

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 977

**An Archaeological Evaluation on Land to the rear of
95 Lynn Road, Downham Market,
Norfolk**

40378 DMM

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October 2004

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Location: Land to rear of 95, Lynn Road, Downham Market, Norfolk
District: West Norfolk
Grid Ref: TF 61466 03867
HER No.: 40378 DMM
Date of fieldwork: 17th and 18th May 2004

Summary

An archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of 95 Lynn Road, Downham Market found a natural water channel running downhill across the site with several post-medieval land drains crossing it. One fragment of abraded Romano-British pottery was recovered from a possible shallow pit.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) on land to the rear of 95 Lynn Road, Downham Market in West Norfolk. The area (c. 2960 sq. m) designated for development was adjacent to the north-west side of the Halcyon Homes housing development, 100m to the north-west of the junction of Lynn Road and Glebe Road. The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Mr P. Newton of Halcyon Homes Norfolk Ltd.

The objective of the evaluation was to ascertain whether any features of archaeological interest existed in the area to be disturbed during the construction of a housing development on the site. Previous archaeological work in an adjacent site (Bates 2002) located several ditches of probable Romano-British date along with sherds of pottery from this period and undated postholes.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref: 1760/KJP) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: DG/13/12/02).

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 site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

Downham Market is located at the interface between the Upper Jurassic clay and Lower Cretaceous chalk (Funnell 1994). An area of glacial Norwich Brickearth lies immediately to the east of the town; while to the west is the Fen area of marine clays and river alluvium. The site lay at a height of c. 20m OD and was drained slowly to the north-west as a spring line is present uphill to the south-east. The ground slopes gradually from 27m OD on the Lynn Road down to the bottom of the site at approximately 16m OD.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The location of the site of Downham Market on the Fen-edge encouraged early settlement due to the various diverse environmental conditions within the immediate area. The rich natural resources allowed for hunting, agriculture and industrial activities to develop (Gurney 1986, 47-8). With the lowering in sea levels, which allowed much Fen-edge land to be reclaimed, an expansion of settlement occurred during the Romano-British period which has been identified in the archaeological record (Percival 2001).

In the vicinity of the current site, pottery sherds dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries were found on the west side of Short Drove in the 1960s and 1970s. A more recent archaeological evaluation adjacent to the south and west of the site located several probable Romano-British ditches and pottery dating to the 2nd century AD (Bates 2002).

A tithe map of 1840 shows the site as being under pasture and it is likely that there has been little change in land use since that time.

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

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.

The Brief required that the trial trenching encompassed 5% of the development site, c. 150 sq. m, to be achieved by the excavation of four trenches measuring 21m x 1.8m. The situation on site, however, entailed realignment of the trench locations, due to the local ground conditions. The original location of Trench 1, for example, was situated in an area of boggy ground to the north-west end of the site near a pond which would not have supported the weight of the plant.

As a result of the soft ground conditions around the proposed location of Trench 1, a short trench (Trench 1b) was excavated measuring 6.5m in length, on the line of Trench 1 and Trench 1a, measuring 16.5m in length, excavated nearby to the south-east on firmer ground.

Of the remaining trenches in the centre and south-east areas of the site (Trenches 2-4), Trenches 2 and 3, were realigned to run in a north-east to south-west direction, making all the trenches parallel. The change of trench layout was approved by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Trenches 1b to 4 were excavated from the slightly firmer upslope ground down towards the boggy area in case machining difficulties were encountered and in order to provide the maximum exposure of underlying deposits.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type supplied by the client using a 1.8m toothless ditching bucket reducing the overburden by 100mm spits of soil 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 *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.

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

Site conditions were generally good, the weather being warm and clear, although the ground conditions were very soft which impeded the manoeuvrability of the machine excavator in certain areas of the site.

5.0 Results

(Figs 3, 4, 5 and 6)

Within all the trenches the topsoil ([1]) was on average 0.50m thick and consisted of a damp spongy dark peaty loam with occasional small stones and gravel. This deposit rested on a thin subsoil interface ([2]), up to 0.20m thick, of mid to dark grey sandy silt. Beneath this was the underlying natural greyish yellow sand which contained patches of iron stone gravel.

The principle feature observed in all the main trenches was a shallow natural channel ([5]) running across the site, leading from higher ground in the south-east down slope to a pond within boggy ground to the north-west. This was adjudged to be as a result of run-off from a natural spring further up the slope to the south-east.

Trench 1a

(Fig. 3)

Trench 1a measured 16.5m x 2m, was aligned southwest–northeast and positioned slightly more to the north-west of the site so to be nearer to the originally intended location of Trench 1 (see 4.0 Methodology).

In the northern half of the trench was a shallow channel ([5]) cut into the natural sand with an average width of 9m, and a depth in the centre of 0.10m, gradually getting shallower towards the edges. This appeared to be a channel for drainage of indeterminate date and which ran downhill in a south-east to north-west direction. Within the depression, particularly in the centre, was a thin layer of light grey silt with yellow sand flecks ([6]), on average 0.06m thick, which appeared to be a water-borne deposit.

No other features were observed in this trench other than a tree bole close to the north-east edge of the channel (not shown on plan).

Trench 1b

(Figs 3 and 4)

This trench measured 6.5m x 1.8m and was excavated in the boggy ground near a pond at the west end of the site. The depth of the trench was slightly greater than others excavated at 0.75m, because of the thickness of peaty soil accumulated in the permanently wet ground.

The base of the trench was cleaned by hand to reveal an irregular gully ([7]), on average 1.2m wide and 0.12m deep, apparently entering the trench at the western edge and curving around to the north-east to end at a slight linear depression running roughly north-east to south-west. The fill ([8]) of this feature was a mid-grey sandy silt with occasional small stones.

The slight linear depression in the north end of the trench was tentatively identified with the south-west edge of the water channel [5], seen in all the trenches to the south-east (see below). No dating evidence was recovered from either of the two features observed.

Trench 2

(Fig. 3)

Trench 2 was excavated along the same alignment as the previous two trenches and measured 21.40m x 1.80m. It was excavated to an average depth of 0.50m.

The channel ([5]) as seen in the previous trenches, was also observed running down slope with the same depth of alluvial fill ([6]) as previously seen.

Two modern land drains were recorded within the channel feature, near its north-east edge, running in the same direction down-slope. Where the ceramic pipe of the drain was observed to have been broken, the drains were filled with a dark grey sandy silt fill. The drain cuts were observed in section to be approximately 0.40m wide and were likely dug from the surface. The line of the two land drains was not so pronounced as in Trenches 3 and 4 (see below).

Apart from a single irregular natural depression in the base of the trench, no other features were observed.

Trench 3

(Figs 3 and 5)

This trench measured 21.40m x 1.80m and was excavated to an average depth of 0.50m. The shallow channel ([5]) was observed in the centre of the trench with the two land drains previously seen in Trench 2 also recorded here on the same alignment. On the south-west edge of the channel a third land drain was observed running across the trench in a north-south direction.

Approximately 2m to the north-east of the edge of the channel was a circular feature ([3]) which contained a single mid grey sand silt fill ([4]), with soft red clay inclusions, to a depth of 0.21m (Fig. 5). A single sherd of Romano-British pottery was recovered from this fill. No other features were observed in the trench.

Trench 4

(Figs 3 and 6)

This trench measured 21m x 1.8m and was dug to an average depth of 0.80m to reach natural sand.

In the middle of the trench was the shallow channel ([5]) cut into the natural sand with an average width of 9m, and a depth in the centre of 0.10m, gradually getting shallower towards the edges. The two post-medieval land drains (also recorded in Trenches 2 and 3) were also seen running through the northern part of channel [5] within this trench.

No other features were observed within the trench other than three irregular-shaped natural depressions filled with grey sand, possibly root holes.

6.0 The Finds

A single fragment of Romano-British pottery was found in deposit [4] is a locally produced Micaceous grey ware sherd from a straight-sided dish with a triangular rim, sometimes referred to as a 'dog dish'. This vessel type was in common usage from the mid 2nd to 4th century AD. This type of ware was produced in north Suffolk and south Norfolk from kilns close to the Waveney Valley of which Wattisfield is the most widely known (Tomber and Dore 1999, 184).

The condition of the sherd is heavily abraded but retains a small patch of sooty concretion which may indicate its function as a cooking pot or possible lid.

7.0 Conclusions

The wide shallow feature ([5]) with a fill of alluvial silts observed in all of the trenches indicated that water had once flowed downhill from the south-east to the north-west in an open channel. Probably from the spring situated uphill of the site to the south-east. It is thus apparent that the spongy and boggy state of the ground is the result of this water still making its way downhill. The pond at the lowest part of the site acts as a receptacle for this water. The post-medieval land drains observed followed the same slope direction as the shallow channel and appeared to utilise the course of this earlier natural drainage. The thickness of the dark peaty topsoil may be as a result of a long period of hillwash deposition and/or an equal period of use as pasture.

The only dating evidence recovered from the site was the single sherd of Romano-British pottery from the fill of the small pit [3]. It is likely that the boggy nature of the ground has precluded any usage of the land other than pasture. It was noted in the previous archaeological evaluation, located adjacent to the present site, that trenches excavated in the boggy areas produced very few features (Bates 2002).

The shallow irregular gully ([7]) located in Trench 1b was also interpreted as a natural feature caused by water running from a slight rise to the south-west feeding into the main water channel running downhill.

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

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mr Paul Newton of Halcyon Homes Norfolk Ltd and site foreman Mr Chester for their interest and co-operation. Also thanks are extended to Halcyon Homes machine driver Derek for expertly excavating the trenches.

The evaluation was carried out by Neil Moss and the author. The pottery was processed by Lucy Talbot and analysed by Alice Lyons. The report was illustrated and produced by Maggie Footitt and edited by Alice Lyons.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Trench	Category	Description	Period
1	All	Deposit	Topsoil	Post-medieval
2	All	Deposit	Subsoil	Unknown
3	3	Cut	Small pit	?Romano-British
4	3	Deposit	Fill of [3]	-
5	All	Cut	Drainage channel	?Natural
6	All	Deposit	Alluvial fill of [5]	-
7	1b	Cut	Curving gully	?Natural
8	1b	Deposit	Fill of [7]	-

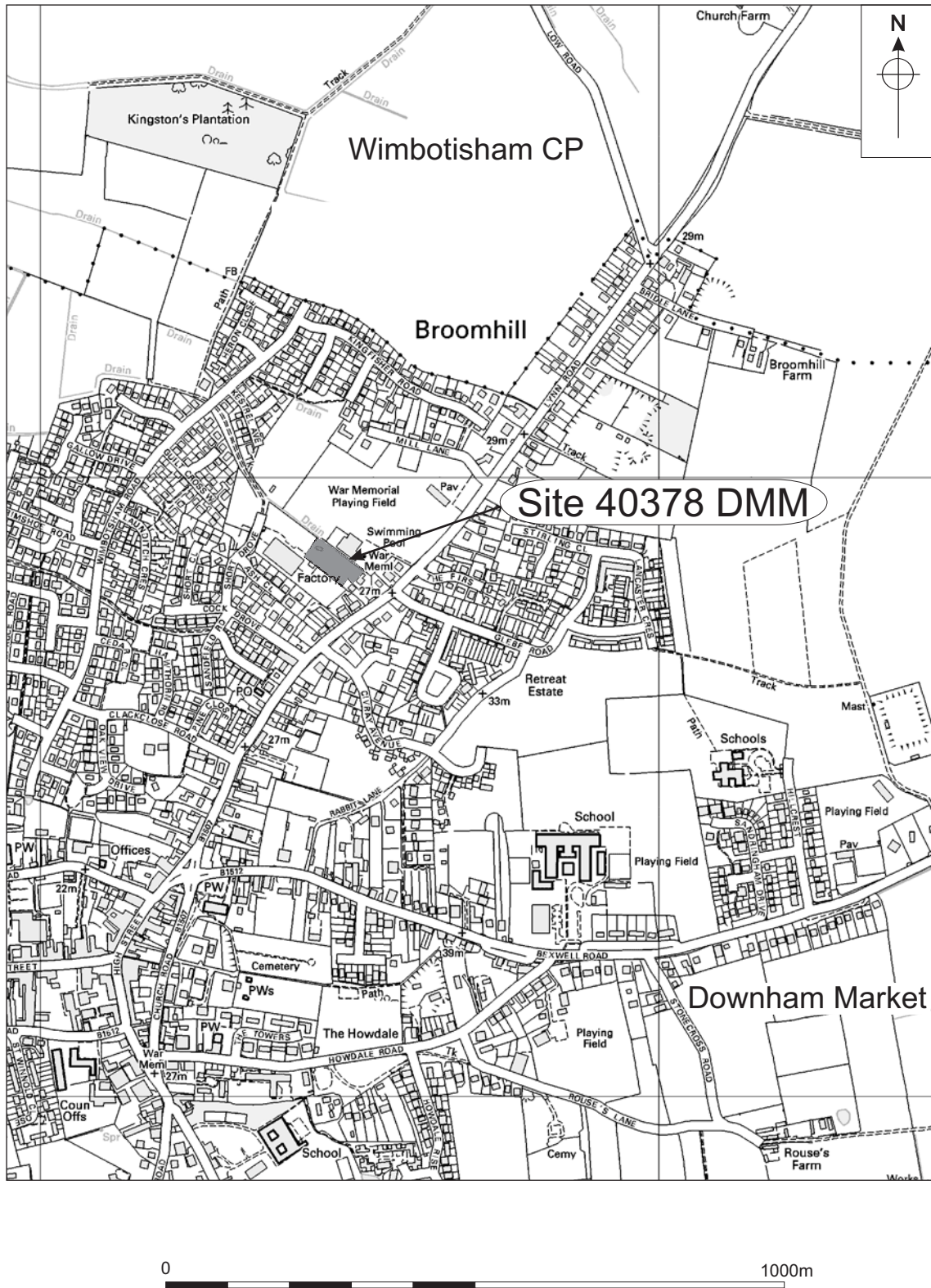
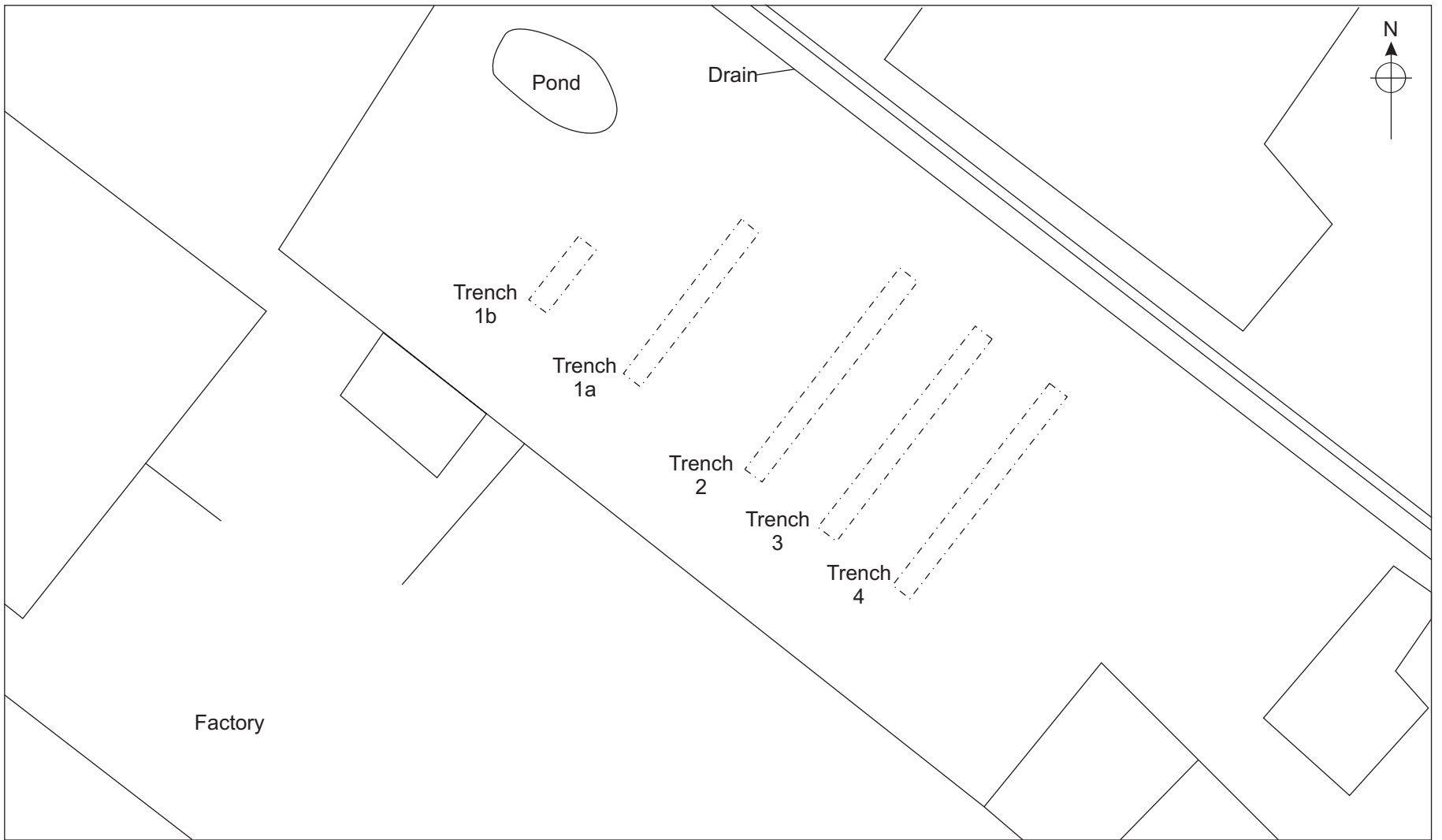
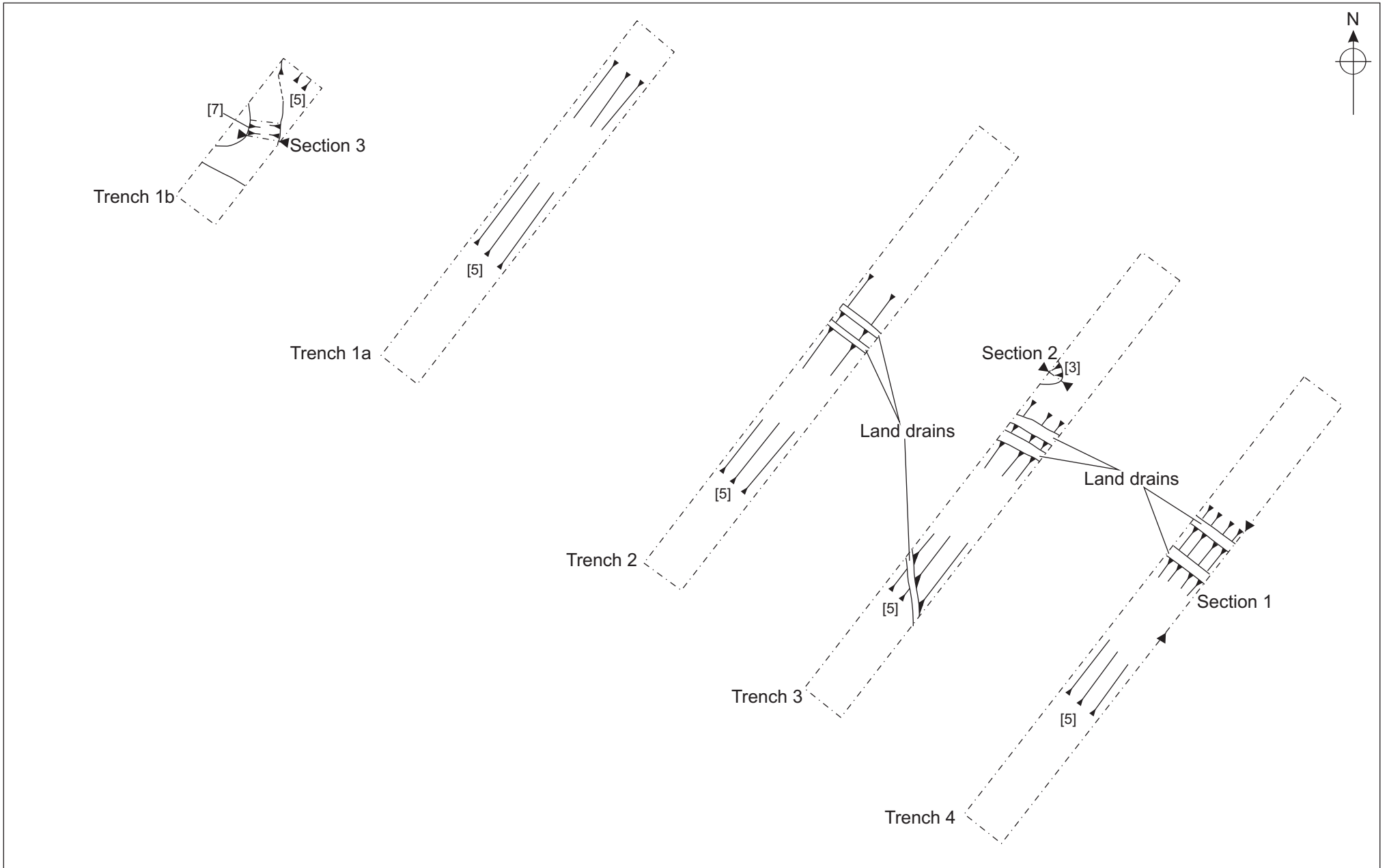


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000



0 30m

Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500



0 20m

Figure 3. Trench plans. Scale 1:200



Figure 4. Trench 1b, section. Scale 1:10

Figure 5. Trench 3, section. Scale 1:10

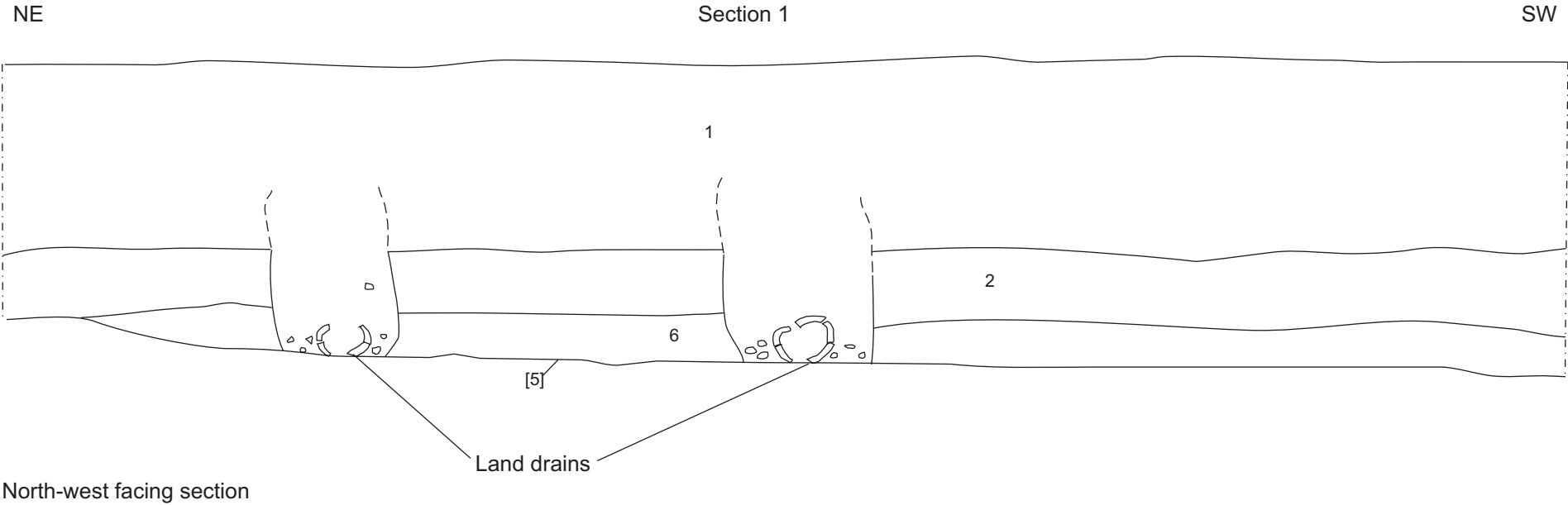


Figure 6. Trench 4, section. Scale 1:20