Northfield School, Littlemore

Archaeological Evaluation Report

March 2020

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Northfield School, Littlemore

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

In February 2020 Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by RSK ADAS Ltd on behalf of Morgan Sindall Construction to undertake a trial trench evaluation on a site proposed for the construction of new buildings for Northfield School, Littlemore (centered on SP 54727 02475). A total of 3 trenches were excavated across the site, and two undated ditches were revealed as well as a series of modern ditches and drains. The undated ditches are thought to be of low archaeological significance.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Andrew Brown of RSK ADAS Ltd who commissioned OA to undertake the project on behalf of Morgan Sindall Construction. 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 Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was directed by Robert McIntosh, who was supported by Andrew Smith. Survey and digitising was carried out by Simon Batsman. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by RSK ADAS Ltd on behalf of Morgan Sindall Construction to undertake a trial trench evaluation ahead of the construction of new school buildings.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (PRE.0004/19). A brief was set by Hugh Coddington, the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist and a written scheme of investigation was produced by ADAS detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process (RSK ADAS 2020b). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is located on land at Northfield School, Littlemore, Oxford (NGR SP 54727 02475). It is bordered to the south by the Kassam Stadium complex, and to the north by residential housing and allotments (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The area of proposed development consists of the existing buildings and playing fields of Northfield School, and is 2.26 hectares in size. The new school buildings will be constructed within the area where the current playing fields are located (Fig. 2).

1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as sandstone of the Beckley Sand Member, this sedimentary bedrock was laid down approximately 157 to 164 million years ago during the Jurassic period, when the local environment was dominated by shallow seas. No superficial deposits are recorded (BGS 2020).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in an archaeological desk-based assessment (RSK ADAS 2020a), and a summary of the results is provided below.

1.3.2 A geophysical survey carried out in 1995 along Grenoble Road, to the south of the Great Leys housing estate, identified a number of anomalies which were subsequently targeted during trial trench evaluations that happened later that year. The trenching uncovered an area of Middle Iron Age settlement activity and Roman activity including a stone surface trackway.

1.3.3 Further geophysical surveys and trial trench evaluations identified evidence of Roman pottery production in the local area around the proposed development.

1.3.4 In 2004, two further archaeological trial trench evaluations were carried out in the vicinity of the site. These investigations recorded Middle Iron Age and 11th to 13th century remains.

1.3.5 During 2006 geophysical survey and archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out at Minchery Farm on the site of the former Benedictine Priory of St Nicholas. The evaluation revealed structural remains of medieval buildings as well as Roman pottery.

1.3.6 In 2011 a geophysical survey was carried out at Northfield School itself. The area surveyed covered the playing field approximately 60m by 90m to the north, and rough grass to the south and south-west of the existing school. The survey identified curving lengths of ditches likely to represent enclosures and pits.

1.3.7 In 2014 an archaeological excavation was conducted at the site of the former Benedictine Priory of Saint May and Nicholas. The excavation investigated the Church and associated burials there in advance of the construction of a new hotel at the Minchery Farm site. Also during 2014, a trial trench evaluation was carried out at the Minchery Farm allotments. This evaluation recorded a single sunken featured building and associated Early Anglo-Saxon pottery.

Historic Mapping and Aerial Photography Analysis

1.3.8 The earliest available detailed historic mapping data consulted was the 1887 Ordnance Survey (OS) County Series map for Berkshire. This showed that the landscape at that time was open agricultural fields (NLS 2020; Old Maps 2020).

1.3.9 Historic mapping from 1876 through to 1975 demonstrates that the field boundary and land use did not experience any significant changes. Northfield School first appears on the 1975-1976 OS Plan, coinciding with a general expansion of residential housing in the local area (NLS 2020, Old Maps 2020).

1.3.10 Aerial photography from the 1940's shows that the landscape within and around the site was largely open fields at that time. From 1988 to 2016 the aerial photography shows a steady increase in residential development around the site as reflected in historic mapping evidence described above (Getmapping 2019, NCAP 2019). The photographs also indicate that there have been no changes to the layout of the school buildings in that time.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

i. To establish the character, quality, date and extent of any archaeological remains or deposits surviving within the Site and to excavate and record them where they will be destroyed or disturbed by the development
ii. To assess the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features and deposits that may be present on site
iii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence
iv. To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable the archaeological impact of the proposed construction of new residential units, access roads and services to be assessed
v. To inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate the impacts of the proposed development on surviving archaeological remains
vi. To disseminate the results through appropriate reporting will also include a summary report and wider publication if the results merit it, and the production of a site archive for deposition with the relevant local museum and digital archive repository, in line with para 199 of NPPF 2019.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Three trenches were excavated on the site. Each trench was 30m long and 1.8m in width. Trench locations were secured with Heras fencing (Fig. 2).

2.2.2 Trenches were set out on OS National Grid (NGR) co-ordinates using a Leica 1200 series Smart Rover GPS and scanned for live services by archaeologists trained in the use of Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT) equipment.

2.2.3 An 8t rubber tracked 360° excavator was fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to open the trenches. All machine work was carried out under the direct supervision of an archaeologist, and all movement to and between trenches was undertaken along plastic matting.

2.2.4 Topsoil and subsoil were removed down to the natural geology. The top of the natural geology was cleared by machine, with the exposed surface inspected by archaeologists and cleaned further by hand as required.

2.2.5 Potential archaeological features were then excavated by hand and recorded where appropriate. Recording was undertaken via photography, hand drawn sections and plans at an appropriate scale and written records.

2.2.6 The trenches were all backfilled using the machine and re-photographed.

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 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 uniform, with the natural geology of light grey sand overlain by a silty sand subsoil, which in turn was overlain by very dark topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were good, and the site remained dry enough throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Potential archaeological features in the form of linear ditches were present in trenches 1 and 3.

3.4 Trench 1 (Fig. 3; Plate 1)

3.4.1 Trench 1 contained a ditch, 103, which was aligned north-east to south-west. The ditch had vertical sides and a somewhat irregular base. The ditch measured 0.8m in width and 0.47m in depth (Fig. 4). The single fill, 104, was a friable, brownish-grey sand with dark brown clay patches, and contained no finds. A further almost parallel ditch, 105, to the south contained 20th century glass and was not further investigated.

3.5 Trench 3 (Fig. 3; Plate 2)

3.5.1 Trench 3 contained four potential features, and on investigation the southernmost two proved to be a ditch containing a drainage pipe and a 20th century French drain. Ditch 303 was located towards the northern end of the trench and was aligned north-east to south-west, terminating within the trench at its north-eastern extent. The ditch was 0.44m wide, 0.2m deep, with near vertical sides and a somewhat irregular base (Fig. 4). Its single fill, 304, was a friable mottled grey-brown silty sand containing charcoal flecks and no finds. Ditch 303 was truncated by a smaller parallel ditch 305, which was 0.38m wide, 0.24m deep, with vertical sides and a flat base (Fig. 4). Its single fill, 306, was a friable, grey-brown mottled silty sand with occasional charcoal flecks, also containing no finds.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Ground conditions during the evaluation were good, and although conditions were wet the ground drained well and water proved no obstacle to the work. All the proposed trenches were successfully excavated to their full extents without need to modify their locations or lengths. The features were obvious in the natural, and several modern and geological features were tested to help in the identification of any archaeological features. The evaluation is therefore thought to provide a high level of reliability.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation has successfully established the character, quality, and extent of archaeological remains within the site.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 It seems likely the three undated linear features identified in trenches 1 and 3 are of 20th century origin and are related to drainage, although this is not confirmed by cartographic evidence. There was a strong similarity between the fill of ditch 103 and the parallel ditch which contained 20th century glass, suggesting that they may both be of recent date. The lack of finds in ditches 103, 303 and 305 suggest that they were not located in the vicinity of any significant focus of occupation, or other related activities, and that they are likely to be drainage features or minor boundaries. The ditches are therefore thought to be of low archaeological significance.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					**Orientation**	N-S
Trench revealed two ditches, but one was found to be 20th Century. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sand with silty patches.					**Length (m)**	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Description**	**Finds**	**Date**
100	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil, very dark brown	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil, brownish grey silty sand	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural, light grey sand with brown patches of silty sand	-	-
103	Cut	0.8	0.47	NE-SW aligned, with near vertical sides and a flat base	-	-
104	Fill	0.8	0.47	Friable, brownish grey sand, with patches of dark brown clay	-	-
105	Cut	-	-	Ditch unexcavated	glass	20th C

Trench 2						
General description					**Orientation**	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sand with limestone outcrops.					**Length (m)**	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Description**	**Finds**	**Date**
200	Layer	-	0.4	Topsoil, very dark brown	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.05	Subsoil, brownish grey silty sand	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural, light grey sand with brown patches of silty sand and limestone outcrops	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					**Orientation**	N-S
Trench revealed two ditches. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sand with limestone outcrops.					**Length (m)**	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Description**	**Finds**	**Date**
300	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil, very dark brown	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil, grey silty sand	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural, whitish grey sand with limestone outcrops	-	-

303	Cut	0.44	0.2	NE-SW aligned linear with visible terminus to NE end. Very steep sides, irregular base	-	-
304	Fill	0.44	0.2	Friable, mottled grey and brown silty sand, charcoal flecks	-	-
305	Cut	0.38	0.24	NE-SW aligned linear, with near vertical sides and a flat base	-	-
306	Fill	0.38	0.24	Friable, greyish brown with mottles of light grey silty sand, occasional charcoal flecks	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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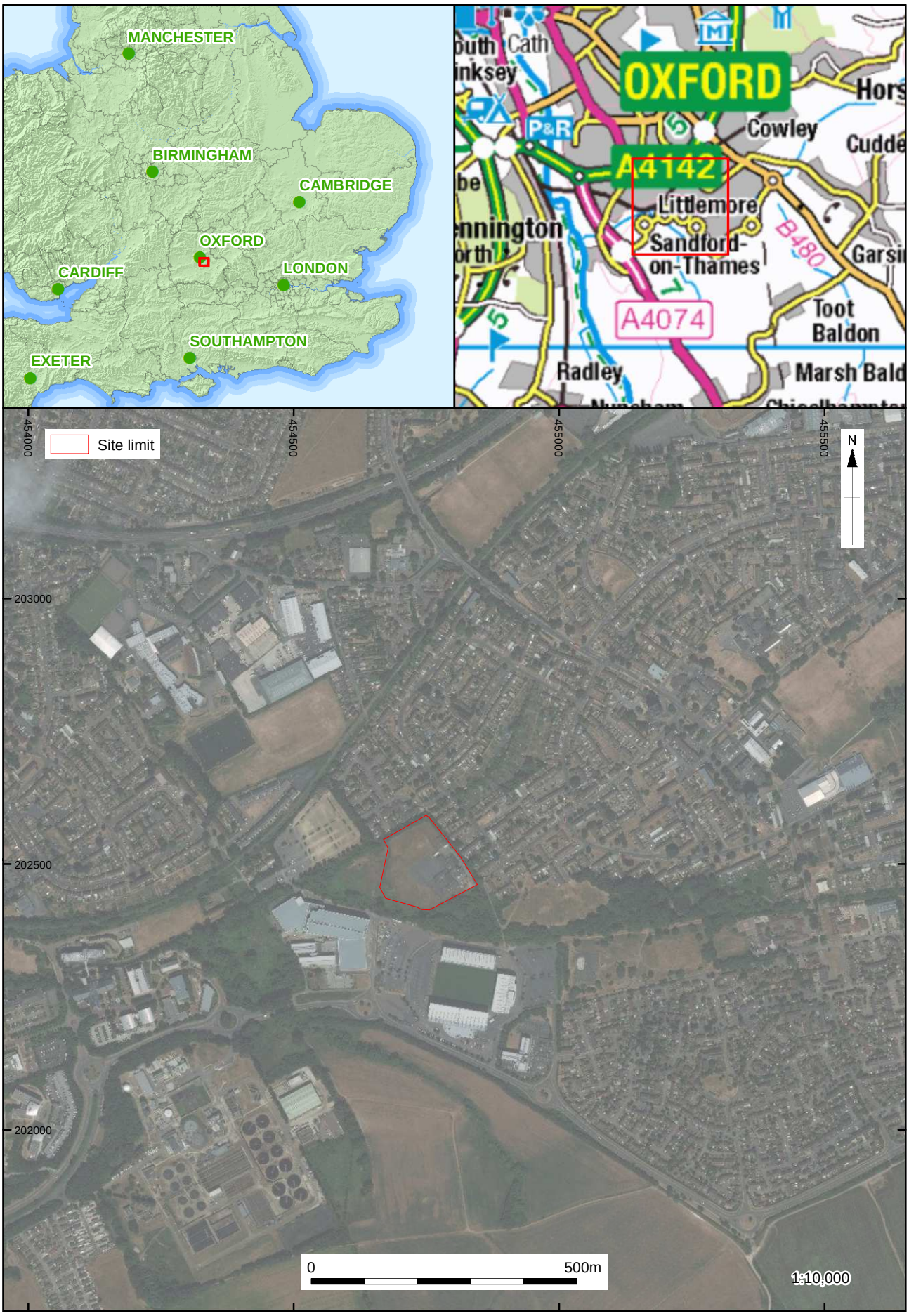
RSK ADAS 2020a Archaeological Desk Based Assessment of Land at Northfield School, Oxford

RSK ADAS 2020b Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Trial Trenching on Land at Northfield School, Oxford

APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Northfields School, Littlemore
Site code:	LINS20
Grid Reference	NGR SP 54727 02475
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	February 2020
Area of Site	2.26 hectares
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA South, 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.2020.33
Summary of Results:	A total of 3 trenches were excavated across the site, which two of which contained undated ditches thought to be of recent origin.



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Figure 1: Site location

X:\\Littlemore_Northfield_School_Eval\010Geomatics\03 GIS Projects - DRM_v2\Figures\LINSEV_Fig1.mxd*aidan.farnan*25/02/2020

\\10.0.10.86\projects\ILittlemore_Northfield_School_Eval\010Geomatics\03 GIS Projects - DRM_v2\Figures\LINSEV_Fig2a.mxd*aidan.farnan*11/03/2020

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Figure 2: Trenches 1, 2 & 3

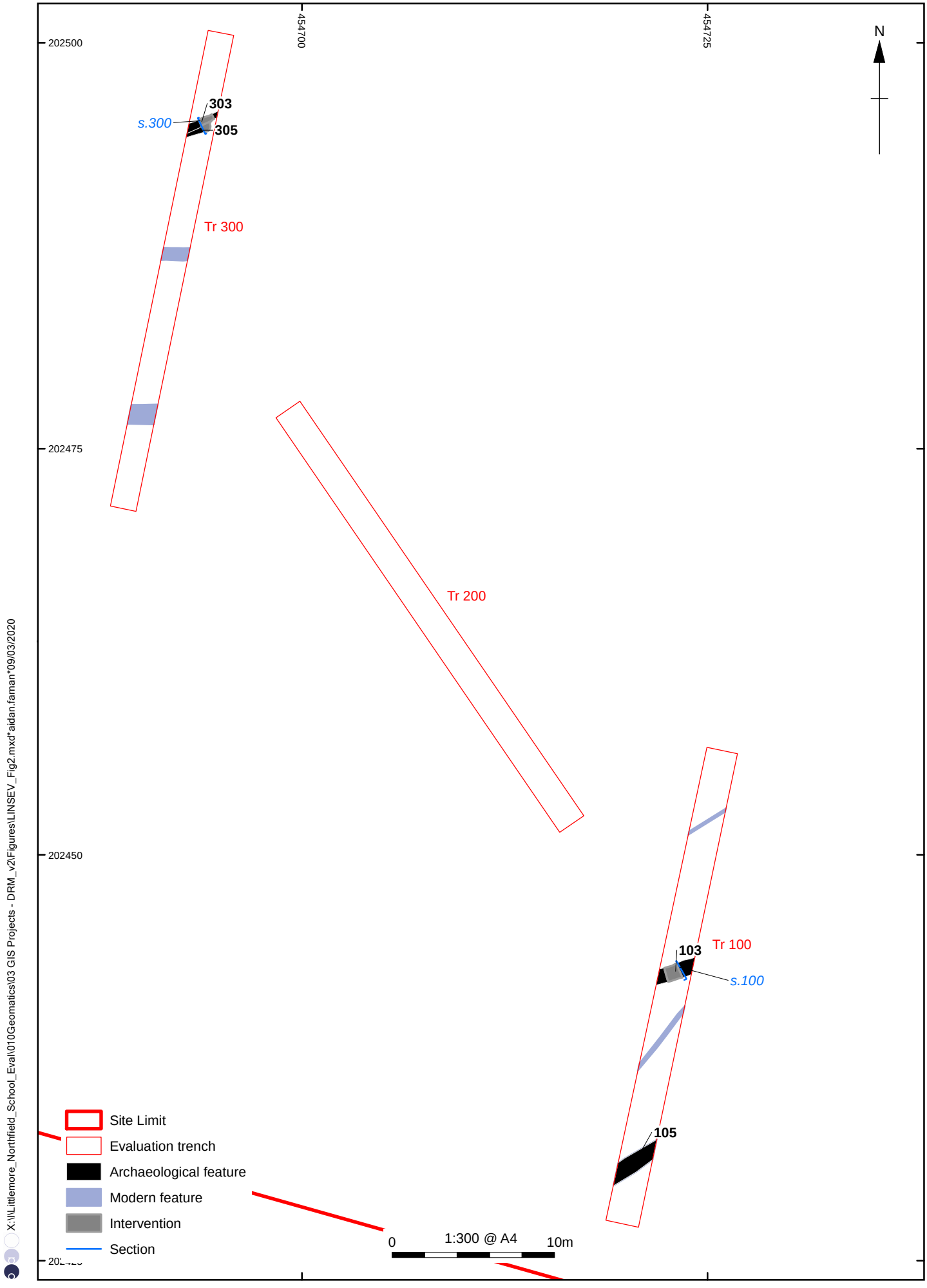


Figure 3: Trenches 1, 2 and 3

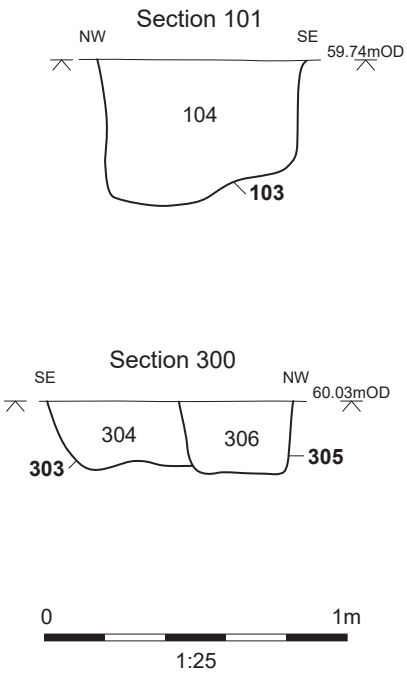


Figure 4: Sections 101 and 300

Plate 1: Trench 1

Plate 2: Trench 3

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