



Popes Farm, Bracknell

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Popes Farm, Bracknell

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Lee Sparks, with graphics by Anne Kilgour

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology completed a five trench evaluation at Popes Farm, Bracknell on behalf of Shanly Homes (Thames Valley). The evaluation demonstrated a very low potential for archaeological remains, other than for modern features associated with Popes Farm. The only features present comprised a small field boundary ditch in Trench 5 which, although undated, was on a perpendicular alignment to the adjacent London Road and therefore most likely to be of post-medieval or later date, and a probably modern posthole in Trench 3, the fill of which contained brick flecks.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Peter Humm of Shanly Homes for commissioning the project and arranging the mechanical plant. Matthew Morgan (EDP) prepared the written scheme of investigation and advised the client. Thanks are also extended to Roland Smith (Berkshire Archaeology), who monitored the work on behalf of Bracknell Forest Council, for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Stuart Foreman. The fieldwork was supervised by Lee Sparks, who was supported by Diana Chard and Belle Neilson. Thanks is also extended to the 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 Shanly Homes (Thames Valley), through the agency of Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a consented housing development at Popes Farm, Bracknell, Berkshire.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 17/00337/OUT). A written scheme of investigation was produced by EDP (report reference edp3382_r001, July 2018) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. OA produced a method statement detailing how the specified requirements would be addressed (OA 2018). This report details the archaeological results of the trial trenching.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies c 2.3km west of central Bracknell and 12.7km south-east of Reading, and is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 484463 169655 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of consented development consists of five small parcels of pasture and in the north-east part of site, Popes Farm, which comprises the main dwelling house, a large outbuilding and several temporary smaller outbuildings associated with smallholdings and garden use. A small area around the house is used as a garden, comprising lawn, patios and flower beds.
- 1.2.3 The topography of the site is a shallow bowl-like valley, with the highest point in the east at a height of c 81 m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), generally falling to the north-west to a height of c 79 m aOD.
- 1.2.4 The geology of the area is mapped as sand of the Bagshot Formation. No superficial deposits are recorded within the site (BGS 2018).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and heritage assessment (EDP June 2018) showed little evidence for any surviving archaeological remains in the surrounding landscape.
- 1.3.2 There is one previously recorded non-designated heritage asset within the boundary of the site, as recorded in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER). This relates to three boundaries marked on the 1839 tithe map, although they do not meet the heritage criteria for 'importance' under the *Hedgerows Regulations 1997*.
- 1.3.3 There has been little recorded evidence for Neolithic or Bronze Age activity in the environs of the site, and no Iron Age archaeology has been found. The East Berkshire Archaeology Survey, carried out in 1987, suggested that this area was not extensively settled during the prehistoric period and was most likely occupied by woodland (EDP June 2018).
- 1.3.4 The small number of artefactual finds from the Roman and early medieval periods do not suggest extensive activity. Those artefacts that have been found are likely to relate to accidental loss or agricultural practices rather than settlement activity.

- 1.3.5 Popes Farm lies in the parish of Binfield, which fell within Windsor Forest in the medieval period. Pope's Manor, which lies 100m north of Popes Farm on the opposite side of Murrell Hill Lane, is a large Grade II listed country house named after the famous poet Alexander Pope who spent part of his early life there, from 1700 to 1715. The house dates from the late 17th century and has alterations and extensions of 18th, 19th and 20th century date (Historic England listing reference 1390284). In Pope's time the property was known as Whitehill House.
- 1.3.6 The forest in Binfield started to be cleared after the Enclosure Act of 1813, when Forestal Rights were abolished and people bought parcels of land for agriculture. Popes Farm may have been established in this period.

2 EVALUATION 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 through direct observation of archaeological deposits.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iii. To complete the investigation without damage or disturbance to Tree Preservation Order tree root protection zones.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Five 1.8m-wide trial trenches, of varying lengths up to 50 m long, were located throughout the site, excluding areas occupied by protected trees and the built footprint of Popes Farm.

2.2.2 The trenches were excavated using a tracked 360 degree excavator fitted with a wide bladed bucket. Machining continued in spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology. Once archaeological deposits had been uncovered, excavation continued by hand.

2.2.3 A sample section of each feature discovered was excavated by hand in an attempt to recover datable artefacts and characterise the features.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, including a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. As no finds or environmental samples were recovered there are no specialist reports.
- 3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated, e.g. pit 102 is a feature within Trench 1, while ditch 304 is a feature within Trench 3.
- 3.1.3 As stated in the WSI submitted to, and approved by, the local planning authority archaeological advisor, the built footprint of Popes Farm was avoided in placing the trenches as the ground was clearly heavily disturbed by the building foundations and services.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence between all trenches was fairly uniform. The natural geology comprised yellow sandy silt, overlain by a brown-grey sandy silt subsoil, which in turn was overlain by topsoil.
- 3.2.2 Ground conditions during the evaluation were generally good, and the trenches remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the exposed natural geology (sand of the Bagshot Formation).

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits (Fig. 2)

- 3.3.1 Single archaeological features were present in Trenches 3 and 5. No archaeological features of any kind were present in Trenches 1, 2 and 4.

3.4 Trench 3 (Fig. 3, Plates 3 and 4)

- 3.4.1 A single, sub-oval shaped posthole, measuring 0.40 x 0.25m wide and 0.14m deep, was excavated in this trench. It contained a single grey-brown sandy silt fill and produced no finds. The presence of brick flecks in the fill suggests that it is a modern feature, probably a fence post formerly used to divide the plot into parcels.

3.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 4, Plates 6 and 7)

- 3.5.1 A small but clearly defined NW-SE aligned ditch, measuring 0.74m wide and 0.11m deep, was excavated in this trench. It was filled by an orange-brown sandy silt fill. Burnt roots were seen during the excavation of the ditch, suggesting that it could be related to an old hedge line. Although undated, due to its perpendicular alignment to the London Road and existing field system, this feature is most likely of post-medieval or later date.

3.6 Finds

- 3.6.1 No artefacts were recovered from any of the trenches. Brick flecks were noted in the fill of posthole 303 but were too small to recover.

3.7 Environmental evidence

3.7.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The trenches represent a good sample of the site area and were located to maximise the chances of exposing archaeological features. The ground and site conditions were good and the machining was carried out cleanly with good visibility of features and deposits in the trenches.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation demonstrated a very low potential for archaeological remains, other than for modern features associated with Popes Farm. The only features present comprised a small field boundary ditch in Trench 5 which, although undated, was on a perpendicular alignment to the adjacent London Road and therefore most likely to be of post-medieval or later date, and a probably modern posthole in Trench 3, the fill of which contained brick flecks.

4.3 Significance

4.3.1 The two isolated archaeological features, although undated, are most likely the result of relatively recent agricultural activity. As such they are of very low archaeological significance.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Soil sequence consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural sandy silt.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	2.10
					Avg. depth (m)	0.27
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.14	Topsoil- Grey sandy silt	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.12	Subsoil- Orange/grey sandy silts	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural- Off white/yellow sandy silts with infrequent stones	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Soil sequence consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural sandy silt.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	2.10
					Avg. depth (m)	0.25
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.16	Topsoil- Grey/brown sandy silts	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.09	Subsoil- Brown/grey sandy silts	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural- Off white/yellow grey sandy silts with manganese flecks	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench contained a single posthole. Soil sequence consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural sandy silt.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2.10
					Avg. depth (m)	0.29
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.18	Topsoil- Grey/brown sandy silts	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.11	Subsoil- Brown/grey sandy silts	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural- Off white/yellow brown sandy silts	-	-
303	Cut	0.40	0.25	Posthole with steep sides and concave base	-	-
304	Fill	0.40	0.25	Fill of [303]- grey brown sandy silts	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Soil sequence consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural sandy silt.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2.10
					Avg. depth (m)	0.39
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.29	Topsoil- Grey/brown sandy silt	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.16	Subsoil- Brown/grey sandy silts	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural- Off white/yellow-brown silt with infrequent stones	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench contains a single WNW-ESE aligned ditch with one fill. Soil sequence consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural sandy silt.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2.10
					Avg. depth (m)	0.36
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil- Light brown-grey sandy silt	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil- Light brown-orange/light brown grey sandy silt	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural – Off white/yellow sandy silts	-	-
503	Cut	0.74	0.11	Ditch- WNW-ESE aligned with shallow sides and flat base	-	-
504	Fill	0.74	0.11	Orange/brown, soft sandy silt fill of [503]	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

BGS, 2018 British Geological Survey, Geology of Britain Viewer.

<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

EDP, 2016 Popes Farm, Bracknell, Archaeological and Heritage Assessment, Ref: 17/00337/OUT, prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd. On behalf of Shanly Homes (Thames Valley). Report reference edp3382_r01e

EDP, 2018 Popes Farm, Bracknell, Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Mitigation, Ref: 17/00337/OUT, prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd. On behalf of Shanly Homes (Thames Valley). Report reference edp3382_r001

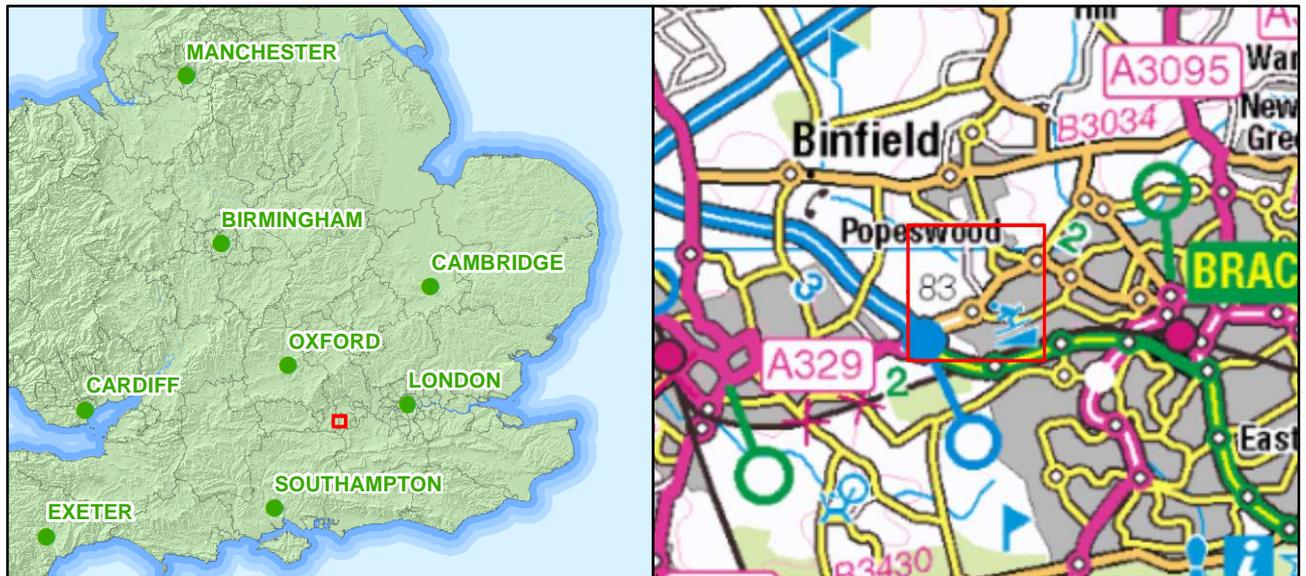
OA, 2018 Popes Farm, Bracknell. Method Statement for a Trial Trench Evaluation. Prepared by Oxford Archaeology

APPENDIX C

SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Popes Farm, Bracknell
Site code:	BIPOPE18
Grid Reference	484463, 169655
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	8th October 2018
Area of Site	400m ²
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES. The Borough of Bracknell Forest currently has no receiving museum for archaeological archives. The site archive will be held at OA offices for a period of two years from the end of the work on site. If no receiving museum has been identified by that time the archive will be returned to the client for long-term storage.

Summary of Results: Oxford Archaeology completed a five trench evaluation at Popes Farm, Bracknell on behalf of Shanly Homes (Thames Valley). The evaluation demonstrated a very low potential for archaeological remains, other than for modern features associated with Popes Farm. The only features present comprised a small field boundary ditch in Trench 5 which, although undated, was on a perpendicular alignment to the adjacent London Road and therefore most likely to be of post-medieval or later date, and a probably modern posthole in Trench 3, the fill of which contained brick flecks.



Site boundary

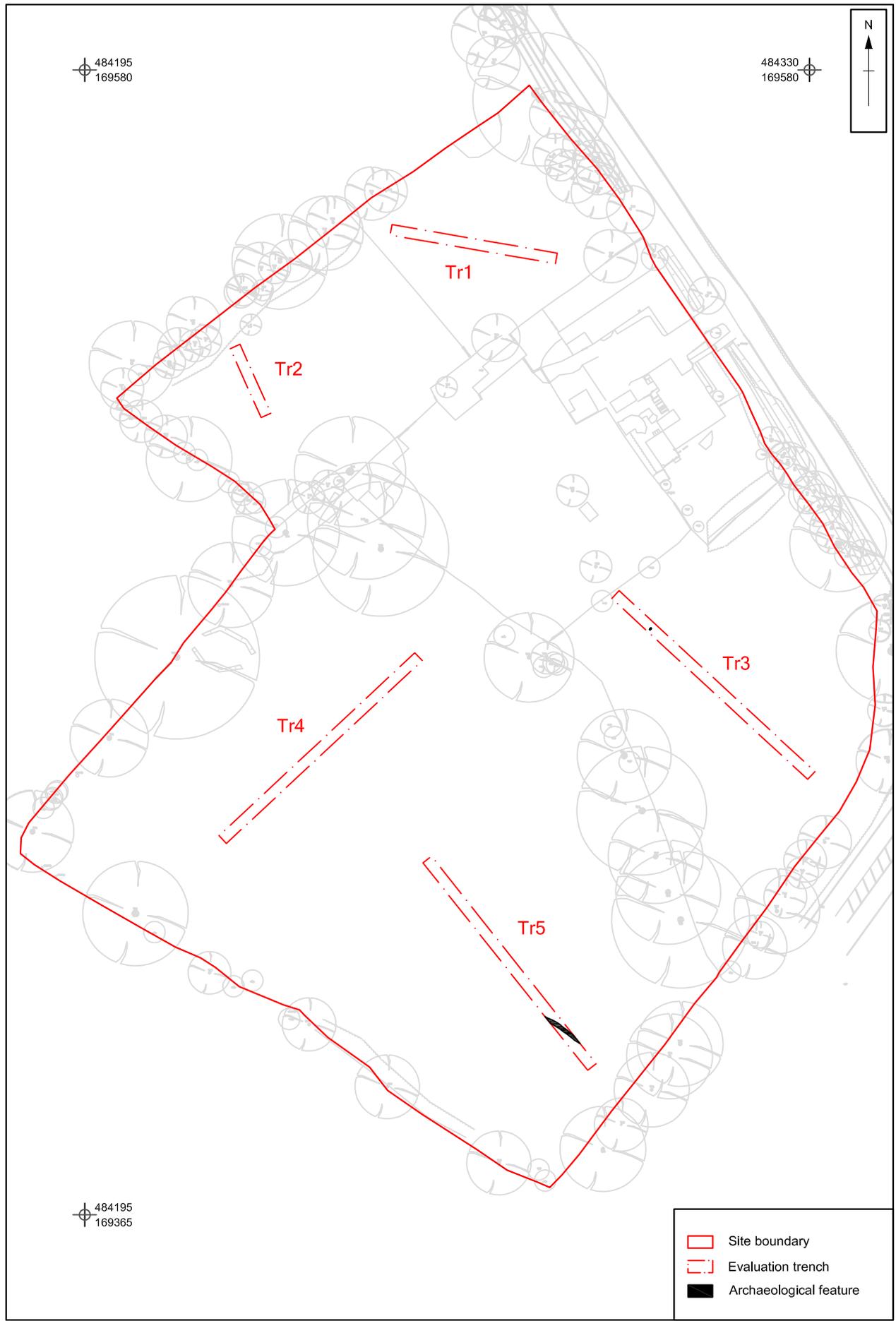


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Figure 1: Site location

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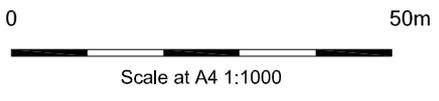
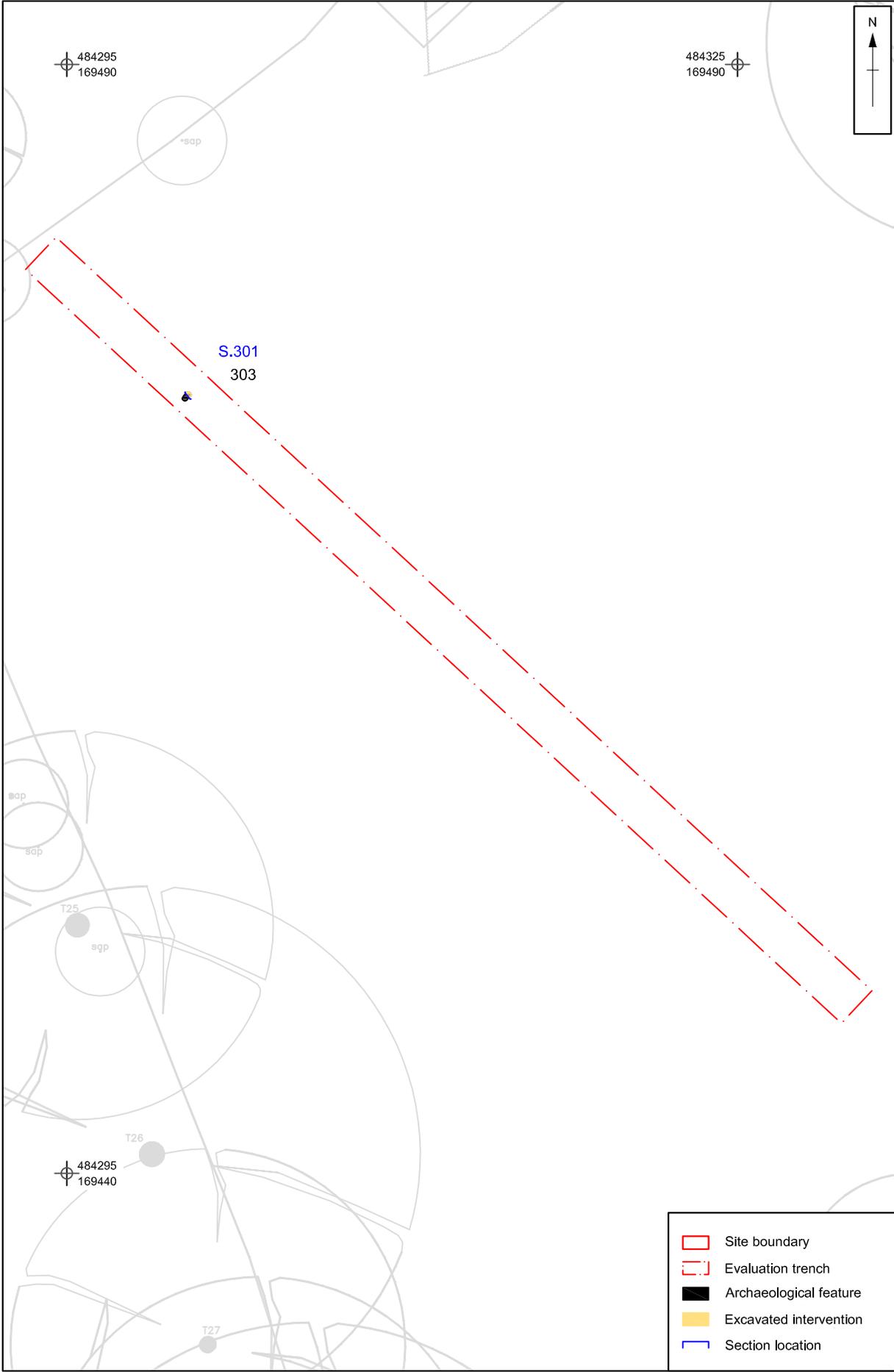


Figure 2: Trench plan

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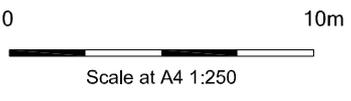
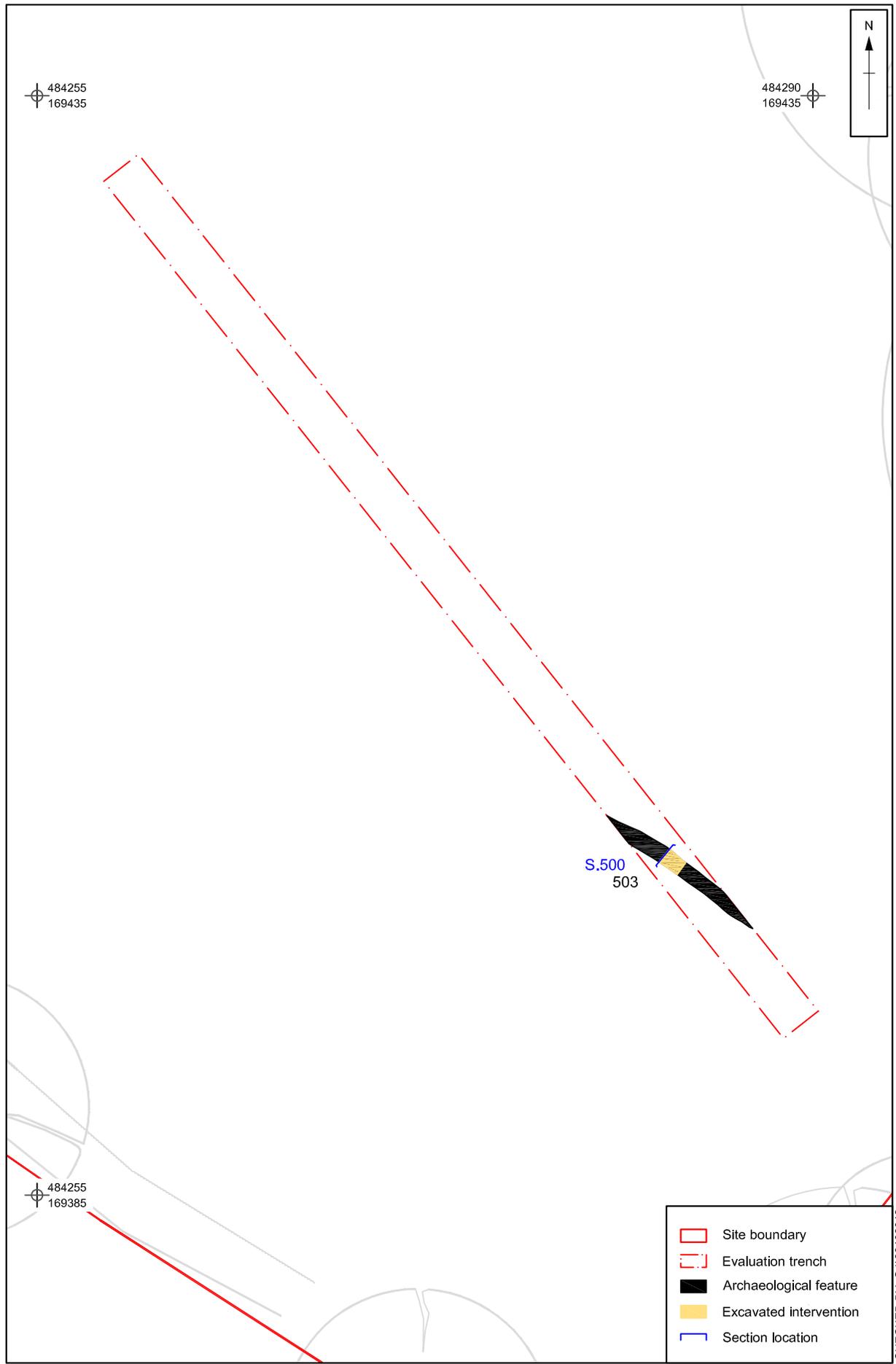


Figure 3: Trench 3

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Survey Data supplied by :
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Scale at A4 1:250

Figure 4: Trench 5

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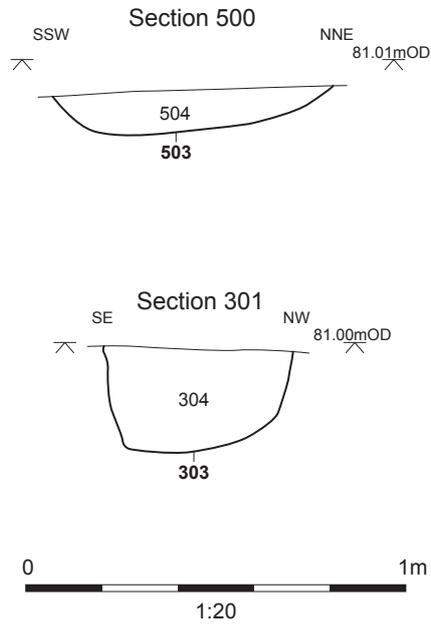


Figure 5: Sections

Plate 1: Trench 1, east facing



Plate 2: Trench 2 north-west facing



Plate 3: Trench 3, south-east facing



Plate 4: Trench 3, posthole 303



Plate 5: Trench 4, south-west facing



Plate 6: Trench 5, north-west facing



Plate 7: Trench 5, ditch 503





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