

HERITAGE NETWORK



'ROMANY RYE'
London Road, Boxmoor, Herts.

(HN529)

Archaeological Evaluation Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

‘ROMANY RYE’ London Road, Boxmoor, Herts.

HN529

Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared on behalf of Fernwood Developments Ltd

by

Geoff Saunders, BA AIFA

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Acknowledgements

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

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Summary

Site name and address:	'Romany Rye', London Road, Boxmoor, Hertfordshire		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	Dacorum
Village/town:	Boxmoor	Parish:	Hemel Hempstead
Planning reference:	4/2477/04	NGR:	TL 03750 05875
Client name and address:	Fernwood Developments Ltd, Unit 10, Warren Yard, Wolverton Mill, Milton Keynes		
Nature of work:	New Housing	Present land use:	House and garden
Size of affected area:	c.2200m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.42.40m ²
Site Code:	HN529	Other reference:	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Evaluation	Curating Museum:	Dacorum Heritage Trust
Start of work	17/05/2005	Finish of work	18/05/2005
Related HER Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	Modern
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis:

In order to determine the archaeological risk posed by a proposal to construct new housing on land at 'Romany Rye', London Road, Boxmoor, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the developer to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation in advance of development.

Three trenches were excavated across the proposed development site. The only archaeological feature encountered was a single un-urned cremation in Trench 2. The cremation contained no datable artefacts, but is likely to be associated with the Romano-British activity in the next plot. The stratigraphy in Trench 3, closest to the London Road frontage, had been heavily disturbed by tree roots and modern services.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of *Fernwood Developments Ltd*, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a proposed development site located at ‘Romany Rye’, London Road, Boxmoor, Herts. The determination of the planning application for the development by the Dacorum Borough Council (DBC), has been referred back to the applicants for further information on the archaeological potential of the site. This is 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 set out 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 02/03/2005). A full specification for the work was contained in the Heritage Network’s approved *Project Design*, dated May 2005.

1.2 The site is located on the southern side of the London Road (A4251), approximately 70m to the west of the junction with Box Lane, centred on NGR TL 03750 05875. The property is presently occupied by a single dwelling. The development proposes the demolition of this building, and the construction of three detached dwellings, with associated access and landscaping.

1.3 The study area lies within Area of Archaeological Significance no.35, as designated in the DBC District Local Plan. This defines the Roman villa at Boxmoor House (180m to the SSW) and its hinterland, including the Roman road linking London with Aylesbury, Roman burials, and other evidence of occupation dating to this period. A recent excavation carried out on the adjacent site to the west uncovered remains of a number of structures and of a hollow-way running NE-SW which is likely to be Roman in origin. On this basis, there was considered to be a good potential for the discovery of further archaeological remains of Roman date within the present study area.

1.4 The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any such remains which 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 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 located within the gardens of the existing dwelling on ground which slopes from 88.50m on the southern site boundary to 87.00m on the northern. To the north the ground falls away towards the River Bulbourne.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Middle Chalk.

METHODOLOGY

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

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

2.5 Three trenches were opened using a tracked 360⁰ mini-digger fitted with a 0.80m 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.

2.6 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.

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

RESULTS

Trench 1

2.8 Trench 1 was located in the south-west corner of the site. It measured 10.00m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned north-east – south-west.

2.9 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a friable, dark greyish brown, silty sand topsoil, over a friable, dark yellowish brown, silty clay subsoil. In the western end of the trench a natural deposit of firm, very pale brown, silty clay was observed beneath the subsoil. Beneath this lay the natural geology of pale yellow chalk with frequent flints.

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

Trench 2

2.11 Trench 2 was located in the centre of the southern half of the site. It measured 10.00m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned east – west.

2.12 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a friable, dark greyish brown, silty sand topsoil over a friable, dark yellowish brown, silty clay subsoil. Beneath this lay the natural geology of pale yellow chalk.

2.13 Sub-circular cut feature [201] was observed cut into the natural chalk in the centre of the western half of the trench. The feature had steep concave sides and a rounded bowl shaped base, a diameter of approximately 0.35m and a maximum depth of 0.19m. The single black silty clay fill contained a significant amount of cremated bone and charcoal. A 100% sample of the feature was taken and further analysis of the material has confirmed it as a human cremation.

Trench data

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
201	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with steep concave sides and a rounded bowl shaped base. Un-urned cremation.	Diameter: 0.35m Depth: 0.19m
202	Fill	Black, silty clay with frequent cremated bone and charcoal. Fill of cremation [201].	Diameter: 0.35m Depth: 0.19m

Trench 3

2.14 Trench 3 was located in the north-east corner of the site. It measured 6.50m in length and 1.60m in width, and was aligned north-east – south-west.

2.15 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a friable, dark greyish brown, silty sand topsoil over a friable, dark yellowish brown, silty clay subsoil. Beneath this lay the natural geology of pale yellow chalk.

2.16 The stratigraphy in the trench had been heavily disturbed by tree roots. It was not possible to excavate the final 3.5m of the south-west end of the trench due to the presence of the stump from a large Yew tree and a live sewer pipe.

2.17 The topsoil within this trench contained a large amount of modern debris including modern CBM, and metal objects. This suggests that material has been dumped in this area of the site, possibly when the present dwelling was constructed.

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

Concordance of finds

Ctxt	Pottery		CBM		Human bone		An.bone		Fe.nails		Shell		Cu alloy		Misc	
	Wt .	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt .	No.	Wt .	No.	Wt .	No.	Wt .	No.
(202)					395	-										
Tr 1 U/S	10	1	815	7			10	1	30	1	15	1				
Tr 2 U/S			500	5							3	3	3	1		
Tr 3 U/S	30	2	540	2					3	1					5	3
Total	40	3	1855	14	395	-	10	1	33	2	18	4	3	1	5	3

Pottery

2.19 A total of 3 pottery sherds, weighing 40g, were recovered unstratified during the present investigation. Two fragments consist of modern flowerpot.

2.20 The third fragment is an intact Romano-British beaker foot ring. The ring has a diameter of approximately 40mm at the base, 36mm at the top, and evidence of where it was cut from the potters wheel is visible.

Recommendations

2.21 Given the small size of the assemblage and its unstratified nature, no further work is recommended.

Ceramic building Material

2.22 A total of 14 ceramic building material (CBM) fragments, weighing 1855g, were recovered unstratified during the present investigation. A total of twelve of the fragments are late post-medieval in date.

2.23 Two fragments are possibly Romano-British in date. Both fragments were heavily abraded, one was undiagnostic, the other appears to be part of a box flue-tile.

Recommendations

2.24 Due to the unstratified nature of this material, no further work is recommended.

Iron nails

2.25 Two iron nails, weighing 33g, were recovered unstratified during the present investigation. The two nails consisted of one large masonry nail and one smaller nail.

2.26 The masonry nail has rectangular head and shank, it measures approximately 63mm in length. The head measures 14mm by 10mm, the shank 10mm by 7mm.

2.27 The small nail has a circular head and shank, it measures approximately 34mm in length. The head has a diameter of 6mm, the shank 3mm.

Recommendations

2.28 Due to the unstratified nature of the nails, no further work is recommended.

Copper Alloy Objects

2.29 A single copper alloy ring, weighing 3g, was recovered unstratified during the present investigation. The ring, which is flattened, measures 23mm by 8mm by 1mm. One side of the ring is broken off, suggesting that it does not represent an item of jewellery. It is likely to previously have been mounted on a larger object. The date of the object is uncertain as it was recovered unstratified.

Recommendations

2.30 Due to its unstratified nature, no further work is recommended on this item.

Miscellaneous object

2.31 Three fragments of a single object, weighing 5g, were recovered unstratified during the present investigation. The object, which appears to be of asbestos type material, measures 33mm by 24mm by 3mm, and is painted white on one side. A hole through the object has been stained by iron corrosion, indicating that the object was likely attached by an iron nail. The date of the object is uncertain, however the material from which it is made suggests that it is probably modern.

Recommendations

2.32 Due to its unstratified nature, no further work is recommended on this item.

ECOFACTS

Animal Bone

2.33 A single fragment of animal bone, weighing 10g, was recovered unstratified during the present investigation. The fragment was small, abraded, and undiagnostic.

Recommendations

2.34 Due to the unstratified and undiagnostic nature of the fragment, no further work is recommended.

Shell

2.35 Four fragments of Oyster Shell, weighing 18g, were recovered unstratified during the present investigation.

Recommendations

2.36 Given the small size of the assemblage and its unstratified nature, no further work is recommended.

Cremations

2.37 A single cremation was 100% excavated, the entire fill was retained for later analysis. The cremation material has been examined macroscopically and separated into three elements, bone, charcoal, and fill.

2.38 The fragments of cremated bone vary in size from small fragments less than 1mm in size, to large fragments of 60mm length, the average size of the fragments is approximately 25-35mm. Recognisable elements within the cremation include fragments of teeth, long bones, and skull. Several fragments of teeth were identified, the condition of the teeth has been affected by the heat generated in the cremation process. A single tooth was identified and has the potential to be human.

2.39 The cremated bone was white and fully oxidised, consistent with a pyre heat of over 600°C.

2.40 A significant amount of bone, weighing a minimum total of 395g, was recovered from within the cremation. This suggests that a large amount of bone was retrieved from the pyre site and that the preservation of the remains was good.

2.41 The cremation contained no datable artefacts.

2.42 The majority of the charcoal fragments recovered are small, less than 15mm across, although occasional larger fragments 20mm across were collected. The charcoal probably represents the remains of the pyre material.

Recommendations

2.43 The cremation has the potential to contribute to a wider study of the demography of this region in the Romano-British period. At this stage no further work beyond initial identification is recommended, however further analysis of the cremation by a specialist should be included in subsequent stages of investigation.

2.44 It is likely that the collected charcoal fragments are too small to have potential to provide a date range for the cremation using C14 dating, however identification of species may be possible. This may indicate the type of fuel used and possibly provide information on the environment in the area at the time. It is recommended that the charcoal is submitted to a specialist for species identification.

Discussion & Conclusion

2.45 Three trenches were excavated in order to investigate the archaeological potential of the present site. Despite the location of the site within 200m of Boxmoor Roman Villa, only a single archaeological feature was observed, cremation [201].

2.46 The cremation contained no datable artefacts, although it is likely to be associated with the known Romano-British activity in the immediate vicinity of the site. The cremation may be the reason the occupation activity observed on the adjacent plot at ‘The Spinney’ does not continue onto the present site.

2.47 The small amount of unstratified and abraded Romano-British pottery and CBM collected, further emphasises that the present site is located on the edge of activity of this period in the area.

2.48 In Trench 3, on the London Road frontage, tree roots and modern services have caused heavy disturbance to the stratigraphy.

Conclusion

2.49 The archaeological evaluation suggests that the Romano-British occupation activity on the adjacent plot does not continue onto the present site. A single cremation, probably Romano-British in date, indicates that the site is on the boundary of settlement activity at this time.

2.50 The tree roots and services on the London Road frontage are likely to have disturbed any underlying archaeology in this area.

2.51 On this basis, there is considered to be a moderate to high probability that further cremation burials may be disturbed by the proposed development. It is, however, unlikely that the development will encounter significant occupation features.

Confidence Rating

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

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

3. Bibliography

Askew, P, 2003 *‘The Spinney’, London Road, Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. Archaeological Evaluation Report.* Museum of London Archaeology Service.

Batt, K, 2005 *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation – Romany Rye, London Road, Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead.* Hertfordshire County Council.

Hillelson, D, 2005 *‘Romany Rye’, London Road, Boxmoor, Herts. Project Design: Archaeological Evaluation.* Heritage Network May 2005.

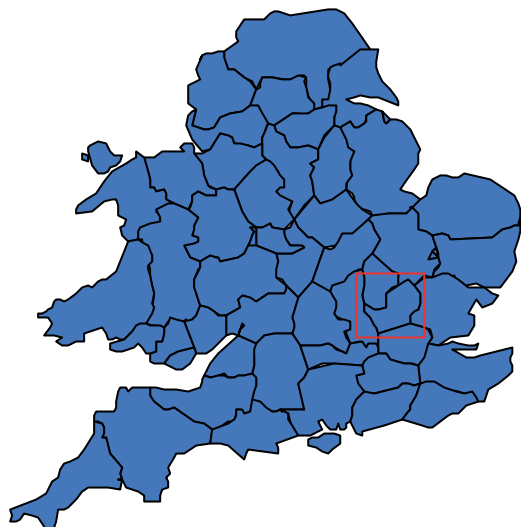
4. Illustrations

Figure 1 Site location

Figure 2 Trench location

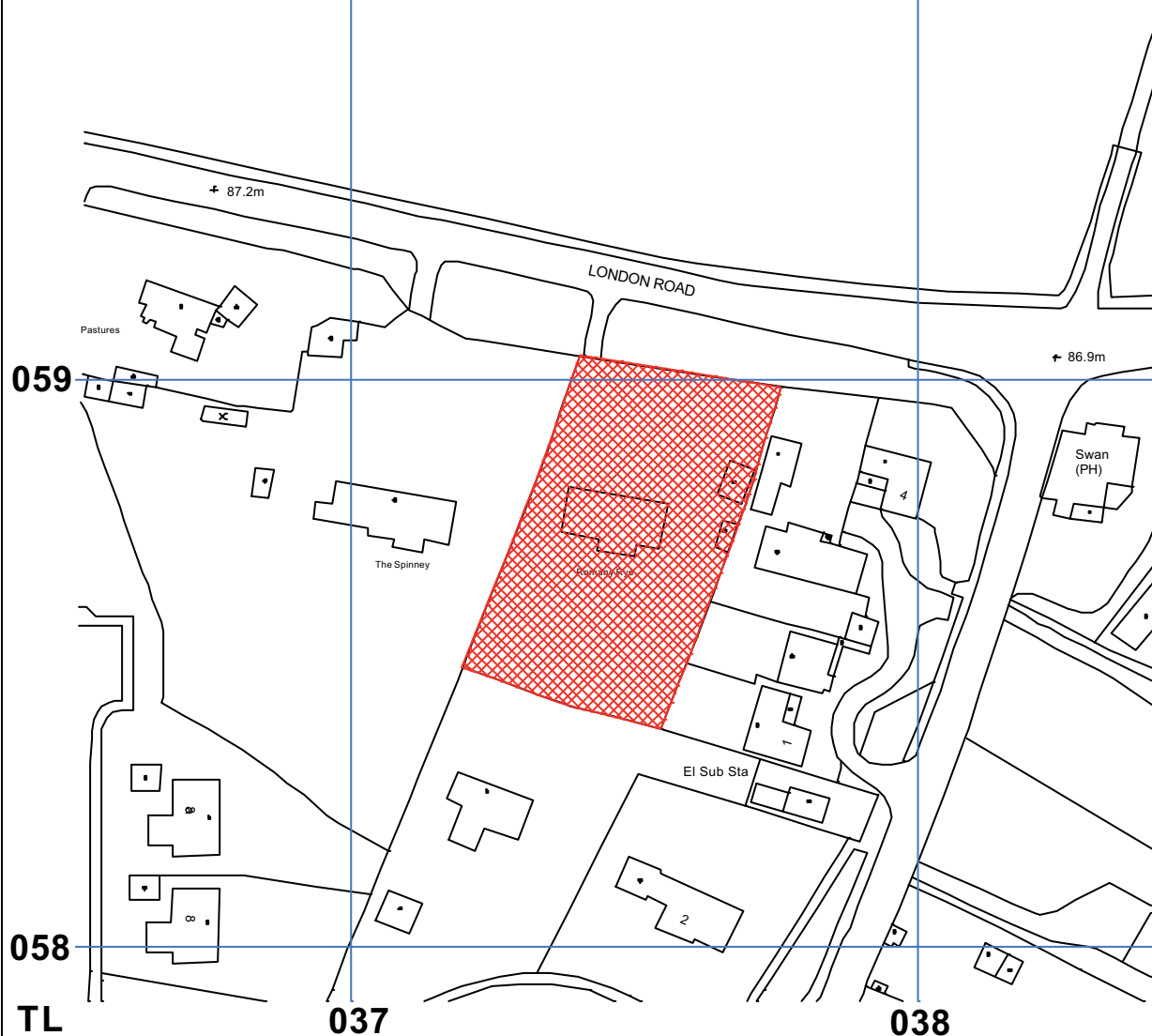
Figure 3a..... Trench sections and plan

Figure 3bSection through cremation [201]



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Boxmoor

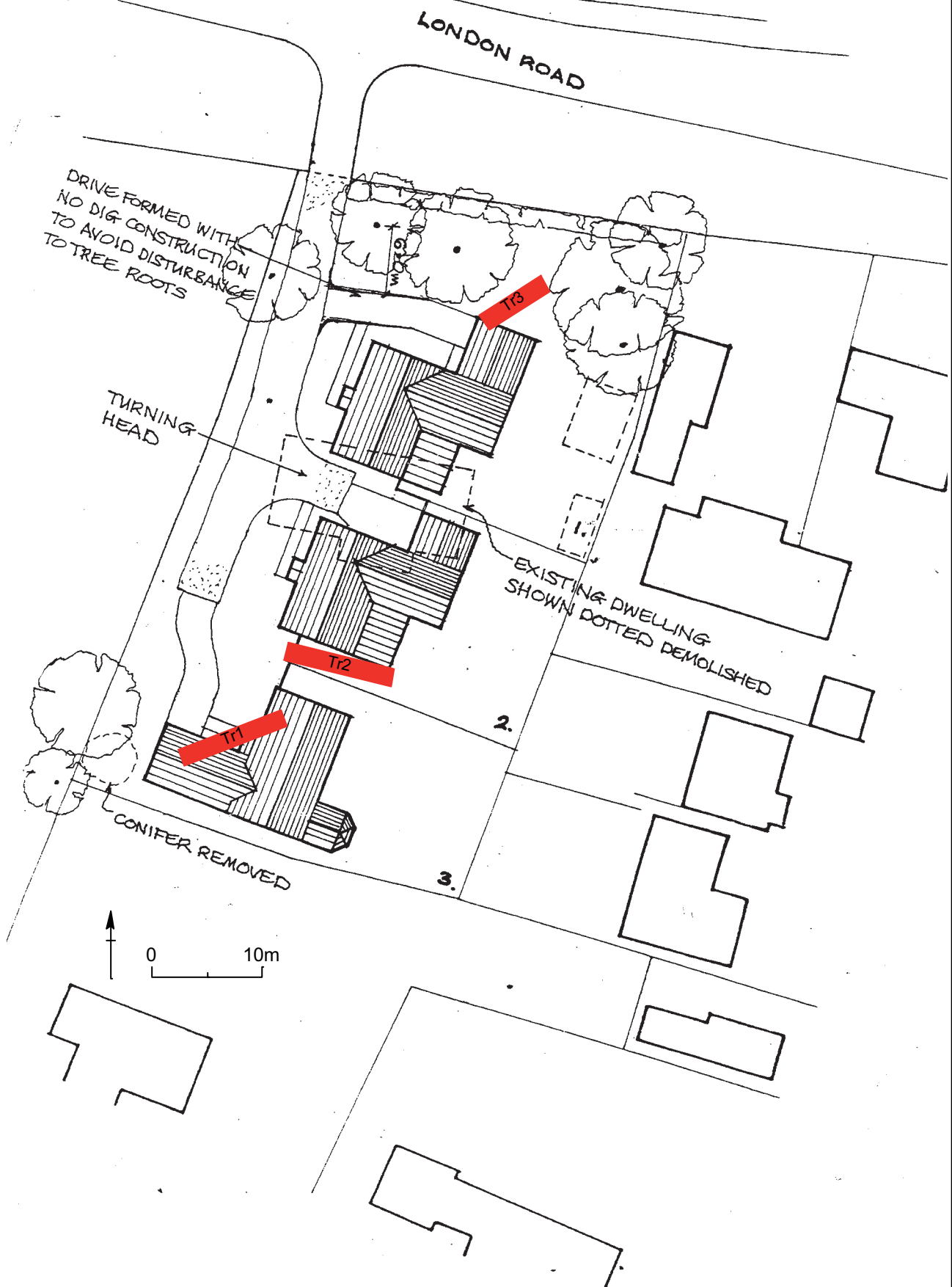


Site Location

Scale 1:1250

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Licence no.AL100014861

Figure 1

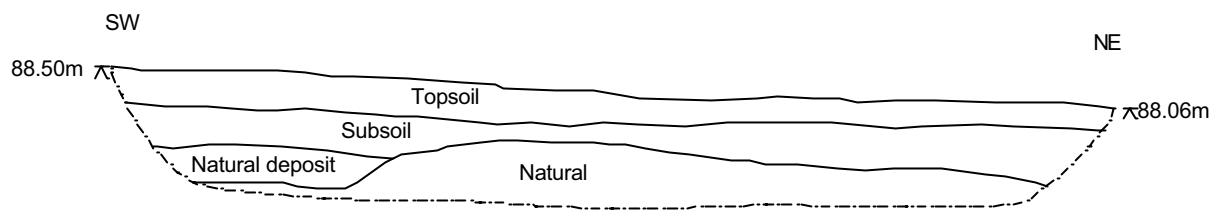


Trench location on development plan, as proposed

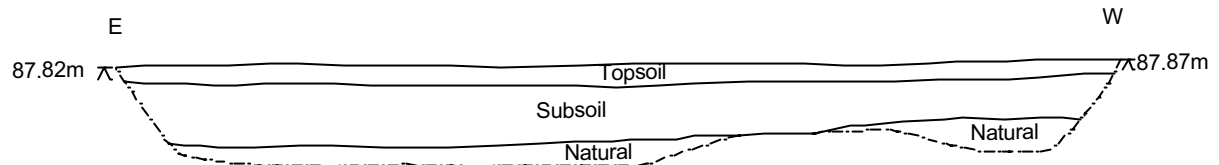
Scale 1:500

Figure 2

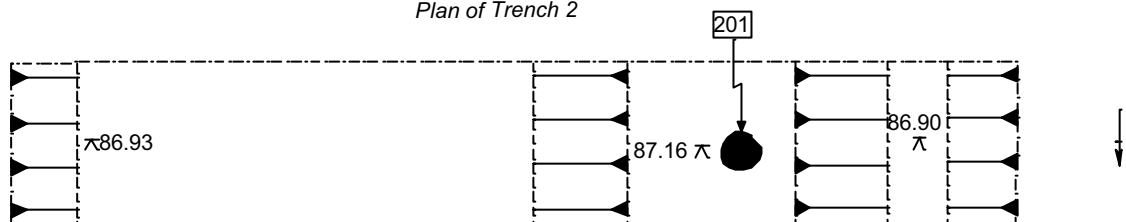
Southeast facing section of Trench 1



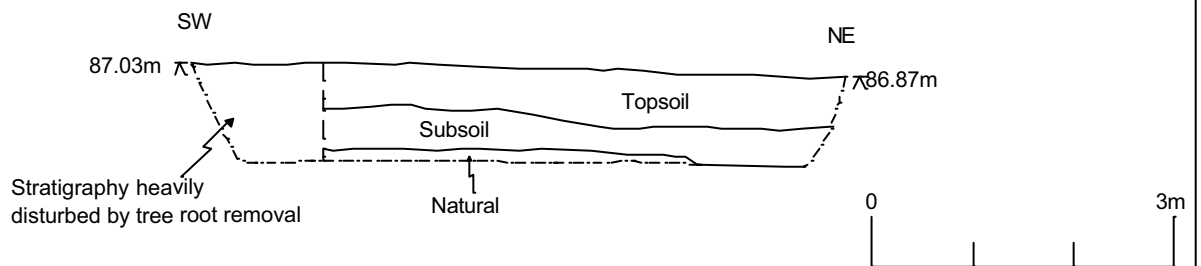
North facing section of Trench 2



Plan of Trench 2



Southeast facing section of Trench 3

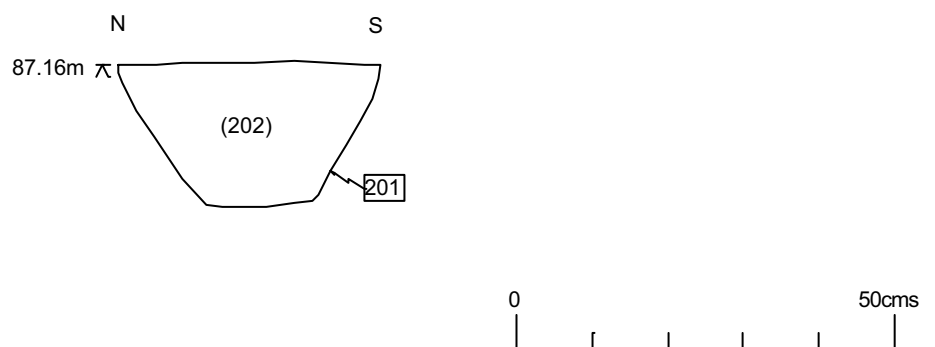


Trench sections and plan

Scale 1:75

Figure 3a

Profile of cremation [201]



Section through cremation [201]

Scale 1:10

Figure 3b