

Buslibury Ltd

**Former Roberts Taxis, Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT***

**NGR SU 3970 8804**

**planning ref : WAN/16895**

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**August 2001**

Bushbury Ltd

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**Former Roberts Taxis, Limborough Road, 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
1.4 Evaluation aims .....	2
2 Evaluation Methodology .....	2
2.1 Scope of fieldwork.....	2
2.2 Fieldwork methods and recording .....	2
2.3 Finds .....	2
2.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence .....	2
2.5 Presentation of results.....	3
3 Results: General.....	3
3.1 Soils and ground conditions .....	3
3.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits .....	3
4 Results: Descriptions .....	3
4.1 Description of deposits .....	3
4.2 Finds .....	5
4.3 Palaeo-environmental remains.....	5
5 Discussion And Interpretation .....	5
5.1 Reliability of field investigation .....	5
5.2 Overall interpretation.....	5
6 Impact of the Development.....	6
6.1 Summary .....	6
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory .....	7
Appendix 2 Pottery assessment/ spot dating .....	8
Appendix 3 Bibliography and references .....	8
Appendix 4 Summary of Site Details .....	8

**LIST OF FIGURES**

- Fig. 1 Site location map  
 Fig. 2 Trench location plan  
 Fig. 3 Trench 1 Plan and Sections  
 Fig. 4 Trench 2 Plan and Section

## SUMMARY

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at the former Roberts Taxis site on Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire on behalf of Bushbury Ltd. The evaluation revealed the presence of between 1.8 and 2.2 m of modern made ground overlying a clay-silt deposit. No archaeological features or deposits were found..*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In August 2001 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at the former Roberts Taxis site on Limborough Road, Wantage (Fig.1) on behalf of Bushbury Ltd. The work was carried out in mitigation of a condition attached to planning permission (Planning Application No. WAN/16895) granted for residential development of the site.
- 1.1.2 The work was carried out according to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by OAU in response to a brief set by Hugh Coddington, Oxfordshire's County Archaeological Services Deputy County Archaeologist. The development site is situated at NGR SU 3970 8804 and is c 0.75 hectares in area.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on head and coombe deposits overlying gault and greensand at c 85 m above OD. The site is situated on a disused hard standing of tarmac which is laid over several infill and dump deposits.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The proposed development site is located within an area of considerable archaeological potential. In 1997 an evaluation (Wessex Archaeology, 1997) either side of Limborough Road established the presence of below ground archaeological features. Immediately overlooking Letcombe Brook to the north evidence of Romano-British activity was found. Ditches containing pottery including tablewares and mortaria, were identified. It is thought that domestic activity took place nearby. To the south of the development area Anglo Saxon pottery was found. Medieval features representing back plot activities were found to the rear of Mill Street.
- 1.3.2 Archaeological evaluation and excavation to the west and south west of Letcombe Brook located part of a Roman town or villa estate on the slope overlooking the Brook. Features included wells, buildings, granaries and enclosures. Lower down the slope onto the Brook floodplain were ditched enclosures but the full level of activity is unclear. The crossing point of the Brook during the Romano-British period and whether the form was a ford or a bridge are unknown.

## **1.4 Evaluation aims**

- 1.4.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 1.4.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 1.4.3 To establish the exigency for a mitigation strategy.
- 1.4.4 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 1.4.5 To make available the results of the investigation.
- 1.4.6 To define any relevant research priorities if additional archaeological investigation proves necessary.

## **2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Scope of fieldwork**

- 2.1.1 The evaluation fieldwork undertaken took the form of the excavation of two trenches covering c 3% of the proposed development area.
- 2.1.2 The evaluation consisted of two trenches each measuring 10 m long x 1.2 m wide (Fig.2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.

### **2.2 Fieldwork methods and recording**

- 2.2.1 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).

### **2.3 Finds**

- 2.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and generally bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

### **2.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence**

- 2.4.1 No deposits of suitable typology for environmental sampling were encountered.

## 2.5 Presentation of results

- 2.5.1 The results of the evaluation are described by trench, beginning with the earliest deposits encountered and continuing in stratigraphic order. This section is then followed by an interpretative section.

## 3 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 3.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 3.1.1 The site is located on a raised slope to the north-east and lies on various backfill and dump deposits which are up to 2.2 m deep from the present ground surface. It was this depth of dump and backfill material which made the location of archaeological horizons particularly difficult within such a confined space. Trench 2 was recorded from the surface ground level as the excavated depth was sufficient to cause health and safety concerns.

### 3.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.2.1 No archaeological deposits or remains were revealed by the evaluation.

## 4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 4.1 Description of deposits

#### *Trench 1 (Fig.3)*

- 4.1.1 The earliest deposit encountered during the evaluation was the layer 106. This was a grey fissured clayey-silt which was of an undetermined thickness and was observed at a level of c 83.79 m OD. This layer was seen through previous bore-hole data (*AEA Technology Environment-Site Characterization*) and is known to overlie the natural greensand deposits.
- 4.1.2 106 was cut by a possible linear feature (107) which was seen to run in a NE-SW direction through the northern end of Trench 1. This had an observed width of c1.5 m (not full extent) and a depth of c 0.22 m. This was filled by a single deposit (108) of mid brown/grey clay-silt which was likely to have been re-deposited material derived from 106. This deposit contained a single sherd of post-medieval pottery, some animal bone and fragments of corroded iron-work.
- 4.1.3 Deposit 111 sealed these earlier layers. This was a mid-grey silty-clay 0.15 m thick. No finds were recovered from this deposit.

- 4.1.4 Deposit 111 was cut by a circular feature (109) which was 0.55 m wide and up to 0.30 m deep. This was filled by a single deposit (110) which was a moderately compact mid grey clay-silt. No finds were recovered from this feature.
- 4.1.5 Layer 105 was a mixed grey black clay-silt dump deposit. It was c 0.25 m thick and extended c 8 m along the trench.
- 4.1.6 Layer 105 was cut by wall 114 and the probably associated drain cut 112. Feature 114 was a brick footing of nine remaining courses which did originally extend east-west across the trench for a single course before being recorded and removed. 114 was sand mortar bonded on a stretcher bond form and in section 100 showed as a corner feature. The bricks were stamped and frogged, and of a red stocked type, measuring 0.22 x 0.11 x 0.09 m. The associated drain cut 112 was seen to be 2 m wide and 1 m deep, containing two brown glazed ceramic drains c 0.24 m in diameter. This cut was filled by the mixed deposit 113 which was a dark grey clay-silt containing fragments of modern building material.
- 4.1.7 Wall 114 was abutted on the NNE side by deposit 104, a black silty loam, which had occasional charcoal, stone and CBM (ceramic building material) inclusions. It had a maximum thickness of 0.8 m and extended for c 7 m. Pottery and clay pipe fragments were recovered from deposit 104. On the SSW side of 114, deposit 101 butted the brick structure. This was a tipped deposit of a loose mixture of CBM material and sand measuring c 0.7 m thick. No finds were recovered.
- 4.1.8 Deposit 103 was a blue/green silty-clay which overlay deposit 104 on its north end. This deposit (103) was 0.6 m thick, included some fragments of modern brick and extended for c 5 m.
- 4.1.9 Layer 115 was a deposit of fragmented but compact concrete/cement which overlay deposit 103. This was 0.15 m thick.
- 4.1.10 Layer 102 overlay 115 and was a gravel leveling deposit c 0.08 m thick. This was overlain by the tarmac hard-standing surface 100.

#### ***Trench 2 (Fig.4)***

- 4.1.11 Deposit 203 was seen to be the earliest layer encountered and was equivalent to layer 106 in Trench 1.
- 4.1.12 This was cut by linear 204 which was seen to be aligned NNE-SSW and had a depth of >1.4 m and a width of >1 m. This was filled by 205, a mid/dark grey clay-silt which was seen to contain <3% concrete and gravel. No finds were recovered from this feature as the depth of the trench did not permit, although some fragments of bone were evident.
- 4.1.13 Layer 202 overlay this as a dark brown moderately compacted clay horizon containing <10% CBM and 5% charcoal inclusions. This was 0.1-0.15 m thick. No finds were recovered from this deposit.



- 4.1.14 Layer 201 was a thick deposit of mixed clay-silt and rubble with 15% charcoal inclusions. It was seen to a maximum thickness of 1.8 m. This was probably equivalent to context 104 within Trench 1.
- 4.1.15 Layer 200 was the upper most layer in the Trench 2 sequence and consisted of leveling gravel and tarmac, equivalent to layers 100 and 102 within Trench 1.

## 4.2 Finds

### *Pottery*

- 4.2.1 Only two small sherds of modern/post-medieval pottery were recovered from the evaluation trenches. Context 108 (Trench 1) was probably the earliest fill on site (feature 107) and from this a single sherd of 18th –19th century green glazed ceramic was recovered.
- 4.2.2 Context 104 also contained pottery in the form of 19th/20th century willow pattern ceramic.

### *Other finds*

- 4.2.3 Ironwork was found within deposit 108 and was possibly discarded machine parts or similar fittings. These were fairly badly oxidized and deformed through pre-deposition activity.
- 4.2.4 A single clay pipe bowl was recovered from context 104. This was probably a late 18th early 19th century example due to the narrow width of the bore of the stem. The bowl had been stamped with the sign of the Irish Harp and is likely to have been a makers mark, possibly originating in Dublin.

## 4.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 4.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental analysis were encountered during this evaluation.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 5.1.1 The field investigation has demonstrated that the sequence of deposits underlying the present tarmac surface are modern to a depth of at least 1.8 m. Due to the depth of 'made ground' it was not possible during this evaluation to reach the surface of the natural geology and positively determine an absence of archaeological deposits at this potential stratigraphic horizon.

### 5.2 Overall interpretation



### *Summary of results*

- 5.2.1 The evaluation has shown that a deep sequence of modern deposits and features underlie the present tarmac surface of the site. The evaluation was unable to reach the surface of the natural geology due to the depth of these deposits. However it should be noted that a series of boreholes drilled around Limborough Road in 1982 (AEAT Report reference; *Wantage Eastern Outfall Sewer*. Vale of the White Horse District Council 1982) recorded the depth of made ground or 'fill' as typically 1 m deep. It therefore seems likely that the Roberts Taxi Site has been subject to localised truncation which has effectively reduced the level of the natural geology. If this is the case the potential for any surviving archaeological deposits below the investigated level is very poor.

## **6 IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT**

### **6.1 Summary**

- 6.1.1 The development involves the construction of four dwellings and associated parking. It has not been established as yet how the foundations for the structures are to be built, whether platform or piling foundations, therefore the extent of intrusive development has still to be clarified.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Find</i>	<i>No./wt</i>	<i>Date</i>
001	100	Layer		0.15	Tarmac	N/A	N/A	N/A
	101	Layer		0.7	Dump	N/A	N/A	N/A
	102	Layer		0.3	Gravel leveling	N/A	N/A	N/A
	103	Layer	1.2	0.6	Dump	N/A	N/A	N/A
	104	Layer		0.8	Dump	Pot Clay pipe	1 1	Post-Med
	105	Layer		0.25	Dump	N/A	N/A	N/A
	106	Layer			Sub-soil ?	N/A	N/A	N/A
	107	Cut	>1	0.22	Linear	Pot iron bone	1 6 10	Post-Med
	108	Fill		0.22	Fill of 107	N/A	N/A	N/A
	109	Cut	0.55	0.3	Pit/post-hole	N/A	N/A	N/A
	110	Fill		0.3	Fill of 109	N/A	N/A	N/A
	111	Layer		0.15	Leveling ?	N/A	N/A	N/A
	112	Cut	2	1	Linear drain	N/A	N/A	N/A
	113	Fill		1	Fill of 112	N/A	N/A	N/A
	114	Structure	0.8	0.8	Natural Brick wall	N/A	N/A	N/A
002	200	Layer		0.3	Tarmac surface	N/A	N/A	N/A
	201	Layer		1.3	Dump	N/A	N/A	N/A
	202	Layer		0.15	Dump	N/A	N/A	N/A
	203	Layer			Sub-soil?	N/A	N/A	N/A
	204	Cut	>1	>1.4	Linear	N/A	N/A	N/A
	205	Fill		1.4	Fill of 204	N/A	N/A	N/A

## APPENDIX 2 POTTERY ASSESSMENT/ SPOT DATING

The pottery recovered from the site consisted of two sherds from two contexts within Trench 1. Deposit 108 was the fill of a possible linear and the pottery was of a late post-medieval date. It was a deep green copper green glaze domestic ware. The second sherd recovered was from the dump deposit 104 and was of a 19th/20th century date being a late blue glaze reproduction willow pattern design of clay china ware. The sherds were not heavily abraded and it would seem that the deposits from which these sherds were found were of a similar date, with the recorded stratigraphy having built up over a short period of time.

## APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Wessex Archaeology, 1997 | <i>Limborough Road Development, Wantage, Archaeological Evaluation, 35662a</i>  |
| AEA Technology, 2001     | <i>Roberts Taxis Site, Limborough Road, Wantage Desk Study</i>  |
| OAU, 2001                | <i>Former Roberts Taxis Site, Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire; Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation</i> |

## APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Wantage, Limborough Road Development

**Site code:** WALIR 01

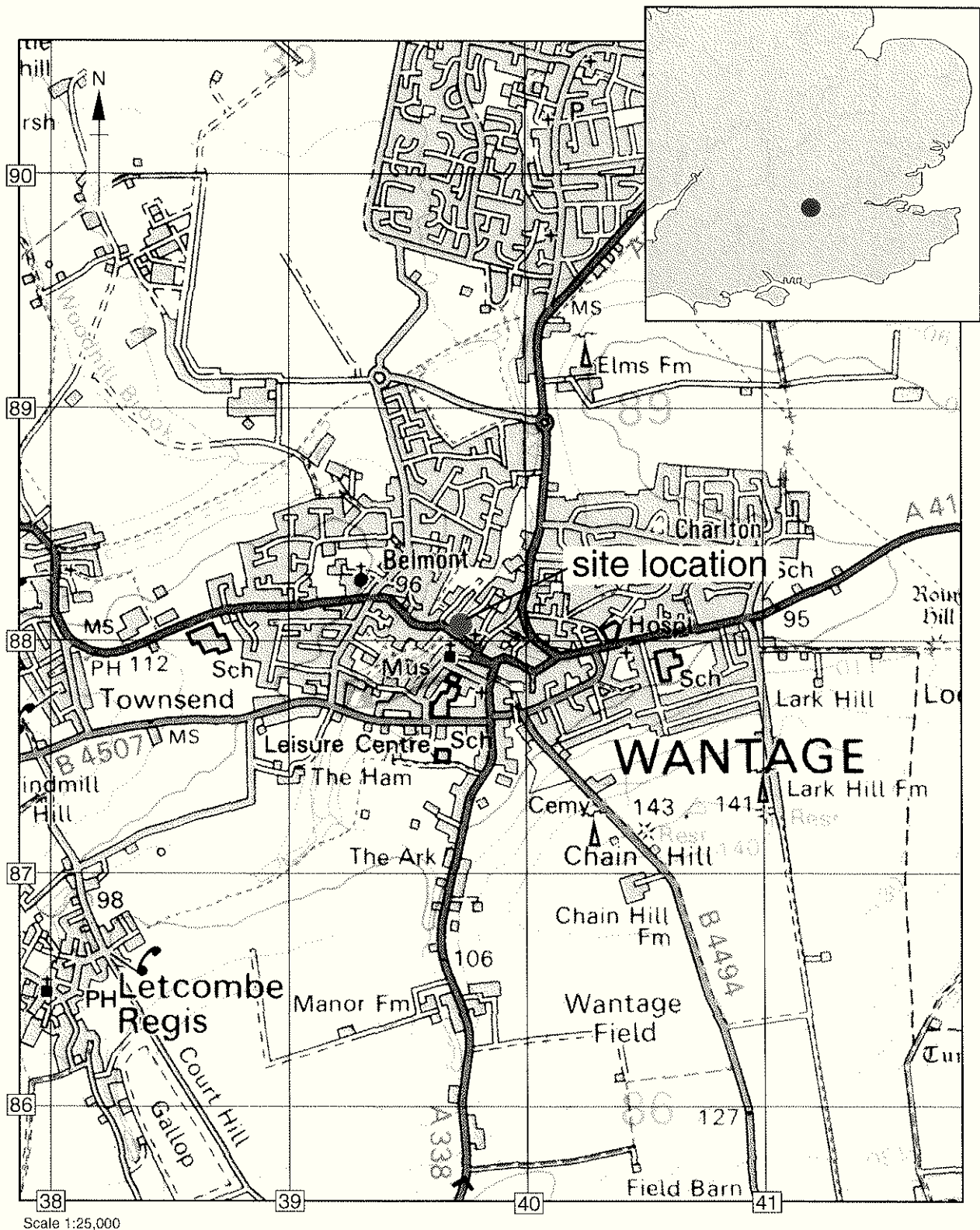
**Grid reference:** NGR SU 3970 8804 **Type of evaluation:** Two 10 m Trenches

**Date and duration of project:** 06/08/01 – 2 days

**Area of site:** 0.75 ha

**Summary of results:** Modern and post-medieval dump and leveling layers, with two modern linear features.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location.

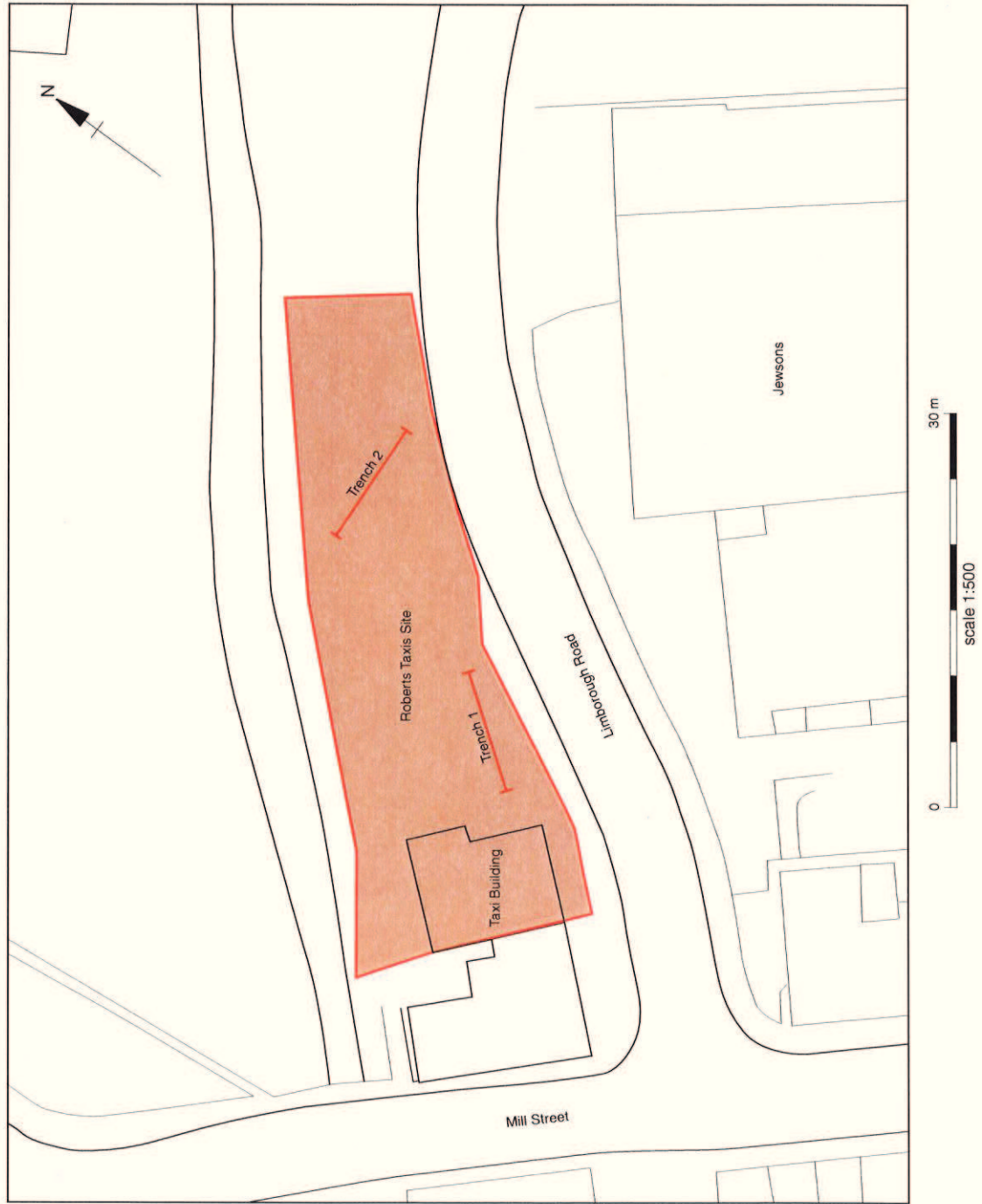
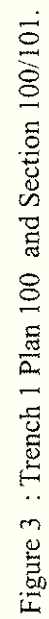


Figure 2 : Trench Location.



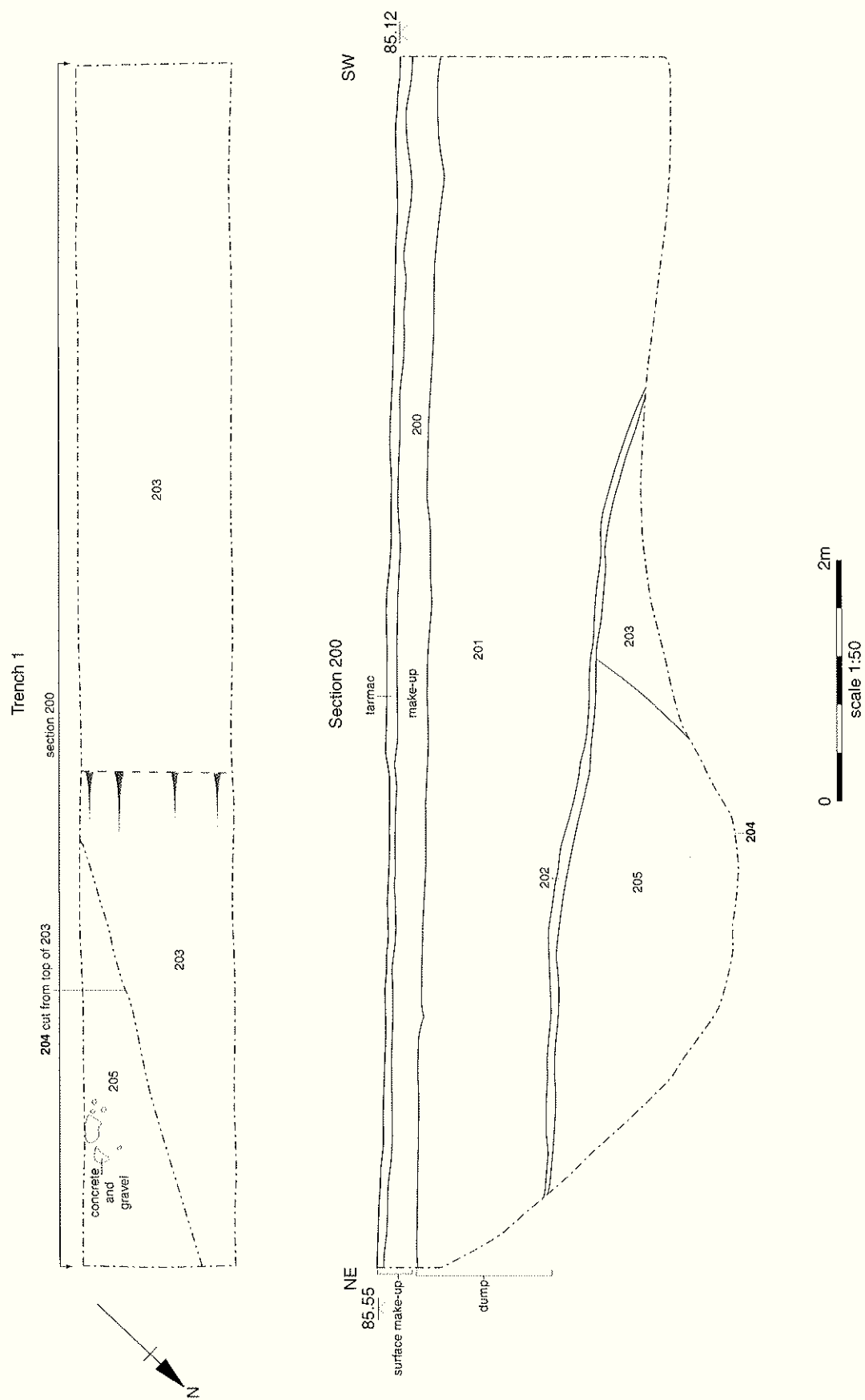


Figure 4 : Trench 2 Plan 200 and Section 200.





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