



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological trial trench evaluation of
land around Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
H18 Spencer's Park
Interim report
May - June 2008



Anne Foard

July 2008

Report 08/120

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NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
JULY 2008

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION
OF
LAND AROUND HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
HERTFORDSHIRE
H18 (SPENCER'S PARK)
MAY – JUNE 2008

INTERIM REPORT

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REPORT 08/120

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological evaluation on land around Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, H18 (Spencer's Park)	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land proposed for housing, at Spencer's Park, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. The evaluation identified a number of pits, ditches and cremations occupying a plateau at the north-west corner of the site. The features date from the early 1st – 3rd centuries AD and are thought to represent enclosures and field boundaries on the periphery of a settlement. The cremations, two of which were possibly buried in boxes, appear to have been bounded by a ditched enclosure. Finds from the site include Roman pottery, glass and tile, together with opus signinum and a quern fragment and suggest that a settlement may lie close by.	
Project type (e.g. DBA, evaluation etc)	Trial trench evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	Geophysical survey	
Current Land use	Arable	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/period	Transitional Roman cremations and enclosures	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	Yes	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Hertfordshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Land at Cherry Tree Lane, Hertfordshire	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	12.9 ha	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	TL 0800 0945	
Height OD	128m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Hertfordshire County Council	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Anne Foard-Colby	
Project Manager	Mark Holmes	
Sponsor or funding body	ENTEC	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	28 May 2008	
End date	19 June 2008	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
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BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological evaluation of land around Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, H18 (Spencer's Park)	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
OF
LAND AROUND HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
HERTFORDSHIRE
H18 (SPENCER'S PARK)**

INTERIM REPORT

ABSTRACT

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land proposed for housing, at Spencer's Park, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. The evaluation identified a number of pits, ditches and cremations occupying a plateau at the north-west corner of the site. The features date from the early 1st – 3rd centuries AD and are thought to represent enclosures and field boundaries on the periphery of a settlement. The cremations, two of which were possibly buried in boxes, appear to have been bounded by a ditched enclosure. Finds from the site include Roman pottery, glass and tile, together with opus signinum and a quern fragment and suggest that a settlement may lie close by.

1 INTRODUCTION

Archaeological evaluation comprising trial excavation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology between May and June 2008 on land to the north of Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 0800 0945; Fig 1).

The work was undertaken in order to inform a pre-application enquiry with regard to developing land for housing at Spencer's Park, Cherry Tree Lane, Hemel Hempstead. The evaluation met the requirements of brief prepared by the County Archaeological Office of Hertfordshire County Council, dated 6 May 2008.

The trial trenching formed the second stage of archaeological evaluation. A previous stage of geophysical survey identified magnetic anomalies thought to be archaeological in origin (Smith and Butler 2008). The objective of the archaeological evaluation was to test the results of the geophysical survey and to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of surviving archaeological remains liable to be affected by the proposed development.

This report provides an interim statement on the excavations. Full analysis of the finds remains to be completed and the results of these will be included in the final report.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The proposed development site is located on the north-east corner of the suburbs of Hemel Hempstead, to the west of the M1 motorway and is bounded to the north by Redbourn Road, to the east by Cherry Tree Lane and to the south-west by Three Cherry Trees Lane. The area of evaluation is approximately 12.9 hectares and the land is currently given over to set-aside.

A flat, natural plateau at the far north-west corner of the site lies at approximately 128m OD. The land falls away to the east and south, to a small east-west aligned valley, before rising again. The solid geology of the area comprises chalk and red chalk, the drift geology is clay with flints (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There were no known archaeological remains within the development site prior to the geophysical survey, although possible archaeological features interpreted as pits and ditches were identified from the geophysical survey. However, the area within which the development site sits is rich in prehistoric and Roman remains.

A number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments surround the site, the closest is an Iron Age plateau fort known as The Aubreys which lies 2km to the north-west of the site. The High Street Green Roman barrow lies about 1km away to the south-west, whilst a Roman temple mausoleum lies 1km to the south. To the west, approximately 3km away, the remains of a Roman villa were discovered and 5km further to the south-west, Roman buildings including another villa have been found. To the south-east, Roman buildings have been identified.

The Roman town of Verulamium (St Albans) lay 5km to the east and had a network of Roman roads connecting it to the rest of Roman Britain. Watling Street, the Roman road from London (Londinium) to Chester (Deva) is situated only 4km to the east of the site. The route of Geddesden Row Roman Road into Verulamium from the north-west is unknown but the existing part of the road lies only 2.5km from the site.

Further documentary research including consultation of aerial photographs taken before the expansion of the suburbs will be undertaken for the final report in order to place the current excavations in their regional context.

4 METHODOLOGY

Initially, seven 50m long trial trenches (Trenches 1 – 7) were excavated using a mechanical digger fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision (Fig 1). In all trenches mechanical excavation proceeded as far as the surface of the natural substrate.

Additional trenches (the north and south extensions to Trench 4 and Trenches 8 -13) were excavated in order to further clarify the extent and character of the archaeology (Fig 1). They ranged in length from between 3.5m to 34m. The positions were discussed and agreed with the Historic Environment Advisor of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

The trenches were related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid by GPS survey. Archaeological information was recorded on pro-forma sheets, with a unique context number being allocated to each distinct deposit and feature. A photographic record comprising both 35mm monochrome negatives, with associated prints, and colour transparencies was maintained, with additional digital photographs. All records were compiled during fieldwork into a comprehensive and fully cross-referenced site archive. The site code is HSP08.

All works were carried out according to the IFA Code of Conduct and *Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Evaluation* (IFA 1994), and all procedures complied with the Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

5 EVALUATION RESULTS

The same natural substrate was encountered in all trenches. This consisted of mid orange-brown silty clay with patches of medium to large flint nodules encountered at a depth of 0.35m. No subsoil was identified anywhere on the site. All trenches were overlain by dark brown silty clay topsoil, measuring up to 0.35m thick.

Trenches 1 – 4, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13 contained archaeological features and are described below. There were no archaeological features present in Trenches 5 – 7 and 10.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 50m long, aligned north-west to south-east (Figs 1 and 2). Two gullies, a ditch and part of a large pit were present. All contained Roman pottery and tile.

Ditch [108] (Figs 1 and 2) aligned north-east to south-west, and was 1.30m wide by 0.60m deep, with a 'V'-shaped profile and flat base. The fill (107) consisted of dark yellow-grey mottled silty clay containing much Roman pottery and charcoal lumps. A tipline of compacted natural flint nodules was present on the western edge of the ditch and may indicate the existence of a bank.

A pit or the terminus of a ditch [110] on the south side of the trench was 1.10m wide and 0.12m deep, with a shallow 'U'-shaped profile. Its fill (109) consisted of yellow-grey mottled silty clay with dense charcoal, Roman pottery, fired clay and burnt flint.

Gully [104], aligned north-west to south-east, was 0.55m wide and 0.20m deep, with a steep side 'U'-shaped profile. Its fill (103) was light grey silty clay with Roman pottery and flint nodules.

Pit [106] was more than 4.00m wide and 0.80m deep, with a wide 'U'-shaped profile; it was not fully excavated because of its depth. Its lower fill (112) consisted of mid grey silty clay with Roman pottery sherds, animal bone, lumps of fired clay and charcoal, and was 0.50m thick. It was overlain by fill (111), mid orange brown silty clay with flint nodules, 0.14m thick, which was a layer of re-deposited natural, possibly backfill from when the pit was first dug. The upper fill (105) was mid grey brown silty clay which contained Roman pottery, bone and tile fragments. It was 0.30m thick.

Trench 2

Aligned north-west to south-east Trench 2 (Figs 1 and 2), measured 50m long. It contained three ditches.

Ditch [207], aligned east-west, was 1.50m wide by 0.65m deep with a 'V'-shaped profile. Lower fill (206) was dark orange-grey silty clay and contained frequent sherds of Roman pottery, including large sherd on the base of the ditch, indicating primary deposition and over a short period of time. It was 0.45m thick. The upper fill (205) was grey-orange silty clay with flint nodules. It was 0.20m thick and no finds were present.

The terminal of a small gully [204], parallel to ditch [207] was 0.70m wide by 0.21m deep with a 'U'-shaped profile. Fill (203) consisted of mid orange-brown silty clay with flint and charcoal flecks. There were no finds present.

Two gullies [209] and [211], also on the same alignment were 0.50m wide but were not excavated. They were both filled with mid orange brown silty clay, but no finds were present.

Part of a feature [213] exposed at the far north-western end of the trench may be ditch [108] located in Trench 1, as it is on the similar alignment.

Trench 3

Aligned north-east to south-west Trench 3 (Figs 1 and 2) was 50m long. It contained three ditches a ditch terminus, a gully and a small pit.

Ditch [306], aligned north-west to south-east measured 1.20m wide by 0.46m deep with a 'U'-shaped profile. Its fill (305) consisted of dark grey clay with tile fragments and flint nodules. It was cut by ditch [308] on a similar alignment, which was 1.72m wide by 0.16m deep, with shallow sides and a flat base. The fill (307) was similar to fill (305). To the west the ditch terminal [304] was 0.80m wide by 0.23m deep. Fill (303) was dark brown silty clay frequent flint nodules.

Ditch [311], aligned north-south, was 1.20m wide by 0.58m deep with a 'V'-shaped profile. The lower fill (310) consisted of dark orange brown mottled silty clay with frequent charcoal lumps and was 0.34m thick. The upper fill (309) was dark grey silty clay with frequent flints and 0.24m thick.

A small pit [313] was 1.00m long by 0.35m wide and filled with light yellow brown silty clay (312). A small gully [315], parallel to ditch [311] was 0.45m wide, but not excavated. Fill (314) was similar to that of the pit.

Trench 4

Trench 4 (Figs 1 and 2) was a cross-shaped trench, which had been extended to explore the extent a small cremation cemetery. There were three ditches, four gullies, five pits and two possible postholes.

Ditch [422] aligned north-east to south-west was not excavated. The fill (421) consisted of grey brown silty clay and contained frequent sherds of Roman pottery and charcoal lumps. It was cut by gully [414] on the same alignment, 0.80m wide, with a fill (413) consisting of dark grey brown silty clay with flint nodules and charcoal.

Six patches of cremated bone were investigated in pits [404], [408], [410], [412], [414] and [418]. Cremations 2, 3 and 4 were deposited in shallow scoops. Cremation 1 was contained within a pottery jar (which had been truncated), cremation 5 may have been deposited within the fill of gully [414] and cremation 6 was buried in a sub-rectangular pit, possibly within a wooden box, accompanied by a small, pottery vessel (truncated) and a ceramic bead.

The cremations were concentrated in an area which may have been partially enclosed by gully [406], which was aligned north-west to south-east in Trench 4 and continued eastwards across the southern extension trench and may be feature [432] which was observed at the east end of Trench 4. The gully measured approximately 0.50m wide by 0.15m deep and its fill (405) consisted of dark grey silty clay with flint nodules and charcoal lumps. To the north of the concentration of cremations was gully [414], aligned north-east to south-west, 0.50m wide and was filled with similar grey clay (413) to that of gullies [406] and [432]. This may represent the northern limit of the cremation cemetery.

Other features at the north end of the northern extension were two gullies [424] and [426], both about 0.70m wide and not excavated. Fills (423) and (425) consisted of mid grey brown silty clay with flint nodules. There were no finds present.

Ditch [420], aligned north-east to south-west was 1.80m wide and cut gully [424]. Fill (419) was mid grey brown silty clay with flint nodules and charcoal and contained sherds of possible Iron Age pottery.

Ditch [416] was aligned north-east to south-west and was 0.80m wide by 0.26m deep, with a deep 'U'-shaped profile. Fill (415) consisted of light orange grey silty clay with flint nodules and contained sherds of Roman pottery. To the south of the ditch were two possible postholes [428] and [430], measuring 0.40m wide, they were not excavated. Fills (427) and (429) were similar to that of ditch [416]. There were no finds present.

Trench 8

Trench 8 (Figs 1 and 3) measured 50m long and was aligned east – west. It contained two ditches and two gullies.

Ditch [810] was 1.50m wide by 0.25m deep and aligned east-west. It had a shallow 'U'-shaped profile with flat base. Its fill (809) consisted of dark brown silty clay containing Roman pottery, charcoal flecks and lumps and flint nodules, which were concentrated on the west side. The fill was cut by ditch [808] which was 1.05m wide and 0.40m deep, aligned north-west to south-east, with a steep sided 'V'-shaped profile. Its fill (807) was dark grey-brown silty clay, containing Roman pottery, charcoal lumps, and large flint nodules, which appeared to have tipped back into the ditch from the west edge.

The terminal of gully [806] was aligned east-west and 0.52m wide. Its fill (805) consisted of dark grey brown silty clay which contained Roman pottery, tile and a lump of Opus Signinum. It was not excavated. Gully [804] was aligned north-west to south-east and measured 0.68m wide. Its fill (803) was dark grey brown silty clay with Roman pottery, charcoal lumps and flint nodules and was not excavated.

Trench 9

Measuring 14m and aligned north-west to south-east, Trench 9 (Figs 1 and 2) contained part of a large pit [903], similar to [106] in Trench 1. It was 3.90m in diameter but may be larger as indicated on the geophysical survey plot (Smith and Butler 2008).

Trench 11

Trench 11 (Figs 1 and 2) measured 3.5m long and was aligned north-west to south-east. It was excavated close to Trench 1 to further investigate the extent of feature [106], a large pit, measuring c4m in diameter which was deeper than the 0.80m excavated as it was not bottomed due to safety concerns.

Trench 11 revealed the eastern edge of the pit which was c4m in diameter. It was filled with the same fill (105) as that in Trench 1. This pit corresponds to one shown on the geophysical survey (Smith and Butler 2008).

Trench 12

Trench 12 (Figs 1 and 2) measured 9m long and was aligned north-west to south-east. Two features were present, a ditch and a small pit.

Ditch [1204] which was 1.7m at its widest, was the same as ditch [108] in Trench 1. The second feature was a small pit [1206] 0.70m in diameter; its fill (1205) consisted of mid orange brown silty clay with flint nodules and contained fragments of ceramic roof tile.

Trench 13

Measuring 12m long and aligned north-west to south-east, Trench 13 (Figs 1 and 2) contained ditch [1304], 1.50m wide and the same as ditch [108] in Trench 1.

6 FINDS

6.1 The flint by Andy Chapman

A total of 11 pieces of flint was recovered, including two pieces of irregular burnt flint. Eight of the pieces are irregular cortical flakes that show no sign of having been struck from prepared cores, and none show any sign of having been retouched or utilised. A single cortical flake, 45mm long, has been struck from prepared core which had previously had small blade-like flake removals. Part of one edge has been retouched. This piece is likely to be of Neolithic/early Bronze Age date.

6.2 The Roman pottery by Tora Hylton

A small assemblage of Roman pottery was recovered from the trial trench evaluation. Spot dates have been provided to assist in phasing. The assemblage largely dates to the early 1st – 2nd centuries AD, although there are a few sherds of 3rd-century pottery, from an upper fill of a large pit [106]. The fabrics represented are typical of those commonly found on Roman sites in the area and include a relatively high proportion of transitional grog tempered, and Verulamium ware. A detailed description of the assemblage will be prepared for the final report.

6.3 The ceramic building material by Pat Chapman

Tile

There are 46 tile sherds varying in size from fragments to sherds up to 85mm long. They are all abraded. Sherds 35-45mm thick, from contexts (103, 112, 305, 903, 1203), could be a few scattered remnants from floor tiles or the tiles forming the pillars of a hypocaust system indicated by three flue tile fragments with a broad comb design from context (107). The flue tile and the thicker floor tile are Roman in date. There appears to be a concentration within the features in trench 1.

The other measurable tiles are 12-13mm thick, from contexts (201, 301, 307 and 901) and two of these, from (201) and (301), have pegholes 11mm and 12mm in diameter. The thickness of 12-13mm is unusually thin for a Roman *tegula* roof tile, and none of them have the distinctive curve of an *imbrex* roof tile which are generally thinner. These are more appropriate to the medieval period.

Table1: *Quantification of tile*

Context/feature	No	Comment
103 / 104	3	1-35mm thick
105 /106	12	fragments
107 /108	6	3-flue
112 /106	2	1-40mm thick
201 /topsoil	2	13mm thick – 1 peghole
301 /topsoil	2	15mm thick – 1 peghole
305 /306	3	2-35mm, 1-45mm thick
307 /308	6	2-12mm thick
805 /806	1	11mm thick
901 /topsoil	1	11mm thick
903 /904	4	1-35mm thick
1203 /1204	1	35mm thick
1205 /1206	3	fragments
Total	46	

Fired clay

Thirty-six fragments of fired clay come from two contexts, five from context (105) and 31 from context (109). These are typically orange to brown and quite hard, generally irregular with an occasional smooth surface. One large fragment comes from (805). This is just general debris from occupation.

6.4 Opus signinum by Pat Chapman

A possible fragment of *opus signinum* came from the fill (805) of gully terminal [806]. It is an irregular piece 35mm thick with one flat surface and one irregular. It is composed of soft pale pink mortar with small calcareous inclusions and finely crushed tile.

6.5 The stone by Andy Chapman

A small irregular fragment of conglomerate contains rounded pebbles, but angular edges of heavily burnt flint pebbles protrude from the surface, suggesting that the piece had disintegrated following intense heating. It may have come from a quern in Hertfordshire puddingstone.

6.6 Other finds by Tora Hylton

The excavations produced 26 individual or group recorded finds in four material types, iron (22), glass (2), ceramic (1) and stone (1). The finds were recovered by hand and during the sieving of soil samples. All the finds were recovered from stratified deposits relating to Roman settlement.

The assemblage comprises many iron nails and possible box fittings from two cremation burials. There is one item which may be for personal adornment, and fragments of vessel glass.

Iron

The assemblage is dominated by nails and possible other box fittings (22+), which have been sent for X-ray to help determine their function. These were found within the fills of two cremations (Cremations 1 and 6). Two distinct rows of nails and box fittings were found in Cremation 6, together with traces of carbonised wood and may represent the presence of a wooden box.

Glass

There are four fragments of glass, from Trench 1. One fragment from a gully is post-medieval in date and thought to be intrusive; the other three are fragments of blue/green Roman vessel glass from a large pit.

Ceramic

A ceramic bead measuring 23mm through the hole and 25mm across its widest part was recovered from the contents of Cremation 6. The hole was probably made with a 4mm square sectioned stick or nail. The fabric of the bead was similar to pottery found on site and contained a shelly temper and had been fired.

7 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 The bone by Karen Deighton

Cremations

Six cremations were excavated, however, only three (Cremations 1, 3 and 4) were processed after consultation with the Historic Environment Advisor (HCC). The three

samples were wet sieved, dried and examined and any possible diagnostic bone fragments were noted. Additional cremated bone was recovered from two bulk samples from fills (105 and 109).

Table 2: Cremated bone per feature

Sample No.	cremation	Volume(L)	Weight(g)	Context Fill/feature	Diagnostic bone
1	pit	40	4	105/106	
3	1	10	444	404/405	3 fragments pos human bone
5	3	10	5	409/410	Tooth root fragment pos human
6	4	10	11	411/412	
8	ditch	40	5	109/110	Phalanx fragment pos human

Recommendations

Any samples containing possible human bones should be examined by the relevant specialist

Animal bone

A total of 301g of animal bone was collected by hand from six contexts during the course of trial trenching. A further 23g was collected from sieved residues (mesh sizes 500microns, 1mm and 3.5mm).

Preservation was extremely poor with heavy fragmentation and abrasion. The condition of the material is likely to be due to the local soil conditions. The bone also exhibited brown mottling which is often consistent with temporary waterlogging. Only two taxa could be identified; Cattle (Bos) and dog (Canid). Cattle were represented by 4 maxillary tooth fragments, a mandible fragment of a young adult and a splinter from the shaft of a femur. Dog was represented by a single carnassial tooth fragment.

The potential for further analysis is severely limited by the low level of preservation and the scarcity of material, which in turn is possibly due to unfavourable soil conditions.

7.2 The charred plant remains by Wallis Lord-Hart

Four bulk soil samples were taken in order to identify macroscopic plant remains.

Table 3: Samples per context

Sample	1	2	8	9
Context	105	310	109	807
Feature	106	311	110	808
Volume	40	20	40	20
Feature	pit	ditch	ditch	ditch

Method

All samples were processed by flotation with a 1mm sieve used for the residue in a modified siraf tank, and then agitated in order to assist in separation. The floating fraction (flot) was collected into a 500 micron mesh. This fraction was then dried and scanned using a binocular microscope with a magnification of up to x 20. Seeds were examined and identified at Northamptonshire headquarters.

Results

Few seeds were recovered from these samples, and those that were recovered were charred and fragmentary. What was recovered mostly came from sample 9. The types of seeds recovered from the site were unidentifiable cereal grains, spelt glume bases, and a few seeds of the *fabaceae* (pea) family.

Discussion

The small number of seeds recovered from this site makes interpretation difficult. The presence of cereal grains, chaff and weed seeds are likely to have been brought on site with the grain as a crop contaminant.

8 DISCUSSION

The trial trenching confirmed the presence of archaeological features identified by the geophysical survey. It also demonstrated that there were further features that had not been detected. The absence of archaeology in Trenches 5 – 7 suggests that activity was concentrated on the plateau in the north-west of the site.

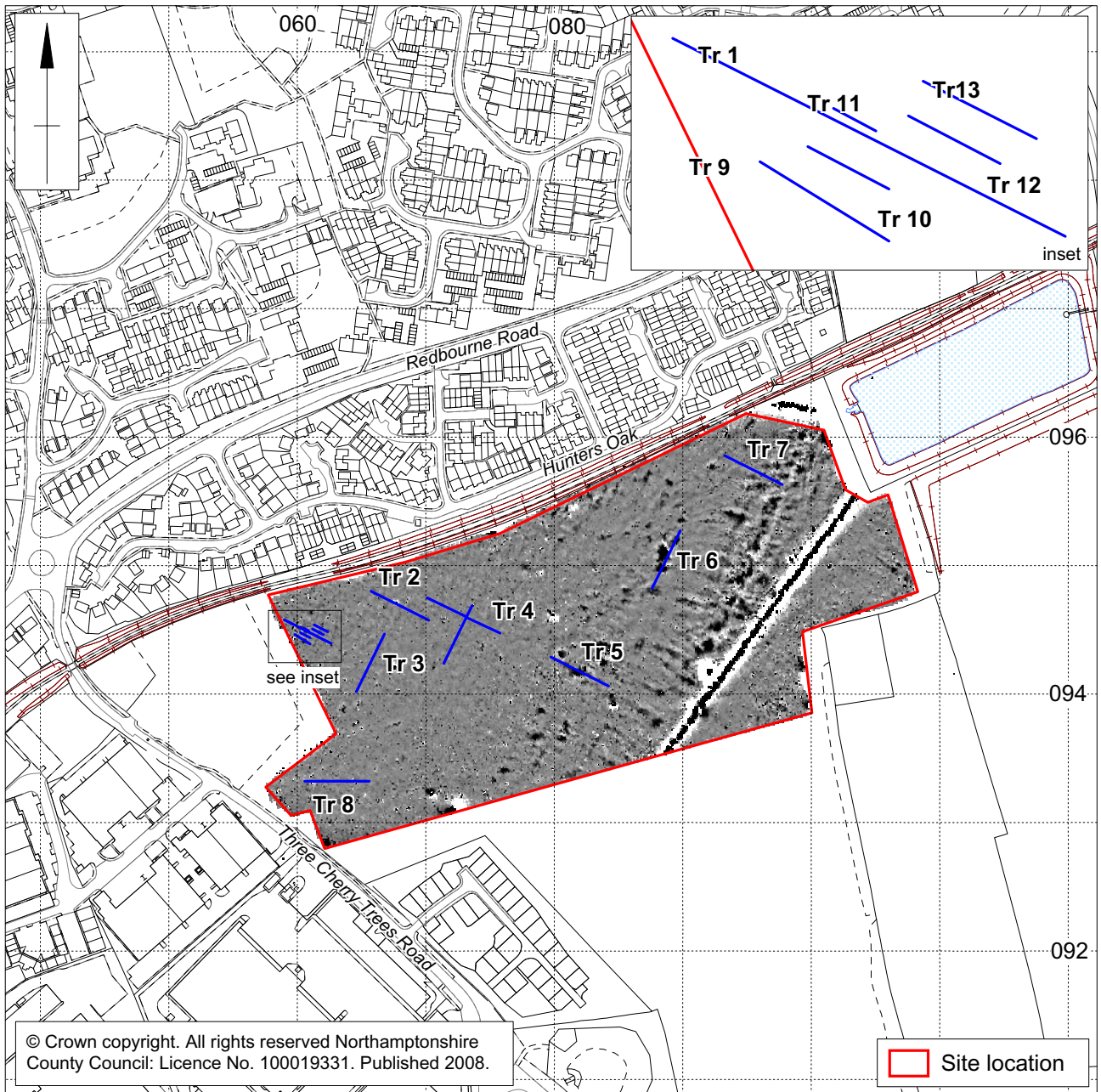
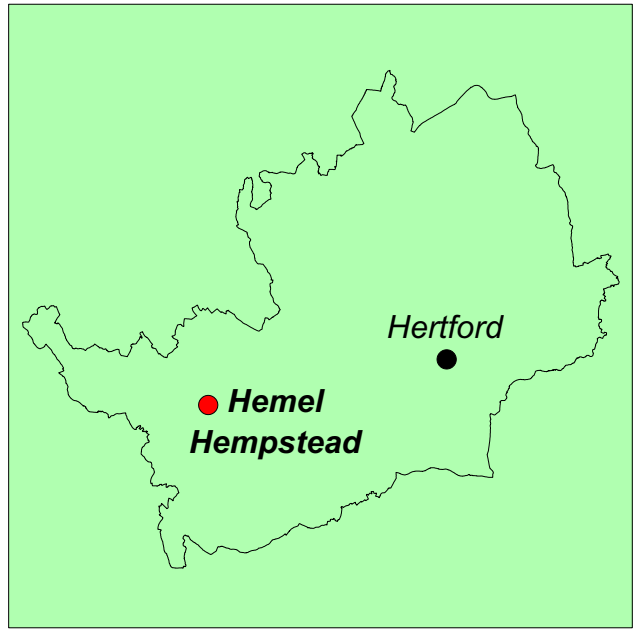
The absence of subsoil and the shallowness of the topsoil has resulted in the truncation of small features such as the cremations, however, there are sufficient remains surviving for further exploration of the area, as seen in the recovery of finds from the cremation burials.

The cluster of six cremations may be enclosed by a small gully identified to the north and south, which may represent a small cremation cemetery. The possibility of at least two of the cremations being buried within wooden boxes, from the evidence of numerous nails and box fittings, charred wood, with the addition of the cremation within a ceramic vessel suggests that these burials may have some status.

Further ditches and gullies may be field boundaries or enclosures to nearby settlement, as shown by the presence of pottery represented by table and kitchen wares of the early 1st to 2nd century AD, together with roof, hypocaust and box flue tiles, especially from the Trench 1 area in the far north-west of the site.

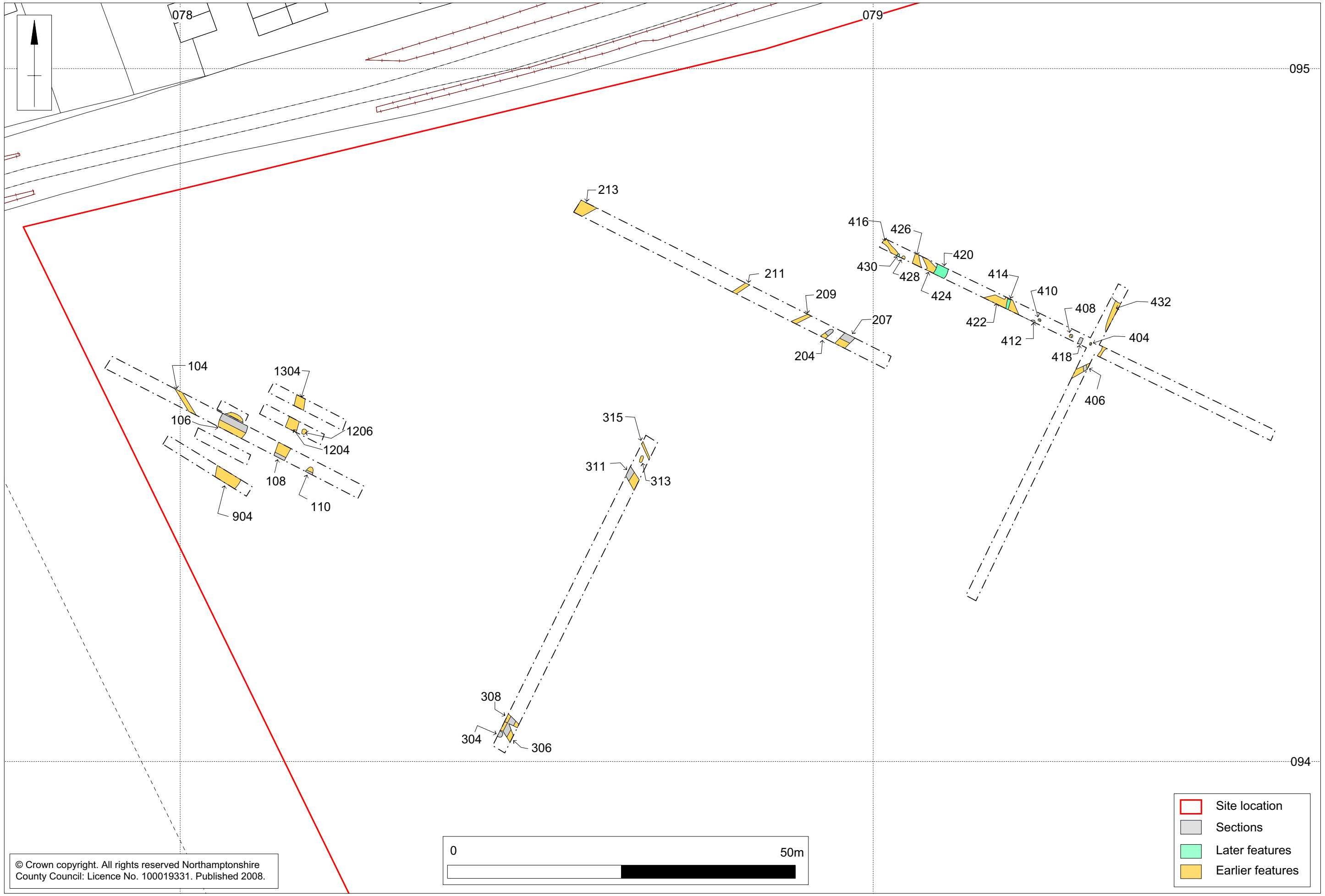
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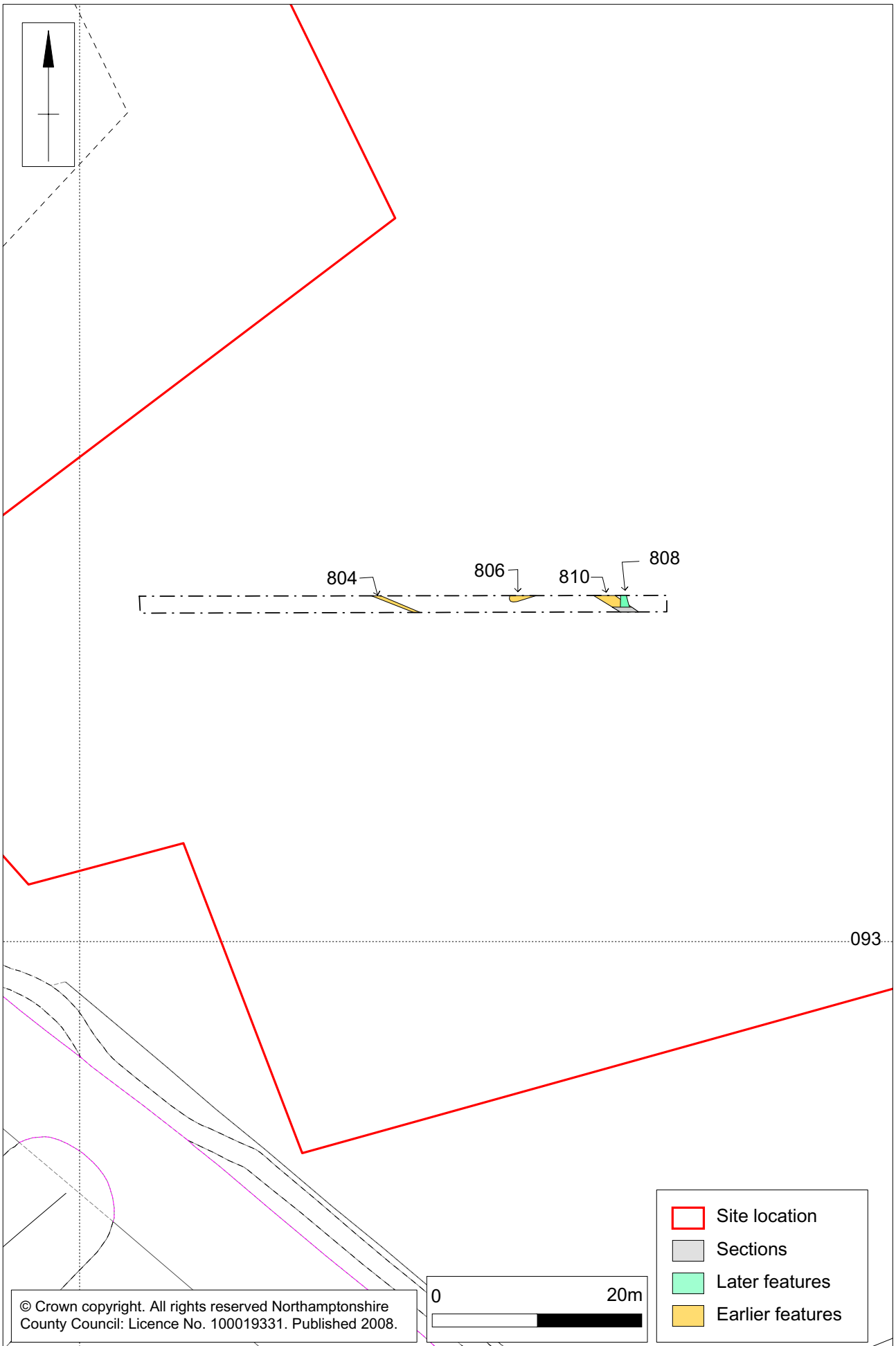
Scale 1:5000

Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:500

The northern trenches Fig 2



Scale 1:500

Trench 8 Fig 3