

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRENCH
EVALUATION AND WATCHING
BRIEF ON LAND AT PIXTON STABLES,
JURY ROAD, DULVERTON, SOMERSET**

prepared for Stacey Construction

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Exeter Archaeology

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation and watching brief was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology as part of the planning condition for conversion of a former 20th century laundry and potting shed and the construction of new buildings as part of the creation of a winter garden at Pixton Stables.

Very little evidence of former 18th-19th century stable buildings was exposed where evaluation took place. A cobbled curvilinear pathway may represent the only observation of that period. However, the remains were recorded of a probable northward extension of the early 20th century laundry.

No archaeological features were observed during the course of the subsequent watching brief

Further information on the standing remains of the laundry and potting shed is found in a report by Richardson (2007).

1. INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared by Exeter Archaeology (EA) for Stacey Construction. It sets out the results of an archaeological trench evaluation undertaken on land at Pixton Stables, Jury Road, Dulverton, Somerset (NGR SS 925 272). The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission for the conversion and refurbishment of a former laundry and potting shed and the construction of a glass winter garden building on the north side of the site (ref. 6/9/07/102). The work is required by Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA), as advised by their Countryside Archaeological Adviser.

An Oasis entry has been created for the project: Ref No 61790.

1.1 The site (Fig. 1)

The site is located in the parish of Dulverton, Somerset, within the Exmoor National Park. At the time of the watching brief two former outbuildings which were once associated with Pixton House stood within the site footprint. The site is situated at around 56m AOD on ground that slopes gently down to the west. The underlying solid geology comprises Upper Devonian sandstones, siltstones, slates and limestones.

The existing structures comprise a former stables/laundry on the west side of the site and a potting shed on the east side positioned around a former central courtyard area. A comprehensive assessment and report on these standing buildings has been carried out (Richardson 2007). Historic mapping depicts buildings present on the site since at least 1800. The map of 1838 shows an additional east-west aligned curving structure occupying the approximate area of the proposed winter garden. Buildings appear in their present form by 1890. Fig. 2 shows the approximate position of buildings present on the site in 1800 and 1838.

2. PROJECT SPECIFICATION

Specifications for archaeological recording are set out in the document '*The conduct of archaeological work and historic building recording within Exmoor National Park*'. The principal requirements were:

- evaluative trenching to determine the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures and deposits,
- watching brief to be conducted on all groundworks associated with the development,
- reporting and archiving as appropriate.

3. METHOD

Three trenches totalling 32m in length were excavated using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. They were sited across the footprint of the winter garden building in order to establish the potential for survival of *in-situ* archaeological deposits. A small trench (Trench 4) was also excavated within the southern part of the site, along the proposed route of a tunnel connecting the winter garden building to the main house. Trench positions were agreed with ENPA prior to commencement on site (see Fig.2).

Machining continued until either natural subsoil or archaeological deposits were reached. Where archaeological deposits were exposed, trenches were cleaned back by hand, and the deposits investigated and recorded.

The standard EA recording procedure was employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* single context record sheets, a drawn record was compiled at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a photographic record was made in black and white print and colour digital format.

4. RESULTS (Figs 3-5)

The typical sequence of deposits observed across the site consisted of natural subsoil encountered at a depth of between 150mm and 500mm, sealed below a modern construction layer of stone chippings.

4.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

This trench was aligned parallel with the north end of the laundry building. All deposits within the western half of the trench had been removed by a deep terrace (104) for a concrete floor, which extended into natural subsoil to a depth of 0.5m. A single course of stone walling (102) survived along the base of the eastern side of the terrace. The base of the trench consisted of a sub-base (103) for the concrete floor, which was sealed by a mixed levelling deposit containing glass, bricks, broken plant pots and other modern debris. No pre-modern features, deposits or artefacts were exposed.

4.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

This trench was positioned to determine the presence of intact archaeological deposits to the north of a brick wall, which had formed part of a former greenhouse, terraced into the sloping ground.

The northwestern outer brick wall of the former greenhouse was exposed 2.5m from the south-east end of the trench. To the north of the wall, natural subsoil was exposed at a depth of between 0.2 and 0.5m overlain by modern deposits. A stone-built structure was revealed 3m to the north of the wall. Set within a terrace cut (206) it was square or rectangular in plan and consisted of mudstone walls measuring 0.45m thick. It contained a fill of silty loam, which probably accumulated following its disuse. It was sealed by redeposited soil containing stone, glass and iron nails.

4.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 5)

This trench was positioned to investigate east-west aligned curving structure depicted on the map of 1838. Natural subsoil was exposed directly beneath modern overburden at a depth of 250mm. Two features were identified: a coarse cobbled surface and a post pit. The cobbled surface (301) extended over an area approximately 1.2m x 0.5m. Interpreted as a pathway, it was built of mudstone and brick and was edged with larger cobbles to the north. It had been disturbed to the south. The post pit (302) measured 1m across and 0.25m deep. It was exposed 3m from the southern end of the trench. No finds were recovered from the features or the trench.

4.4 Trench 4

The test pit demonstrated the presence of topsoil to a depth of 0.3m above natural yellow clay.

4.5 Watching brief

A watching brief was undertaken following the commencement of works but no archaeological features were observed.

5. DISCUSSION

Direct evidence of former 18th-19th century stable buildings on the site, depicted on the map of 1838, was absent and was only hinted at by a section of cobbled pathway within Trench 3. The pathway appears to be situated to the outside of the northern wall of the former building, running parallel with it. The post pit, located within the suspected interior of one of the former buildings represents the only possible structural evidence.

In Trench 1 the remains of a wall and a concrete surface terraced into the natural subsoil, correlate with the wall line and floor level of the existing early 20th century laundry building to the south. This may indicate an original northwards extension of the laundry which is perhaps confirmed by the observation that there are phases of blocking in the north gable end wall of the standing building of the laundry (Richardson 2007, 5). The stone structure (203) located in Trench 2 was not fully excavated. It does not appear on any of the available mapping and could be a well or a sump associated with the laundry building.

6. CONCLUSION

Little evidence of former buildings of the 18th-19th century was present where observations took place. This may be due in part to poor preservation as a result of both localised terracing for recent buildings and by recent landscaping of the area, which appears to have caused some partial truncation of earlier deposits. Evidence observed in Trench 1 suggests that the early 20th century laundry may originally have extended further north or that a separate building was appended to it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The report was commissioned by Doug Bailey for Stacy Construction. The project was administered for EA by J. Valentine. The fieldwork was directed by J. Best, assisted by P. Pearce. The report was prepared by J. Best. T. Ives prepared the illustrations.

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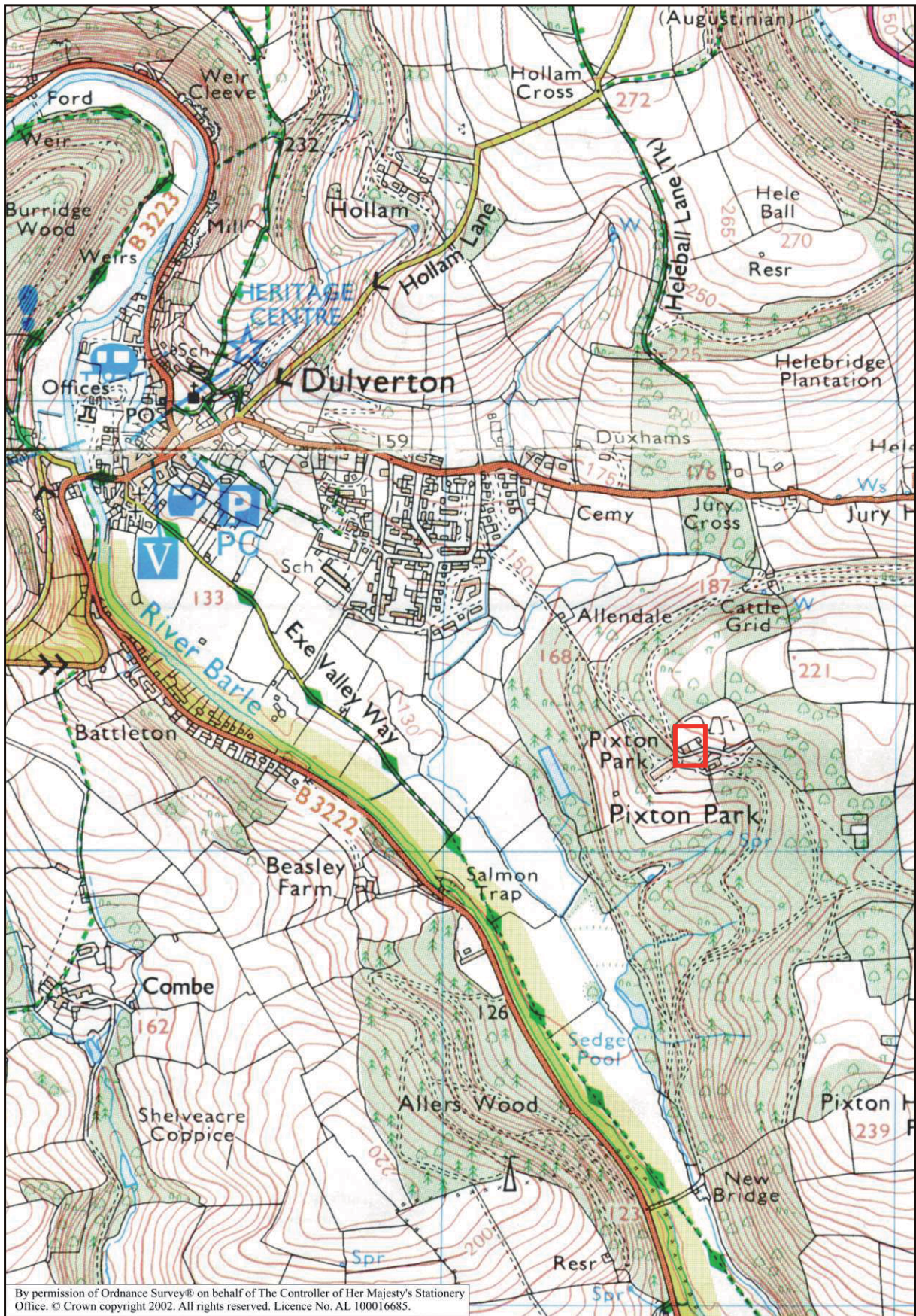


Fig. 1 Location of site. Reproduced from the 1:25000 Explorer™ map 114 (enlarged to 1:12500).

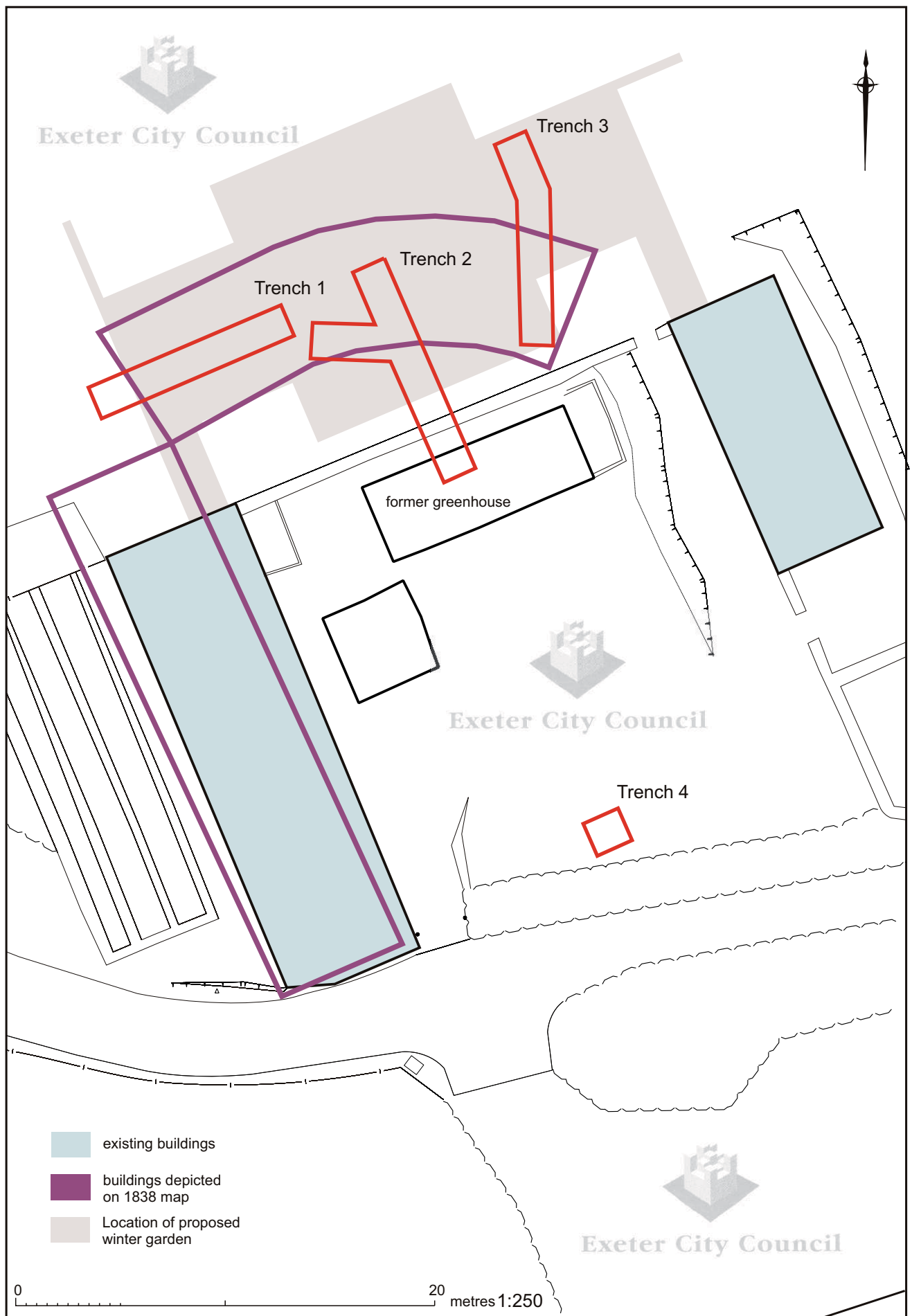


Fig. 2 Trench locations, showing approximate position of buildings present in 1838. Scale 1:250 @ A4. Reproduced from a plan supplied by Louise Crossman Architects.

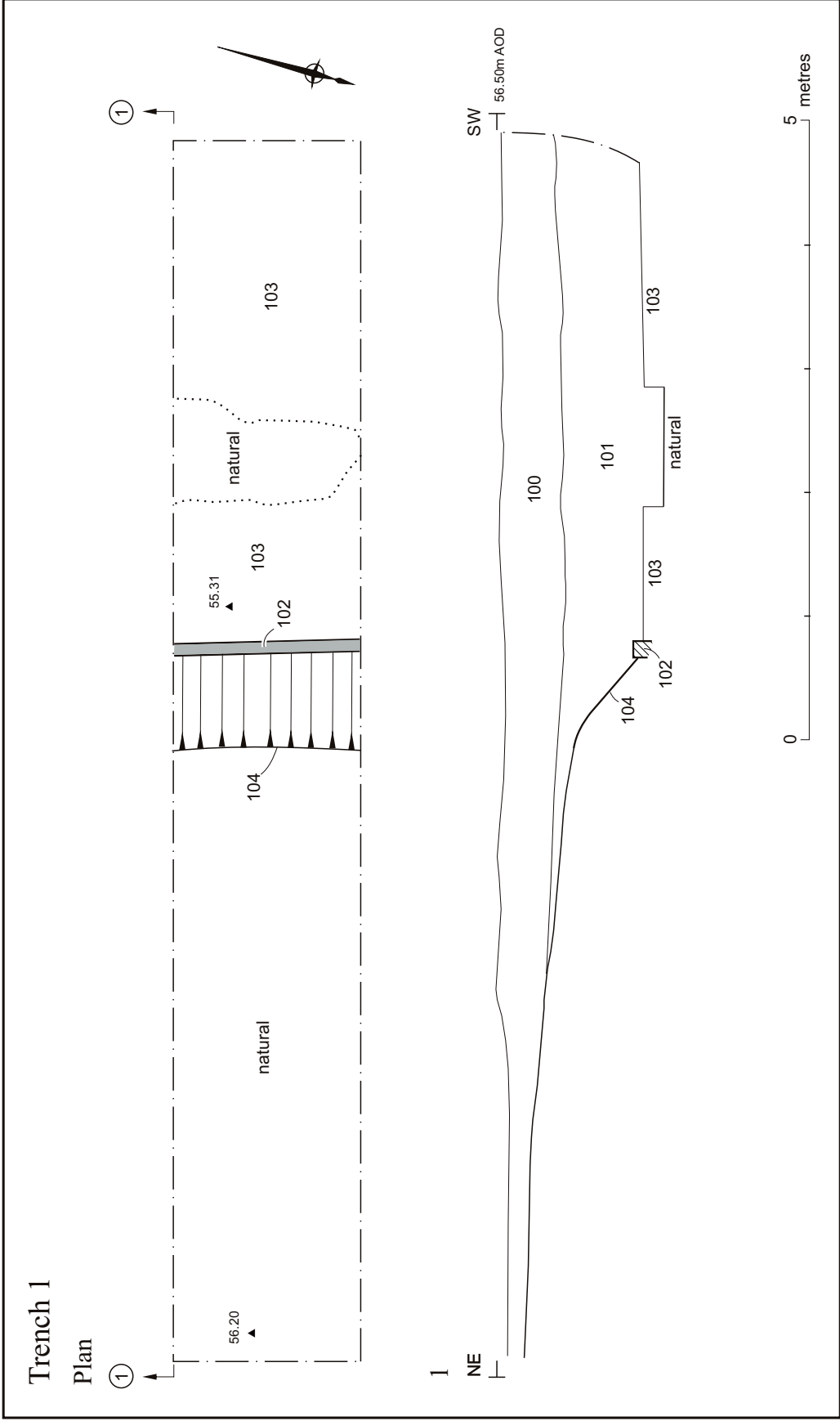


Fig. 3 Trench 1, plan and section. Scale 1:50 @ A4.

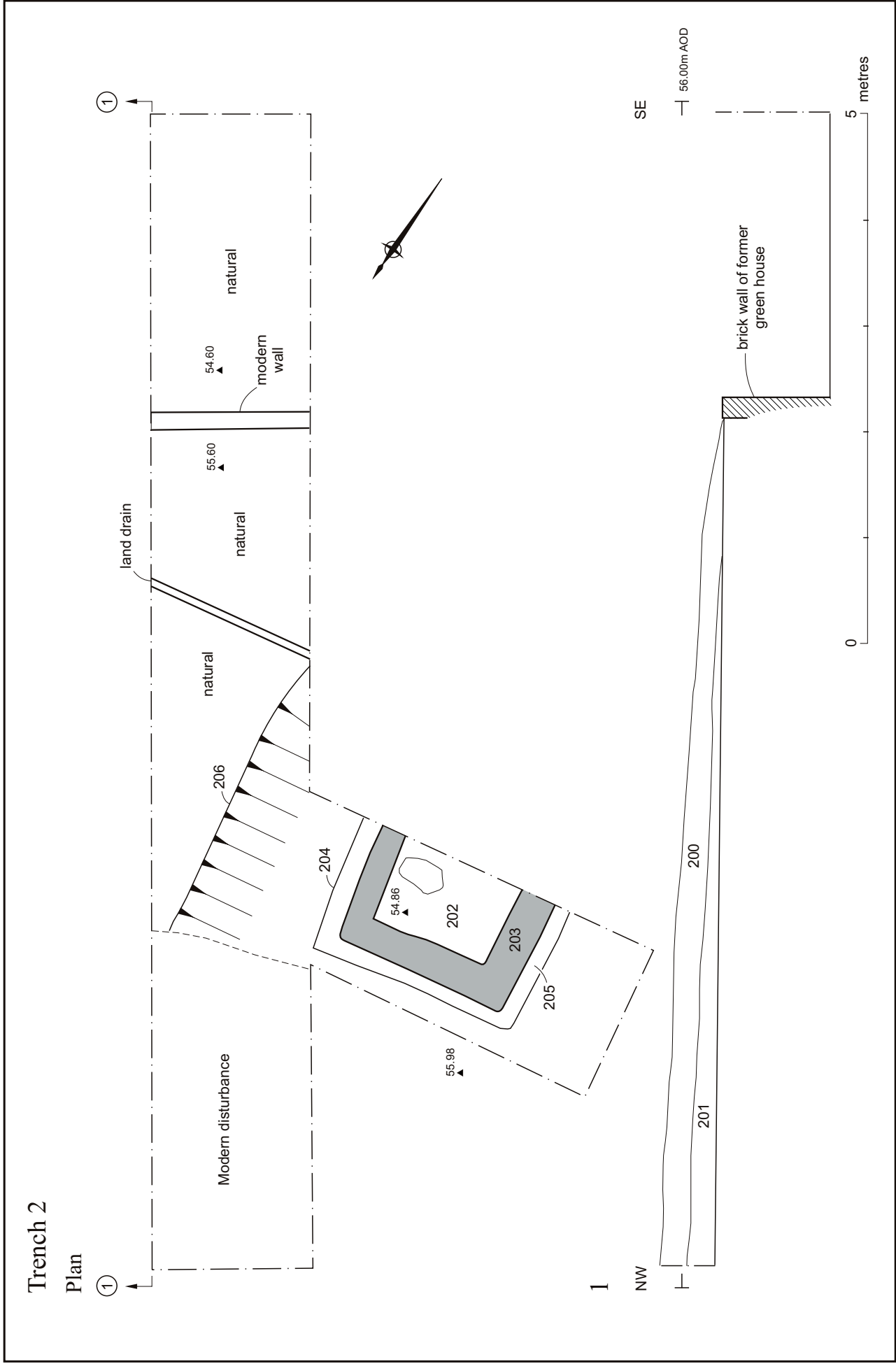


Fig. 4 Trench 2, plan and section. Scale 1:50 @ A4.

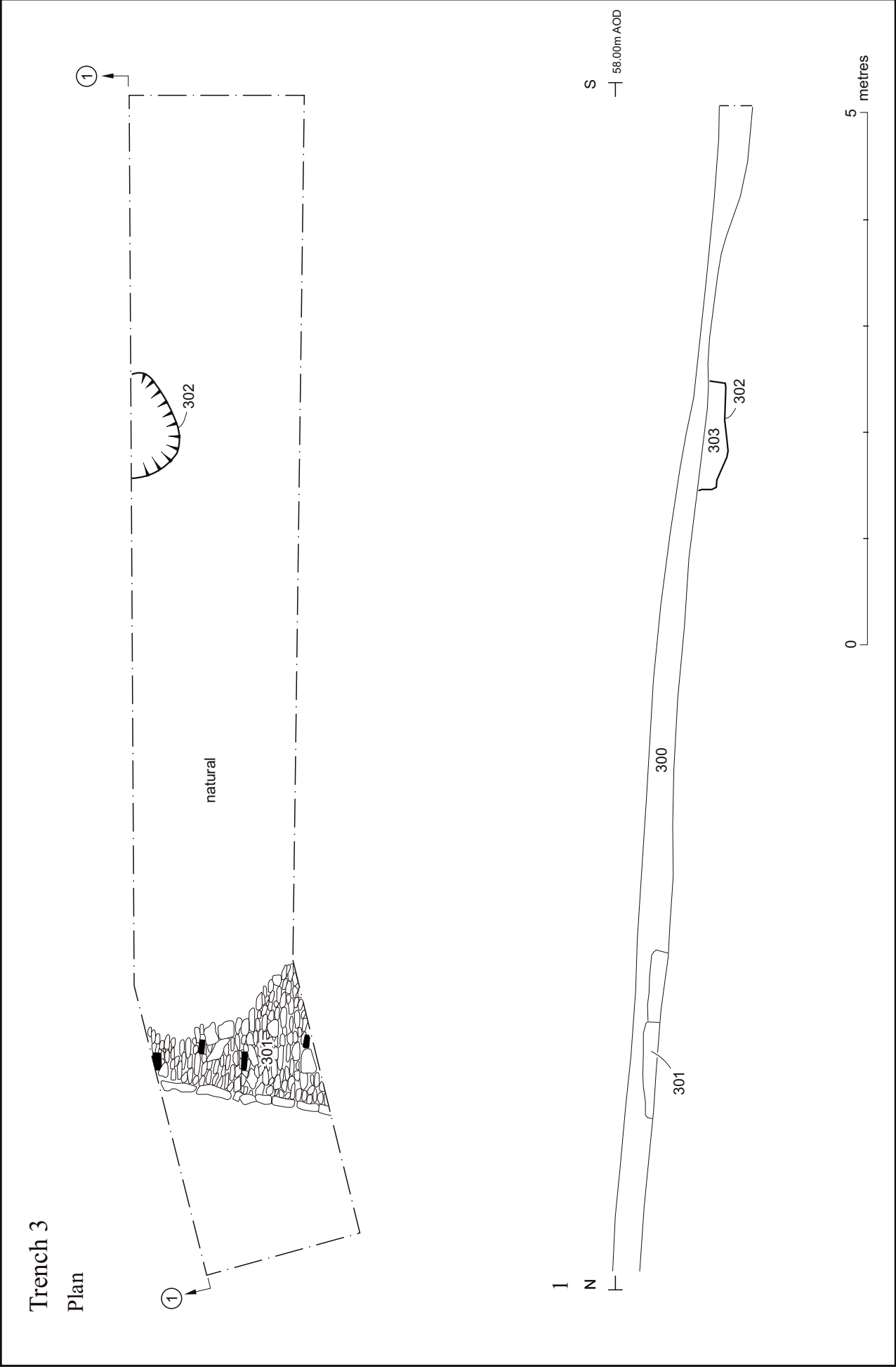


Fig. 5 Trench 3, plan and section. Scale 1:50 @ A4.



Plate 1 General site view, looking south-east



Plate 2 View of trench 3, looking south