

Ripon College Cuddesdon



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Summary

In November 2009 Oxford Archaeology carried out a field evaluation in the grounds of Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford. The project was carried out on behalf of Ripon College. The evaluation consisted of four trenches targeted on the impact areas of proposed new buildings. A shallow pit and a ditch were revealed. Both of these features are thought to be associated with the present buildings on the site which date from between 1853 and 1878. A stone built wall foundation is thought to pre-date the current buildings but to relate to post-medieval activity in the area.

Generally the topsoil across the site was shallow, and its interface with the underlying natural deposits indicates that a degree of landscaping has taken place on the site. This was most notable in the north-western area of the proposed development where the deposits were truncated through levelling of the area for a tennis court.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 The proposed development site is situated within the grounds of Ripon College, which is located on the north side of Cuddesdon on the western side of the road (SP 5989 0320) (Fig. 1). Ripon College propose to construct two new buildings on the site and are in the process of applying for planning permission. Due to the potential presence of archaeological features on the site and in accordance with PPG16 and Local Plan policies a predetermination archaeological evaluation was requested by Richard Oram, County Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS). A Brief (OCAS 2009) was issued to define the work required. Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by Ripon College to undertake the evaluation and produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (OA 2009) for the work which was subsequently approved by OCAS.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies at approximately 105m OD. The underlying geology is Portland Formation sand and limestone.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The background to the site as presented in the Brief (OCAS 2009) is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The site is located in an area of archaeological potential. It is located 77m to the east of an Anglo Saxon burial site (Historic Environment Record, Primary Record Number (PRN) 1821)(SP 5997 0319). Several inhumations were recovered in the 19th century along with a number of Saxon objects including two iron sword blades, a bronze bucket and two small glass vases during road construction related to the Episcopal Palace. The finds were recorded as typical of a pagan Saxon burial site. The quality of the objects found suggest a very high status burial site. The bronze bucket appears to have been a very rare item of Egyptian origin but its location is currently unknown. Further work on the site in the 1970s did not record any finds or features of this date.
- 1.3.3 The site is also located 94m south-west of a Roman building which was excavated between 1916 and 1921 (PRN 1853)(SP 5998 0325). A hypocaust was recorded along with wall plaster and opus signinum (a Roman concrete) suggesting a building of some status but no trace of tessellated floor was discovered. The building was dated to the 3rd or 4th century from pottery finds.
- 1.3.4 Located 142m to the east is the site of the Bishop's Palace (PRN D2758)(SP 6002 0315). The first palace was built using timber from Shotover in 1635 and was destroyed during the Civil War in 1644. This was rebuilt in 1679 as a symmetrical stone house with projecting wings and a hipped roof. This house burnt down in the early 1960s
- 1.3.5 Ripon College is a Grade II* listed building built in 1853-4 and 1873-8 by G.E. Street, and extended in 1904 by Spencer Slingsby Stallwood (PRN 19589). A separate Vicarage, now part of the college, was built at the same time by G.E. Street and is also listed (PRN 19591). A post-medieval copper finger ring was found by a metal detector 20m south-west of the site and was dated to between 1500AD and 1650AD.



2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1

- (i) To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- (ii) To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- (iii) To establish the need for any onward mitigation strategy.
- (iv) To make available the results of the investigation

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The proposed development comprises two main areas (Fig. 2). The evaluation consisted of three 20m x 1.5m trenches situated within the footprint of the proposed southern building and one trench of the same dimensions within the footprint of the proposed northern building.
- 2.2.2 The trenches were located, in the absence of any known archaeological features, to provide good overall coverage of the area of impact (Fig. 2). They were further positioned to avoid the root protection zones of nearby trees and known services.
- 2.2.3 Work was undertaken in full accordance with the WSI, the Brief and OA's standard methodology for evaluations (OA 1992).
- 2.2.4 Excavation of the trenches was undertaken by a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under direct archaeological supervision.
- 2.2.5 Machine excavation proceeded to the natural geology or the top of the first archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.
- 2.2.6 Archaeological features were sampled sufficiently to characterise and date them. Care was taken to ensure no damage was done to the archaeological deposits during machine excavation.
- 2.2.7 Archaeological features were hand sampled and issued with unique context numbers. Context recording was in accordance with established OA practices (OA 1992). All contexts were given unique numbers and any bulk finds were collected by context.
- 2.2.8 Site plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50, sections were recorded at a scale of 1:10, and a photographic record, consisting of colour slide and black and white film was maintained.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 A description of soil and ground conditions is given and the distribution of archaeological deposits described. The results of the evaluation are summarised with each trench being described individually. This is followed by a discussion and interpretation of the results. A summarised table of contexts is provided.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The natural geology consisted of Portland Formation sand and limestone. The site varied topographically. In the north-western area the ground was lower and there appeared to have been stripping and levelling for a tennis court. There was a higher frequency of limestone in the natural deposits in this area.

3.2.2 The horizon between the topsoil, which was between 0.3m and 0.4m deep and consisted of a dark brown silty loam, and underlying deposits was well defined. There was a thin mid orange-brown sandy clay deposit of 0.1–0.22m present in the southern part of the site and this may be a truncated subsoil or a disturbed interface between the topsoil and the natural. The clear distinction between the topsoil and underlying deposits would suggest that this soil is relatively new and may be a result of recent landscaping activity related to the present buildings.

3.2.3 To ascertain that the deposits immediately underlying the topsoil were natural and not made ground Trench 3 was mechanically excavated to a depth of 1.1m. This confirmed that the deposits were indeed natural. Sondages were also excavated in Trenches 1 and 2 to ensure any made ground would be recognised if present but no such deposits were revealed.

3.2.4 The ground was well drained in all trenches. The water table was not encountered.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were identified within three of the four trenches excavated. A shallow pit or garden feature was identified within Trench 1 (Fig. 3), a stone built wall foundation was revealed in Trench 3 (Fig. 4) and a ditch was recorded in Trench 4 (Fig. 5)

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 Trench 1 was located in the area of the proposed southern building and was aligned north-south. A single sub-circular feature was identified proximal to the western baulk (Fig. 3). This proved to be a shallow cut (1003) 0.6m in diameter, containing a single homogeneous fill of friable mid brown clayey sand (1004). An iron object was recovered from the surface of this feature (see 3.8.1). Natural deposits (1002) were revealed at a depth of 0.4m below ground level.

3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 Trench 2 was oriented northeast-southwest within the footprint of the proposed southern building. No archaeological features were observed within this trench.



3.6 Trench 3

3.6.1 Trench 3 was oriented northwest-southeast and was located within the footprint of the proposed southern building. Towards the south-eastern end of the trench the remnants of a northeast-southwest oriented stone built wall foundation were observed (Fig. 4). The foundation itself (3004) consisted of unfinished limestone constructed in irregular courses with no bonding agent. It survived to a depth of 0.7m and measured 0.9m wide. The wall was revealed for a length of 1.6m crossing the trench. Evidence for a construction cut (3003) was observed in section and recorded. No artefactual evidence was recovered. The feature was encountered at a shallow depth immediately underlying the topsoil (3000). Natural deposits (3002) were revealed at a depth of 0.5m below ground level.

3.7 Trench 4

3.7.1 Trench 4 was aligned east-west and was located within the area of the proposed smaller building to the north. A single ditch (4003) was revealed, aligned northwest-southeast for a length of 2.5m crossing the trench (Fig. 5). The ditch was 0.4m deep and the sides were slightly irregular but steep and relatively straight leading to a narrow flat base. This feature was filled by a single homogenous fill (4004) of mid orange-brown compact sandy clay. Natural deposits (4002) were revealed at a depth of 0.4m below ground level.

3.7.2 A modern drain was located in the north-eastern corner of the trench which corresponded with known services at the site.

3.8 Finds summary

3.8.1 Despite monitoring of the spoil heaps only a single find was recovered from the evaluation. This was an iron object recovered from the top of the circular feature (1003) in Trench 1. This has been identified as being of modern cast iron material and is probably part of a hinge for a door or a gate. This will not be retained. No deposits of environmental importance were observed therefore no samples were collected for environmental analysis.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The trenches were located to target the main impacts from the proposed development. The ground conditions during machine excavation were good. The natural horizon was clearly identified. Trench 3 was excavated to a greater depth to ensure that the deposit observed was natural and not made ground resulting from landscaping. This did prove that the deposits were natural and not made ground. The results obtained are considered to provide a reliable evaluation of the development area.

4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 The archaeology observed in the evaluation was limited. A shallow pit or garden feature was identified in Trench 1. A single piece of metalwork was recovered from the top of the fill of this feature which has been identified as being of modern cast iron material and is part of a hinge from a door or gate. This feature is thought to relate to activity associated with the current buildings in the area, the construction of which date from between 1853 and 1878. It is probably a garden feature.

4.2.2 A stone-built wall foundation was revealed in Trench 3. The foundation survived to a depth of approximately 0.7m. This was a trench-built foundation of dry stone construction. The wall associated with this foundation may have formed part of a revetment or boundary. It does not appear to relate to the current buildings which were constructed between 1853 and 1878 but in the absence of other earlier finds or features a post-medieval date is most probable. This trench demonstrated a sharp definition between the topsoil and the natural deposits indicating a degree of landscaping. Given that the wall was observed immediately below the topsoil at a very shallow level it is likely that the wall was truncated through landscaping activity.

4.2.3 A single ditch was revealed in Trench 4. Its dimensions suggest it may have served as part of a drainage or irrigation system. The fill deposit suggests a single episode of infilling rather than gradual silting. The ditch could not be dated confidently but is thought to relate to the present buildings. The ground level here has been truncated through landscaping, and is lower than the surrounding grounds. A tennis court in this area probably explains the lowered ground level.

4.2.4 Overall the topography suggests marked landscaping. The topsoil was uniformly shallow across the site with a clearly defined horizon between the topsoil and the natural deposits below. There was variation between the ground level to the north-west containing the tennis court and the higher ground to the south and east. However, to what extent landscaping activity may have truncated any potential archaeological deposits across the site as a whole is not fully clear.

4.3 Significance

4.3.1 The results of the evaluation show a low concentration of archaeological deposits within the proposed development area and these appear to be post-medieval or later in origin.

APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		N-S
Trench was excavated to an average depth of 0.45m with a 1m sondage excavated at the northern end to ensure correct level was achieved. The average depth of the natural was 0.4m (103.73 OD at northern end). A single shallow sub-circular feature (1003) was observed proximal to the western baulk and 1.6m south of the midway point of the trench. This measured 0.6m in diameter and had a depth of 0.05m. A single homogenous fill was observed. This appears to be a natural feature related to root action. A single iron object was recovered from the very top of the fill and may well be intrusive.				Avg. depth (m)		0.45
				Width (m)		1.7
				Length (m)		20
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1000	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.1	Subsoil ?	-	-
1002	Layer	-	0.6	Natural (as excavated)	-	-
1003	Cut	0.6	0.05	Cut of sub-circular feature	-	-
1004	Fill	0.6	0.05	Fill of sub-circular feature	Fe object	Modern

Trench 2						
General description				Orientation		NE-SW
Trench was excavated to an average depth of 0.55m with a 1.1m sondage excavated at the north-western end to ensure correct level was achieved. Average depth to the top of the natural was 0.5m (104.82 OD at NE). Trench 2 was devoid of archaeology.				Avg. depth (m)		0.55
				Width (m)		1.7
				Length (m)		20
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
2000	Layer	-	0.4	Topsoil	-	-
2001	Layer	-	0.1	Subsoil ?	-	-
2002	Layer	-	0.6	Natural (as excavated)	-	-



Trench 3						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench was excavated to a depth of 1.1m. The average depth to the top of the natural was 0.5m (105.27 OD at SE). The remnants of a trench built wall foundation (3004) were observed 2m from the SE limit of excavation. The wall was oriented NE-SW, measured 1.6m in length across the trench. It was constructed within cut (3003) of irregular courses of unfinished limestone with no bonding agent. No dating was recovered.				Avg. depth (m)		1.1
				Width (m)		1.6
				Length (m)		20
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
3000	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
3001	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
3002	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
3003	Cut	0.9	0.7	Cut for wall construction		
3004	Structure	0.9	0.7	Wall structure		

Trench 4						
General description				Orientation		E-W
Trench was excavated to a depth of 0.4m (103.42 OD). No sondage was necessary as the natural horizon was clearly defined in this trench. A single linear ditch (4003) was observed 4m west of the eastern limit of excavation. It was visible for a length of 2.5m oriented NW-SE across the trench. It was a narrow and relatively shallow ditch with irregular sides and a single fill (4004). Dating was not possible as no finds were recovered. A modern drain was also located towards the NE corner of the trench in an area where services were recorded.				Avg. depth (m)		0.4
				Width (m)		1.7
				Length (m)		20
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
4000	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
4001	Layer	-	0.05	Subsoil ?	-	-
4002	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
4003	Cut	0.4	0.4	Cut of ditch	-	-
4004	Fill	0.4	0.4	Fill of ditch	-	-



APPENDIX B. REFERENCES

Oxford Archaeology (OA), 2009, *Ripon College, Cuddesdon. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation.*

Oxford Archaeology (OA), 1992, *Fieldwork Manual*, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS), 2009, *Ripon College Cuddesdon. Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation.*



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Ripon College, Cuddesdon

Site code: CURIP 09

Grid reference: SP 5989 0320

Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: 2nd - 3rd November, 2009

Area of site: 9960.56 square metres

Summary of results: In November 2009 Oxford Archaeology carried out a field evaluation project in the grounds of Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford. A total of four 20m long trenches were excavated. Of these three revealed archaeological deposits. A shallow pit or garden feature and a narrow ditch were revealed in Trenches 1 and 4 and are thought to relate to the present buildings on the site and a foundation wall of possible post-medieval date was revealed in Trench 3. The site showed evidence of general landscaping.

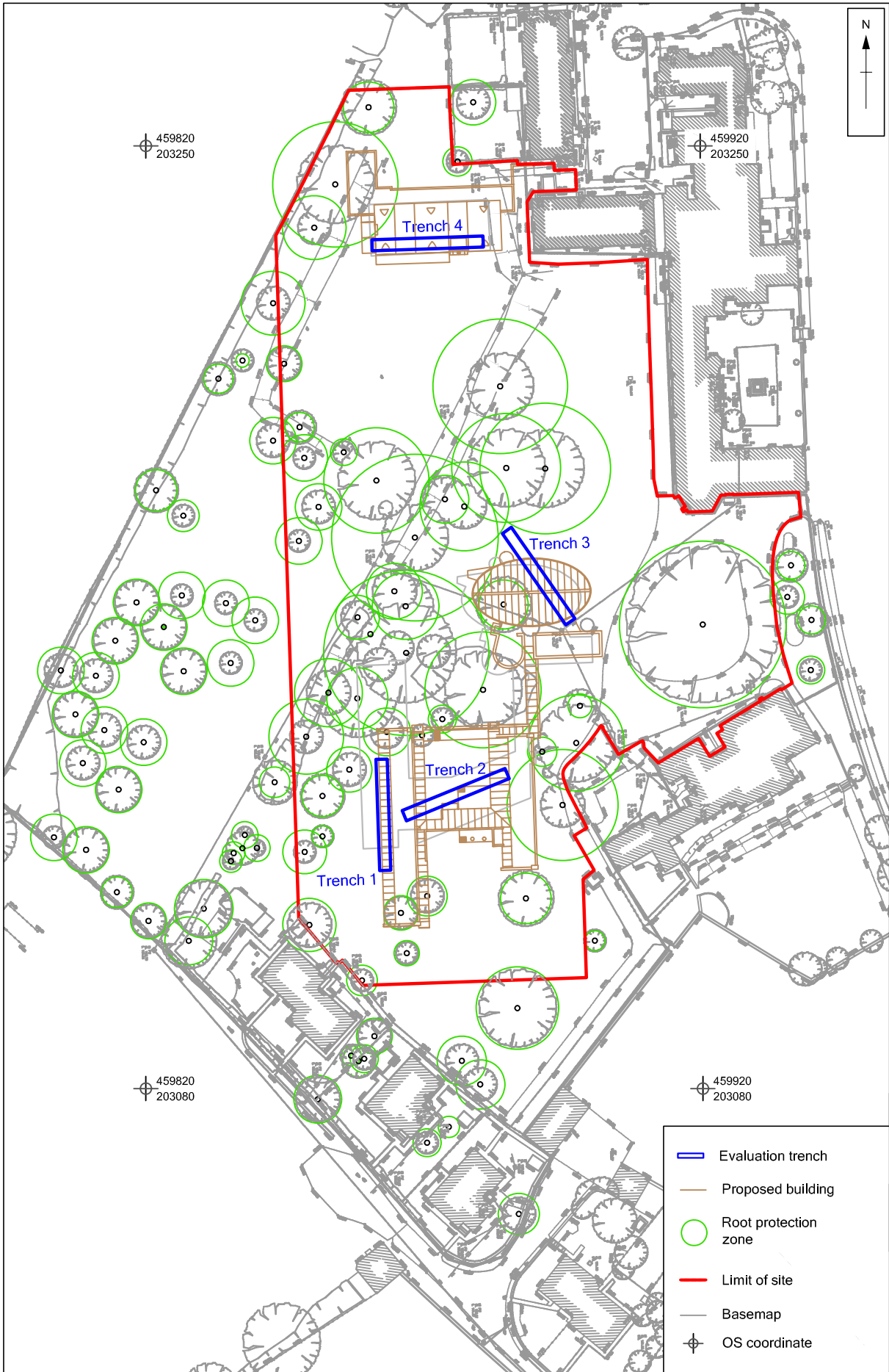
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Figure 1: Site location

X:\Ripon College Cuddesdon\010\Geomatics\02\CAD\001\current\CUR\PEV_Ripon_College_trench_setout_OS_Grid_291009.dwg(Figure 2)****mark.littlewood* 13 Nov 2009



CHECKED BY: MJB*131109

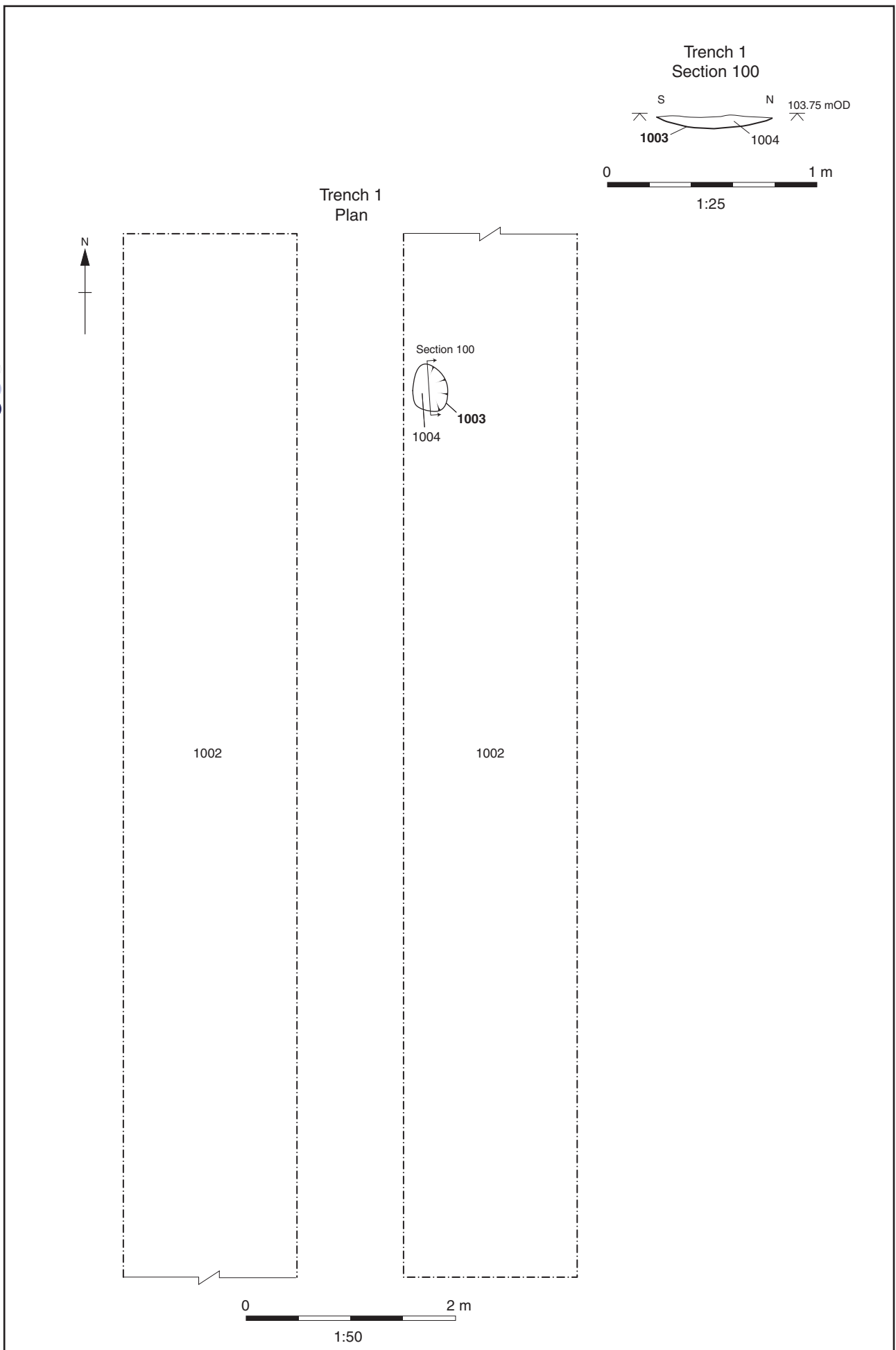


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and section

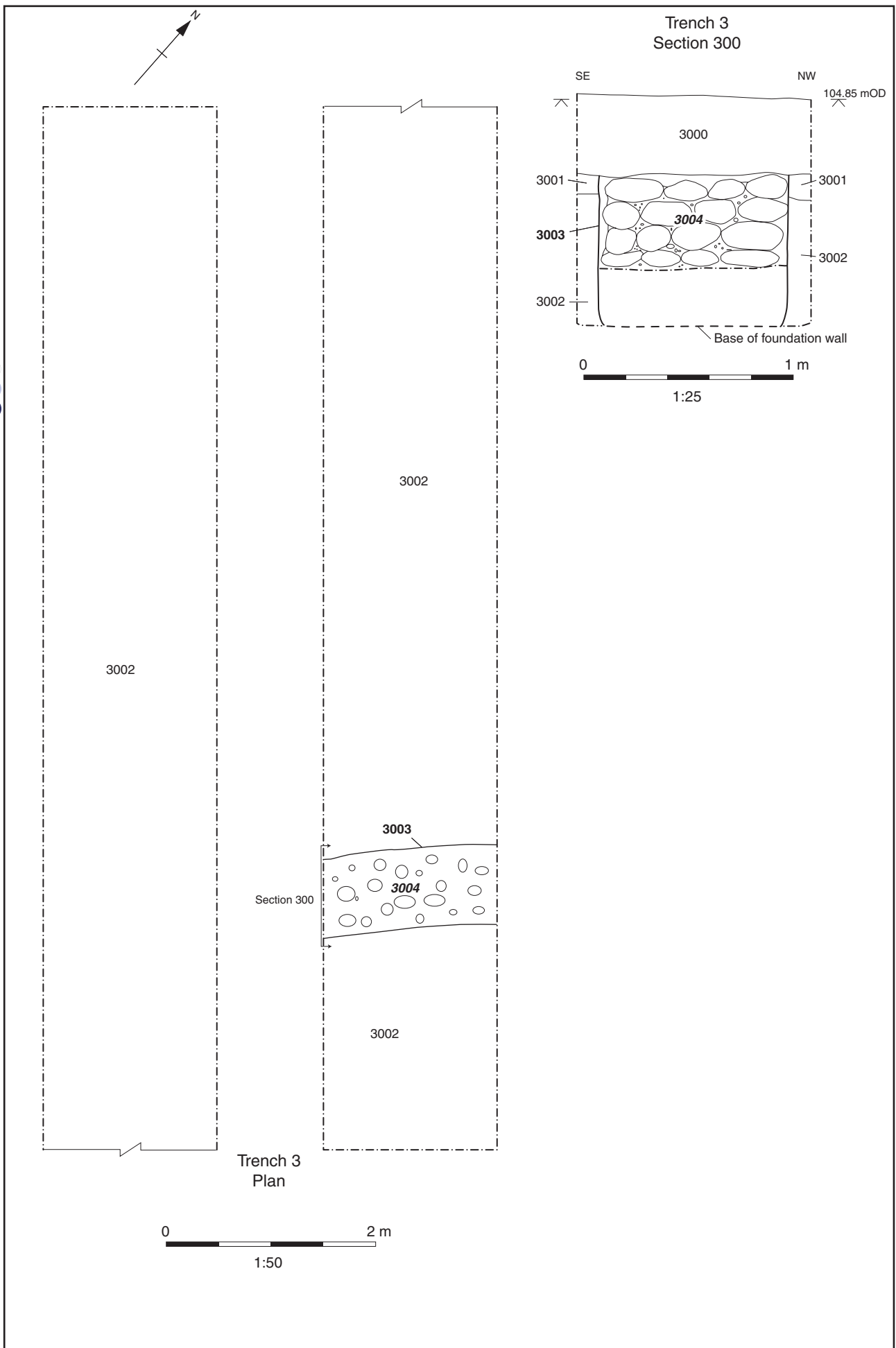


Figure 4: Trench 3, plan and section

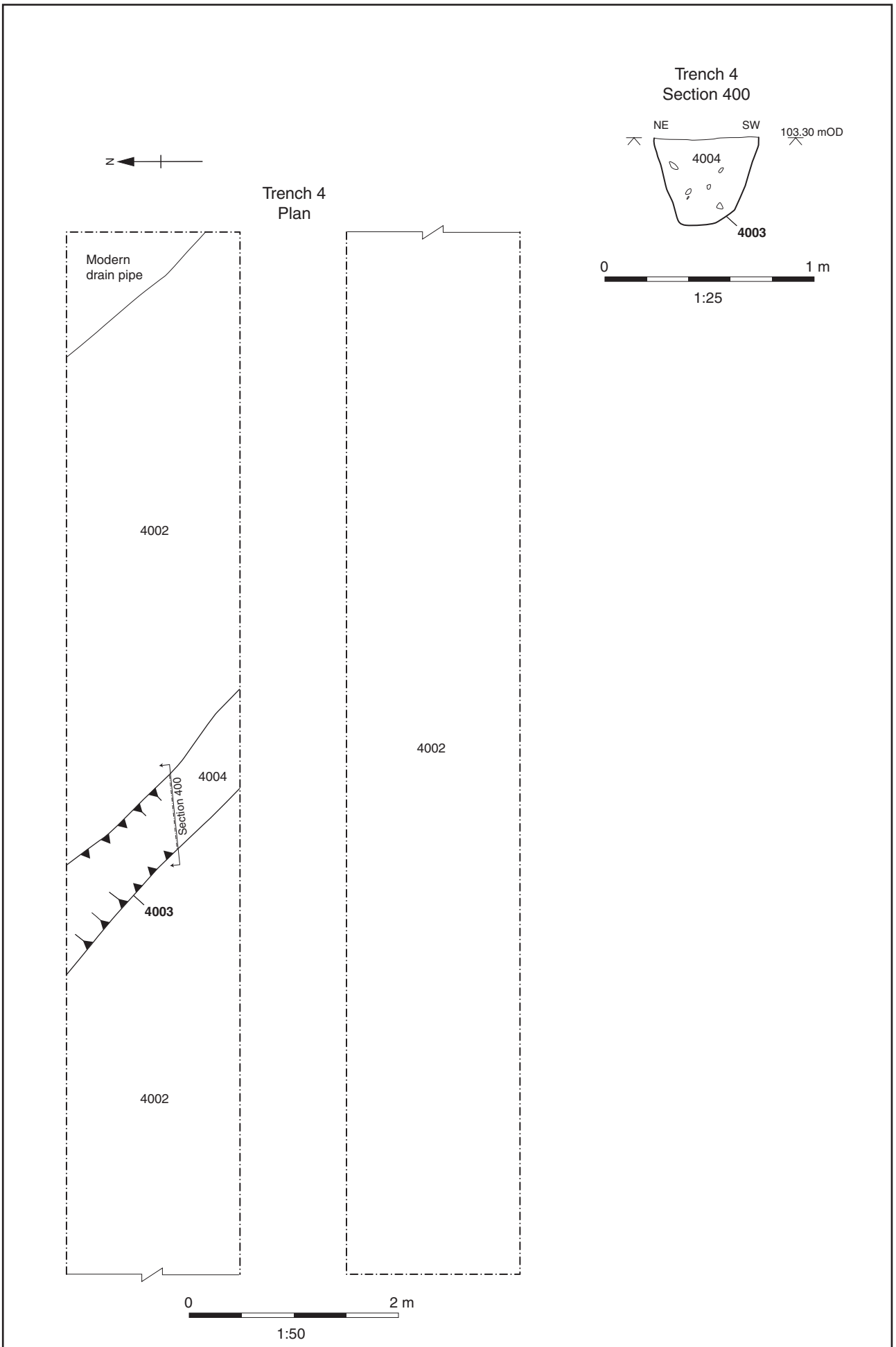


Figure 5: Trench 4, plan and section



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