



**Wilton Autos, Wilton
Wiltshire**

Interim Statement on an Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared for:
**Archstone Lifestyle Homes Ltd
Archstone House
Pullman Business Park
Pullman Way
Ringwood
Hampshire
BH24 1HD**

by:
**Wessex Archaeology
Portway House
Old Sarum Park
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP4 6EB**

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Figure 1 Site outline and trench location
Figure 2 Detail of trenches 1 and 2

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Archstone Lifestyle Homes Ltd, to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of potential redevelopment on land at Wilton Autos, West Street, Wilton, Wiltshire (hereafter the Site, see **Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The evaluation was required by Salisbury District Council as a condition of consent of planning application (S/2007/1198) for the proposed construction of a series of 8 domestic dwellings with associated car parking at the site of Wilton Autos, 41-45 West Street, Wilton.

1.2 Scope of Document

1.2.1 This document provides an interim statement and has been prepared on the initial completion of the evaluation prior to the completion of any detailed specialist assessments.

1.3 Site location, topography and geology

1.3.1 The Site covers an area of approximately 0.09ha and comprises a sub-rectangular shaped plot located to the south of Netherwells Lane (**Fig. 1**). The Site is bounded to the north and west by houses and gardens, to the east by West Street, and to the south by Salisbury Demolition. The Site's centre is located at National Grid Reference (NGR) 409420 131370. The most recent land use is as vehicle repair and sales centre, and access to the Site is from Netherwell Lane.

1.3.2 The underlying geology of the Site comprises a spur of Valley Gravel overlying solid geology consisting of Cretaceous Upper Chalk (Ordnance Survey 1976).

1.3.3 The Site is relatively flat and situated at 55m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1 The archaeological evidence from Wilton has recently been collated and synthesised as part of the extensive survey of Wiltshire's towns (Wiltshire County Council 2002). The existence of prehistoric and Romano-British activity on the gravel island which Wilton occupies has been postulated, but little archaeological evidence has so far been uncovered (Andrews et al. 2000, 200). Haslam (1976) suggests that there may have been an early river crossing utilising the gravel island, but implies that a significant Romano-British settlement or presence is unlikely as the main road between

Dorchester and Old Sarum crosses the Nadder approximately two kilometres east of Wilton.

- 2.1.2 The Saxon settlement of Wilton probably originated in the 5th or 6th century. The Saxons are known to have favoured this type of site, particularly for royal residences. The first documentary reference to Wilton dates to 838AD, in the form of a concordat between the King of Wessex and the Archbishop of Canterbury written at Kingston upon Thames and confirmed at Wilton (Haslam 1976). The confirmation of the document at Wilton shows the presence of the King of Wessex at Wilton, emphasising the importance of this settlement.
- 2.1.3 The status of Wilton as a royal seat during the 9th century is further indicated by the charter 854AD in which King Ethelwulf tithed his lands (Haslam 1976). This document was dated at Wilton, although the council was held at Winchester. This shows that Wilton remained important even though Winchester was becoming predominant as the administrative centre of Wessex. By the time of Alfred's reign in the later 9th century the importance of Wilton as a royal seat was on the wane and Winchester was the major town of the Kingdom.
- 2.1.4 During the 9th and 10th centuries Wilton was a stronghold comprising part of a chain of defensive centres or burhs created by Alfred and listed in the Burghal Hidage – a document drawn up in the 10th century by one of Alfred's immediate successors. West Street is likely to have originated as one of the principal streets within the burh. Wilton was also the principal mint for the shire in this period. After 1003, when the town was sacked by the Danes, the moneyers appear to have preferred the more defensible site at Old Sarum, although Wilton was not abandoned as a mint until 1250 (VCH 1962).
- 2.1.5 The Domesday survey records that the Borough of Wilton paid a substantial custom of £50. Eighteen burgesses under seven manors are recorded, paying 14s, 15d. In addition, two other manors held five houses in Wilton, paying 4s, 10d. The suburb of Ditchampton to the north-west (just beyond the Site) was held by the Bishop of Bayeux; it had a small agricultural assessment, but contained four mills. At the end of the 11th century the town possessed eight parish churches with an additional four in the suburbs, suggesting a considerable population. The presence in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries of a large Jewish community suggests both economic prosperity and a significant urban population with a cosmopolitan attitude (VCH 1962).

- 2.1.6 Wilton suffered a decline in importance in the 13th and 14th centuries, caused primarily by the establishment of the planned town of New Sarum (Salisbury) in 1219 and by the building of the Harnham bridge in 1244 (Haslam 1976, 51), and has seen limited development since. This has led to both its archaeological obscurity and archaeological potential. Relatively few disturbances have damaged the archaeological deposits within the town in the intervening centuries, but for the same reason recent development-led glimpses of the town's archaeology have been few.
- 2.1.7 Despite the significance of the town in the Late Saxon period, archaeological evidence is rare. However, evaluation of the St John's Hospital site (immediately to the north of the Site under consideration here) in the 1970s (Anon. 1971; Anon. 1972) and by Wessex Archaeology in 1993 (WA 1993), followed by an excavation and watching brief in 1996 and 1997 (WA 1996; WA 1997; Andrews et al. 2000), revealed a well-preserved and complex sequence through the Late Saxon burgh defences comprising a ditch and bank. The Late Saxon defences may have been modified during the 13th century, but there were very few other features of medieval or post-medieval date (Andrews et al. 2000, 189).
- 2.1.8 The evaluation undertaken, adjacent to the Site, at 35 West Street by Wessex Archaeology in January 2006 has indicated the presence of well-preserved medieval archaeological remains, sealed beneath approximately 1m of post-medieval / modern deposits. No Late Saxon deposits or finds were identified, although the Site lies within the area enclosed by the burgh defences.
- 2.1.9 The absence of Late Saxon remains may be explained by the small size of the test pits, but possibly also by the Site lying in a relatively peripheral location, close to the burh defences which ran south-west to north-east less than 50m to the north. The Site also lay almost 50m from West Street, well to the rear of any Late Saxon structures which may occupied the street frontage.
- 2.1.10 A few sherds of pottery assigned an 11th / 12th century date, all from Test Pit 1 but probably residual, may indicate early medieval activity in the vicinity, perhaps along West Street. Two areas containing possible medieval structures and occupation evidence were highlighted in Test Pits 1 and 4, in the north-east and central parts of the Site. Due to the limited areas exposed within the test pits it is difficult to positively determine the nature, density, extent and layout of the archaeological remains uncovered. However, a hearth or kiln, crucible fragments, metalworking debris and relatively large quantities of fired clay indicate copper alloy working and iron smithing of probable 13th century date. This is likely to represent craft / industrial activity within the backyard areas of one or more properties fronting West Street. Anecdotal evidence suggests a forge occupied part of the Site in the 17th century, and it is just possible that the association with metalworking spanned several hundred years. The existing building in the southernmost property on the street frontage, formerly an inn, is of apparent 18th or possibly 17th date.
- 2.1.11 Test Pits 3 and 5 revealed the approximate extent of a former stream channel thought to have run through the rear of the Site (**see Fig. 1**), probably infilled (and ? culverted) in the Post-medieval and modern periods. No Post-medieval structures or features were identified, perhaps again

reflecting the limited extent of the test pits, but possibly also their distance from West Street. There is likely to have been considerable contraction of the town from its Anglo-Saxon and medieval heyday, a contraction also indicated by the paucity of later medieval and Post-medieval features at, for example, St John's Hospital (Andrews et al. 2000, 189) immediately to the north of the Site.

2.1.12 Following the evaluation, an excavation was undertaken in January 2007 by Wessex Archaeology on the Site. The excavation proved the absence of archaeological features within the Site. Its results suggest that the area formed part of an uninhabited flood plain until the canalisation of the former stream south-west of the Site. The excavation area had also been subject to limited 19th century disturbance.

2.1.13 A Watching Brief at 35 West Street, carried out by Wessex Archaeology in May 2007, revealed human remains on the Site. The bones were derived from a lime-filled pit in the part of the site adjacent to St John's hospital/priory (of medieval origin). This, along with severe pathologies on the bones, suggests they are of a medieval date (B.Buss *pers comm.*).

3 AIMS

3.1 General

3.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to determine or confirm the presence/absence and the general nature of any remains present.

3.1.2 The evaluation also aimed to determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence where development is proposed.

4 EVALUATION STRATEGY

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The development footprint was to be subject to archaeological evaluation comprising two trenches (1No 10m x 1.8m and 1No 20m x 1.8m) as indicated on **Figure 1**.

4.2 Fieldwork

4.2.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the Specification (WA2007) and approved by Wiltshire County Council.

4.2.2 The evaluation trenches were excavated under constant archaeological supervision by a JCB with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation by machine ceased at the level of the archaeology or the top of the natural basal geology, whichever was encountered first. The machine excavated material was scanned for artefacts. Following the identification of archaeological features these were hand cleaned and a sample of each feature excavated.

4.2.3 All works were conducted in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations (as amended 1994).

4.3 Survey

4.3.1 All evaluation trenches were surveyed using a GPS and tied in to the Ordnance Survey.

4.4 Recording

4.4.1 All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording system.

4.4.2 A complete drawn record of excavated archaeological features and deposits was compiled. This includes both plans and sections, drawn to appropriate scales (1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections), and with reference to a site grid tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. The Ordnance Datum (OD) height of all principal features and levels was calculated and plans/sections were annotated with OD heights.

4.4.3 A full photographic record was maintained using both colour transparencies and black and white negatives (on 35 mm film). Digital photography was employed as appropriate. The photographic record illustrates both the detail and the general context of the principal features, finds excavated, and the site as a whole.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The following section describes the archaeological sequence on the Site by trench and feature / deposit type. Contexts representing deposits and cuts of features are highlighted in bold. The evaluation confirmed and dated the presence of archaeology within the Site location (**Figure 1 and 2**).

5.2 Trench 1

5.2.1 Trench 1 was excavated towards the south-west limit of the Site (**Figure 1**). A series of modern rubble and tarmac overburden deposits were identified overlying two dark grey silty clay layers **106 and 107**. Beneath which a mid brown silty clay/gravel layer, **108**, was identified and at this stage of enquiry is interpreted as a subsoil/ occupation layer (**Figure 2**).

5.2.2 A total of two post pits **109 and 114** were identified located towards the north-east end of the trench. In profile both were stepped to the south-west. The post pits were filled with a dark grey/black deposit of silty clay and contained a high quantity of animal bone and pottery of medieval date.

5.2.3 A total of four pits were recorded within the trench. Three extended beyond the confines of the trench. Two were excavated **111 and 120** and both yielded a high quantity of animal bone and pottery of medieval date.

5.2.4 Towards the south-west end of the trench a total of three ditches were revealed during the evaluation. The two most substantial ditches, **122 and 127**, were located at the south-westernmost end of the trench and are north-west south-east aligned (**Figure 2**). At this stage they are recorded as separate features, however the excavated slot and section did not provide a complete stratigraphic sequence. Ditch **122** was excavated to a depth of

0.76m below the base of the trench and ditch **127** reached a similar depth of approximately 0.70m. The combined width of **122** and **127** is approximately 5.00m. Both were filled with intrusive material from **108** and capped by dark grey/black silty clay. The artefacts retrieved included animal bone, recovered from all fills, burnt clay and pottery were predominantly recovered from the upper dark deposits. The pottery dates to the medieval period. The third north-south aligned ditch **116** is far shallower at a depth of 0.23m below the base of the trench and was filled with lower redeposited material from **108** and upper dark grey/ black silty clay. The latter contained animal bone and pottery of Medieval date.

- 5.2.5 A north-east south-west aligned wall was observed in the south-easternmost corner of the trench and appeared to be constructed of flint nodules set in mortar. The top of the wall was approximately 0.90m below the present ground level. The wall was partially exposed within the trench limit and remains unexcavated at this stage of enquiry.

5.3 Trench 2

- 5.3.1 Trench 2 was excavated towards the north-eastern end of Site immediately south-west of West Street (**Figure 1**). The south-east end of the trench was modern demolition rubble overlying modern truncation to a depth of 1.40m directly overlying natural gravel geology. The same sequence of modern demolition rubble and tarmac were evident at the north-west end of the trench as in Trench 2 however the underlying layers were different. A thick band of mid grey silty clay **205** overlying **206** degraded chalk and mortar material was identified. Beneath a layer of yellow/red brown silty clay and gravels **208** were observed at a depth of approximately 0.90m. All archaeological features were encountered at this level and end of the trench (**Figure 2**).

- 5.3.2 A total of two narrow linears were evident in plan at the base of the trench located towards the south-west end. The feature excavated at this stage was **215** a north-west south-east aligned feature partially exposed within the trench limit. The feature was in very close proximity to two discrete features (**Figure 4**), at this stage interpreted as a pit **211** and posthole **209**, and was filled with a single dark grey black deposit that contained animal bone and pottery of medieval date. The north-south feature remains unexcavated however it was observed to contain animal bone and sandstone fragments.

- 5.3.3 Three discrete features were evident in plan two were excavated these include a possible posthole **209**, and two pits one of which was excavated **211**. Pit **211** was filled with mid grey brown silty clay that contained animal bone and pottery of Medieval and Romano-British date. The latter are interpreted as residual at this stage of enquiry. Posthole **209** yielded a high quantity of animal and pottery of medieval date.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

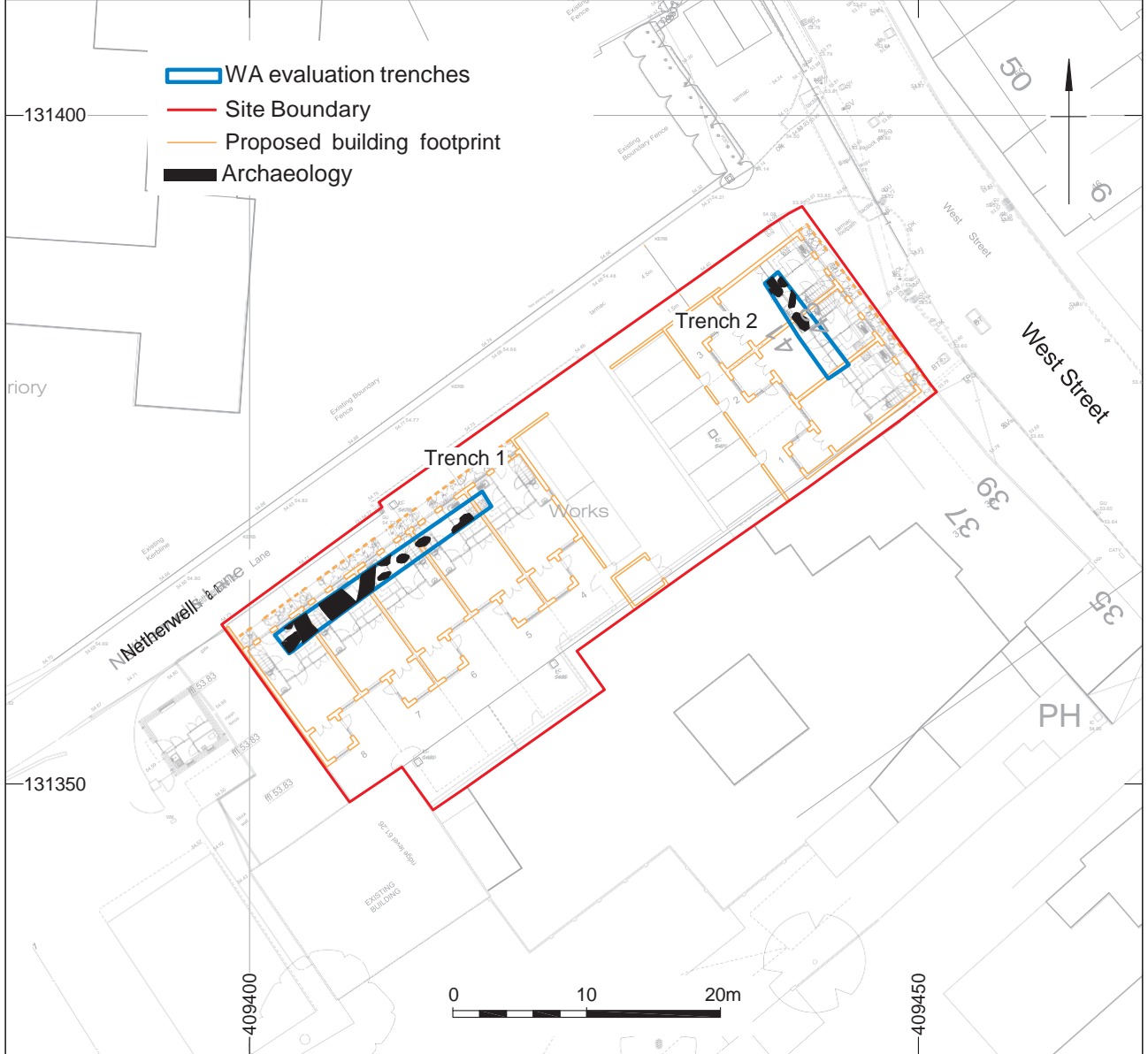
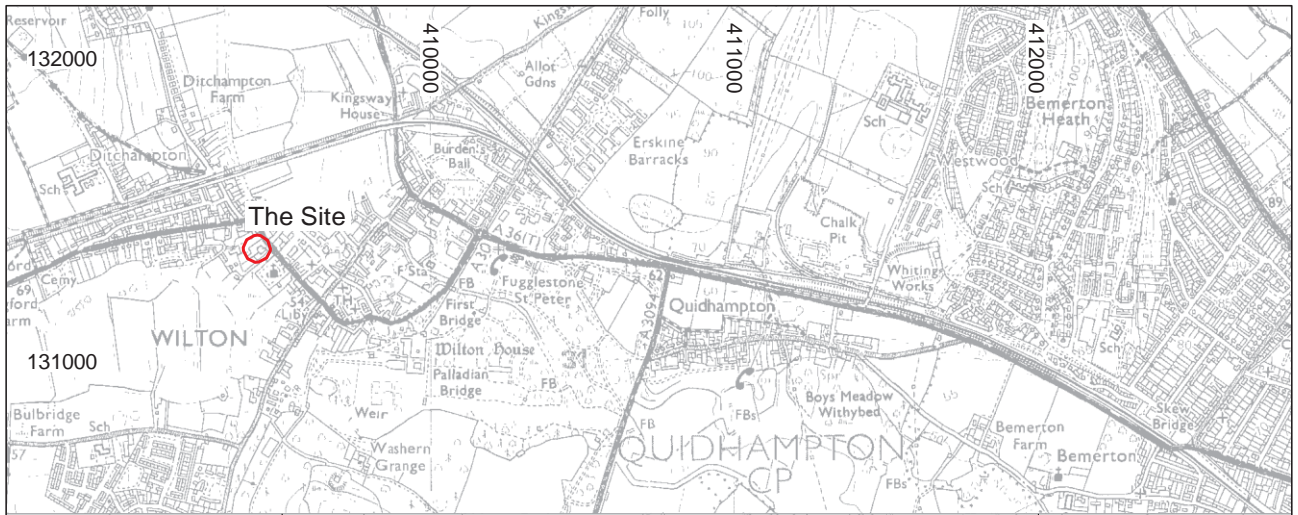
- 6.1.1 The evaluation has confirmed the presence of a relatively high concentration of archaeological remains on the Site which is consistent with other archaeological remains of medieval date found in the surrounding area. In light of these findings the Assistant Archaeologist for Wiltshire County Council has recommended that the existing trenches are extended to

include the entire footprints of the proposed buildings and that the extended trenches are excavated by archaeological strip, map and sample.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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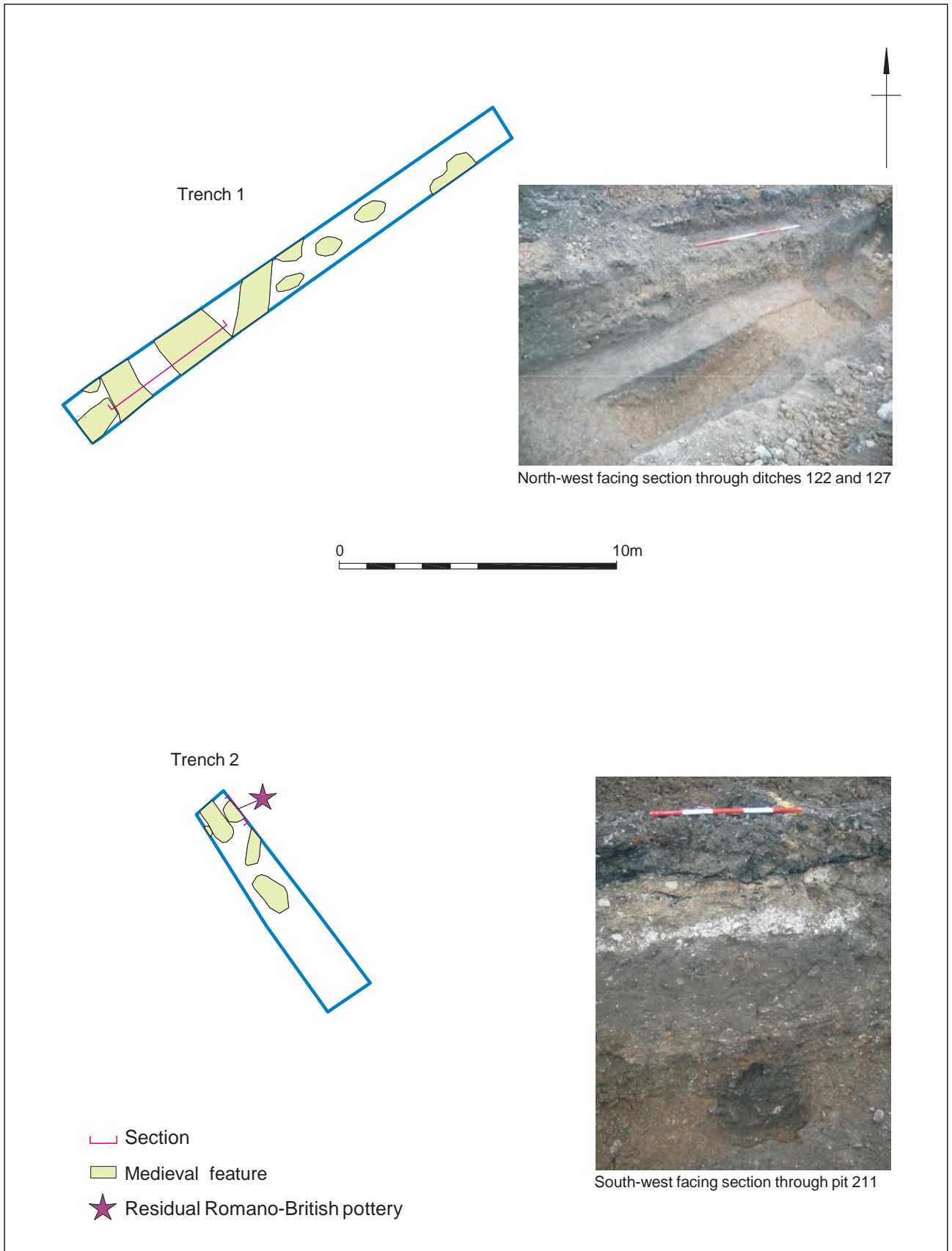
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Site Outline and Trench location

Figure 1



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Detail of trenches 1 and 2

Figure 2