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Archaeological Evaluation at  
79 Tiddington Road,  
Stratford-upon Avon, Warwickshire



Report 0926

May 2009



# Archaeological Evaluation at 79 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

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Warwickshire Museum Field Services  
The Butts  
Warwick  
CV34 4SS

## Summary

Archaeological trial trenches excavated to the rear of 79 Tiddington Road revealed part of a Romano-British cemetery located at the edge of the Avon's second gravel terrace. The burials were aligned east to west and formed part of the cemetery excavated in 1923-24 during the building of the neighbouring 77 Tiddington Road. A series of linear boundary features below the crest of the terrace were dated to the Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon periods. These features seem to imply some form of occupation outside the cemetery.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Proposals have been formulated for the re-development of 79 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire involving the construction of a replacement house, ancillary buildings and a sunken garden. The site lies in an area of significant Romano-British settlement, and the developer was advised that the archaeological implications of the development could not be ascertained without a field evaluation to provide the planning authority with appropriate information before any planning decision is reached.

1.2 An archaeological field evaluation was therefore commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group and carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (dated February 2009) in March 2009.

1.3 This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under site code TA09.

## 2. Location

2.1 The site lies on the north side of the Tiddington Road, at National Grid Reference SP 2122 5536 (Fig 1).

2.2 The Tiddington Road runs along the southern side of the Avon along the ridge formed by the 2nd river terrace (BGS 1974). The land surface falls away to the north-west across an outcrop of Mercia Mudstone onto the first river terrace, and again down to the alluvial floodplain.

## 3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The earliest datable find in the area is a rare form of stone implement, a possible leaf point of Upper/Final Upper Palaeolithic date (*c* 40,000-8,000 BC), the period in which modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) began to colonise the part of the continental landmass that is now the British Isles. It was found in about 1930 during the construction of No 80 Tiddington Road (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record Number MWA 893). It is one of only two finds of this period known from the entire county and their general paucity in Britain suggests that there was only a very small population at this time.

3.2 After the last Ice Age had ended *c*10,000 years ago, the region was sporadically visited by growing numbers of Mesolithic (*c*8000 BC – 4000 BC) hunter gatherers. No finds of this date are known in Tiddington but it is certain that they would have travelled along the Avon Valley during this time. At the beginning of the Neolithic



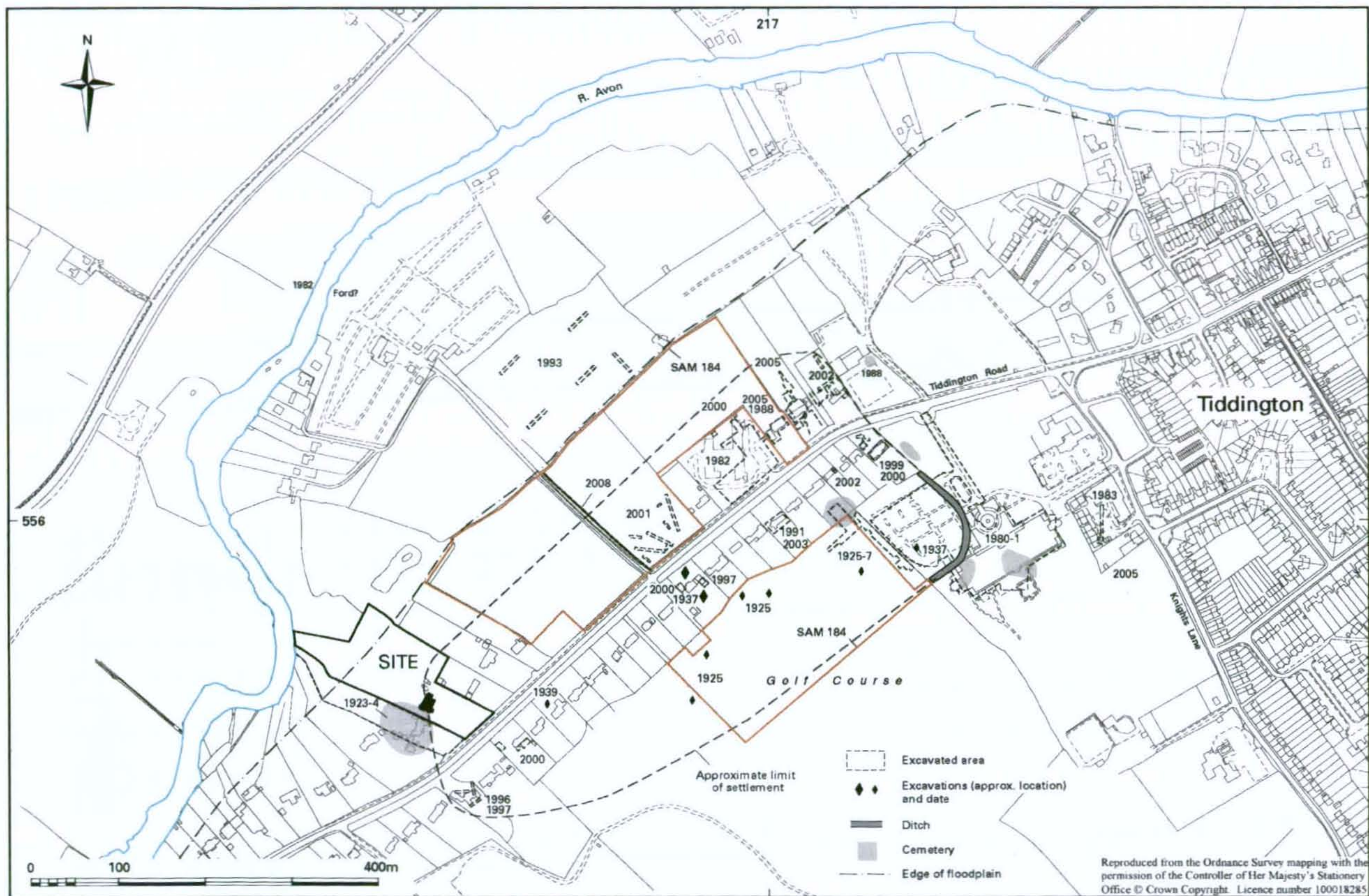


Fig 1: Tiddington Roman Settlement showing the location of archaeological excavations



period (c4000 BC) domesticated cattle and sheep along with domesticated cereals such as wheat and barley began to arrive from the continent and the indigenous people slowly adopted a new world view which included the construction of ceremonial and funerary monuments and the inevitable, but piecemeal adoption of agriculture. Thin scatters of flint tools and waste flakes of this date have been found in fields to the east of Tiddington suggesting the locale was visited but no concentrations are dense enough to suggest settlement. The technology for working metals such as copper and tin was imported from the continent around c2500 BC in the Early Bronze Age. There are sporadic flint finds of this date in the area and a number of cropmarks east of Tiddington represent ring-ditches or ploughed out burial mounds of Neolithic or Bronze Age date.

3.3 Permanent settlement of this part of the Avon Valley probably originated in the Late Bronze Age c1000 BC. Cropmarks to the east of Tiddington represent boundary features that define land-units that may well have remained in existence throughout the Iron Age (c800 BC – AD 43) and later.

3.4 The earliest dated settlement evidence in the area is Middle Iron Age (c400 BC – 0 AD) and was excavated at the NFU site in the early 1980s (Fig 1). This was probably one of a number of small farmsteads in this part of the Avon Valley, which is likely to have been heavily exploited by this time (Palmer 1983).

3.5 The Iron Age settlements were succeeded by a large village (HER MWA 4469), during the Roman period (AD 43–410). The impetus for this development may well have been a location at a crossroads: a road along the south side of the river, following the line of the modern Tiddington Road, met another running south-east to north-west down to a ford. The ford was probably at the place where Roman coins and brooches were dredged out of the river in 1982.

3.6 The village grew rapidly during the 1st and 2nd centuries, serving as a market for the farms in the vicinity. The settlement seems to have contracted during the 3rd and 4th centuries, with some areas being abandoned.

3.7 Imperial Rome withdrew from Britain in AD 410, and settlement after this date is often difficult to identify in the archaeological record not least because of the collapse of the Roman industries which produced datable artefacts in the later 4th century which culminated in a total absence by c430 AD (Esmonde-Cleary 1989) and the absence of any building forms which have left a recognisable trace. However, recent finds of early Anglo-Saxon pottery in the vicinity indicate that some form of settlement could have continued into the post-Roman period at Tiddington (Palmer & Palmer 1988; Biddulph 2005; Palmer forthcoming a & b).

3.8 The first modern indications of the existence of the Roman settlement came in the 18th and 19th centuries when large numbers of Roman coins were collected from the fields at Tiddington. Systematic investigation began in the 1920s when housing development spreading along the Tiddington Road uncovered Roman remains. In 1923 a cemetery of 220 burials was encountered during the building of 77 Tiddington Road (HER MWA 1014). The documentation from this site is very sketchy, the only surviving plan suggesting that the excavation extended into the No 79 plot revealing 20 burials. Further burials were probably encountered during the construction of the present swimming pool (Derek Squires pers comm). Another burial was found in the back garden of No 77 in 1936 (*Stratford Herald* 31st Jan 1936). These excavations also produced some hand-made Iron Age type pottery (HER MWA 1064) but the suggestion that there were also Anglo Saxon finds including a brooch from the site (HER MWA 6268) is unsubstantiated. In 1925-7 the construction of the golf course revealed more Romano-British burials and the remains of buildings (Fieldhouse *et al* 1931). Further excavation work was carried out in 1937-8 at 102 Tiddington Road and in 1939 at 84 (HER MWA 1072).

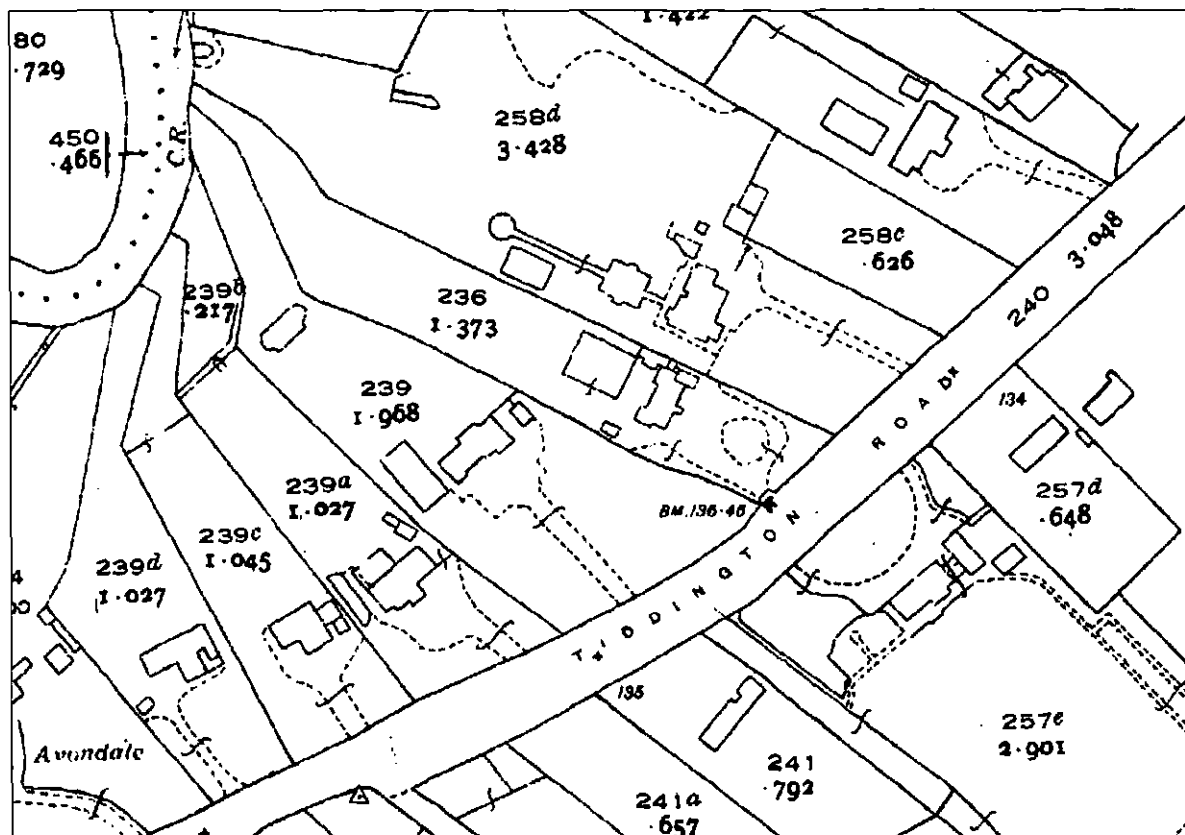


Fig 2: Detail from the 1940 edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map

3.9 In 1980-1 a large scale excavation was carried out in advance of the construction of new offices for the NFU Mutual and Avon Insurance on a 4ha site on the east side of the settlement. This revealed dense Roman occupation from the 1st century AD to the 4th century when a large defensive ditch was dug round part of the settlement. Many settlements were fortified at this time, a reflection of uncertain times at the end of the empire, but the extent of the defended area remains unknown. The houses were mostly of timber with thatched roofs, although one large stone house was also found. The plots also contained outbuildings, corn-drying ovens, wells and rubbish pits, and there were streets paved with gravel. Outside the settlement, areas of cemetery, rubbish pits and field system were located.

3.10 In 1982 another large area, within the settlement to the north of the Tiddington Road, was excavated in advance of the building of the Reading Court sheltered housing. Here also dense Roman occupation dating from the 1st century AD to the mid-3rd century was found. The earliest buildings were timber roundhouses surrounded by animal enclosures. In the 2nd century paved roads were laid out accompanied by more timber buildings, now rectangular, of a more Romanised form. Two pottery kilns, one late 1st-century, the other early 2nd-century were also found. After the early 3rd century no further buildings were constructed, but the roads continued in use and some late (4th-century) burials were deposited alongside them.

3.11 Since 1982 further, mainly small-scale excavations have been undertaken in the area, mostly as a result of local authority planning requirements during redevelopment. These include excavations on the south side of the Tiddington Road at Nos 80 (Jones & Palmer 1996; Palmer 1997) and 82 (Gethin 2000); the excavation of an electricity trench to Rayford Caravan Park in 2008 (Palmer forthcoming b) and excavations at 117 (Palmer & Palmer 1988), 119 (Palmer forthcoming a), 121 and 123 (Biddulph 2005) in advance of the construction of replacement dwellings. In 2009 the



foundations for an extension to the rear of 77 Tiddington Road revealed another single inhumation burial and much modern disturbance (Palmer 2009).

## 4. Aims and Methods

4.1 The evaluation was designed to discover the date, nature and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits which might be present within the area of the proposed development scheme.

4.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of historical map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. This was followed by the excavation of a series of six trial trenches in positions agreed with the Planning Archaeologist. The trenches were excavated using a 3 tonne mini-excavator with a 1.2m wide ditching bucket.

4.3 The artefact content of the topsoil was assessed by inspecting the spoil from the trenches and found to be negligible. A metal detector was used across the spoil heaps and inside the excavated trenches.

## 5. Evaluation Trenches

### Trench 1

5.1 Trench 1 was 4m long and aligned north to south between the existing swimming pool and the house. Geological natural was not established within the trench which was excavated to 2.05m below surface level. A mixed fill of dark grey sandy loam (101) which contained 19th- and 20th-century pottery, roof tile and flower pot was overlaid by a lens of sand over the northern end of the trench which aligned approximately with a garden feature shown on the 1940 Ordnance Survey (Figs 2 & 3). The trench was sealed by 0.28m of dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil (100).



Fig 3: Trench 1 viewed from the north during excavation



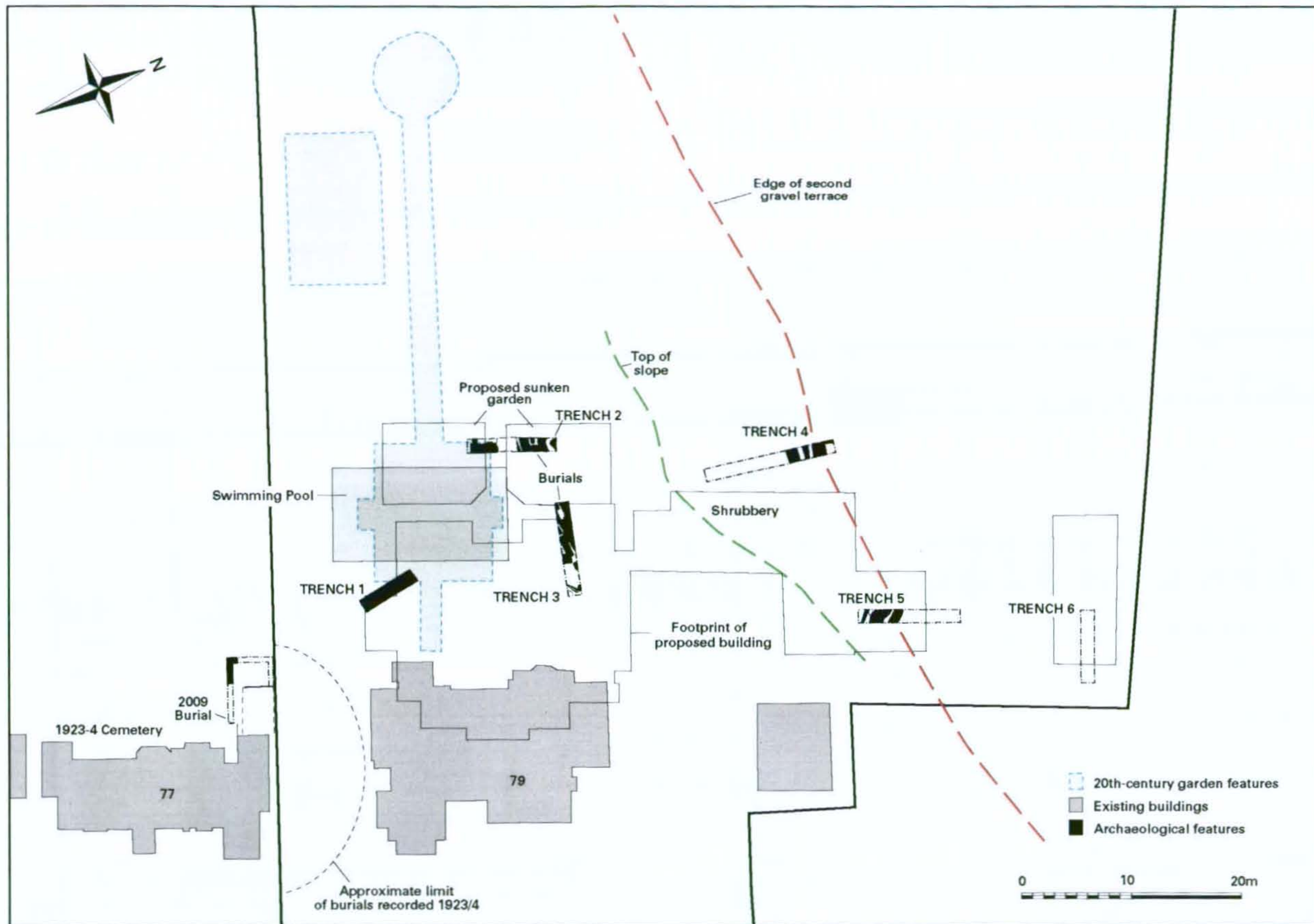


Fig 4: Trench locations



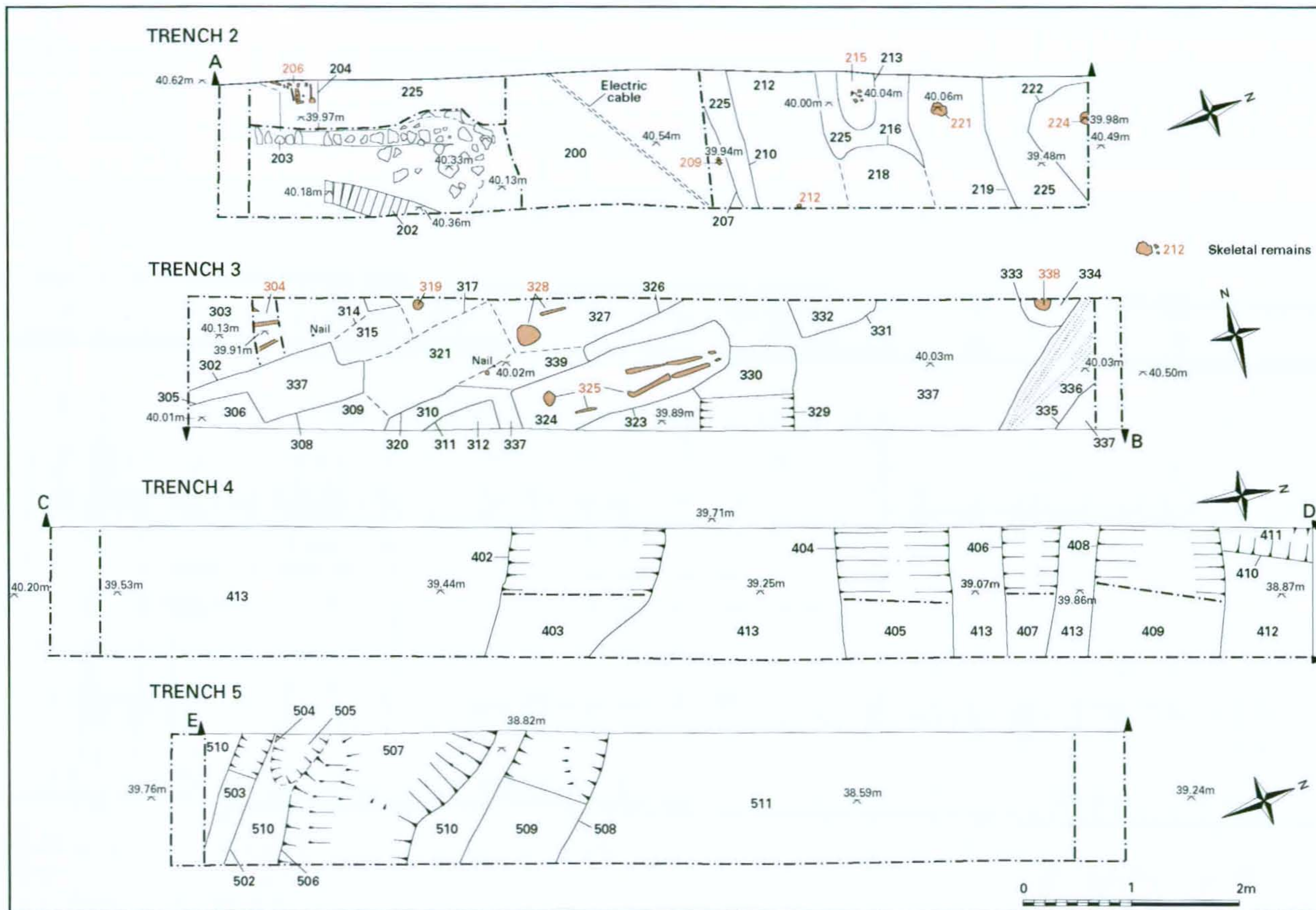


Fig 5: Detailed plans (Trenches 2-5)



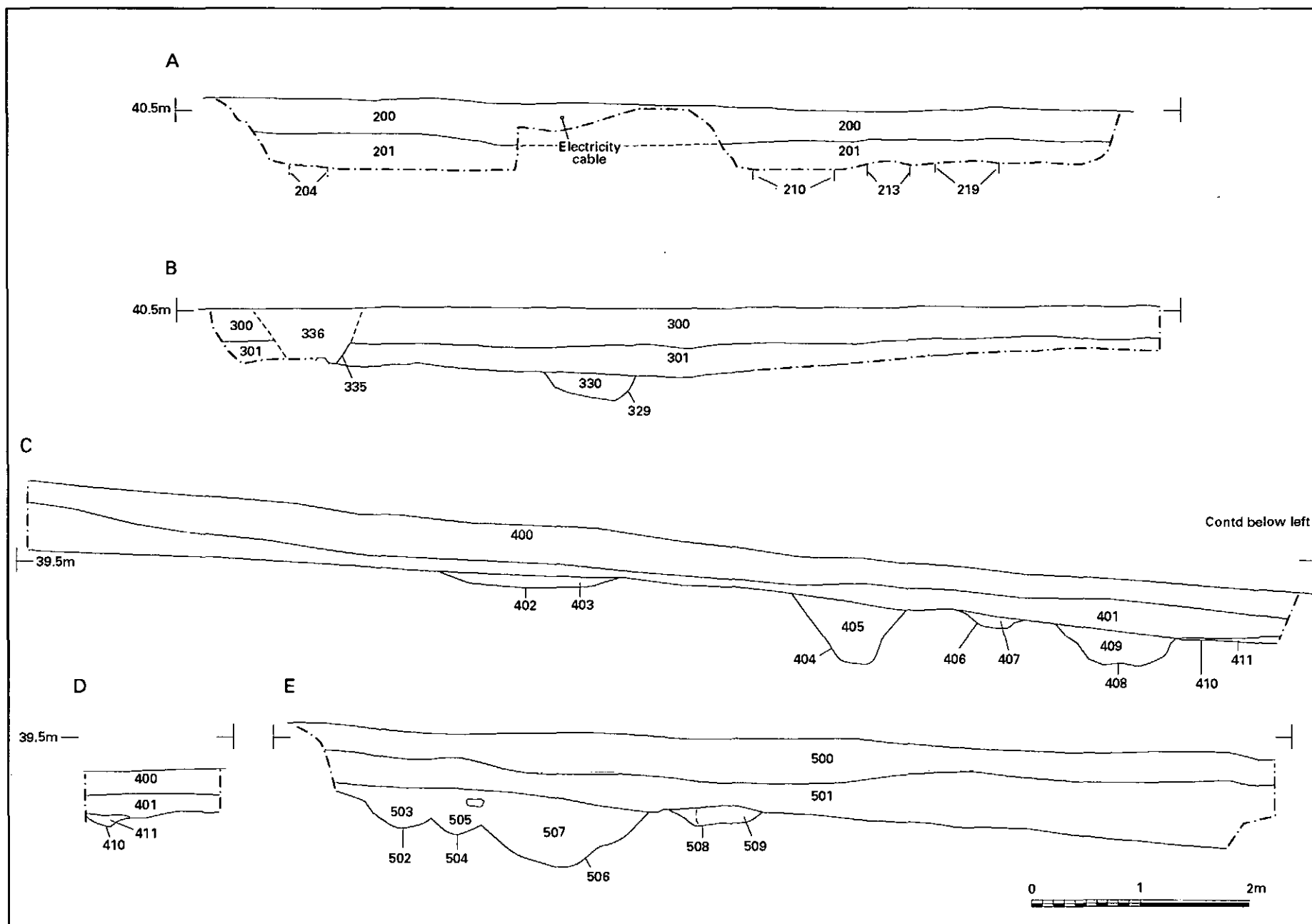


Fig 6: Detailed Sections (Trenches 2-5)





Fig 7: Trench 2 viewed from the north-east during excavation

## Trench 2

5.2 This trench (Section A) was 8m long aligned north-east to south-west, on the western side of the swimming pool. Approximately 1.8m of the trench could not be excavated due to the presence of an east to west aligned electricity cable. Geological natural gravel (225) was achieved at 0.5m below ground level. The natural was cut by a sequence of at least seven graves all aligned east to west. At the southern end of the trench grave 204 revealed a partial skeleton (206) truncated by later wall 203. On the northern side of the electricity cable a partially exposed grave 207 (with skeletal material 209) lay adjacent to grave 210 in which some skeletal material (212) was observed. To the north a probable infant grave 213 (with skeletal material 215) lay to the west of a possible grave (216) in which no bones were exposed. To the north grave 219 contained skull 221. At the northern end of the trench skull 224 lay in grave 222. Each of the graves was sealed by 0.20m of dark reddish-brown sandy loam plough soil (201).

5.3 Cutting 201, a stone wall 203 at the south-west end of the trench probably belonged to a garden feature depicted on the 1940 Ordnance Survey. A brick wall 202 had been dumped over 203 and sealed by topsoil layer 200.





Fig 8: Trench 3 viewed from the west during excavation

### Trench 3

5.4 Trench 3 (Section B) was 8.4m long, aligned north-west to south-east, on the north-east side of the swimming pool. Geological natural (337) was achieved at 0.40-0.50m below ground level. The natural was cut by a series of at least 11 graves on an east to west alignment. One feature which was not a grave appeared to be earlier than a grave that cut it. This was pit or gully butt end 329 which was aligned north to south, had sloping sides 0.90m wide, a sloping base 0.24m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (330). A small patch of reddish-brown sandy loam (339) located between graves 320 and 323 could not be assigned to a grave and may therefore be an earlier feature.

5.5 The most easterly grave 333 contained skull 338. To the west a possible grave was represented by 331 although no skeletal material was exposed. To the south-west grave 323 cut pit/gully 329 and contained skeleton 325. Immediately to the north grave 326 contained skeleton 328, and to the north-east grave 317 contained skull 319 and yielded a single sherd of Roman pottery (318). Grave 320 to the south was ill-defined, although it produced an iron nail (fill 321), as was possible infant grave 314 to the west. Grave 302 revealed skeletal long bones 304 some 0.30m below the top of the cut and an iron nail was recovered from the fill (303). To the south graves 305, 308 and 311 were only partially visible along the southern edge of the trench.





Fig 9: Trench 4 viewed from the north during excavation

5.6 All the graves were overlaid by a layer of up to 0.25m of reddish-brown sandy loam plough soil (301) which yielded Roman and medieval pottery, and which was in turn sealed by modern topsoil (300). The eastern end of the trench was cut by a series of modern pipes and cables within a cut 335.

#### Trench 4

5.7 This trench (Section C) was 11.2m long and aligned north to south on the northern garden slope alongside the shrubbery. Geological natural at the northern end of the trench was an outcrop red clay, Mercia Mudstone (412) achieved at 0.50m below surface level. The higher, southern end of the trench revealed the edge of the gravel terrace (413) at 0.60m below surface level. The earliest feature in the trench lay at the northern end and cut through the Mercia Mudstone (412). Gully 410 had a narrow U-shaped profile over 0.30m wide and 0.20m deep. It was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (411) which yielded a single sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery. This gully was cut by east to west ditch 408 which had irregular sloping sides 1.28m wide, an irregularly rounded base 0.39m deep and was filled with mixed reddish-brown sandy clay and dark reddish-brown sandy loam (409) producing eight fragments of animal bone.





Fig 10: Trench 5 viewed from the north-east during excavation

5.8 Immediately to the south gully **406** had shallow sloping sides 0.53m wide, a flattish base 0.13m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (**407**). To the south ditch **404** had a flared U profile 1.10m wide, a flattish narrow base 0.53m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (**405**) which yielded a sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery and animal bone. In the centre of the trench a large undated tree root hole **402** was revealed. All the features were sealed under 0.10-0.30m of dark reddish-brown sandy loam plough soil (**401**), and overlying topsoil (**400**).

### Trench 5

5.9 Trench 5 (Section D) was 8.6m long and aligned north to south on the northern slope in the vegetable garden. Geological natural at the lower northern end was red clay Mercia Mudstone (**511**) at 0.90m below surface level, and gravel (**510**) at the higher, southern end at 0.55m below surface level. The gravel was cut by a succession of north-west to south-east aligned linear features. The northernmost feature was gully **508** which had sloping sides 0.83m wide, a flat base 0.12m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (**509**) which yielded both animal and human bone along with Roman pottery. Immediately to the south ditch **506** had irregular sloping sides 1.1-1.45m wide, a rounded base 0.4-0.5m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (**507**). A fragment of Roman brick and two fragments of antler comb were recovered from this fill. On the south side of ditch **506**, gully **504** had a U-shaped profile 0.35m wide and 0.20m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (**505**). At the southern end of the trench gully **502** had a U shaped profile 0.28m wide and 0.13m deep and was filled with dark reddish-brown sandy loam (**503**).





Fig 11: Trench 6 viewed from the south-east during excavation

5.10 All the features were sealed by 0.20-0.6m of dark reddish-brown sandy loam plough soil (501) which yielded a single sherd of medieval pottery. It was overlain by topsoil (500).

### **Trench 6**

5.11 This trench was 6m long and aligned north-west to south-east in the orchard in the north-east corner of the vegetable garden. Geological natural was not achieved within the trench which was excavated to a depth of 1.57m below the present ground level. The lowest 0.25m was a fine, virtually stone-free, reddish-brown loamy sand (603). This was overlaid by 0.70m of brown sandy loam (602). Both these layers were probably derived from the gravel terrace to the south during erosive processes such as early ploughing. Both were sealed under 0.54m of greyish-brown sandy loam plough soil (601) which was sealed by 0.28m of topsoil (600).





Fig 12: Late Roman or Anglo-Saxon bone comb fragments (507)

## 6. Conclusions

6.1 Trenches 2 and 3 revealed a large group of human burials. Although none were fully excavated and are therefore not securely dated, their form, character, orientation, absence of grave goods other than hobnails and general condition suggest that they are Romano-British and form part of the cemetery excavated in 1923-24 under 77 Tiddington Road. In common with the majority of human burials encountered at Tiddington where the soils are slightly acid, they range from moderately well to poorly preserved.

6.2 The absence of any graves in the sloping Trenches 4 and 5 suggests that the cemetery was restricted to the flat part of the Second Avon river terrace, although it remains possible that the linear features aligned across the slope represent the cemetery boundary. Alternatively the features could mark the edge of settlement or other activity. Their alignment along the edge of the Mercia Mudstone would tend to support this.

6.3 The Anglo-Saxon features at the northern end of Trench 4 and possibly in Trench 5 seem likely to reflect settlement or activity of this date in the vicinity. Other isolated foci of Anglo-Saxon activity have been found at 117-121 Tiddington Road and on the track toward Rayford Caravan Park (Palmer forthcoming a and b).

6.4 Trench 1 was positioned over an area of deep disturbance. Given that the sand lens at the northern end coincided with the former garden feature (Ordnance Survey 1940) it is reasonable to assume both that the disturbance pre-dated the construction of the feature and that the feature represented a gravel quarry, perhaps associated with the construction of the house.



6.5 Trench 6 seems to have encountered a thick layer of colluvial hillwash. Although not datable it seems likely to have been a post-glacial (Holocene) deposit, perhaps the result of ploughing and rainfall on the gravel terrace above. A similar deposit was observed to the north-east in a trench excavated down the slope to Rayford Caravan Park (Palmer forthcoming b).

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A: List of Finds

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Comments</i>
3	301	Pottery	1	Medieval
3	301	Pottery	1	Romano-British
3	303	Iron	1	Nail
3	318	Pottery	1	Romano-British
3	321	Iron	1	Nail
4	405	Animal bone	5	
4	405	Pottery	1	Anglo-Saxon
4	409	Animal bone	8	
4	411	Pottery	1	Anglo-Saxon
5	501	Pottery	1	Medieval
5	507	Animal bone	51	2 x bone comb fragments (Late Roman or Anglo-Saxon)
5	507	Brick	1	Romano-British
5	509	Animal bone	38	
5	509	Human bone	1	Tibia
5	509	Pottery	1	Romano-British



## Appendix B: List of Contexts

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	100	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	Modern Post-1940
	101	Pit fill	
2	200	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	Modern Medieval/post-medieval
	201	Plough soil	
	202	Brick wall	20th-century
	203	Stone Wall	20th-century
	204	Grave	Roman
	205	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	206	Human pelvis and spine	Roman
	207	Grave	Roman
	208	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	209	Human skeletal fragments	Roman
	210	Grave	Roman
	211	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	212	Human skeletal fragments	Roman
	213	Infant grave	Roman
	214	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	215	Infant skeletal fragments	Roman
	216	Probable grave	Roman
	217	Reddish-brown sandy loam fill	Roman
	218	No bones visible	
	219	Grave	Roman
	220	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	221	Human skull	Roman
	222	Grave	Roman
	223	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	224	Human skull	Roman
	225	Natural gravel	
3	300	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	Modern Medieval/post-medieval
	301	Plough soil	
	302	Grave	Roman
	303	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	304	Human long bones	Roman
	305	Probable grave	Roman
	306	Reddish-brown sandy loam fill	Roman
	307	No bones visible	
	308	Probable grave	Roman
	309	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	310	No bones visible	
	311	Grave	Roman
	312	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	313	Human bone fragments and coffin nail	Roman
	314	Possible infant grave	Roman
	315	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	316	No bones visible	
	317	Grave	Roman
	318	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	319	Human skull	Roman
	320	Probable grave	Roman
	321	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman



<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>
3 cont	322	No bones visible	
	323	Grave	Roman
	324	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	325	Human skull and long bones	Roman
	326	Grave	Roman
	327	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	328	Human skull and long bone	Roman
	329	Pit/gully	Undated
	330	Fill of 329	
	331	Possible grave	Roman
	332	Reddish-brown sandy loam fill	Roman
	333	Grave	Roman
	334	Reddish-brown sandy loam grave fill	Roman
	335	Pipe trench	20th-century
	336	Fill of 335	20th-century
	337	Geological natural	
	338	Human skull in 333	Roman
	339	Fill between graves	Undated
4	400	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	Modern
	401	Plough soil	Medieval/post-medieval
	402	Tree throw hole	Undated
	403	Fill of 402	Undated
	404	Ditch cut	
	405	Fill of 404	Anglo-Saxon
	406	Gully cut	
	407	Fill of 406	
	408	Ditch cut	
	409	Fill of 408	
	410	Gully cut	
	411	Fill of 410	Anglo-Saxon
	412	Geological natural Mercia Mudstone	
	413	Geological natural river gravel	
5	500	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	Modern
	501	Plough soil	Medieval
	502	Gully cut	
	503	Fill of 502	
	504	Gully cut	
	505	Fill of 504	
	506	Ditch cut	
	507	Fill of 506	RB/AS
	508	Gully cut	Roman
	509	Fill of 508	Roman
6	600	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	Modern
	601	Plough soil	Medieval
	602	Colluvium	
	603	Colluvium	



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**Archaeology Projects Group, Warwickshire Museum Field Services**

The Butts, Warwick, CV34 4SS Tel: 01926 412280/412278 Fax: 01926 412974

e-mail: [fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk)

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