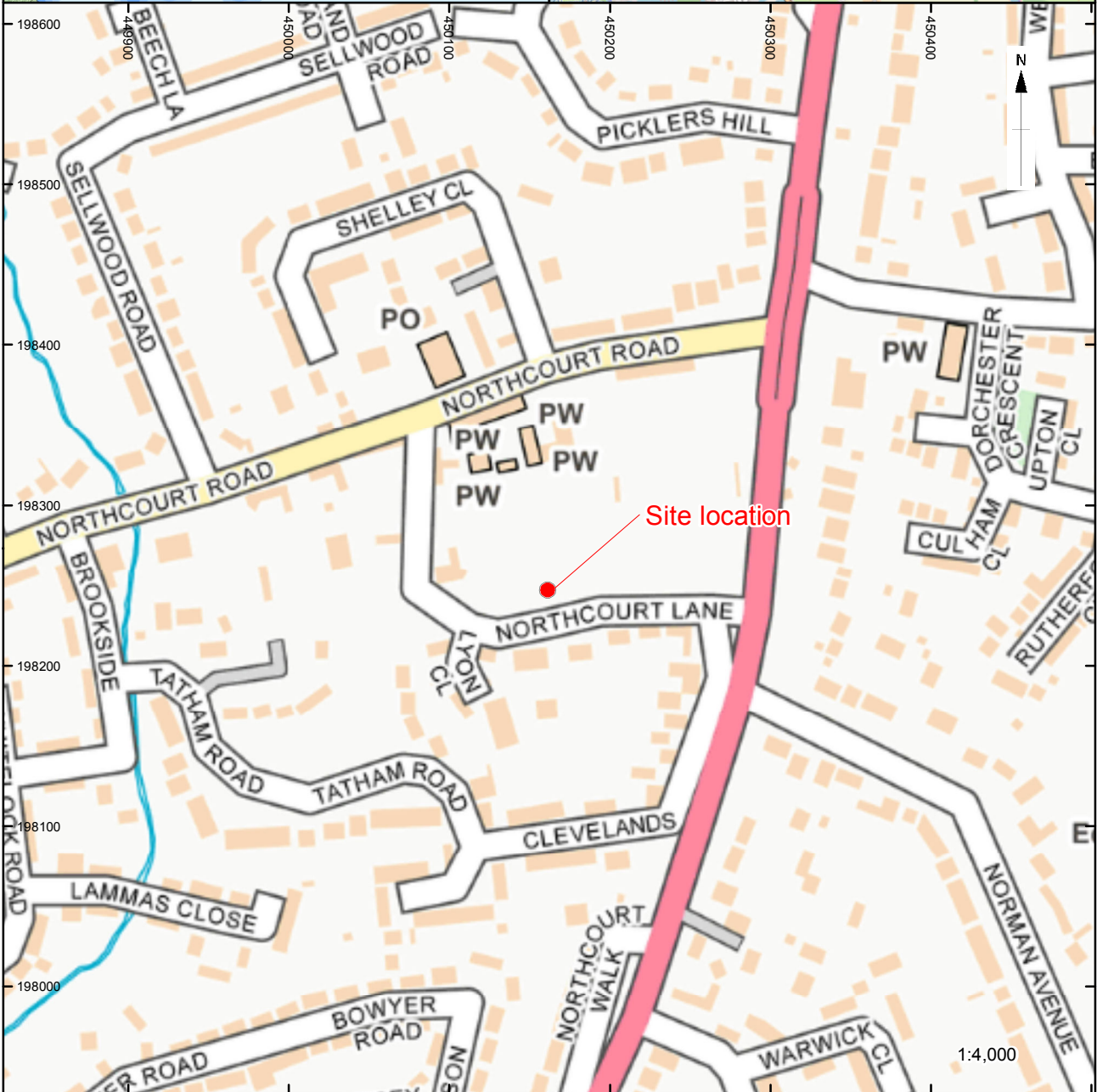
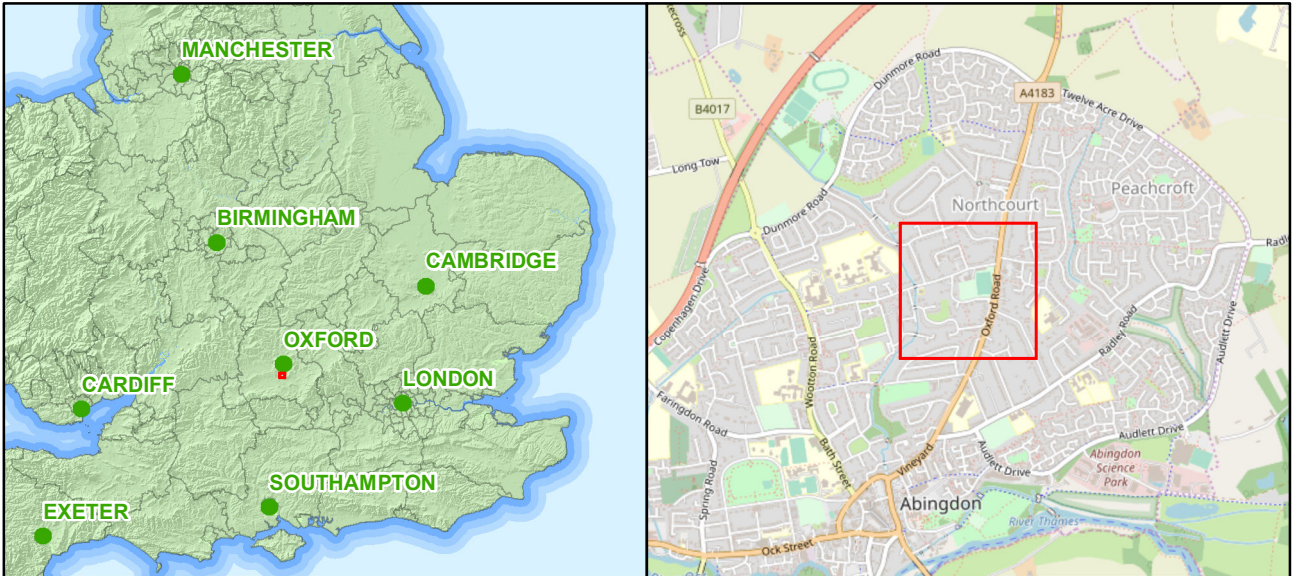
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APPENDIX E SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM

Site name:	Land off Northcourt Lane, Abingdon-on-Thames
Site code:	ABNL19
Grid Reference	SU 5016 9824
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	Fieldwork 17 th June 2019
Area of Site	c. 0.35ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with The Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.
Summary of Results:	Evaluation was undertaken of a c. 0.35ha site. Two 25 x 1.8m trenches were excavated. Two ditches dating to the medieval period (AD 900-1250) were identified.



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 Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan,

Figure 1: Site location

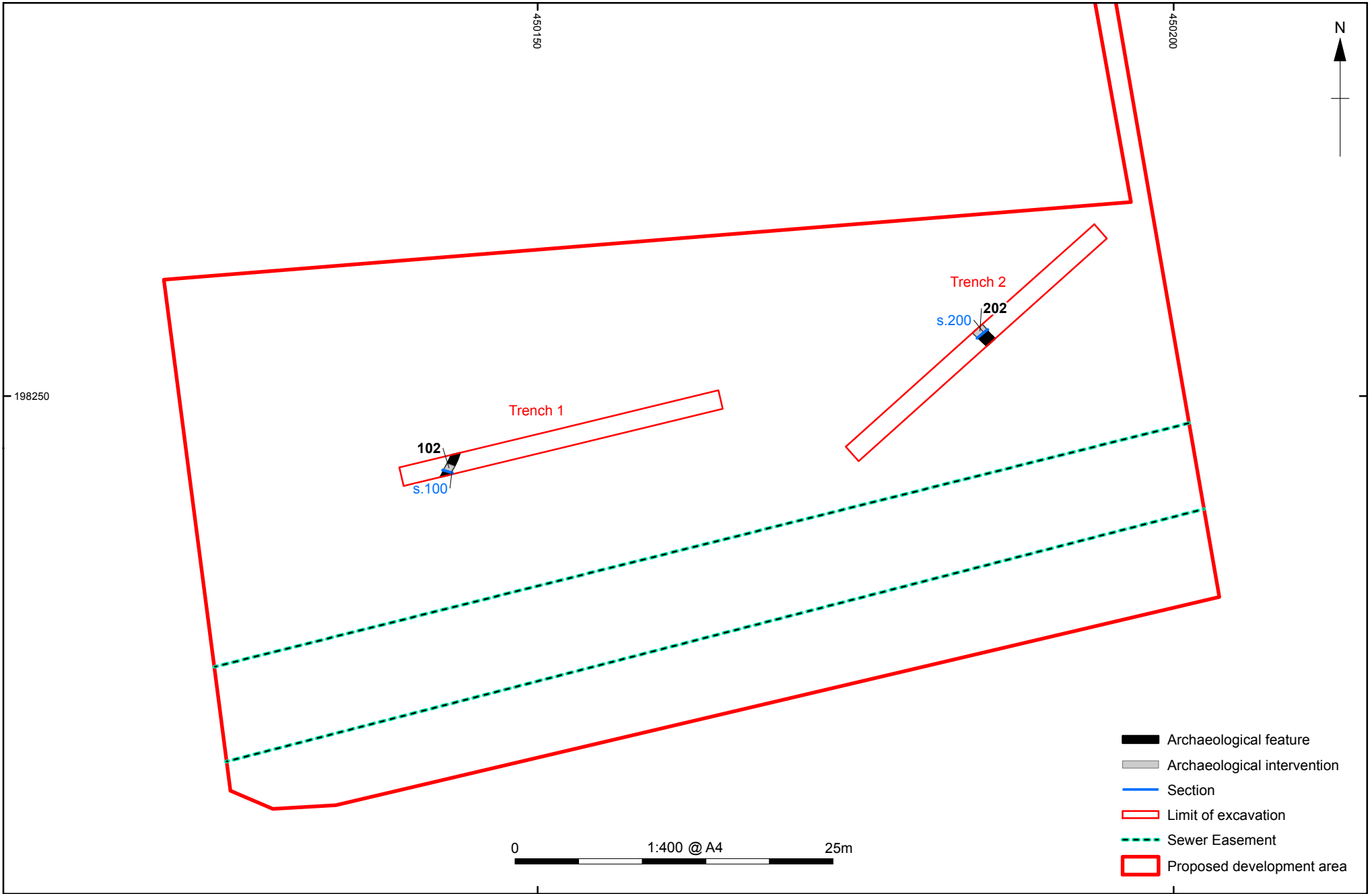


Figure 2: Trench location plan with features 102 and 202

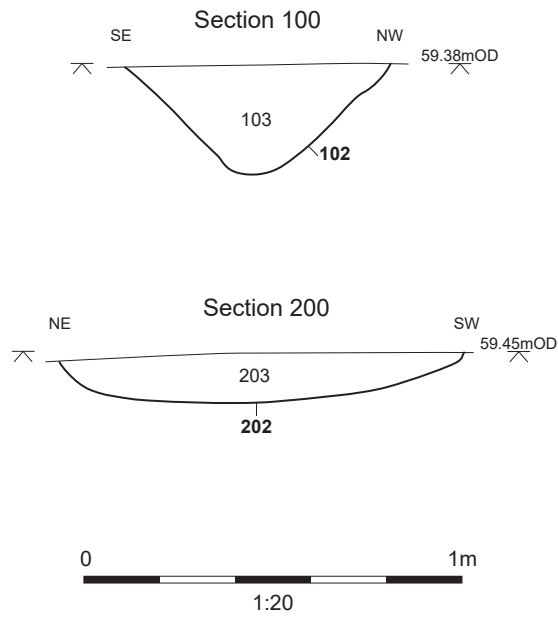


Figure 3: Sections of ditches 102 and 202



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