

St Dunstan's Church Monks Risborough Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeology

July 2004

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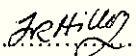
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St Dunstan's Church, Monks Risborough, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 812 044

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Cover Plate: Proposed graveyard extension during fieldwork.

SUMMARY

In June 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at St Dunstan's Church, Monks Risborough, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 812 044) on behalf of the Parish Church Council. The work was undertaken in respect of a planning application for the extension of the existing graveyard. The evaluation revealed a number of boundary ditches dating from the 10th century, possibly forming part of an area of late Saxon occupation. No structural remains of this date were discovered within the trenches, though Roman building materials from these features suggest either a substantial building of that date in the vicinity or the reuse of a local resource in the late Saxon period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In June 2004 OA carried out a field evaluation at St Dunstan's Church, Monks Risborough, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1) on behalf of the Parish Church Council. OA carried out the work in respect of a planning application for the extension of the existing graveyard (Planning Application No. 04/5540).

1.1.2 A project brief was set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with David Radford, Buckinghamshire's Archaeological Officer.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on Chalk Marl at 114 m above OD. The site is situated to south-west of the present graveyard and at present covered in trees.

1.2.2 The development site is situated to the south of the church next to the present graveyard and is 2000 m² in area.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background for this evaluation was prepared for the WSI (OA 2004), based on information contained in the project brief and further research, the results of which are presented below. There are several known sites with archaeological remains near to this development site.

1.3.2 The site lies within the historic core of Monks Risborough, situated close to the manor (CAS 295) and grange (CAS 4602) complex associated with medieval St Dunstan's Church. The ancient ridgeway- Icknield way - passes to the east of the site. A surviving late Saxon land charter documents the Parish of Monks Risborough and landmarks that are still extant within the present landscape, for example the 'Black Hedge' and prehistoric burial mounds on Whiteleaf Hill.

1.3.3 Whiteleaf Hill is situated to the east of Monks Risborough and comprises five Scheduled Ancient Monuments: a Neolithic oval-shaped barrow (Scheduled Monument -SM- 19053) two round barrows (SM 19047 and SM 19048), a cross-

ridge dyke (SM 27148), which cuts the hill from east to west, and a chalk-cut cross on a triangular base (SM 27147).

- 1.3.4 Excavation in the 1930s of the barrow on Whiteleaf Hill revealed a later Bronze Age child burial and Roman finds from the topsoil and upper fill of the ditch surrounding the barrow mound. A Roman rubbish pit was also found on the west side of the mound, indicating continued use of the hill after the prehistoric period (OA 2003, 2-4).
- 1.3.5 The Parish of Monks Risborough had manorial links with Canterbury Abbey, having been passed to the Archbishop by the late 10th century. By the time of the Norman Conquest, Monks Risborough was a substantial rural settlement complex featuring a recorded forty households with associated appurtenant slaves and woodland held by Asgar, the Constable from Christ Church monastery, Canterbury. There is also documentary evidence that the Archbishops of Canterbury held court at Monks Risborough throughout the 11th century.
- 1.3.6 The manor of Monks Risborough remained under the protective control of the Abbey until the Dissolution, with the church being held by the Archbishop, thereby keeping the village beyond the normal control of the medieval shire.
- 1.3.7 The Church of St. Dunstan is much altered by Street's Victorian restoration (1863-4), though Pevsner suggests that the building's details date it to the early 14th century. The flint exterior masks a building containing perpendicular windows and S arcade of 14th century date, though the N arcade could predate this. There is little or no evidence for a Norman foundation for the building (Pevsner, 211)
- 1.3.8 It is thought that the original medieval manor was located at the site of Place Farm to the west of the church, and at the time of the evaluation it was thought likely that the area proposed for the graveyard extension lay within the manorial enclosure or its associated tenements.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.3 To associate, if possible, any extant archaeology with the manorial complex and/or specific links to the medieval development of the settlement.
- 2.1.4 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.5 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of three trenches each measuring 20 m long and 1.8 m wide (Fig. 2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical mini-excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 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.
- 3.2.2 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).

3.3 Finds

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

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

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

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of Trenches

Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 6)

- 4.1.1 The trench was located along the east side of the site and was aligned north-east/south-west. The trench was 20 m long, 1.8 m wide and 0.55 m in depth. At the base of the trench was the natural (100), a light grey clay with chalk. A number of features were cut through this deposit.
- 4.1.2 A narrow linear feature, a ditch (104) at the south end of the trench had steep sloping sides and a narrow concave base. It was 1.65 m long, 0.9 m wide and 0.4 m in depth and contained a compact mid brown silty clay (105) with chalk and sandstone fragments. To the north of this feature was a sub-circular pit (106) with sloping sides rounding to a flat base. It measured 0.85 m in width and was 0.18 m in depth, with the fill consisting of a light brown silty clay (107).
- 4.1.3 At the north end of the trench a larger linear feature, possibly a boundary ditch (108) was aligned north-west/south-east. The ditch had steep sloping sides, with the north side slightly stepped, descending to a narrow concave base. It measured 1.75 m in length, 1.45 m in width and was 0.6 m deep. It contained two fills: the lower fill was

a light grey silty clay (103) with chalk fragments, probably material eroding into the feature from the bank along the north side of the ditch being. This fill was overlain by a dark brown silty clay (109) containing 4 sherds of late 10th century pottery, animal bone and ceramic building material of notably Roman date.

- 4.1.4 Overlying the fills of all these features was a layer of 0.26 m thick light brown silty clay (102) soil, sealed below a 0.2 m thick layer of dark grey brown silty clay (101) topsoil.

Trench 2 (Figs 4 and 6)

- 4.1.5 This trench was aligned north-west/south-east and located towards the north of the site. It measured 20 m long, 1.8 m wide and 0.4 m in depth. It exposed a natural (200) of light grey clay and chalk.
- 4.1.6 At the north-west end of the trench was a small linear ditch (206) with sloping sides and narrow concave base. It measured 1.7 m long by 0.7 m wide and was 0.3 m in depth. It was filled by a very dark brown silty clay (207), from which some undiagnostic building material was recovered.
- 4.1.7 To the east of this feature was a larger ditch (208), possibly a boundary that was aligned north to south. It had sloping sides with a step on the west side and a flat base. It measured 1.8 m long, 2.4 m wide and 0.8 m in depth and contained three fills. The primary fill was a mid-brown silty clay (209) with chalk fragments. Overlying this was a very dark brown silty clay (210) that contained pottery of ?late 10th century date (see pottery report below) and was sealed below a light brown silty clay (211), which was the remnants of the ditch bank pushed or eroded in complete the filling of the ditch. (Residual) Roman building material was recovered from this fill.
- 4.1.8 Cutting across ditch 208 was a linear feature, probably a ditch (203), aligned north-west to south-east. This ditch had steep sloping sides, with the north side slightly stepped and a narrow concave base. It measured 5 m long, 1.2 m wide and 0.55 m in depth and contained two fills. The lower fill was a light grey silty clay (205) with chalk fragments, probably material from the bank along the north side of the ditch being eroded into the feature. This was overlain by a dark brown silty clay (204) that produced with fragments of ?10th century pottery, bone and ceramic building material. Ditch 203 appears to be a continuation of the boundary ditch (108) observed in Trench 1. Sealing all these features in Trench 2 was a 0.2 m thick layer of light brown silty clay (202) soil, which was overlain by a 0.20-0.25 m thick layer of very dark grey brown silty clay (201) topsoil.

Trench 3 (Figs 5 and 6)

- 4.1.9 This trench was located at the west of the site and was aligned north-east to south-west. It measured 20 m long, 1.8 m wide and 0.4 m - 0.5 m in depth. At the base of the trench was the natural (300) comprising light grey clay and chalk with a number of features cut into it. Two features were found upon investigation to be tree root holes (310 and 312), both being sub-circular with uneven sloping sides and bases.

- 4.1.10 Fill 313 in 312 was cut by a linear feature, possibly a boundary ditch (303) that was aligned north-west to south-east. This ditch had steep sloping sides, with the north side slightly stepped and a narrow concave base. It measured 1.7 m long, 1.7 m wide and was 0.55 m in depth. The lower fill was a light grey silty clay (305) with chalk fragments, overlain by a dark brown silty clay (304) with fragments of animal bone and ceramic building material of Roman date. The ditch (303) was a continuation of the boundary ditch (108 and 203) that was observed in Trenches 1 and 2; the Roman material is therefore residual.
- 4.1.11 To the south-west of ditch 303 was a narrow gully (306), aligned north-south with a rounded terminal end at its north end. It had a shallow concave profile that broadened and became deeper towards the terminus. The gully measured 10.5 m long and was 0.5 m wide and 0.1 m in depth, shallowing to be 0.6 m wide and 0.4 m in depth at the terminus. Its fill was a dark grey brown silty clay (307) with fragments of ceramic building material and animal bone.
- 4.1.12 This had been cut by a small irregular shaped root hole (308), which measured 0.83 m long, 0.5 m wide, 0.18 m in depth and was filled by a mid brown silty clay (309). Sealing this was a 0.2 m thick layer of light brown silty clay (302) soil that contained some Roman building material, and which was overlain by a 0.20-0.25 m thick layer of very dark grey brown silty clay (301) topsoil.

5 FINDS

5.1 Animal Bone by Emma Evans, OA

- 5.1.1 A total of 38 fragments (362 g) of animal bone and teeth were excavated. Identification of the bone was undertaken using the reference collection and published guides. All animal remains were counted, weighed, and where possible identified to species, element, side and zone (Serjeantson 1996). Also, fusion data, butchery marks, gnawing, burning and pathological changes were noted when present. Undiagnostic bones were recorded as small (small mammal size), medium (sheep size) or large (cattle size).
- 5.1.2 The condition of the bone was graded using the criteria stipulated by Lyman (1996), grade 0 being the best preserved bone and grade 5 indicating that the bone had suffered such structural and attritional damage as to make it unrecognisable. Measurements of adult, that is, fully fused bones were taken according to the methods of von den Driesch (1976), with asterisked (*) measurements indicating bones that were reconstructed or had slight abrasion of the surface.
- 5.1.3 The animal bone survived in fair to good condition, with the majority scoring 2 according to Lyman's grading. However, the bone was very fragmented, resulting in only six bones being identified to species, as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Species identified from St Dunstan's Church

Context	Cattle	Sheep/goat	Domestic fowl	Unidentified	Total
109	-	-	1	6	7
204	1	-	-	2	3
207	-	-	-	1	1
302	3	-	-	17	20
304	-	1	-	2	3
307	-	-	-	4	4
Total	4	1	1	32	38

5.1.4 The nature and size of assemblage of the bone does not allow for any conclusions to be made as to the importance and use of animals from this site. No pathologies, butchery marks, burning or gnawing was noted, and measurements could only be taken on two bones, a cattle 3rd phalanx and a domestic fowl ulna.

5.2 The Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn, specialist

5.2.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 9 sherds with a total weight of 76g. It was all late Saxon apart from two sherds (10g) of Romano-British grey ware.

5.2.2 The location of the site means that the assemblage comprised some types that are well-known in Buckinghamshire and others which are not, but are common finds in Oxfordshire.

5.2.3 Consequently, the Buckinghamshire types were recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994), here prefixed with 'MK', whereas the Oxfordshire types utilised the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), prefixed with 'OX'.

5.2.4 **MK SNC1:** *St. Neots Ware*, c AD900-1100. 5 sherds, 15g.

OXAC: *Cotswold-type ware*, AD975-1350. 2 sherds, 51g.

5.2.5 The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Table 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Ctx	RB		SNC1		OXAC		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
109			4	13	1	26	L10thC?
204	1	7	1	2			10thC?
210	1	3			1	25	L10thC?
Total	2	10	5	15	2	51	

5.3 Building Material by Leigh Allen, OA

5.3.1 A total of 1276g (15 fragments) of ceramic building material was recovered from St Dunstan's Church, the majority of the identifiable fragments are Roman.

Table 3: Building material by context

Ctx	No. frags	Weight	Type	Date
109	3	239g	Imbrex frag 2 plain frags	RB
207	2	16g	Miscellaneous	-
210	1	19g	Miscellaneous	-
211	1	77g	Plain fragment	RB
302	5	757g	2 tegula frags; tubuli fragment with combed key for plaster; 2 plain frags one with a semi circular signature on it	RB
304	2	164g	Fragment from the flange of a tegula	RB
307	1	4g	Miscellaneous	-

5.3.2 The small assemblage of ceramic building material contains a number of identifiable tile types; tegula and imbrex for roofing, plain tiles for flooring and a fragment from a tubuli or box tile used in the construction of a Roman hypocaust system.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 6.1.1 The main feature observed on the site was the 1.3 m wide ditch, large enough to represent a boundary feature, which crossed the site from the south-east to the north-west. It appeared to have had a bank along its north-east side that had gradually eroded back into the upper part of the feature.
- 6.1.2 The ditch contained pottery dating to the late 10th century and certainly cut across the line of another substantial boundary present in Trench 2, which also contained pottery of the 10th century (but not demonstrably late 10th - see 5.2 above). A number of other features were present in the trenches in the form of smaller ditches and a pit.
- 6.1.3 The two main boundary ditches and the small gully ditch (306) in Trench 3 all contained fragments of (residual) Roman roof tile, while the presence of building material used for the construction of heating ducts could suggest that there was an important Roman building near the site, with materials reused and/or discarded at the time the features were open. The two sherds of Romano-British grey ware on the site hint at limited domestic occupation of this date in the vicinity,
- 6.1.4 The limited excavations undertaken suggest that these ditch features could relate to 10th century settlement activity (fields or possibly garden plots) that was part of the nucleus of the parish recorded in Domesday. The pottery and features are complemented by the animal bone finds - presumably also domestic in context.
- 6.1.5 The absence of later pottery thus far, though not conclusive, implies that the site went out of use into the early medieval period, with immediately localised activity concentrating around the site of the church upon its foundation in the 14th century.
- 6.1.6 Further work would be needed in this area to characterise the features thus far discovered and to understand their relationship to the later church and its hinterland. The presence of residual Roman building material raises the intriguing possibility of re-use of a local resource, again a factor that could only be resolved by further investigations.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctx No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>
001							
	100	Natural				Natural	
	101	Layer		0.25 m		Topsoil	
	102	Layer		0.20 m		Sub Soil	
	103	Fill				Fill of ditch	
	104	Cut	0.90 m	0.40 m	1.65 m	Small ditch/gully	
	105	Fill				Fill of ditch/gully	
	106	Cut	0.85 m	0.18 m	0.90 m	Small pit	
	107	Fill				Fill of pit	
	108	Cut	1.45 m	0.60 m	1.75 m	Boundary Ditch	
	109	Fill				Fill of ditch	CBM, pottery and bone
002							
	200	Natural				Natural	
	201	Layer		0.20 m		Topsoil	
	202	Layer		0.20 m		Sub Soil	
	203	Cut	1.20 m	0.55 m	5 m	Boundary Ditch	
	204	Fill				Fill of ditch	Pottery, bone and flint
	205	Fill				Fill of ditch	
	206	Cut	0.70 m	0.30 m	1.70 m	Small ditch/gully	
	207	Fill				Fill of ditch/gully	CBM and bone
	208	Cut	2.40 m	0.80 m	1.80 m	Boundary Ditch	
	209	Fill				Fill of ditch	
	210	Fill				Fill of ditch	Pottery, flint and CBM
	211	Fill				Fill of ditch	CBM
003							
	300	Natural				Natural	
	301	Layer		0.25 m		Topsoil	
	302	Layer		0.20 m		Sub Soil	CBM, bone and shell
	303	Cut	1.70 m	0.55 m	1.70 m	Boundary Ditch	
	304	Fill				Fill of ditch	CBM and bone
	305	Fill				Fill of ditch	
	306	Cut	10.50 m	0.5-6 m	0.1-4 m	Small ditch/gully	

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>
303							
	307	Fill				Fill of ditch/gully	CBM and bone
	308	Cut	0.50 m	0.18 m	0.83 m	Root Hole	
	309	Fill				Fill of root hole	
	310	Cut	1 m	0.20 m	1.40 m	Root Hole	
	311	Fill				Fill of root hole	
	312	Cut	0.75m	0.60 m	0.80 m	Root Hole	
	313	Fill				Fill of root hole	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Dunstan's Church, Monks Risborough, Buckinghamshire

Site code: MRDUN 04

Grid reference: NGR SP 812 044

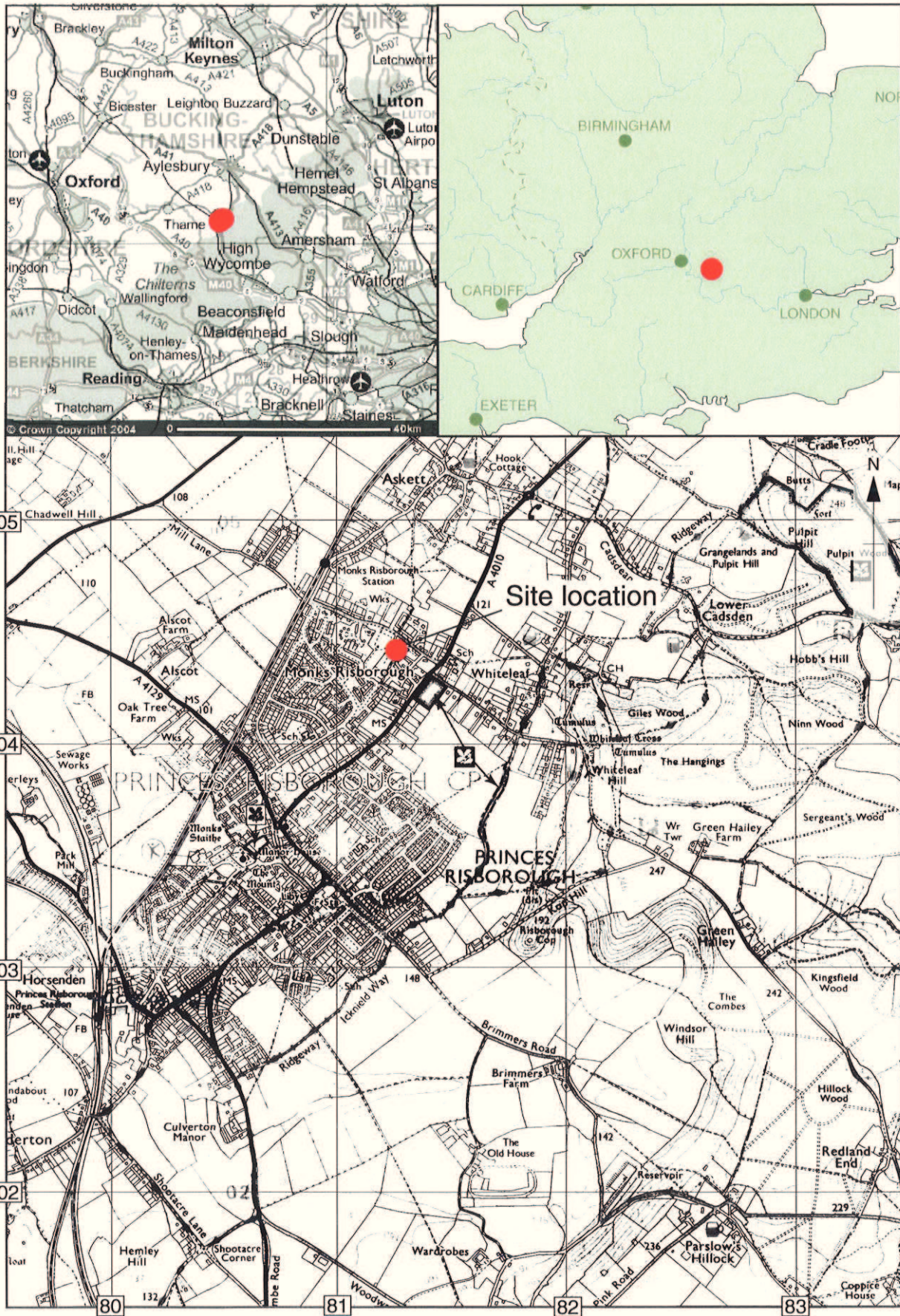
Type of evaluation: Three trench evaluation prior to extension of graveyard.

Date and duration of project: Two days from the 24th to 25th of June 2004.

Area of site: 60 m x 37 m

Summary of results: A number of boundary ditches dating from the late 10th century, possibly part of a late Saxon area of occupation.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum, Technical Centre, Tring Rd, Halton, Aylesbury, Bucks HP22 5PJ in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM: 2004.89



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Figure 1: Site location

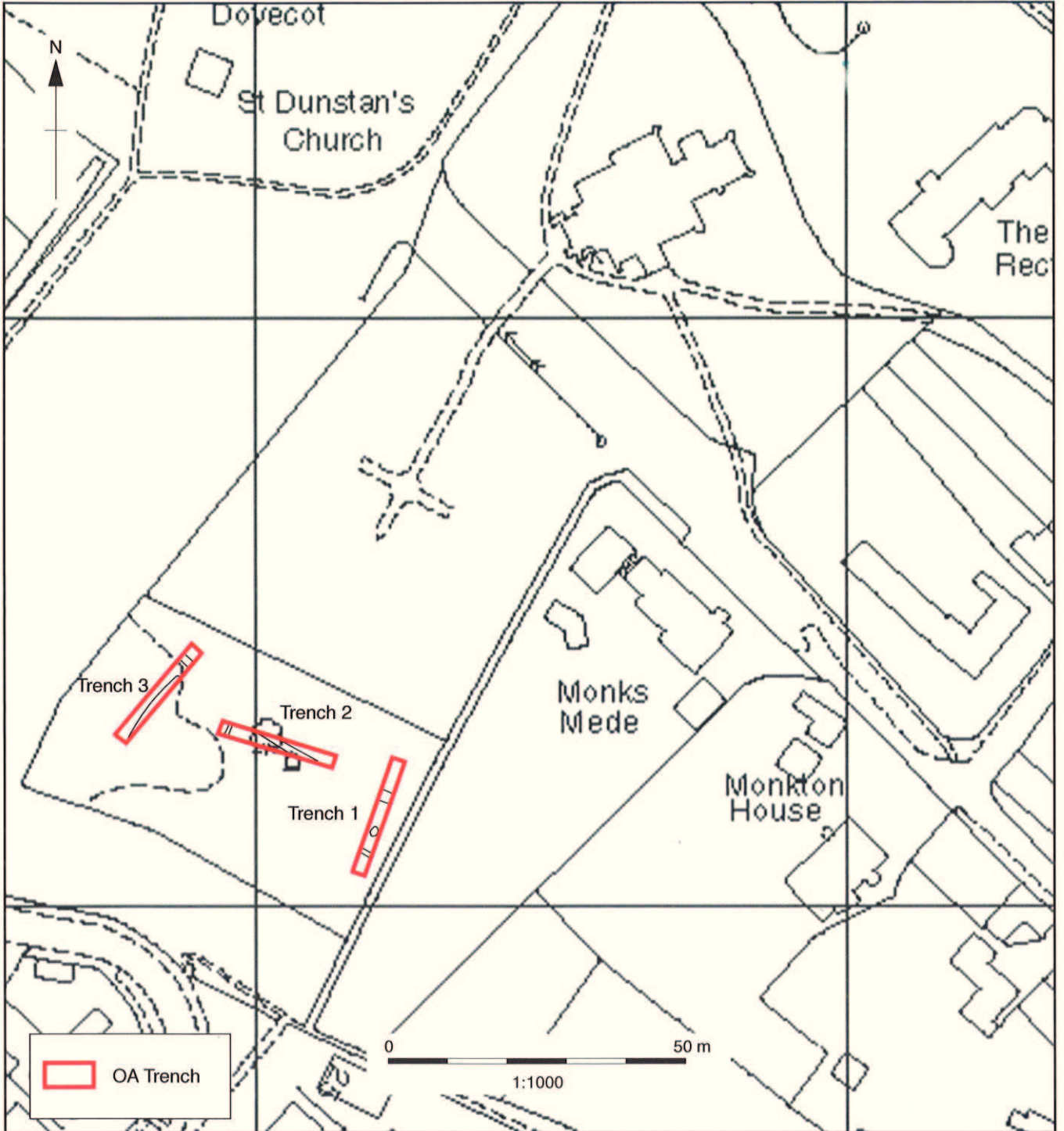
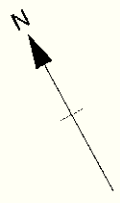


Figure 2: Trench location plan



Plan 1

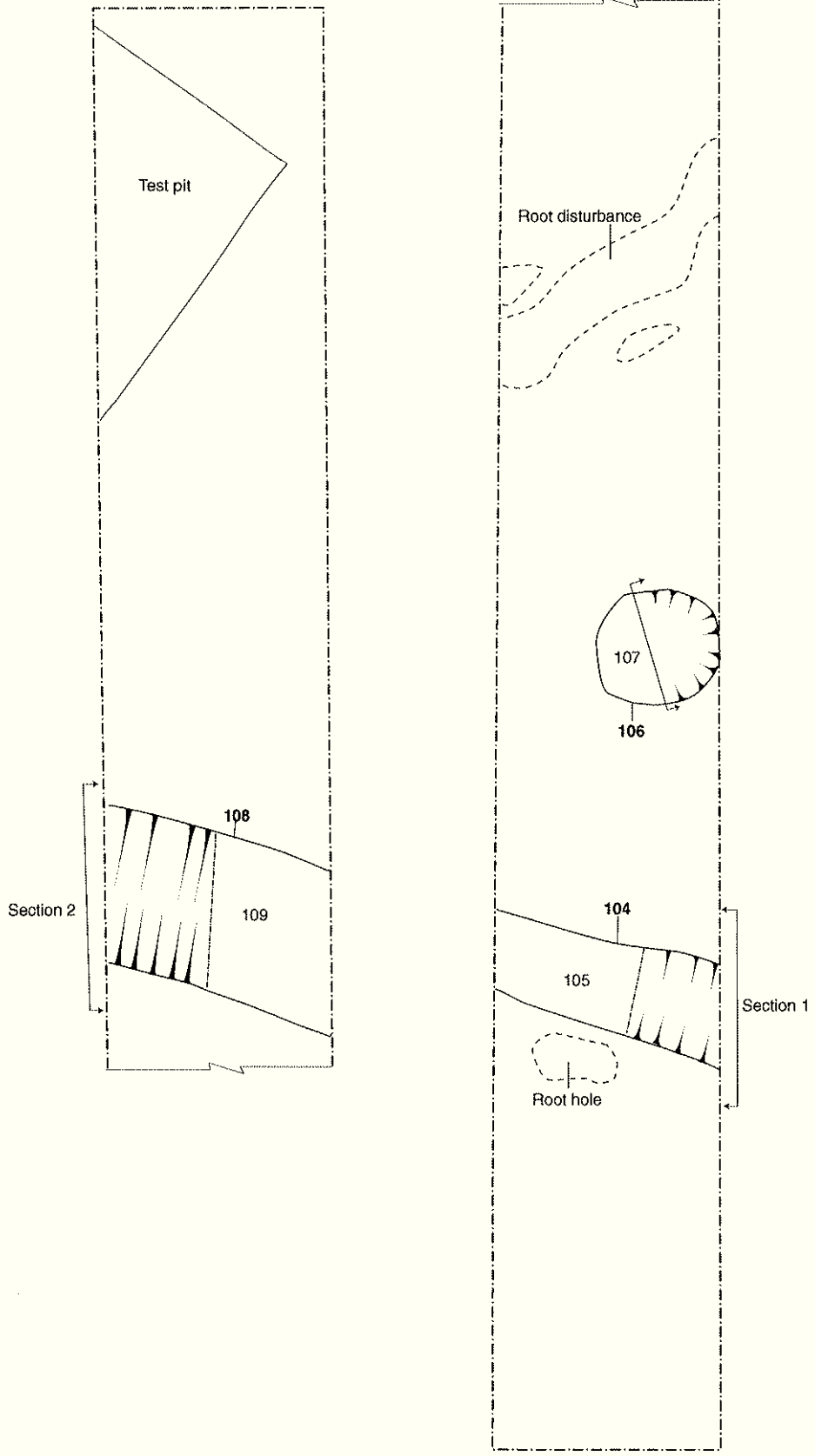
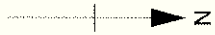


Figure 3: Trench 1, Plan



Plan 2

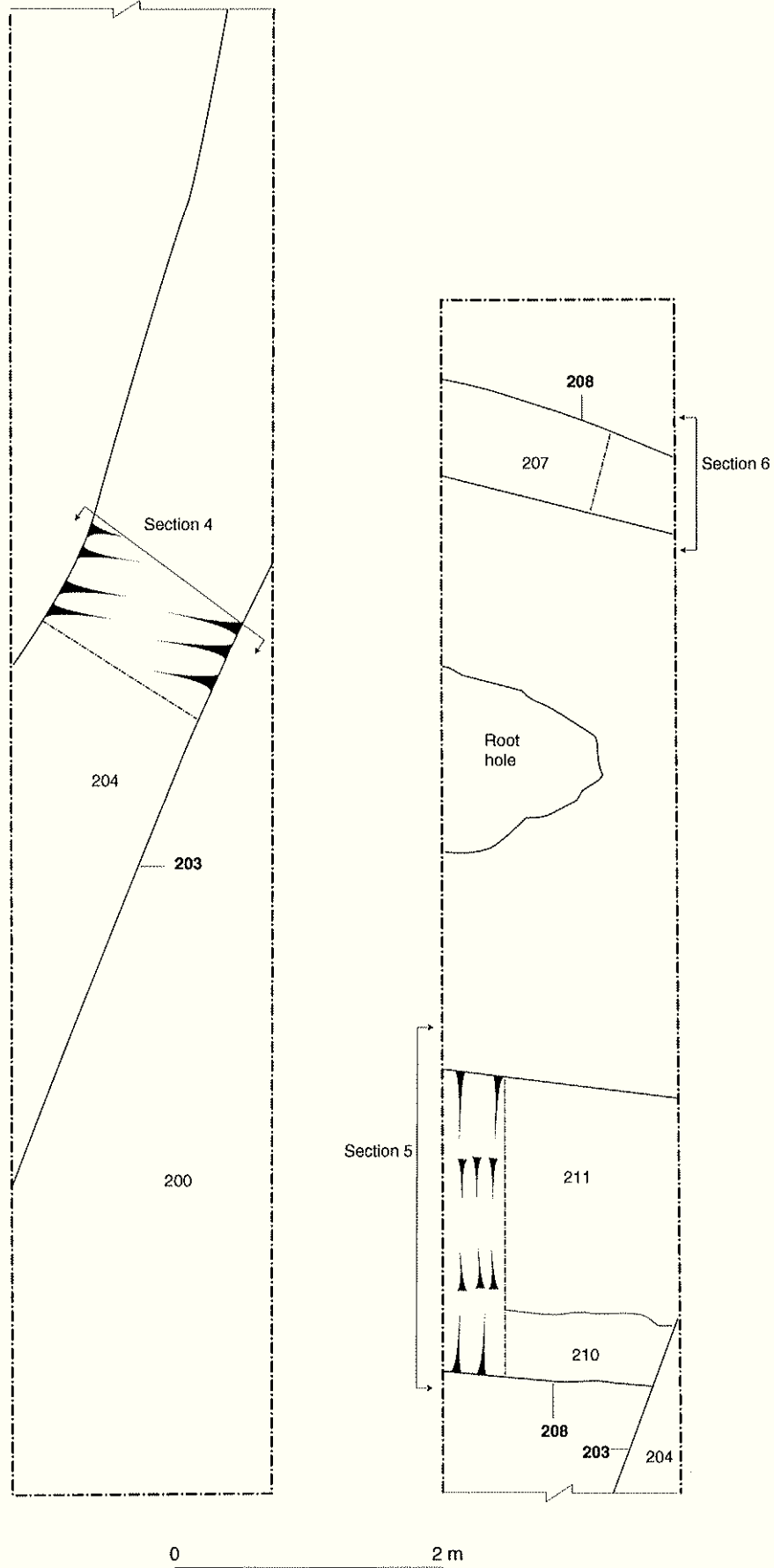


Figure 4: Trench 2, Plan

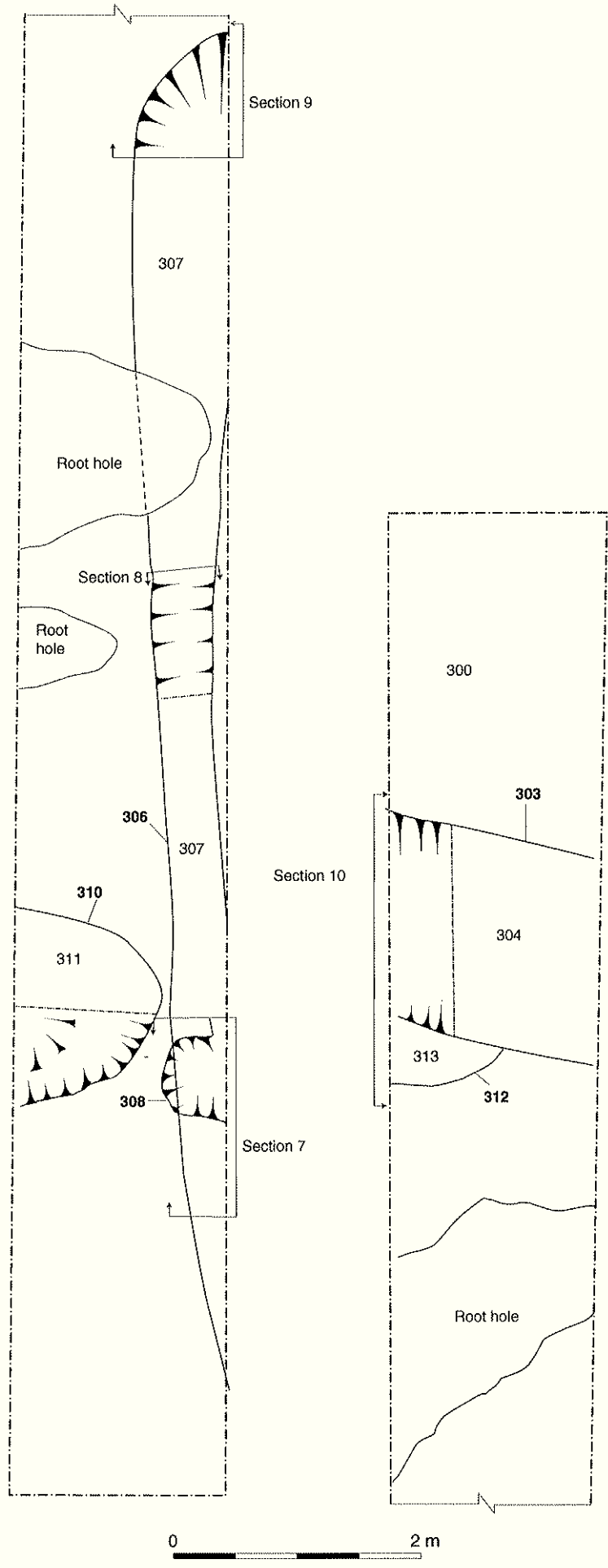
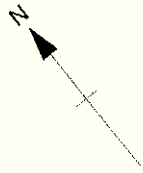


Figure 5: Trench 3, Plan

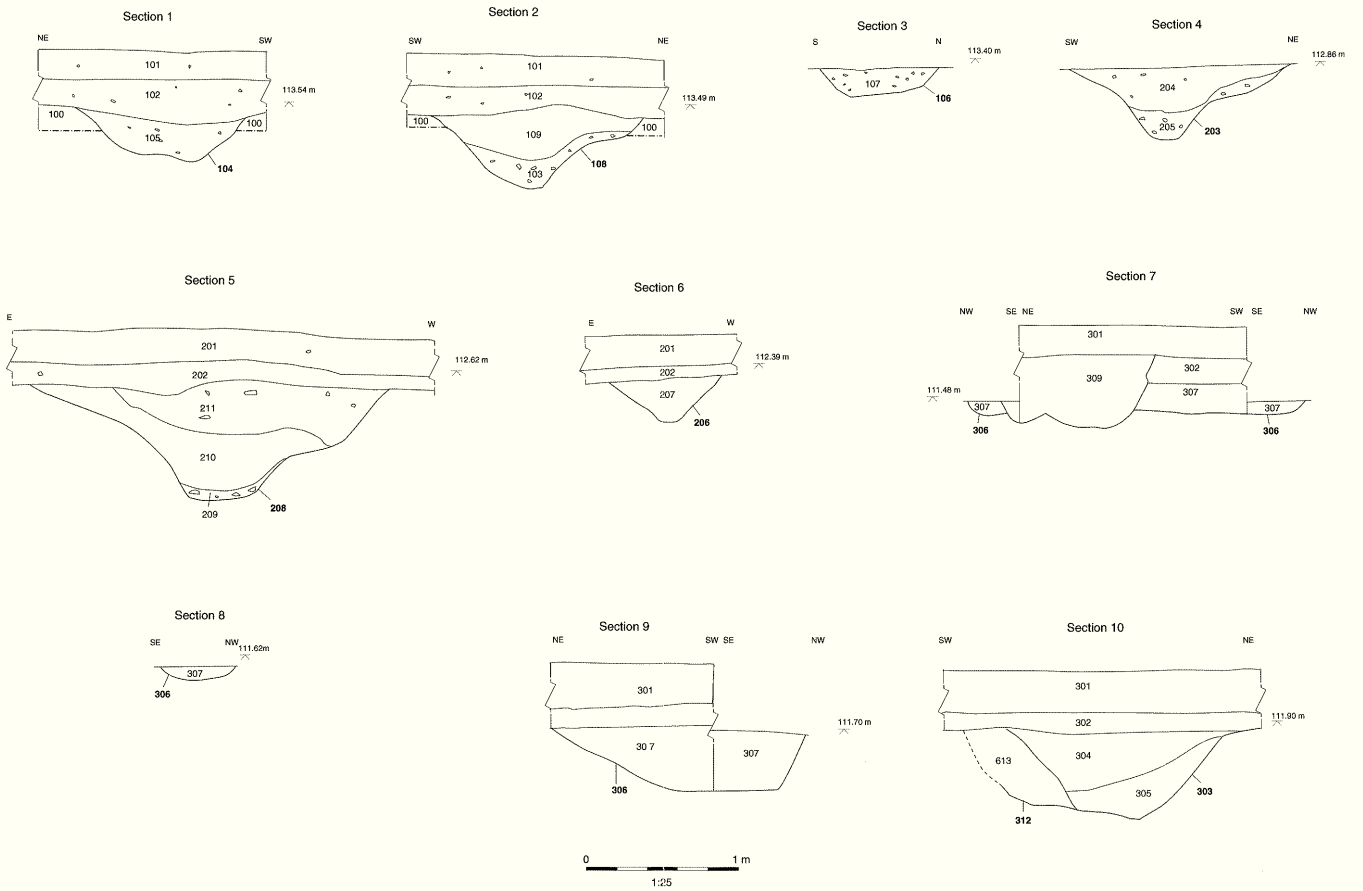


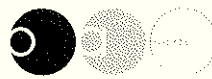
Figure 6: Sections 1-10



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