



# **Bullmarsh Close, Middleton Stoney, Oxfordshire**

## **Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**May 2020**

**Client: Cherwell District Council**

Issue No: 1

OA Reference No: 23670

NGR: SP 53077 23594





Client Name: Cherwell District Council  
Document Title: Bullmarsh Close, Middleton Stoney, Oxfordshire  
Document Type: Evaluation Report  
Grid Reference: SP 53077 23594  
Planning Reference: 19/01709/CDC  
Site Code: MISBC20  
Invoice Code: MISBCEV  
Receiving Body: Oxfordshire County museum Service  
Accession No.: OXCMS:2020.17

OA Document File Location: X:\m\Middleton-Stoney\_Bullmarsh-Close\_EVAL\Report  
OA Graphics File Location: X:\m\Middleton-Stoney\_Bullmarsh-Close\_010Geomatics

Issue No: 1  
Date: April 2020  
Prepared by: Paul Murray (Project Officer)  
Checked by: Joakim Thomasson (Senior Project Manager)  
Edited by: John Boothroyd (Senior Project Manager)  
Approved for Issue by: Dave Score (Head of Fieldwork)  
Signature:



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**OA South**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford  
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

**OA East**

15 Trafalgar Way  
Bar Hill  
Cambridge  
CB23 8SQ

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

**OA North**

Mill 3  
Moor Lane Mills  
Moor Lane  
Lancaster  
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w. [oxfordarchaeology.com](http://oxfordarchaeology.com)

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Director and Chief Executive  
Gill Hey, BA PHD FSA MCIFA  
Private Limited Company, No: 1618597  
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Registered Office: Oxford Archaeology Ltd  
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

# **Bullmarsh Close, Middleton Stoney, Oxfordshire Archaeological Evaluation Report**

*Written by Paul Murray.*

*With contributions from John Cotter and illustrations by  
Matt Bradley*

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## Summary

In March 2020 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Cherwell District Council to undertake a trial trench evaluation of the site of a proposed new residential development at Middleton Stoney, Oxfordshire. The evaluation comprised two trenches located within the footprint of the proposed development.

The evaluation recorded a buried soil horizon, two pits and a well structure. One of the pits produced a small assemblage of pottery representing at least six medieval vessels. The second pit, the buried soil and the well were not dated, although their character is indicative of a medieval date. The evaluation established that the upper structure of the well had been levelled to a depth of c. 1m below present ground level. A 20<sup>th</sup> century deposit, c. 0.8m in depth, recorded in both trenches indicated that the area had been landscaped relatively recently, and is likely to be contemporary with the construction of nearby houses.

## Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Cherwell District Council for commissioning the project. Thanks, are also extended to Richard Oram who monitored the work on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Joakim Thomasson and Paul Murray directed the fieldwork. Survey and digitising was 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 Leigh Allen and prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicola Scott.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Cherwell District Council to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed new residential development.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 19/01709/CDC). Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions with Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, established the scope of work required, and which were set out within a written scheme of investigation produced by OA (OA 2020). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.1.3 The works were conducted on the 31 March 2020 and completed in one day.

### 1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies in the village Middleton Stoney, Oxfordshire, c. 8km west of Bicester (Fig. 1). The proposed development comprises an area of grassland within a built-up area.

1.2.2 The underlying geology is mapped as Great Oolitic White Limestone Formation, which is Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 166 to 168 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (BGS 2020). The area surrounding the site lies on an outcrop of Cornbrash, at this point forming a plateau between 91m and 107m over Ordnance Datum. It is due to the presence of this stone that the village probably owes the second part of its name, which is first recorded in 1552 (Lobel 1959).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The primary information regarding the archaeological and historical background derives mainly from the volume relating to Middleton Stone in A History of the County of Oxford (Lobel 1959), and publications deriving from the excavations in the village undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s (Rowley 1972; Rahtz, et al 1984). The following summary provides a context for the works.

#### *Prehistoric period (500,000 BP – AD 43)*

1.3.2 Traces of occupation of probable Late Bronze Age and Iron Age origin are common in the area, notably in the form of ring ditches and other cropmarks around Bicester. Aerial reconnaissance undertaken in the area suggests that evidence of prehistoric occupation extends westwards across the limestone ridge to the Cherwell Valley. An undated circular cropmark has been identified c. 40m south of the site.

1.3.3 The most notable Iron Age site is the north-south aligned linear earthwork known as Aves Ditch and the two adjacent settlements, c. 2km west of Middleton Stoney. All the archaeologically recorded settlement features were dominated by middle Iron Age pottery, with activity ceasing before the late 1st century. The burials of four infants were also recovered. Excavations of the Aves Ditch itself (at least 4km long) indicated a probable construction date in the early 1st century and could possibly have been the boundary of the Catuvellauni.

### ***Romano-British period (AD 43 – 410)***

- 1.3.4 The area is richly represented with Roman remains. The most important site in the vicinity of Middleton Stone is that of the small Romano-British town at Alchester, which lies 6km east of the site, just south of Bicester. The east-west orientated Akeman Street, c. 2.5km south of the site connected Alchester with the town of Cirencester further east. It is also suggested that Aves Ditch continued to be in use as a boundary during the Roman and Saxon periods and may have functioned as a road.
- 1.3.5 There are known Roman sites scattered in the landscape surrounding the site, for example the cemetery site at Ashgrove Farm in Ardley north of the site, and possible Roman settlements within the vicinity of Bicester, at Slade Farm in Kirtlington and at Park Farm situated by Aves Ditch.
- 1.3.6 Excavation at the former village site of Middleton Stone revealed remains from a Roman settlement that originated in the late 1st or early 2nd century and lasted until the end of the 3rd Century. In the late 2nd century, a large stone structure was built, along with three light stone sided buildings, metallised areas and a small furnace/corn-drier. All these structures were potentially located within a precinct wall.

### ***Early medieval period (AD 410 – 1065)***

- 1.3.7 The evidence of early medieval activities in the area derives from the latter parts of the period. Middleton is one of many settlements of Saxon descent recorded in the Domesday Survey in 1086. From the entry relating to Middleton, it is clear that much of the parish was occupied by woodland.
- 1.3.8 The place name Middleton means middle farmstead or estate, from the Old English *middel* and *tūn* (Mills 2011). The settlement comprised 16 ploughlands and had a recorded population of 37 households in 1086, putting it in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in Domesday (Palmer & Powell-Smith 2020). Remains of Saxon date were uncovered at the Roman site in the village, but it is at present debated if these represent an enclosure surrounding a putative late Saxon settlement.
- 1.3.9 Presence of other settlement in the closer proximity other than the units recorded in the Domesday Survey, can (as indicated by the place name) be found c. 1km further to the south. References in the written sources to an Old Churchyard Furlong with an adjacent tumulus of Saxon origin in this area may indicate the location of such a settlement.

### ***Later medieval period (1066 – 1550)***

- 1.3.10 The nucleus of the village Middleton was until the early 19th century situated in the area from the present church of All Saints in the west to Ardley Road in the east. According to the Hundred Rolls of 1279 name 27 tenants, each holding a single yard of land. Few traces of the old village survive, except in the form of parch marks to the north of the castle. There are also a few sunken tracks and irregular bumps which also belong to the old settlement. Ridge and furrow belonging to the open field system and ancient trackways leading from the village can be seen in the eastern part of Middleton Park.

- 1.3.11 The Hundred Rolls of 1279 also mentions 14 burgage-holders. The existence of these 'burgesses', coupled with the grant of a weekly market in 1202, and of a market and annual fair in 1294, may have been an attempt on the part of the lords of Middleton to establish there something more than a purely agricultural community. These burgages are not mentioned as such in the extent of the manor drawn up after the death of Roger Lestrangle in 1349. It is possible that the regular arrangement of tenements to the north-east of the castle shown on an estate map of Middleton Stoney in 1737, dates from the attempted town planning by setting out burgage plots. The site is located within this area.
- 1.3.12 The base of the Middleton Stoney Cross is now situated 50m north of the churchyard in Middleton Stoney. Its original location is depicted on a map of 1737, near the entrance to the village between Heyford Road and the former rectory which stood next to the castle.
- 1.3.13 The current church of All Saints is a mid-12th century building and constitute the earliest evidence for the existence of a church at Middleton. The oldest parts of the existing church are the chancel and the enriched south doorway. The latter, however, is not in its original position, having been moved to its present setting when the south aisle was built in the 14th century. Late in the 12th century the existing chancel arch was built, and the nave was enlarged by the addition of a north aisle. The transitional arcade of three arches is supported on columns with carved capitals. There is a north doorway of similar date, with a hood-mould terminating in animal heads. The west tower was added early in the 13th century. To the north was the Rectory, with its barn and stables, and, at a point approximately half-way between the latter and the road to Heyford.
- 1.3.14 The remains of the motte and bailey castle are situated next to the church. It is first mentioned in 1215, but it may be older. King John ordered its destruction in 1216, and there is no evidence that it was ever refortified (Lobel 1959). A manor house was sometime afterwards constructed immediately to the west of the castle, known as the old manor-house of the Harmans. It survived as a farmhouse until the early 19th century.
- 1.3.15 A hunting park surrounded the estate. King John granted its formation in 1201, the same year as the grant of the market. It is described in an extent of 1328 as surrounded by a stone wall half a league in circuit and its original limits are now indicated by the bank and ditch surrounding the Home Wood.

### *Post-medieval period (1550-1900)*

- 1.3.16 The old manor-house was deserted in favour of an isolated mansion standing in its own grounds appears to have taken place in the time of Sir Edmund Denton (1698–1712), to whom the building of 'Middleton Park House'.
- 1.3.17 The enclosure of the parish began around 1686, when part of the parish land was taken out of the common field. The process continued during the following years, until in 1709 when all the parish common land was enclosed.

1.3.18 The creation of the current Middleton Park, which occupies nearly half the parish, was the work of the holder of the manor in the early 19th century. The latest eastward extension of the park was completed in 1824–5, when the old manor house and the adjoining cottages were demolished, leaving the church in isolation half-way between the mansion and the park gates.

## **2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 General Aims**

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- 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 or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iv. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy,
- 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, and
- ix. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality, and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

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

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- x. To determine or confirm the presence of remains related to the prehistoric and Roman settlements, and
- xi. To determine or confirm the presence of remains related to the Middleton Stoney village and putative burgrave plots.

### **2.3 Methodology**

2.3.1 The works comprise the excavation of 2 trenches, one measuring 13m by 1.8m and one measuring 11m by 1.8m. This comprised a c. 4% sample of the development (Fig. 2).

2.3.2 The trenches were laid out as shown in Figure 2 using a GPS with sub-15mm accuracy. Due to the presence of services both trenches were shortened and repositioned from those proposed in the written scheme of investigation.

2.3.3 The trenches were excavated using an JCB 3CX mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket under the direct supervision of an archaeologist. Spoil was stored adjacent to, but at a safe distance from trench edges.

2.3.4 Machining continue in spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology or the first archaeological horizon depending upon which is encountered first. Once

archaeological deposits were exposed, further excavation proceeded by hand and the appropriate use of machine.

2.3.5 The exposed surface was sufficiently clean to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains. Where safety restriction allowed, the exposed archaeological features were sample excavated by hand.

2.3.6 Upon agreement with Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Council, the Trenches were backfilled.

## 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 the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits are tabulated in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are can be found in Appendix B.

### 3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in the trenches was generally uniform. The natural geology of firm, mid brown silt was established at a general depth of 1m. Both trenches recorded a buried topsoil overlaying the geological horizon, which in turn was overlain by a modern landscaping deposit; apart from the south-eastern end of Trench 1 where a distinct layer of rubble was identified.

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 geology.

### 3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were present in both trenches.

### 3.4 Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

3.4.1 The geological horizon (109) was established at a depth of c. 1.2m (c. 101m aOD) within a machine excavated sondage.

3.4.2 A distinct and homogenous layer (103) of firm, dark grey silty clay with a moderate percentage of charcoal flecks, 0.2m thick, overlaid 109 and appeared to represent a buried topsoil.

3.4.3 Layer 103 was truncated by a well structure (105). The well structure was teardrop in plan, measuring 1.2m x 0.95m and had walls up to 0.3m thick. It was formed from unhewn limestone averaging 0.2m x 0.2m x 0.15m in size, constructed in random courses with an earth bond. On its western side an internal skin (108) had been constructed; possibly representing a modification during construction or later repair. This was roughly 0.8m long and 0.22m wide and built in the same style as the main structure. The well was backfilled with loose, dark grey silty clay with 30% small-medium limestone (106).

3.4.4 A distinct layer of rubble (102) overlay the well. This was up to 0.56m thick, extending and gradually thinning for 6.5m towards the north-west. The layer comprised firm, dark grey silty clay with 35% limestone, averaging 0.2 x 0.2m x 0.15m. This deposit almost certainly represents the destruction and levelling of the upper structure of the well and is probably contemporary with the 20<sup>th</sup> century levelling deposit 107.

3.4.5 Deposit 107 was recorded at the north western end of the trench, extended for 6.5m southward where it overlay deposit 102. It was up to 0.56m thick, thinning to the south east. This deposit comprised mixed and broadly layered firm, mid brown, and pale

greenish brown clay with lenses of grey, silty loam. Frequent 20<sup>th</sup> century CBM, wood pieces and general rubbish were noted within this deposit.

3.4.6 Deposit 107 was overlain by the current turf and topsoil (101), which was 0.3m thick.

### 3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 The geological horizon (203) was established at a depth of c. 1.05m (c. 100.7m aOD).

3.5.2 The geological horizon was overlain by a distinct and homogenous layer (202) of firm, dark grey silty clay with a moderate percentage of charcoal flecks. The deposit measured up to 0.25m thick.

3.5.3 Two pits (204, 206), only partially exposed, were recorded cutting the buried topsoil towards the south eastern end of the trench.

3.5.4 Pit 204 measured 1.58m (N-S) x 0.61m (E-W). Enough of the pit was exposed to estimate that the pits diameter would be c. 2m. It was filled with a soft, mid yellow brown silty clay, with inclusions of 10% small stones and rare charcoal flecks (205). The pit was not excavated due to safety constraints and no finds were recovered from its surface.

3.5.5 Pit 206 measured 1.8m (N-S) x 0.71m (E-W). Enough of the pit was exposed to estimate that the pits diameter would be c. 2.2m. It was filled with soft, mid yellow brown silty clay with 2% small stones and rare charcoal flecks (207). The pit was not excavated due to safety constraints, although 14 sherds of pottery (weight 224g) were recovered from the surface for the feature. The pottery represents six medieval fabrics with the latest item dated between 1225-1400 AD.

3.5.6 Overlying the pits was a 20<sup>th</sup> century levelling deposit (201). This was up to 0.5m thick and comprised firm, mixed brown, and yellow clay with a moderate quantity of 20<sup>th</sup> century CBM.

3.5.7 Deposit 201 was overlain by the current turf and topsoil (200), which was 0.3m thick.

### 3.6 Finds summary

3.6.1 A total of 14 sherds of medieval pottery, weighing 224g, was recovered from context 207, the exposed upper fill of pit 206 (Appendix B).

## **4 DISCUSSION**

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

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken during fair weather conditions, with no flooding of the trenches. The revealed features were generally easy to identify against the underlying natural deposits.
- 4.2.1 It should be noted, that due to the depth of the trenches, neither feature within trench 2 could be excavated and a full interpretation of their form and function is not possible. However, the recovered of pottery from the surface of one of the pits provides suitable dating evidence and indication of use.

### **4.3 Evaluation objectives and results**

- 4.3.1 The locations, extent, date and character of the archaeological remains were evaluated, and their relative depths recorded, to provide an indication of their vulnerability to future development.
- 4.3.2 The evaluation identified two pits (Plate. 1), one containing medieval domestic wares, and a well which was not dated. Given the wells proximity to the pits, (c. 10m) stratigraphic position and general character, it is likely that the structure is contemporary with the pits. The well was an unusual teardrop shape in plan (Plate. 3) with an internal repair or modification on its west side. The well possibly underwent a partially collapsed during construction requiring shoring with a stone construction.
- 4.4.1 The evaluation revealed previously unknown archaeology that is likely to be associated with the medieval settlement at Middleton Stoney. The pits appeared to serve a domestic function for the disposal of household waste and cess. One of the pits produced pottery representing six fabric types of ordinary domestic medieval wares typical of the north Oxfordshire area.

## APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Consists of buried topsoil, which was cut by a well structure, overlaid by a rubble deposit which in turn was overlain by a modern landscaping deposit.					Length (m)	13
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	1
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
101	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	0.56	Rubble	-	-
103	Layer	-	0.2	Buried topsoil	-	-
104	Cut	-	-	Construction cut for structure 105	-	-
105	Structure	1.2	0.95	Well structure	-	-
106	Fill			Backfill of 105	-	-
107	Layer		0.56	Levelling/landscaping deposit	-	-
108	Structure	0.8	0.22	Modification/repair to 105	-	-
109	Layer			Alluvial geology	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of silty sand.					Length (m)	11
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	1
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.30	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.4	Levelling/landscaping deposit	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.22	Buried topsoil	-	-
203	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-
204	Cut	1.58		Pit	-	-
205	Fill	1.58		Fill of 204	-	-
206	Cut	1.8		Pit	-	-
207	Fill	1.8		Fill of 206	Pottery	c, 1225-1400

## APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

### B.1 Pottery

*By John Cotter*

#### *Introduction and methodology*

B.1.1 A total of 14 sherds of medieval pottery, weighing 224g, were recovered from a single context. Given the small quantity present, this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described below. Medieval fabric codes referred to are those of the Oxfordshire type series (Mellor 1994).

#### *Description*

B.1.2 **Context (207) Spot-date: c 1225-1400.** Description: 14 sherds (weight 224g). Six medieval pottery fabrics were identified. Probably the latest item here is part of a jug base in Brill/Boarstall ware (Fabric code OXAM, c 1225-1400). This comprised 5 joining sherds (26g) from the central (floor) area of a flat jug base with a greenish glaze on the underside. The other five fabrics are listed below:

B.1.3 Ashampstead-type ware (OXAG, c 1175-1400). 1 unglazed body sherd (4g).

B.1.4 Northamptonshire-type shelly ware (OXBK, c 1150-1400). 1 sherd (24g). Body sherd from a wheel-thrown cooking pot in a hard, light brown fabric with moderate shell tempering. Sooted externally.

B.1.5 Medieval Oxford ware (OXY, c 1075-1300). 5 sherds (130g). Fresh sherds from a minimum of three cooking pots, including sagging bases. Sooted externally. Some joining.

B.1.6 Cotswold-type ware (OXAC, c 1050-1250). 1 sherd (28g). Body sherd from a cooking pot. Sooted externally.

B.1.7 St Neots-type ware (OXR, c 900-1100). 1 sherd (12g). Jar rim of thickened everted rim form. Fresh. Sooted.

#### *Discussion*

B.1.8 The pottery comprises ordinary domestic medieval wares typical of the north Oxfordshire area. Nothing later than c 1400 is present. The sherds are generally in a fairly fresh condition.

#### *Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material*

B.1.9 The pottery here has the potential to inform research through re-analysis - particularly when reviewed alongside other assemblages from the same general area. It is therefore recommended it be retained.

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## APPENDIX D

## SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM

<b>Site name:</b>	Bullmarsh Close, Middleton Stoney, Oxfordshire
<b>Site code:</b>	MISBC 20
<b>Grid Reference</b>	SP 53077 23594
<b>Type:</b>	Evaluation
<b>Date and duration:</b>	31/3/20. One day
<b>Location of archive:</b>	The archive is currently held at OA, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2020.17
<b>Summary of Results:</b>	Buried soil horizon, medieval pit, undated pit and well structure. Modern landscaping deposits.





Figure 1: Site location

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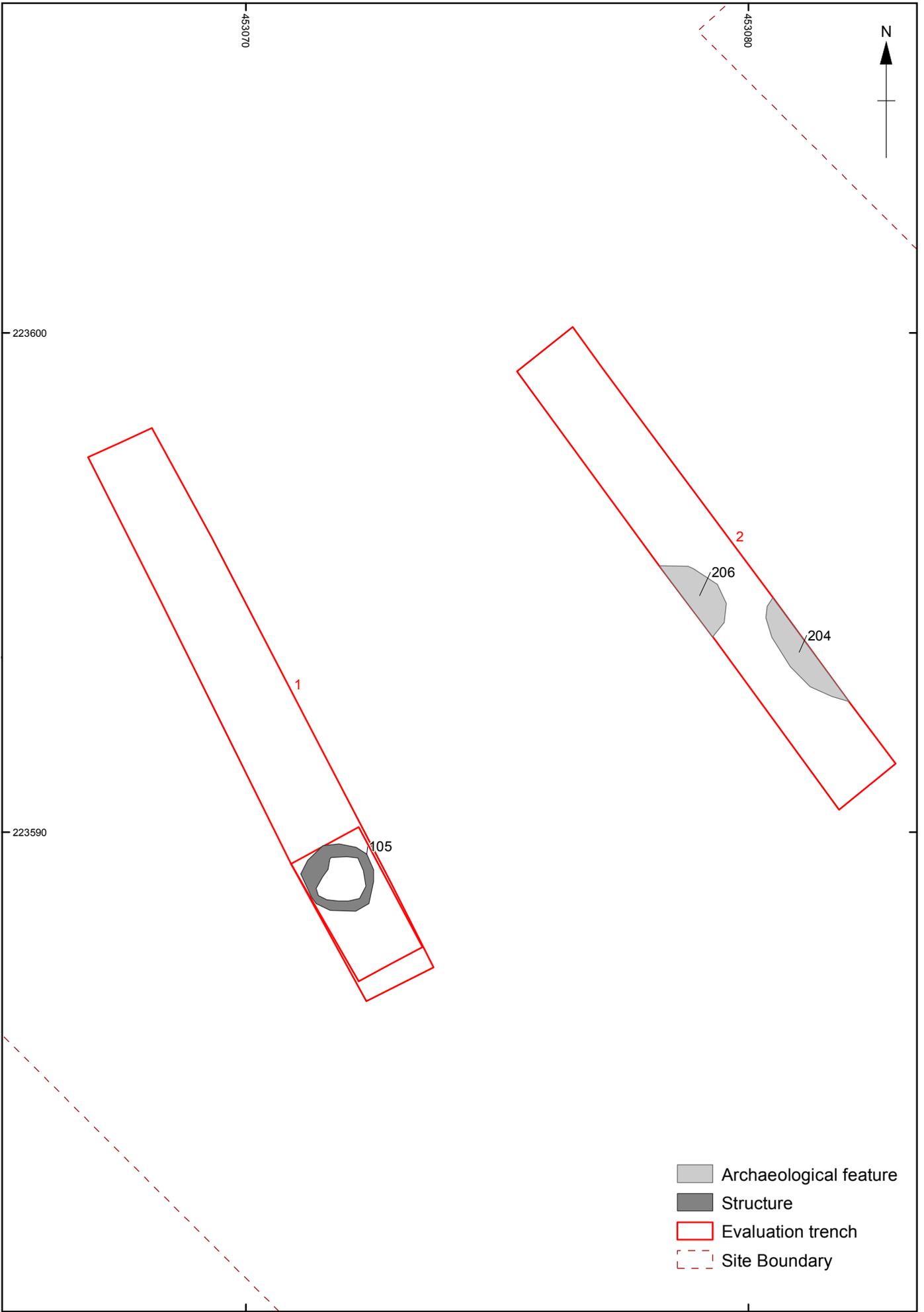


Figure 2: Trench plan



**Head Office/Registered Office/  
OA South**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX20ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800  
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496  
e: [info@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto:info@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

**OA North**

Mill 3  
Moor Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000  
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606  
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

**OA East**

15 Trafalgar Way  
Bar Hill  
Cambridgeshire  
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500  
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



**Director:** Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCIfA  
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