

HERITAGE NETWORK



15 ROBBERY BOTTOM LANE Welwyn, Herts.

HN523

Archaeological Evaluation Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

15 ROBBERY BOTTOM LANE
Welwyn, Herts.

HN523

Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared on behalf of Philip Sandford Properties Ltd

by

Geoff Saunders, BA AIFA

Report no.288

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The cover illustration shows a view of the site taken from the south

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Geoff Saunders and David Hillelson. The report was written and illustrated by Geoff Saunders, and edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Philip Sandford and Sarah Curtis, Philip Sandford Properties Ltd; Dan Bennett, R W Bennett & Son Plant Hire; and Jonathan Smith, County Archaeology Office, HCC, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	15 Robbery Bottom Lane, Welwyn, Hertfordshire		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	Welwyn Hatfield
Village/town:	Welwyn	Parish:	Welwyn
Planning reference:	6/04/1642	NGR:	TL 24917 17673
Client name and address:	Philip Sandford Properties Ltd, 146a London Road, Knebworth, Herts.		
Nature of work:	New Housing	Former land use:	Housing
Size of affected area:	c.2050m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.48m ²
Site Code:	HN523	Other reference:	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Evaluation	Curating Museum:	Welwyn Hatfield Museums
Start of work	19/04/2005	Finish of work	20/04/2005
Related HER Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	Modern
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis:

In response to an archaeological condition on the planning permission for new housing on land at 15 Robbery Bottom Lane, Welwyn, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the developer to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation in advance of development.

Four trenches were excavated within the proposed footprints of the new buildings with the particular aim of identifying a Roman road which runs east from the Great North Road in the vicinity of the site. No archaeological evidence for activity on the site predating the modern period was observed, and it seems likely that the line of the Roman road is fossilised in the footpath which runs along the northern boundary of the site.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of *Philip Sandford Properties Ltd*, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a development site located at 15 Robbery Bottom Lane, Welwyn, Herts. Planning consent for the development (ref. 6/04/1642), controlled by the Welwyn Hatfield Council (WHC), has been granted subject to a standard archaeological condition, 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* produced by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority (ref. JS 14/03/2005). A full specification for the work was contained in the Heritage Network's approved *Project Design*, dated March 2005.

1.2 The site is located on the northern side of Robbery Bottom Lane, which leads east from the B197 Great North Road at Mardley Hill, just to the east of the junction with Larch Lane. It is centred on NGR TL 24917 17673. The study area comprises a single plot, formerly occupied by a dwelling and its garden. The development proposes the construction of two separate dwellings with detached garages and associated services and landscaping.

1.3 The site lies in a documented archaeological landscape close to the junction of two Roman roads, the Great North Road (linking London with York) and Watton Road which runs east and may have been encountered in the course of the evaluation.

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 such remains, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), should they be discovered.

1.5 The present report is intended 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, if any, mitigation measures may be required to allow the development to proceed.

2. Fieldwork

SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site is situated on the northern side of a natural valley, the southern half of the site appears to have been terraced into the hill and is reasonably level at approximately 79mAOD. The northern half of the site rises steeply to a height of approximately 89mAOD on the northern boundary. The single dwelling and associated structures which previously occupied the site had been demolished prior to the start of the evaluation.

2.2 Cartographic evidence from 1884 shows the site lying within open fields at this time.

2.3 Two different types of geology were observed on the site: a yellowish brown slightly clayey sand on the southern half of the site, and a strong brown clayey sand and gravel on the northern half of the site.

METHODOLOGY

2.4 All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and IFA standards.

2.5 The trenches were located by triangulation from known points using fibreglass tape measures.

2.6 Four trenches were opened using a tracked 360° mini-digger fitted with a 0.75m wide toothless ditching bucket (see Figure 2). Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts. Trenches were machined to the first significant archaeological horizon.

2.7 The trenches were cleaned by hand, and all potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

2.8 All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate pro-forma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:20 and 1:50.

RESULTS

Trench 1

2.9 Trench 1 was located across the area proposed for vehicle access and parking for the new dwelling on the southern half of the site. It measured 5.00m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned north – south.

2.10 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of modern mixed overburden containing modern debris including concrete, CBM, and wood, probably deposited during the recent demolition works. Beneath this was a layer of firm, very dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay topsoil over a very firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/6), clayey sand weathered natural subsoil. Beneath this lay the natural geology of firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/6), clayey sand with frequent flints.

2.11 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 2

2.12 Trench 2 was located across the proposed footprint of the new dwelling on the southern half of the site. It measured 10.20m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned north – south.

2.13 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a thin layer of loose, dark brown (10YR 3/3), clayey sand topsoil over a very firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/6), clayey sand weathered natural subsoil. Beneath this lay the natural geology of firm, yellowish brown (10YR 5/8), slightly clayey sand with gravel patches.

2.14 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 3

2.15 Trench 3 was located across the area proposed for vehicle access and parking for the new dwelling on the northern half of the site. It measured 5.20m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned north – south.

2.16 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a thin layer of loose, dark brown (10YR 3/3), sandy clay topsoil over the natural geology of firm, strong brown (7.5YR 4/6), clayey sand with gravel patches.

2.17 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 4

2.18 Trench 4 was located across the proposed footprint of the new dwelling on the northern half of the site. It measured 9.00m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned north – south.

2.19 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a layer of firm, brown (10YR 4/3), slightly sandy clay topsoil over the natural geology of firm, strong brown (7.5YR 5/8), clayey sand and gravel.

2.20 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Concordance of finds

2.21 During the course of the evaluation, artefacts, including pottery, ceramic building material (CBM), and fragments of concrete, all of 20th century date, were observed within the overburden. These artefacts are likely to be associated with the dwelling which was demolished prior to the start of the fieldwork. In the context of the present site, these types of artefacts have no archaeological significance and, although their presence was noted, they were not collected.

3. Discussion & Conclusion

3.1 Four trenches were excavated in order to investigate the archaeological potential of the present site and, in particular, the line of a Roman road heading east off the Great North Road towards Watton. Despite the location of the site in a well documented archaeological landscape, no archaeological features or deposits were identified, and no artefacts predating the 20th century were recorded.

3.2 No evidence for the Roman road, or any other activity during the Roman period, was observed. This may, in part, be due to the steep nature of the slope between the northern and southern limits of the site. In addition, modern terracing is likely to have removed any archaeological remains which may have existed on this part of the site.

3.3 A study of the modern 1:25000 series Ordnance Survey suggests that the line of the Roman road may be fossilised in the footpath which runs along the northern boundary of the site, known as Larch Lane.

Conclusion

3.4 The archaeological evaluation of the site suggests that any human activity in the vicinity in the past was ephemeral, leaving little or no surviving physical evidence.

3.5 On this basis of these findings, the risk that the proposed development will encounter or disturb archaeological remains of any significance may be considered to be Very Low.

Confidence Rating

3.6 During the course of the fieldwork, the conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation.

3.7 There are no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than High.

4. Bibliography

Hillelson, D, 2005 *15 Robbery Bottom Lane, Welwyn, Herts* . *Project Design: Archaeological Evaluation*. Heritage Network.

Smith, J, 2005 *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation – 15 Robbery Bottom Lane, Welwyn, Herts*. Hertfordshire County Council.

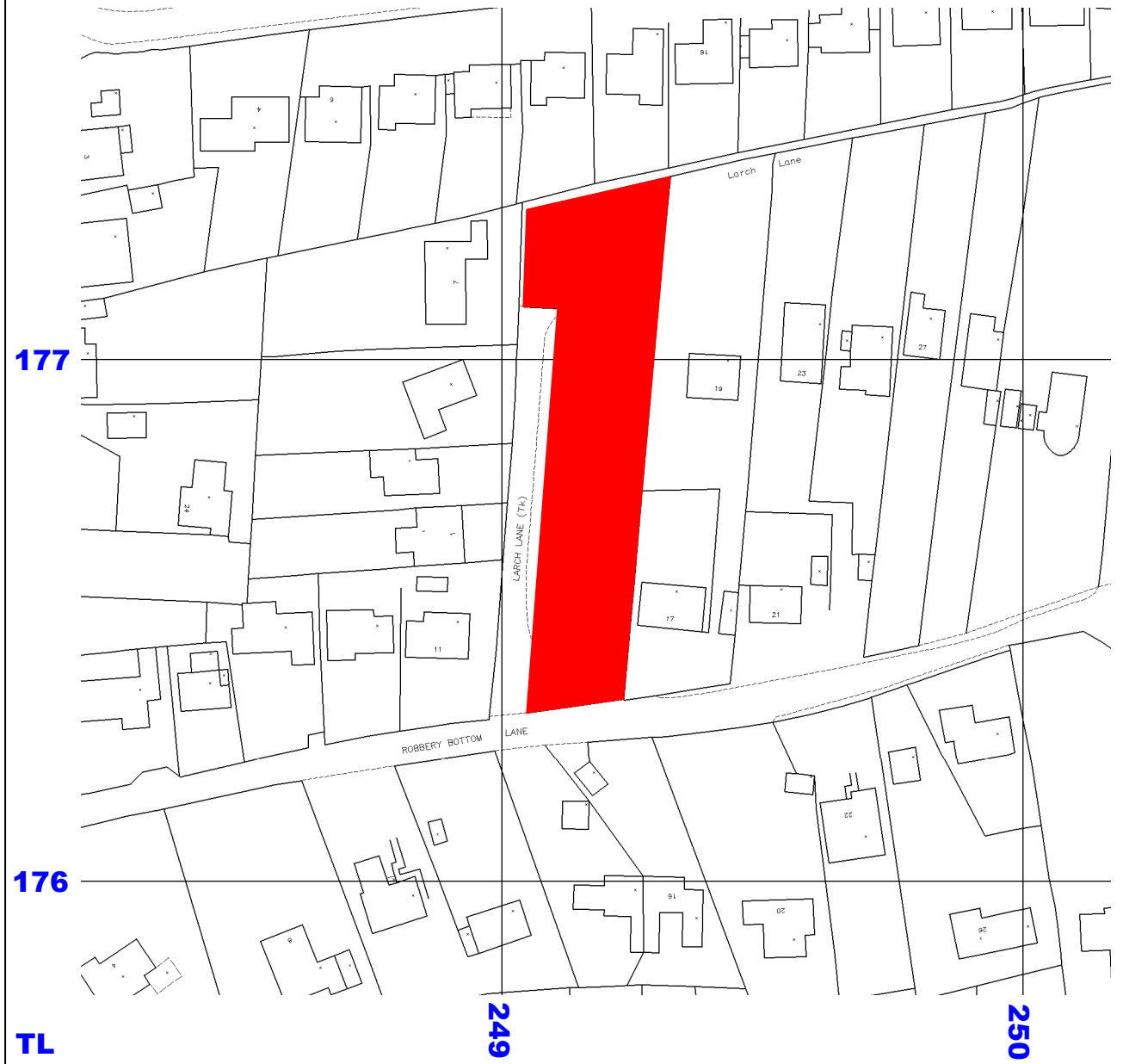
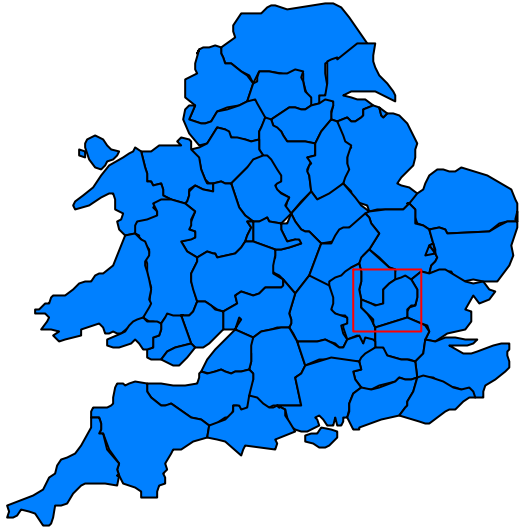
5. Illustrations

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Trench location
Figure 3	Trench profiles

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15 Robbery Bottom Lane, Welwyn

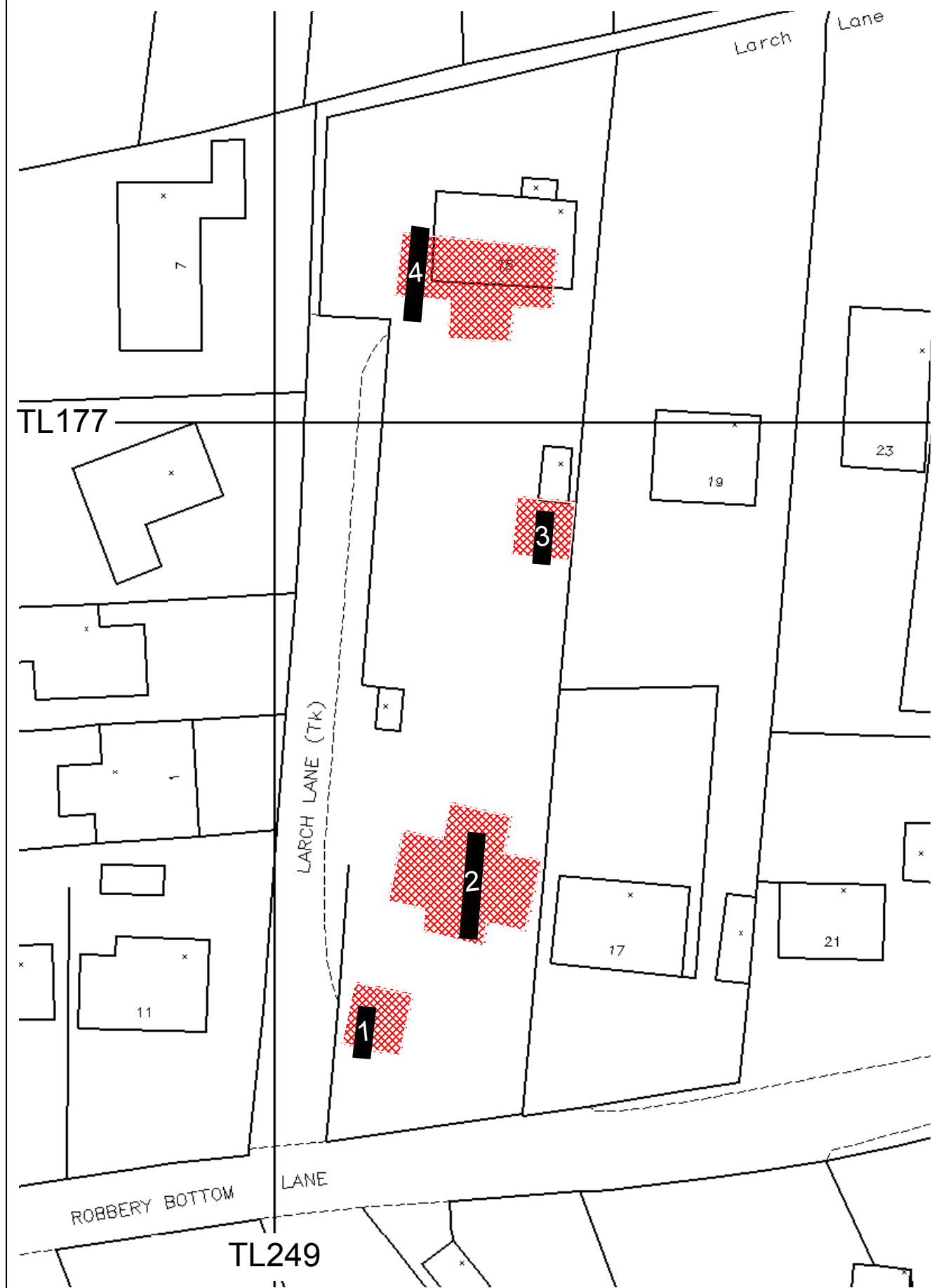
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Site Location

Scale 1:1250

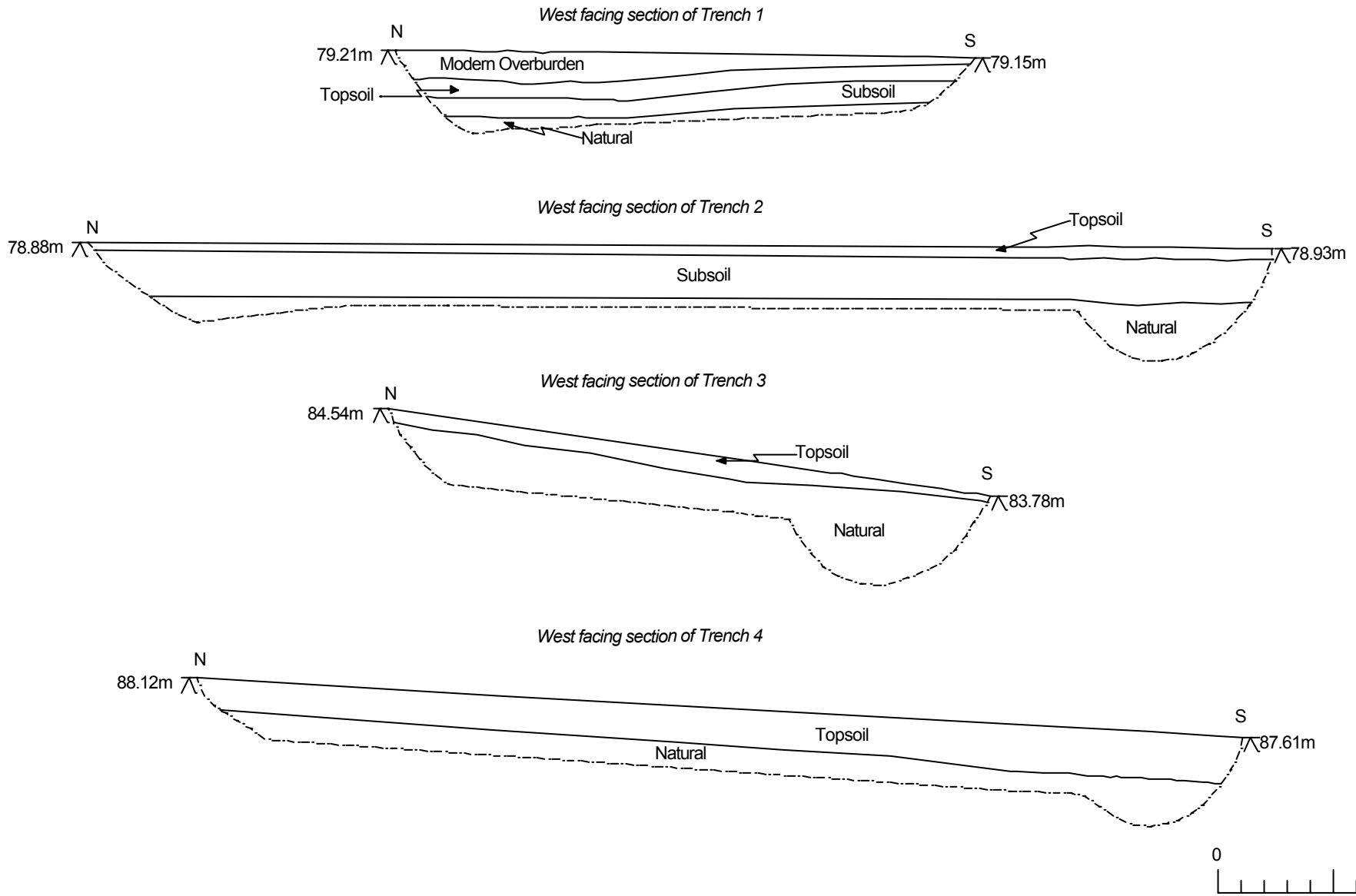
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Trench location

Scale 1:500

Figure 2



Trench profiles

Scale 1:50

Figure 3