Smith's Transport Yard
Former Wantage Wharf
Wantage
Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

oxford

January 2006

Client: The Development Planning Partnership Ltd

Issue N^{O}: 1
OA Job N^{O}: 2894
Planning Ref N^{O}: WAN/19361
NGR: SU 43975 18825

Client Name:	The Development Planning Partnership Ltd
Client Ref No:	
Document Title:	Smith's Transport Yard, Former Wantage Wharf, Wantage, Oxfordshire
Document Type:	Evaluation
Issue Number:	1
National Grid Reference:	NGR SU 43975 18825
Planning Reference:	WAN/19361
OA Job Number:	2894
Site Code:	WAWHA 06
Invoice Code:	WAWHAEV
Receiving Museum:	Oxfordshire County Museum Service
Museum Accession No:	OXCMS:2006.7
Prepared by:	Mr James Mumford
Position:	SWD Project Supervisor
Date:	25th January 2006
Checked by:	Dan Dodds
Position:	Head of Small Works
Date:	25th January 2006
Approved by:	Alan Hardy
Position:	Senior Project Manager
Date:	30th January 2006
Document File Location	U:/OAU/Evaluation Reports/Oxfordshire/WAWHA.doc
Graphics File Location	Servergo:/oaupubs RthruZ*WAWHAEV*WAWHA06* Smith's Transport Yard, Former Wantage Wharf, Wantage, Oxfordshire *GS*24.01.06
Illustrated by	Georgina Slater

Signed.....

Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES
t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

Smith's Transport Yard, Former Wantage Wharf, Wantage, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

CONTENTS

Summary 1
1 Introduction 1
1.1 Location and scope of work 1
1.2 Geology and topography 1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background 1
2 Evaluation Methodology 3
3 Results: Descriptions 3
3.1 Description of deposits 3
4 Discussion and Interpretation 5
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory 6
Appendix 2 Bibliography and References 8
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details 8

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 Site location map
Fig. 2 Trench location
Fig. 3 Trench 1, plan and section
Fig. 4 Trench 2, plan and section
Fig. 5 Trench 3, plan and sections

Cover Plate: View of transport yard from the south.

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Smith's Transport Yard, Former Wantage Wharf, Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 43975 18825) on behalf of The Development Planning Partnership Ltd. The evaluation didn't expose any archaeological features or deposits pre-dating the construction of the canal wharf in the early 1800's. .

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In January 2006 OA carried out a field evaluation at Smith's Transport Yard, Former Wantage Wharf, Wantage, Oxfordshire on behalf of The Development Planning Partnership Ltd in respect of a planning application for construction of 59 dwellings with access, parking and landscaping on the site (Planning Application No. WAN/19361) (Fig. 1). The brief was set by and a WSI agreed with Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeological Officer of Oxfordshire County Council.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The development site is approximately 0.5 ha in area, and is located to the north of Mill Street opposite the Town Mill and 200 m west of the Market Place (NGR: SU 396 881). Letcombe Brook is situated 40 m to the east of it. The site was formerly a transport yard.

1.2.2 The underlying geology is Greensand and Terrace gravel with overlying deposits of alluvium.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate Building Assessment and WSI (OA 2005), the results of which are presented below. The site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence, although there are some known sites with archaeological remains adjacent to the development site.

1.3.2 The site of the proposed development lies within the bounds of the Romano-British settlement at Wantage. Archaeological excavation prior to the construction of the housing estate off Rolls Court in 1993-4 by Cotswold Archaeology revealed the presence of extensive Romano-British settlement (Holbrook & Thomas, 1996). The excavation revealed activity dating from the later 1st century through to the early Saxon period. The earliest phase was identified as a series of field boundaries. During the 2nd century a small granary was constructed along with a rectangular building that probably had a domestic function. These were demolished during the later 3rd century and replaced in the early 4th century by a square structure. The depth of the foundations showed that this building supported more than one floor and it has been interpreted as a tower granary. The Romano-British activity could be part

of the settlement or part of a villa estate. This latter interpretation has been enhanced by the discovery of a villa, with similar occupation phases off Denchworth Road. The early Saxon period saw a creation of a series of ditched enclosures. During the evaluation phase a number of loom weights dating to that period were also found.

1.3.3 Romano-British features have also been found on the east side of the Letcombe Brook and south of Mill Street on the west side of the brook, which could represent part of a larger settlement. Although no structural evidence of Anglo Saxon settlement has been found the documentary and artefactual evidence suggests that it may lie in the proximity of the brook.

The Wilts and Berks Canal

1.3.4 Wantage Wharf was built following an Act of 1795 to serve the Wilts and Berks Canal, which started life from a junction with the Kennet and Avon Canal at Semington. It ran in a northerly direction between the Cotswolds Hills and the Malborough Downs, then on to the Vale of the White Horse to Abingdon on the Thames. The canal had reached Swindon by 1804 and six years later the short branches to Chippenham, Calne, Longcot and Wantage were completed. The primary purpose for the construction of the canal was to carry coal along the Vale of the White Horse (Small 2003 8).

1.3.5 The Wantage branch left the main waterway just to the west of the Grove lock, and ran for nearly a mile to the wharf at the bottom of Mill Street (Wilkinson 2004 13). The Hiskins family had premises on the wharfs in the Wantage area and it is known that James Hiskins & Son operated from Wantage Wharf during the late 19th century. They dealt in coal, coke, salt, hay, straw, corn and 'celebrated manures' (Wilkinson 1985). The Wantage area in particular was known for the exportation of grain and threshing machines (Fuller, date unknown).

1.3.6 The canal is significant in linking the town to London via the Thames, to Bristol and to the industrial areas of the Midlands and the North. The canals also facilitated the building and town plan of Wantage as considerable quantities of building materials were carried by the boats. In the 1860s Wantage invested in the building of a brand new sewage system and numerous houses, and reconstructed most of its roads. Bricks, tiles and stone arrived regularly at Wantage Wharf, which enabled the construction of the Convent, the Baptist Church, and the Methodist Church. The social implications of the canal were not as beneficial and Wantage earned the reputation of 'Black Wantage' due (in part) to the behaviour of the navvies (Philip 1971).

1.3.7 The canal was also utilised in the construction of the Great Western Railway when boats were carrying large quantities of material used in its construction. The importance of the canal to the railway is shown by the fact that it is never more than two miles from the line of the canal. This led to the most profitable years for the canal in 1840 and 1841, when profits amounted to £9,000 in both years. The success and profitability of the Wilts and Berks Canal during construction of the GWR was

somewhat ironic as the spread of the new railway network was instrumental in the decline and eventual collapse of the canal (Scathard 2005).

1.3.8 In 1875 the Wantage Tramway opened and this seemed to operate in harmony with the canal but by 1895 the Somerset Coalfield was worked out and the main reason for the existence of the canal was gone. In 1905 the tramway company took over part of the wharf site and converted it into a goods yard (Wilkinson 2004 17). A photograph dating to c.1904 shows the poor condition of the canal. The last boat recorded in Wantage Wharf was in the mid-1890s and it was only able to transport 17 tons compared with the designed limit of 34 tons. This was due to severe silting up of the channel due to lack of dredging, reducing the available depth of water. By 1900 traffic had all but ceased and the canal was officially closed on July 31, 1914. A public footpath now follows the line of the canal.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1.1 The evaluation consisted of Three trenches each measuring 30 m long and 2 m wide (Fig. 2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.

2.1.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

3.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

3.1.1 This trench was oriented NW - SE and measured 30 m long x 2 m wide and excavated to a depth of 1.6 m into a series of layers of natural alluvium (109, 110, 111 and 112) of light brown and bluish grey silty clay. This had been truncated by a band of very dark blackish brown peat (108), part of a former watercourse. Sealing these deposits was a 0.1 m to 0.25 m thick layer of cultivated soil of dark reddish brown silty clay loam, which had been cut by the construction cut (106) for a brick culvert (105) carrying Letcombe Brook. Only 2.5 m x 1.1 m x 0.4 m of what was exposed in the trench. This was covered by a back fill of dark reddish brown silty clay (104), which was sealed below a 0.50 m thick mid grey brown silty clay (103) and a 0.20 m to 0.75 m thick layer of light blue and grey silty sand (102). This represented upcast material for the construction of the canal wharf in 1810. Sealing this was a 0.5 m to 0.18 m thick compact black ash with reddish brown silty clay and an ironstone base (101), which was the yard surface for the wharf from the 19th century with more recent repairs and modern re-surfacing represented by layer (100).

Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

3.1.2 Trench 2 was oriented NE - SW and measured 29 m long x 2 m wide and excavated to a depth of 1.2 m into a series of natural alluvium layers (207 and 209) of greyish blue and light brown silty clay. These had been contaminated by diesel from nearby storage tanks at the north-eastern end of the trench. Sealing this was a 0.15 m thick very dark greyish green silty sand (206), which appeared to be upcast material from wharf construction. This was sealed below a 0.1 m thick reddish brown silty clay (205) base of former 19th-century yard surface for the wharf. Overlying this was a 0.3 m thick demolition/ make up layer of very dark greyish brown silty sand (204) contains a lot of brick rubble. It had been cut by a modern vertical sided feature (203) partly exposed in section with a mid brown silty clay fill (202) containing bricks and a railway sleeper. Sealing all these deposits was the present yard surface (201) of a compact gravel and hardcore with fragments of concrete and a 0.07 m layer of tarmac (200).

Trench 3 (Fig. 5)

3.1.3 Trench 3 was oriented SE - NW and measured 31 m long x 2 m wide. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.7 m and cut into the natural alluvium of greyish blue and light brown silty clay (326, 331 and 332). This had been cut by natural streams filled with peat (319 and 333). At the north-west end of the trench a 0.5 m thick layer of dark reddish brown silty clay cultivated soil (324) was identified, which had been cut by the construction cut (318) for the brick culvert (317). This was the same culvert (105) as seen in Trench 1. It had two backfills of mid blue grey silty clay (315) and reddish brown silty clay (316). A spread of mid grey brown silty clay (314) was overlying this. These were all sealed below a 0.3 m thick light reddish brown silty sand with stone rubble (329) overlain by a series of black ash and cinder deposits (328 and 330), which represented the 19th-century surface to the wharf. This has been cut by a drain (327) and was filled by a dark grey brown silty clay (313) with ceramic pipe and stone lining. Also identified was the construction trench (325) for a belt run from a standing engine to the red brick workshop to the north of the site. The trench was brick-lined (306) with a mid grey brown silty clay (305) backfill. This had been cut by late 20th-century demolition cut (307) removing the engine platform and belt run. This cut was filled by a loose reddish brown brick rubble (304). At the north-west end of the trench a wall (308) of rough hewn stone and brick was observed on the south side of the trench. It was trench built in cut 309, and stood 1 m high and 0.4 m wide and was a revetment wall for the back of the wharf. On the north-west side it was built into a number of deposits (320, 321, 322 and 323) of material upcast from the construction of the wharf. To the south-east of wall 308 is a series of dumps of post-19th-century material (310. 311 and 312), making up the present ramp onto to the wharf. These were sealed below the hardcore and concrete make up (303) of present yard surface, which had been cut by a modern service trench (302) and sealed below a layer of compact gravel and tarmac (300).

4 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1.1 The evaluation trenches did not reveal any archaeological deposits or features pre-dating the early 19th-century construction of the canal wharf. A number of peat filled stream beds were recorded cutting into the natural clay alluvium suggesting that, prior to the site post medieval development the site was open with small streams relating to Letcombe Brook running through it. The brook had been channelled into a brick lined culvert prior to the construction of the canal wharf and was observed in Trenches 1 and 3. This had been covered in the upcast from the excavation and construction of the canal wharf. The site had then been covered in a compact yard of stone hardcore with cinder and ash dating from the 19th century with later features and surfaces cutting into this or sealing it.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	*Cxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Thick. (m)*	*Comment*	*Date*
001						
	100	Layer		0.15 m	Present yard surface	Modern
	101	Layer		0.18 - 0.50 m	Made ground	Modern
	102	Layer		0.20 - 0.75 m	Canal upcast	19th Century
	103	Layer		0.20 m	Cultivated soil horizon	19th Century
	104	Fill			Back fill on construction trench	19th Century
	105	Struct			Brick culvert	19th Century
	106	Cut			Construction trench	19th Century
	107	Layer		1.5 m	Cultivated soil horizon	
	108	Layer			Peat deposit	
	109	Natural			Natural alluvium	
	110	Natural			Natural alluvium	
	111	Natural			Natural alluvium	
	112	Natural			Natural alluvium	
002						
	200	Layer		0.07 m	Tarmac surface	Modern
	201	Layer		0.08 m	Modern make up	Modern
	202	Fill			Fill of modern feature	Modern
	203	Cut			Modern feature	Modern
	204	Layer		0.30 m	Modern make up layer	Modern
	205	Layer		0.1 m	Yard surface make up	19th Century
	206	Layer		0.15 m	Yard surface make up	19th Century
	207	Natural			Natural alluvium	
VOID	208	VOID	VOID	VOID	VOID	VOID
	209	Natural			Natural alluvium	
003						

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Thick. (m)*	*Comment*	*Date*
003	300	Layer		0.08 m	Tarmac and gravel surface	Modern
	301	Fill			Fill of modern service trench	Modern
	302	Cut	0.70 m	0.35 m	Modern pipe trench	Modern
	303	Layer		0.20 m	19th century surface	19th Century
	304	Fill		0.70 m	Modern backfill on demolition trench	Modern
	305	Fill			Fill between construction trench and wall	19th Century
	306	Struct			Brick wall lining of belt run	19th Century
	307	Cut			Demolition cut for belt run	Modern
	308	Struct	0.40 m	1 m	Revetment wall to wharf	19th Century
	309	Cut			Construction trench for revetment wall	19th Century
	310	Layer		0.70 m	Dumped material making ground up	Modern
	311	Layer		0.26 m	Dumped material making ground up	Modern
	312	Layer		0.17 m	Dumped material making ground up	Modern
	313	Fill			Fill of drain cut	Modern
	314	Cut			Service trench	Modern
	315	Fill			Back fill of culvert	19th Century
	316	Fill			Back fill of culvert	19th Century
	317	Struct			Brick culvert	19th Century
	318	Cut			Construction cut for culvert	19th Century
	319	Layer		0.50 m	Peat deposit	
	320	Layer		0.32 m	Dump of material making ground up	19th Century
	321	Layer		0.35 m	Dump of material making ground up	19th Century
	322	Layer		0.30 m	Dump of material making ground up	19th Century
	323	Layer		0.10 m	Dump of material making ground up	19th Century
	324	Layer		0.50 m	Dump of material making ground up	19th Century

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Thick. (m)*	*Comment*	*Date*
	325	Cut	1.80 m	0.70 m	Construction cut for belt run	19th Century
	326	Layer		0.35 m	Natural Alluvium	
	327	Cut	1.10 m	0.60 m	Service trench	19th Century
	328	Layer		0.30 m	Yard surface make up	19th Century
	329	Layer		0.25 m	Yard surface make up	19th Century
	330	Layer		0.10 m	Yard surface make up	19th Century
	331	Layer		0.35 m	Natural Alluvium	
	332	Layer		0.35 m	Natural Alluvium	
	333	Layer		0.35 m	Natural Alluvium	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Dalby, L.J *The Wilts and Berks Canal*, S&S Publishing (1986)

Fuller, B *Visitors Guide to Wantage* (published by author)

N Holbrook & A Thomas Excavations at Mill Street, Wantage', Oxoniensia 61, 190-79

OA 2005 Smith's Transport Deport, Mill Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire Written scheme of Investigation

OA 2005 Former Wantage Wharf, Oxfordshire Historic Building Assessment

OAU, 1992 Field Manual (ed. D Wilkinson)

Philip, K *Black Wantage* (published by the author) (1971)

Philip, K *Victorian Wantage* (published by the author) (1968)

Scatchard, P *A Brief History of the Wilts and Berks Canal* (http://web.ukonline.co.uk/doug.info/Trust/aboutcan.htm)

Small, D *Images of England: The Wilts & Berks Canal*, Tempus (2003)

Wilkinson, R *A Waterway to Wantage*, published by the author (2004)

Wilkinson, R (1985) *Trading on the Wilts and Berks Canal*, The Blowing Stone

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Wantage Wharf, Wantage, Oxfordshire
Site code: WAWHA 06
Grid reference: NGR SU 43975 18825
Type of evaluation: Three trench evaluation across the site.
Date and duration of project: Four days from the 17th January to 20th January 2006.
Area of site: Three 30 m x 2 m trenches.
Summary of results: The evaluation didn't expose any archaeological features or deposits pre dating the construction of the canal wharf in the early 1800's.
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2006.7

Figure 1: Site location

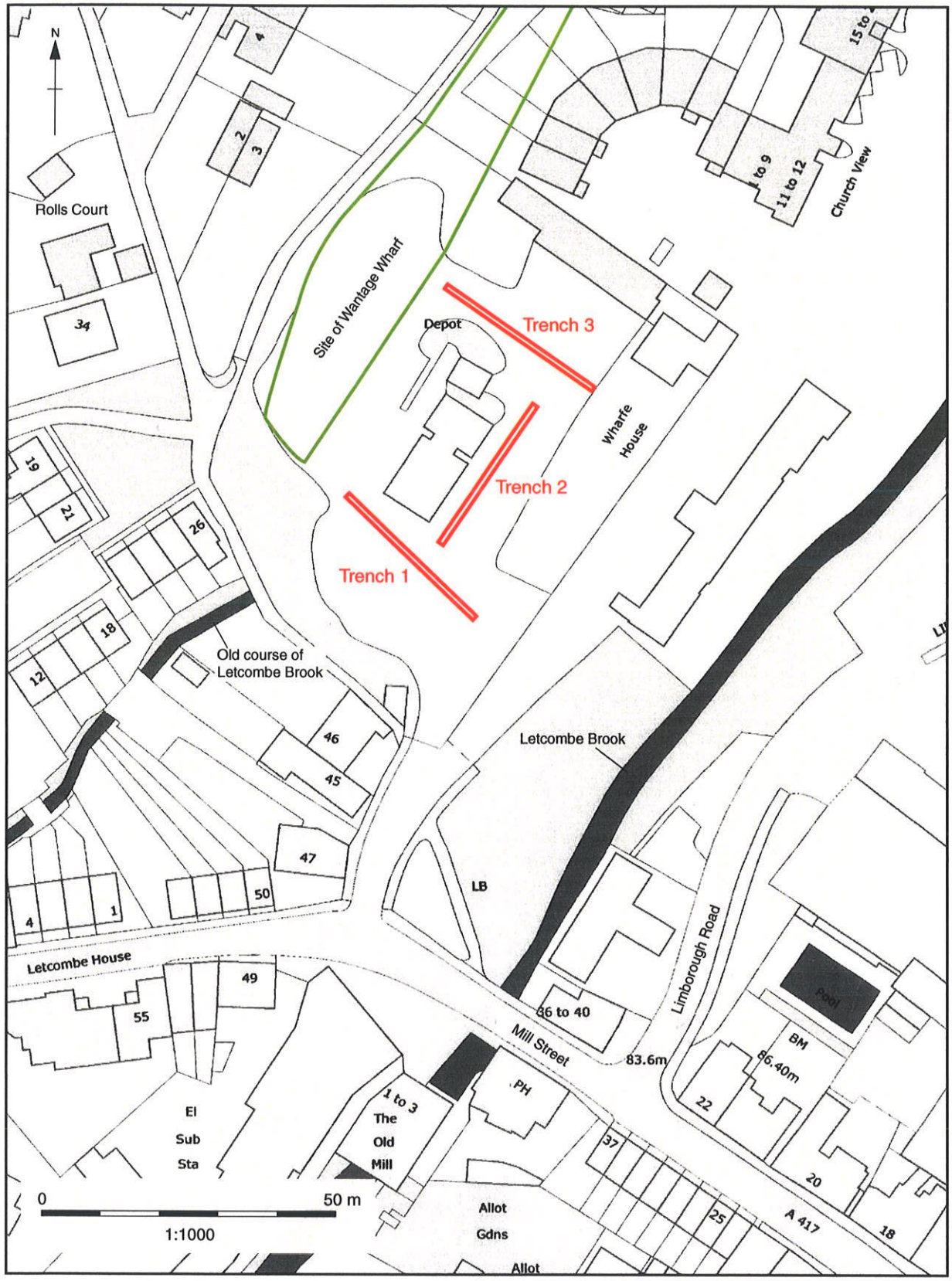
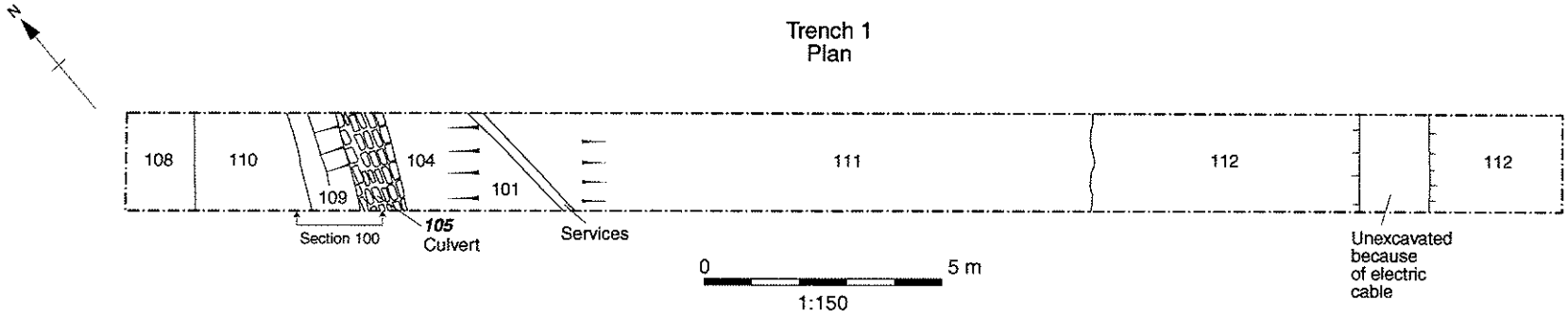


Figure 2: Trench locations



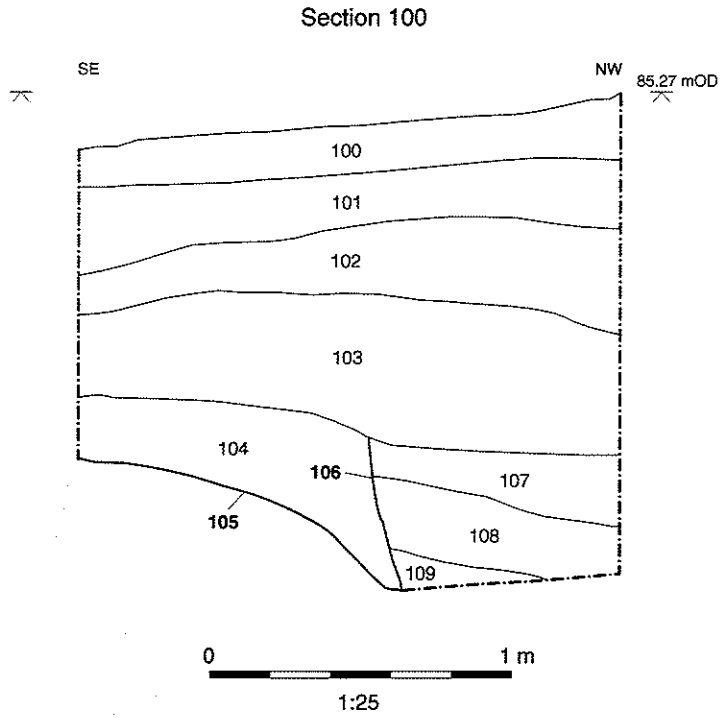
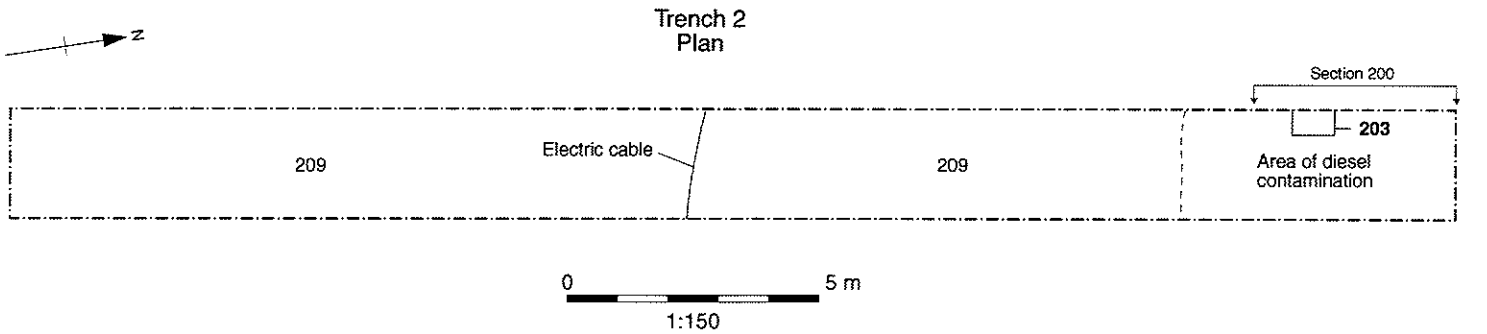


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and section



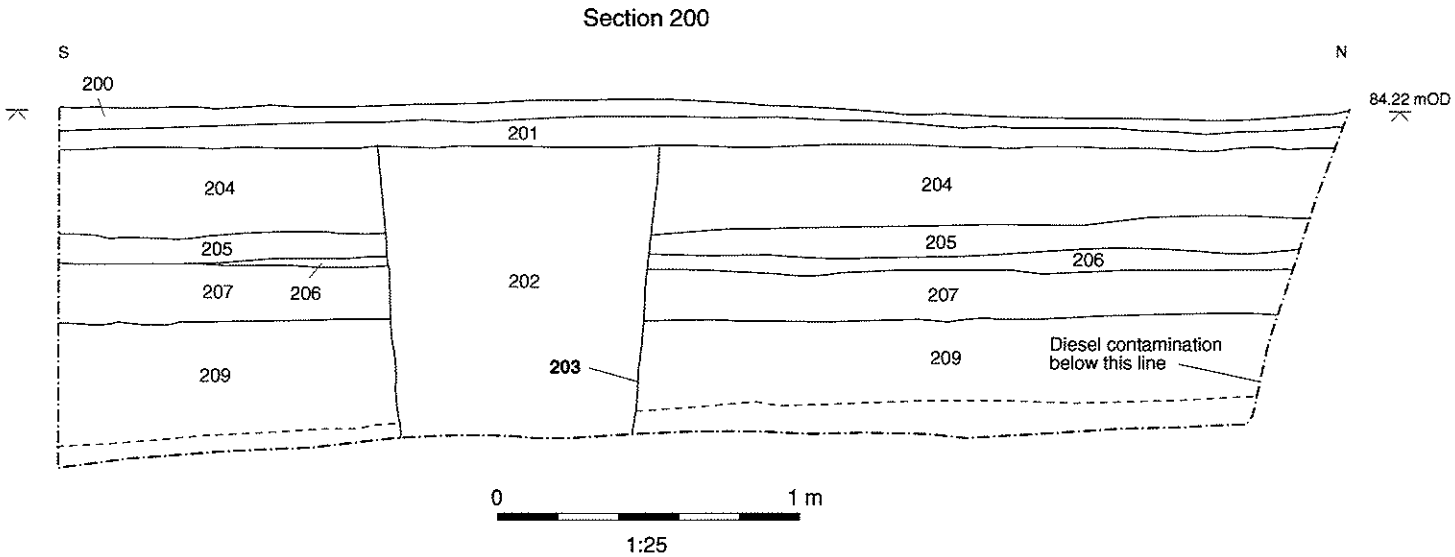


Figure 4: Trench 2, plan and section

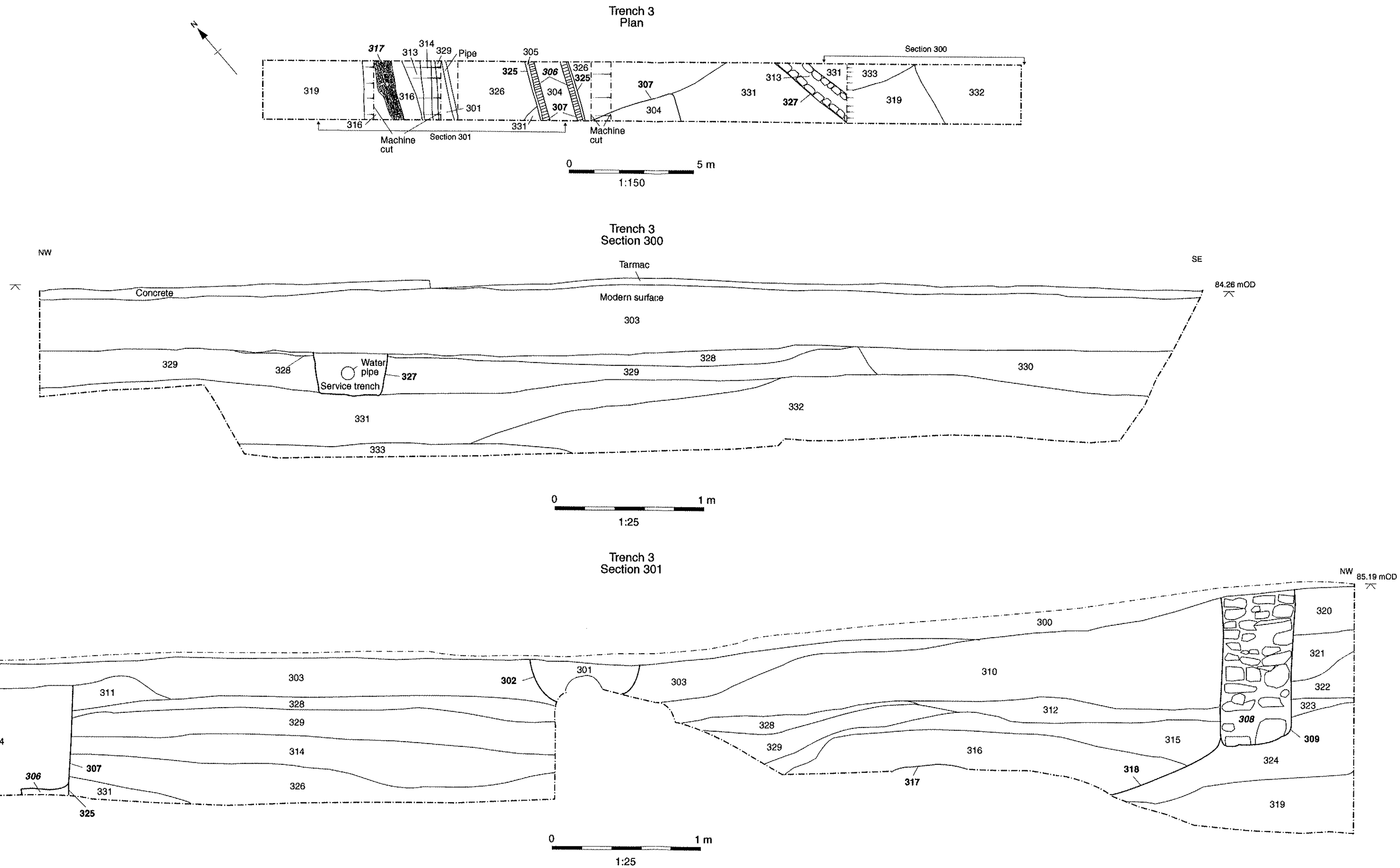


Figure 5: Trench 3, plan and sections