

Land off Laburnum Avenue, Yaxley



Archaeological Evaluation Report



May 2016

Client: Luminus Group

OA East Report No: 1929

OASIS No: oxfordar3-250682

NGR: TL 1875 9274

Land off Laburnum Avenue, Yaxley

Archaeological Evaluation

By Nicholas Cox BSc

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Report Date: May 2016

Report Number: 1929
Site Name: Laburnum Avenue
HER Event No: ECB 4712
Date of Works: May 2016
Client Name: Luminus Group
Client Ref: N/A
Planning Ref: 15/00659
Grid Ref: TL 1875 9274
Site Code: YAX LAB 16
Finance Code: YAX LAB 16
Receiving Body: CCC Stores
Accession No: YAX LAB 16
Prepared by: Nicholas Cox
Position: Assistant Supervisor
Date: May 2016
Checked by: James Drummond-Murray
Position: Senior Project manager
Date: 09/06/16
Signed:



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Summary.....	5
1 Introduction.....	7
1.1 Location and scope of work.....	7
1.2 Geology and topography.....	7
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	7
1.4 Acknowledgements.....	9
2 Aims and Methodology.....	10
2.1 Aims.....	10
2.2 Methodology.....	10
3 Results.....	11
3.1 Introduction.....	11
3.2 Trench 1.....	11
3.3 Trench 2.....	11
3.4 Trench 3.....	11
3.5 Finds Summary.....	11
3.6 Environmental Summary.....	11
4 Discussion.....	12
4.1 Roman (AD 43 to 410).....	12
4.2 Modern (AD 1700 to present).....	12
4.3 Significance.....	12
4.4 Recommendations.....	12
Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory.....	13
Appendix B. Finds Reports.....	14
B.1 Pottery.....	14
Appendix C. Bibliography.....	15
Appendix D. OASIS Report Form.....	16

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location map
Fig. 2 Trench location plan
Fig. 3 Plan of Trench 1 and sections

List of Plates

- Plate 1 Trench 1, facing north
Plate 2 Gully 4, facing east
Plate 3 Trench 3, facing south

List of Tables

- Table 1 Romano-British Pottery

Summary

On the 4th of May 2016 Oxford Archaeology East conducted an archaeological evaluation consisting of three trial trenches on the former site of Ashton House, off Laburnum Avenue, Yaxley (NGR TL 1875 9274).

The evaluation found evidence for the construction and demolition of Ashton House and the truncated remains of a Roman ditch.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at the site of the demolished Ashton House off Laburnum Avenue, Yaxley (Fig 1).
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Gemma Stewart of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application 15/00659), supplemented by a specification prepared by OA East.
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012). The results will enable decisions to be made by CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Yaxley lies on the Yaxley – Farcet ridge to the south of Peterborough which forms the edge of the Peterborough “mainland” before it drops off into the Fens to the south-east.
- 1.2.2 The Bedrock geology of the development area is Middle Jurassic Oxford Clay mudstone. These are overlain by Mid Pleistocene deposits of mixed silts, sands and clays and by Oadby Member glacial tills deposited by the ice sheets of the Anglian glaciation.
- 1.2.3 The development area was flat, located at 21.3m above Ordnance Datum (OD). It was bounded to the north by Laburnum Avenue, to the west by Queen’s Road and to the south by Broadway.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The following information is drawn from the Written Scheme of Investigation (Drummond-Murray 2016).
- 1.3.2 The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) records a Palaeolithic hand axe found at ‘Yaxley Yard’ (CHER 01419). A single pit containing a small number of prehistoric flints and fragmented bone was found at Vicarage Farm (CHER 11336A). A single site on the gravel island between Farcet Fen and Yaxley Fen, 4.5km to the east, yielded a range of flint artefacts of Neolithic date, with some items of the Mesolithic and Bronze Age also present (CHER 1087). Bronze Age remains comprising two barrows (CHER 10872 and 10873) and a possible burnt mound (CHER 10874) also lie upon this island. In contrast, both Yaxley and Farcet Fens lack evidence for prehistoric settlement.
- 1.3.3 Prior to the recent excavations (see below) there were no recorded instances of Iron Age sites in Yaxley or Farcet Fen.

Roman

- 1.3.4 The Roman town of *Durobrivae* lay on Ermine Street close to the present village of Water Newton and 7.5km due north-west of the site. *Durobrivae* was a small but important town and would have been the focus for a variety of contemporary farms, burial grounds and industrial sites, in particular the Nene Valley pottery industries. Information on the extent to which it affected the prosperity of the local region is limited, as little excavation has taken place within *Durobrivae* itself and few villa sites have been identified and investigated in the area.
- 1.3.5 The CHER records several Roman sites within approximately 2km of the site. The nearest were located 500m to the north-east of the excavated area and comprised finds of Roman pottery (CHER 01353 and 01379). The site of a Roman pottery kiln is located 700m to the south of the excavated area at Cow Bridge Farm (CHER 01628). An evaluation north of Manor Farm, 1.75km to the south-west, included an earthwork survey which recorded a series of linear earthwork features including banks and ditches. During trial trenching, a small group of possible 2nd century AD Romano-British pottery was recovered from a ditch-type feature in the southern part of the study area, and a single sherd of abraded Samian ware was found elsewhere (Hughes and Jones 1998; CHER CB15469). Finds of coins and pottery were also located at these places (CHER 01390, 01409 and 00996). A Roman burial was encountered in 1906 in Farcet Fen at a location roughly 2.5km to the north-east; it was reported to have been buried beneath a stone slab 1.8m long by 0.75m wide (CHER 02811). Recently, a small excavation at the western end of Broadway, approximately 1.2km to the west, uncovered evidence for small-scale pottery production in the form of a large assemblage of pottery (6.93kg) including wasters, as well as kiln furniture (bars, brick, plates and lining), all recovered in the middle and upper fills of a ditch (CHER 03819). Part of a cheese press was also recovered.
- 1.3.6 Major sites slightly further afield include a substantial farmstead at Haddon, 5km to the west, close to Ermine Street (CHER 09748). The farmstead, in use throughout the Roman period, included a number of structures, one of which was an aisled barn. To the south of the farmstead a Roman bathhouse was excavated in 1991 (CHER 10384). A Roman settlement or farmstead including enclosures, ditches, gullies and stone surfaced yard areas was found at Norman Cross during road improvements to the A1 (CHER 11925). The higher land that Yaxley sits on drops off to the north before rising again on the southern fringe of Peterborough. Within this area an excavation at Orton Hall Farm, 2.75km to the north, revealed a farmstead in use throughout the Roman period. As well as an evolving pattern of ditched enclosures, three aisled barns were uncovered. These were linked with agricultural activity, specifically brewing.

Medieval

- 1.3.7 The study of the surrounding fen indicates that use of the upland would have been extensive (Hall 1992). The village of Yaxley was an inland port of consequence where goods were unloaded for transport by road further up the Nene Valley throughout the Middle Ages until the mid-17th century. The River Nene and Yaxley Brook were canalised via Conquest Lode and Yaxley Lode. Their banks were sufficiently high to allow erection of buildings which would have included dwellings, landing stages, fisheries, toll houses and a wealth of other structures. The fen itself was sufficiently well drained to allow the extension of the medieval open fields with its characteristic ridge and furrow, although much of this has been destroyed by modern ploughing.

Previous Investigations

- 1.3.8 Archaeological excavations 350m to the east found evidence of a Late Iron Age through to Late Roman farming settlement. Part of the site lay in Cambridgeshire and was excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology (MCB 16368: Brown 2008). A small cemetery was associated with the settlement.
- 1.3.9 The eastern part lay in Peterborough and was excavated by OA East (Phillips 2014) This investigation revealed evidence of previous land use from two broad periods; the Late Iron Age and Late Roman periods. The Late Iron Age occupation was restricted to the south-eastern half of the site and comprised a square enclosure, a roundhouse and parts of a field system. Within the square enclosure was a much smaller C-shaped enclosure which may have been the remains of a shelter of some form. The presence of slag and hammerscale suggests that this shelter or structure was the focus of industrial activity. The low density of artefacts from the Late Iron Age features suggests this was on the periphery of any settlement.
- 1.3.10 Late Roman activity was restricted to the north-western half of the site. The dating evidence suggests that there may have been an earlier Roman presence, although it has been difficult to separate this out from the predominantly Late Roman (3rd – 4th century AD) activity.
- 1.3.11 An evaluation and subsequent excavation at 2 Park Close, 300m south-west of the site found primarily evidence of medieval quarrying but also two Iron Age pits and other possibly prehistoric features (Clarke 2013; Rees 2013)

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 Oxford Archaeology East would like to thank the Luminus Group which commissioned and funded the work. The project was managed by James Drummond-Murray. Field work was conducted by the author, with the assistance of Margaret Leman. Site survey was conducted by David Brown. The archaeological works were monitored by Gemma Stewart of CCCHET.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The objective of this trial trenching was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The Brief required that a 5% sample of the development area be investigated. This comprised three 20m trenches, totaling of 60m of trenching.

2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with an 8-ton tracked 360-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

2.2.3 The site survey was carried out by David Brown using a Leica 1200 GPS.

2.2.4 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

2.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

2.2.6 The site was dry and well drained. Two low bunds of topsoil roughly 0.50m high ran across parts of the site. These bunds crossed the line of two of the trenches (Trench 1 and Trench 3).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 Each of the three evaluation trenches (Fig 2) excavated is described individually.
- 3.1.2 A comprehensive index of trench depths and descriptions can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 Trench 1

- 3.2.1 Trench 1 was located on the western side of the site at a height of 20.42m OD. It was 20m in length and 2m wide, and was orientated north-west to south-east (Plate 1).
- 3.2.2 Located 12m from the south-eastern end of the trench was a shallow gully (4) running on an east to west alignment (Fig.3, Plan 1). This was 0.50m in width and 0.16m deep. It was filled by a dark brownish grey silty clay (5). Fill 5 contained two sherds of Roman pottery (Fig.3, Section 1; Plate 2).
- 3.2.3 Two metres to the south-east of gully 4 was a curvilinear feature containing a large amount of modern rubbish.
- 3.2.4 The trench was then overlain by a dark brown grey chalky clay levelling layer (3), which was 0.10m to 0.12m thick. Above this was a modern hardcore layer (2), which varied from 0.19m at the south-east end of the trench to 0.60m thick at the north-west. A final 0.26m thick topsoil layer of dark grey brown sandy silt covered the whole trench (Fig.3, Sections 2 and 3).

3.3 Trench 2

- 3.3.1 Trench 2 to the north of Trench 1 (Fig 2), forming a T-shape, at a height of 20.33m OD. It was 20m in length, 2m wide and was orientated north-east to south-west.
- 3.3.2 No archaeological features were present in the trench.
- 3.3.3 The whole trench was overlain by a dark brown grey chalky clay levelling layer (3), which was 0.15m to 0.25m thick, and this layer was itself overlain by a modern demolition material (2) which was 0.40m to 0.43m thick. A final 0.25m thick topsoil layer of dark grey brown sandy silt covered the trench.

3.4 Trench 3

- 3.4.1 Trench 3 was located on the eastern end of the site (Fig 2) at a height of 20.55m OD. It was 20m in length and 2m wide, and was orientated north west to south east (Plate 3).
- 3.4.2 The only feature was a modern concrete drain located c.15m from the north-west end of the trench.
- 3.4.3 The whole trench was overlain by a dark brown grey chalky clay levelling layer (3), which was 0.15m to 0.46m thick, and this layer was itself overlain by a modern hardcore layer (2) which was 0.25m to 0.48m thick. A final 0.22m thick topsoil layer of dark grey brown sandy silt covered the trench.

3.5 Finds Summary

- 3.5.1 The pottery assemblage consisted of one sherd (6g) of Roman pottery.
- 3.5.2 No other finds were recovered.

3.6 Environmental Summary

- 3.6.1 No environmental evidence was recovered.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Roman (AD 43 to 410)

4.1.1 The only Roman feature on the site was an east to west aligned shallow gully (4) in Trench 1. Based on the pottery recovered from it this gully dated to between the mid 2nd and early 4th centuries. This feature is likely to be the base of an originally larger feature which has been truncated by the later modern activity.

4.2 Modern (AD 1700 to present)

4.2.1 All of the modern activity on the site appears to be related to the construction and subsequent demolition of Ashton House. The only possibly earlier evidence is a curvilinear feature in Trench 1 which was filled with modern rubbish and overlain by later material (layer 3).

4.2.2 All deposits above the natural across the whole site appear to be of recent origin. All three trenches contained a clay levelling layer (3) which was probably laid down during the construction of Ashton House. This layer appears to have truncated most of the existing deposits, including the fill of gully 4.

4.2.3 Later material found on the site relates to a probable tarmac surface outside of the building and rubble layers from its demolition.

4.3 Significance

4.3.1 The depth of the modern deposits and shallowness of the one non-modern feature indicate that any archaeology within the development area is likely to have been heavily disturbed and truncated if not completely destroyed during the construction of Ashton House.

4.3.2 The presence of Roman archaeology on the site may relate to evidence of earlier activity found on the northern side of Broadway (Brown 2008; Phillips 2014). However, the limited survival of features on this site means it is not possible to determine what kinds of activity were being undertaken on it and whether there is any continuity between this evidence and that found on nearby excavations.

4.4 Recommendations

4.4.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation	NW-SE	
Trench contained a shallow Roman gully and a modern feature. Consists of soil, a modern demolition layer and a modern levelling layer of clay.				Avg. depth (m)	0.70	
				Width (m)	2.00	
				Length (m)	20.0	
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.26	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.60	Demolition layer	-	Modern
3	Layer	-	0.12	Levelling layer	-	Modern
4	Cut	0.50	0.16	Gully	-	Roman
5	Fill	-	0.16	Gully	pottery	Roman
Trench 2						
General description				Orientation	NE-SW	
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil, a modern demolition layer and a modern levelling layer of clay.				Avg. depth (m)	0.79	
				Width (m)	2.00	
				Length (m)	20.0	
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.43	Demolition layer	-	Modern
3	Layer	-	0.25	Levelling layer	-	Modern
Trench 3						
General description				Orientation	NW-SE	
Trench contained a modern concrete drain. Consists of soil, a modern demolition layer and a modern levelling layer of clay.				Avg. depth (m)	0.82	
				Width (m)	2.00	
				Length (m)	20.0	
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.22	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.48	Demolition layer	-	Modern
3	Layer	-	0.46	Levelling layer	-	Modern

APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By Stephen Wadson

Introduction and methodology

- B.1.1 A total of 1 sherd weighing 6g were recovered from a single context consisting of a probably truncated Roman gully (4).
- B.1.2 The pottery was analysed following the guidelines of the Study Group for Roman Pottery (Darling 2004). Local and national (Tomber and Dore 1998; Tyers 2006) publications were used for referencing the fabrics and forms.
- B.1.3 The total assemblage was studied and a catalogue was prepared (Table 1). The sherds were examined using a hand lens (x10 magnification) and were divided into broad fabric groups defined on the basis of inclusion types present. Vessel forms (jar, bowl) were also recorded. The sherds were counted and weighed to the nearest whole gram and recorded by context. Decoration, residues and abrasion were also noted.
- B.1.4 OA East curates the pottery and archive.

Nature of the Assemblage

- B.1.5 The assemblage consists of a single body sherd from a Nene Valley grey ware (NVGW) vessel which date from AD 150 to 300.

Fabric	Abbreviation	Vessel Form	Sherd Count	Weight (g)	Weight (%)
Nene Valley Grey Ware	NVGW		1	6	100.00
Total			1	6	100.00

Table 1: Romano-British Pottery

APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX D. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-250682		
Project Name	Land off Labrunum Avenue, Yaxley		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	04-05-2016	Finish	04-05-2016
Previous Work (by OA East)	No	Future Work	No

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	YAX LAB 16	Planning App. No.	15/00659
HER No.	ECB 4712	Related HER/OASIS No.	

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Planning condition
Development Type	Housing Estate

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Gully	Roman 43 to 410	Pottery	Roman 43 to 410
	Select period...		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	Huntingdonshire	Labrunum Avenue Yaxley Peterborough
Parish	Yaxley	
HER	Cambridgeshire	
Study Area	2860 sq.m	National Grid Reference TL 1875 9274

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Gemma Stewart
Project Design Originator	James Drummond-Murray
Project Manager	James Drummond-Murray
Supervisor	Nicholas Cox

Project Archives

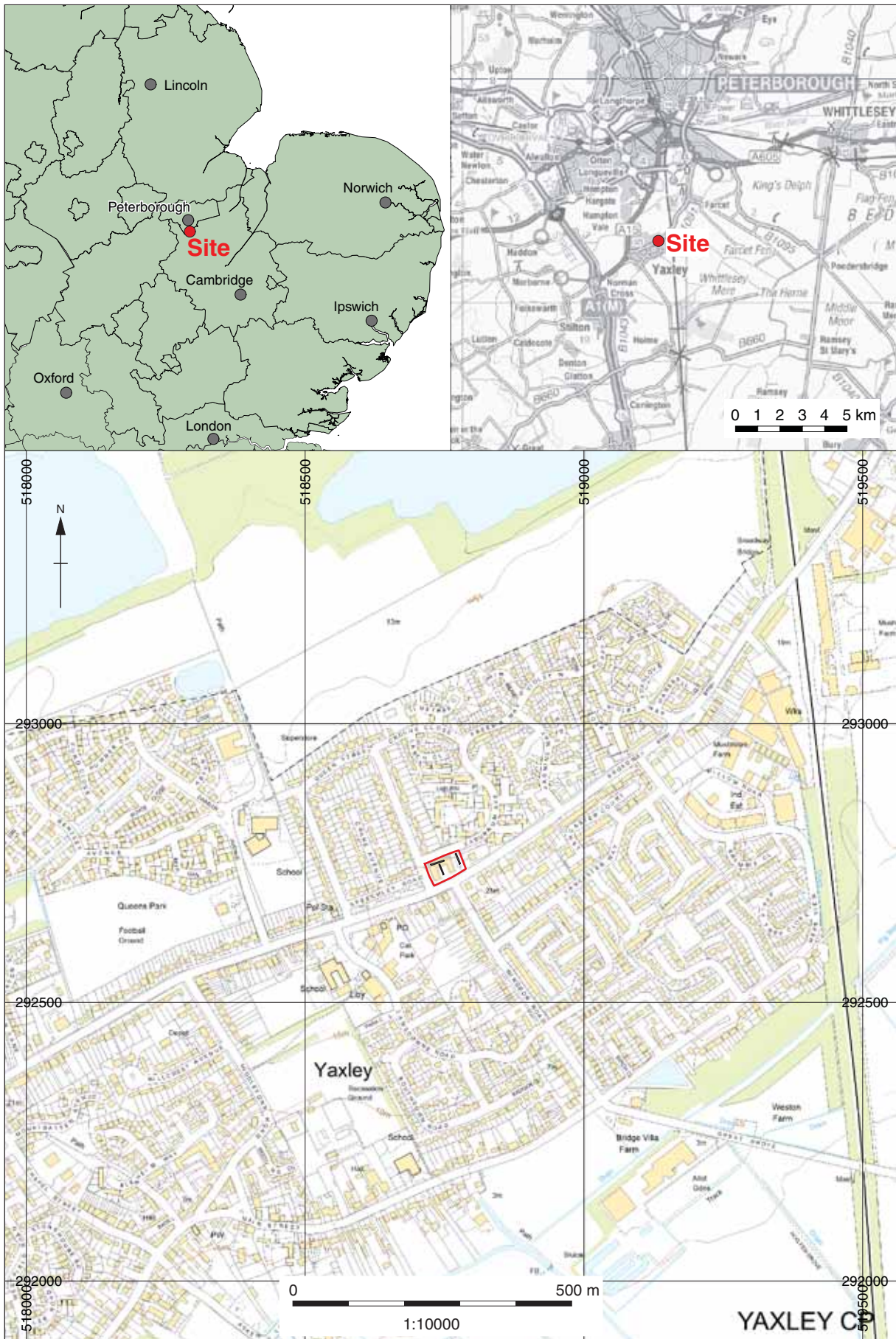
Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Stores	OA East	CCC Stores
YAXLAB16	YAXLAB16	YAXLAB16

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:



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Figure 1: Site location showing archaeological trenches (black) in development area (red)

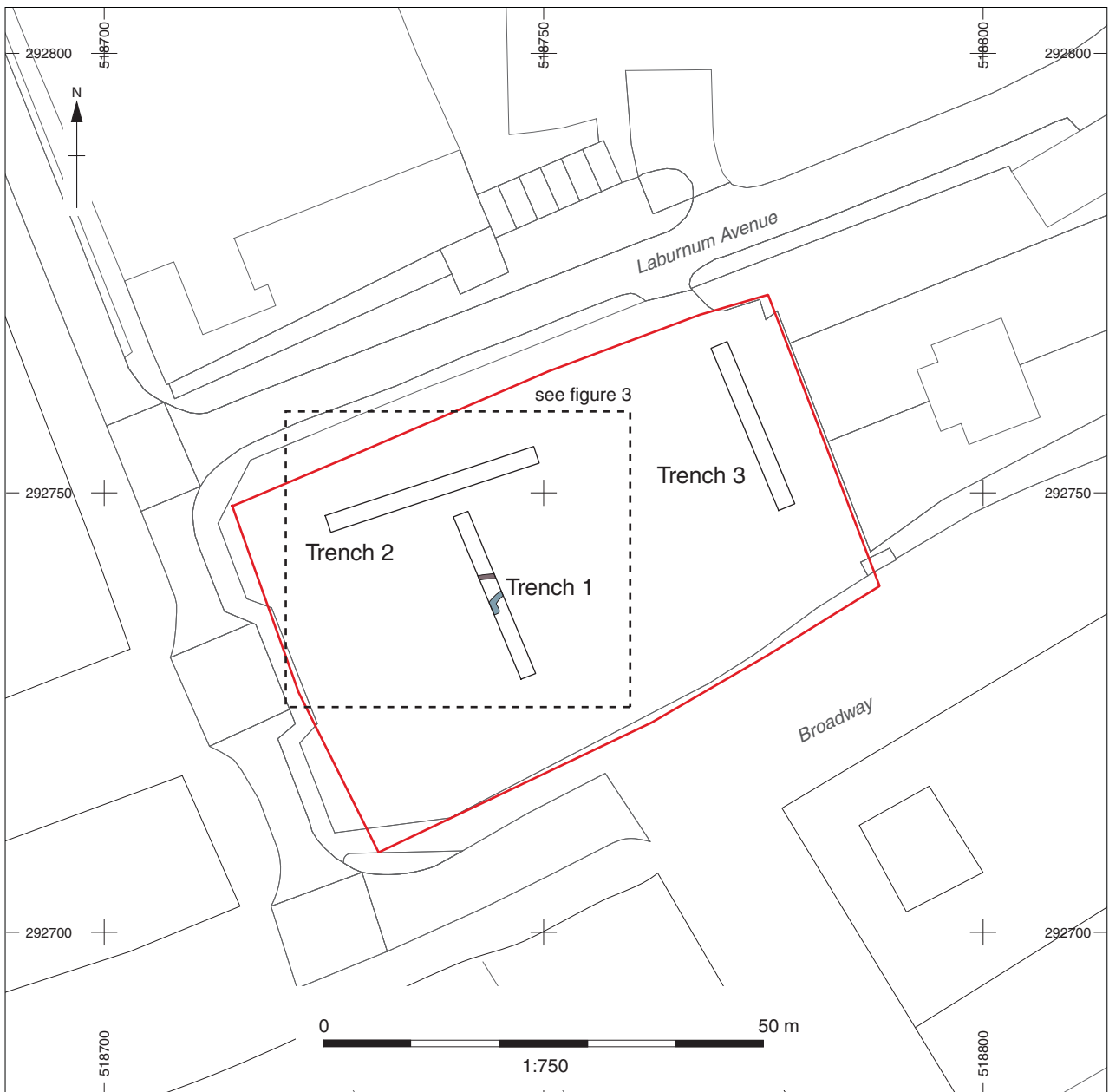


Figure 2: Trench location plan

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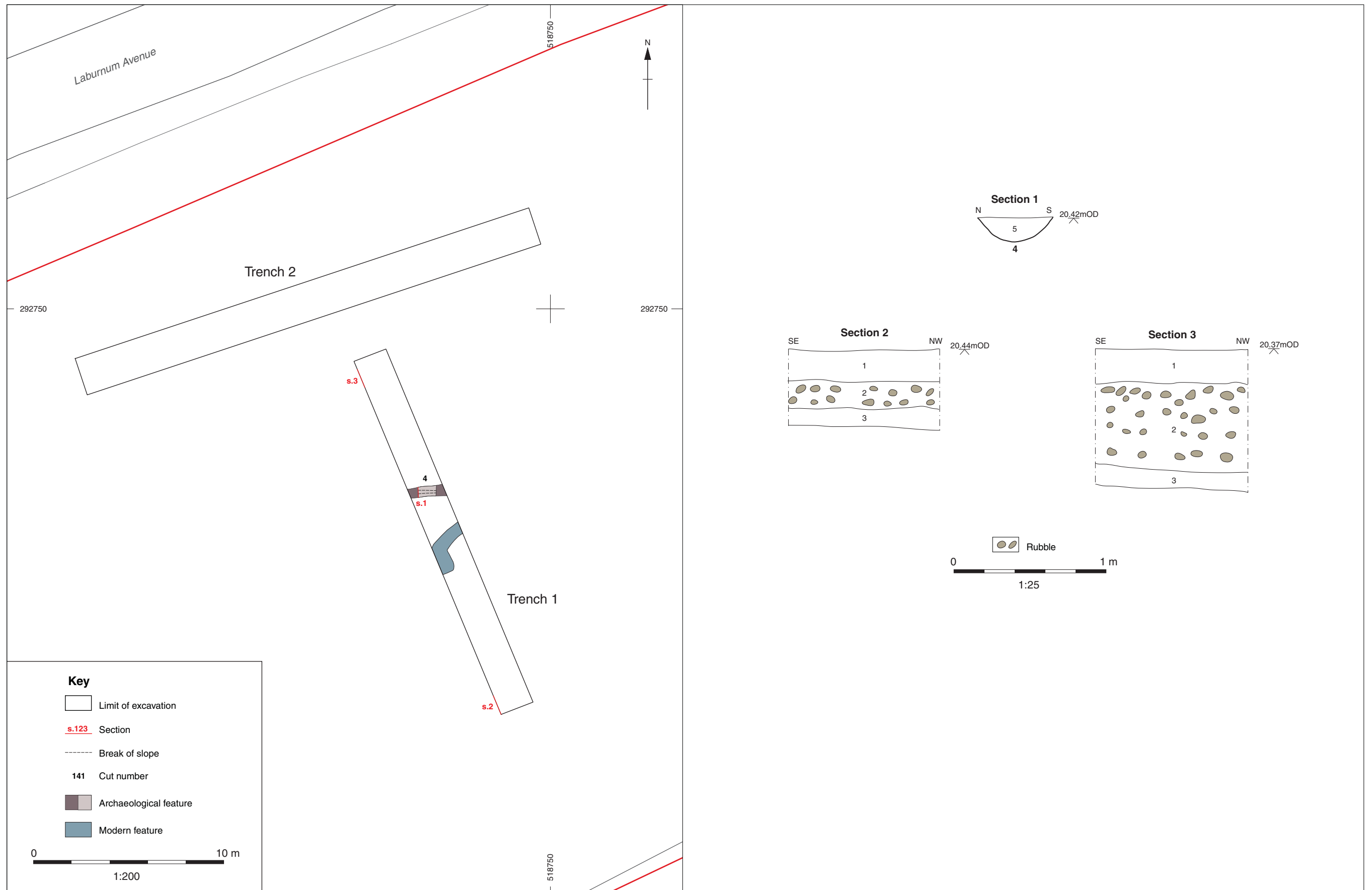


Figure 3: Plan of Trench 1 and sections

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Plate 1: Trench 1, facing north



Plate 2: Gully 4, facing east



Plate 3: Trench 3, facing south



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