

HERITAGE NETWORK



WELLBURY HOUSE SCHOOL School Lane, Offley, Herts.

(HN412)

Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

WELLBURY HOUSE SCHOOL Offley, Herts.

HN412

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Prepared on behalf of the Trustees of Wellbury House School

by

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and

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Report No. 193

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Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out Chris Turner, Geoff Saunders, and Mark Winter. Illustrations were prepared by Karin Semmelmann, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

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Summary

Site name and address:	Wellbury House School, Offley, Hertfordshire		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	North Herts
Village/town:	Offley	Parish:	Offley
Planning reference:	99/1411/1	NGR:	TL 51357 22907
Client name and address:	The Trustees, Wellbury House School, c/o 97 Geldeston Road, London E5		
Nature of work:	Extension	Present land use:	Garden
Size of affected area:	c.1000m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.47.65m ²
Site Code:	HN412	Other reference:	N/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Evaluation	Finds location/Museum:	N/a
Start of work	7 th April 2003	Finish of work	8 th April 2003
Related SMR Nos.:	N/a	Periods represented:	Modern
Previous summaries/reports:			

Synopsis: In response to an archaeological condition on the planning permission for an extension to Wellbury House School, School Lane, Gt. Offley, Herts. the Heritage Network was commissioned by the owners to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation of the site.

The foundations for the extension were already in place prior to the commission and for this reason four trial trenches were opened as close to the extension footprint as possible. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

A fifth trial trench was opened on the proposed site of a soakaway for the new development. This was also devoid of archaeology.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of the *Trustees of Wellbury House School* as part of an archaeological evaluation associated with building development at Wellbury House School, Offley, near Hitchin, Herts. The planning permission for the development, granted by the North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC), has been subject to a standard archaeological condition, according to the provisions of the Department of the Environment's *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16). The scope of the works was discussed on site with Dr Stewart Bryant of the *County Archaeology Office* (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to NHDC, and a full specification was contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated March 2003.

1.2 Wellbury House lies in a rural location approximately 1km southeast of the line of the Icknield Way, 2km north-northwest of Great Offley, and 0.7km northeast of Little Offley (centred on NGR 51357 22907). It lies in an area of known prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity, including a possible deserted medieval settlement.

1.3 The development involved the construction of a new dormitory block, attached to the eastern elevation of the existing house, in an area of former garden. All ground clearance, and the excavation of footings and drainage for the block had been completed without archaeological intervention before the Heritage Network was commissioned.

1.4 In order to mitigate the loss of potential archaeological information resulting from the unsupervised groundworks carried out to date, a programme of desk-based research and intrusive fieldwork work was designed to characterise the archaeological and historical context for the site, to assess the likelihood that the groundworks had disturbed archaeological features and deposits, and to investigate the location of the final phase of groundworks for the installation of a septic tank.

1.5 The present report has been prepared with the aim of completing the requirements of the planning condition.

2. Desk-based Research

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site lies at 121.79m AOD, on land which rises steeply to the west.

2.2 The underlying geology is upper chalk.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

2.3 The County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the field section of the North Hertfordshire District Council hold data on archaeological sites within 1km of the study area (Figure 2).

Prehistoric

2.4 A Neolithic greenstone adze with an hourglass perforation was found at an unspecified location close to the study area (SMR 547).

2.5 Two Bronze Age objects (SMR 2300, 1711) were found together approximately 460m north-east of the site. One was a possible collared urn and the other a barbed and tanged arrowhead.

2.6 The Icknield Way, an ancient trackway linking East Anglia with the West Country, is located approximately 1km northwest of the study area.

Roman

2.7 Roman activity close to the study area is attested both in the Roman road, Viatores No. 168 (SMR 4624), which runs east to west approximately 1km north of the study area and the objects found by metal detecting (SMR 7836) approximately 423m north-east of the site.

Medieval

2.8 Two deserted medieval settlements are recorded on either side of the study area. The deserted village of Wellbury (SMR 1838) lies approximately 960m north-east of Wellbury House in the vicinity of Old Wellbury. Approximately 808m south-east of Wellbury House is the hamlet of Little Offley (SMR 6460). Nothing is visible of either site on aerial photographs.

Post-medieval

2.9 A post-medieval icehouse (SMR 1749) lies approximately 238m north of Wellbury House, the exact date of which is not clear.

2.10 Little Offley Gardens (SMR 9584) lies in the same area as the deserted medieval village. Again, the exact date of this is unclear.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.11 The Domesday Survey records that, prior to the Norman Conquest, the manor of Welles had been held by Leueva. In 1086 the manor was held by a sokeman of William and was assessed at 1 hide. It had been attached to Lilley by Sheriff Illey, but the overlordship was transferred to Hitchin after he was removed from office.

2.12 The early history of the manor is difficult to trace. It may be the hide in Weelberia, which Henry de Tilley granted to his brother William in 1200.

2.13 In 1309 the manor was conveyed to William Tuchet and Ellen de Danarston by William de Goldington and his wife Mary. Tuchet's brother inherited the manor in 1327-8 and conveyed it to Giles de Bradesmere.

2.14 On his death in 1338 the manor went to de Bradesmere's daughter Maud and her husband, John de Vere, Earl of Oxford. It remained in their family until 1393, when the manor was granted to Thomas, Duke of Gloucester. Two years later, he granted the manor to the Master, Warden and chaplains of the college he had founded in the church at Pleshey, Essex. It remained with the college until its dissolution in 1546, when it was granted to Sir John Gates, who, in turn, granted it to his brother the following year.

2.15 Wellbury Manor was sold to Richard Spicer in 1557 who held it for 12 years before conveying it to William Crawley. The manor descended to his son and grandson.

2.16 No further records appear until 1704, when it was held by Henry Bolderne and his wife Anne. It was sold to Thomas Ansell in 1713 by their son, Henry. It was later acquired by Samuel Burroughs, whose daughter and heir, Sarah, married Sir Thomas Salusbury.

2.17 It then descended to the Marquess of Winchester from whom it was bought by Anne Burroughs in 1840. She passed the manor on to her sister, Maria. In 1872 Francis Gosling acquired Wellbury Manor (VCH 1971:41-2). Much of the lands were sold by his wife after his death.

2.18 The house and its remaining lands were sold to Stanislas Thomas Eyre in 1926, who, in turn, sold them to Bernard Kenworthy-Browne three years later. By 1933 Wellbury House was a Roman Catholic Preparatory School with Kenworthy Browne as the headmaster (HALS H942581).

CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

2.19 The Enclosure Map of 1807 shows a series of buildings on the site of Wellbury House (Fig. 3a). These are again shown, with some modification, in an indenture of 1814 (Fig. 3b). Although neither plan shows the buildings in much detail, it would appear that the complex underwent some alterations in the intervening years, with the northern boundary being straightened and the construction of a new building on a different orientation.

2.20 Whilst Wellbury House appears to be of mid 19th century construction, it is unclear whether the house was rebuilt or renovated between 1814 and 1878. The complex shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey plan remained largely unchanged until 1946, although some

minor alterations had occurred to the south and the north of the main building (Figs. 4a-5b). By 1979 the outbuildings to the west of the house had been replaced by three houses. The only alterations to the eastern end of the house appear to have comprised an extension of the northern end, which occurred in the early 20th century.

2.21 The cartographic evidence suggests that major landscape changes have occurred over the last two hundred years. The 1814 plan names Wellbury House as Wellbury Farm, and the lands surrounding the house appear to have been mainly agricultural. By the late 19th century many of these fields had been converted to parkland, some woodland plantations having been established to the west. Some of the parkland appears to have reverted to agricultural use in latter years. In contrast, the gardens to the east of the house appear to have undergone few changes.

3. Fieldwork

METHODOLOGY

3.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, although minor alterations were made to the size and location of the trial trenches due to the presence of existing services.

3.2 Five trenches were opened using a tracked 360° mini digger fitted with a 1.2m wide toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision. Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts.

3.3 The trenches were cleaned by hand, and all potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

3.4 All levels have been recorded from a temporary benchmark on hardstanding at the northwest corner of the existing house, which has been given an estimated value of 122.5mOD.

RESULTS

Trench 1

3.5 Trench 1 was located close to the north corner of the new extension where it meets the existing house (Fig.6). The trench measured 1.80 x 3.60m and was aligned northeast to southwest (Fig.7).

3.6 The stratigraphy in this trench consisted of alternating layers of dark yellowish brown aggregate and redeposited chalk overlying the natural geology, suggesting that the chalk had been previously exposed and covered with levelling deposits. The aggregate had been cut by two service trenches one of which contained a corroded black metallic pipe, the other a brick built culvert.

Recorded contexts

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
100	Layer	Dark yellowish brown aggregate with frequent small angular flints and pebbles.	0.35 thick
101	Layer	White redeposited chalk with occasional CBM fragments.	0.35 thick
102	Layer	Dark yellowish brown aggregate with frequent small angular flints and pebbles.	0.15 thick
103	Layer	White redeposited chalk with occasional CBM fragments.	0.25 thick
104	Service trench	Cut of service trench for corroded black metallic pipe, aligned northeast to southwest. Cuts layer [100] and culvert [106].	3.60+ long 0.45 wide 0.90+ thick

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
105	Service trench	Cut of service trench for brick built culvert [106] aligned east to west.	2.80+ long 0.50 wide 0.52 thick
106	Structure	Brick built culvert cut by service trench [104]. Constructed of red brick and cement mortar and four courses deep. Square in profile.	2.80+ long 0.42 wide 0.32 thick

Trench 2

3.7 Trench 2 was located close to the east corner of the new extension. The trench measured 2.50 x 4.30m and was aligned northwest to southeast.

3.8 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a very dark greyish brown clayey silt topsoil over a dark yellowish brown silty clay subsoil beneath which was the natural geology. The trench was stepped in the centre over the location of a service pipe for the new development.

Recorded contexts

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
200	Layer	Friable, very dark greyish brown clayey silt with moderate CBM fragments. Topsoil.	0.20 thick
201	Layer	Firm, dark yellowish brown silty clay with occasional CBM fragments. Subsoil.	0.25 thick

Trench 3

3.9 Trench 3 was located close to the south corner of the new extension. The trench measured 2.10 x 3.40m and was aligned northwest to southeast.

3.10 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a very dark greyish brown clayey silt topsoil over a yellowish brown silty clay subsoil beneath which was the natural geology.

Recorded contexts

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
300	Layer	Friable, very dark greyish brown clayey silt with moderate CBM fragments. Topsoil.	0.20 thick
301	Layer	Firm, yellowish brown silty clay with occasional CBM fragments. Subsoil.	0.25 thick

Trench 4

3.11 Trench 4 was located close to the west corner of the new extension where it meets the existing house. The trench measured 1.80 x 4.60m and was aligned northeast to southwest.

3.12 The stratigraphy in this trench consisted of alternating layers of dark yellowish brown aggregate and redeposited chalk overlying a mixed layer of make up beneath which was the natural geology. This suggests that the chalk had been previously exposed and covered with levelling deposits. The aggregate had been cut by two service trenches one of which contained a corroded black metallic pipe (probably the return of the one found in trench 1) the other a large ceramic drainage pipe.

Recorded contexts

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
400	Layer	Dark yellowish brown aggregate with frequent small angular flints and pebbles.	0.55 thick
401	Layer	White redeposited chalk with moderate large CBM fragments.	0.10 thick
402	Layer	Light brownish grey make up material with frequent CBM fragments and mortar inclusions.	0.20 thick
403	Service trench	Cut of service trench for corroded black metallic pipe, aligned northeast to southwest. Cut through layer [400].	4.60+ long 0.45 wide 0.85+ thick
404	Service trench	Cut of service trench for ceramic drainage pipe aligned east to west. Cuts layer [400]. Diameter of pipe 0.18m.	2.90+ long 0.80 wide 0.76 thick

Trench 5

3.13 Trench 5 was located on the site of a proposed septic tank for the new extension, c.13m northeast of the east corner of the extension. The trench measured 3.00m x 5.00m and was aligned north to south.

3.14 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted a dark greyish brown very sandy silt topsoil over an olive brown slightly sandy silt subsoil. The subsoil was overlying a thin layer of redeposited chalk beneath which was the natural geology. The subsoil was cut by a service trench on an east to west alignment which contained a ceramic drainage pipe. In the south of the trench a slightly stonier area of subsoil with more CBM inclusions ran across the trench from east to west. This stonier area aligned with a gate in the property boundary and probably represents the remains of a pathway. In the north of the trench the subsoil contained a sub-square area of heavy root disturbance which was probably natural in origin.

Recorded contexts

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
500	Layer	Friable, dark greyish brown very sandy silt with moderate small CBM fragments. Topsoil.	0.20 thick
501	Layer	Friable, olive brown slightly sandy silt with occasional small CBM and chalk fragments. Subsoil.	0.50 thick
502	Layer	White redeposited chalk with very occasional small CBM fragments.	0.20 thick
503	Service trench	Cut of service trench for a ceramic drainage pipe on an east to west alignment. Diameter of pipe 0.23m.	1.80+ long 0.23 wide 0.30 thick
504	Deposit	Friable, olive brown slightly sandy silt with frequent small subround stones and CBM fragments. Linear deposit, remains of path on east to west alignment.	2.80 long 0.90 wide 0.30 thick
505	Deposit	Friable, olive brown slightly sandy silt with occasional small chalk fragments and heavy root disturbance. Sub-square natural deposit.	0.45 long 0.40 wide 0.03 thick

4. Risk Assessment

- 4.1 The documentary and cartographic evidence consulted indicates that the landscape around the house underwent considerable changes in the post-medieval period, with plantations being established and construction work taking place both on the estate itself and close by. Once established in the 19th century, the footprint of the house remained relatively unchanged until modern times.
- 4.2 It should be noted that Hitchin Museum was also consulted but not visited due to building works. The consultation would suggest that their holdings would not significantly alter the findings.
- 4.3 The fieldwork was designed to investigate earlier occupation on the site. No features predating the Victorian period were uncovered.
- 4.4 On the basis of this information, it is possible to predict the likelihood that archaeological remains within the study area were disturbed by groundworks associated with the current development. The model has been subdivided by period.

Prehistoric

- 4.5 Few prehistoric finds have been recorded within a 1km radius of the study area and no evidence of prehistoric activity was uncovered during the fieldwork.
- 4.6 On this basis, it is considered unlikely that prehistoric remains were disturbed by the current development.

Romano-British

- 4.7 Although a few Roman objects have been found within a 500m radius of the site, the nearest known Roman feature is the road situated approximately 1km away. No evidence of Romano-British activity was uncovered during the fieldwork.
- 4.8 On this basis, it is considered unlikely that Romano-British remains were disturbed by the current development.

Medieval

- 4.9 Wellbury House lies between two deserted medieval villages, the extent of which are unknown. No evidence of medieval activity was uncovered during the fieldwork, however.
- 4.10 On this basis, it is considered unlikely that medieval remains were disturbed by the current development.

Post-Medieval

- 4.11 The documentary evidence suggests that although the footprint of the current house has changed little in recent times, the surrounding landscape has been substantially

altered over the last two hundred years. The fieldwork indicated that services, in the form of a brick culvert and several drainage pipes, associated with the present house and probably dating to the Victorian period run across the area affected by the current development. In addition the remains of a pathway probably modern in date were identified in trench 5.

- 4.12** On this basis, it is considered likely that further services and garden features dating to the late post-medieval and modern periods were disturbed by the current development.

CONFIDENCE RATING

- 4.13** Although it was not possible to consult the archives held by Hitchin Museum, an acceptable range of documents and maps were available from other sources in order to allow a comprehensive overview of the development of the land use on and in the vicinity of the present site to be obtained.
- 4.14** During the fieldwork conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation.
- 4.15** On this basis, there are no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which is less than High.

5. Sources Consulted

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

Ordnance Survey	1878 1 st edition Sheet XI
Ordnance Survey	1901 Sheet XI.3 Scale: 25" – mile
Ordnance Survey	1901 Sheet XI.NE Scale: 6" – mile
Ordnance Survey	1924 Sheet XI.3
Ordnance Survey	1925 Sheet XI.NE
Ordnance Survey	1946 Sheet XI.NE
Ordnance Survey	1979

HALS Reference Description

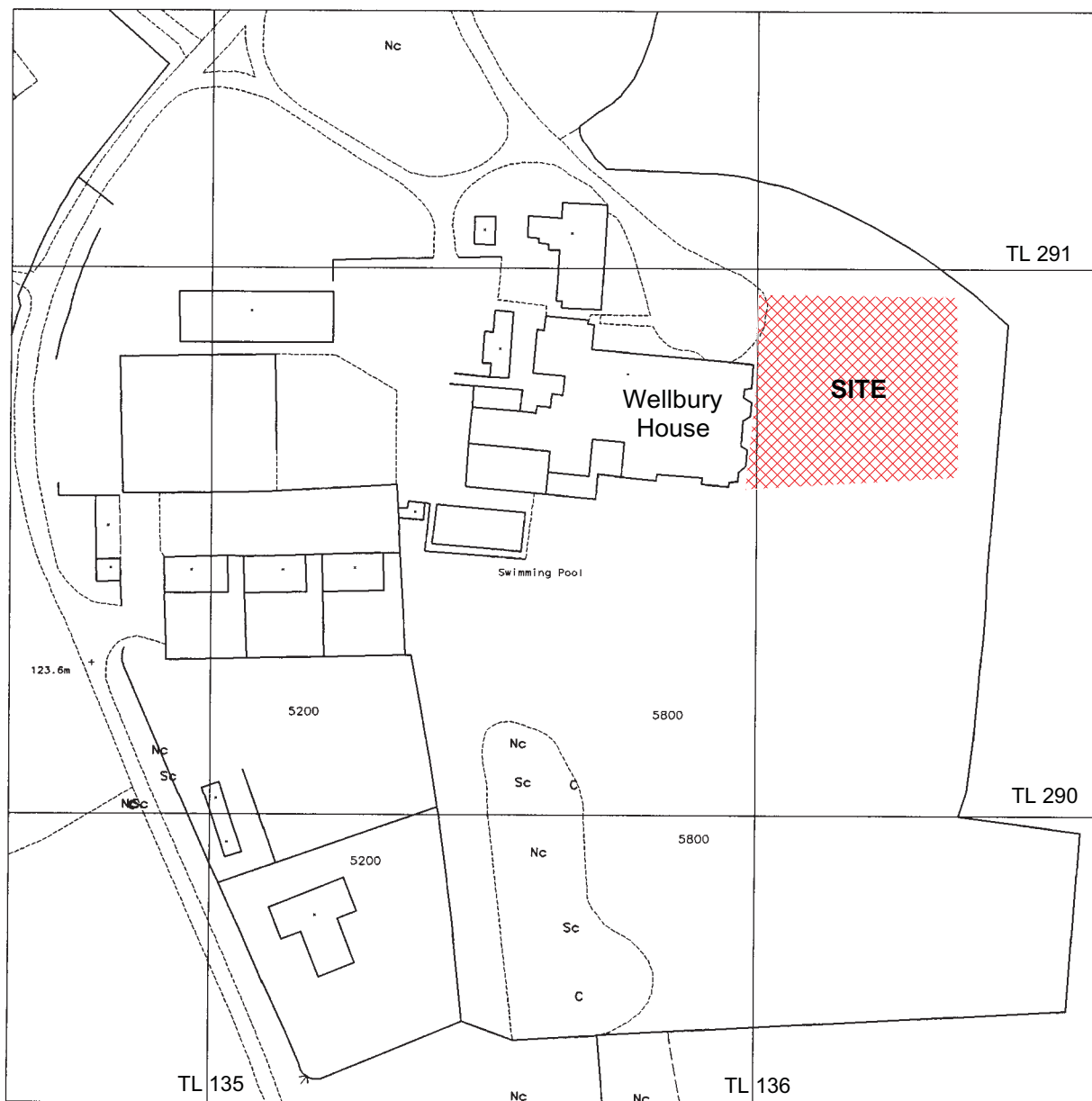
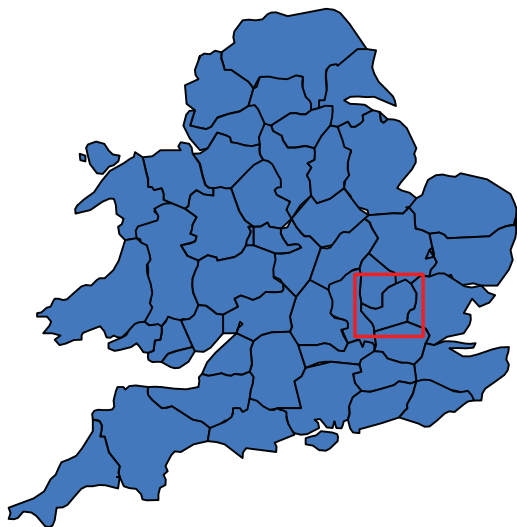
D/ELG T.32	A plan of the land in Offley belonging to the Revd. L. Burroughs 1809
D/ELG T32	Plan of Wellbury Farm Offley, 1814
80242	Great Offley Estate in Offley c.1814
80243	Plan of the estate of Richard Sheppard Esq. c.1814
D/ER P10	Endorsed plan of Wellbury Road 1848
D/P76 29/10	A map of the parish of Offley in the county of Hertford, 1807
PC676	Tithe map
PC681	Tithe award
QS/E/56	Enclosure map 1807
QS/E/55	Enclosure award 1814
D/EFO/T46	Manor of Wellsbury
D/ELG/T17	Tithes from arable lands of manors of Putteridge, Wellbury...
D/EX107/T39	Indenture of Wellbury Farm
D/EB513/T45	Various indentures of the manor of Welles alias Welbury
D/EB1260/T2	Capital messuage called Wellbury
72322	Manor of Welles alias Welbury
D/ERY/B312	Rental concerning properties in Offley (Wellbury etc)
66430	Wellbury estate (sale catalogue), April 13 th 1918
72351	Survey of the manor of Welles alias Wellbury
D/EGM/36	Articles and newspaper cuttings relating to buildings in Offley
D/ERG B312	Sale particulars of 14 th Sept. 1920

6. Bibliography

Hillelson, D. 2003. *Project Design for Wellbury House School*, Offley, Herts. Heritage Network March 2003

7. Illustrations

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Figure 7	Plan and section of trench 1
Figure 8	Trench sections



Site Location

Scale 1:1250

TL 14

TL 29

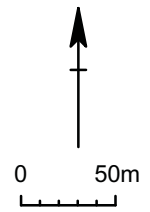
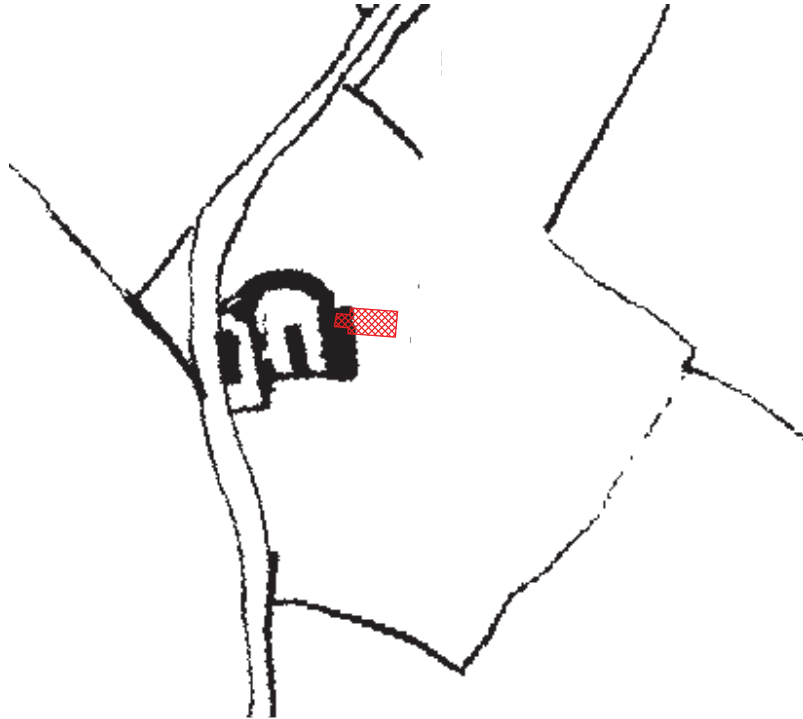


SMR plot for 1km radius from study area

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Licence no.AL100014861

Scale 1:2000

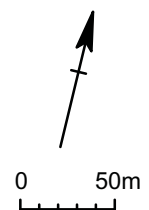
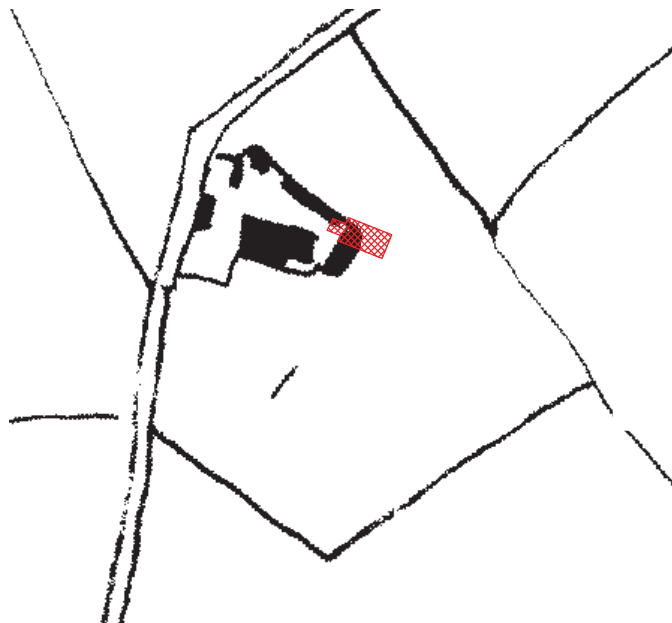
Figure 2



Tracing from the Enclosure Map (1807)

Scale 1:4000

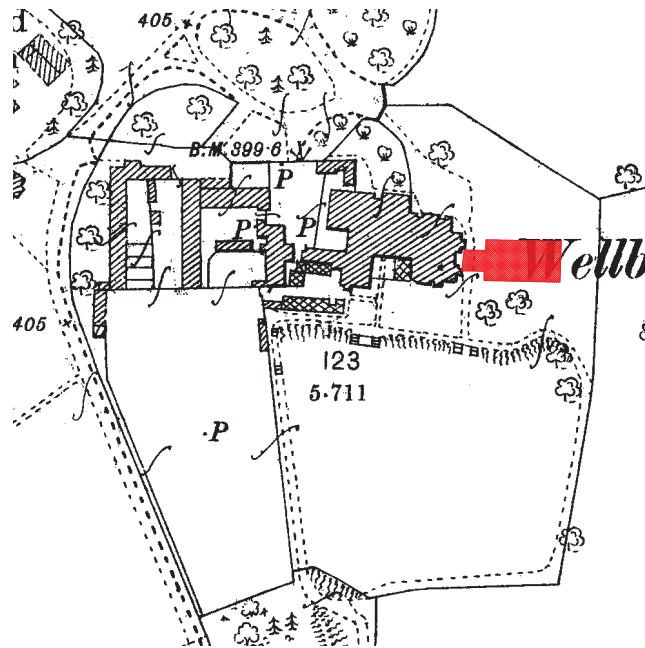
Figure 3a



Tracing from an indenture of 1814

Scale 1:4000

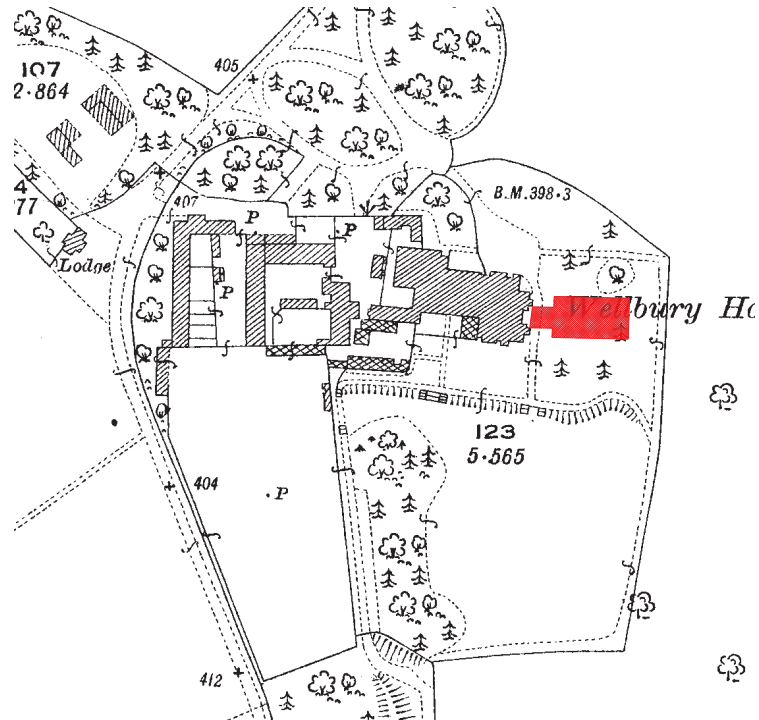
Figure 3b



Ordnance Survey Plan: 1901

Scale 1:2500

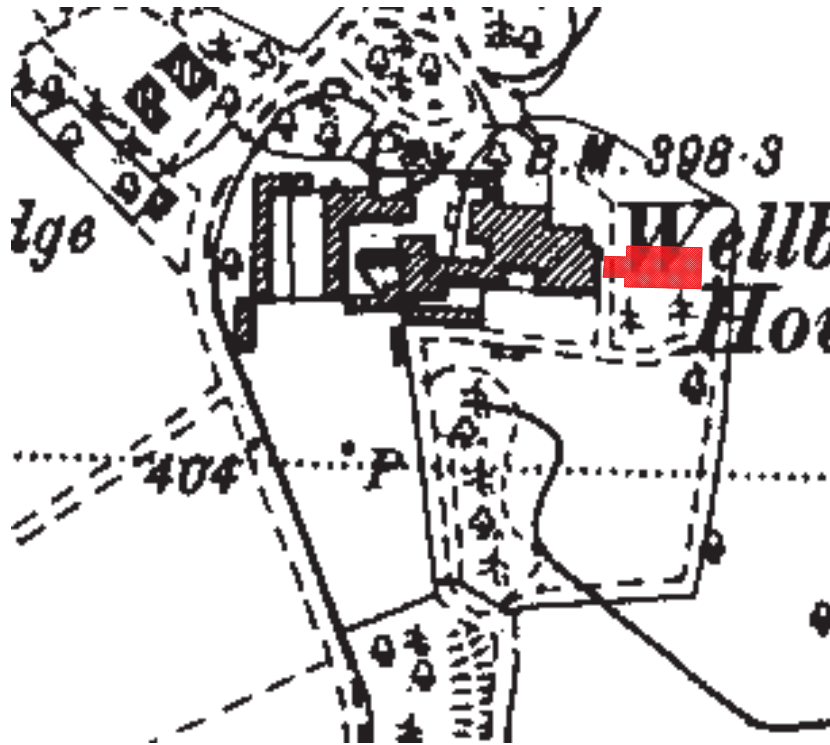
Figure 4a



Ordnance Survey Plan: 1924

Scale 1:2500

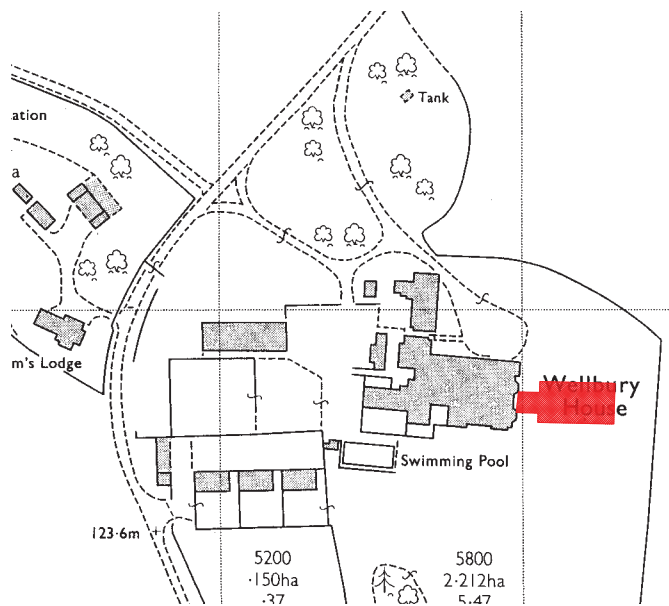
Figure 4b



Ordnance Survey Plan: 1946

Scale 1:2500

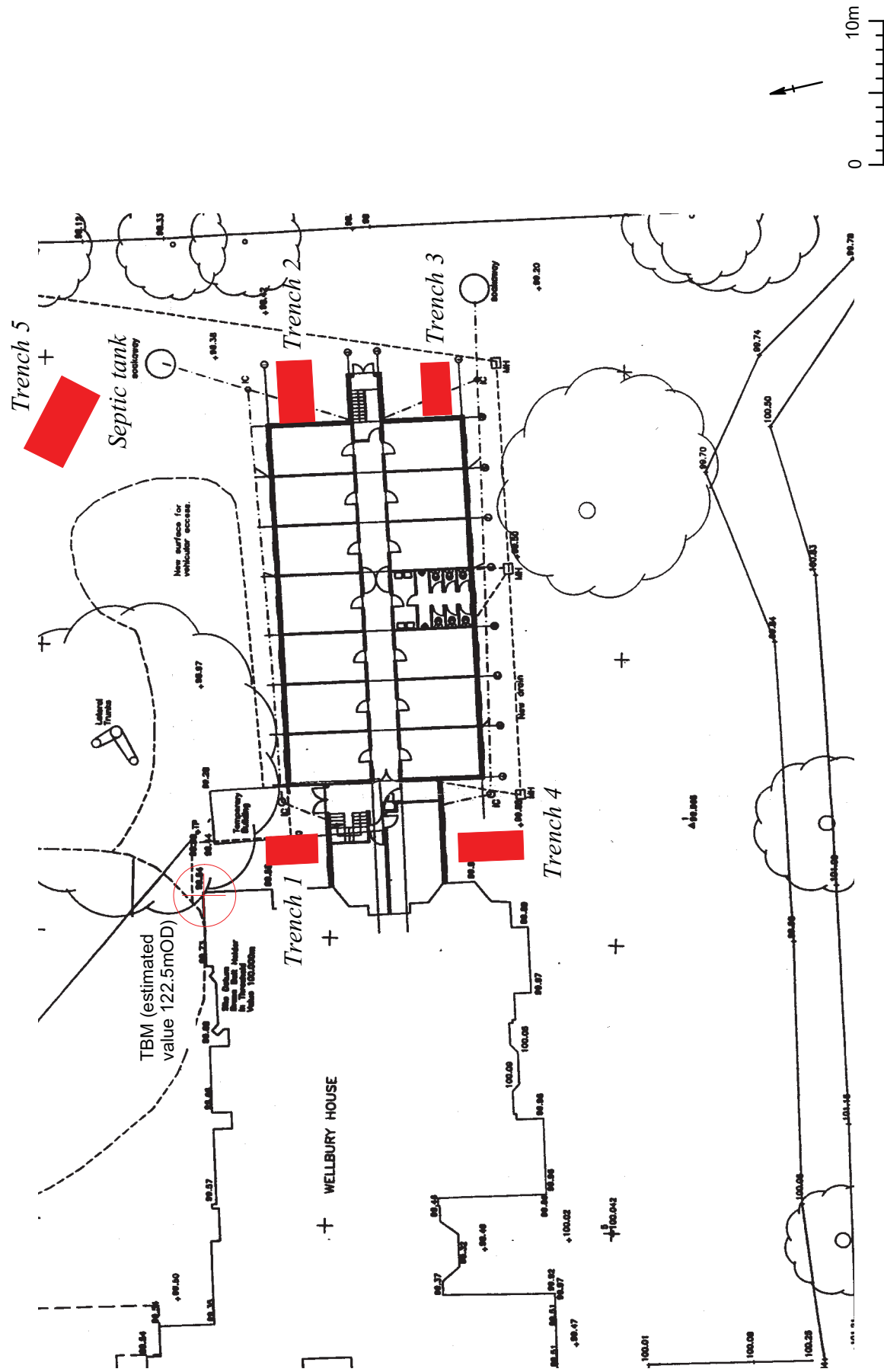
Figure 5a



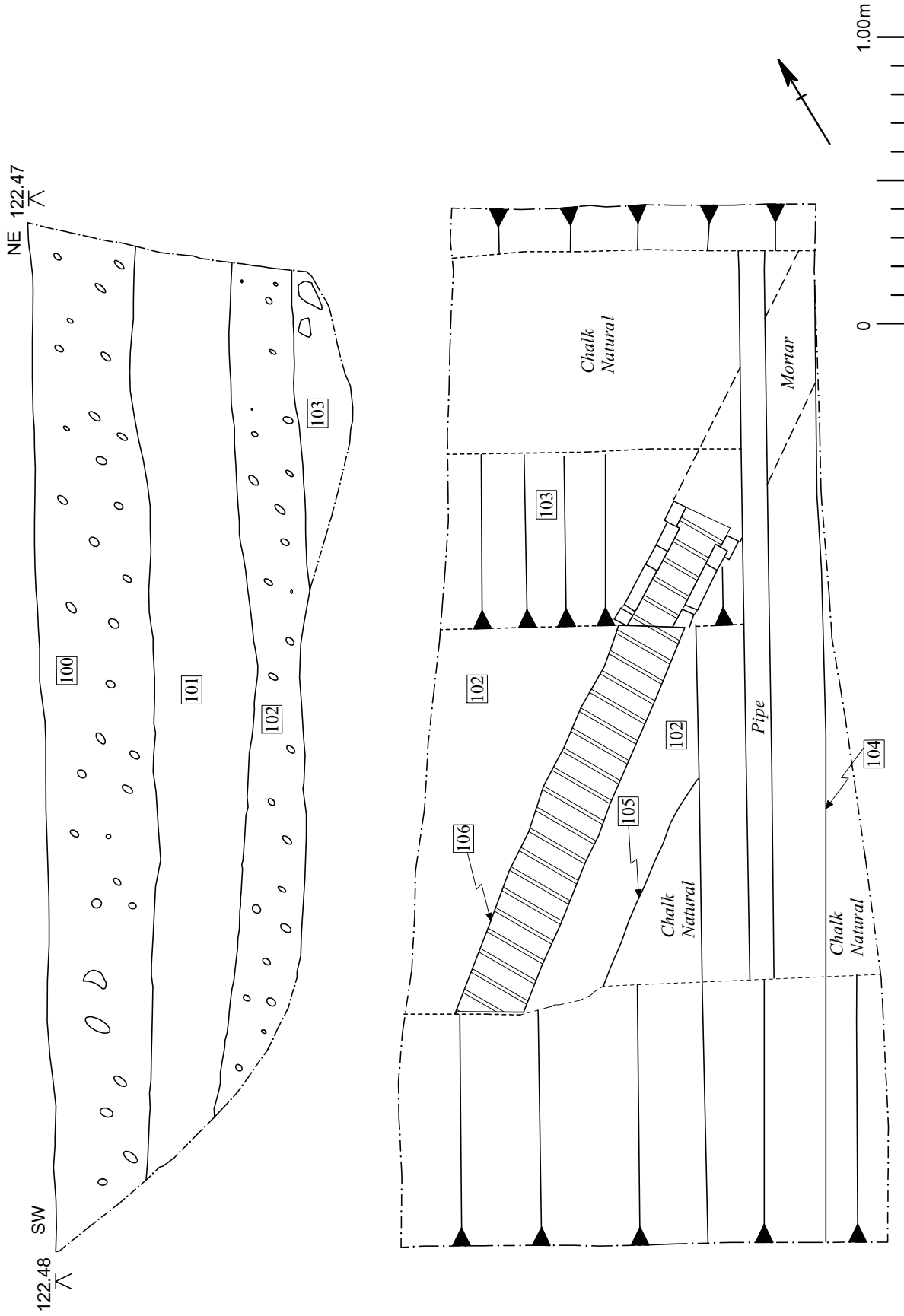
Ordnance Survey Plan: 1979

Scale 1:2500

Figure 5b



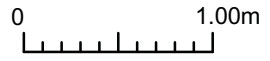
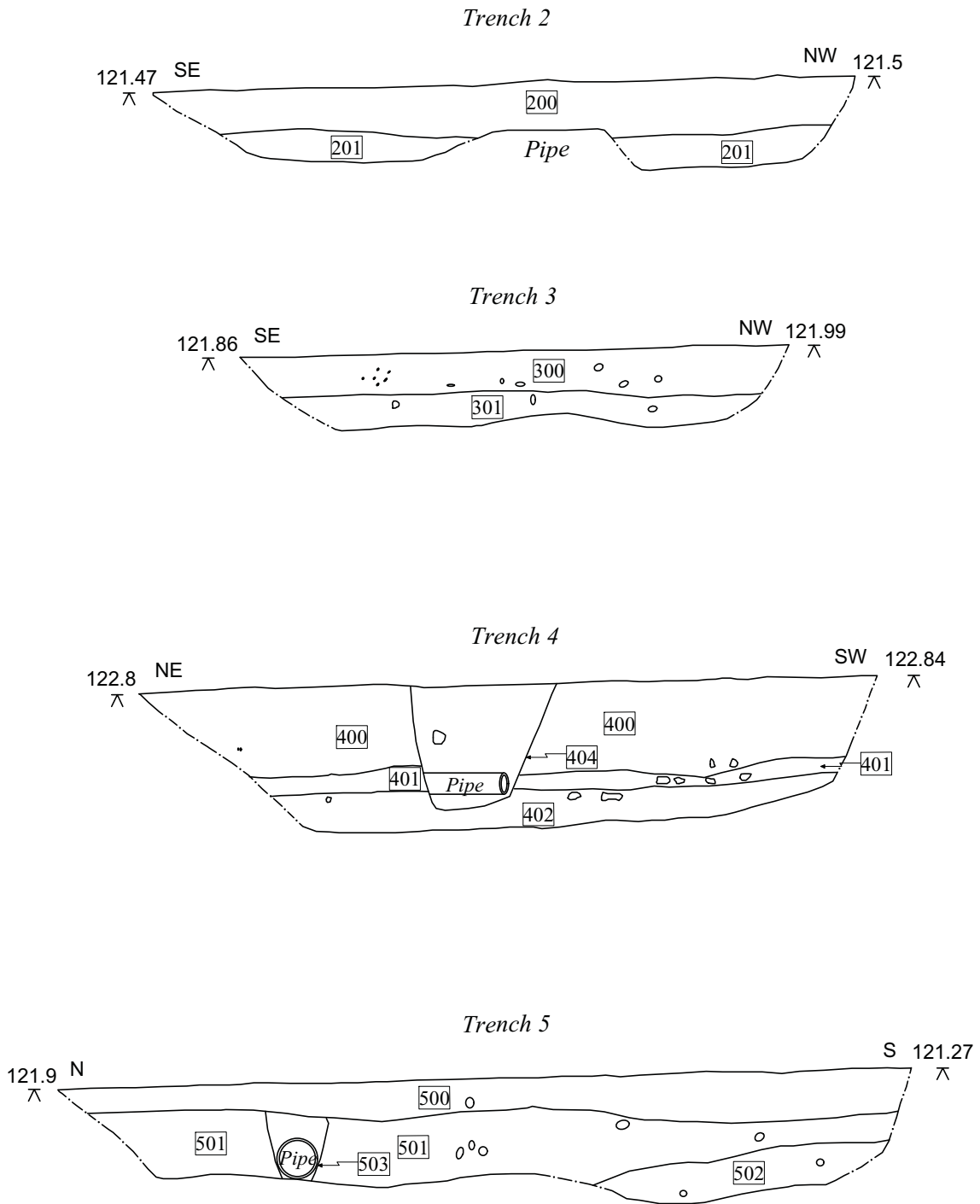
Trench location



Plan and section of Trench 1

Scale 1:20

Figure 7



Trench sections

Scale 1:40

Figure 8