

**24-26 EAST STREET,
READING,
BERKSHIRE**

NGR: SU 7186 7310

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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SUMMARY

During 2005 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological recording on land at 24-26 East Street, Reading (NGR: SU 7186 7310). The project was commissioned by Zenith Builders Ltd.

The project required the monitoring of all groundworks within the proposed development area.

The watching brief followed on from an archaeological evaluation in July 2005 which revealed extensive modern and late post-medieval disturbance of the natural ground. Three archaeological features were identified during the evaluation, of which two were undated while the third yielded sherds of medieval pottery comparable with the Newbury C industry (13th-14th century).

The watching brief identified a number of roughly parallel ditches, some of which were of a substantial size and are likely to be defensive in nature. It is likely that the site contained a series of medieval property boundaries as well as part of the Civil War defences. A 17th century pit was also revealed, which might also be seen as relating to the Civil War period, although it might equally be entirely unrelated to the defences. It is possible, but unlikely, that the ditches represent a hitherto unknown medieval defensive circuit. The ditches had all been very badly disturbed by later post-medieval/modern development and were present only in a very fragmentary form.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period from 1066 to *circa* 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case sand and gravel.

Neolithic

Division of the prehistoric period dated approximately between 4500 BC and 2000 BC.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Prehistoric

For the purpose of this report Prehistoric is defined as being the period prior to the Roman invasion of AD43.

Romano-British

The period between AD 43 – *circa* AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Foundations Archaeology between 14th and 16th September 2005, on land at 24-26 East Street, Reading (NGR: SU 7186 7310). The project was commissioned by Zenith Builders Ltd.
- 1.2 A programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was required by Reading Borough Council during groundworks, in accordance with the principals of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of the Reading Borough Council. The watching brief followed on from an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in July 2005 (Foundations, 2005).
- 1.3 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works. The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Foundations 2005) which complied with the brief prepared by Berkshire Archaeology (2005). The project was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, revised 2001). The Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists was adhered to throughout.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The planning application (02/01164) was for the demolition of the existing office and storage buildings and the construction of 35 flats with undercroft car parking and landscaping.
- 2.2 The study area lies on the west side of East Street, on the north side of South Street and close to the centre of Reading. The site lies within an area of medieval and post-medieval remains. The proposed development therefore has the potential to impact upon archaeological remains associated with earlier uses and buildings on the site, and with the origins and development of Reading.
- 2.3 An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Foundations Archaeology in July 2005. The evaluation revealed extensive modern and late post-medieval disturbance of the natural ground. Three archaeological features were identified during the evaluation, of which two were undated while the third yielded sherds of medieval pottery comparable with the Newbury C industry (13th-14th century).
- 2.3 The study area therefore contained the potential for significant archaeological features and deposits, predominantly associated with the Medieval period. This did not prejudice the works against the recovery of finds or features associated with other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological recording were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
 - ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
 - iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The archaeological specification required the monitoring of groundworks associated with the new development. Groundworks comprised the excavation of an area measuring approximately 1300m² and 2m to 3m in depth. In the event, Foundations Archaeology was not informed of the commencement of groundworks, therefore a small area in the western part of the site had already been excavated to below the level of natural ground, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothed bucket (Figure 2).
- 4.2 Thereafter, the remainder of the area was excavated under constant archaeological supervision, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation of the area was undertaken rapidly and it was often only possible to record features in section. Spoil tips were scanned for unstratified finds across the entire study area.
- 4.3 Any significant archaeological deposits and/or features within the study area were to be manually cleaned, investigated and recorded in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation.
- 4.4 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 Natural deposits of yellow sands and gravels were encountered across the development area. The natural substrate was overlain by (1004), a dark grey brown silt sand, which contained occasional small fragments of chalk, small sub-angular flint nodules and CBM flecks. In the northwest corner, which

comprised an area of higher ground sloping down to the south and southeast, this deposit was up to 0.55m in depth. Within the rest of the site, however, (1004) was absent, but for a thin layer, up to 0.08m in depth, intermittently remaining in the south facing section along the northern edge of the excavation. This deposit probably represented a subsoil layer. It was overlain by (1003), a modern hardcore layer 0.28m in depth comprising half and quarter brick fragments in a yellow sand and black ashy layer. This was overlain by (1002), a modern layer of yellow gravel hardcore, 0.17m in depth, which was in turn overlain by (1001), a layer of Tarmac 0.04m thick.

- 5.2 The site was substantially disturbed by late post-Medieval and modern cuts, predominantly comprising drainage trenches and disturbance from the recently demolished building of 24-26 East Street.
- 5.3 In the eastern half of the site, a number of roughly parallel ditches traversed the excavated area on a north northwest/south southeast alignment. Each were visible in the north facing and south facing sections of the excavated area, but had otherwise been almost entirely destroyed by later disturbance..
- 5.4 Ditch [1004] measured at least 40m in length, at least 3m in width and 0.96m in depth. It had a gently sloping western edge and a slightly rounded base; the eastern edge was cut away by ditch [1007]. Ditch [1004] was primarily filled with (1005), at least 3m in width and 0.50m in depth, a grey brown silt sand with 50% angular flint gravel inclusions. From this context tile four fragments of undiagnostic tile were recovered. Fill (1005) was overlaid by (1006), a dark grey brown compact silt sand with 20% flint gravels and rare charcoal fleck inclusions, at least 2.4m in width and 0.46m in depth. Artefactual evidence from this context comprised four fragments of undiagnostic tile, three sherds of Ashampstead Ware (12th -14th century) and one residual sherd of Newbury A Ware (mid 10th to mid 12th century).
- 5.5 Ditch [1004] was probably equivalent to feature [302] found in Trench 3 during the earlier evaluation (Foundations 2005).
- 5.6 Ditch [1007] was a substantial feature which measured at least 26m in length, 4.12m in width and 1.76m in depth. The original cut [1007] had steep sides tapering to a narrow, fairly pointed base. It was filled with (1008), a dark brown silt sand with 20% small to medium sub-angular flint gravel and rare charcoal fleck inclusions. From this context two undiagnostic tile fragments were recovered.
- 5.7 Feature [1007] was re-cut by [1021] which measured 3.54m in width and 1.34m in depth and had a similar profile to [1007]. This re-cut appears to have been deliberately back-filled. The primary fill of [1021] was (1009) which comprised medium sized flint gravels in a dark grey brown loose silt clay matrix. Fill (1009) was overlaid by (1011), (1012) and (1013). Fill (1011) was a yellow brown moist, soft sand with occasional small sub-angular flint nodule inclusions. This fill was overlain by (1012), a dark yellow brown loose silt sand with 50% small to medium flint gravels and occasional charcoal flecks. Artefactual evidence from this fill comprised two undiagnostic tile fragments,

a fragment of undiagnostic animal bone and one sherd of Ashampstead Ware (12th -14th century). The uppermost fill (1013) comprised dark grey brown friable silt sand with frequent small, sub-angular flint nodule inclusions. Artefactual evidence from this fill consisted of occasional undiagnostic tile fragments and a few cattle bone ribs.

- 5.8 A further two intercutting features were situated within the southern half of the site, seen in the south facing section of the excavated area. Both features cut the natural deposits and were sealed by (1003).
- 5.9 Feature [1015] measured at least 0.94m in width and 0.50m in depth and had steeply sloping sides and a narrow, pointed base. It was filled with (1016), a mid grey brown compact silt sand with 35% small flint gravels and rare flecks of charcoal. Artefactual evidence from this feature comprised two sherds Newbury B Ware (mid 12th –mid 14th century).
- 5.10 Feature [1017] cut through the eastern edge of [1015]. It measured 0.60m in width and 0.36m in depth and had steeply sloping sides and a narrow, rounded base. It was filled with (1018), a mid to light grey brown silt sand with 35% flint gravels and rare charcoal fleck inclusions. Artefactual evidence from this feature comprised a single fragment of undiagnostic tile.
- 5.11 A sub-circular pit [1019] was situated in the northern half of the excavated area, close to the southern boundary of the area. Only half of this pit was available for examination as the remainder had already been removed by machine. It measured 1.2m in width and 1.25m in depth and had a near vertical northeast edge, a steeply sloping southwest edge and a flat base. It was filled with (1020), a dark grey clay silt with frequent flint nodules. It cut the natural deposits and was overlaid by 0.20m of modern ground. Artefactual evidence from this feature comprised 10 fragments of clay pipe, four fragments of undiagnostic tile, one iron object, three sherds including a near complete jug and two bodysherds from separate vessels of Cologne/Freschen Ware (late 16th -17th century), two sherds (possible) Creamware (late 17th century), three fragments of animal bone (?two cattle and one rabbit) and four complete/semi-complete globular glass bottles (one badly broken) of probable 17th century origin.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The monitoring work revealed two ditches, a pit and two further features comprising either pits or ditches. Significant levels of late post-medieval and modern disturbance were present within the area and made identification and interpretation of the archaeological features extremely difficult.
- 6.2 Features [1004] and [1015] were of probable Medieval origin; both contained sherds of Ashampstead Ware dating to 12th -14th century. Ditch [1004] was probably equivalent to ditch [302] found during the evaluation (Foundations, 2005). This feature runs roughly parallel to East Street and falls effectively on the line given in Astill (1978) for the edge of the medieval town of Reading. It

is possible therefore, that this feature may represent an element of a ditch delimiting the medieval town.

- 6.3 Ditch [1007], immediately to the east of and cutting [1004] was significantly larger. It is very likely that this latter feature represents a town ditch. Dating evidence from the feature was extremely limited and consisted of two sherds of ceramic tile, although it must post-date [1004]. There is a significant chance that this feature represents an element of the 17th century Civil War defences of Reading. The ditch had been recut as feature [1021], which was slightly narrower and shallower than [1007]. Dating evidence from this feature comprised a single sherd of medieval pottery, which is likely to be residual in context.
- 6.4 It is clear, therefore that a number of interpretations are possible for [1004], [1007] and [1021]. The most plausible of these is that [1004] represented a town ditch defining the medieval settlement and that [1007] represents the Civil War ditch, with [1021] a later recut – probably excavated as a refinement of the defences – certainly a bastion is believed to have been located close to this area. It is also possible, though unlikely, that [1007] and [1021] are not part of the Civil War defences, but rather represent elements of a hitherto unknown medieval defensive circuit. It is most likely that ditch [1021] represents a recut of the Civil War defensive ditch.
- 6.5 Ditch [1015] also yielded medieval pottery. This feature had also been recut by ditch [1017] of uncertain, but probably roughly contemporary, date. These ditches only survived in the northernmost part of the site. They may represent property boundaries within the medieval town, or possibly features associated with the Civil War defences. The sole remaining feature [1019] comprised a 17th century refuse pit, which might also be associated with the Civil War defences.
- 6.6 The watching brief has therefore identified significant archaeological features within the study area. These had been substantially destroyed within the site and, to a large extent, survived only in the northern and southern sections with very small, badly disturbed sections within the site. Future development to the north and south of the site therefore has the potential to reveal these features in a more coherent form.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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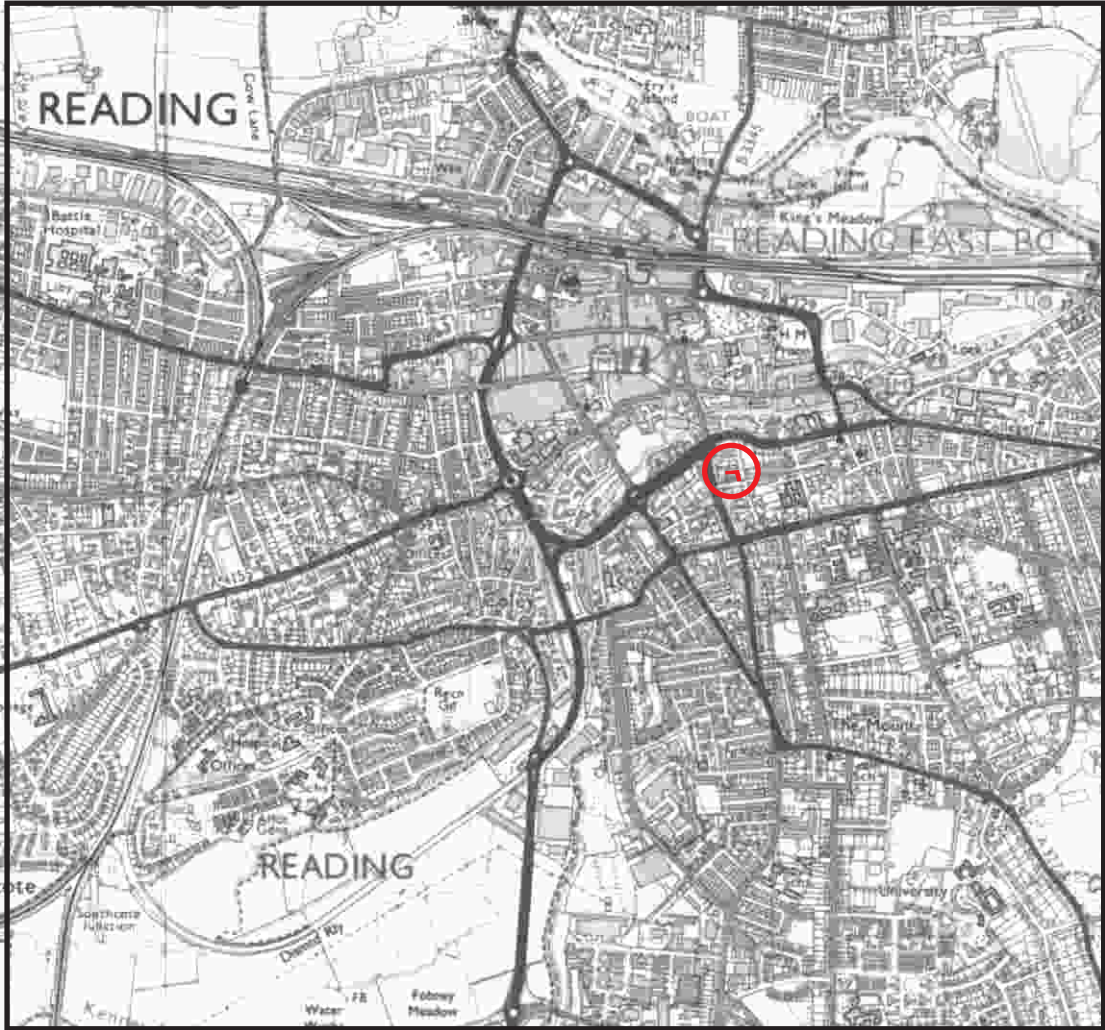
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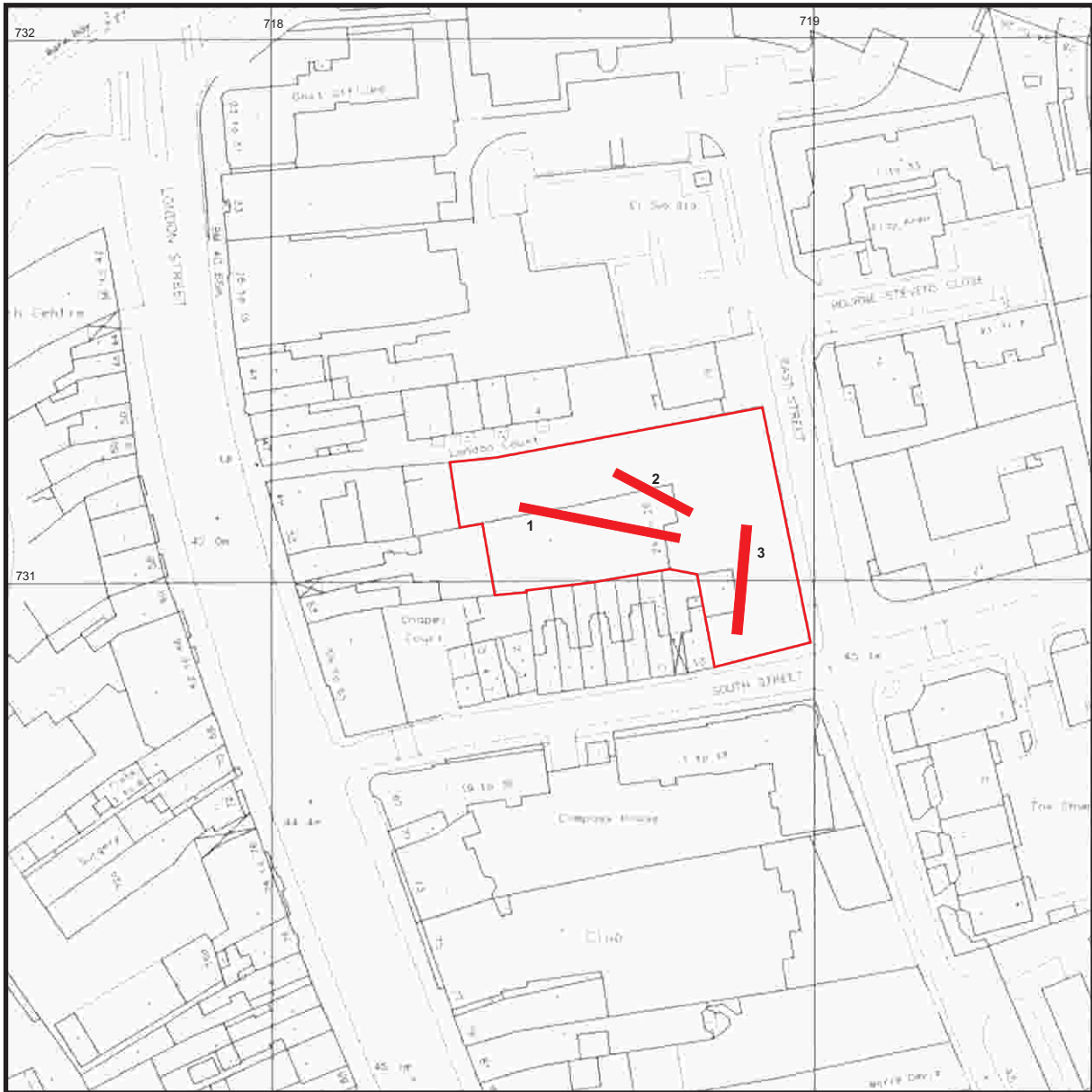
8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FIGURE 1: Site Location



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FIGURE 2: Trench Location Plan

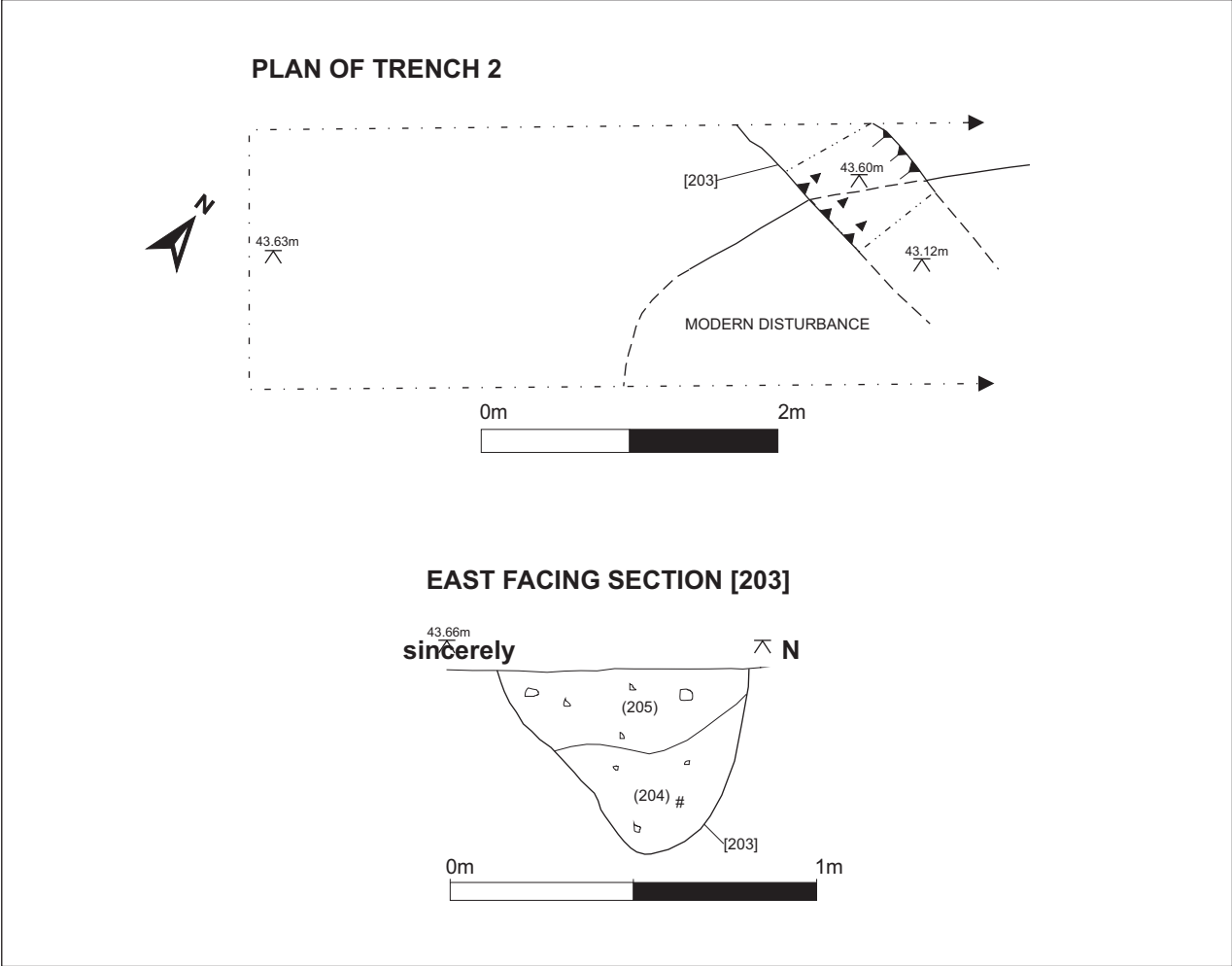
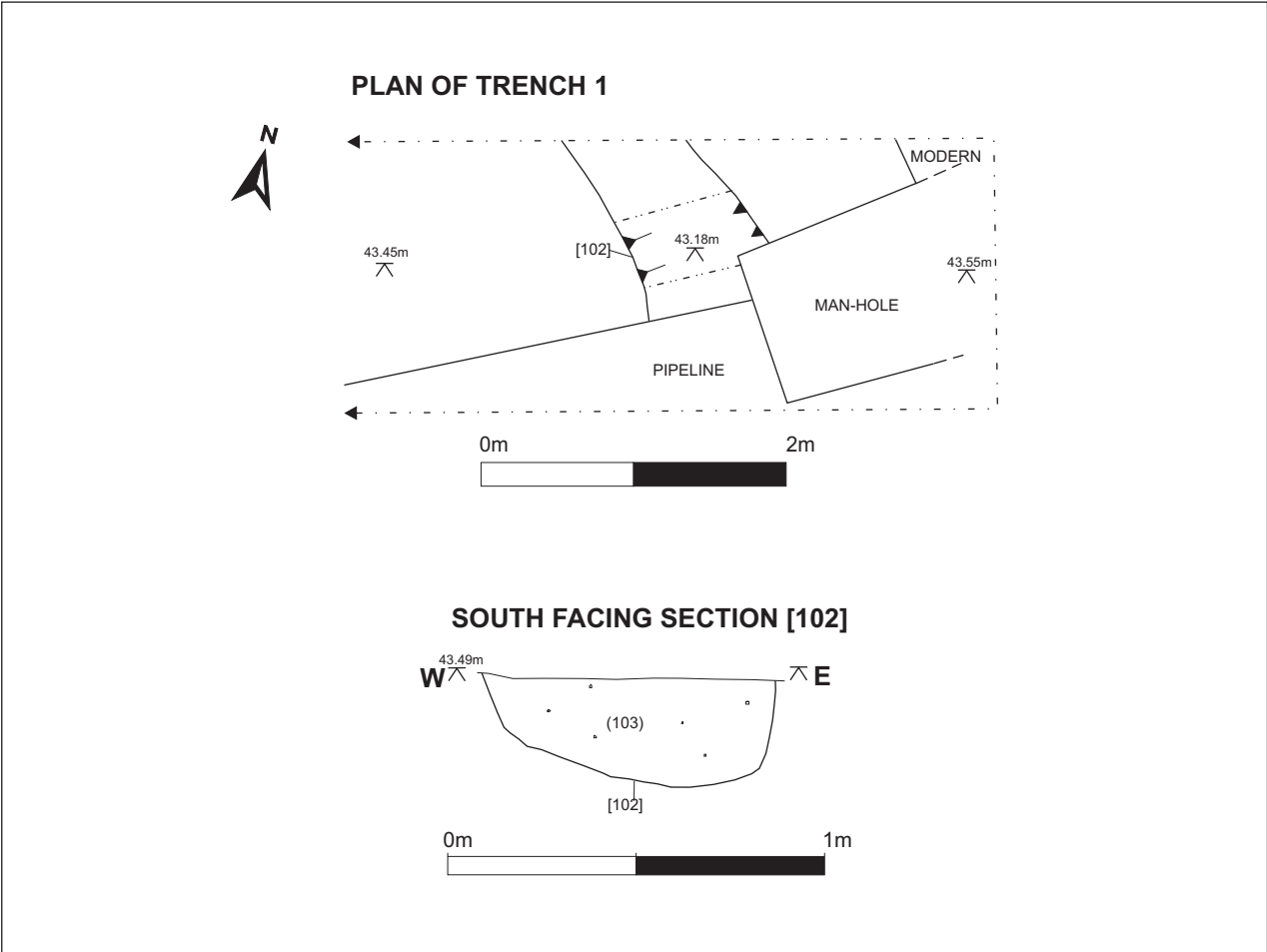
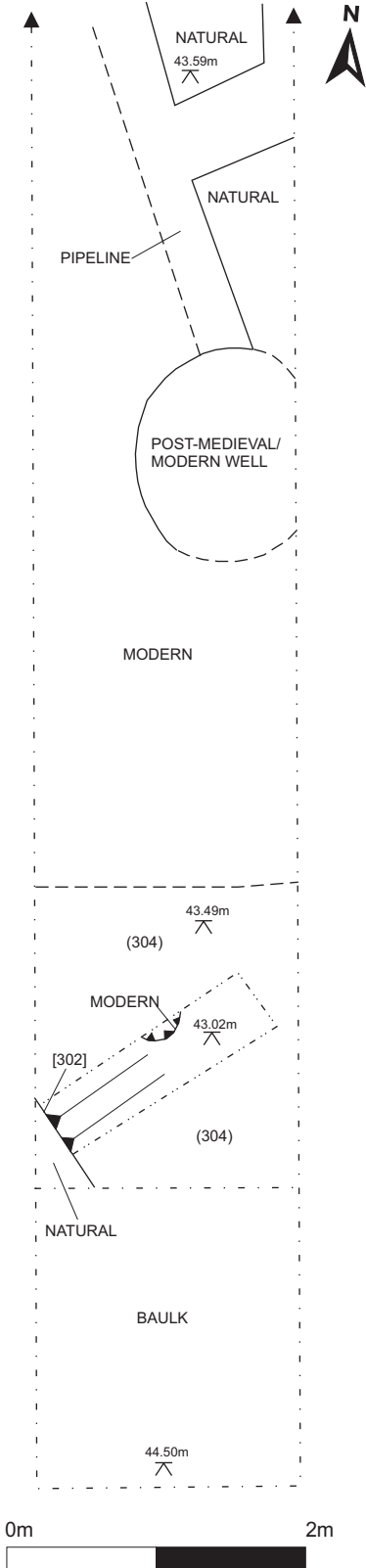


FIGURE 3: Trenches 1 and 2, Plans and Section

PLAN OF TRENCH 3



SOUTH EAST FACING SECTION [302]

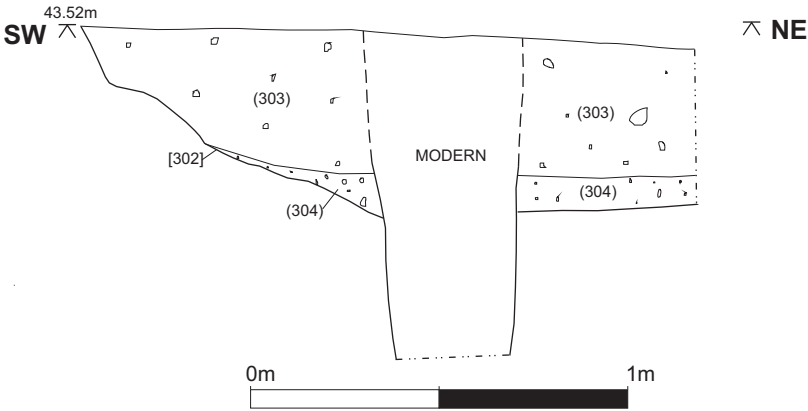


FIGURE 4: Trench 3, Plan and Section