

Stable Block Area Mentmore Towers Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Stable Block Area, Mentmore Towers, Mentmore, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Cover Plate: View of Mentmore Towers from the south-east.

SUMMARY

In June 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Mentmore Towers, Mentmore, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 9027 1983) on behalf of Mentmore Towers Ltd. The evaluation did not reveal any significant archaeological features, but identified quarry activity and later park landscaping .

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In June 2007 OA carried out a field evaluation at Mentmore Towers, Mentmore, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1) on behalf of Mentmore Towers Ltd in respect of a planning application for the refurbishment of the building, installation of new services and underground kitchen, a new wing (Derby Wing) terraced into the wooded slope to the north of the house, underground parking, a new stable block (with underground utility space), car park and new access (Planning Application No. 01/00922). The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief set by and a WSI (OA 2007) agreed with David Radford of Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Services. This evaluation specifically dealt with the area to be impacted by the new stable block and access road to the north-east of the existing house centered on NGR SP90271983.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The Mentmore house and gardens are located in Mentmore Parish, Buckinghamshire centered on NGR SP90251963 and situated to the southwest of the village centre. The Site is situated on high ground, possibly a chalk outlier, which rises above the surrounding clay vale. Soils throughout the site are permeable clays with a slight calcareous component.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence. There are some known sites with archaeological remains adjacent to the development site.
- 1.3.2 Specific areas of interest include the area around the landscaped and raised north eastern access drive which passes the northern edge of Mentmore churchyard (Saxon burials have been identified in this vicinity- See below), also the house itself which lies on a raised level platform with wide terrace to the west (a speculated Roman road runs under the house) and the formal 19th century gardens.
- 1.3.3 An Environmental Impact Assessment, including archaeological desk based assessment, has been produced for this site by Rolfe Judd Consultants (2001). A limited programme of test pitting has been undertaken around the house and along

the existing southern access, which has been subject to a watching brief by Oxford Archaeology (2006).

- 1.3.4 Antiquarian finds of Roman metalwork and burials from a possibly extensive Anglo-Saxon inhumation and cremation cemetery were found during quarrying work in 1842-1853, located in the vicinity of the later Tropical Garden (Ouvry, 1854). There is potential for an extensive Anglo-Saxon cemetery in this area, close to the parish church of St Mary.
- 1.3.5 A possible Roman Road has been suggested running northwest through Mentmore, directly through the house (CAS29991 Viatores 169a). This has been speculated as a possible predecessor of Watling Street and a main driving line for the Claudian invasion, however the existence of the road has not been confirmed in Bucks.
- 1.3.6 Mentmore Park is a grade II* registered Park and Garden. The present house and gardens were designed by Sir Joseph Paxton for Baron de Rothschild and constructed in the mid 19th century mostly on agricultural land and incorporating part of the village of Mentmore, which was rebuilt to the east. The house is a grade I listed structure built between 1851 and 1854. A summary of the history of the grounds is provided in the Mentmore Towers Landscape Conservation Plan (Elizabeth Banks Associates, 2001). A farm called Burystead was located under the current south lawn of the house; it is shown on the 2nd surveyor's map and may be of medieval origin.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

2.1.1 General

- To determine the general nature of any remains present.
- To determine the date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- To determine the extent, condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present.
- To make available the results of the investigation.

2.1.2 Specific

- To determine whether burials exist in the area of the proposed new access road and Stable Block and if they do qualify their nature

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of seven trenches of which six measured 30 m x 1.9 m wide and one measured 20 m x 1.9 m wide (Fig. 2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.
- 3.1.2 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).

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The site is located to the north-east of the house on a wooded east to west downward slope, which has been partly cleared. The natural is light brown silty clay with odd patches of flinty gravel and was found at depths of 0.40 m to 1.2 m below ground level. The ground had been badly disturbed by tree roots and at the time of the evaluation the tree stumps had been ground to below ground surface level and covered in a thick layer of chipped wood.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.1 This trench was originally aligned north to south and was moved to the east and realigned from its proposed position due to trees still standing on the site. The trench measured 20 m long, 1.9 m wide and 1.4 m in depth. A 4.5 m long section at the north-east end of the trench exposed the natural light brown silty clay (3013). This had been sealed by a 0.55 m thick grey brown silty clay (3012) colluvium hill wash forming at the base of the slope. Overlying this was a 0.60 m thick reddish brown silty clay (3011) with a 0.20 m very dark grey brown silty clay (3010).topsoil

Trench 2 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.2 This trench was aligned north-west to south-east and measured 26 m long and 1.9 m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.40 m onto the natural of light brown silty clay (3022). This was sealed by a 0.25 m thick reddish brown silty clay (3021), which was cut by a number of root holes (3023) filled by dark grey brown silty clay with reddish patches (3024). Sealing these was a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (3020) topsoil.

Trench 3 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.3 This trench was aligned north west to south east and measured 30 m long and 1.9 m wide and was excavated to 0.60 m onto top of natural. This was light brown silty clay (3032) and had been cut by a shallow sloping cut (3035) which ran along the trench and turned south-east at the eastern end of the trench. This was part of the 19th century landscaping of the quarry, the corner of which was marked by a large tree stump. The cut was covered with a 0.20 m - 0.35 m thick layer of reddish brown silty clay (3031), which was cut by tree root holes (3033) with a fill of dark grey brown silty clay (3034) and sealed by a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (3030) topsoil.

Trench 4 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.4 This trench was aligned north east to south west and measured 30 m long and 1.9 m wide a 2 m section was machined at the south end and exposed the light brown silty clay (3045) natural. This was sealed below 0.24 m thick dark brown silty clay (3044) which was quarry in-fill material. This was sealed below a re-deposited natural (3042) forming a terrace step with more dark grey silty clay (3043) in-fill. This was all sealed below a 0.10 m 0.50 m thick reddish brown silty clay (3041) cultivated soil. This had been cut by a line of trees along the line of the terrace (Fig.2). The trench was sealed by a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (3040) topsoil.

Trench 5 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.5 This trench was aligned north west to south east and measured 30 m long and 1.9 m wide and was excavated to 1.2 m in depth onto top of a light brown silty clay (3052) natural. This was sealed below a series of layers starting with a 0.6 m thick dark reddish brown silty clay (3056) in-fill, then a re-deposited natural (3054) and a mid-reddish brown silty clay (3051). These were sealed by a 0.20 m thick layer of reddish brown silty clay (3053) cultivated soil, which was sealed by a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (3050) topsoil. This had been cut a large tree root hole (3055) which had disturbed the layers below.

Trench 6 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.6 This trench was aligned north west to south east and measured 30 m long and 1.9 m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.40 m on to the light brown silty clay (3062) natural. This was sealed below a 0.20 m thick layer of reddish brown silty clay (3061) cultivated soil, which was sealed by a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (3060) topsoil. This had been disturbed by a tree roots (3063) and (3064) in the trench.

Trench 7 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.1.7 This trench was aligned north west to south east and had been moved to the west to avoid cutting the road surface. It measured 30 m long and 1.9 m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.50 m on to the light brown silty clay (3072) natural. A small terrace step 1 m in width was seen near the east end cut into the natural slope.

The natural was sealed below a 0.30 m thick layer of reddish brown silty clay (3071) cultivated soil. This had been cut by a root hole (3073). The trench was sealed by a 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (3070) topsoil.

5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 A number of badly abraded brick and tile fragments dating from the mid to late 19th century were recovered from the cultivated soil horizon in Trenches 3, 5, 6 and 7. These are thought to be associated with the construction of the house and had become incorporated into the soil during the landscaping activities.

5.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 5.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the course of the evaluation.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 6.1.1 The evaluation did not reveal any further evidence for Anglo-Saxon inhumations or cremations similar to those found during quarry work in 1842 - 1853 to the south-west of the churchyard. The area of the evaluation has certainly been the site of extensive quarry activity almost certainly associated with the construction of the main house. The evaluation did locate the approximate location of a step in the side of the quarry into the western slope of the hill. The quarry was a broad shallow hollow which appears to start close to the road to the east of the evaluation area and has a number of steps and terraces as it moves westward. It was later partially infilled with imported material and landscaped presumably with the rest of the grounds around the house. The edges were landscaped to form shallow steps on which lines of trees had been planted to define and stabilise them as particularly evidenced in Trench 4. It is felt that the levels of truncation in the area of this evaluation would make it unlikely that any significant archaeological remains would survive.

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>Finds</i>
1						
	3010	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3011	Layer	0.60 m		Cultivated soil	
	3012	Layer	0.56 m		Colluivum	
	3013	Natural			Natural clay	
2						
	3020	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3021	Layer	0.25 m		Cultivated soil	
	3022	Natural			Natural clay	
	3023	Cut	0.30 m		Tree root hole	
	3024	Fill			Fill of tree root hole	
3						
	3030	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3031	Layer	0.36 m		Cultivated soil	
	3032	Natural			Natural clay	
	3033	Cut			Tree root hole	
	3034	Fill			Fill of root hole	
	3035	Cut			Garden terrace step	
4						
	3040	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3041	Layer	0.50 m		Cultivated soil	
	3042	Layer	0.50 m		re-deposited natural	
	3043	Layer	0.40 m		In-fill layer	
	3044	Layer	0.24 m		In-fill layer	
	3045	Natural			Natural clay	
5						
	3050	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3051	Layer	0.40 m		In-fill layer	
	3052	Natural			Natural clay	
	3053	Layer	0.20 m		Cultivated soil	

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>
	3054	Layer	0.30 m		re-deposited natural	
	3055	Cut	0.50 m		Tree root hole	
	3056	Layer	0.70 m		In-fill layer	
6						
	3060	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3061	Layer	0.25 m		Cultivated soil	
	3062	Natural			Natural clay	
	3063	Cut			Tree root hole	
	3064	Cut			Tree root hole	
7						
	3070	Layer	0.20 m		Topsoil	
	3071	Layer	0.30 m		Cultivated soil	
	3072	Natural			Natural clay	
	3073	Cut			Tree root hole	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

EBA 2001 Elizabeth Banks Associates, Mentmore Towers: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

OA 2007 Mentmore Towers, Mentmore, Buckinghamshire, Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation of New Stable Block Area and Formal Gardens

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

Ouvry, F 1854 Note on Saxon and other remains discovered at and near Mentmore, in the County of Buckingham, *Archaeologia*, 35, 379-82

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Mentmore Towers, Mentmore, Buckinghamshire

Site code: BUMENT 06

Grid reference: NGR SP 9027 1983

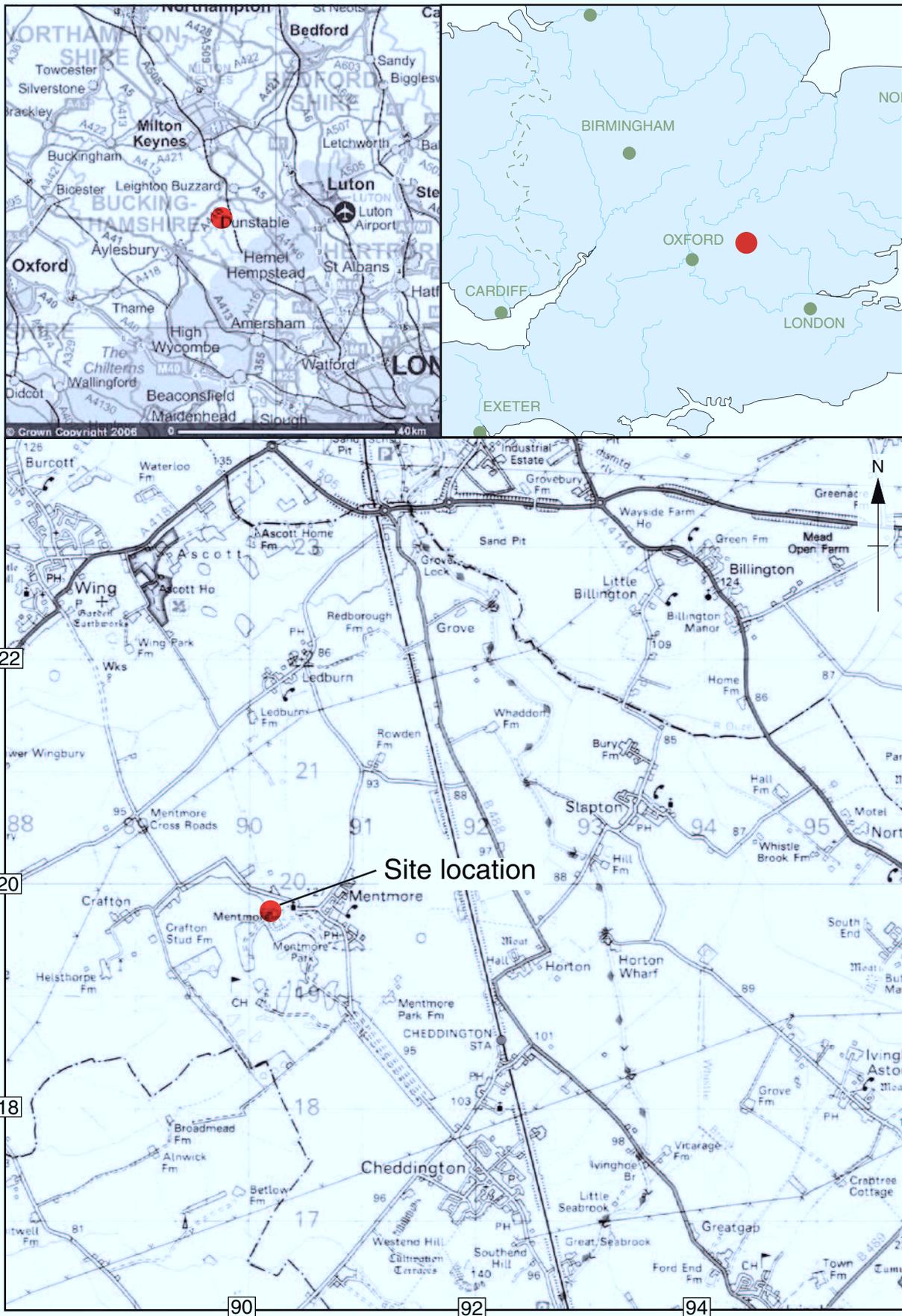
Type of evaluation: Seven trench evaluation to investigate possibility of burials relating to Anglo-Saxon cemetery found in mid 19th century to the north east of the current development.

Date and duration of project: Four days from the 25/6/07 to 28/6/07.

Area of site: Six trenches 30 m long x 1.9 m wide and one 20 m long and 1.9 m wide.

Summary of results: The evaluation did not reveal any further burials, but located a quarry and later park landscaping.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2006.200



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

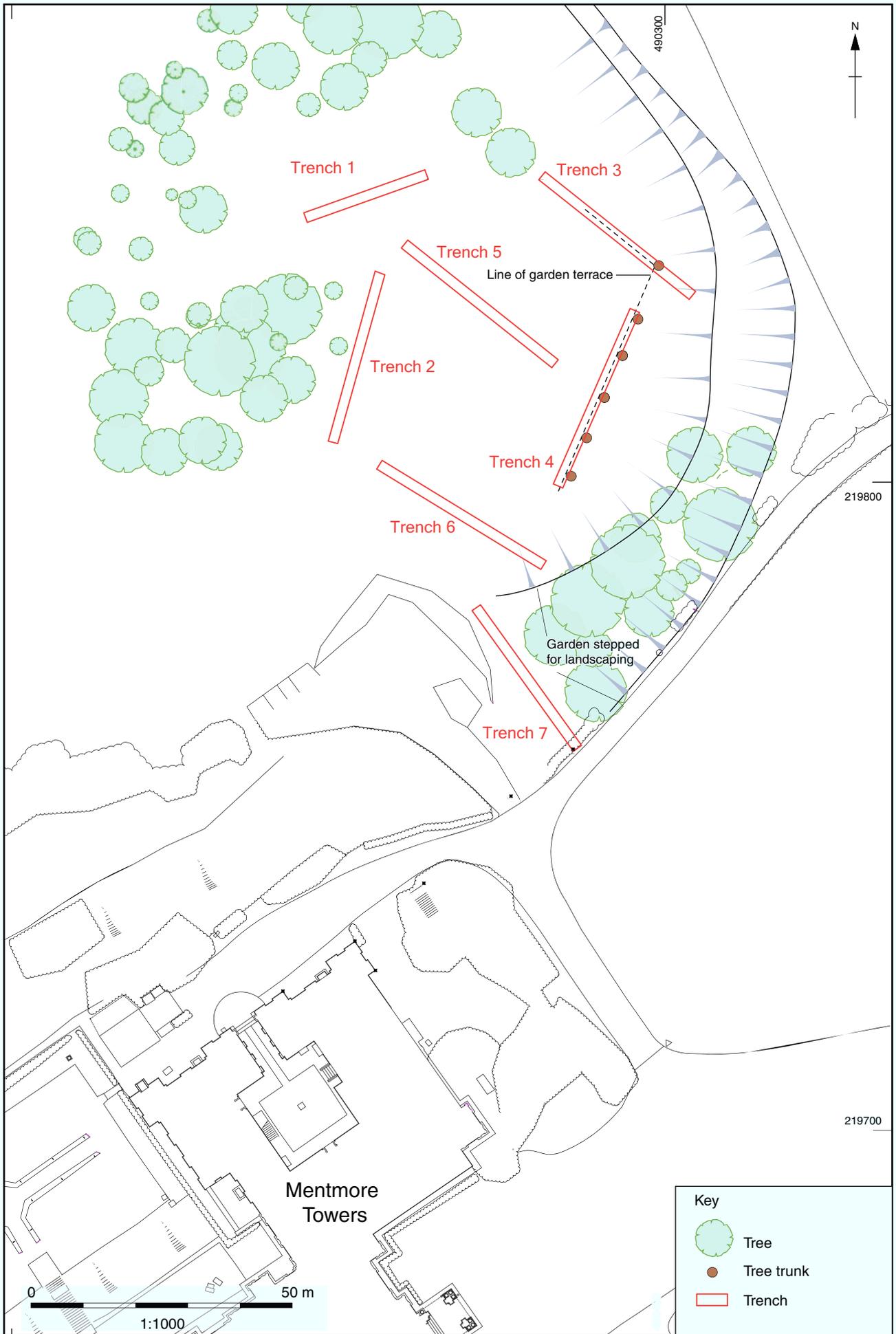


Figure 2: Trench location plan

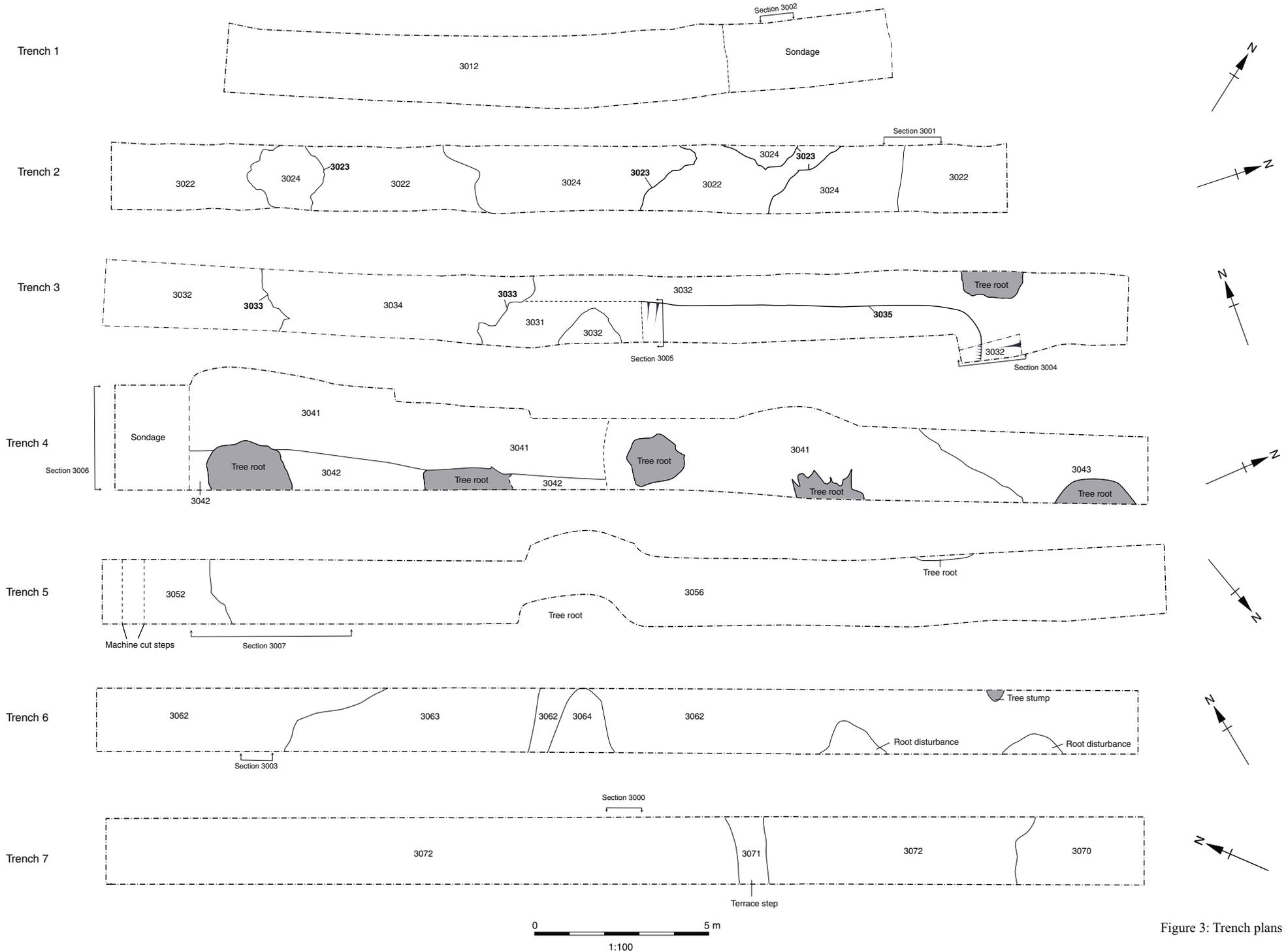


Figure 3: Trench plans

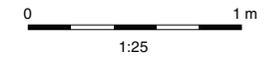
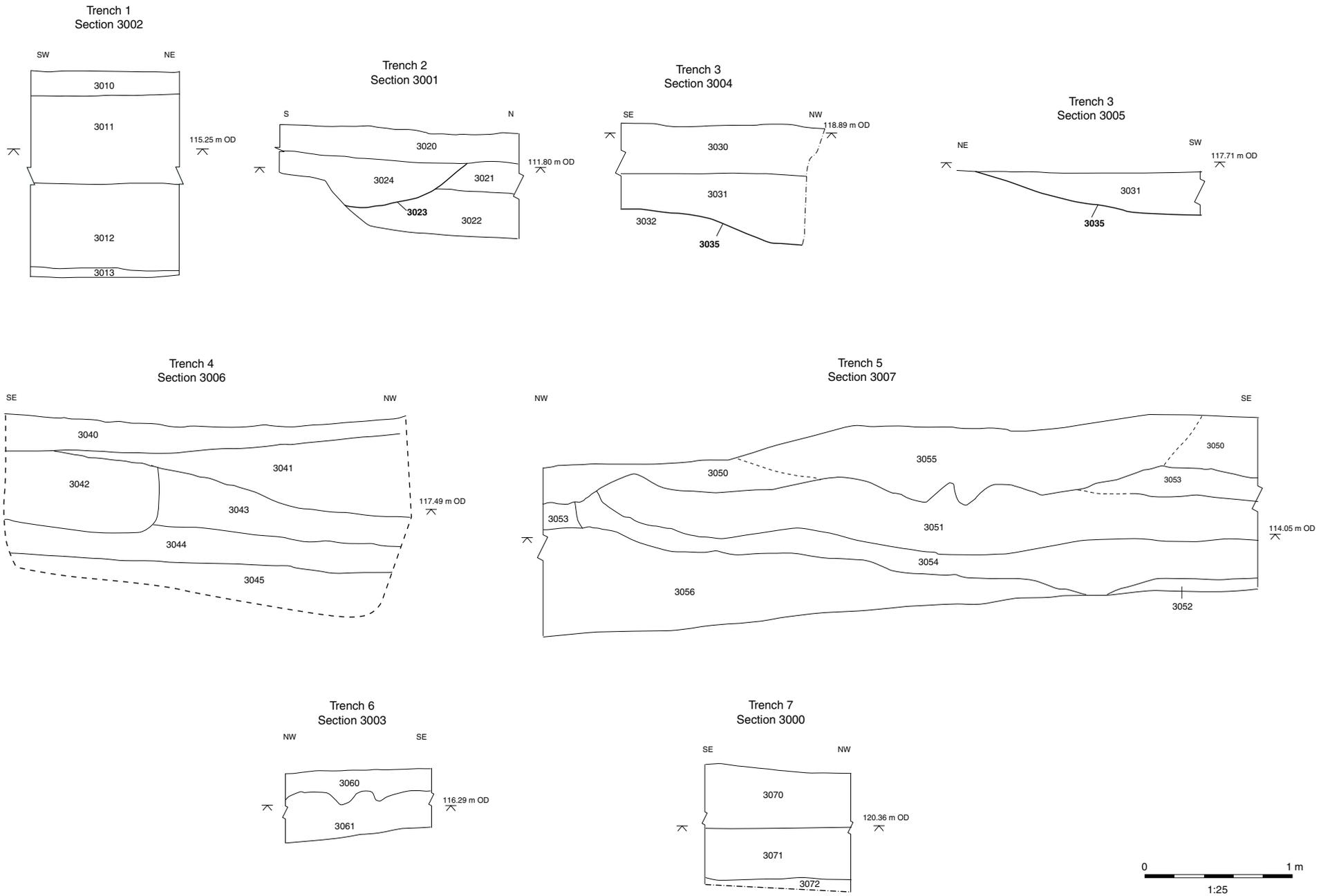


Figure 4: Sections



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