

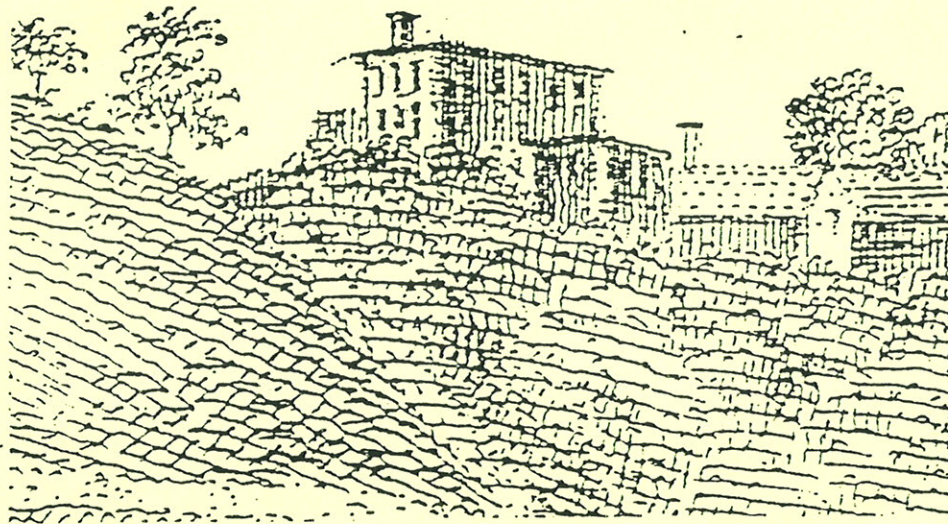
Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners

Proposed New Ride at Alton Towers, Farley, Staffordshire

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

SK 0719 4315

*Alveton Lodge.*



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1999

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NGR SK 0719 4315

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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## SUMMARY

*In February 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Alton Towers, Staffordshire on behalf of Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners. No significant archaeological remains were discovered and it was revealed that the area of the proposed development had previously been stripped down to bedrock prior to the construction of a car park. The evaluation also revealed that the site has been heavily affected by modern services.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

Over a period of three days in February 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Alton Towers, Staffordshire on behalf of Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners in respect of a planning application for the construction of a new ride ('The Dark Ride') (Planning Application No. SM98-0981). The work was carried in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by the OAU following a specification set by the County Archaeologist on behalf of Staffordshire County Council. The development site was situated within the Alton Towers Leisure Park, which lies in the parish of Farley, Staffordshire (Fig. 1), and measured approximately 17 m by 35 m and was 595 m<sup>2</sup> in area.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

The Alton Towers Leisure Park lies on an escarpment, above and to the north of the River Churnet (SK 0719 4315). The village of Alton lies *c.* 1 km to the south. The geology is Triassic Hollington formation sandstone overlying Hawksmoor sandstone (GSGB 1983, sheet 124). The site lies at around 189 m OD.

The proposed development site lay within Bunbury hillfort, *c.* 10 m to the east (and outside) of the western section of the scheduled rampart and its associated envelope (Fig. 1). At the time of the evaluation the area of investigation was tarmac car park, with the general area being used as a workshop area for Alton Towers Theme Park. It was bounded to the north-east, north-west and west by late 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, comprising workshops and other utilitarian structures. A small part of the northern end of the development site lay within the moat of Alton Towers Hall. Approximately 200 m to the south-west of the tarmac lies the southern rampart of the hillfort and the vehicle entrance to the workshop area

### 1.3 Archaeological background

The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate Desk Based Archaeological Assessment (OAU 1999) the results of which, with particular attention to Bunbury hillfort, are summarised below:

There was no evidence for occupation or activity dating to the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods within 1 km of the development area. There was evidence for Bronze Age activity, however. Several early prehistoric finds have been discovered including, a leaf-shaped bronze sword, a Bronze Age perforated hammer, a 'fine' stone. A Bronze Age barrow can be seen at Rainroach Rock, c.1 km to the south-west of the site.

Bunbury hillfort (SAM 21633) is an important site in that it is one of a relatively small number of univallate hillforts in the country and one of even fewer within the north-west. It has been described in antiquity by Plot (1686), prior to the construction of Alton Towers, as having 'no regular feature encompassed with a double and some times treble ditch, on the north, north west and north east sides, all the rest being naturally inaccessible, the whole including about 100 acres'. An excavation was carried out within the hillfort in the 1960s.

The surviving ramparts to the west and south of the development area, and a strip of c.15 m extending out from the ramparts into the interior, have been scheduled on the assumption that the main areas of surviving archaeology lay within this curtain. The development area, although within the hillfort interior, falls outside what is considered to be the areas of best preserved archaeological deposits.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

The aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality, date, and depth of any archaeological remains present. Additionally the evaluation aimed to establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features, and to make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

It was originally intended that the evaluation would comprise three trenches, each 10 m long and 1.6 m wide. However, the trench locations and dimensions had to be altered to avoid the unexpectedly numerous services located in this area, which included an 11000 Volt electricity cable. Despite these limitations two 10 m trenches were achieved in the southern half of the development area (Trenches 1 and 2), but the density of services at the north

end of site meant that trenching in this area was limited to three separate 2 m long hand excavated test pits (Trenches 3, 4 and 5) (Fig. 2). The overall area eventually trenched was 42 m<sup>2</sup>, representing a sample of approximately 7% of the development area.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The overburden in Trenches 1 and 2, and tarmac in Trenches 3, 4 and 5, was removed by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. The trenches were then cleaned by hand, planned and photographed. Sections were drawn where appropriate. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Trench descriptions (see Fig. 2 for trench locations)

#### 4.1.1 Trenches 1 and 2

Throughout these two trenches the top of the sandstone bedrock was located at an average depth of 0.50 m below the present tarmac surface. Patches of a reddish sand subsoil survived in hollows above the bedrock, but in most areas the hardcore rubble for the modern tarmac surface directly overlaid the bedrock.

A modern service trench containing two pipes ran obliquely through centre of Trench 1. The location of Trench 2 had been altered to avoid this line of services. No archaeological features were found cut into the bedrock in either of these trenches and no finds were recovered.

#### 4.1.2 Trench 3

Once the tarmac surface had been removed, this trench was hand-excavated to a depth of 1.25 m. Although the bedrock had still not been reached at this level, excavation ceased due to safety considerations. The only deposits encountered comprised layers of rubble and sand containing 19<sup>th</sup>-century ('Willow pattern') pottery and fragments of brick. This material appeared to be filling a deep modern disturbance of uncertain extent. A large metal water pipe was exposed along the northern edge of this trench.

#### 4.1.3 Trenches 4 and 5

In Trench 4 the top of the bedrock was located at a depth of 0.75 m below the present ground surface and in Trench 5 at a depth of 0.80 m. The sequence of deposits in these two trenches was the same as those encountered in Trenches 1 and 2. However, the layer of sand subsoil above the bedrock was less truncated in this area, surviving to a depth of up to 0.20 m, but was much disturbed and contained fragments of modern drainpipe. Trench 4 was bisected by a deep service trench containing a large modern ceramic sewer pipe and a 19<sup>th</sup>-century lead water pipe. No archaeological features were found in these two trenches

and the only finds recovered consisted of a small quantity of redeposited 19<sup>th</sup>-century pottery from the modern hardcore layer in Trench 5.

## 4.2 Finds

### 4.2.1 Pottery (*identification by Paul Booth*)

The only finds recovered from the evaluation comprised a small assemblage (17 sherds) of 19<sup>th</sup>-century pottery, which was retrieved from a layer of rubble backfill in Trench 3 and from a make-up layer for the car park in Trench 5.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The results revealed that the proposal area had previously been stripped down to bedrock prior to the construction of the present car park. The original height of the ground level across the site could be estimated by taking levels on areas of undisturbed ground surface to the south of the development area and on the top of the bedrock exposed in the south face of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century moat which bounded the site to the north (Fig 2).

It could be observed that several trees which had been retained in the area immediately to the south of the car park lay on small islands of raised ground, and this represented the original ground level. Levels taken at the base of these trees, and on top of the bedrock exposed in the evaluation trenches revealed the original ground level over the site had been truncated by up to 1.3 m.

The level on top of the bedrock in the south face of the moat was only 0.80 m lower than in Trench 1 (Fig. 2). This revealed that there was only a very gradual slope from south to north, and confirmed that the depth of deposits seen in Trench 3 was the result of the bedrock having been cut away at this point by a deep modern disturbance.

### 5.1 Reliability of field investigation

Despite the constraints caused by the unexpectedly numerous modern services, a sufficient spatial distribution of trenches and overall sample size (7%) was achieved to provide evidence of the character and depth of deposits across the development area. Additional evidence of the original topography was provided by examining the relative levels of surviving ground surface to the south of the development area and exposed sections of bedrock in the south face of 19<sup>th</sup>-century moat (see above).

The evaluation was carried out in poor weather conditions, which included snow and hard overnight frosts. However, all exposed trench surfaces were cleaned, recorded and photographed immediately upon excavation before they became obscured by overnight frost and ice. Therefore, although the adverse weather conditions occasionally made working difficult, it did not affect the reliability of the results.

## 5.2 Overall Conclusions

No significant archaeological deposits were discovered within the proposal area and no finds earlier than 19<sup>th</sup>-century in date were recovered. Previous development of the site has already destroyed any deposits which may have existed above the level of the bedrock, and deeper disturbance has been caused throughout the area by numerous 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century service trenches and other activity.

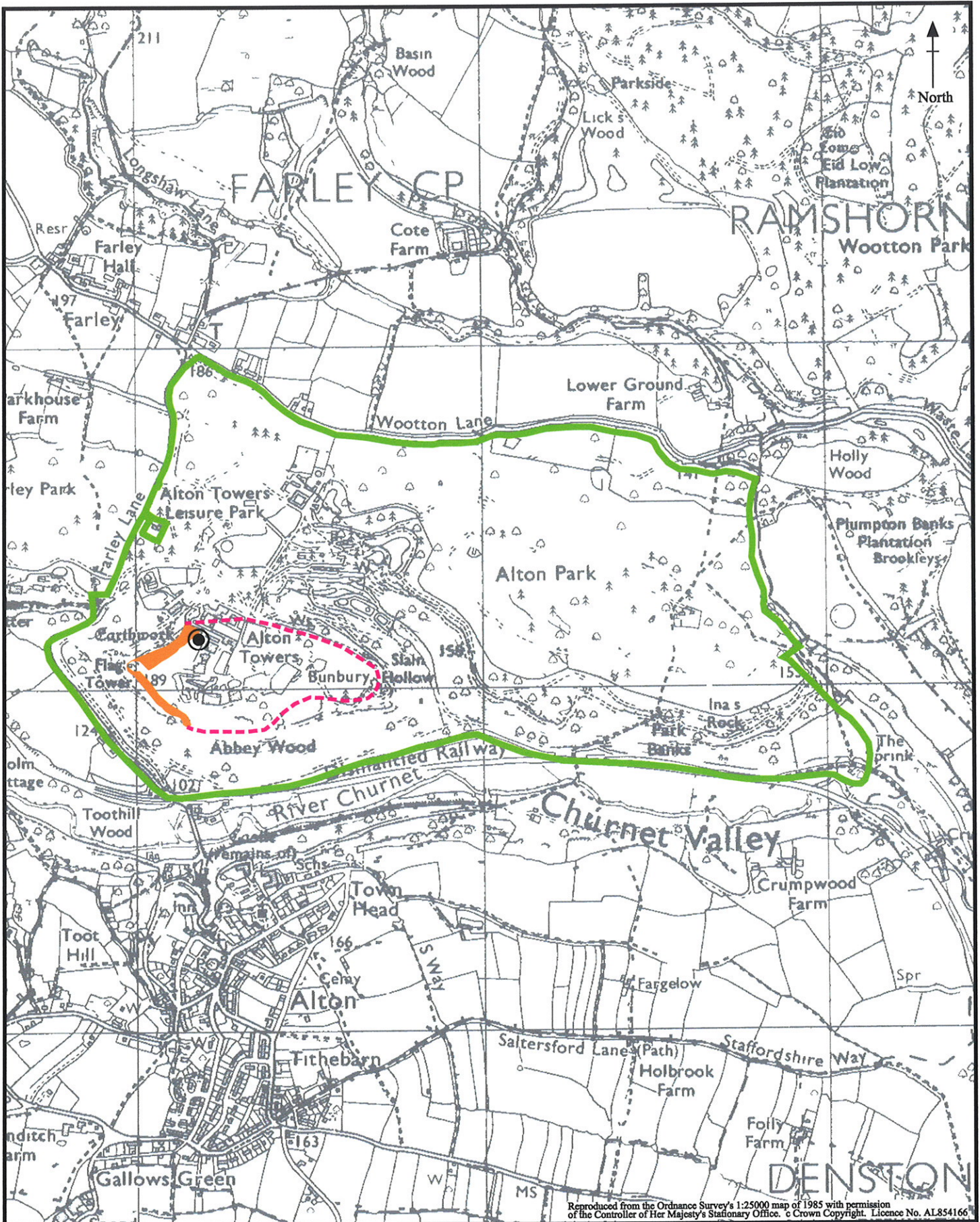


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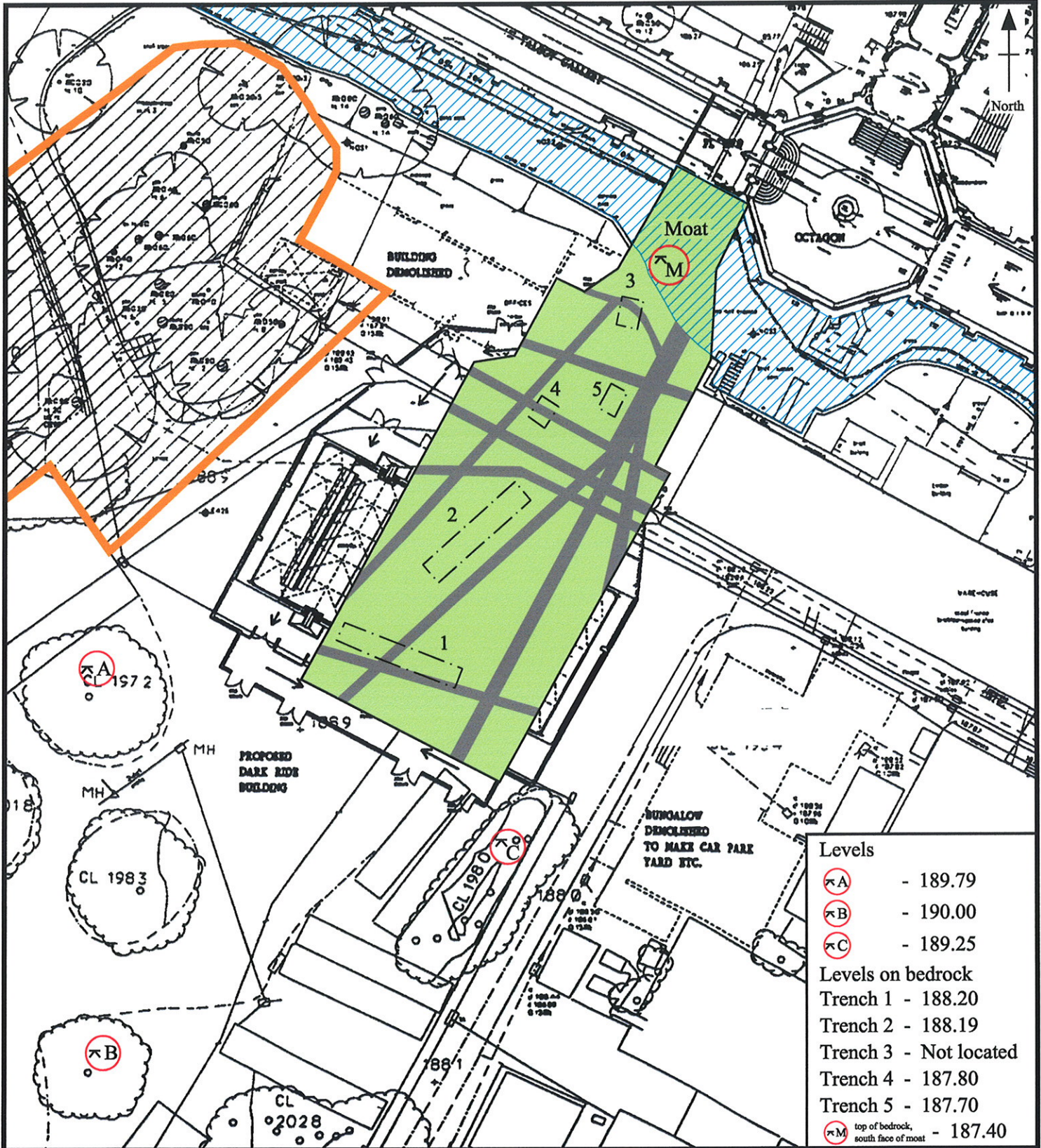


Key:

- Development area
- Bunbury Hillfort - SAM
- Alton Park
- possible extent of hillfort

Scale 1:15,000 at A4

Figure 1: Site Location Plan



Levels	
⊖A	- 189.79
⊖B	- 190.00
⊖C	- 189.25
Levels on bedrock	
Trench 1	- 188.20
Trench 2	- 188.19
Trench 3	- Not located
Trench 4	- 187.80
Trench 5	- 187.70
⊖M	top of bedrock, south face of moat - 187.40

Key: 1:250 at A4

- Area of proposed development
- Moat
- Trenches 1 - 5
- Area of SAM - Bunbury Hillfort
- Modern services
- ⊖A Levels taken at the base of tree

Figure 2: Trench Location Plan



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