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DESK BASED ASSESSMENTS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION  
GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY  
TOPOGRAPHICAL AND LANDSCAPE SURVEY  
HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING  
EIA AND HERITAGE CONSULTANCY



**CENTRE ESTATES LTD**

**LAND AT SWITHLAND AVENUE, PHASE 2, LEICESTER, LEICESTERSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT**

**JULY 2015**

**DATE ISSUED:** June 2015  
**JOB NUMBER:** CP11365/15  
**SITE CODE:** SWL-B  
**OASIS REFERENCE:** Wardella2-217816  
**GRID REFERENCE:** Centred on SK5850 0620  
**REPORT NUMBER:** RPT-001

Centre Estates Ltd

Swithland Avenue, Phase 2, Leicester, Leicestershire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

June 2015

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## SUMMARY

Wardell Armstrong Archaeology was commissioned by Centre Estates Ltd, to undertake the second phase of archaeological evaluation of land at Swithland Avenue, Leicester, Leicestershire (centred on SK 5850 0620). This work was required as a condition of the planning consent for the proposed residential development at the site.

The work is a continuation of a scheme of trenching started in February 2015, in response to an archaeological desk-based assessment identifying the potential for archaeological remains to survive within the site boundary. The two trenches excavated as part of the first phase of works produced the undated remains of a possible hedge, with no archaeological features identified.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken in a single phase, over two days from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2015, and comprised a single trench, 31.66m in length, excavated on the site. No archaeological remains were observed.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Wardell Armstrong Archaeology (WAA) thanks Centre Estates Ltd, for commissioning the project and for all assistance throughout the work. Thanks also to Chris Wardle, City Archaeologist at Leicester City Council, for all his assistance throughout the project.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Damion Churchill. The report was written by Damion Churchill and the drawings were produced by Adrian Bailey.

The report was edited by Richard Newman, Post Excavation Manager for WAA. The project was managed by Nick Daffern, Senior Project Manager for WAA.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Circumstances of the Project**

1.1.1 In February 2015, Wardell Armstrong Archaeology was invited by Centre Estates Ltd to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at Swithland Avenue, Leicester (Centred on NGR SK 5850 0620; Figure 1) prior to submission of a planning application for a proposed residential development. This was because of the sites proximity to medieval sites associated with Leicester Abbey.

1.1.2 In consultation with Chris Wardle, Archaeologist at the Leicester City Council, a programme of archaeological mitigation was decided. This is in line with government advice as set out in Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012).

1.1.3 This report outlines the archaeological evaluation undertaken on-site, the subsequent programme of post-fieldwork analysis, and the results of this scheme of archaeological works.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Written Scheme of Investigation

2.1.1 Wardell Armstrong Archaeology were commissioned by Centre Estates Ltd, to prepare a Written Scheme of Investigation (WAA, 2015b) for a second programme of archaeological work at Swithland Avenue, Leicester, Leicestershire. This second phase of work follows the initial phase conducted in February 2015 (WAA, 2015a). Following acceptance of the project design by Chris Wardle, Archaeologist at Leicester City Council, WAA was commissioned by the client to undertake the work.

2.1.2 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken following the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (2014a), and in accordance with the WAA Excavation Manual (2012).

2.1.3 The fieldwork programme was followed by an assessment of the data as set out in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (CIfA 2014a) and the *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

### 2.2 The Archaeological Evaluation

2.2.1 The archaeological evaluation consisted of a single trench, measuring 31.88m in length, which covered 51m<sup>2</sup> of land in total. The purpose of the archaeological evaluation was to identify whether archaeological remains were present and, if remains were identified, to quantify their nature and extent.

2.2.2 In summary, the main objectives of the field evaluation were:

- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these where they were observed;
- to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover palaeoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.
- To establish the likely impact on archaeological deposits of the proposed development

2.2.3 The modern overburden and soils were removed by mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. The trench was subsequently cleaned by hand and

all features were investigated and recorded according to the Wardell Armstrong Archaeology standard procedure as set out in the Excavation Manual (WAA, 2012).

2.2.4 No finds were encountered during the course of this project.

### 2.3 The Archive

2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the specification, and in line with current UKIC guidelines (1990) and according to the Archaeological Archives Forum recommendations (Brown 2011). The archive, along with copies of the report, will be deposited within Leicester Museum, Leicester, Leicestershire, where they will be made available upon request. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifier WAA15 SWL-B/15 CP 11365.

2.3.2 Wardell Armstrong Archaeology and Cheshire County Council, support the **Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS)** project. This project aims to provide an on-line index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature, created as a result of developer-funded archaeological work. As a result, details of the results of this project will be made available by Wardell Armstrong Archaeology, as a part of this national project.



### 3 BACKGROUND

#### 3.1 Location and Geological Context

3.1.1 The site is located approximately 1km north west of Leicester city centre, 200m to the west of River Soar. It is enclosed on the north, east and west sides by Swithland Avenue and to the south by Abbey Park Road (Figure 1).

3.1.2 The proposed development area is situated within a residential area and approximately 0.49 hectares in size. Until recently the site was occupied by disused residential garages and overgrown with vegetation (Figure 2).

3.1.3 The geology of the site comprises mudstone, known as Branscombe Mudstone Formation. This sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 200 to 217 million years ago in the Triassic Period. This is overlain by sands and gravels formed two million years ago in the quaternary period.(BGS, 2015)

#### 3.2 Historic and Archaeological Background

3.2.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken by North Pennines Archaeology (2008), a summary of which is included below. This historical background is compiled mostly from secondary sources and from records consulted during the assessment. It is intended only as a summary of historical developments around the study area.

3.2.2 **Prehistoric:** A variety of prehistoric stone implements have been located within a kilometre of the site, including Paleolithic and Mesolithic tools, along with Neolithic hand axes. Extensive Iron Age activity has been identified in excavations along the River Soar. Despite this, there is no known evidence for prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the proposed development area.

3.2.3 **Roman:** The Roman occupation of Leicester is known to have begun in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, and had become a large civilian settlement by the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. As the civitas, or tribal capital, of the Corieltauvi, the Roman settlement would have been one of the largest in the region with civic buildings such as baths and forum established by the mid second century AD.

3.2.4 Towards the end of the second century, the town had adopted defences walls and ditches which were strengthened in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The site is located outside of the Roman town walls, and although there is evidence of Romano – British activity within 0.5km of the site, notably Romano-British burials, along with coins and

brooches within the nearby medieval Abbey grounds, none exists which would suggest activity within the proposed development area.

3.2.5 **Medieval:** the near proximity of the proposed development area to known medieval sites associated with the remains of Leicester Abbey, was identified in the desk-based assessment (2008). Because of this, it was determined that there was the potential for archaeological remains to survive within the site boundary.

3.2.6 Evidence of early medieval remains near the vicinity of the site include stone work in the nave of St. Nicholas church, approximately dating to 1000 AD, a Norman-Saxon carving found during excavation at Leicester Abbey, and a purported watermill roughly 110m east of the site entrance used from the early to post medieval periods.

3.2.7 Founded in 1143, Leicester Abbey was perhaps one of the wealthiest Augustinian houses in England. Despite this, little was recorded about the church itself. It had survived until its dissolution in 1538 whereupon it as demolished in 1539.

3.2.8 No evidence of medieval activity exists within the proposed development area.

3.2.9 **Post-medieval and Modern:** following the demolition of the Abbey in 1539, the land was passed through a succession of tenants and owners, until between 1590 and 1613 the mansion Cavandish House was constructed. This was occupied until its destruction during the English civil war in 1645 after the recapturing of Leicester by royalist forces. The land occupied by Cavandish House was sold in 1733, and utilised as agricultural land.

3.2.10 Despite the proximity of Leicester Abbey and subsequent Cavandish House, the proposed development area remained undeveloped until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was part of an area of land known as abbey gardens on Spencer's map of 1857 (Simmons 1983). Residential garages were constructed at the site during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of the urbanisation of the local area.

### 3.3 Previous Archaeological Work

3.3.1 Two 40 metre trenches were excavated in the first phase of this project (WAA, 2015a). Archaeology was not encountered in either trench, with the first trench containing a modern linear feature, and the second trench containing the remains of a possible undated hedgerow.

## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken in a single phase on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2015. The trench was excavated towards the centre of the proposed development site (Figure 2), targeting the area of archaeological potential. Overlying deposits were removed to reveal the natural substrate by a mechanical excavator with toothless grading bucket. Potential features observed were cleaned and investigated.

### 4.2 Results

4.2.1 **Trench 1:** The trench was located towards the centre of the proposed development area, and measured 31.88m long by 1.60m wide. Aligned broadly north north - east – south south - west, the trench measured up to 1.18m deep.

4.2.2 Up to 0.30m of modern brick and concrete rubble levelling deposit **(103)** was removed to reveal a buried topsoil deposit **(102)** and soft mid greyish brown subsoil **(101)** overlying natural geology predominantly comprised of compact orange and reddish brown sands and gravels **(100)**.

4.2.3 The natural geology **(100)** was overlain by a further sub-soil deposit **(110)** towards the southern end of the trench. A single feature, likely to be the remnant of a root bole **[104]** was observed to disturb this soil, located towards the southern end of Trench 1 (Figure 3). The edges of the root bole were poorly defined, and irregular, with the feature measuring up to 2.13m wide and 0.70m deep.

4.2.4 Spanning the width of the trench on a broad east – west orientation, the root bole was filled with alternating layers of soft greyish brown sandy silt, with frequent limestone inclusions, and soft orange-yellow sand and silt (Plate 1). The final deposit in the sequence **(109)** was comprised of the orange-yellow sand. No finds were recovered from the fills of root bole **[104]**

4.2.5 No archaeological remains were identified in Trench 1.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

5.1.1 During the archaeological evaluation at the land at Swithland Avenue, Leicester, a single trench totalling 51m<sup>2</sup> of excavation across the proposed development area was investigated. This was with the aim of identifying whether archaeological remains are present.

5.1.2 The trench was devoid of archaeological features. The sole feature of the site was a probable plant root bole located in the southern half of Trench 1. This is therefore not considered to be of archaeological significance.

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<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyOfBritain/viewer.html>

## APPENDIX 1: TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

### Trench 1

Length: 31.88m      Width: 1.6m      Orientation: NNE-SSW  
 Maximum Depth: 1.18m      Minimum Depth: 0.50m

Context Number	Context Type	Description	Maximum Thickness/Depth
100	Natural Substrate	Loose orange/reddish brown sand and gravel	N/A
101	Subsoil	Soft greyish brown sandy silt	0.50m
102	Topsoil	Stiff dark brown sandy silt	0.28m
103	Modern Overburden	Compacted red brick and concrete rubble	0.30m
104	Feature	Plant root bole	0.70m
105	Deposit	Stiff yellow brown mixed gravel and sand, fill of [104]	0.22
106	Deposit	Soft greyish brown sandy silt, fill of [104]	0.19
107	Deposit	Soft yellow/orange sand and silt, fill of [104]	0.07
108	Deposit	Soft greyish brown sandy silt, fill of [104]	0.37
109	Deposit	Soft yellow/orange sand and silt, fill of [104]	0.14
110	Subsoil	Soft greyish brown sandy silt	0.21m

## APPENDIX 2: PLATES

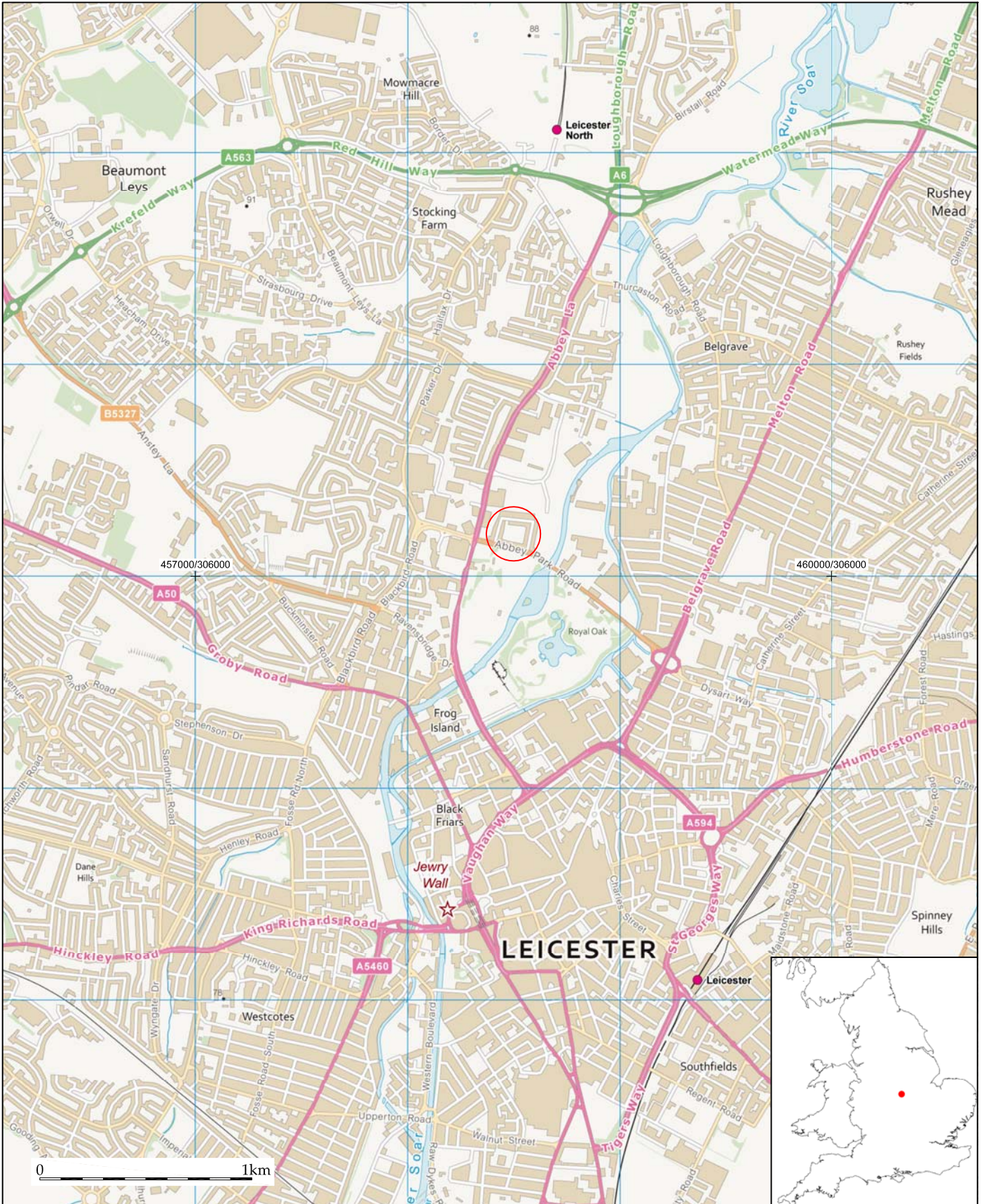


*Plate 1: A section through the probable plant bole in Trench 1, looking east, 1 x 1m scale*

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### **APPENDIX 3: FIGURES**








 <p>Wardell Armstrong Archaeology 2015</p>	<p>PROJECT: Land at Swithland Avenue, Phase 2, Leicester</p> <p>SCALE: 1:25,000 at A4</p> <p>REPORT No: CP11365</p> <p>CLIENT: Centre Estates</p> <p>DRAWN BY: AB</p> <p>DATE: May 2015</p> <p>FIGURE: 1</p>	<p>KEY:</p> <p> Site location</p>	 <p>Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 100019512</p>
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Figure 1: Site location.



Wardell Armstrong  
Archaeology  
2015

PROJECT:

Land at Swithland Avenue,  
Phase 2, Leicester

CLIENT:

Centre Estates

SCALE: 1:1250 at A4

DRAWN BY: AB

DATE: June 2015

KEY:

- Site boundary
- Evaluation trench
- Proposed building



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REPORT No:

CP11365

FIGURE:

2

Figure 2: Trench location plan.

PROJECT:

Land at Swithland Avenue,  
Phase 2, Leicester

CLIENT:




Centre Estates

SCALE: Plan 1:75/Section 1:40 at A3

DRAWN BY: AB

DATE: June 2015

KEY:

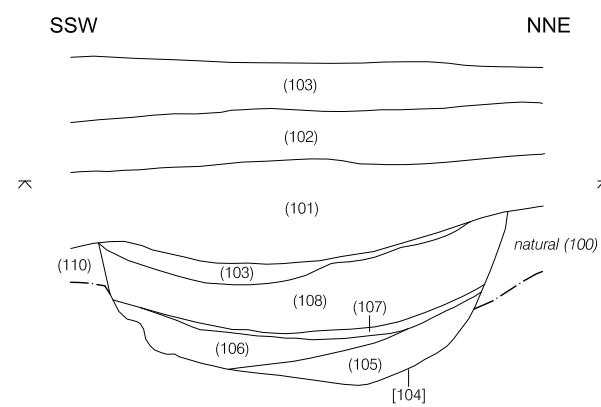
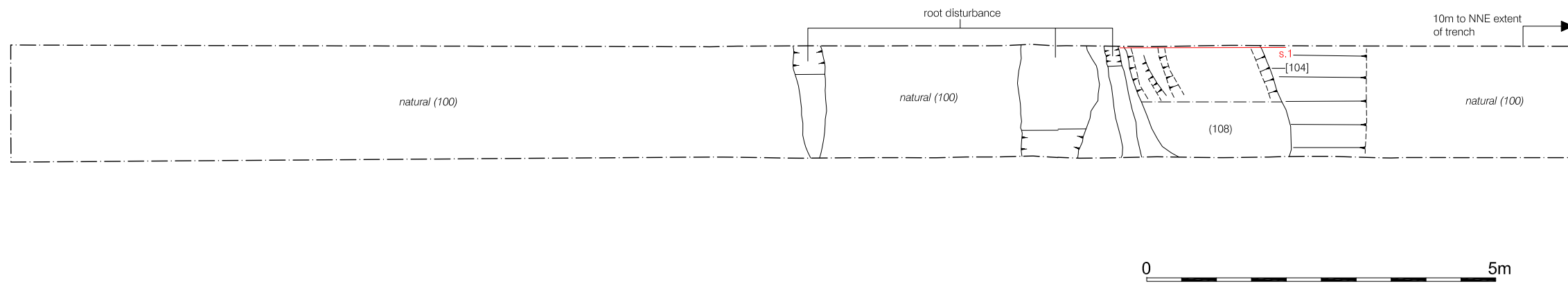
- (101) Context number
-  Height mAO
-  Section location
-  Limit of excavation

REPORT No:

CP11365

FIGURE:

3



Section 1. ESE facing section across ditch [104].



Figure 3: Trench 1; plan and section.

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