

NAU ARCHAEOLOGY

Report No. 1302

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Thurton VC Primary
School, Thurton, Norfolk**

HER 50405 THT

Project over seen by:	Please tick
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July 2007

BAU 1591

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Location: Thurton VC Primary School, Thurton, Norfolk
District: South Norfolk
Grid Ref: TG 3273 0108
HER No.: 50405 THT
Date of fieldwork: 28th and 29th June 2007

Summary

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out at Thurton VC Primary School. Four trenches, measuring 15m by 1.8m, were dug across the site of a proposed new school. Shallow ditches ran across two of the trenches and a shallow hollow of uncertain origin was excavated in another trench. Nothing of archaeological interest was observed in the fourth trench. A small piece of tile of post-medieval date and some animal bone came from the fill of one of the ditches.

1.0 Introduction

Archaeological evaluation involved the excavation of four trenches at Thurton VC Primary School which is situated immediately to the east of the A146 Norwich to Beccles road in Thurton, South Norfolk (Figs 1 and 2).

The site is that of a proposed new school and consists of a total of 4218 square metres in area. At the time of the work, the area consisted largely of grass playing field with part of the area, at its southern edge, having been disturbed by the recent removal of temporary classrooms and their concrete footings.

The work was commissioned by NPS Property Consultants Ltd

This archaeological programme was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Norfolk County Council and was in accordance with a Project Design prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref: BAU1591/DW) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (Ken Hamilton, 16th May 2007).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The present work involved the excavation of four trenches which were sited to evaluate the area of the proposed development. Each trench was 15m x 1.8m in size. This represented a 5% sample of the area under proposal.

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The solid geology for the area in which the site lies is Upper Chalk (British Geological Survey 1985). The overlying soils are part of the Central Norfolk Claylands with areas of outwash gravel (Williamson 2005). The undisturbed natural deposits exposed in

the excavated trenches were mostly very sandy with some stoney, and some slightly clayey, areas. These were cut by the archaeological features. Above the infilled features, overburden consisted of a mid orangey brown sandy subsoil, slightly clayey in some areas, (<0.50m) and a brown sandy loam topsoil (<0.40m).

The site sloped slightly downwards from north-to-south and lay at an approximate height of 13m OD.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site is situated within Thurton village, which is mentioned in Domesday as *Tortuna* which could mean 'the place of the thorn bush' or 'Thor's enclosure' (www.thurton.org.uk/history/history_index.html). Its parish church, St Ethelbert's, which is situated south of the modern village centre, dates to the Norman period with later additions and alterations.

A search of the Norfolk Historical Environment Record reveals several sites and findspots in the area surrounding Thurton Primary School. A curvilinear or hengiform cropmark (HER 23743) is recorded just to the north-west of the present site. It clearly predates the main Norwich Road (A 146), the line of which is shown on Faden's map of Norfolk of 1797, and it might be an enclosure of prehistoric date or, possibly, a hengiform monument of Neolithic date. In the same area and extending southwards into the area immediately west of Thurton School, are a series of rectilinear west-to-east and north-to-south cropmarks (HER 49513). These partly correspond to the 1806 Thurton enclosure map and are likely to be of medieval or post-medieval date. Other linear cropmarks are undated. About 150m to the west of the school playing field, and probably associated with some of the linear cropmarks, is the cropmark of an incomplete ring ditch (HER 49512) which probably represents a Bronze Age barrow and may be an outlier to a cemetery to the south-west (HER 49491). Several barrows were excavated there in the mid 19th century (HERs 10308, 10309, 10310 and 10311). Cropmarks, including another ring ditch of probable Bronze Age date are also recorded about 650m to the north-west of the present site (HER 10325).

A flaked flint axe of Neolithic date was found in 1976 about 100m east of the present site (HER 16261).

Fieldwalking in 1995, 250-300 metres to the south of the present site, led to the recovery of a lead weight and a coin of medieval date (HER 31482) and a buckle, strap fittings, a book fitting and coins, jettons of various medieval and post-medieval dates were found by further detecting in 2002 (HER 1663).

About 150m to the south of the school site, The George and Dragon public house may have originated as a late medieval hall house (HER 32076). A watching brief carried out in its car park in 2006 recorded nothing of archaeological significance (Hobbs 2006)

As part of the archaeological evaluation of the present site, a geophysical magnetometry survey was carried out in the school playing field (Sabin and Donaldson 2007). A single low magnitude positive linear anomaly was located close to the eastern edge of the survey area but there was widespread magnetic disturbance. This was caused by, amongst other things, fences, the former presence of temporary classrooms and goal posts.

4.0 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

Four trenches measuring 15m by 1.8m were to be excavated, a five percent sample of the development area.

Machine excavation was carried out with a tracked hydraulic 360° mini-digger using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

The exact height OD of the site was, unfortunately, unknown as neither of the two benchmarks closest to the site could be found. Levels on site were related to a temporary benchmark on the north kerb of the existing car park.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions were generally good, weather was mostly fine with one or two heavy downpours.

5.0 Results

Trench 1

The trench ran north-to-south at the eastern side of the site. It was dug, by machine, to a depth of 0.75m at which level the undisturbed natural sand and gravel was reached. Towards the northern end of the trench a shallow subcircular hollow was excavated [3] (Figs 3 and 4). It was a metre in diameter and 0.14m deep. Its fill was a gingery brown silty sand [4]. The feature may have been a truncated pit or was possibly a tree bole.

The infilled feature was overlaid by light orange brown silty sand subsoil [2] (0.40m deep) and then by the topsoil (0.35-0.45m deep) which was a mid-to-dark brown sandy loam [1].

Trench 2

This trench ran east-to-west close to the northern edge of the site. The natural sand and gravel was revealed at a depth of 0.70-0.75m. Cut into this was a narrow and quite shallow ditch which crossed the trench from north-to-south [9] (Figs 3 and 4). It was filled with gingery brown silty sand with occasional flints [10]. Included within it was a piece of tile of probable 19th-century date and some butchered and gnawed cattle bone.

The infilled ditch appeared to be sealed by the subsoil (0.25-0.35m deep) which was a mixed ginger brown silty sand with some paler orangey-coloured clayey silt [12]. It was overlaid by the mid-to-dark brown silty sand loam topsoil [11] (0.35m deep).

Trench 3

This trench ran north-to-south in the western part of the site. The natural sand and gravel was revealed at a depth of 0.85m at the northern end of the trench. It was overlaid by a mixed mid-to-dark brown silty sand and pale orange clayey sand subsoil [16] (0.50m deep) and by the mid-to-dark brown silty sand loam topsoil [15] (0.35m deep at the northern end of the trench and 0.28m deep to the south).

There was nothing of archaeological significance in this trench. At its southern end, a modern plastic pipe (possibly leading from the recently removed temporary classrooms to a soakaway) was revealed at a depth of about 0.60m. It was left undisturbed.

Trench 4

The trench ran east-to-west towards the southern side of the site. It was dug, by machine, to a depth of 0.90m at its western end and 0.60m to the east (The western end was slightly over-excavated). The undisturbed natural sand and gravel was mottled yellow and orange brown-coloured with some slightly clayey patches. Near the eastern end of the trench a shallow ditch crossed the trench from north-to-south [7] (Figs 3 and 4). Its fill was a quite pale yellowish brown silty sand with very sparse small flints [8]. No finds were recovered from the fill of the ditch.

The infilled ditch appeared to be sealed by the subsoil (<0.40m deep) which was an orangey brown slightly loamy sand [6]. At the western end of the trench a thin layer of orangey brown silty sand with occasional patches of chalky clay [14] (<0.10m thick) could be distinguished above the subsoil and was overlaid by the mid-to-dark brown sand loam topsoil [5] (0.35m deep). Deposit [14] may have represented a layer of dumped soil.

6.0 The Finds

Introduction

The finds and environmental material from the site is presented in tabular form with basic quantitative information in Appendix 2: Finds by Context.

In addition to this summary, more detailed information on specific finds and environmental categories is included below.

6.1 Ceramic Building Material

The site produced a single example of late post-medieval/modern plain roof tile [11], weighing (0.014kg). The fragment is of a medium sandy fabric with coarse inclusions of quartz, finely crushed flint and ferrous pellets. It probably dates to the 19th century.

6.2 Metal finds

A copper alloy disc, possibly a token, was recovered [11]. Stamped with an 'H' and possibly a 'P'; it is probably of 19th-century date.

7.0 Environmental evidence

7.1 The faunal remains (by Julie Curl)

Methodology

All of the bone was examined primarily to determine range of species and elements present. The assessment was carried out following a modified version of guidelines by English Heritage (Davis, 1992). A note was also made of butchering and any indications of skinning, hornworking and other modifications. When possible a record was made of ages and any other relevant information, such as pathologies. Counts and weights were noted for each context examined. All information was recorded on the faunal remains recording sheets. A table giving a summary of the information is included with this report.

Results and discussion

A total of 0.288kg of faunal remains, consisting of forty-eight pieces was recovered from two deposits of post-medieval date.

Three butchered cattle bones were found in the fill [10] of ditch [9] in Trench 2. One of them showed canid gnawing, suggesting some meat waste was given to dogs for food or, possibly, was scavenged. Both the pelvis and femur are good quality meat bearing bones. The remains in context [10] exhibited slightly eroded surfaces, indicative of acidic soil conditions; some root damage was also seen on these bones.

In Trench 4, deposit [14] contains what appears to be the remains of part of a piglet skeleton, including the deciduous pre-molar, vertebrae and fragments of limb bones. There is no wear at all on the piglet pre-molar, which would indicate a neonatal that died soon after birth. Mother pigs are often quite clumsy when it comes to parental care and frequently crush at least one of their brood, these piglets are often discarded with general rubbish.

8.0 Conclusions

A small shallow feature, excavated in one trench, seems most likely to have been of natural origin due to its sterile sandy fill and the absence of any finds within it.

Two narrow ditches were excavated about twenty metres apart, one in each of two trenches. Both the ditches shared the same, roughly north-to-south orientation and they were very similar in width, depth and type of fill. It seems highly likely that they form part of the same system of boundaries. A piece of roof tile from one of the ditches suggests a post-medieval date for the features and it is possible that they form part of the system of field divisions represented by the rectilinear cropmarks to the west of the site. The fills of the ditches were very similar to the overlying subsoil but it was thought most likely that the infilled ditches were sealed by that deposit.

A stamped copper alloy disc, possibly a token, came from the topsoil in Trench 2. It is probably of 19th-century date.

Nothing else of archaeological significance was recovered during the work.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned and funded by NPS Property Consultants Ltd. The advice of Mark Burghall is gratefully acknowledged. The interest and co-operation of the staff at Thurton VC Primary School is also acknowledged.

The trench evaluation of the site was carried out by John Ames and Sarah Bates with machining by Peter George of Bryn Williams Plant Hire.

Finds from the site were processed and reported on by Lucy Talbot. The animal bone was examined by Julie Curl.

This report has been illustrated by Julie Curl and edited by Jayne Bown.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Trench	Category	Description	Period
1	1	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
2	1	Deposit	Subsoil	Modern
3	1	Cut	?Pit	Undated
4	1	Deposit	Fill of ?pit 3	Undated
5	4	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
6	4	Deposit	Subsoil	Modern
7	4	Cut	Ditch	Undated
8	4	Deposit	Fill of ditch 7	Undated
9	2	Cut	Ditch	Post medieval
10	2	Deposit	Fill of ditch 9	Post medieval
11	2	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
12	2	Deposit	Subsoil	Modern
13	2	Deposit	Subsoil	Undated
14	4	Deposit	Layer	Modern
15	3	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
16	3	Deposit	Subsoil	Modern

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Period (delete as appropriate)	Feature type	Quantity
Unknown	Ditch	1
Unknown	Pit	1
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)	Ditch	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
10	Ceramic Building Material	1	0.014	Post Medieval
10	Animal bone	-	0.249	-
11	Copper alloy	1		Post Medieval
14	Animal bone	-	0.039	-

Appendix 2b: NHER finds summary table

Period (delete as appropriate)	Material	Quantity
Unknown	Animal bone	48
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900AD)	Roof tile	1
	Disc	1

Appendix 3: Faunal Remains

Context	Total context weight (kg)	Total context quantity	Species	Species quantity	Comments
10	0.0249	3	Cattle	3	Pelvis and femur fragments, butchered and canid gnawing on femur head
14	0.039	45	Pig	45	Neonatal piglet. Dp4 tooth, vertebrae and limb bones

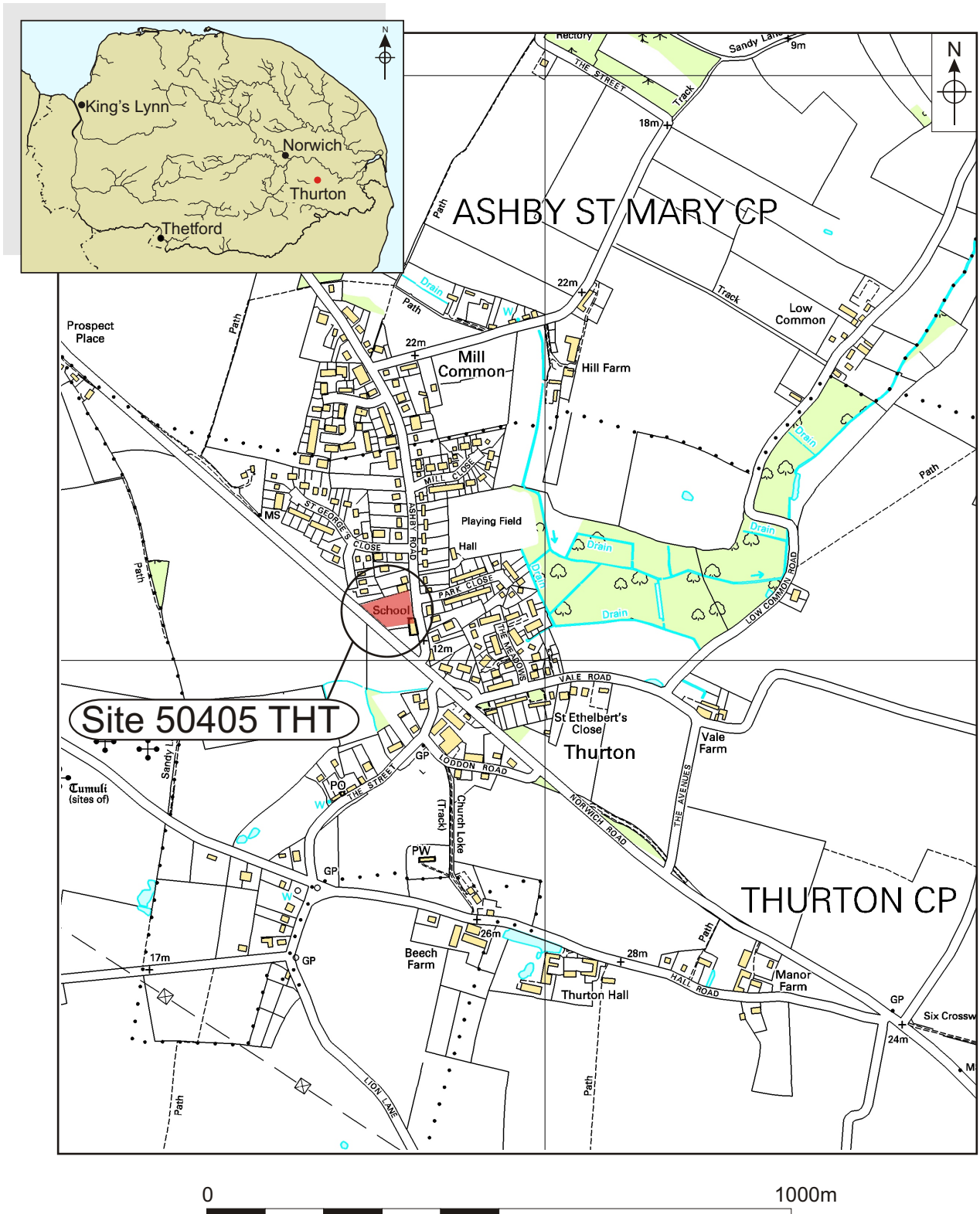


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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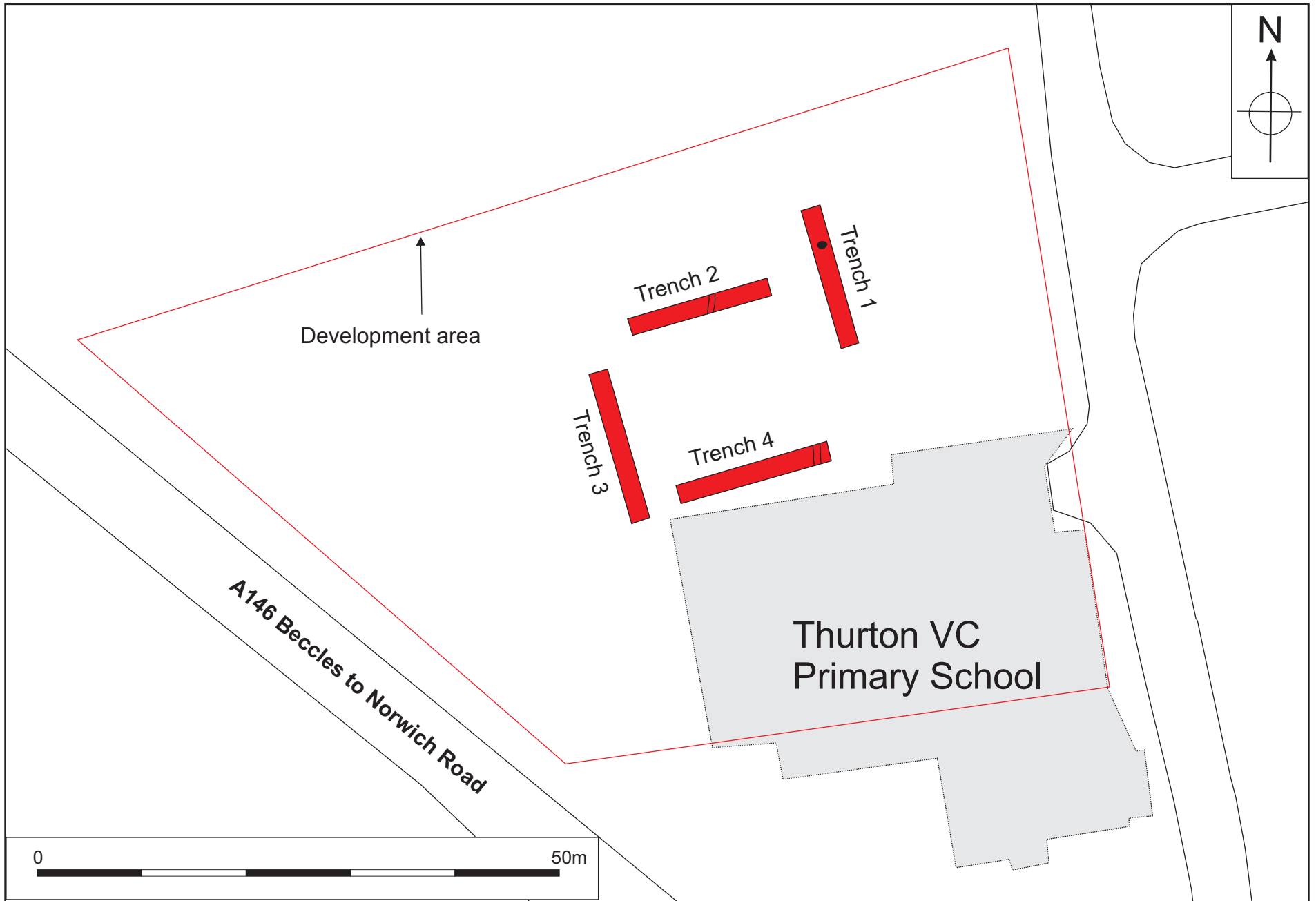


Figure 2. Locations of Trenches 1 to 4. Scale 1:500

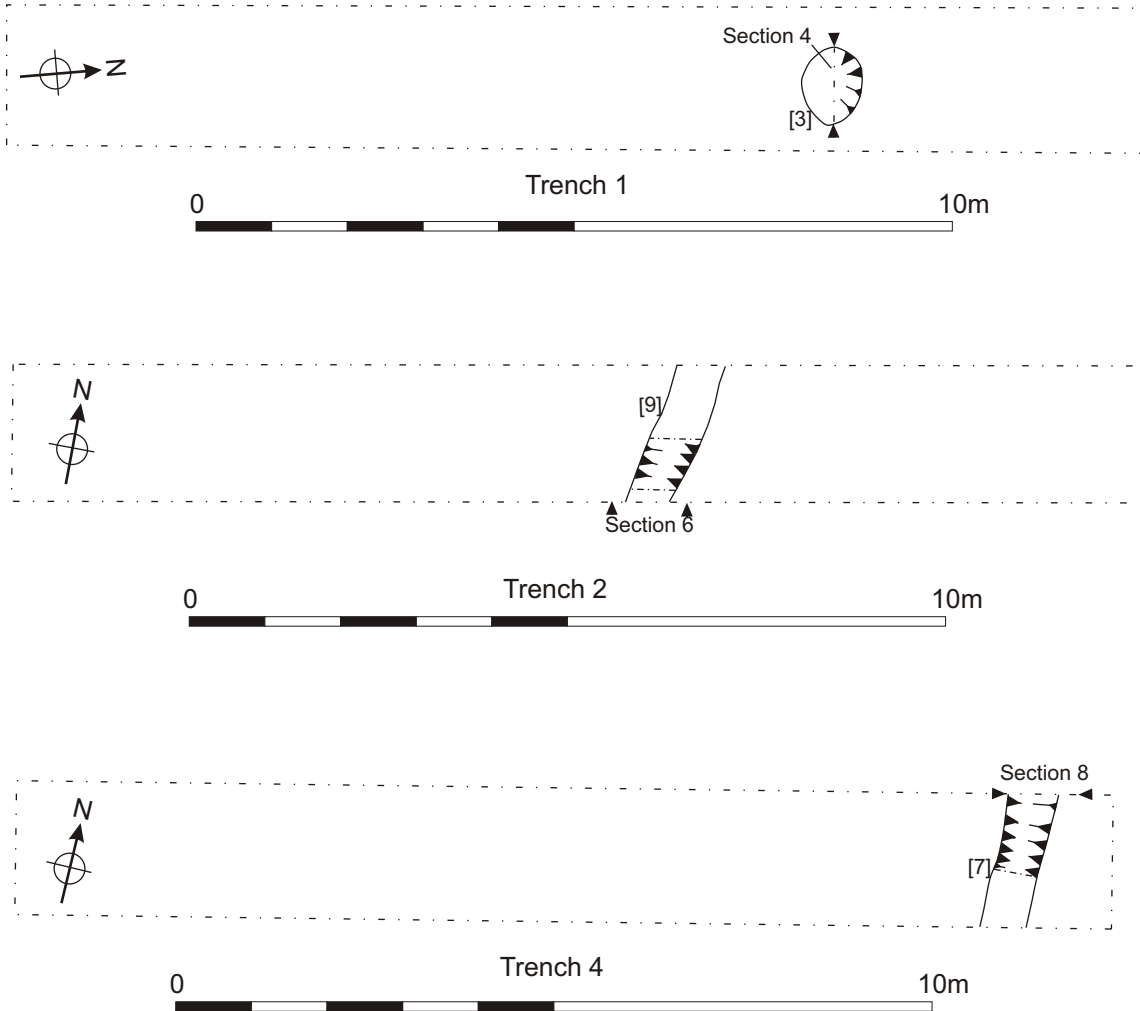


Figure 3. Plans of Trenches 1, 2 and 4. Scale 1:00

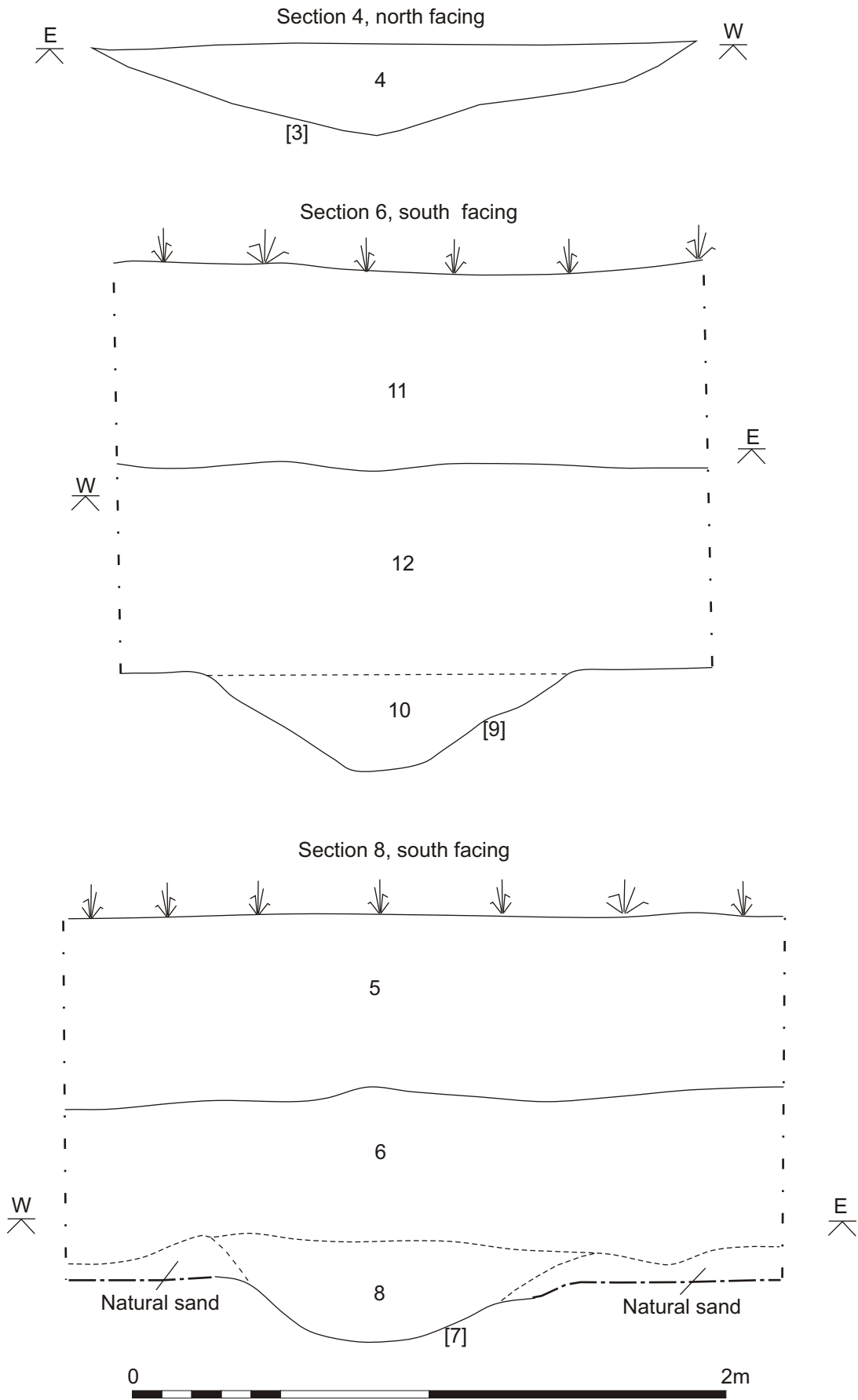


Figure 4. Sections 4, 6 and 8. Scale 1:20