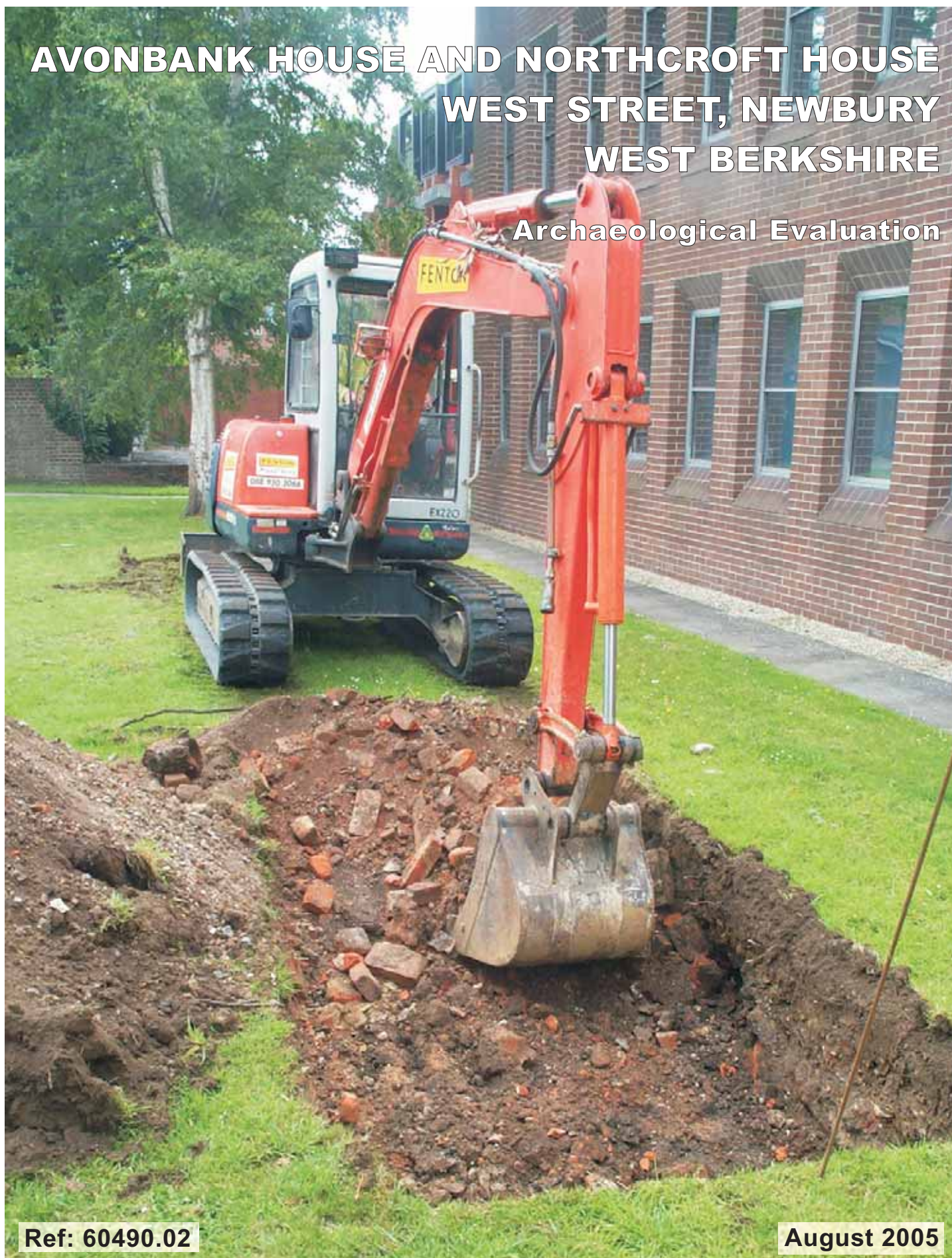


AVONBANK HOUSE AND NORTHCROFT HOUSE WEST STREET, NEWBURY WEST BERKSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation



**AVONBANK HOUSE AND NORTHCROFT HOUSE
WEST STREET NEWBURY
WEST BERKSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARIES

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Watson Woods Partnership to carry out an archaeological evaluation comprising 3 trenches on land at Avonbank House and Northcroft House, West Street, Newbury RG14 1BZ centred on NGR 463220 154290.

No archaeological features were observed, although augering established the presence and depth of peat and tufa deposits several metres below modern ground level. These deposits are known to be associated with Mesolithic activity elsewhere in the local Kennet valley area.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Watson Woods Partnership (the Client). Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Duncan Coe of West Berkshire Heritage Service who monitored the project.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Peter Reeves. The fieldwork was carried out by David Norcott with the assistance of Steve Thompson. This report was prepared by David Norcott with a contribution from Lorraine Mephram. The illustrations were prepared by Mark Roughley.

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WEST STREET, NEWBURY
WEST BERKSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Watson Woods Partnership (the Client) to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at a site at Avonbank House and Northcroft House, West Street, Newbury RG14 1BZ in the unitary authority of West Berkshire. The site is centred on NGR 463220 154290.
- 1.1.2 A Planning Application has been lodged with West Berkshire Council for the demolition of Avoncroft House and Northcroft House (05/01180/CON) and for the construction of 65 apartments with underground parking (05/01182/OUTMAJ). West Berkshire Heritage Service had advised that, due to the high archaeological potential of this site, an archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken.

1.2 Site Description

- 1.2.1 The bulk of the site is currently occupied by three storey modern office blocks, with Newbury United Reform Church immediately adjacent to the north-east. Some areas around the buildings were available for field evaluation, including a tarmac covered small car park on the south east corner of the site, and areas of grass between the two buildings (**figure 1**).
- 1.2.2 The Site is relatively level and fronts onto West Street to the west and Pembroke Road to the south.

1.3 Archaeological/Historical Background

- 1.3.1 There has been little archaeological investigation within the immediate vicinity of the Avonbank/Northcroft House site; however there are a number of reasons (1.3.2 to 1.3.6 below) for considering that this area is of high archaeological potential.

Prehistoric

- 1.3.2 The Kennet Valley through Newbury is well known as the location of Mesolithic deposits relating to some of the earliest Holocene evidence for human occupation in Britain. The current site falls within the wetland and wetland edge areas favoured by these early communities.

Saxon/Medieval

- 1.3.3 Newbury is first recorded in AD 1080, but is not recorded in the Domesday Book. It is therefore highly likely that the town is a Norman creation. However, Domesday does record a manor called *Ulvritone* with a sizeable number of households, indicating that the town was constructed within a

Saxon landholding. The size and exact location of this pre-Norman settlement was remains unknown.

- 1.3.4 The town proved very successful and grew rapidly with many of the attributes of a medieval town in existence by the beginning of the 13th century. The site lies on the edge of the medieval town of Newbury and has great potential for providing important evidence about the growth and development of the town during this period.

Post-medieval

- 1.3.5 Newbury is well known for the scale of the production of cloth in the early post-medieval period. However, little physical evidence of how this industry was organised has been recorded.
- 1.3.6 Newbury United Reform Church lies immediately adjacent to and to the east of Northcroft House (see **figure 1**). The present church buildings date from the latter half of the 20th century, but a plaque on the building indicates that the original church was founded in 1662. According to anecdotal evidence from local church members, there have been two previous churches which have had to be replaced when they subsided into the soft peat beneath the site. Repositioned gravestones along the walls of the car park to the east of the church date from the late 17th to the 19th century.

2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- 2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Characterise the nature, date, extent and state of preservation of underlying archaeological deposits.
- Identify the depth of burial (and thus the depth of sensitivity) of any underlying archaeological deposits or features.
- To determine the presence and character of any Mesolithic deposits present.
- To examine whether any evidence exists on the site for the Domesday settlement of *Ulvritone*.
- To examine whether evidence exists on the site to assist with the dating of the laying out of the medieval town.
- To determine whether deposits relating to post-medieval industrial activities are present on the site.
- To observe, if applicable the depth and rate at which ground water enters the excavated trench.

- 2.1.2 The results of the trenching are to be used to inform decisions regarding any possible requirement for mitigation during or in advance of further construction.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Health and Safety

- 3.1.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety regulations (1992) and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation and regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.
- 3.1.2 A risk assessment was prepared by Wessex Archaeology before the commencement of fieldwork.
- 3.1.3 The locations of all trenches were 'swept' with a Cable Avoidance Tool prior to trench excavation.

3.2 Excavation and Recording

- 3.2.1 All works were conducted in accordance with the WSI, current best practice and the guidance and standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (2004).
- 3.2.2 Trenches were located on the ground using measurements from features present on OS maps (e.g. boundaries or buildings).
- 3.2.3 The trenches were excavated using a tracked 5-tonne 360° mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.6m wide toothless bucket, under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. Machine excavation proceeded until either the top of archaeological deposits, natural geology or the limit of safe working depth was encountered.
- 3.2.4 After machine excavation each trench was cleaned by hand and any features present were investigated and excavated by hand. All trenches were 'signed off' by the Archaeological Officer of West Berkshire Heritage Service prior to their backfilling. The trenches were backfilled with their arisings, levelled off by machine and compacted with the machine bucket.
- 3.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were fully recorded on Wessex Archaeology pro forma sheets in accordance with Wessex Archaeology guidelines for fieldwork recording. A full photographic record was kept comprising black and white negatives, colour transparencies and digital images. All site drawings were drawn at an appropriate scale, typically 1:10 for sections and 1:20 for plans.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The evaluation comprised the excavation of three trial trenches (**Figure 1**).
- 4.1.2 Trench 1 (4m in length) was located in the small car park at the southeast corner of the site. Trench 2 (6m in length) was positioned in a grass area north of Avonbank House, and trench 3 (2m in length) in a smaller grass area on the southeast corner of Northcroft House. All trenches were 1.6m wide.
- 4.1.3 No archaeological features of any antiquity were found in any of the trenches. A modern brick floor and wall foundation were recorded in trench 2.

4.2 Evaluation trenches

- 4.2.1 A similar sequence of deposits were found in each of the trenches; beneath the modern turf and topsoil (tarmac in the case of trench 1) was a layer of modern made-up ground down to around 0.6m below ground level. From this depth to 1.1-1.2m below ground level was a dark greyish brown layer of silty clay loam. This was quite humic and contained fairly common post-medieval/modern brick and tile, and has been interpreted as a post-medieval garden deposit.
- 4.2.2 Below this deposit (with a quite undulating and diffuse boundary) was the top of the 'natural', a grey tufaceous marl. No cut features were observed.

4.3 Underlying stratigraphy

- 4.3.1 As the evaluation trenches had failed to provide answers for many of the project objectives (due at least in part to the depth of modern and post-medieval overburden), it was decided to carry out an auger survey of the deposits underlying the site to establish the presence and depth of possible peat deposits. Augering was carried out in Trenches 1 and 2, using a Dutch-headed auger. The results from both trenches were very similar, indicating that the deposits found are likely to be representative of the site as a whole. The detailed results can be found in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.3.2 The grey tufaceous marl was found to become more nodular and concreted with depth. A thick layer of peat (note this is a terrestrial deposit: a fen peat formed in marshy conditions, as evidenced by the plant remains) was recorded at 3.07-3.84m, which was overlain by a cream coloured tufa (a calcareous spring deposit). Beneath this peat the ground was saturated with water, so it became difficult to retrieve sediments with the auger – however there was some indication of a possible incipient humic soil horizon overlying the gravel. Impenetrable gravel was reached at 4.77m below ground level.

Tufa/peat
- 4.3.3 This tufa/peat sequence correlates well with alluvial deposits found locally at Thatcham (Chisham 2004, Churchill 1962, Wymer 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962) and in Newbury itself (White 1907). At these sites the peat deposits have

been shown to date from the early Mesolithic and are associated with Mesolithic artefacts, animal bones and evidence of burning both within the peat and sealed beneath in an immature soil formed on the underlying river gravels.

- 4.3.4 The majority of tufa in the area has been found to date to the Late Boreal-Atlantic periods, but also formed locally along spring lines from the Pre Boreal/ Early Mesolithic, hence in places being contemporary with the peat, elsewhere sealing and post-dating it (Chisham 2004).

Gravels

- 4.3.5 The underlying gravels at c.4.7m below ground level are a potential source of earlier prehistoric archaeological material. There have been finds of Palaeolithic flints within the upper gravels in South Newbury (Richards 1895, in White 1907, p100) and most Palaeolithic finds in the Kennet catchment are associated with the gravel terraces (cf. Wymer 1977).
- 4.3.6 The local early fluvial deposits may notably include Upper Palaeolithic long blade material contemporary with that at Avington (Barton and Froom 1986, Barton *et al* 1998) and potentially early activity at Thatcham (Chisham 2004).

4.4 Ground water levels

- 4.4.1 No ground water entered any of the evaluation trenches, and deposits in the base of these trenches were relatively dry (at 1.2m below modern ground level). From the results of the augering in Trench 1 it was observed that the underlying deposits became noticeably moist at around 2.1m below modern ground level, and completely saturated at around 3.8m.
- 4.4.2 The level of the water table at present is therefore likely to lie between 2.1 and 3.8 metres below modern ground level, somewhat lower than that suggested by the height of water observed in nearby storm drains.

5 FINDS

- 5.1.1 A very small quantity of finds were recovered during the evaluation, from two contexts. From context **103** came one sherd of post-medieval Border ware, from the Surrey/Hampshire border industry, and a fragment of ceramic roof tile. The latter object is likely to be medieval, on the grounds of its coarse fabric and irregular manufacture. Finds from context **207** comprise one oyster shell, three sherds of modern pottery (refined whitewares), and a second fragment of ceramic roof tile, again probably medieval. None of these finds have been retained following identification and quantification.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1.1 No archaeological features were present in any of the evaluation trenches. However augering has shown that the alluvial tufa and peat deposits known to be associated with Mesolithic activity in the local area are indeed present beneath the site, and at depths likely to be impacted upon by the proposed development.

- 6.1.2 It is worth noting that later prehistoric sediments and evidence for activity are notably lacking from alluvial and peat sequences in the area, and that therefore any later archaeological features or artefacts are likely to be located on or cut into the top of the tufaceous marl 'natural' at c.1.1-1.2m below present ground level.

7 CONFIDENCE RATING

- 7.1.1 All trenches were carefully examined during the initial machining. Topsoil removed mechanically was examined for finds, all trenches were cleaned by hand, and any potential features were investigated. Weather conditions were generally good. It is therefore thought very unlikely that any features of archaeological significance were overlooked.

8 THE ARCHIVE

- 8.1.1 The project archive will be prepared in accordance with the *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage* (UKIC 1990). Following agreement with the client, the project archive, including any finds and environmental samples, will be deposited with the most appropriate museum.
- 8.1.2 The resulting archive will be microfiched to the standards accepted by the National Monuments Record (NMR). One copy will be deposited with the West Berkshire SMR, a further copy will be deposited with the NMR.
- 8.1.3 Details of the evaluation will be entered into the online 'OASIS' database maintained by the Archaeological Data Service (ADS).

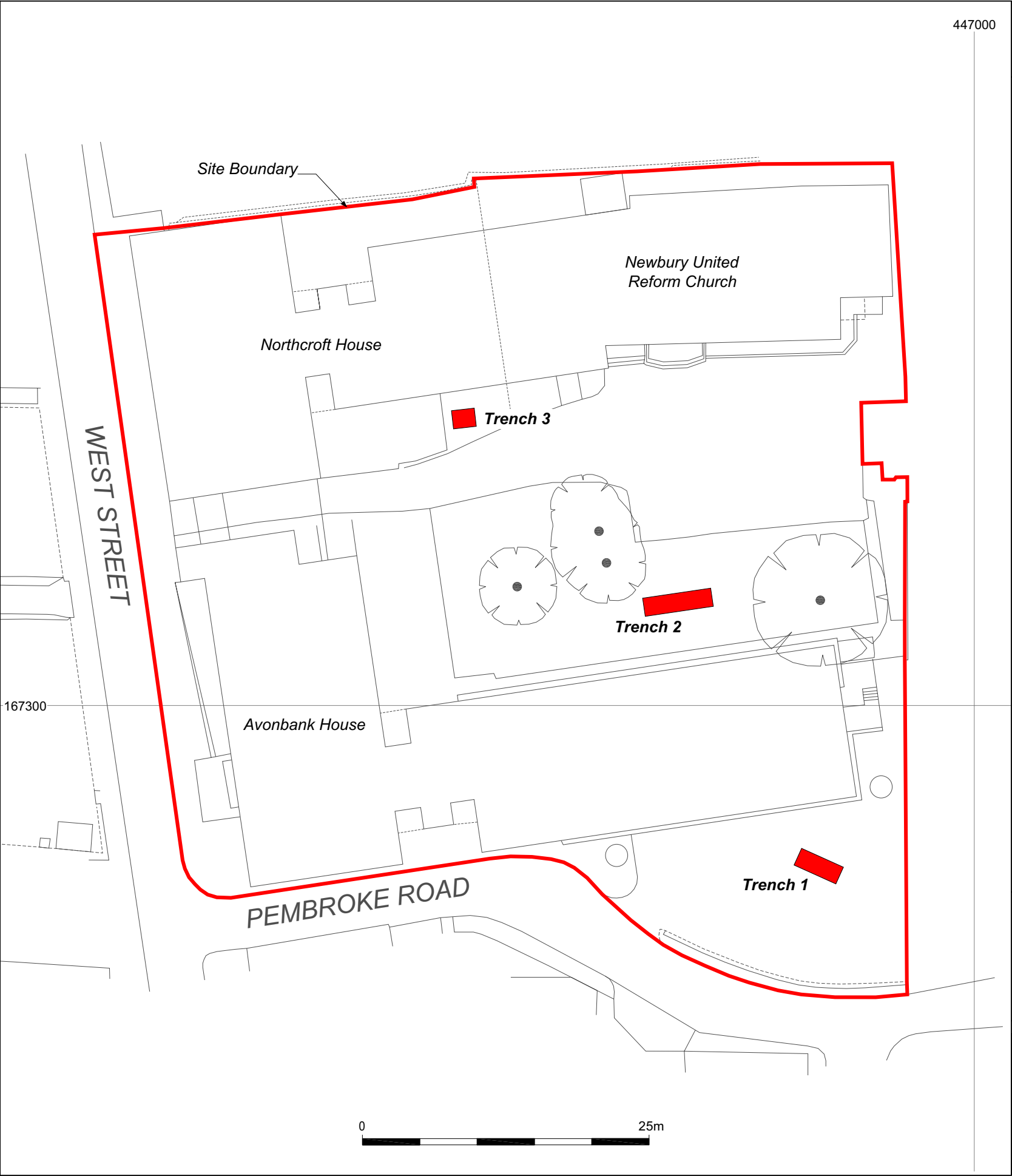
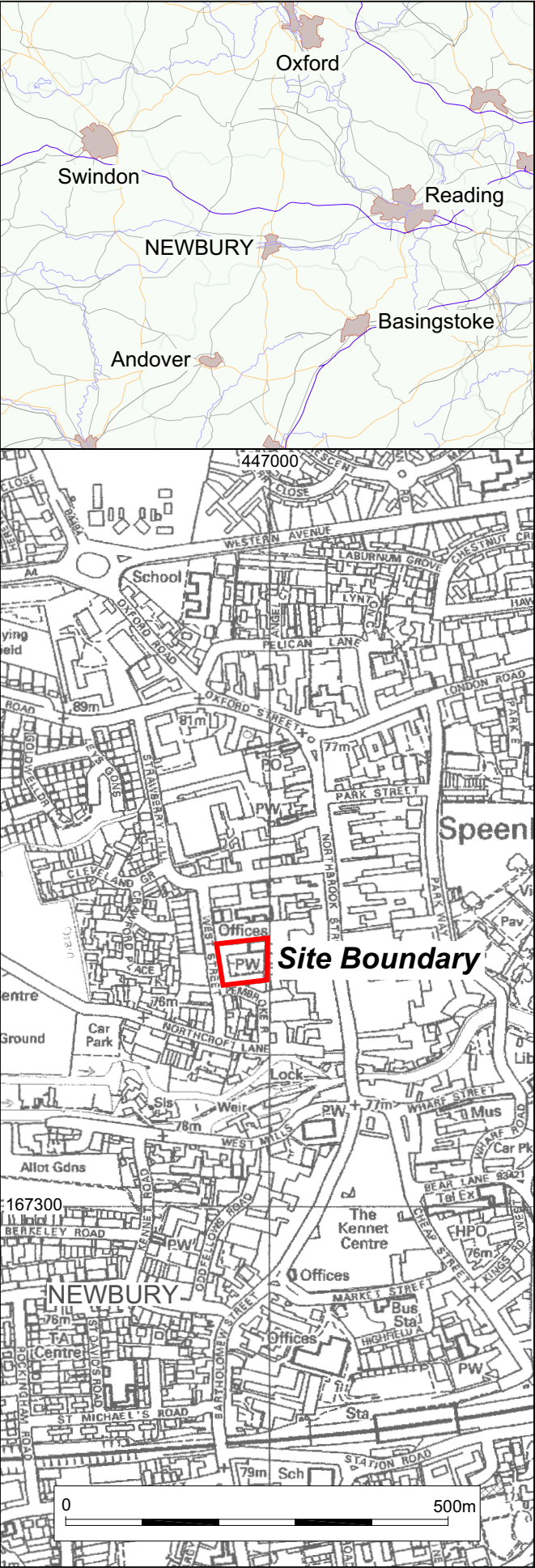
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Trench 1			
Length: 4m		Width: 1.6m	Max. depth: 1.2m
C'xt	Description		Depth (m)
101	Tarmac and hoggin, car park made-up surface		0-050
102	Brick rubble		0.50-0.62
103	Post-Med garden soil-type material. Mid to dark brown silty clay loam with quite a lot of post-Medieval tile and one frag of late Med pot. Uneven and clear to diffuse boundary with grey calcareous alluvium below.		0.62-1.17
	Below this point deposits described from augering:		
	Mid grey sandy clay loam, highly calcareous, occasional small charcoal fragment		1.17-1.37
	Very pale grey tufaceous marl, loose, concretions <5mm, relatively unconsolidated minor silt and clay components		1.37-1.95
	Firm very dark brown compact woody peat		1.95-2.08
	Gap		2.08-2.13
	Moist loose unconsolidated tufaceous marl, highly calcareous, concretions <5mm. Occasional molluscan remains. Becoming slightly organic to base, with rare wood fragments. Gradual/quite diffuse boundary.		2.13-2.87
	Cream coloured loose tufa, very little clay and silt, nodules up to 10mm. Abrupt boundary		2.87-3.07
	Dry crumbly finely divided highly humified peat, no recognisable plant remains. Clear boundary.		3.07-3.21
	Soft crumbly mid brown peat well preserved recognisable plant remains (reeds and wood)		3.21-3.84
	Many gaps as v wet - Saturated mixed silty clay alluvium with tufaceous marl – becoming organic to base with fine grit <3mm (possible incipient soil)		3.84-4.77
	Gravels (impenetrable with auger)		4.77+

Trench 2			
Length: 6		Width: 1.6	Max. depth: 1.12
C'xt	Description		Depth (m)
201	Turf and topsoil		0-0.24
202	Modern made-up ground		0.24-0.40
203	Brick floor – fairly modern machine extruded bricks, though unfrogged.		0.4-0.65
204	Modern wall foundation trench		
205	Modern brick wall remnant		
206	Brick rubble		
207	Mid -Dark greyish brown layer with post-med rubble. Basically looks like mixed post-med to modern garden soil material.		0.65-1.12


	Disturbed 'natural' alluvium, light to mid grey silt clay loam, calcareous with fine calcareous sand.	1.12+
	Below this point deposits described from augering; very similar to Trench 1 so descriptions abbreviated somewhat	
	Mid grey sandy clay loam	1.12-1.35
	Very pale grey tufaceous marl	1.35-1.92
	Thin brown peat layer	1.92-2.00
	Gap	2.00-2.34
	Moist loose unconsolidated tufaceous marl	2.34-2.80
	Cream coloured loose tufa	2.80-3.02
	Dry crumbly finely divided highly humified peat	3.02-3.15
	Soft crumbly mid brown peat	3.15-3.80
	Gaps with some organic 'sludge'	3.80-4.69
	Impenetrable layer (almost certainly gravel)	4.69+

Trench 3			
Length: 2m		Width: 1.6m	Max. depth: 1.10m
C'xt	Description	Depth (m)	
301	Turf and Topsoil – mid grey brown silt loam, common small flint pebbles.	0-0.24	
302	Modern made-up ground		
303	Modern made-up ground		
304	Service trench		
305	Fill of service trench		
306	Modern brick structure, with steel girder		
307	Mid -Dark greyish brown layer with post-med rubble. Basically looks like mixed post-med to modern garden soil material.	0.9-1.10	
	Disturbed 'natural' alluvium, light to mid grey silt clay loam, calcareous with fine calcareous sand.	1.10+	





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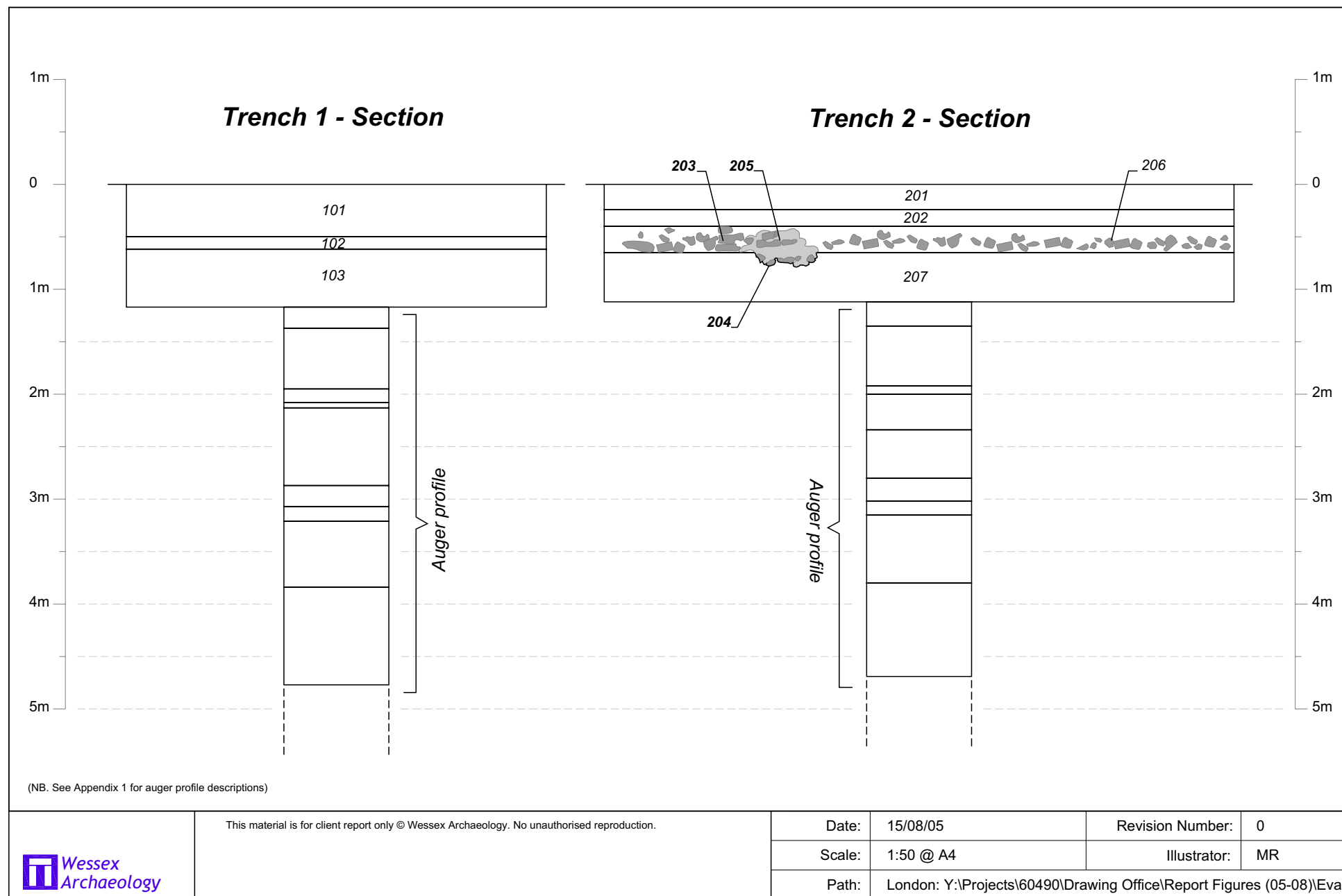
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Site and Trench Location Plans

Figure 1



Representative Sections from Trenches 1 & 2

Figure 2