

**A Further Phase of Archaeological Evaluation  
on land at Church Street, Thorney, Cambridgeshire.**

**NGR: TF 2827 0429**

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***Client: Highview Homes Limited***

**Checked by Project Manager**

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## **A Further Phase of Archaeological Evaluation on land at Church Street, Thorney, Cambridgeshire, January 2004 NGR TF 2827 0429**

### **Summary**

*A further phase of archaeological evaluation on land at Church Street, Thorney, Cambridgeshire (approximately centred on NGR TF 2827 0429) was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services prior to the development of the site. The work was carried out in January 2004 and comprised the excavation of a 2m x 12m trial trench and a 2.5m x 2m test pit.*

*The work revealed a number of layers containing a range of archaeological material predominantly from the 16th century and post-medieval period. The layers showed evidence of occupation debris with one layer containing quantities of organic material. Three undated features were recorded cutting into the natural substrata. The results from the evaluation suggest that the northern part of the development site was at the very edge of the medieval Thorney Island with many of the layers being formed by dumped/cultivated material.*

*The archive from the evaluation will be held by Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery under the site code THY 04.*

### **1 Introduction**

The site lies approximately 20km east of Peterborough on the A47 trunk road (NGR TF 2827 0429) (Fig. 1). Prior to any evaluation work an orchard occupied the site. The site slopes from south to north and covers an area of approximately 0.07ha and is at a height of c. 4m OD. (Fig. 2).

This document represents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out as an extension to earlier site evaluation work. Initial planning application (99/00192) by Highview Homes Ltd for one dwelling prompted an evaluation (accession number THY 01) followed by an area excavation of the southern part of the site in October 2002 (accession number THY 02) (Thomas 2001 and 2003). A later change in the planning application to include two units covering the northern part of the site meant that a second phase of evaluation was required in this area.

This evaluation forms the third part of staged archaeological work undertaken by ULAS on the site. Initial evaluation on the southern part of the site was carried out by trial trenching in May and June 2001 followed by an open area excavation in October and November 2002. The most recent work in the northern half of the site took place between 26th and 28th of January 2004. All work followed the guidelines set out in the Design Specification for a further phase of archaeological investigation on Land at Church Street, Thorney (ULAS 21.01.04 Appendix 1) and in consultation with the Archaeological Officer, Peterborough City Council.

The material and record archive will be lodged with the Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery.

## **2 Archaeological Background**

Earlier stages of archaeological evaluation confirmed the presence of well-preserved archaeological remains across the development site. Deposits were recovered dating from the late Saxon to the early post-medieval indicating almost continuous occupation on or near the site.

Excavation of the southern part of the site in October 2002 revealed a complex sequence of stratigraphic deposits (Thomas 2003). Two clay layers were shown to have been deposited as surfaces above earlier topsoil. Structural activity was noted cutting through one of the clay layers, as were a number of post holes. Evidence was discovered for lead working whilst slag and waste indicated iron and copper alloy working activities on or near the site.

During the same work a series of building remains were also partially revealed the partial remains of three medieval buildings. Within the area of the wall footings lay the remains of a brick and stone built central hearth. Substantial deposits of high quality medieval painted window glass, provisionally dated to the later 13th and early 14th centuries were recovered from in and around the building foundations alongside evidence for the salvaging and re-working of the window lead. The finds from the site (including fine pottery and glazed roof tiles) as well as the complex of buildings, suggested the site was associated with the former abbey complex and the nature of the deposits (glass and lead re-working) may indicate that the later periods of activity on the site were related to the Dissolution.

## **3 Aims and Objectives**

### *Aims*

The aims of the archaeological evaluation as set out in the Specification were:

- To establish the nature, character and extent of any archaeological deposits within the designated area(s) whilst minimising damage to such deposits.
- To establish a date range for any archaeological deposits located.
- To define the state of preservation of these deposits, including the potential for the survival of environmental data
- To assess the local, regional and national importance of any deposits.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

### *Objective*

- The objective is to gain an indication of the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits in order to determine the potential impact on such deposits from any groundworks associated with revised plans for redevelopment of the site.

## 4 Methodology

All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (1999)*.

Two trial trenches were located, as specified, in the north of the site to investigate areas not previously evaluated but which would be disturbed under the new planning application. The two trenches were numbered as 6 and 7 so that the numbering sequence followed on from the first evaluation in 2001 (Fig. 2). Context numbers were started at 300 to avoid confusion with earlier work.

The topsoil, made ground and any disturbed subsoil was removed in spits using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under full archaeological supervision, until undisturbed substrata were revealed, archaeological deposits were encountered or when a depth of 1.2m was reached.

The base of each trench was hand cleaned and any features revealed were planned and sample excavated to provide an adequate sample of the archaeology on site. The trenches were then recorded by notes, photographs and drawings. Trench plans were produced at a scale of 1:50, all excavated sections were drawn at either 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. All trenches and sections were located and tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid and Ordnance Survey Datum.

## 5 Results

### Trench 6

Trench 6 (Fig. 4) measured 12m long x 2m wide (excluding stepping) and was aligned on a north to south orientation. The trench was located on the western side of the site between the disused shop and the previously excavated Trench 4. As the natural substrata was greater than 1.2m below ground level Trench 6 had to be stepped in order to avoid sections deeper than 1.2m in accordance with current H&S regulations. The minimum depth of excavation was approximately 1.21m below ground surface at the southern end of the trench which was approximately 4.29m above OD (Fig. 6). The maximum depth of excavation was at the northern end and was 1.78m below surface level which was approximately 4.07m above OD (Fig. 5 and Plate 1).

Trench 6 was excavated through an initial layer of dark grey-brown silty clay with frequent rounded stones (303). Below this, in the northern part of the trench a pale brown loose layer of degraded wall plaster and rubble (304) was observed. Numerous clay pipe stems and bowls dating from the late 17th century were recovered from this layer along with 16th century Redware and post-medieval Blackware (Appendix 3). A single piece of glass from a late(?) 17th century bottle was also found in this layer. Beneath (304), but extending further south along the trench, was a layer of yellow-brown clay containing many small stones (305). This layer produced a single sherd of possible Roman calcite gritted ware, 16th century Redware and undated brick fragments. The lowest layer in Trench 6 was a very dark-brown silty clay (306) covering the entire length of the trench. (306) contained a number of fragments of brick, tile and wood. Several pieces of worked stone were also recovered (Plates 2 and 6). (306) followed the rising level of the natural clay substrata and decreased in

thickness from 1m at the north end to 0.3m in the south. A small layer of orange-brown gravely clay (307) was noted at the south end of the trench beyond the southern limit of layer (305). No finds were recovered from layer (307). The underlying natural consisted of an orange-brown silty clay.

Three features were observed cutting into the natural. A shallow pit (311) [312] with a post hole (310) next to it (Fig. 4). No finds were recovered from fill (311) and the post-hole (310) could not be excavated due to a rapid influx of ground water. To the north west of these a shallow flat-bottomed feature (308) [309] extended from the western edge of the trench (Figs. 4, 7 and Plate 3). Pieces of oyster shell, wood and undateable earthenware fragments were recovered from the fill. As only a small area of this feature was visible it was not clear if it was a pit or gully.

### ***Trench 7***

Trench 7 was specified as a 2.5m x 2.5m test pit located to the north of the site between the wooden building and the A47 Wisbech Road. However, lack of space for spoil and risk of undermining adjacent structures meant that the dimensions were reduced to 2.5m x 2m. Full excavation of Trench 7 was hampered by a lack of working space and was only excavated to a depth of 1.2m below surface level which was approximately 3.97m OD. A small test pit was excavated down to natural in order to ascertain the depth the natural substrata which was at approximately 2.39m OD (Fig. 8 and Plate 4).

Beneath a modern surface of tarmac was a layer of dark grey-brown silty clay with frequent rounded stones (300). Layer (300) was similar in appearance to (303) in Trench 6. Many fragments and bowls of late 17th century clay pipe were noted in this layer along with post-medieval Redware, Blackware and Brown salt-glazed Stoneware. One sherd of modern china/earthenware was also recovered from (300). A thin layer of pale yellow-brown clay containing many small stones (301) but no finds extended half way across the trench from the southern edge beneath (300). The lower layer of Trench 7 consisted of very dark-brown silty clay (302) containing many animal and bird bone fragments, part of a leather strap, a piece of shaped oak board (Plate 5) and a fragment of a stone coffin (?) (Plates 6 and 7). Ceramic finds included sherds of 15th/16th century Bourne D type ware, post-medieval Redware and possible Bourne products of roof tile and brick fragments. Evidence of industrial activity was seen in this layer in the form of a single piece of iron slag. As in Trench 6 the underlying natural, seen in the small test pit, consisted of an orange-brown silty clay. No features were observed cutting into the natural.

## **6 Discussion**

The evaluation has revealed a number of layers containing somewhat disturbed archaeological material suggesting phases of dumping or cultivation at the edge of the medieval Thorney Island. The two trenches had to be placed around the existing buildings meaning that Trench 6 did not extend very far into the footprint of one of the proposed buildings.

The three features in Trench 6 cannot provide dating evidence and do not appear to be related to each other or to other features found in earlier work. It was unfortunate that only a small amount of natural could be exposed in Trench 7 but indications are that little would be seen.

The single piece of Roman pottery in context (305) may have been imported from elsewhere on the site during post medieval cultivation or dumping activity. Work carried out nearby in 1987 suggested the focus of Roman activity took place on drier ground to the west of the development site (Hall: 52).

Earlier work on this site identified similar clay layers to (301) and (305) and interpreted them as potential compacted surfaces. This may be the case in Trenches 6 and 7.

Much of the remaining pottery dated from the early post-medieval period and some could feasibly relate to clearing activities from the abbey site in the late 16th century (Thomas 2001: 2). This could also be true for the pieces of worked stone in Trench 6 and the small portion of coffin found in Trench 7. Evidence found in the 2001 evaluation identified an area of 16th/17th century activity around the southern end of the site with robbed walls and ditches. The layers discovered in Trenches 6 and 7 probably represent waste disposal from this activity.

In summary, the work revealed a number of layers containing a range of archaeological material predominantly dating from the 16th century and post-medieval period. The layers showed evidence of occupation debris with one layer containing quantities of organic material. The three undated features cannot be commented on further due to their lack of finds. Overall, the results from the evaluation suggest that the northern part of the development site was at the very edge of the medieval Thorney Island with many of the layers being formed by dumped/cultivated material.

## **7 Archive**

The archive consists of 13 context sheets, site indices, 1 A3 permagraph sheet containing trench plans and sections, colour slides and monochrome contact sheets. The archive will be stored at the Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery under the site code THY04.

## **8 Acknowledgements**

This report was compiled from information gathered on site by the author and John Thomas, Field Officer, and consultation with Ben Robinson, Archaeology Officer, Peterborough Museum. The evaluation was greatly assisted by the developer, Mr David Pilsworth, for machine driving and help on site. The project was managed by Richard Buckley.

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9th February 2004

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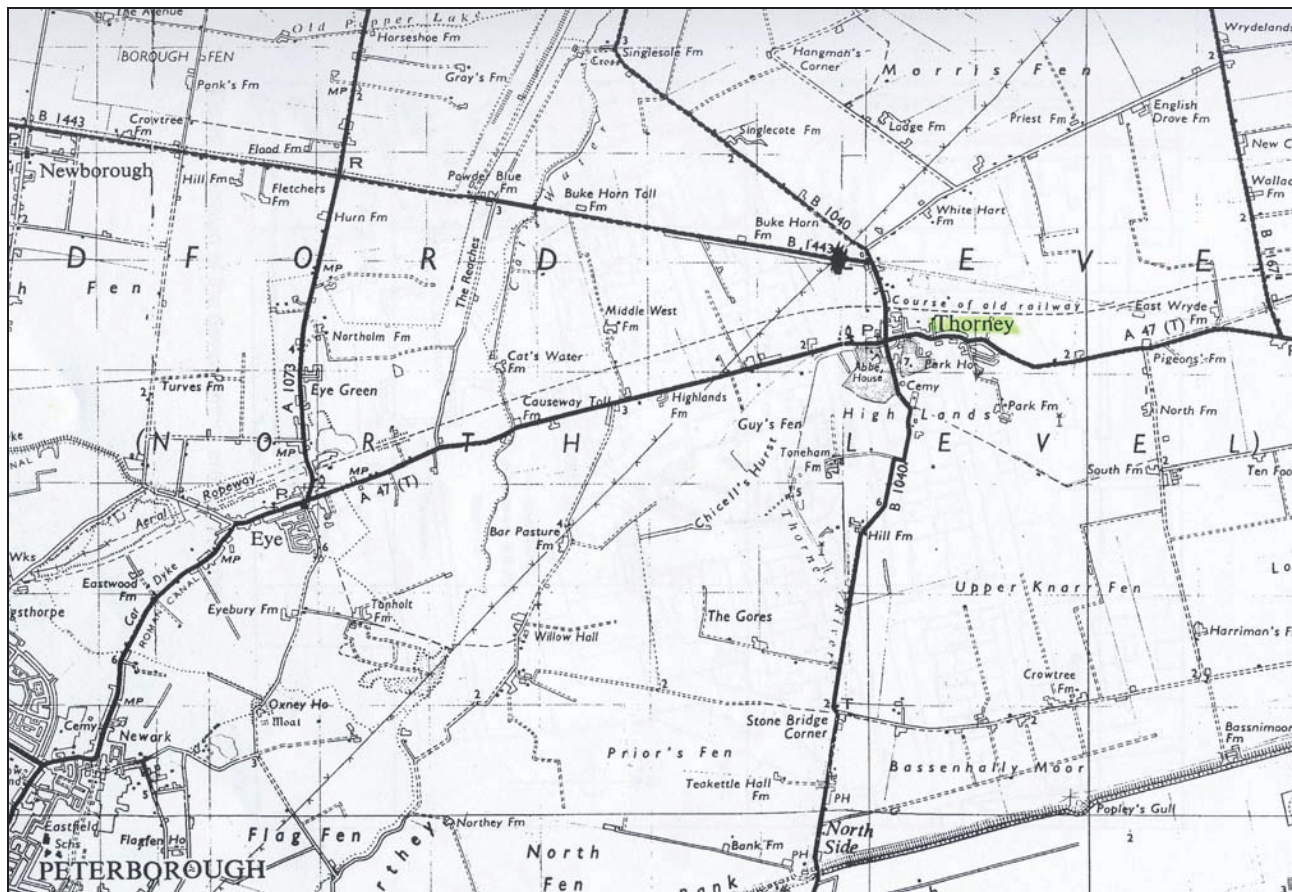


Figure 1. Location of Thorney.

Reproduced from the 1976 Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 Peterborough Sheet 142 map  
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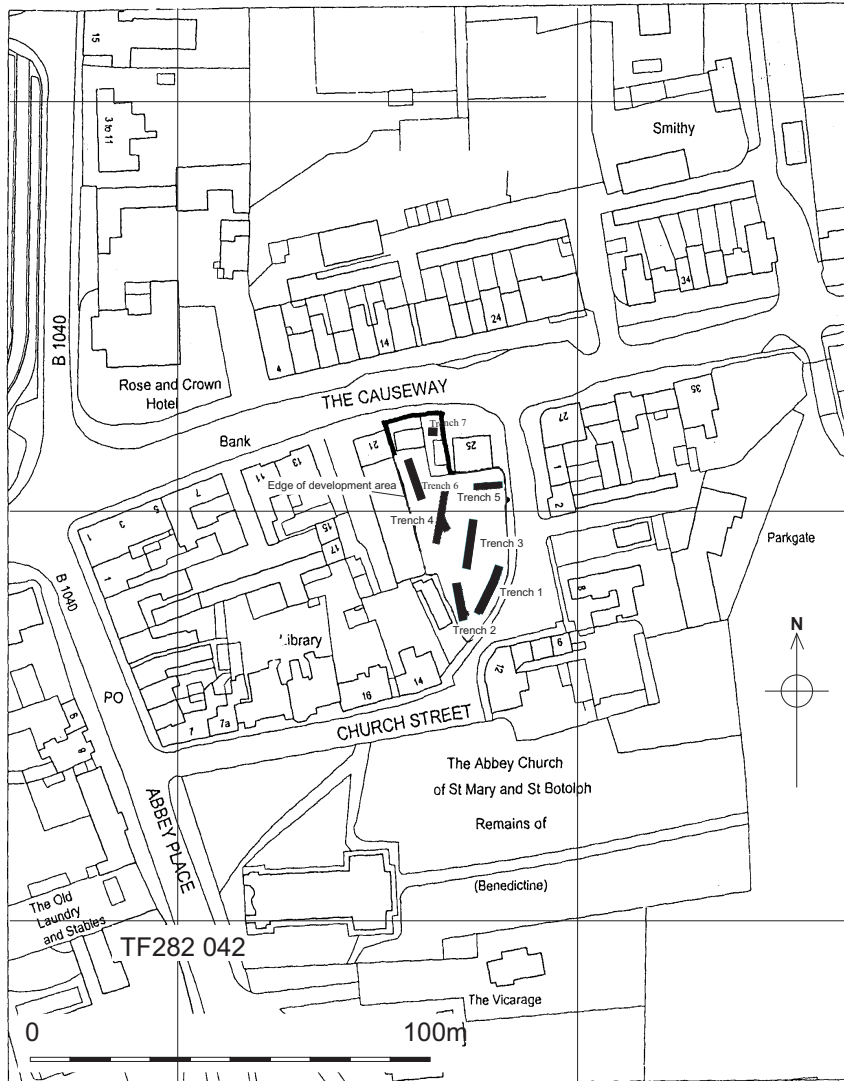


Figure 2 location of trial trenches within development area

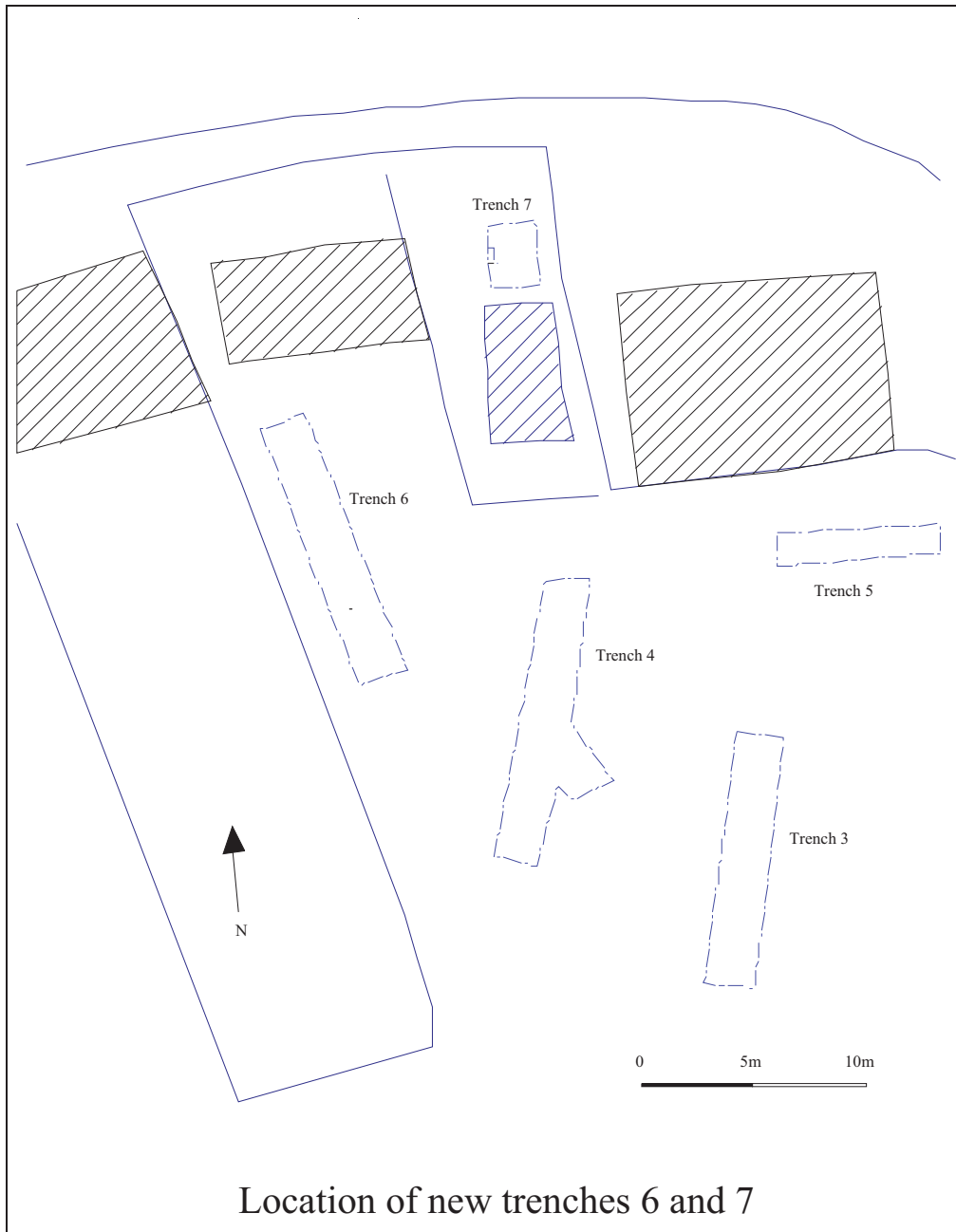


Figure 3. Detailed location of Trenches 6 and 7.

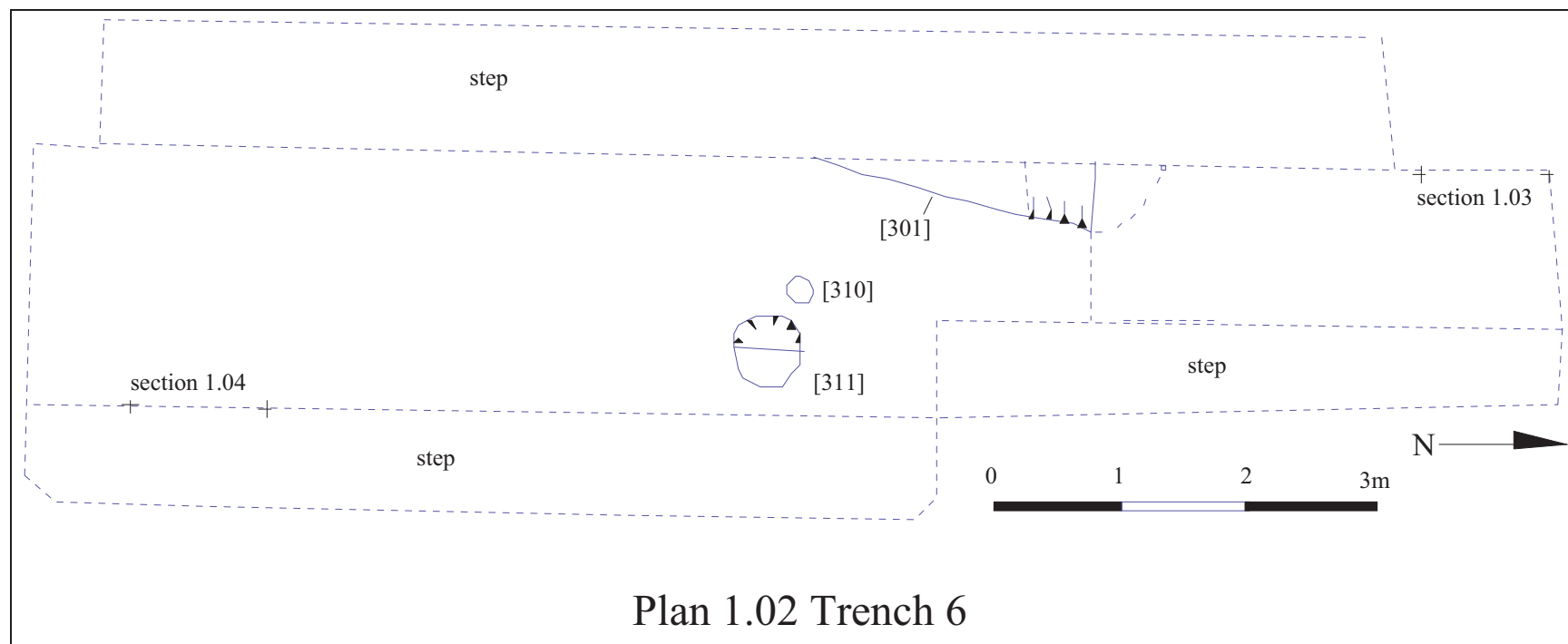


Figure 4. Plan of Trench 6

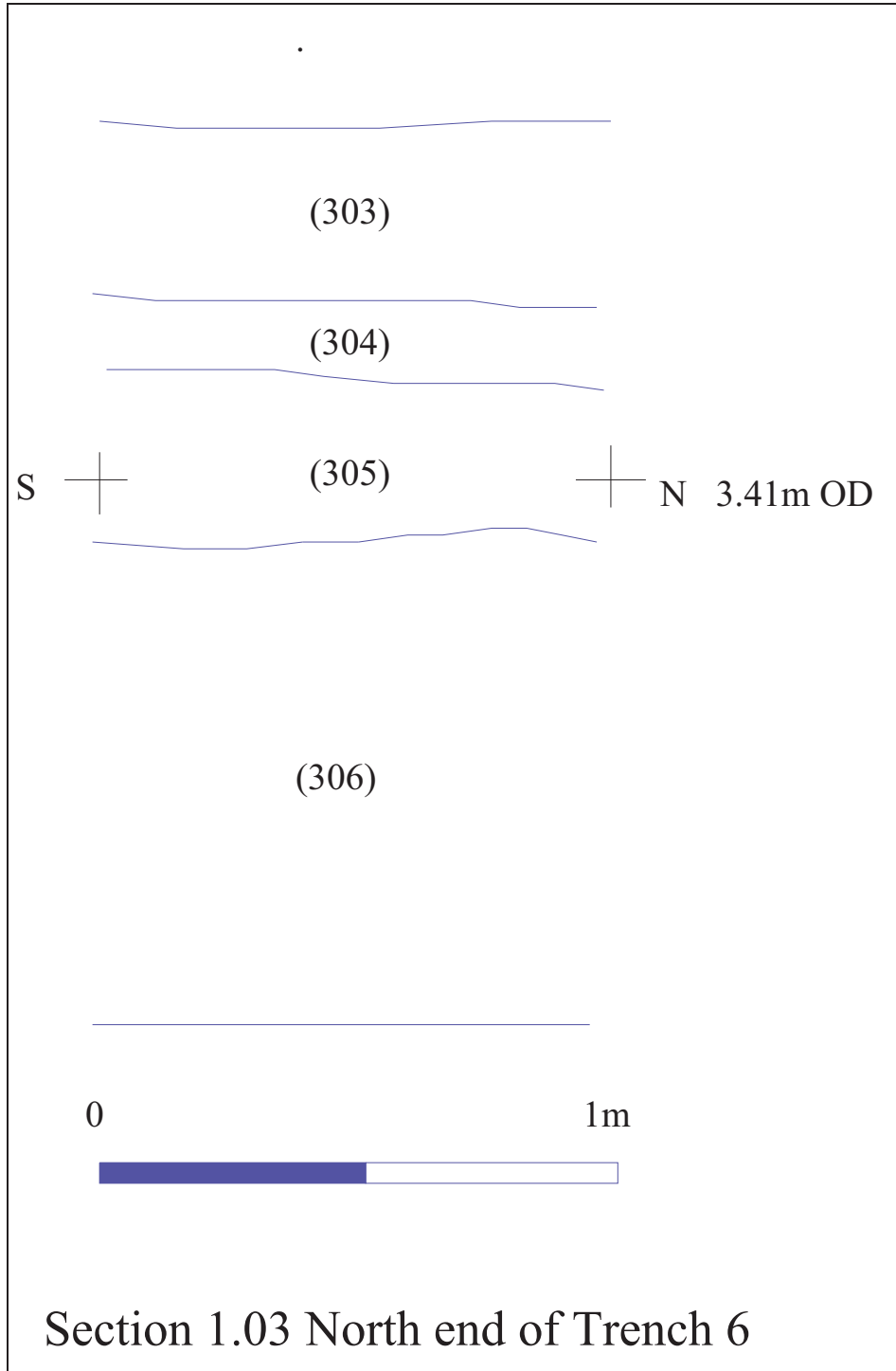


Figure 5.

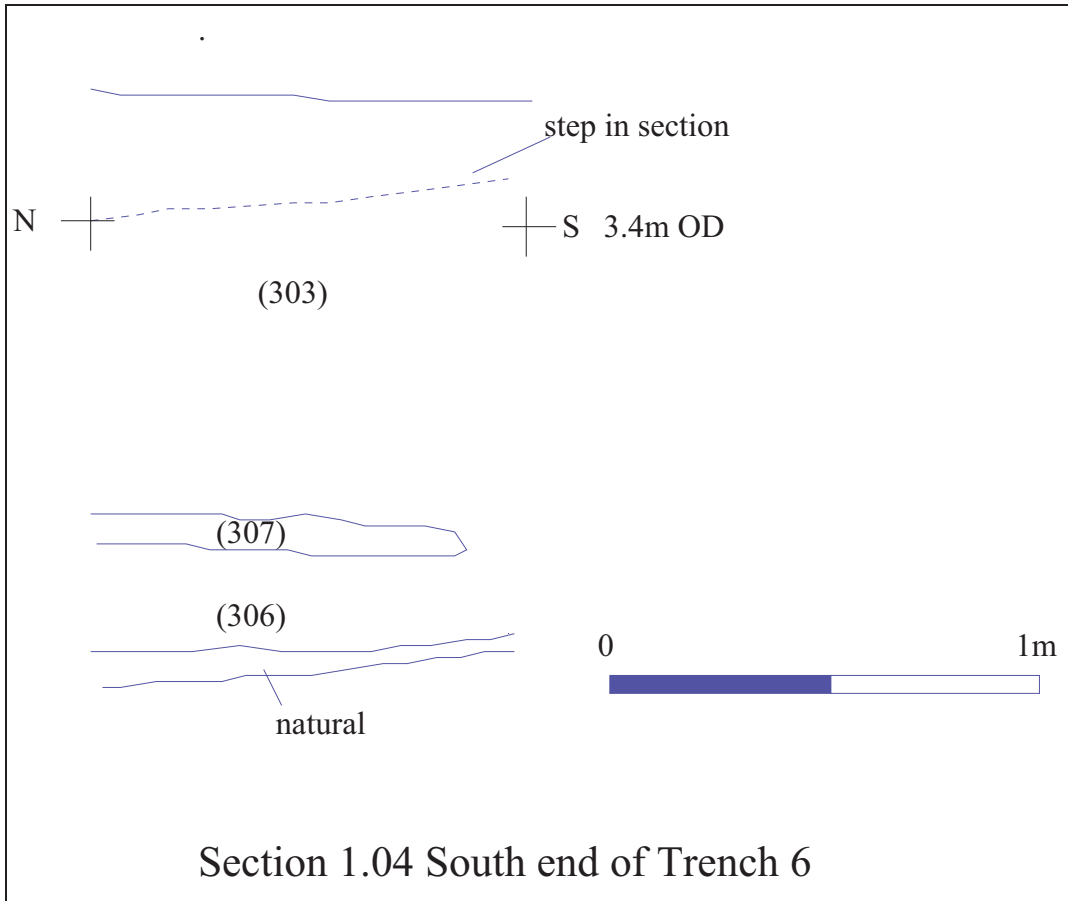


Figure 6.

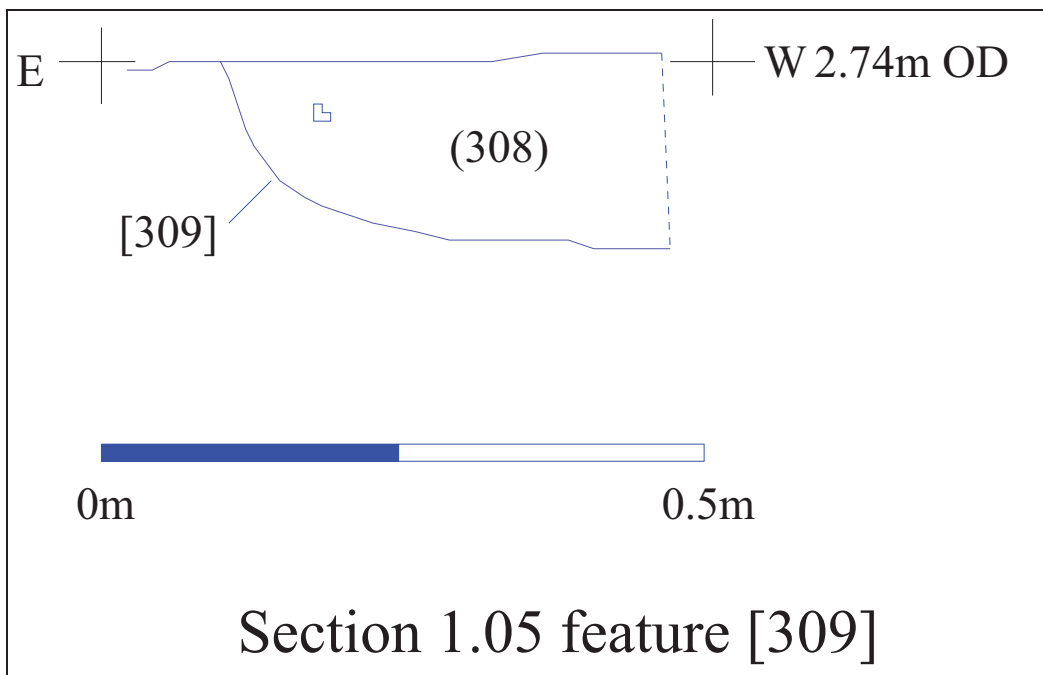


Figure 7.

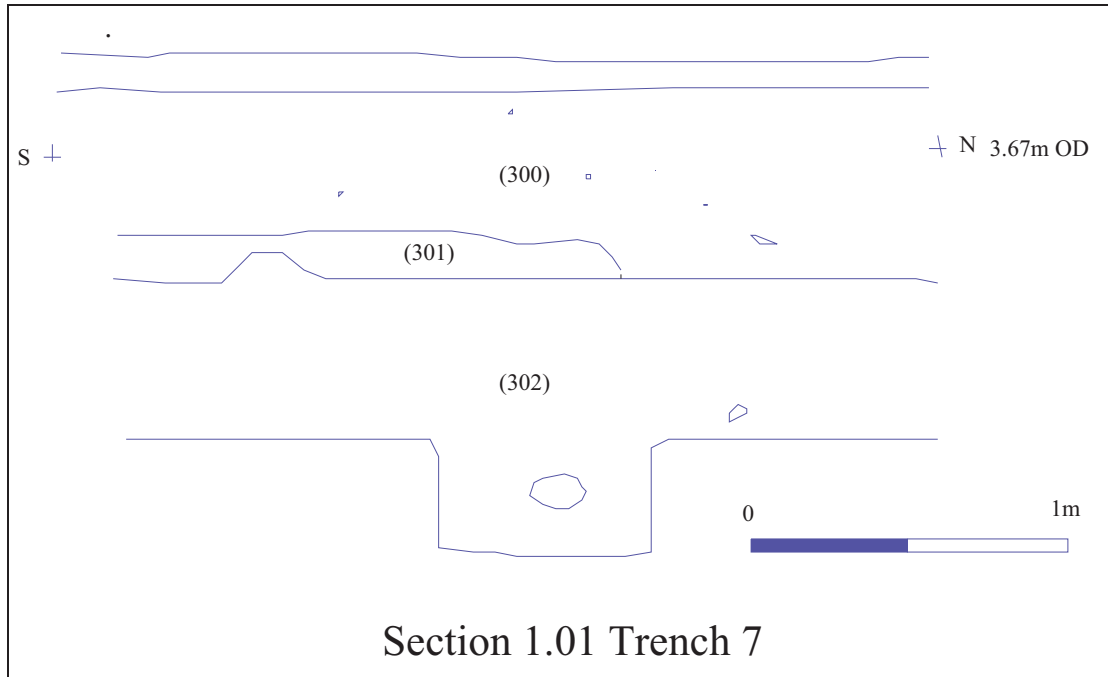


Figure 8.



Plate 1. North end of Trench 6 during excavation



Plate 2. Worked stone fragments from layer (306) in Trench 6



Plate 3. Pit/gully [309] Trench 6.





Plate 4. Trench 7 showing small test pit down to natural



Plate 5. Shaped wood from layer (302) Trench 7.  
Scale 10cm



Plate 6. Internal view of coffin from layer (302) Trench 7  
plus fragment of window from (306) Trench 6.  
Scale 30 cm



Plate 7. External view of coffin from layer (302).  
Scale 30 cm

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 ULAS Design Spec.

Appendix 2 Peterborough City Council Request for PPG-16 condition-led archaeological investigation assistance.

Appendix 3 Pottery report