



# Castle Rushen, Castletown

Isle of Man

## Archaeological Evaluation Report

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**Oxford Archaeology North**

September 2010

Issue No: 2010/1104

OA North Job No: L10286

NGR: SC 265 674

**Manx National Heritage**

**Document Title:** CASTLE RUSHEN, CASTLETOWN, ISLE OF MAN

**Document Type:** Archaeological Evaluation Report

**Client:** Manx National Heritage

**Issue Number:** 2010/1104

**Job Number:** L10286

**National Grid Reference:** SC 265 674

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**Date:** September 2010

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## **SUMMARY**

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A series of shallow, machine-cut trenches in the area formerly occupied by the moat at Castle Rushen, designed to assess the nature of the stratigraphy below the topsoil, have revealed widespread deposits of demolition rubble. This was not excavated, but appeared to be of late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century date. The apparent utility of the moat for the disposal of demolition debris suggests that there will be a number of layers of earlier, similar material. The positioning of eighteenth-century buildings at a level higher than the presumed original base of the moat lends weight to this interpretation.

The work was commissioned by Manx National Heritage, and carried out by Oxford Archaeology North. Following the excavation, the ground was reinstated. No artefacts were collected.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Andrew Foxon of Manx National Heritage for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to Andy Johnson and Allison Fox of Manx National Heritage, Jackie Sloane and all other staff at Castle Rushen, and Eddie Convery, Clerk to the Castletown Commissioners, for their co-operation and support during the course of the project.

The topsoil investigation was directed by Andy Bates, who also produced this report, assisted by Kelly Clapperton. The drawings were produced by Marie Rowland, and the project was managed by Nick Johnson, who also edited the report.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 To contribute to an ongoing feasibility study for the regeneration of the extramural landscape of Castle Rushen, Manx National Heritage (MNH) separately commissioned a small-scale evaluation of the topsoil stratigraphy in key areas of the space between the curtain wall and the glacis, once filled by a tidal moat. This report presents the results of the evaluation.

### 1.2 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 Castle Rushen itself lies on the west bank of the estuary of the Silverburn (Fig 1). Since construction of the castle, the town has developed around it, and the estuary has been considerably modified to form a harbour, with the addition of quaysides, bridges and a weir, with the result that the aspect of the castle has altered substantially. A low ridge rises on the west bank of the river, and is now occupied by Malew Street. The castle lies at the termination of this ridge, with a clear view over almost the whole southern half of the Island.
- 1.2.2 The underlying solid geology is the Knockrushen Formation, wackestone and fine-grained packstone, overlain by the gravel sandur deposits of the Shellag Formation, which, to the east, are themselves overlain by fluvial deposits generated by the Silverburn (BGS 2001).

### 1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 The date of construction of the castle is not known, but a chronology of its development has been conjectured, based on comparisons with other similar sites (Freke 1996, 5). It is thought that the central, square portion of the keep was constructed in the twelfth century, and the encircling ditch, part of which was located by excavations in 1989, may be contemporary (Freke 1996, 8). Projecting towers were added to the keep in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The surrounding curtain wall was also constructed in the fourteenth century, when the original ditch was backfilled and a new moat cut. The overall height of the keep was also increased to improve the view over the curtain wall. Concerted action against the Island by the Scots during the mid-sixteenth century led to further development of the defences, ordered by Henry VIII (Curphey 1982, 74). A glacis was constructed, with gun ports and drum towers, which in turn, probably led to alterations of the moat.
- 1.3.2 Eighteenth-century prints show three separate lean-to buildings against the outside face of the curtain wall. Two of these appear to have been single storey, while that against the northern face of the wall may have had two storeys. Given the extant evidence for roof lines, and slots in the curtain wall for roof timbers, this strongly suggests that there had already been considerable infilling of the moat by this date. The buildings, at least one of

which is clearly a store, are likely to be associated with revised arrangements for the military in Castletown, which included the barracks on the west side of the marketplace.

- 1.3.3 In 1813 the castle was modified to create a gaol. Major alterations occurred in 1910, when the architect Armitage Rigby endeavoured to return the castle to a condition more closely resembling its medieval state (Freke 1996, 15). In the process, the surviving medieval stratigraphy in some parts of the site appears to have been considerably truncated (Freke 1996, 16).

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## 2 METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the Method Statement (*Appendix 1*), and was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute for Archaeologists, and generally accepted best practice.

### 2.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

2.2.1 **Trench configuration:** the trenches were located in the area formerly occupied by the castle moat, now occupied by gardens, between the curtain wall and the glacis. Each trench measured 0.9m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.25m. In total, four trenches were excavated, of varying lengths (Fig 1).

- *Trench 1:* located to the north of the western entrance to the gardens, adjacent to Barclays Bank, was aligned north-west/south-east and measured 12.5m in length;
- *Trench 2:* was aligned north-north-east/south-south-west and measured 3m in length. It was excavated just above the break in slope on the route from the marketplace to the quay;
- *Trench 3:* was aligned north-north-east/south-south-west and measured 3m in length. It was excavated on the upper part of the incline immediately following the break in slope on the route from the marketplace to the quay;
- *Trench 4:* was aligned north-east/south-west and north-north-east/south-south-west and measured 46m in length, and occupied the area known as the custodian's garden.

2.2.2 **Excavation:** the turf and topsoil was excavated by a 1.5 ton 360° mechanical excavator, to a maximum depth of 0.25m, with all spoil scanned for artefacts. No further excavation was undertaken.

2.2.3 Recording of the excavation utilised standard OA North *pro forma* sheets, on which the deposits and materials revealed by the excavation were described and classified. The trenches were located and planned using a Total Station Theodolite, tied into the Ordnance Survey grid using plans provided by Manx National Heritage. An indexed photographic record was maintained, using monochrome, colour slide, and digital formats.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 The products of the archaeological evaluation will form the basis of a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edn, 1991) and the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (Walker 1990). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project.

- 2.3.2 OA North conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives for long-term storage. The archive will be deposited with Manx National Heritage. The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) online database project *Online Access to Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) will be completed as part of the archiving phase of the project.
- 2.3.3 The material and paper archive generated from the evaluation will be transferred in accordance with the guidelines provided by *Archaeological Archives: A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation* (Brown *et al* 2007).

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## 3 RESULTS

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 In total, four trenches of varying sizes were excavated across the area of the castle gardens (Fig 1). An overview of the results is presented below, and a description of the archaeological deposits is provided in *Appendix 2*.

### 3.2 TRENCH 1

3.2.1 This trench was aligned north-west/south-east and measured 12.5m in length. It was located in the vicinity of the western entrance to the gardens, adjacent to Barclays Bank (Fig 2; Plate 1). Between 0.20m and 0.25m of topsoil, **100**, was removed to reveal concrete, **101**, along 9.97m of the trench. Topsoil was still present at the south-eastern end of the trench. Two service trenches were cut through the concrete. No archaeologically significant deposits were encountered.

### 3.3 TRENCH 2

3.3.1 Trench 2 was aligned north-north-east/south-south-west and measured 3m in length. It was located just above the break in slope in the northern arm of the castle gardens (Fig 3; Plate 2). Topsoil, **200**, was excavated to a depth of 0.25m, revealing two deposits. In the south-western half of the trench was soil layer **201**, possibly an imported soil used for landscaping, while in the northern half, there was a mixed deposit of sandy clay and clayey sand, layer **202**.

### 3.4 TRENCH 3

3.4.1 Trench 3 was aligned north-north-west/south-south-east and measured 3m in length. It was excavated on the upper part of the incline following the break in slope in the northern arm of the castle gardens (Fig 3; Plate 3). A maximum depth of 0.10m of topsoil, **300**, was excavated, below which lay deposit **301**, a very mixed layer including frequent stone inclusions. Some if not all of these stones represent building demolition rubble, along with fragments of red brick and roof slate.

### 3.5 TRENCH 4

3.5.1 Trench 4 was excavated in the eastern and south-eastern part of the castle gardens, in the area known as the custodian's garden. The trench measured 46m long, with a curve halfway along to allow it to follow the line of the curtain wall. The separate arms of the trench were aligned north-east/south-west and north-north-east/south-south-west (Fig 4; Plates 4 to 6).

3.5.2 Topsoil, **400**, measured 0.12m thick, below which a subsoil deposit, **401**, was excavated to

a maximum depth of 0.13m. A step was left towards the northern end of the trench, to preserve the roots of an adjacent tree. Deposit **402**, which lay below **401**, and was not excavated, was present along most of the length of the trench. It contained copious quantities of crushed lime mortar, mixed with other building materials and soil.

- 3.5.3 In the centre of the trench, a linear feature, aligned north-east/south-west was revealed along the south-eastern edge of the trench. It was not excavated, but the straight, clean edge of its cut suggested a modern date, and a service trench.
- 3.5.4 At the south-western end of the trench deposits **403** and **404** were exposed. Layer **403** contained abundant stone inclusions. It is possible that both these deposits are the fill of a feature truncating layer **402**, but they were not excavated.
- 3.5.5 In addition, a cable was revealed in the base of the northern end of the trench. The excavation did not disturb this cable, which remains intact.

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## 4 CONCLUSIONS

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 In total, four trenches were excavated in the castle gardens to a maximum depth of 0.25m. These trenches investigated the depth of the topsoil, and any underlying archaeological deposits. In accordance with the Method Statement, no archaeological investigation took place below this depth. The work aimed to assess the potential impact on archaeological deposits of any development in the gardens.

### 4.2 DISCUSSION

- 4.2.1 In Trench 1 a layer of concrete, *101*, cut by two services, was present across much of the trench. In Trench 2 to 4, below the topsoil, deposits used to in-fill and level the ground to its current level were revealed. These deposits represent the last, relatively recent phases of levelling, and contained building stone, and red brick and roof slate fragments. No finds were retained from the excavation, but the few that were exposed on the surface of the trenches implied that demolition had occurred in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century. While the trenches have shown the presence of such material close to the surface, assessment of the available views and prints showing the castle has suggested that there had already been some infilling of the moat by the eighteenth century, when relatively substantial masonry buildings are shown occupying the space. The present exercise has not determined the overall depth of the later demolition rubble, and the original depth of the moat is not known. The potential for the survival of deposits in the moat dating from periods when little is known about Manx material culture must be considered high.

### 4.3 IMPACT OF POTENTIAL GROUND WORKS ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY

- 4.3.1 The trial trenches have given an insight into the potential for archaeologically significant deposits to a depth of 0.25m below the present ground surface. Ground works of this depth are likely to have a marginal impact upon the upper levels of the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century demolition rubble used to infill the area between the glacis and the curtain wall. The potential impact of any works at greater depth remains to be assessed.

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Fig 2: Plan of Trench 1

Fig 3: Plan of Trenches 2 and 3

Fig 4: Plan of Trench 4

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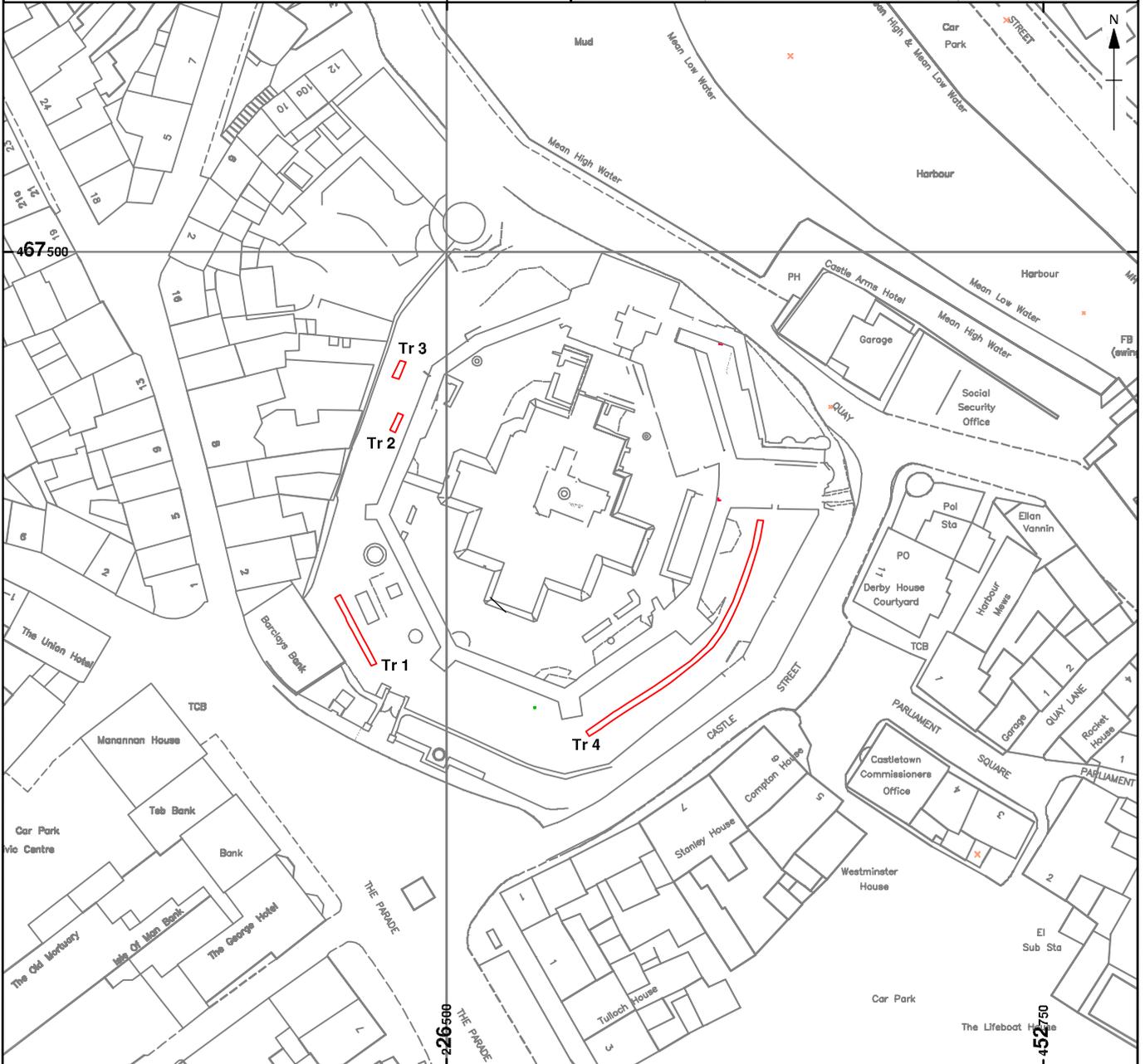
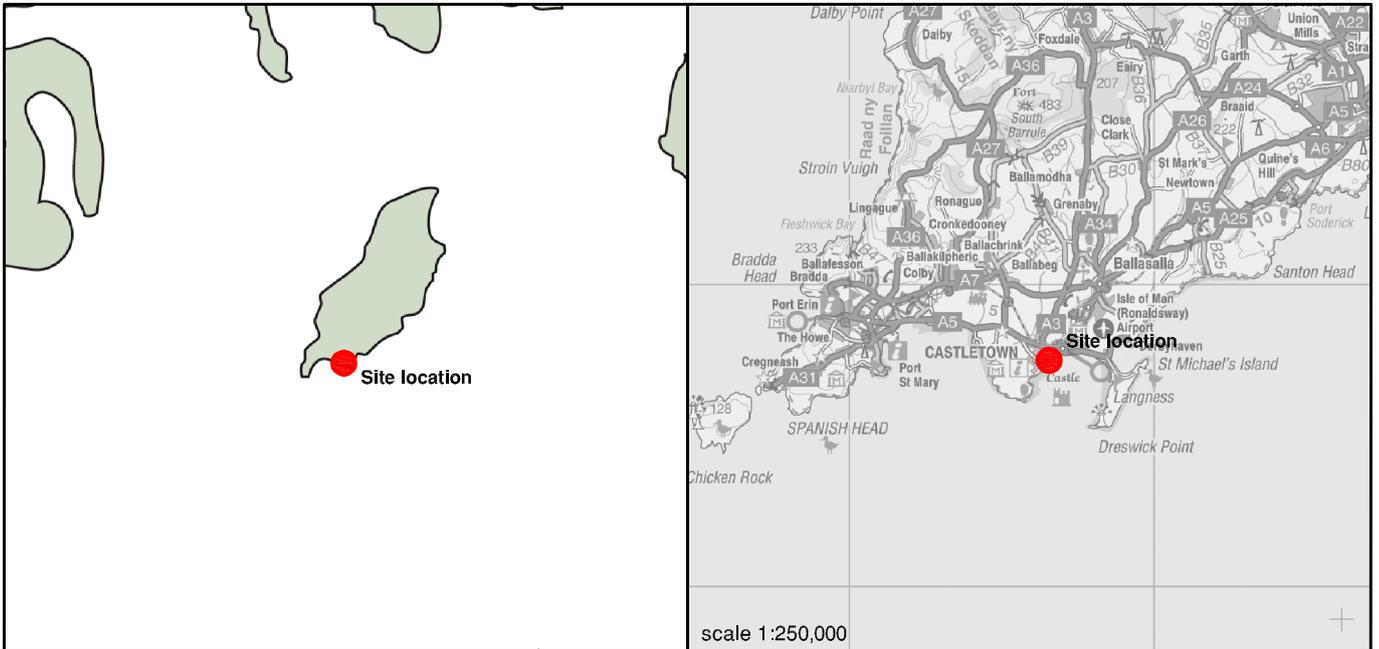
Plate 2: Trench 2, looking north-east

Plate 3: Trench 3, looking south-west

Plate 4: Trench 4 at its north-north-eastern end, looking south-south-west

Plate 5: The central part of Trench 4, looking south-south-west

Plate 6: The north-east/south-west-aligned part of Trench 4, looking north-east



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Figure 1: Site location

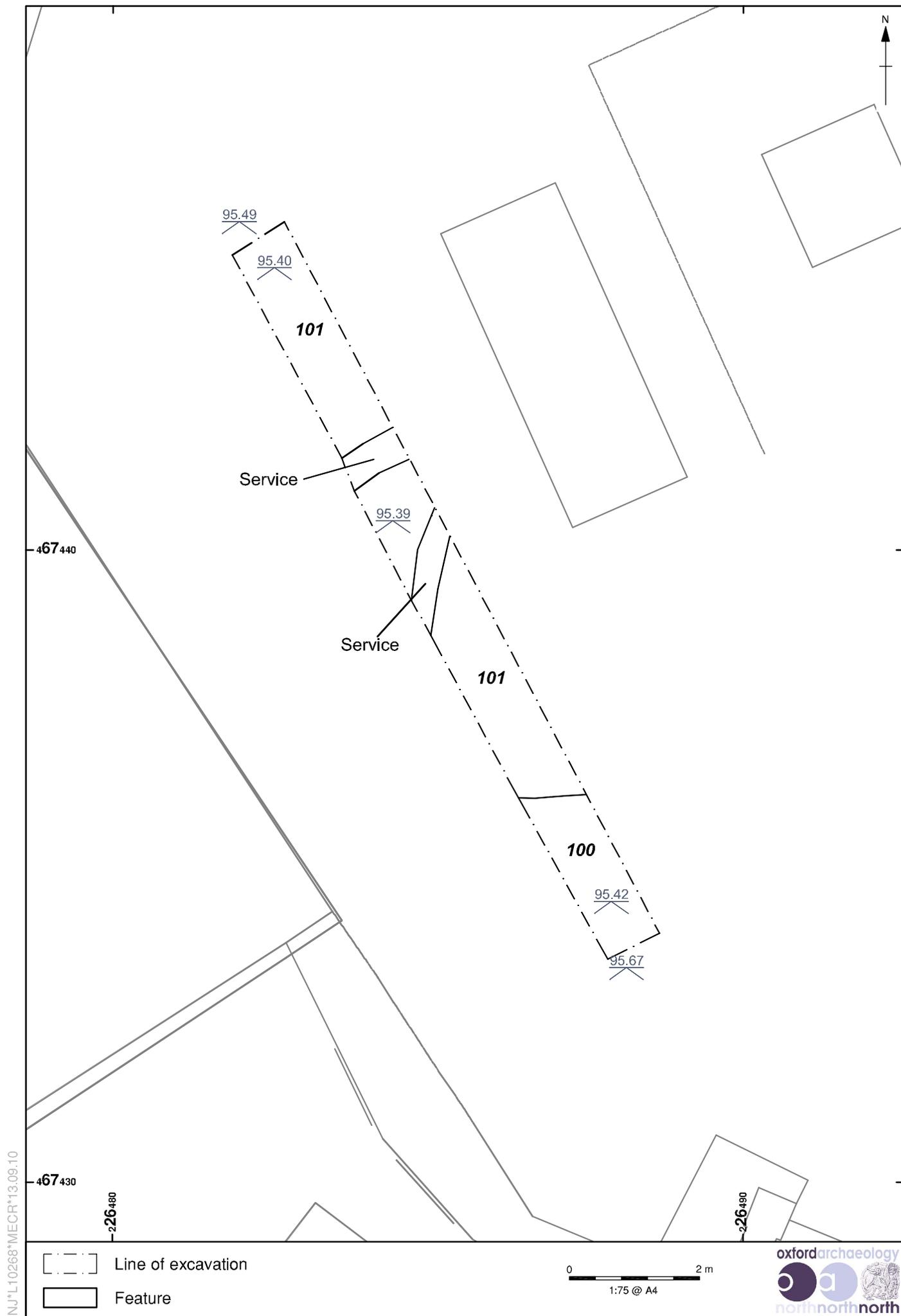
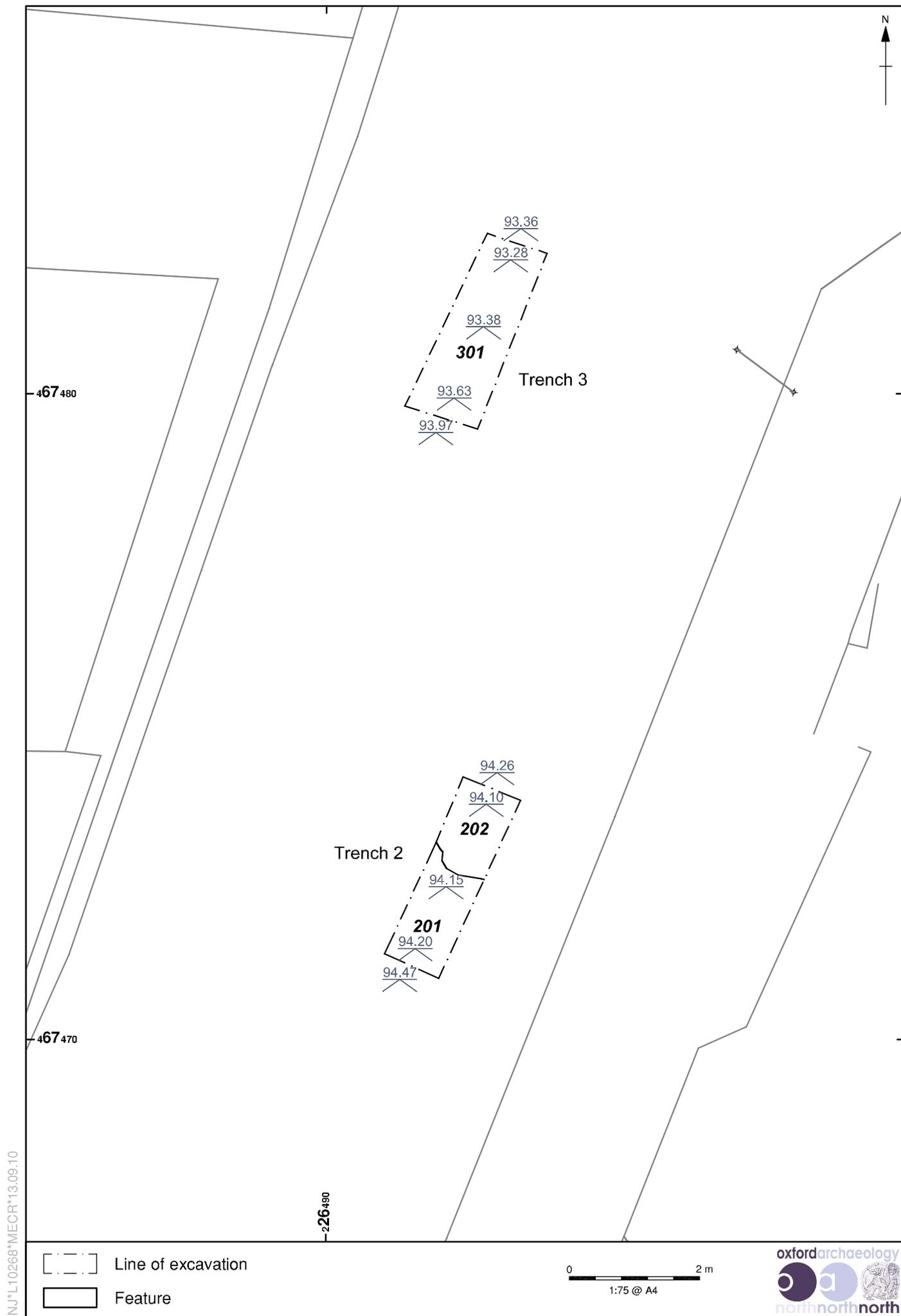


Figure 2: Plan of Trench 1



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Figure 3: Plan of Trenches 2 and 3

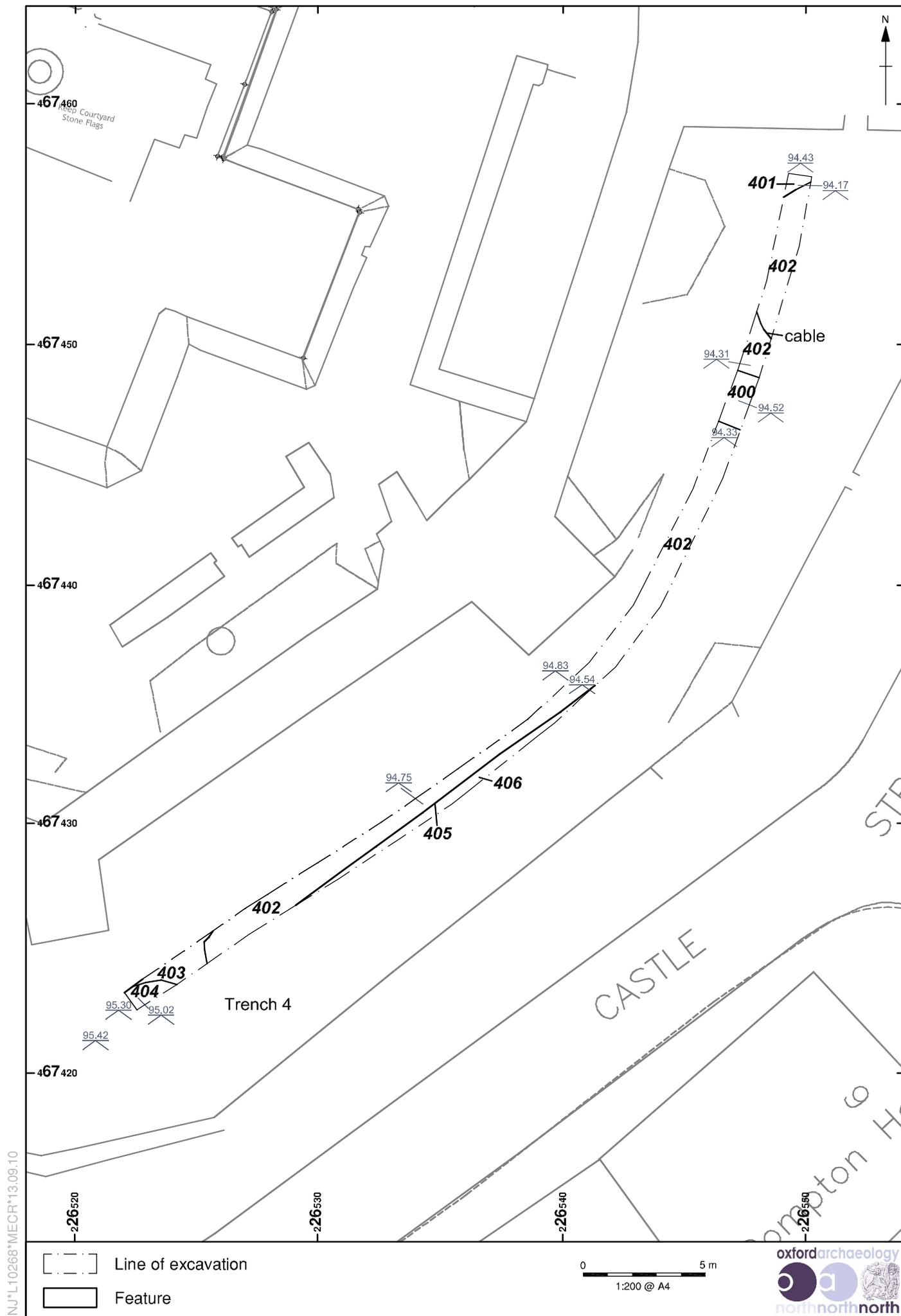


Figure 4: Plan of Trench 4



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking north-west



Plate 2: Trench 2, looking north-east



Plate 3: Trench 3, looking south-west



Plate 4: Trench 4 at its north-north-eastern end, looking south-south-west



Plate 5: The central part of Trench 4, looking south-south-west



Plate 6: The north-east/south-west-aligned part of Trench 4, looking north-east

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## A1 METHOD STATEMENT

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 To inform the Castle Rushen Feasibility Study (2010), Oxford Archaeology North (OAN) have been invited by Manx National Heritage (MNH) to undertake limited trial excavations in the moat area of Castle Rushen, to determine the depths of topsoil at a variety of locations.
- 1.1.2 This document is a statement of the methods which will be employed in undertaking the topsoil strip, and is submitted in support of an application for an excavation licence.

### 1.2 METHOD

- 1.2.1 In advance of on-site work, OAN will prepare a health and safety Risk Assessment, and will liaise with Castletown Commissioners regarding public access.
- 1.2.2 The strip will be undertaken by a mini-digger, supervised by OAN archaeologists, and fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The machine will run backwards, cutting a linear trench the width of the digger bucket. The work will proceed in five stages, as follows:
- removal of turf, placed to one side;
  - removal of topsoil to a point where archaeological stratigraphy is apparent, or to a maximum depth of 0.25m, whichever is the lesser, with spoil placed on the opposite side from the turf;
  - recording of the trench, *ie* its geographical location, surface spot heights, and surface features;
  - re-instatement of topsoil using the machine;
  - re-instatement of turf, using the machine, and tidied up by hand.
- 1.2.3 OAN have a standard procedure for recording the surface of a trench, developed to meet principles outlined by the Institute for Archaeologists. Using a Total Station, sufficient reference points will be taken to allow the outline of the trench to be mapped on existing large-scale survey maps and, therefore, also tied into the existing topographic survey.
- 1.2.4 Previous gardening is likely to have mixed the topsoil thoroughly and, therefore, any artefacts in the soil will be residual. This project does not anticipate collecting any artefacts, as all excavation is to stop at the level of archaeological stratigraphy, if not before. Artefacts may be collected if something unusual or of exceptional usefulness to interpretation of the site is encountered. OAN archaeologists will sign a standard MNH finds waiver.
- 1.2.5 Three main locations for investigation *via* the strip are planned at present:
- at the break in slope on the northern side of the moat, taking the route down to the quay;
  - in the area of the moat where its width is greatest, *ie* north of the gateway from the marketplace, and east of Barclays Bank;
  - within the Custodian's Garden, assuming the mini-digger can access this space.
- 1.2.6 Following completion of the excavation, a short report will be prepared detailing the work undertaken and describing the results. This will include mapping of the trenches and their spot heights.

## A2 TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

**Trench 1**    **Dimensions:** 12.5 x 0.9m

**Orientation:** north-west /  
south-east

Context	Description	Depth m
<b>100</b>	Topsoil. A dark brown grey clayey silt, with less than 5% sub-rounded stone inclusions, measuring a maximum of 0.09 x 0.11 x 0.02m; less than 2% brick fragments, measuring a maximum of 0.12 x 0.10 x 0.05m; and less than 2% charcoal flecks.	0.25
<b>101</b>	Concrete	0.10

**Trench 2**    **Dimensions:** 3 x 0.9m

**Orientation:** north-north-east  
/ south-south-west

Context	Description	Depth m
<b>200</b>	Topsoil. A very dark grey silty clay.	0.25
<b>201</b>	Subsoil. A very dark grey coarse sand silty clay, with c 5% sub-rounded stone inclusions, measuring a maximum of 0.06 x 0.05 x 0.04m.	Unknown
<b>202</b>	Levelling layer. A mixed deposit of dark orangey grey medium sandy clay and clayey medium sand.	Unknown

**Trench 3**    **Dimensions:** 3 x 0.9m

**Orientation:** north-north-east  
/ south-south-west

Context	Description	Depth m
<b>300</b>	Topsoil. A very dark grey silty clay.	0.10
<b>301</b>	Levelling layer. A very dark grey coarse sandy silty clay. Approximately 10% of this deposit was sub-rounded and sub-angular stone, measuring a maximum of 0.52 x 0.34 x 0.21m. Some were faced limestone blocks with lime mortar attached. In addition, less than rare fragments of roof slate were present, measuring a maximum of 0.09 x 0.08 x 0.04m.	Unknown

**Trench 4 Dimensions:** 46 x 0.9m**Orientation:** north-north-east / south-south-west and north-east/south-west

Context	Description	Depth m
400	Topsoil. A dark grey fine sand silty clay, with less than 5% sub-rounded stone inclusions, measuring a maximum of 0.04 x 0.074 x 0.04m.	0.12
401	Subsoil. A dark brown grey medium sand clayey silt.	Unknown
402	Rubble layer. A mixed deposit of light yellowish grey coarse sandy silt and dark brown grey silty clay soil. The deposit contained <i>c</i> 50% crushed lime mortar; <i>c</i> 20% sub-angular stone, measuring a maximum of 0.18 x 0.13 x 0.04m; <i>c</i> 10% sub-rounded stone inclusions, measuring a maximum of 0.15 x 0.10 x 0.05m; <i>c</i> 10% slate fragments, measuring a maximum of 0.10 x 0.10 x 0.10m; and 5% red brick fragments, measuring a maximum of 0.10 x 0.10 x 0.10m.	Unknown
403	Layer. A mid-dark brownish grey fine sandy silt. Approximately 40% of the deposit was sub-rounded stone inclusions, measuring a maximum of 0.15 x 0.10 x 0.07m, and <i>c</i> 5% red brick fragments, measuring a maximum of 0.05 x 0.05 x 0.05m.	Unknown
404	Subsoil. A mid-grey brown fine sandy silt. Approximately 5% of the deposit was sub-rounded stone, measuring a maximum of 0.01 x 0.01 x 0.01m; less than 2% charcoal flecks; and less than 1% red brick fragments measuring less than 0.02 x 0.02 x 0.02m.	Unknown
405	Putative cut. North-east/south-west aligned linear feature, at least 14.73m in length and 0.47m wide, continuing beyond the south-eastern limit of excavation. Not excavated.	Unknown
406	Fill of 405. A dark brown grey medium sand clayey silt. Identical to sub-soil 401.	Unknown