

OVERSLEY CASTLE, WARWICKSHIRE

Phase 2: Archaeological Evaluation



understanding heritage matters

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 14100

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*Working for
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SUMMARY

A programme of archaeological evaluation undertaken prior to redevelopment at Oversley Castle focussed on those areas where ground disturbance could potentially disturb archaeological remains. A series of 12 trenches was machine excavated under archaeological supervision with only a single significant feature identified. This was a small undated pit of uncertain function. A soil sample from this pit was processed and found to contain a very small amount of charcoal so no further analysis was warranted.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission has been obtained from Stratford-upon-Avon District Council for the redevelopment of Oversley Castle, including conversion and extension of the main house and its associated outbuildings into 14 independent dwellings with associated garaging and new access. Archaeology Warwickshire has been commissioned to undertake a programme of archaeological work alongside the redevelopment in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation approved in 26th September 2014.

1.2 The Castle was the subject of a (Phase 1) Heritage Asset Assessment (Palmer et al 2013) which detailed the potential impact of the development alongside an appraisal of its inherent merits. The topographic survey drawing and Master plan are included below for reference (Figs 1 & 2).

1.3 This report presents the results of the (Phase 2) evaluation carried out in October 2014.

2 SITE LOCATION

2.1 Oversley Castle is centered on NGR SP 0945 5536 in the south of the Parish of Alcester. It lies adjacent to the modern border with both Exhall and Wixford in a manner which suggests that the hilltop may once have been used as the point of reference for the boundary between the three parishes (Fig 1).

2.2 As a hilltop location, drainage is naturally circumferential and most obvious today some 450m to the north in the form of an unnamed stream canalised in the field edges and 680m to the south in the Hay Brook; both drawing to the River Arrow which flows north to south some 1km to the west.

2.3 The underlying geology of the area is a remnant fluvioglacial sand and gravel deposit capping a peak of Mercia Mudstone (British Geological Survey 1974)

3 AIMS AND METHODS

3.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if there were any significant archaeological remains in the area of development, to form an understanding of their value and their potential to shed light on the subsequent development of the area.

3.2 Secondary aims included placing the results in their wider local and regional contexts as appropriate.

3.3 The objective was to locate, record and analyse archaeological materials and deposits and to disseminate the results in an appropriate format.

3.4 A total of 12 trenches were opened up by a 360° excavator. Topsoil and other plough soils were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist until either the top of archaeological remains or geological natural was reached.

4 RESULTS

Trench 1

4.1 Trench 1 was 10m long by 1.6m wide and aligned NE/SW on the north side of the Tudor Barn. Geological natural reddish brown clay (108) was reached at a depth of 0.35m below the modern ground surface. It was overlaid by 0.20m of gravel and cobbles in a light brown sandy clay matrix (101) which may also have been natural. Two modern service trenches cut this layer (102 and 104). Cut 102 was filled with dark brown silty loam (103) and contained a water pipe (107). A plastic pipe (106) surrounded by very dark grey silty loam (105) filled cut 104. Grey silty clay loam topsoil covered the trench (100). Nothing of archaeological significance was found in this trench.

Trench 2

4.2 Trench 2 was 10m long by 1.6m wide and aligned north/south to the west of the stables. Geological natural reddish brown clay (203) was reached at a depth of c.0.3m below the current ground surface. It was overlaid by 0.15m of soft reddish brown clay with large pebbles and limestone fragments and the occasional brick (202) which is likely to have been disturbed construction level for the overlying 0.15m of concrete yard surface (100).

Trench 3

4.3 Trench 3 was 10m long by 1.6m wide and aligned NE/SW within the raised lawn to the south of the main house. Geological natural reddish yellow sand and gravel (302) was reached at a depth of 0.55m below the current ground surface, although the trench was subsequently excavated deeper to ensure this deposit was indeed natural. It was overlaid by 0.30m of brown sandy loam (301), itself overlain by 0.25m of dark brown sandy loam topsoil with turf (100). No archaeological finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 4

4.4 Trench 4 was located within the courtyard and was 10m long by 1.6m wide aligned ENE/WSW. Geological natural mixed reddish brown and grey clay (403) was reached at a depth of between 0.50m and 0.70m below the modern ground surface. It was cut by a large, irregular shaped, modern pit (402). The pit was filled with a mixture of reddish brown and grey sand and gravel which may have been modern cement gravel (404). The pit was not excavated as it contained diesel. The natural and the pit were overlaid by 0.50m of yellowish brown sand and gravel (401) which must have been deposited in preparation for the modern concrete yard surface (400).

Trench 5

4.5 Trench 5 was 6.5m long and up to 4m wide, located to the west of the swimming pool. A live electricity cable nearby meant that the trench became roughly 'L' shaped. Geological natural reddish brown clay (505) was reached at a depth of 1.04m below the current ground surface. It was overlain by 0.20-0.40m of very dark greyish brown clay loam (502) that seems likely to have been a buried topsoil. A modern linear feature (503) cut the buried topsoil at the east end of the trench and was filled with dark greyish brown clay loam mixed with red clay (504). A 0.50-0.70m deep layer of mixed reddish brown sand and gravel (501) containing some re-deposits of red clay overlay the deposits below. A recent topsoil of very dark greyish brown clay loam (500) had formed to a depth of 0.12m across the area.

Trench 6

4.6 Trench 6 was 10m long by 1.6m wide aligned NE/SW within the gardens to the west of the property. The geological natural reddish brown clay and gravel (602) was reached at a depth of 0.5m below the current ground surface. Cutting the natural was a sub-rounded pit (603). It had a steep 'U' shaped profile, was 0.33m deep and filled with greyish brown clay

loam fill (604). The pit was sealed under a layer of reddish brown clay loam (601) overlain by very dark greyish brown sandy clay loam topsoil (600).

Trench 7

4.7 Trench 7 was 5m by 1.6m and aligned north-south to the north-west of the main house. Geological natural of mid-reddish brown sand and gravel (702) was reached at a depth of 0.65m below the current ground level. It was overlain by a 0.38m deep layer of reddish brown sandy loam cultivation soil and 0.27m of mid brown sandy loam topsoil (700). No archaeological finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 8

4.8 Trench 8 was located north of Trench 7 and was 5m long by 1.6m wide. Geological natural mid-reddish brown sand and gravel (802) was reached at a depth of 0.57m. It was overlain by 0.33m of reddish brown sandy loam (801) cultivation soil and 0.24m of mid brown sandy loam topsoil (800). Nothing of archaeological significance was found in this trench.

Trench 9

4.9 Trench 9 was 10m long by 1.6m wide, aligned north-south to the north of the tower of the main house. Geological natural reddish brown sand and gravel (901) was overlain by 0.2m-0.45m of brown sandy loam topsoil (900). A quantity of window glass was noted in the topsoil at the north end of the trench.

Trench 10

4.10 Trench 10 was 4.5m long by 1.6m wide and aligned north-south in the terraced garden area to the north-east of the main house. Geological natural mid-brown sand and gravel (1004) was reached at 1.2m below the modern surface. It was overlain by a 0.2m deep layer of reddish brown sandy loam (1005) which was sealed by 0.20m of dark brown silty loam topsoil (1003). Overlying the buried topsoil was 0.57m of mid brown sandy loam containing modern detritus, CDs and bits of plastic (1002). A thin layer of dark brown sandy loam (1001) was then sealed by modern gravel on a plastic membrane (1000).

Trench 11

4.11 Trench 11 was 10m x 1.6m long and located to the north-west of the site, aligned NE/SW. The trench was rotated to avoid two young yew trees. Geological natural reddish brown sand and gravel was reached at a depth of c.0.65m below the current ground level

(1104). It was overlain by 0.3m of brown sandy loam with frequent small pebbles (1101). Topsoil overlay layer 1101. It was a dark greyish brown loam, 0.35m deep and no finds were recovered from it (1100). A modern pit cut through the topsoil. The pit was at least 1.6m wide and 0.8m deep, extending beyond the trench (1102). It was filled with hundreds of champagne bottles in a dark greyish brown loam (1103).

Trench 12

4.12 Trench 12 was 10m x 1.6m and aligned NE/SW. It was located to the south of the glass house on the eastern edge of the site. Geological natural of reddish brown sand and gravel (1202) was reached at a depth of 0.7m below the present ground level. It was overlain by mid-reddish brown sandy loam with 50% gravel (1201). This layer was c.0.33m deep and overlain by topsoil. The very dark greyish brown clayey sandy loam topsoil (1200) was 0.37m deep and contained some fragments of animal bone (not collected).

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The programme of trial trenching has established that the new building footprint for the permitted redevelopment is highly unlikely to impact on anything of archaeological significance. One feature of undetermined date was noted in Trench 6 where the trial trench covered a large proportion of the proposed new build.

5.2 The scheme of conversion in the standing buildings with all the associated service trenching and drainage will be accompanied by an Archaeological Watching Brief which will be the subject of a separate report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

British Geological Survey 1974 *1:50,000 Series, England and Wales, Sheet 200 Stratford-upon-Avon, Solid and Drift Geology.*

Palmer, S C, Soden, I, and Greig I, 2013 *Oversley Castle, Alcester, Warwickshire: Heritage Asset Assessment*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1311.

APPENDICES

A List of contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comment</i>
100	Topsoil	Grey silty loam
101	Layer	Light brown sandy loam
102	Cut	Linear cut for water pipe
103	Fill	Dark brown silty loam, fill of 102
104	Cut	Linear cut for plastic ducting
105	Fill	Very dark grey silty loam, fill of 104
106	Pipe	black plastic pipe within 104
107	Pipe	black plastic pipe within
108	Natural	Reddish brown clay
200	Concrete	Yard surface
201	Wall	Brick wall aligned ?/?
202	Layer	Reddish brown clay
203	Natural	Reddish brown clay
300	Topsoil	Brown sandy loam
301	Layer	Brown sandy loam
302	Natural	Mid orange ? sand and gravel
400	Concrete	Yard surface
401	Layer	Yellowish brown sand and gravel
402	Cut	Irregular pit cut, modern
403	Natural	Reddish brown clay mixed with grey clay
404	Fill	Mixed reddish brown and grey sand and gravel, fill of 402
500	Topsoil	Very dark greyish brown clay loam
501	Layer	Reddish brown sand and gravel, re-deposited natural
502	Layer	Very dark greyish brown clay loam, buried topsoil
503	Cut	Linear feature, former service trench or drain
504	Fill	Dark greyish brown clay loam mixed with red clay, fill of 503

505	Natural	Reddish brown clay
600	Topsoil	Greyish brown sandy clay loam
601	Layer	Reddish brown clay loam
602	Natural	Reddish brown clay
603	Cut	Sub-circular pit
604	Fill	Greyish brown clay loam, fill of 603
700	Topsoil	Brown loam
701	Layer	Reddish brown sandy loam
702	Natural	Reddish brown sand and gravel
800	Topsoil	Brown loam
801	Layer	Reddish brown sandy loam
802	Natural	Reddish brown sand and gravel
900	Topsoil	Brown sandy loam
901	Natural	Reddish brown sand and gravel
1000	Layer	Grey modern gravel, sitting on a plastic membrane
1001	Layer	Dark brown loam
1002	Layer	Brown sandy loam
1003	Layer	Black sandy loam, modern
1004	Natural	Brown sand and gravel
1005	Layer	Reddish brown sandy loam
1100	Topsoil	Dark greyish brown sandy loam
1101	Layer	Brown sandy loam
1102	Pit cut	Sub-rounded, not fully exposed in trench
1103	Fill of pit	Dark greyish brown sandy loam with hundreds of bottles
1104	Natural	Reddish brown sand and gravel
1200	Layer	Very dark greyish brown clayey sandy loam
1201	Layer	Reddish brown sandy loam
1202	Natural	Reddish brown sand and gravel

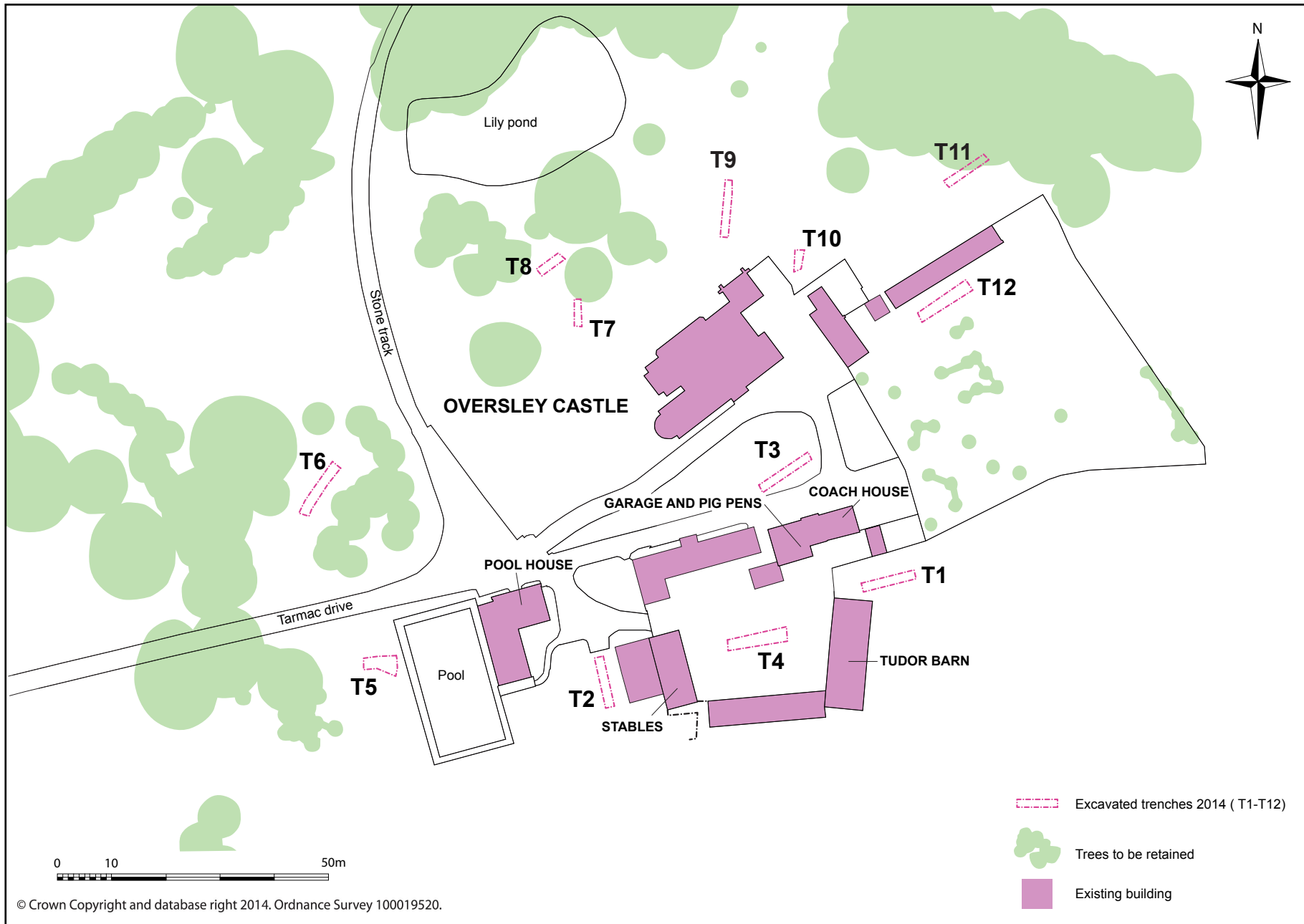


Fig 1: Location of excavated evaluation trenches

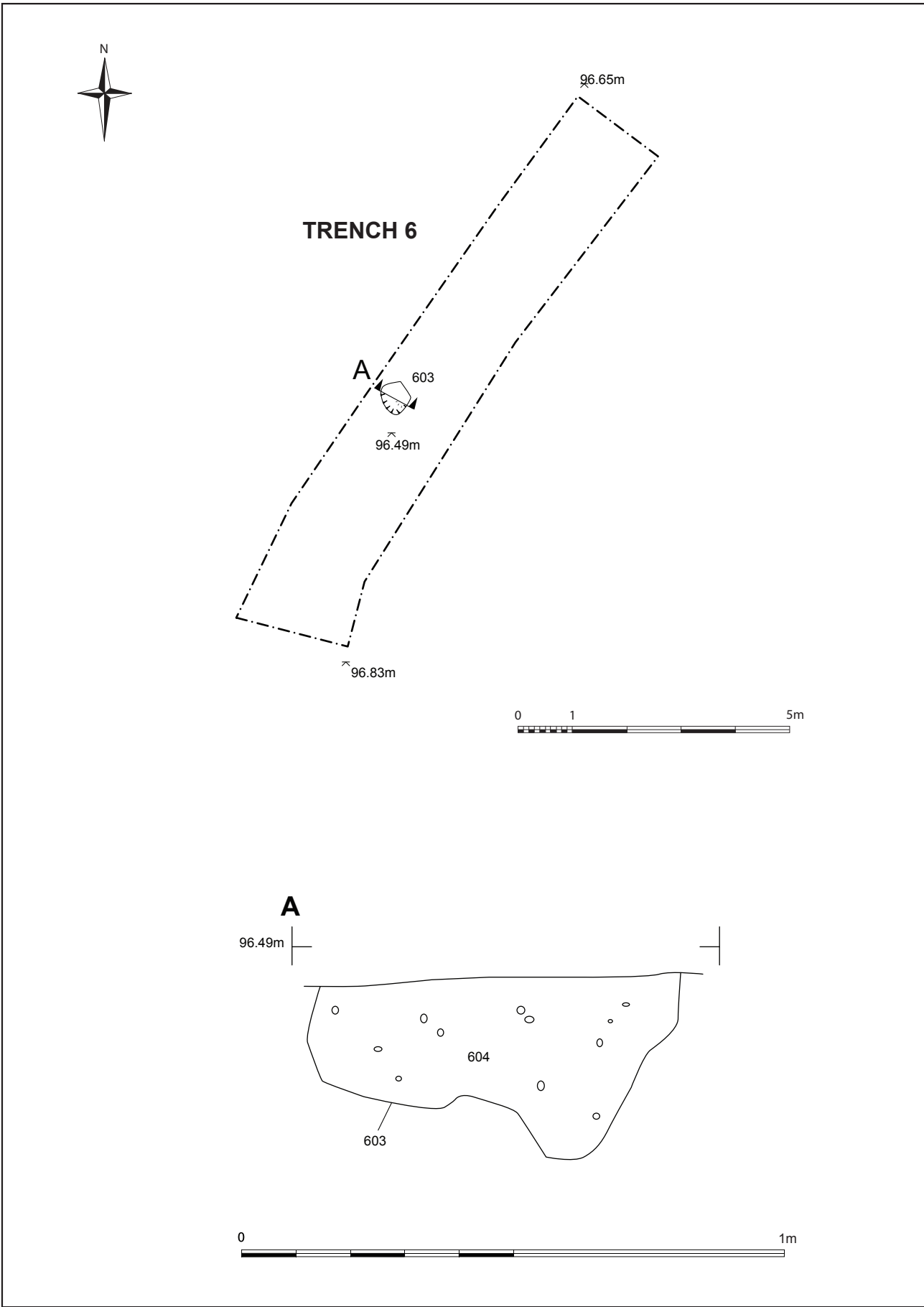


Fig 2: Trench 6 and section A



Fig 3. Trench 1



Fig 4. Trench 2



Fig 5. Trench 4



Fig 6. Feature 402



Fig 7. Trench 5



Fig 8. Trench 6



Fig 9. Pit 603



Fig 10. Trench 7



Fig 11. Trench 8



Fig 12 Trench 10



Fig 13: Trench 11



Fig 14. Trench 12