



HERITAGE NETWORK



**343-351 HIGH STREET
Berkhamsted, Herts.**

HN474

Archaeological Evaluation Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

343-351 HIGH STREET
Berkhamsted, Herts.

HN474

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Prepared on behalf of Pegasus Retirement Homes Ltd

by

David Kaye, BA

Report No.259

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Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out Robin Densem, Daniel Barnes and Robert Scott, and the finds assessment was undertaken by Helen Ashworth. Illustrations were prepared by David Kaye, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to the Directors of Pegasus Homes Ltd; John Montgomery, Tanner & Tilley Planning Ltd; and Kate Batt, County Archaeology Office, Hertfordshire County Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	343-351 High Street, Berkhamsted, Herts		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	Dacorum Borough
Village/town:	Berkhamsted	Parish:	Berkhamsted
Planning reference:	4/01112/03	NGR:	SP 985 081
Client name and address:	Pegasus Retirement Homes Ltd, Cheltenham, GL53 7LE		
Nature of work:	New development	Present land use:	Car showroom & hardstanding
Size of affected area:	2200m ²	Size of area investigated:	67m ²
Site Code:	HN474	Other reference:	N/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Evaluation	Archive location:	Dacorum Heritage Trust
Start of work	7 th September 2004	Finish of work	9 th September 2004
Related SMR Nos.:	n/a	Periods represented:	Modern
Previous summaries/reports:	Heritage Network report no. 245		

Synopsis:

In order to determine the archaeological risk posed by a proposal to construct two new blocks of flats at 343-351 High Street, Berkhamsted, Herts., the Heritage Network was commissioned by the developers to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation.

The site was divided between two separated areas lying along the street frontage, Area A to the south-east, and Area B to the north-west. Two evaluation trenches were excavated in Site A, and four in Site B.

Only two archaeological features were identified. In Area A, a ditch containing fragments of iron tap slag was recorded running approximately parallel with the street frontage. In Area B, a single pit containing fragments of post-medieval or modern brick/tile fragments, was recorded.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of *Tanner and Tilley Planning Ltd* on behalf of *Pegasus Retirement Homes Ltd*, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a development site at 343-351 High Street, Berkhamsted, Herts. Planning permission for the development (ref.4/01112/03), controlled by the Dacorum Borough Council (DBC), has been granted subject to a standard archaeological condition (Condition 14 of the Appeal Decision dated 15 April 2004) in accordance with the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note No.16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning. The scope of the required investigation has been defined in a *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation* prepared by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority (ref. KB 05/08/2004). A full specification for the work was contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated September 2004.

1.2 The site, which consists of two pieces of land separated by a petrol filling station, lies on the former London to Aylesbury trunk road, and is centred on NGR SP 985 081 (Fig.1). Area A lies on the junction of the High Street with Cross Oak Road and Area B lies approximately 42m to the west of Area A. The development proposes the construction of two three-storey blocks of retirement apartments with associated access. Area A was occupied by buildings at the time of the evaluation, except for a 10m strip along the High Street frontage. Area B was clear, with concrete hard standing.

1.3 The site lies within Area of Archaeological Significance (AAS) 21, as designated in the Local Plan. This notes Berkhamsted's medieval origins, but also the widespread prehistoric and Roman material already known in the area. A desk-based archaeological assessment prepared by the Heritage Network in advance of the present field evaluation (Report no.245), demonstrated that there was a moderate to high possibility that archaeological remains of Roman and medieval date could be preserved below ground in areas A and B. However, it was not possible to be conclusive, from the documentary sources consulted, about how such remains might have been affected by the later development of the site.

1.4 The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any remains that are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional, archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they were discovered.

1.5 The present report has been prepared in order to provide the planning authority with sufficient data to allow it to consider the archaeological implications of the proposed development, and to determine what further mitigation measures, if any, may be required to allow the development to proceed.

2. Fieldwork

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site is situated at the bottom of the downslope of the Bulbourne valley, the ground rising away from the site to the south-west.

2.2 The modern surface of the site consists of a concrete slab relating to late twentieth use of the site as car showrooms, and as a garage.

2.3 A geo-environmental site investigation carried out for the developers demonstrates varying depths of made ground over natural clay with flints and Middle Chalk (WSP 2004).

METHODOLOGY

2.4 Six evaluation trenches were opened using a JCB wheeled mechanical excavator, fitted with a 1.5m toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with an archaeological *Project Design* (Hillelson, 2004), approved by the CAO. The trenches were c.1.6m wide and they were dug to between 0.6m and 1.0m deep.

2.5 Trenches were machined to the first significant archaeological horizon and were then cleaned by hand. All potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation. Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts.

2.6 All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate proforma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:10 and 1:50.

RESULTS

Stratigraphy

2.7 The upper stratigraphy was consistent across the site. It consisted of a layer of modern concrete approximately 25cm thick laid down for the existing car showroom and garage. Beneath that was a levelling layer of a similar thickness. The natural geology across the site consisted of clay and flints.

2.8 A thin grey clay silt, a few centimetres thick where it survived, was noted across the site between the post-medieval levelling and the natural. It contained occasional, small, abraded fragments of red brick or tile and is likely to be the remnant of a post-medieval subsoil deposit.

Trench 1

2.9 Trench 1 (Figure 2) was located in the south east corner of Area A and was orientated north-west to south-east, running parallel with the existing buildings. It measured 5m by 1.6m by 0.8m deep.

2.10 A south-east to north-west aligned linear feature was found in Trench 1, cutting the natural and running approximately parallel with the High Street (Figures 4 and 5)). The feature had a minimum width of c.1.2m and was up to 0.4m deep. The fill consisted of a grey clay/silt with a little sand and occasional pieces of angular gravel to 10cms, and contained fragments of iron tap slag. Despite additional sampling of the fill of this feature, no datable artefacts were found in association with this material. The feature is likely to represent a roadside boundary ditch which could be Roman or later in date.

Recorded contexts

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
101	Concrete	C20th concrete hardstanding for the existing building.	Length: 5m+ Width: 1.6m+ Depth: 0.15-0.30m
102	Fill	Mid-dark grey silty-clay with a little sand. Moderately compact with fairly frequent angular grave <10cm. Fill of [101].	Length: 1.0m+ Width: 0.4m Depth: 0.4m
103	Cut	Linear feature orientated NW-SE. Sloping sides and bowl-shaped profile.	Length: 1.0m+ Width: 0.4m Depth: 0.4m
104	Natural	Mid to pale grey orange, silty clay with flints. Medium to hard compaction.	Length: 5m+ Width: 1.6m+ Depth: 0.27m+
105	Layer	Black and dirty grey sandy-silt and silty-clay. Moderately compact.	Length: 5m+ Width: 1.6m+ Depth: 0.30m

Trench 2

2.11 Trench 2 was located on the eastern side of Area A and was orientated north-east to south-west (Figure 2). It measured 5.5m by 1.6m by 1.05m deep.

2.12 No archaeological features were present in the trench although it was noted that the natural was overlain by a layer of colluvial clay silt running the length of the trench.

Trench 3

2.13 Trench 3 was located on the western side of Area B and was orientated north-west to south-east (Figure 3). It measured 4.90m by 1.6m by 0.44m deep.

2.14 No archaeological features were present in the trench.

Trench 4

2.15 Trench 4 was located in the middle of Area B and was orientated north-east to south-west (Figure 3). It measured 5.5m by 1.6m by 0.79m deep.

2.16 No archaeological features were present in the trench.

Trench 5

2.17 Trench 5 was located in the middle of Area B and was orientated north-west to south-east (Figure 3). It measured 10m by 1.6m by 0.71m deep.

2.18 A single circular feature cut the natural clay, extending beyond the south-western edge of the trench (Figures 4 and 5). The portion within the trench had a diameter of c.1.5m and had near vertical sides, with a single fill of mid grey mottled with orange, clay/silt with flints that contained three small fragments of CBM, and a very few fragments of charcoal.

2.19 The feature was excavated to a depth of 1.25m below modern ground surface, and was found to have been cut by at least 0.65m into the natural. No attempt was made to bottom the feature, for health and safety considerations, and it has been interpreted as a possible well.

Recorded contexts

501	Fill	Mid grey with orange mottles silty clay with angular flints <10cm. Hard. Fill of [502]	Diameter: 1.5m Depth: 1.04m
502	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature running into the south western baulk with steep sides and flat base.	Diameter: 1.5m Depth: 1.04m
503	Natural	Mid orange-brown clay/silt with frequent angular flints <10cm. Medium to hard compaction.	Length: 10m+ Width: 1.65m+ Depth: 0.99m+
504	Concrete	Concrete with reinforcing bars.	Length: 10m+ Width: 1.65m+ Depth: 0.20m
505	Layer	Pale grey make-up layer for concrete [504]. Sandy and hard with concrete fragment inclusions.	Length: 10m+ Width: 1.65m+ Depth: 0.02-0.21m
506	Layer	Mid grey clay/silt with sand. Occasional CBM. Possible post-medieval earth.	Length: 5m+ Width: 1.6m+ Depth: 0.15-0.30m

Trench 6

2.20 Trench 6 was located on the eastern side of Area B and was orientated north-east to south-west (Figure 3). It measured 5.5m by 1.6m by 0.65m deep.

2.21 No archaeological features were present in the trench.

FINDS CONCORDANCE

Context	CBM		Slag		Comments
	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	
102			545	21	Iron tap slag
501	20	4			Post-medieval tile
Total	20	4	545	21	

FINDS ASSESSMENT***Ceramic Building Material***

2.22 This assemblage consisted of 4 small fragments, probably tile.

Recommendations

2.23 Given the small size and nature of this assemblage, no further work is proposed.

Slag

2.24 This assemblage consisted of 21 pieces of iron tap slag derived from a linear feature. No dateable material was found in association and its significance cannot therefore be ascertained.

Recommendations

2.25 Given the nature of the deposit containing these artefacts no further work is proposed.

Ecofacts

2.26 No ecofacts were recovered during the excavation.

3. Discussion

3.1 Only two features were identified in the course of the present evaluation: an undated linear feature in Trench 1 in Area A, and a probable well in Trench 5 in Area B.

3.2 The linear in Trench 1 may represent a roadside drainage ditch, although its size and the nature of its fill would suggest that this was not the case. Alternatively, it could be the boundary to a property bordering the road. The lack of datable ceramic or metal finds from this feature, despite additional sampling, means that it cannot be assigned a period with any confidence. The lack of significant occupation debris suggests that the feature was not in an area of intensive settlement during its lifetime.

3.3 The backfill to the probable well in Trench 5 contained fragments of post-medieval or modern tile and it is likely that it is associated with the Victorian properties which existed on the site until the mid 20th century. The lack of any lining to the feature may suggest an earlier post-medieval date, and association with the small holdings shown on the Tithe Map of 1838.

3.4 Both areas of the site showed signs of terracing into the prevailing slope of the ground and this, taken with the low level of archaeological survival on the site suggests that the overall risk that the proposed development would disturb archaeological remains of any archaeological significance should be considered to be low.

CONFIDENCE RATING

3.5 In the course of the fieldwork, weather and ground conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation.

3.6 There are no other circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the present evaluation which is less than High.

4. Bibliography

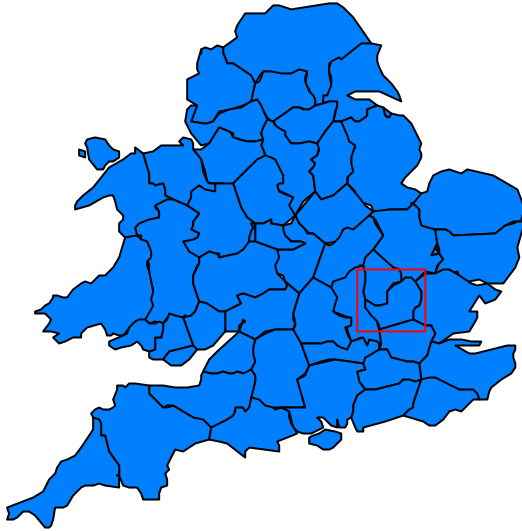
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Semmelmann K, 2004, *343-351 High Street, Berkhamsted, Herts, Desk-Based Archaeological Assessment*, unpublished Heritage Network report no. 245.

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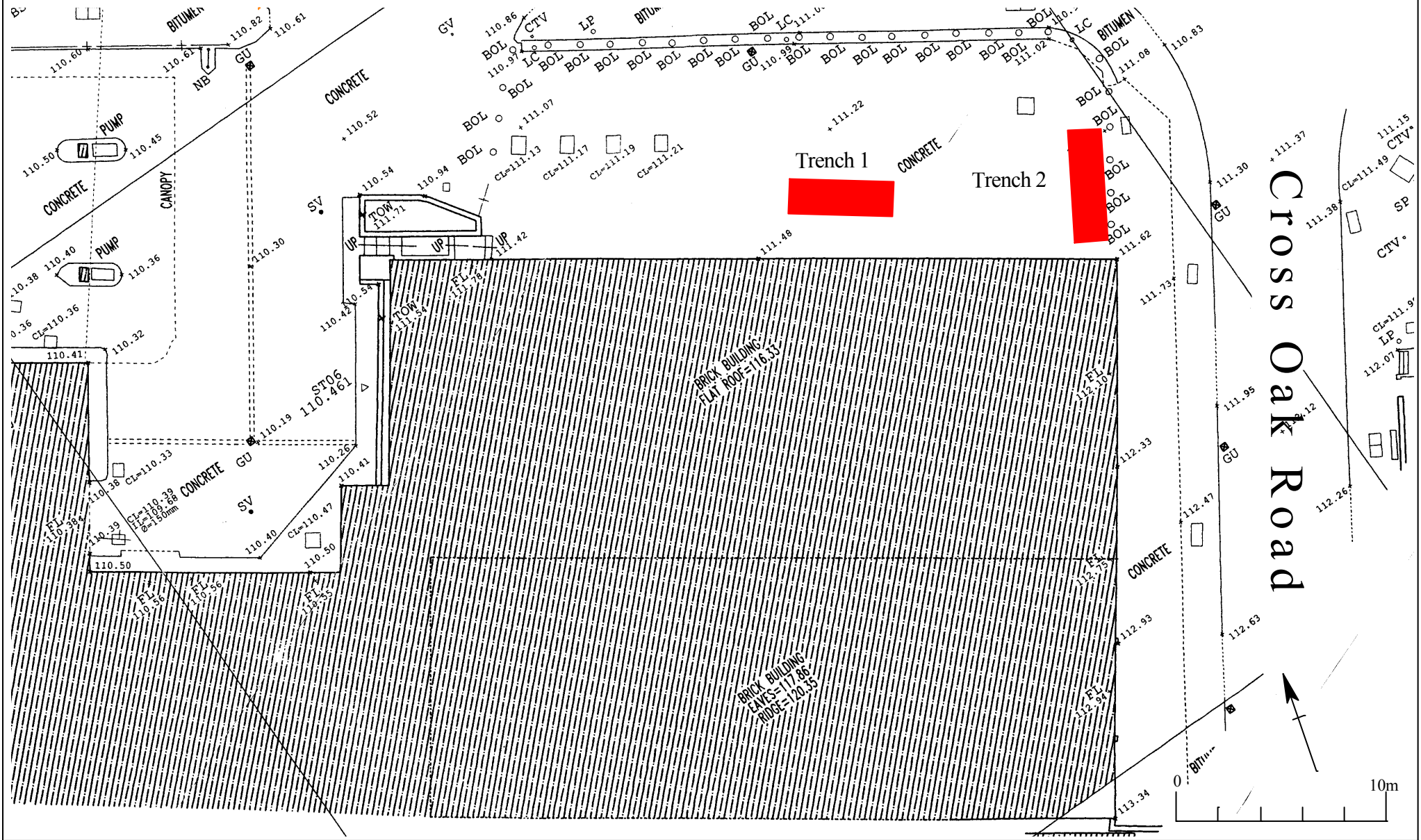
5. Illustrations

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Area A: Trench location
Figure 3	Area B: Trench location
Figure 4	Trench Plans
Figure 5	Trench Sections



Site Location

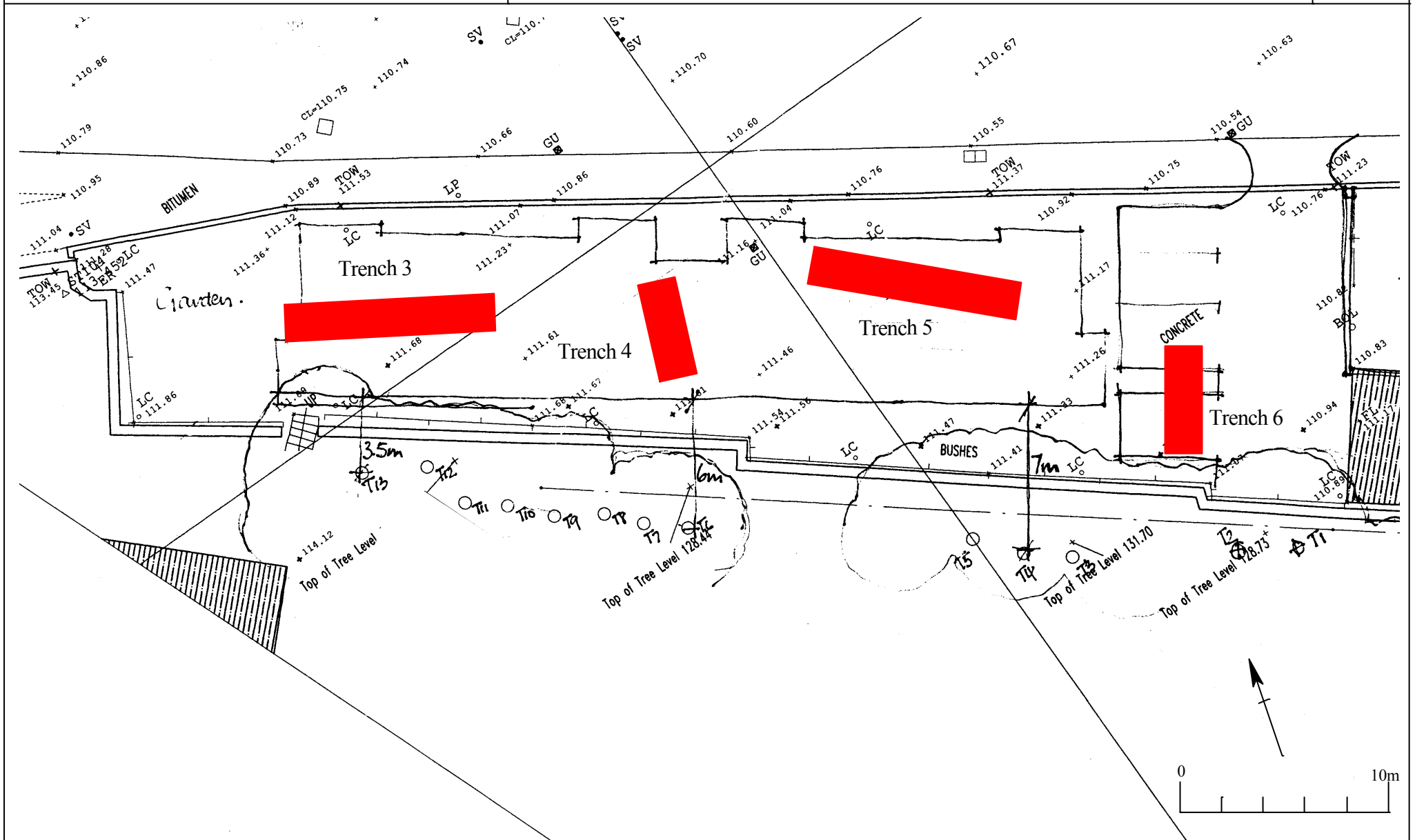
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Area A: Trench location

Scale 1:200

Figure 2

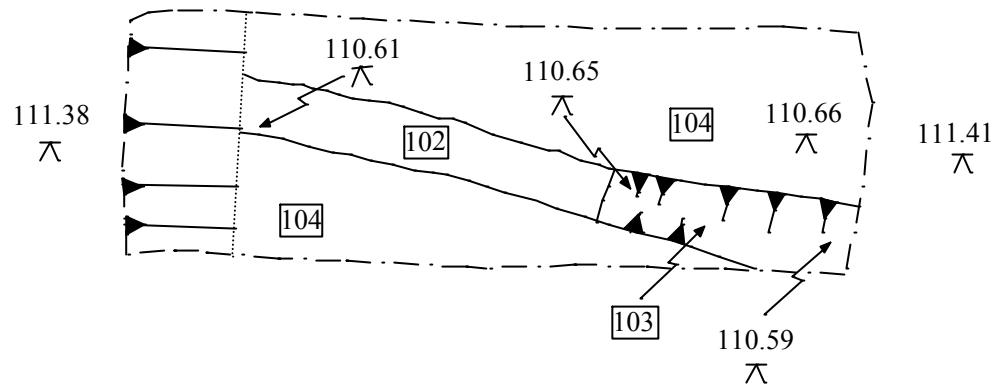


Area B: Trench location

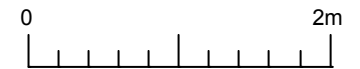
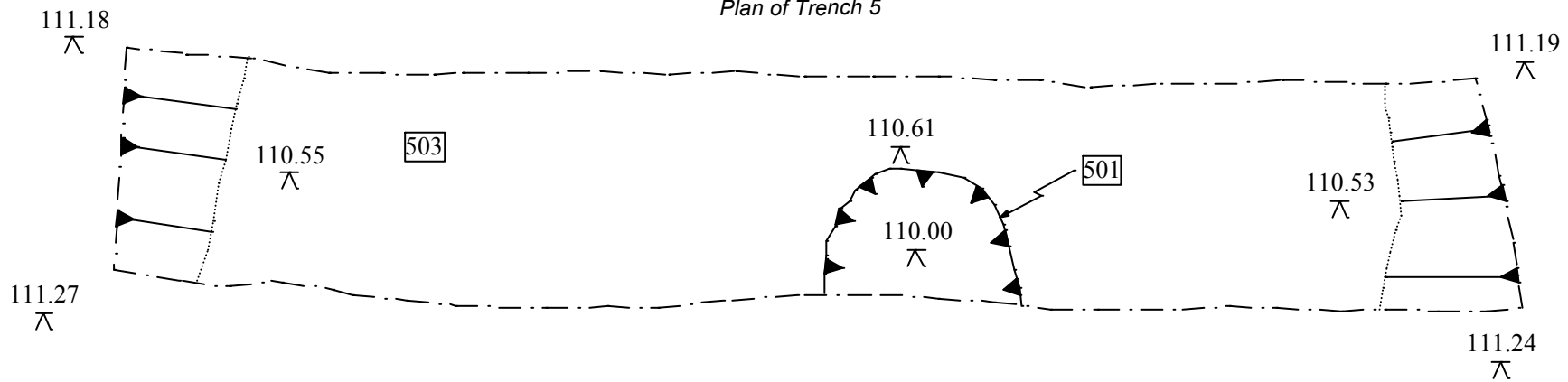
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Figure 3

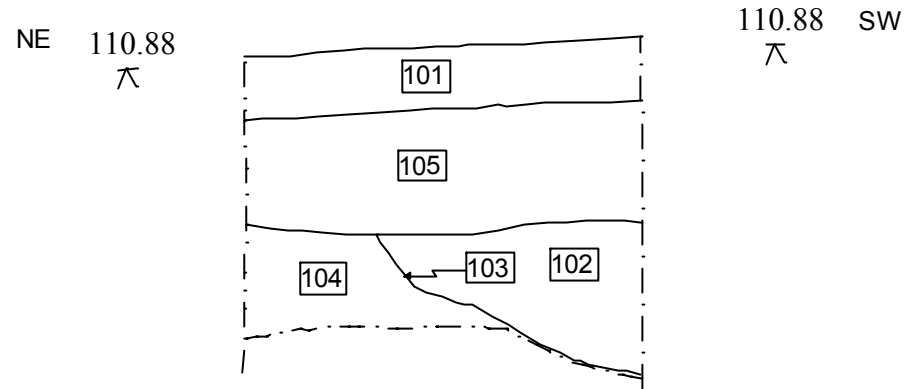
Plan of Trench 1



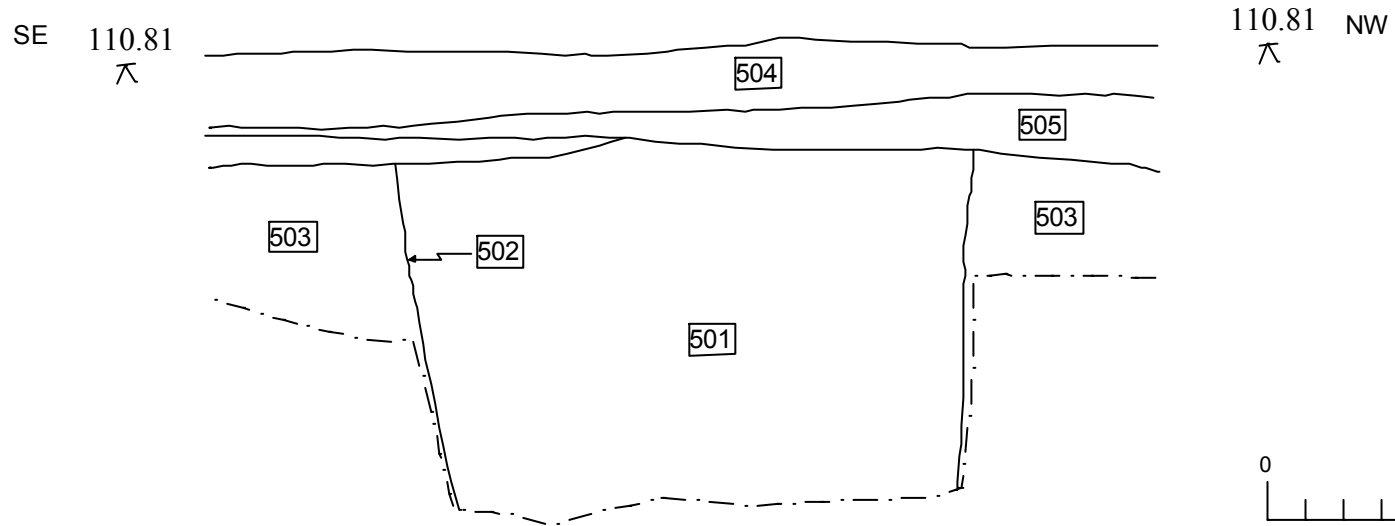
Plan of Trench 5



SE facing section of Trench 1



SW facing section of Trench 5



Trench sections

Scale 1:20

Figure 5