terrain archaeology

assessment • evaluation • survey

BEAULIEU ROAD, AMESBURY, WILTSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation

Report No. 53203/2/1

November 2005

Beaulieu Road, Amesbury, Wiltshire
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Report written by:

Peter Bellamy BSc (Hons) MIFA and Rebecca Montague

Prepared on behalf of:

Simon Scutt
4 St Thomas' Square
Salisbury
SP1 1BA

Beaulieu Road, Amesbury, Wiltshire

Archaeological Evaluation, October 2005

SUMMARY

In October 2005, Terrain Archaeology carried out an evaluation of land at Beaulieu Road, Amesbury, Wiltshire (NGR SU16344101) proposed for new development. A single 15 metre long trench was excavated. This revealed a buried topsoil layer beneath the modern hard standing and concrete surfaces, which in turn sealed an east-west aligned ditch of probable Romano-British date, cut into the natural chalk. This ditch is likely to be part of the extensive system of field boundaries previously investigated at Butterfield Down and New Covert to the south and northeast.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Mr Simon Scutt to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site of three proposed dwellings to the rear of 9-15 Ringwood Avenue, off Beaulieu Road, Amesbury, Wiltshire, which forms part of Planning Application No. S/2005/1555.

The archaeological evaluation, comprising a trial trench, was requested by Wiltshire County Council, as set out in an archaeological brief issued on 26 April 2005. This is in line with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Archaeology and Planning).

An archaeological evaluation is a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site. If such archaeological remains are present, field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context, as appropriate.

The site lies within a housing estate on the southeastern edge of Amesbury (Figures 1 and 2). At present, the site is occupied by a row of single garages along the western side, with a large area of concrete access and hard standing and smaller grass strips on the northern and eastern sides (Figure 3). There are two trees along the eastern edge of the site. The site lies on a low east-west ridge at about 107 m above Ordnance Datum, centred on NGR SU16344101. The underlying geology is Upper Chalk.

The fieldwork was carried out on 24th October 2005 by Rod Brook and Rebecca Montague in poor weather conditions (heavy rain and strong winds).

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge Mr Simon Scutt, Roy Canham and Helena Cave-Penney (Wiltshire County Council), Mr Colin Kirby (QineticQ Archaeology) and Jane Timby for their help and cooperation during this project.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies in an area rich in archaeological remains which have been recognised through aerial photography, from excavations in advance of development, and from observations during development.

A large number of prehistoric remains, primarily dating to the Bronze Age have been found in the area surrounding the site (Figure 2). A number of Bronze Age round barrows have been identified from aerial photographs in the area to the west of the site and during construction work in 1951, another barrow was observed to the northeast of the site (Figure 2). This was a ditched bowl barrow with a primary cremation in an inverted collared urn accompanied by a bronze awl (Rawlings and Fitzpatrick 1996). During the refurbishment of the former Married Quarters, Boscombe Down, which included the stripping out of Beaulieu Road, Lyndhurst Road and Ringwood Avenue and renewal of all services in 2003–4, a number of Early Bronze age burials were found (Kirby 2004). The most spectacular being the grave containing seven burials known as the 'Boscombe Bowmen', accompanied by eight Beakers five barbed and tanged flint arrowheads and other worked flint, a boar's tusk and a bone toggle (Fitzpatrick 2004). A number of pits dated to the Early Bronze Age were also observed (Figure 2).

The site also lies in an area of extensive Roman settlement. Romano-British pits and middens were found during the development of the area in 1951. To the northwest of the site, part of an extensive Romano-British settlement has been excavated at Butterworth Down (Rawlings and Fitzpatrick 1996) and further Roman settlement and field traces have been found at New Covert (Figure 2).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological works is to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site, that is, to appraise the nature, extent, level of preservation and importance of any archaeological deposits.

The evaluation aimed to record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the works in order to provide sufficient data to assess the archaeological significance of the site.

The results of this evaluation may be used to formulate a strategy for the preservation or management of any archaeological remains; and/or formulate an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may affect adversely any such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or formulate a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research.

METHODS

The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* and Wiltshire County Council's *Standards for Archaeological Assessment and Field Evaluation in Wiltshire* (1995).

The evaluation comprised intrusive investigation in the form of a single machine-excavated trial trench (Trench 1) in the northeastern part of the site, positioned within the footprint of the proposed new building (Figure 3). The trench measured 15.8 m by 1.8 m across, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3 m below ground level.

The concrete surface of the parking area within the trench was removed using a concrete breaker, and the underlying deposits were excavated by a wheeled JCB using a toothless grading bucket. An exposed soil layer (106) was machined off in several thin spits, as its nature was unclear; no features were noted cut through this layer. Machining was halted when the underlying chalk natural and feature(s) cut through it were exposed. The long sections and the entire base of the trench were then cleaned by hand.

After cleaning, all archaeological deposits and features exposed during the works were planned and recorded. Due to poor weather conditions, and the loose nature of excavated gravel layers exposed in the sections, the trench did not stay clean for long. Excavation of archaeological

deposits and features was limited to resolving questions relating to their date, nature, extent and condition. All such excavation was carried out by hand.

All deposits revealed, irrespective of their apparent archaeological significance, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

RESULTS

Natural Deposits

Natural chalk bedrock (111) was exposed at the base of the trench (Plate 1). The surface of the chalk natural sloped down from the southeast towards the northwest, and occurred at heights between 106.94 m above OD (SE end) and 106.56 m (NW end), i.e. between 0.24 m and 0.86 m below the present concrete surface (Figure 4). The chalk was pasty white and rather degraded, and contained several sizeable flint nodules. Periglacial stripes aligned approximately N-S ran across the trench – these were filled with a pale buff brown chalky silt. A couple of these stripes may have been plough furrows as they contained a darker brown silt, similar to overlying layer 106. However, as these had an identical alignment to the periglacial stripes it may be that some of soil 106 had become incorporated into the top of a few of these features.

Features

One definite and one possible feature were noted cutting through the chalk natural: a ditch (109) and a scoop or natural depression (107).

Ditch 109 was aligned approximately E-W across the central part of the trench, and was exposed for a length of about 2.6 m (Figure 4). It was 1.80 m wide and had a maximum depth of 0.73 m. It was slightly irregular in plan, but its excavated sides were regular and steep, with a narrow flat base (Plate 2). It was filled with a pale greyish-brown medium compact silty loam (110) with frequent small chalk inclusions and some large flint nodules occurring in the central part of the fill, and with chalk peagrits on the base and sides of the cut. In the lower part of the fill was a small quantity of animal bone and a small crumb of possible prehistoric pottery. In the upper 0.3 m of the fill, six sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered, together with a possibly intrusive piece of slate. Worked flint and burnt flint was found throughout the fill. It is possible that two fills were present, although no differentiation could be made: the fill appeared homogeneous throughout.

Feature 107 was only partially exposed at the northwestern end of the trench. It was irregular in plan, and had irregular sides and a flattish base. It was exposed for a length of 1.5 m and a width of 0.45 m, and was 0.07 m deep. It was filled with a fairly loose medium brown silty loam (108) with frequent small chalk inclusions. It contained a single piece of animal bone.

Agricultural Soils

Both features were overlain by layer a fairly compact medium brown silty slightly clayey loam (106) with very occasional flint and chalk fragments. Feature 107 was clearly sealed by this layer, but the relationship between the fill of ditch 109 and layer 106 was less clear. Layer 106 appears to have been truncated at the southeastern end of the trench by the later activity related to the construction of the overlying concrete access and parking area; elsewhere across the trench its

thickness was a fairly constant 0.25 m (Figure 4). This layer probably represents a buried soil layer. Although no dating evidence was recovered from this layer, it is likely to be of relatively recent origin representing the final agricultural activity prior to the construction of the present housing estate.

Access and parking surfaces

Several layers are associated with the construction of the concrete slab surface 103. It appears that some truncation /terracing of the southeastern end of the site had occurred at this time (as evidenced by the truncation of 106 and the overall 'depressed' nature of the parking area compared to the grass strip to the southeast and south). Yellowish-brown sand (105) lay at the base of these deposits, and occurred only intermittently across the trench. It had a maximum thickness of 0.1 m. Above this lay a thick layer of orangey-brown flint gravels in a gritty sand matrix (104) with frequent broken bricks, concrete lumps, pockets of clinker and loose tarmac. This layer had a maximum thickness of 0.38 m and lay directly under concrete slab 103. At the northwestern part of the trench was a thick layer of redeposited chalk (102). This occurred at a similar level as 104 and appears to be associated with the make-up/hardstanding layers under 103. This layer had a maximum thickness of 0.36 m. Topsoil (101) occurred only at the northwestern end of the trench, and was a dark brown silty clay loam some 0.25 m thick. The concrete slab (103) was fairly level across the trench and varied between 0.15 m and 0.20 m in thickness. It was not reinforced.

Finds

The finds recovered from the excavation are presented in Table 1.

context	?prehistoric pot		Roman pot		Worked flint		Burnt unworked flint		Slate		Animal bone	
	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)
108											1	14
110	1	<1	6	62	14	265	10	159	1	1	4	218
Total	*1*	*<1*	*6*	*62*	*14*	*265*	*10*	*159*	*1*	*1*	*5*	*232*

Table 1: Finds assemblage by context.

?Prehistoric Pottery

A single small crumb or buff poorly fired pottery or baked clay was recovered from the lower part of context 110. This very small scrap disintegrated before it could be properly examined.

Roman Pottery by Jane Timby

Six sherds of Roman pottery (62 g) were recovered from a single context (110). The group comprises one sherd of New Forest colour-coated beaker, one sherd of Alice Holt grey ware and four sherds of grey ware of uncertain provenance. None of the pieces was featured but the New Forest sherd would suggest a date for the group from the later 3rd or 4th century.

1. One bodysherd from a New Forest colour-coated beaker. Date: *c* AD 270-400.
2. One bodysherd from an Alice Holt grey ware large jar. Date: Roman.
3. One bodysherd with a handle scar probably from a small flask. Grey sandy ware with an oxidised exterior. Date: mid-later Roman.
4. Three miscellaneous grey sandy wares. Date: Roman.

Worked flint

Fourteen pieces of worked flint were recovered from ditch fill 110. These were slightly rolled with some edge damage and all except one flake was patinated. This was variable ranging from slight bluish specks to heavy white patination. The assemblage comprised ten complete flake, three broken flakes and one scraper. The flakes and scraper were all Bronze Age in character.

Other finds

One small piece of slate was recovered from context 110. It may be intrusive in this context.

A total of 159 g of heavily burnt unworked flint was recovered from ditch 109 (context 110).

Animal Bone

At least four animal bones were recovered from context 110. The bone was very fragmentary, as it had been damaged during excavation. The bone included a scapula and part of a mandible from a sheep/goat and a mandible of a dog. A single poorly preserved sheep/goat ankle bone was recovered from context 108.

CONCLUSIONS

The site lies in an area extremely rich in archaeological remains, and despite some terracing/truncation revealed in the trench, the activity associated with the construction of the concrete access area was not deep enough to affect the buried archaeological features. The area of the proposed building is on the highest part of the site; the concrete surface dips down significantly towards the southwest. Judging from the present ground levels, the surface of the natural chalk in the southern part of the site may have been truncated, but the potential depth of this disturbance is unlikely to have completely removed all but the most ephemeral archaeological features.

The evaluation trench represents an approximate 25% sample of the area of the proposed new building. One definite and one possible archaeological feature was revealed and excavated within the evaluation trench. The ditch (109) fits into the pattern of boundary ditches, primarily of Roman date, discovered in the immediately surrounding area. The finds from the ditch suggest it had silted up by the later Roman period (late 3rd/4th century AD). No secure evidence was recovered to date the period of initial digging of this ditch. Another part of this same ditch had been previously investigated where it ran beneath Beaulieu Road only a few metres to the east of the evaluation trench. No dating evidence was recovered from that section and the only finds were some animal bone (Kirby 2004). The other feature exposed was of uncertain archaeological significance and may be no more than a localised disturbance in the chalk. It was undated.

The results of the evaluation have shown that archaeological remains do survive intact within the area of the footprint of the proposed new buildings and previous archaeological work in Beaulieu Road has demonstrated a fairly dense distribution of features, mainly Roman ditches under the road immediately east of the proposed development site (Figure 2). Some of these may cross the site.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53203) will be deposited with Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, which has agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. A copy of the microfilmed archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record.

REFERENCES

Kirby, C.	2004	'The Married Quarters Roads Project, Boscombe Down, Salisbury, Wiltshire: A Summary of Archaeological Work'. QineticQ Archaeology December 2004. Unpublished client report
Fitzpatrick, A. P.,	2004	'The Boscombe Bowmen: Builders of Stonehenge?' *Current Archaeology* **193**, 10-16
Rawlings, M. and Fitzpatrick, A. P.,	1996	'Prehistoric sites and a Romano-British Settlement at Butterfield Down, Amesbury' *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* **89**, 1-43.

Figure 1: Location map

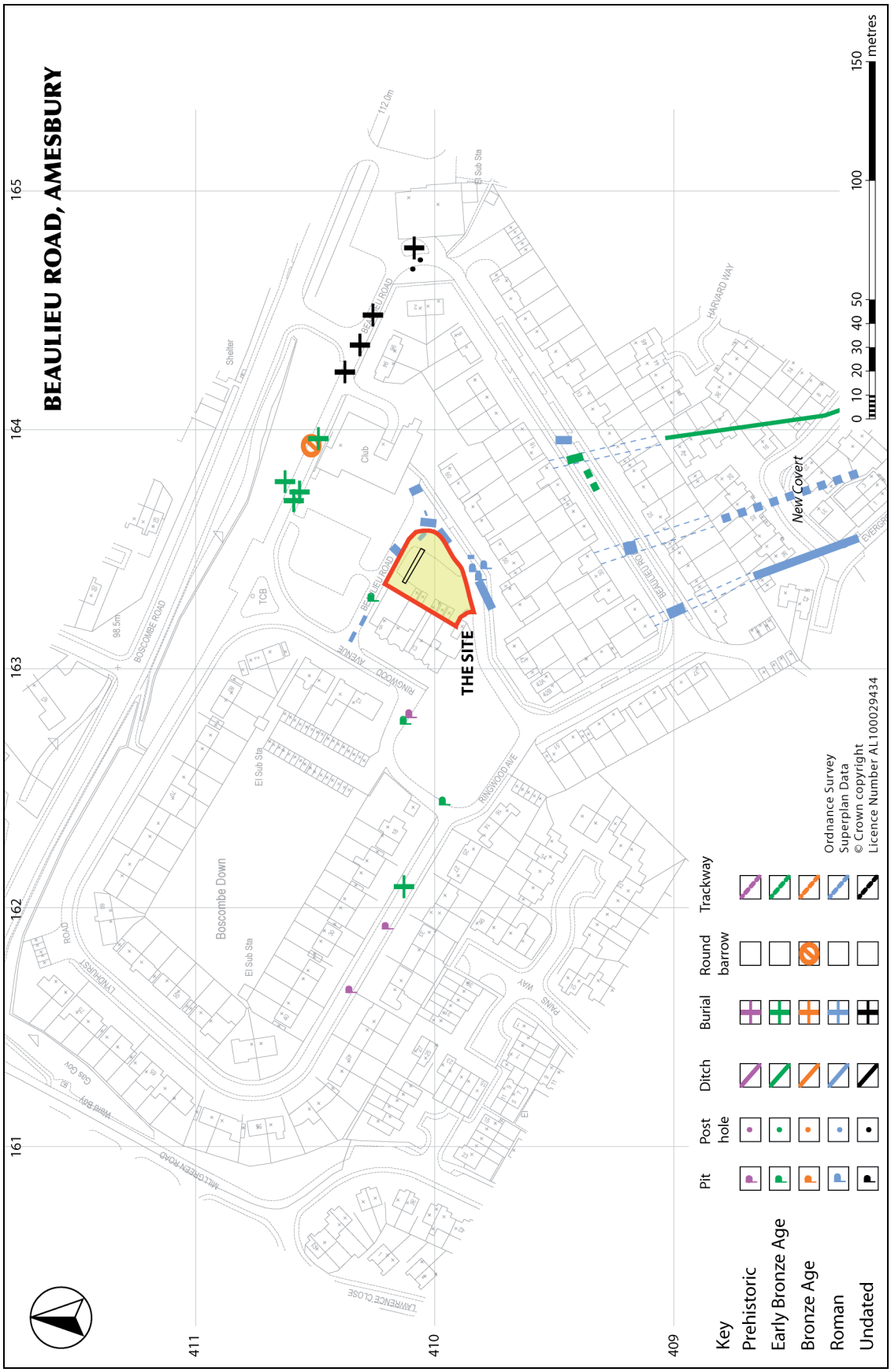

Figure 2: Detailed location of site in relation to previous archaeological discoveries.

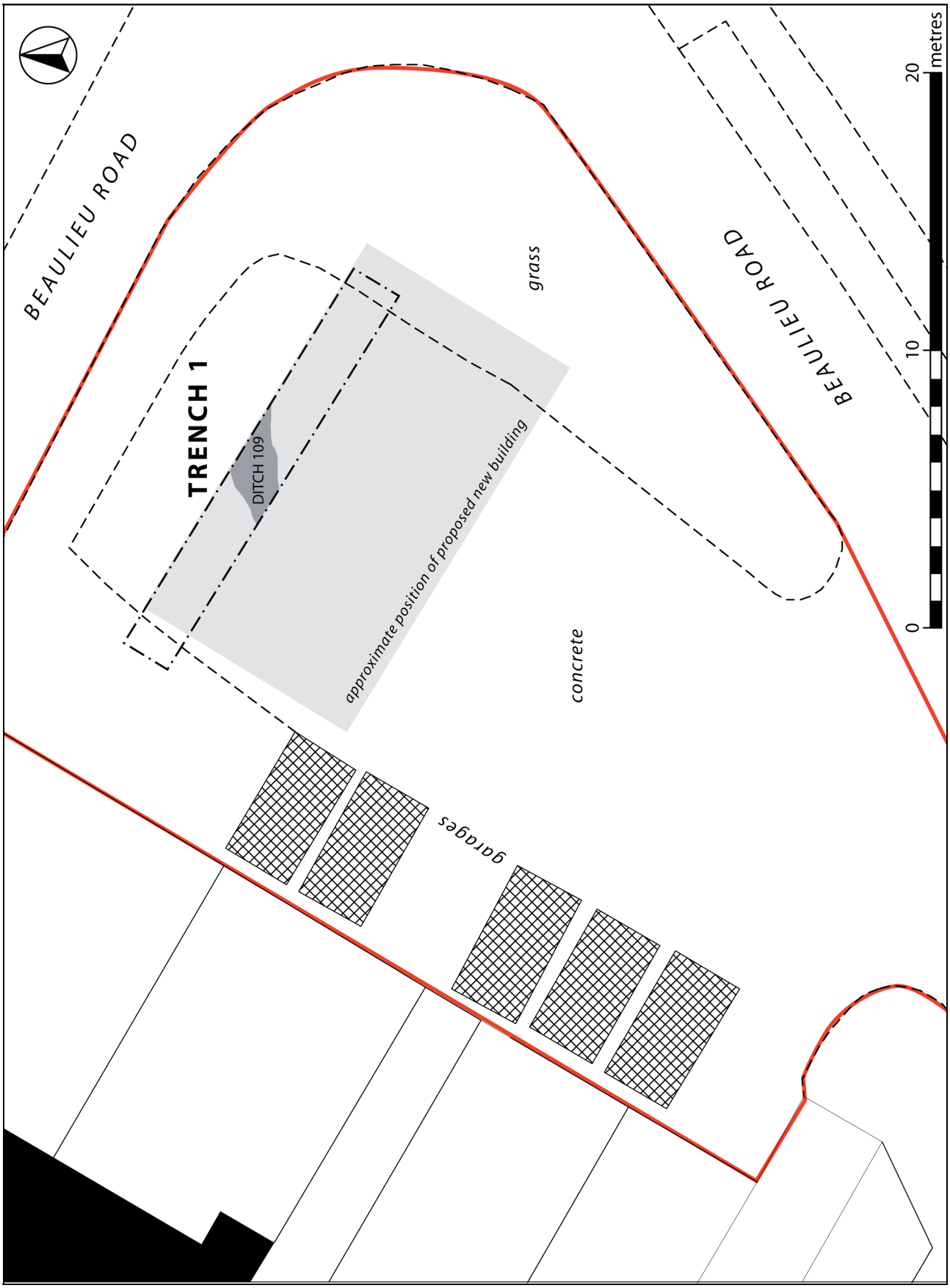

Figure 3: Plan of proposed development area showing location of Trench 1.

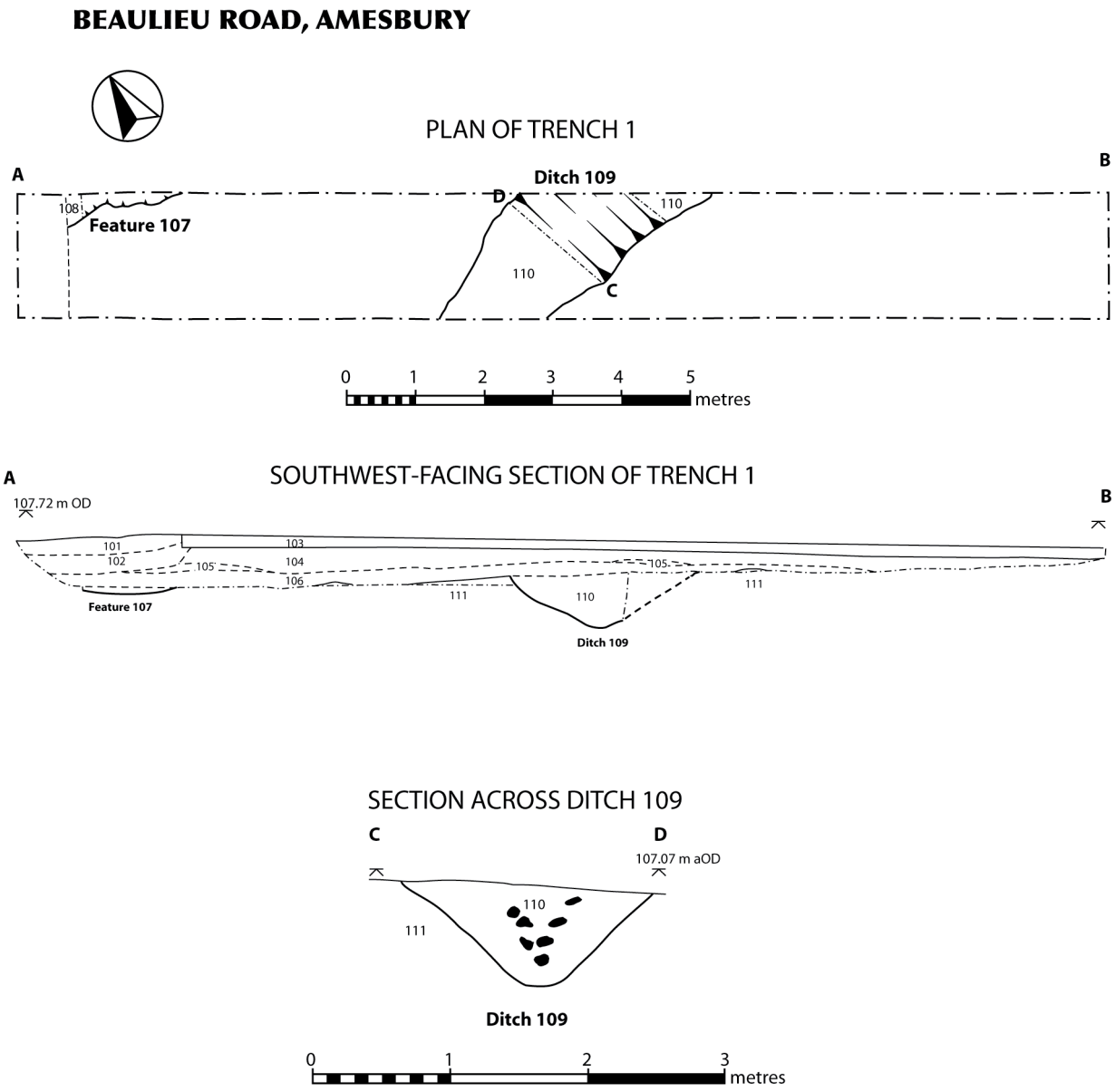

Figure 4:Plan and Sections of Trench 1.

Plate 1: View of trench from WSW, after initial cleaning.

Plate 2: Ditch 109 after excavation. Viewed from east.