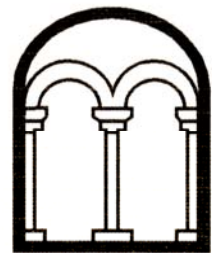


**LAND TO THE REAR OF RAMSMEAD
CHURCH END
BIDDENHAM
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH
EVALUATION**

Albion
archaeology



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EVALUATION**

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Contents

Preface	3
Version History	3
Structure of the Report	3
Key Terms	3
Non-Technical Summary	4
1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Planning Background	5
1.2 Site Location	5
1.3 Archaeological Background	5
1.4 Project Objectives	6
2. METHODOLOGY	7
3. RESULTS	8
3.1 Overburden and Undisturbed Geological Deposits	8
3.2 Late Saxon / Saxo-Norman Features	8
3.3 Undated Features	8
4. SUMMARY	9
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY	10
6. APPENDIX	11
6.1 Context Summary	11

List of Figures

Figure 1: Site location plan

Figure 2: All features

The figures are bound at the back of the report.



Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

Fieldwork for this project was undertaken by Marcin Koziminski (Archaeological Supervisor) and Slavomir Utrata (Assistant Archaeological Supervisor). This report has been prepared by David Ingham (Project Officer) and Slavomir Utrata, with contributions from Joan Lighting (CAD Technician) and Jackie Wells (Finds Officer). It was edited by Mike Luke (Project Manager). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

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Version History

Version	Issue date	Reason for re-issue
1.0	16/09/11	n/a
1.1	12/10/11	Results section amended for clarification following comments from HET

Structure of the Report

Section 1 is an introduction to the project, the methodology for which is presented in Section 2. The results are described in Section 3, and summarised in Section 4. Section 5 is a bibliography. Section 6 is an Appendix, which contains detailed descriptions of the archaeological deposits recorded on the site.

Key Terms

The following abbreviations are used throughout this report:

HER	Bedford Borough Council Historic Environment Record
HET	Historic Environment Team of Bedford Borough Council
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



Non-Technical Summary

Bedford Borough Council has granted planning permission (10/01520/FUL) for Mr B Henry to construct a detached house and garage on land to the rear of Ramsmead, Church End, Biddenham. Acting on advice received from the Council's Historic Environment Team (HET), a condition was attached to planning consent requiring a programme of archaeological work to be carried out at the site, due to its location within an area of archaeological sensitivity.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mr Henry to carry out this programme of archaeological work, in line with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Albion Archaeology 2011) approved by the HET. This document presents the results of a trial-trench evaluation undertaken within the development area, the results of which will be used to assess the archaeological potential of the site and determine the need for further works.

Biddenham lies adjacent to the north-western suburbs of Bedford, with the development site itself centred on grid reference TL 01817 49864 at approximately 34m OD. The site comprises a portion of the garden of Ramsmead measuring c. 0.12ha, located to the west of the existing property (Fig. 1). The geology of the area comprises river terrace sands and gravels of the Ouse Valley Formation, with underlying Oxford Clay.

The development site lies within the historic core of Biddenham, in an area of high archaeological potential. Extensive archaeological work within the Biddenham Loop has demonstrated that the area to the south has been occupied since early prehistory, with widespread settlement from the middle Iron Age to the Roman period. Mention of Biddenham in the Domesday Survey shows that the village itself predates the Norman Conquest. Roman, Saxo-Norman and Medieval settlement remains were identified during evaluation works in St James' churchyard (Albion Archaeology 2005), c. 400m to the north-west.

The development site lies in the north-west corner of a large oval enclosure (HER15271); similar enclosures in the region are thought to date to the Saxon period, and previous archaeological work within the enclosure at Biddenham has revealed remains dating from the Saxo-Norman period onwards (HER17732).

Trial-trench evaluation of the development area has demonstrated that it contains the remains of late Saxon / Saxo-Norman activity, as well as features that cannot currently be dated. These remains are of local significance, and do not warrant preservation in situ. With the agreement of the HET, the negative impact of the proposed development can be mitigated by a programme of archaeological works undertaken prior to or during the associated groundworks.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

Bedford Borough Council has granted planning permission (10/01520/FUL) for Mr B Henry to construct a detached house and garage on land to the rear of Ramsmead, Church End, Biddenham. The Council placed a condition on this requiring a programme of archaeological work to be carried out at the site, due to its location within an area of archaeological sensitivity. This was in accordance with advice received from the Borough Council's Historic Environment Team (HET) and *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment*.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mr Henry to carry out this programme of archaeological work, initially by preparing a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Albion Archaeology 2011) in response to a brief issued by the HET (2011) detailing the requirements for these works.

This document presents the results of a trial-trench evaluation undertaken within the development area, the results of which will be used to assess the archaeological potential of the site and determine the need for a programme of mitigation.

1.2 *Site Location*

Biddenham lies adjacent to the north-western suburbs of Bedford, with the development site itself centred on grid reference TL 01817 49864. The site comprises a portion of the garden of Ramsmead measuring *c.* 0.12ha, located to the west of the existing property (Fig. 1).

The ground is generally level at approximately 34m OD. The geology of the area comprises river terrace sands and gravels of the Ouse Valley Formation, with underlying Oxford Clay.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

The development site is located within the historic core of Biddenham, in an area of high archaeological potential. Major archaeological investigations undertaken within the Biddenham Loop have demonstrated that the area to the south contains significant sub-surface archaeological remains from the early Neolithic through to the medieval period.

Field-walking within the Biddenham Loop has located a large number of flint concentrations suggestive of occupation sites, and the Loop is known to contain a Neolithic and early Bronze Age monument complex. The landscape changed in the middle Bronze Age to comprise an extensive system of fields, concentrated to the south and east of the Loop, while eight middle Iron Age farmsteads were identified during archaeological fieldwork (Albion Archaeology 2008; Luke 2008). Their spacing at intervals of 250–650m raises the possibility that similar remains may be present within the vicinity of the current development.

The Ouse Valley appears to have been densely settled in the late Iron Age/Romano-British period, with four Romano-British farmsteads known within the Biddenham Loop. A fifth has been proposed north of St James' Church (Luke 2008, 267–8), *c.*



400m to the north-west, which was identified when a branch of the Southern Orbital Sewer was constructed to Biddenham village. Its extent is uncertain, but Roman pottery, coins and other metalwork have been found to the north of the church (HER 323). Roman, Saxo-Norman and Medieval remains were also identified during evaluation works in St James' churchyard (Albion Archaeology 2005), comprising intercutting pits, ditches, a trackway, a pair of post-built fence lines, and the possible remains of the former churchyard wall. Eighteen coins were also found *c.* 500m west of the development site (HER 15155), although the HER notes that the exact location is not reliably known.

The first mention of Biddenham itself comes in the Domesday Survey, indicating its existence prior to the Norman Conquest. The development site is located near the centre of the village (HER17017), *c.* 400m south-east of the 12th–16th-century church of St James (HER1021). Biddenham is recorded as having two mills at Domesday and it has been proposed that one of these was at Church End (CPM 1991, 37).

The development site lies in the north-west corner of a large oval enclosure (HER15271) formed in places by an extant ditch and bank. Similar enclosures in the region are thought to date to the Saxon period, and previous archaeological work within the enclosure at Biddenham has revealed remains dating from the Saxo-Norman period onwards (HER17732).

Rectilinear earthworks were once visible to the west of Biddenham (HER 1770), which are thought to represent the ends of closes running west from Church End.

1.4 Project Objectives

The principal objective of the trial trenching was to determine whether archaeological remains were present at the site and, if so, to determine their extent, condition, nature and significance. This information will be used in the formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy for the archaeological remains, guided by research strategy documents for the region and county (Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000; Oake *et al.* 2007; Medlycott and Brown 2008).



2. METHODOLOGY

Trial-trenching took place on 9th–12th September 2011. It had been agreed with the HET to open two trenches covering a total area of 48m²; however, ecological constraints on the development site meant that the northern trench had to be moved southwards and shortened slightly, in consultation with the HET. As the two trenches became contiguous, they were recorded as a single trench.

The trenches were opened by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, operating under close archaeological supervision. Overburden was removed down to the top of the archaeological deposits or undisturbed geological deposits, whichever were encountered first. The spoil heaps were scanned for artefacts.

The bases and sides of all trenches were cleaned by hand. Any potential archaeological features were noted, cleaned, excavated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. Each trench was subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence.

A full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2011).

The project adhered throughout to the standards prescribed in the following documents:

• Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1. Fieldwork</i> (2nd edn, 2001).
• Bedford Borough Council	<i>Preparing Archaeological Archives for Deposition in Registered Museums in Bedford</i> (1998)
• EAA	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> (2003)
• English Heritage	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide</i> (2006)
	<i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation</i> (2002/01)
• HET	<i>Brief for a programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation at Ramsmead, Church End, Biddenham, Bedfordshire</i> (June 2011).
• IfA	<i>By-Laws and Code of Conduct</i>
	<i>Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (updated 2008) and finds (updated 2008)</i>

The trench was inspected by Geoff Saunders of the HET prior to its backfilling.



3. RESULTS

All deposits and features of archaeological interest are summarised below, along with a description of the finds recovered from them. The location and extent of these features are shown on Figure 2. Detailed technical information on all archaeological features / deposits can be found in the Appendix.

3.1 *Overburden and Undisturbed Geological Deposits*

The overburden was homogenous in character across the site. The topsoil comprised a 0.22–0.36m thick deposit of garden soil, while the subsoil was *c.* 0.15m thick. Their combined depth ranged from 0.34m at the east end of the trench to 0.52m at the south-west end.

The underlying geological deposits comprised gravelly clay, which was heavily disturbed in places by tree roots.

3.2 *Late Saxon / Saxo-Norman Features*

Two features can confidently be dated to the late Saxon / Saxo-Norman period. The small feature [103] in the corner of the trench (Fig. 2: Section 2) was only partially revealed; it is likely to have been a shallow pit, but may have been the terminus of a ditch.

Ditch [107], measuring 1.95m wide and 0.34m deep (Fig. 2: Section 1), was identified at the south end of the trench on an east–west alignment.

These features produced the only finds recovered from the site, comprising twenty-six sherds of highly fragmentary pottery (average sherd weight 2g). The sherds survive in poor condition, with heavily abraded surfaces and leaching-out of shell inclusions.

Pit [103] contained fourteen sherds (39g), representing six shell-tempered, wheel-thrown vessels in the St Neots-ware tradition (Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series category B01) and its variants (B01A / B01B). St Neots-type ware ranges in date from the mid-9th to 12th centuries, peaking during the 10th–11th centuries. The sherds derive from fine vessels with walls measuring 4–6mm thick. An everted-rim jar with heavily sooted surfaces is the only diagnostic form.

Ditch [107] produced twelve sherds in type B01A, representing three vessels (23g). An everted-rim jar with applied strip decoration was identified.

3.3 *Undated Features*

One pit and one gully were identified which produced no artefactual dating evidence. Both features were small and shallow. Pit [105] was located close to Saxo-Norman ditch [107], and may have been contemporary, whereas gully [110/112] was orientated NE–SW, making its alignment different to that of the Saxo-Norman ditch revealed further to the south.



4. SUMMARY

Trial-trench evaluation of the development area has demonstrated that it contains the remains of late Saxon / Saxo-Norman activity, as well as features that cannot currently be dated (Fig. 2). This is consistent with the site's location within the historic core of Biddenham, a village known to be late Saxo in origin.

The remains identified in the trial trench are of local significance, and do not warrant preservation *in situ*. The intended development will have a negative impact on them, but its sub-surface impact is relatively localised. With the agreement of the HET, this negative impact can be mitigated by a programme of archaeological works undertaken prior to or during the groundworks associated with the development.



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6. APPENDIX

6.1 Context Summary

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable mid brown grey sandy silt, occasional small-medium stones	✓	
101	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown clay silt, moderate small stones	✓	
102	Natural	Firm mid brown orange silty clay, occasional small-large stones		
103	Pit	Oval; NW-SE; sides: concave; base: concave; dimensions: max breadth 0.45m, max depth 0.15m, max length 0.98m	✓	
104	Fill	Firm mid brown grey clay silt, moderate flecks charcoal, moderate small stones, occasional medium stones	✓	✓
105	Pit	Sub-square; sides: irregular; base: flat; dimensions: max breadth 0.88m, max depth 0.07m, max length 0.78m	✓	
106	Fill	Friable mid grey brown clay silt, occasional small stones	✓	
107	Ditch	Linear; ESE-WNW; sides: steep; base: concave; dimensions: max breadth 1.95m, max depth 0.34m, max length 1.6m	✓	
108	Lower fill	Firm mid grey brown clay silt, moderate flecks charcoal, moderate small stones, occasional medium stones	✓	✓
109	Upper fill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt, frequent flecks charcoal, occasional small-medium stones	✓	✓
110	Gulley	Linear, NE-SW; sides: concave; base: concave; dimensions: max depth 0.08m, max width 0.3m	✓	
111	Fill	Firm light grey brown clay silt, occasional small-medium stones	✓	
112	Gulley	Linear; NE-SW; sides: concave; base: concave; dimensions: max width 0.3m		
113	Fill	Firm light grey brown clay silt, occasional small-medium stones		

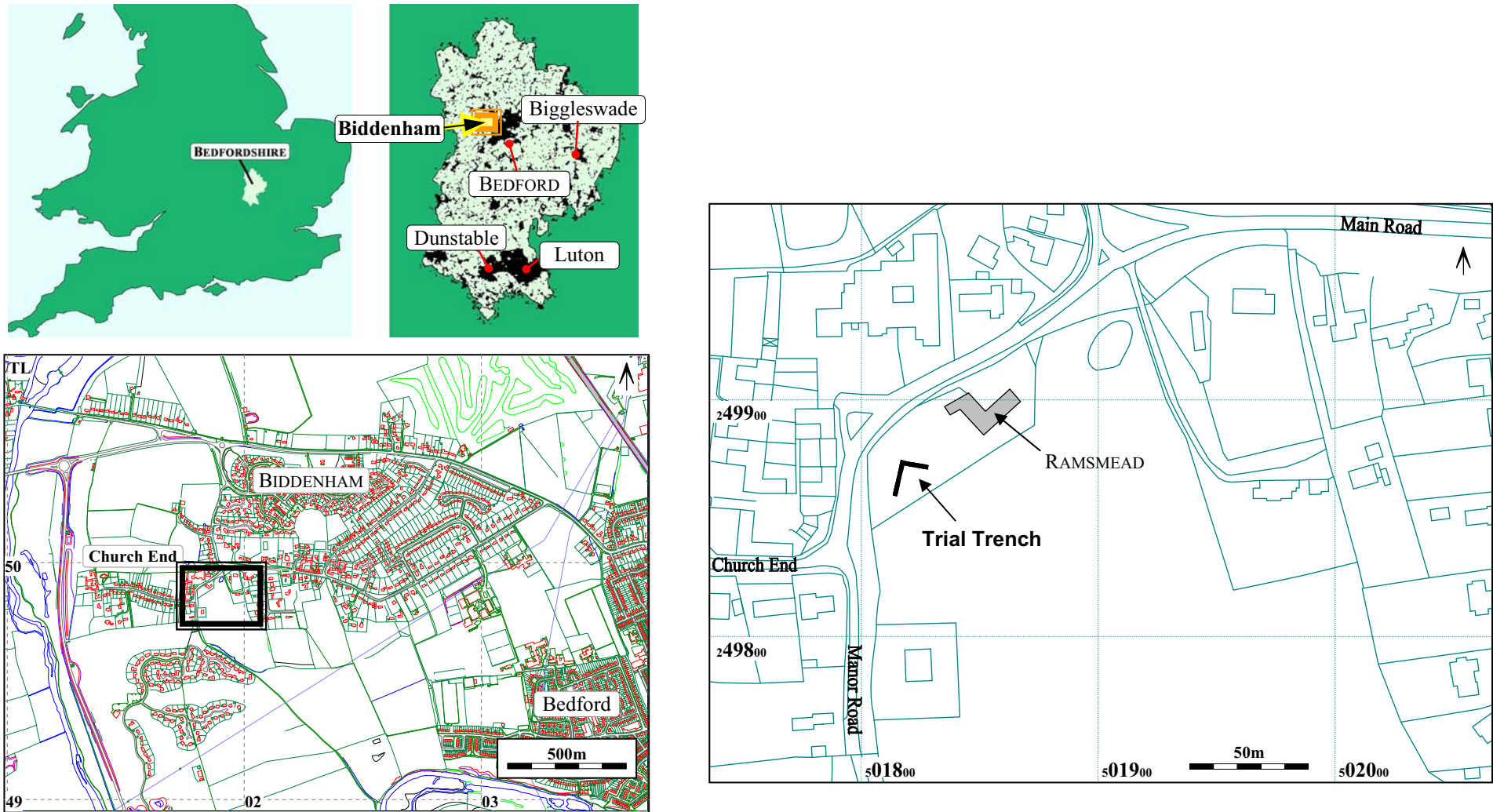
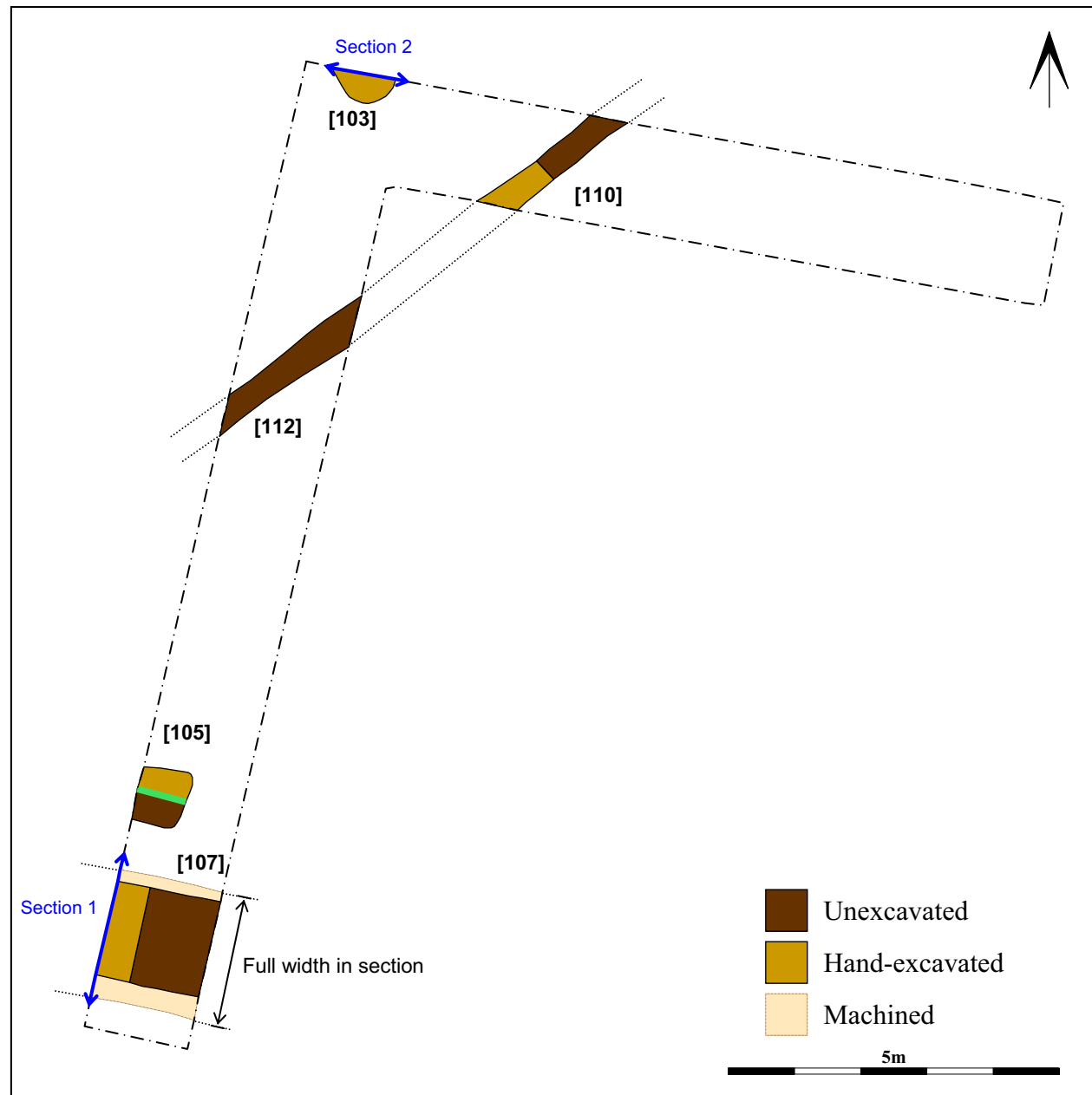


Figure 1: Site location plan

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East-west arm of trial trench, looking east. Scale 1m



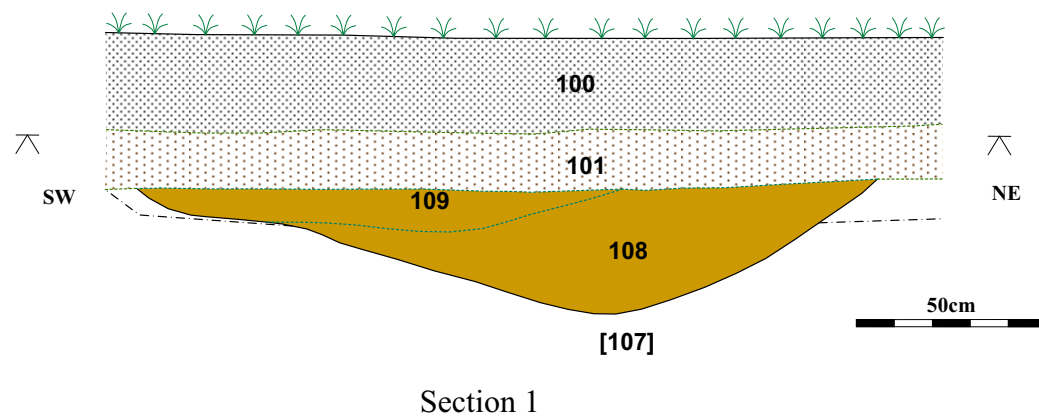
North-south arm of trial trench, looking south. Scale 1m



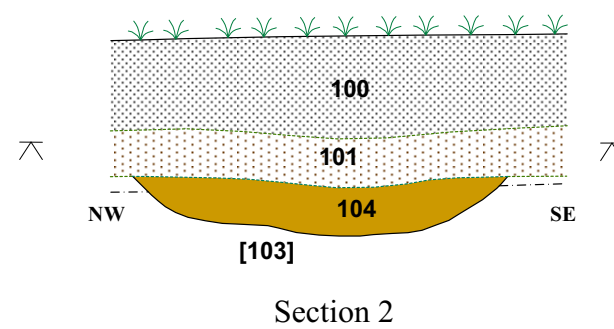
Pit [105], looking south. Scale 40cm



Gully [110], looking north-east. Scale 40cm



Section 1



Section 2

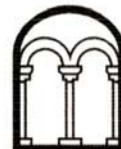


Machining of trench

Figure 2: All features

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