



Archaeological Services
University of Durham

Land at 3 Sandyhouse Cottages, Milfield, Wooler, Northumberland

archaeological evaluation

on behalf of
Sale & Partners

ASUD Report 1224
March 2005

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18-20 Glendale Road, Wooler, Northumberland, NE71 6DW

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1. Summary

The project

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation conducted in advance of a proposed development at 3, Sandyhouse Cottages, Milfield, Wooler, Northumberland. The evaluation comprised the excavation of three trial trenches.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Sale & Partners, and conducted by Archaeological Services University of Durham in accordance with a Project Design provided by Archaeological Services and approved by the Assistant County Archaeological Officer.

Results

- 1.3 A pit containing prehistoric pottery was identified in trench 3, to the rear of 3, Sandyhouse Cottages.
- 1.4 No other archaeological features or remains were identified during the evaluation.

Recommendations

- 1.5 A significant archaeological resource has been identified by the evaluation. It is anticipated that any future development of the site will impact upon it and it is likely therefore that a scheme of mitigation will be required.
- 1.6 It is recommended that the pottery assemblage should be quantified, that radiocarbon and organic residue studies should be carried out, and that the sherds should be conserved, reassembled, illustrated and published.

2. Project background

Location (Figure 1)

- 2.1 The site is located to the rear of 3, Sandyhouse Cottages, Milfield, Wooler, Northumberland and is centred on grid reference NT 9337 3239. It is bounded to the north and west by the present Sandyhouse Cottages, to the east by agricultural land, and to the south by holiday cottages. The proposed development area is c.100 square metres in size.

Development proposal

- 2.2 The proposal is to construct an extension to the rear of the existing property, along with associated access roads and services.

Objective

- 2.3 The objective of the scheme of works was to assess the nature, extent and potential significance of any surviving archaeological features within the proposed development area, so that an informed decision may be made regarding the nature, and scope of, any further scheme of archaeological works that may be required in advance of development.

Methods statement

- 2.4 The works have been undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation provided by Archaeological Services and approved by the Assistant County Archaeological Officer.

Dates

- 2.5 Fieldwork was undertaken between 14th and 15th February 2005. This report was prepared between 16th February and 8th March 2005.

Personnel

- 2.6 Fieldwork was conducted by Alan Rae, James Roberts, and Andy Willis. This report was prepared by Alan Rae, and edited by Daniel Still with illustrations by Linda Bosveld. Specialist analysis was conducted by Fraser Hunter (ceramics), Dr. Charlotte O'Brien (macrofossils) The Project Manager was Peter Carne.

Archive/OASIS

- 2.8 The site code is SMW 05, for Sandyhouse **Milfield Wooler 2005**. It is intended to deposit the site archive and finds with the county SMR at the end of the project. The OASIS number for this project is archaeol3-6386.

3. Landuse, topography and geology

- 3.1 The site is located to the south of Milfield village and is bounded to the north and west by the present Sandyhouse Cottages, to the east by agricultural land, and by holiday cottages to the south. It is currently used as a lawn and garden. The ground slopes gently from the north-east to the south-west between 64.40mOD and 64.19mOD.

Geology

- 3.2 The solid geology of the site consists of Carboniferous limestone. This is overlain by Tertiary sands and gravels.

4. Historical and archaeological background

- 4.1 The site is located within an important archaeological landscape, containing both ritual and settlement sites dating from Neolithic period onwards. Many of the prehistoric features have been incorporated and reused in later periods, especially when the Maelmin palace site was constructed to the east of Milfield in the early-medieval period. A large number of these sites have been designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and the archaeological landscape of the Milfield area is regarded as being an area of national importance.

Previous archaeological works

- 4.2 No previous archaeological works are known to have been undertaken in the area of the proposed development.

5. The evaluation trenches

- 5.1 Three trenches, each measuring 5m x 1.8m in size, were excavated within the footprint of the proposed development (Figure 2). The overburden was removed using a backhoe excavator with a toothless bucket under close archaeological supervision. All trenches were cleaned and recorded by hand.

Trench 1 (Figure 3)

- 5.2 This trench was excavated to the south of the existing cottages, and orientated on an east-west alignment. The natural subsoil was identified at 63.72m OD and consisted of orange brown sandy gravel [3]. Above this was a grey brown silty clay subsoil [2] measuring 0.29m thick. Overlying the entire length of the trench was the dark grey brown clay silt topsoil [1]; this measured 0.26m thick. No finds or features were identified within the trench.

Trench 2 (Figure 3)

- 5.3 This trench was excavated to the east of the existing cottages, and orientated on a north-south alignment. The natural subsoil was identified at 63.62m OD and consisted of orange brown sandy gravel [3]. Above this was a grey brown silty clay subsoil [2] measuring 0.26m thick. Overlying the entire length of the trench was the topsoil [1] measuring 0.24m thick. No finds or features were identified within the trench.

Trench 3 (Figure 4)

- 5.4 This trench was located to the east of the existing cottages and aligned north-south. The natural subsoil was identified at 63.75m OD [3]. In the southern part of the trench a sub-circular pit was identified cutting the natural [F5]. This measured 1.10m long, 0.8m wide, 0.26m deep, and was filled by orange brown coarse sand [4]. Nine fragments of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pot were

recovered from this context. Above this was a grey brown silty clay subsoil [2] measuring 0.12m thick. This had been cut by a modern ceramic drain which traversed the trench on an approximate east-west alignment. Overlying the entire length of the trench was the topsoil [1] measuring 0.15m to 0.46m thick.

6. The finds

Pottery

- 6.1 Nine potsherds were examined; these come from two vessels, a thick-walled substantial bucket-shaped vessel and a relatively fine shouldered jar. The form of the jar suggests a late Bronze Age/Iron Age date. The jar is decorated, an unusual feature for pottery from the region. The nine sherds can be attributed to two vessels.

Vessel 1

- 6.2 Four sherds, three conjoining make up a substantial part of the profile of a relatively fine shouldered jar. The wall is straight and thin (8.5-10mm), with a high rounded shoulder and an inturned flat rim. The rim is decorated with an incised chevron pattern, while the exterior has three horizontal incised lines straddling the shoulder; these are defined by crudely conjoined short incisions. The three joining sherds form a portion measuring 96mm high and 68.5mm wide. The fourth sherd is slightly thicker (12.5mm), and presumably comes from nearer the base of the vessel. The fabric is mid-brown with substantial fragments of angular rock temper, oxidised to orange at the rim.

Vessel 2

- 6.3 Five substantial sherds are from a much thicker vessel; its form is unclear but it was probably bucket-shaped. Four are wall sherds (one preserving only one face), and measure 14.5-17mm thick. The fifth is a much thicker base sherd (32mm). The sherds are not badly abraded and two are over 70 mm in length. The fabric is externally oxidized and internally reduced, with substantial fragments of angular rock temper. The outer surface is friable, and temper fragments have been lost; the internal surface has been smoothed by wiping. Substantial carbonised residues survive on the interior, and these would provide material for dating and residue analysis.
- 6.4 Both sherds are at home in local later prehistoric traditions, characterised by substantial coarse pots, often bucket-shaped. The shouldered form of vessel 1 is most typical of a Late Bronze Age/Iron Age tradition. By local standards this is a fine ware, which is rare in the assemblages of Northumbria and southern Scotland. Decorated vessels are unusual, and a full report should look for parallels. The sherds are unabraded and substantial, with some joins, indicating the assemblage is not residual.

7. Environmental assessment report

- 7.1 Five litres of soil from context (4) were manually floated and sieved through a 500 μ mesh. The residues were retained, described and scanned using a magnet for ferrous fragments. The flots were dried slowly and scanned at x 40

magnification for waterlogged and charred botanical remains. Identification of these was undertaken by comparison with modern reference material held in the Environmental Laboratory at Archaeological Services, University of Durham. Total numbers of remains per species were logged and the results were interpreted in their archaeological and palaeoecological contexts. Plant taxonomic nomenclature follows Stace (1997).

- 7.2 The only charred plant remains in the sample were fragments of hazelnut. An uncharred seed of ivy-leaved speedwell, fat-hen and woundwort and small amounts of charcoal, coal, burnt bone and modern roots were also present in the flot. The contents of the residue and flot are listed in Table 2.1.
- 7.3 The occurrence of charred hazelnut fragments in the context suggests these were gathered for food. Hazelnuts formed an important part of the diet during the Neolithic and to a lesser extent in the Bronze Age through to the medieval period (Huntley & Stallibrass, 1995).
- 7.4 The well-drained nature of the sediment, in combination with the presence of modern roots, suggests that the uncharred seeds of speedwell, fat-hen and woundwort are modern introductions.
- 7.5 No further work is recommended on the macrofossils.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1 The evaluation has indicated that archaeological deposits dating from the late Bronze Age/Iron age period survive on the site. Any future development will impact upon the archaeological resource. It is likely therefore that a scheme of mitigation will be required.
- 8.2 The late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery recovered from the site is of both local and regional significance. Because of this further work is recommended on the ceramic assemblage, as summarized below:
 - Production of a full quantified report with parallels
 - Radiocarbon date for residues
 - Organic residue analysis
 - Conservation to rejoin sherds where possible
 - Illustration of conjoining sherds from vessel 1 and representative sherds of vessel 2
 - Publication of the full illustrated analysis report

9. Sources

Harding, A. 1981, Excavation in the Prehistoric ritual complex near Milfield, Northumbria, *Proc Prehistoric Society* 47.

Huntley, J. P. & Stallibrass, S. (1995) *Plant and vertebrate remains from*

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Figure 1
Location map

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scale 1:40 000 - for A4 plot



location of site

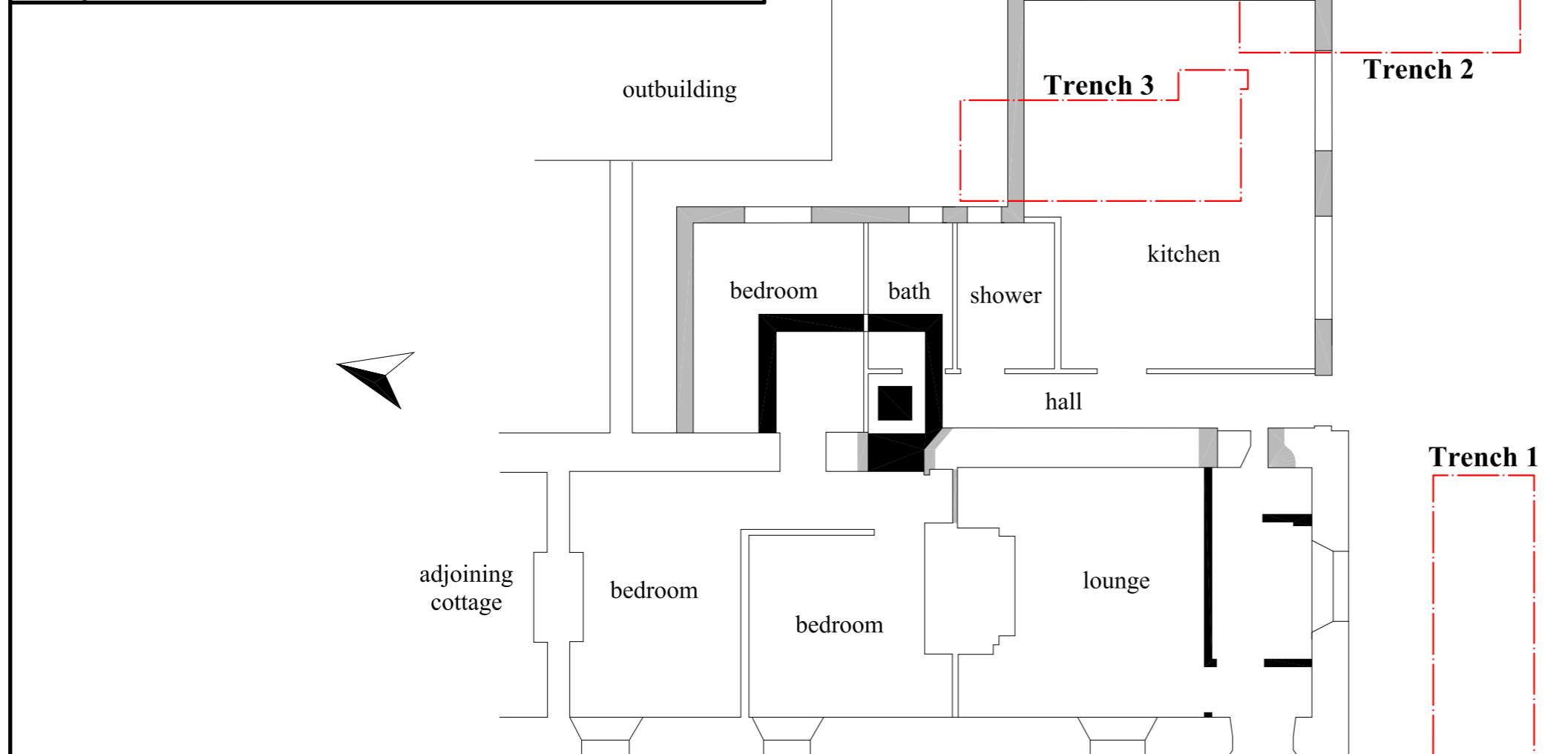
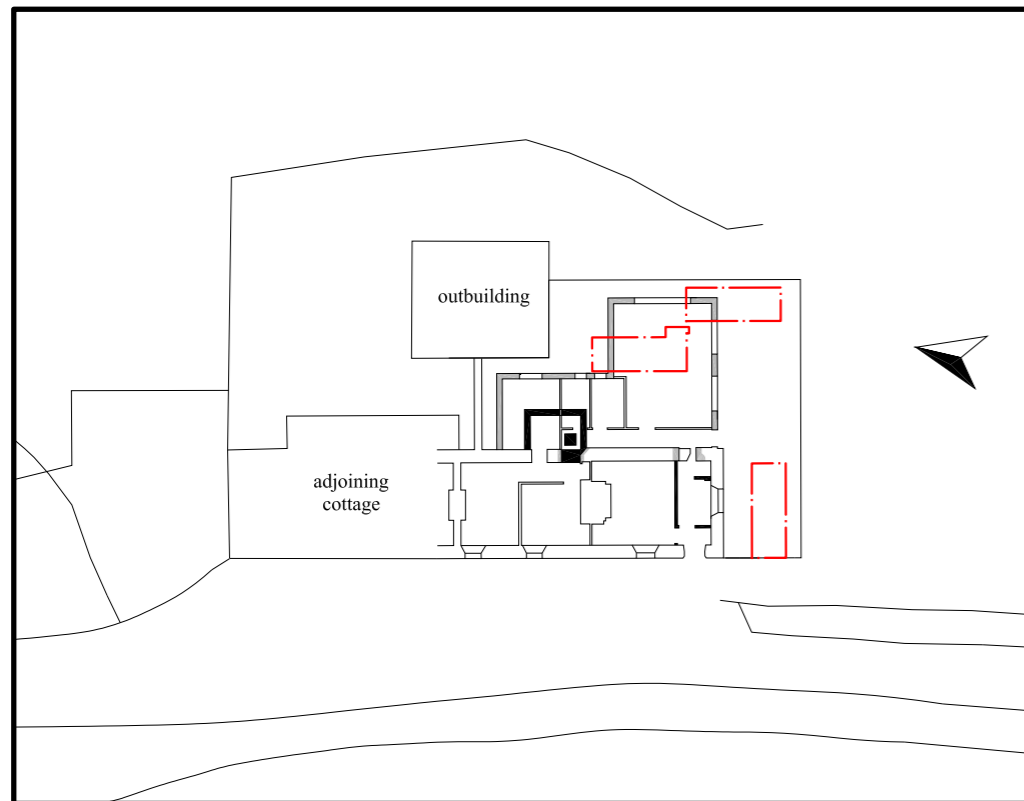


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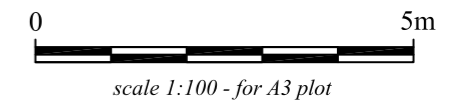
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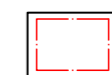
Figure 2

*Location of Sandyhouse and the
trenches*



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-  new extension
-  previous extension
-  location of trenches

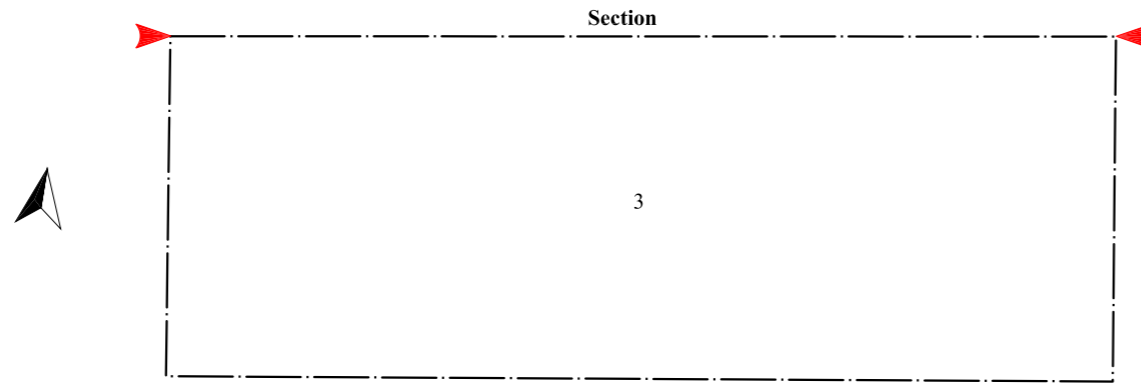
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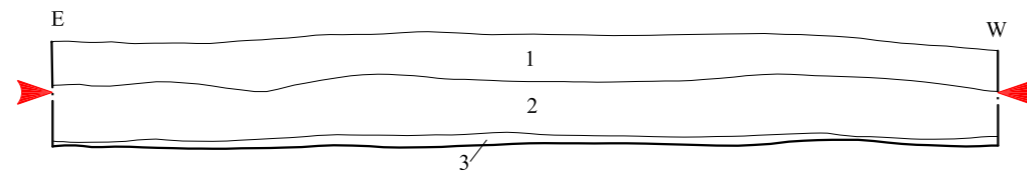
Figure 3

Plans and sections of Trenches 1 and 2

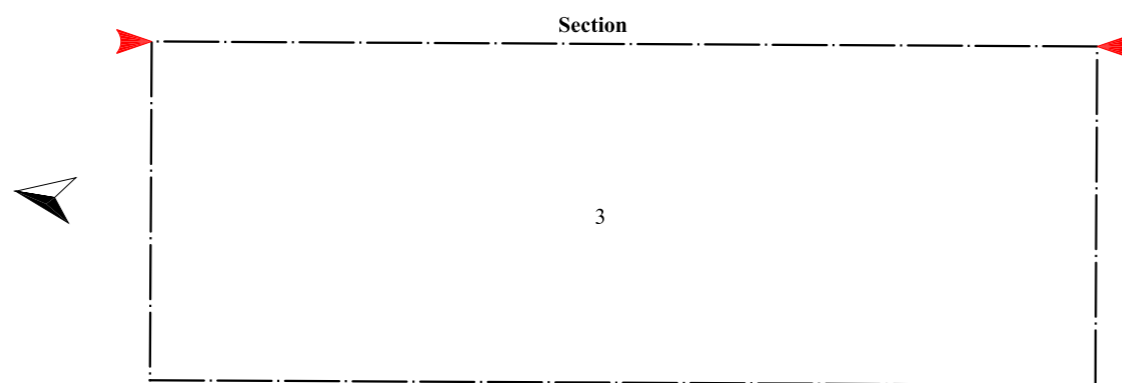
Trench 1, plan



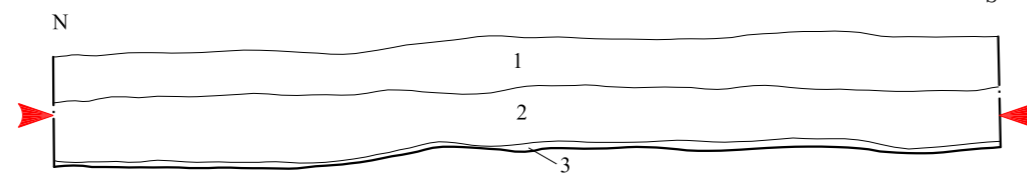
Trench 1, section



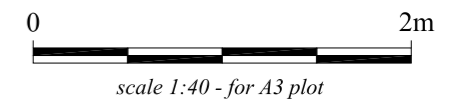
Trench 2, plan

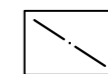
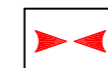


Trench 2, section



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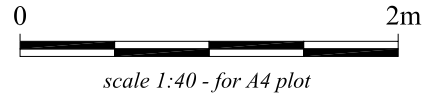





-  extent of excavation
-  extent of section



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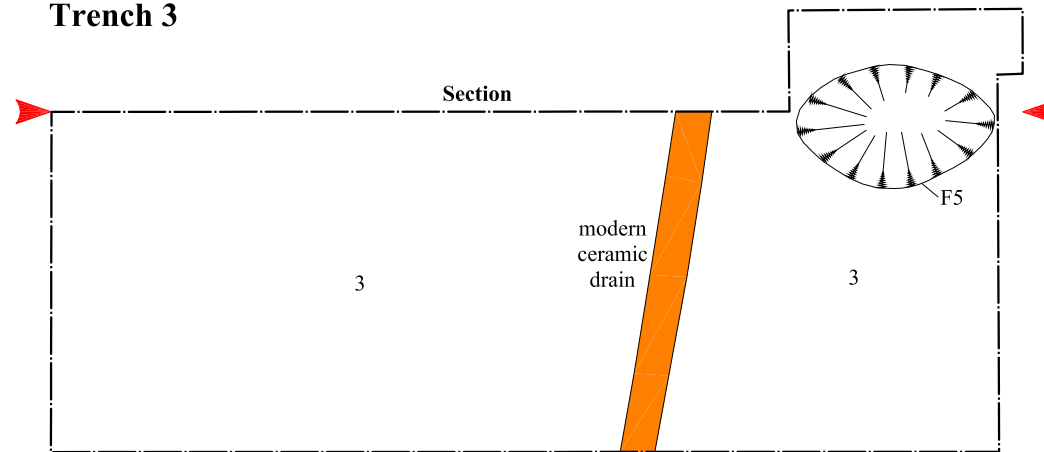
-  extent of excavation
-  extent of section
-  ceramic field drain

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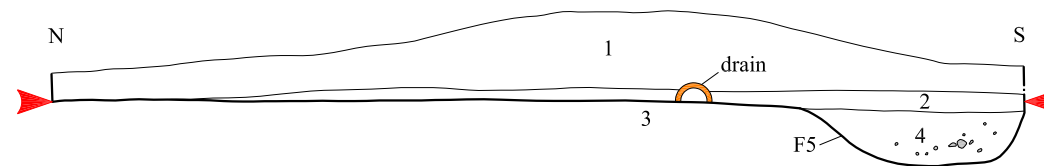
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Figure 4
Plan and section of Trench 3

Trench 3



Trench 3, section



Appendix 1: Context data

Summary list of contexts. The • symbols in the columns at the right indicate the presence of finds of the following types: P pottery.

No	Description	P
1	Topsoil	
2	Sub-soil	
3	Natural gravel	
4	Fill of pit F5	•
F5	Cut for sub-circular pit	

Appendix 2: Data table

Table 2.1: Contents of the residue and flot from Context 4

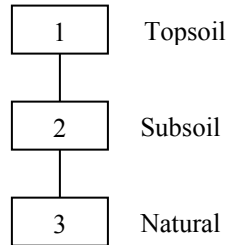
Sample	1
Context	4
<i>Volume processed (ml)</i>	15000
<i>Volume of flot (ml)</i>	200
<i>Volume of flot assessed (ml)</i>	200
<i>Residue contents (relative abundance)</i>	
Burnt bone	1
<i>Flot matrix (relative abundance)</i>	
Burnt bone	1
Charcoal	1
Coal	2
Modern roots	1
<i>Charred remains (total counts)</i>	
(t) <i>Corylus avellana</i> (Hazelnut fragment)	12
<i>Waterlogged remains (total counts)</i>	
(a) <i>Chenopodium album</i> (Fat-hen)	1
(x) <i>Stachys</i> sp (Woundwort)	1
(x) <i>Veronica hederifolia</i> (Ivy-leaved speedwell)	1

(a: arable weed; t: trees/shrubs; x: wide niche)

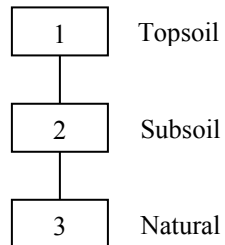
Relative abundance is based on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Appendix 3: Trench Matrices

Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 3

