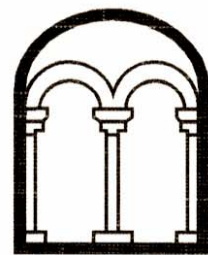


**LAND TO THE REAR OF RAMSMEAD
CHURCH END
BIDDENHAM
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION,
INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND
PUBLICATION**

Albion
archaeology



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Contents

Preface	3
Version History	3
Key Terms	3
1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Site Location and Description	5
1.3 Archaeological and Historical 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 this document.



Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation and submission of this document and all statements 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.

This document has been prepared by Anna Rebisz-Niziolek (Assistant Archaeological Supervisor), edited by David Ingham (Project Officer) and checked by Mike Luke (Project Manager). Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager) is responsible for the overall management of all Albion projects.

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Version History

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Key Terms

The following terms or abbreviations are used throughout this document:

BBC	Bedford Borough Council
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. As the development lies within an area of significant archaeological sensitivity, the Council's Historic Environment Team (HET) recommended that a condition should be attached to planning consent requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out a trial-trench evaluation as the first stage of this programme, the results of which led the HET to recommend an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the development. This report presents the final results of both phases of work.

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.

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 identified the remains of late Saxon / Saxo-Norman activity, as well as features that could not be dated. These remains were of local significance, and did not warrant preservation in situ. Only one more feature was identified during the watching brief; it is also likely to be late Saxon / Saxo-Norman in date.

The archive generated by these works can be found at Bedford Museum under Accession Number BEDFM: 2011.52.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 **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), in line with policies contained in the Bedford Borough Local Plan (2002) and the Bedford Borough Core Strategy and Rural issues Plan (2008).

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mr Henry to carry out this programme of archaeological work, which began with a trial-trench evaluation of the development area (Albion Archaeology 2011b). The results of this evaluation were reviewed by the HET, who recommended that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out on groundworks associated with the development. This report covers both stages of work, which were carried out in line with Written Schemes of Investigation (WSI) that were approved in advance by the HET (Albion Archaeology 2011a; Albion Archaeology 2012).

1.2 **Site Location and Description**

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 and Historical 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 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. The results of the evaluation would then be reviewed in order to determine whether additional works were required. This review led to an archaeological watching brief, the primary aim of which was to investigate, characterise and record any archaeological deposits encountered within any sub-surface groundworks associated with the development.



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 trench was 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 base and sides of the trench 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 (100–199). A full methodology for the evaluation is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2011a).

Monitoring of the subsequent groundworks took place on 16th–17th July 2012. Archaeological observation was carried out on the mechanical excavation of footing trenches for the new house and garage, which were *c.* 2.6m deep and 0.6–1.8m wide. Due to the depth of the trenches, no cleaning of the sides or base was possible, and all recording was undertaken from ground level. Visibility was further hampered by wet ground conditions, which also led in places to deep rutting.

Any potential archaeological features were recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. They were subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence, commencing at 200. A full methodology for the watching brief is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2012).

The project adhered throughout to the standards set out 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)
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>

All archaeological fieldwork was monitored by Geoff Saunders of the HET.



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 in the east of the area to 0.52m in the west.

The uppermost geological deposits comprised gravelly clay, which was heavily disturbed in places by tree roots. Excavation of the footings revealed further layers of boulder clay (202)/(204) beneath this, in turn overlying solid limestone bedrock.

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 trial trench (Fig. 2: Section 1) 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 2), 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 aligned NE–SW, making its alignment different to that of the Saxo-Norman ditch revealed further to the south.

Ditch [206] was revealed during the watching brief, aligned north–south and measuring *c.* 1m wide and *c.* 0.4m deep (Fig. 2). No finds were recovered from it, but the similarity of its fill and profile to those of [107] suggests it may represent the return of that Saxo-Norman ditch.



4. SUMMARY

Trial-trench evaluation of the land to the rear of Ramsmead demonstrated that it contained the remains of late Saxon / Saxo-Norman activity, as well as features that could not be dated (Fig. 2). This is consistent with the site's location within the historic core of Biddenham, a village known to be late Saxon in origin. The remains are of local significance, and did not warrant preservation *in situ*.

A subsequent watching brief on the excavation of footing trenches for a new house and garage revealed only one additional feature, which is likely also to be late Saxon / Saxo-Norman in date. The overall results of this programme of archaeological work do not merit further analysis or publication.

The archive generated by these works can be found at Bedford Museum under Accession Number BEDFM: 2011.52.



5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Albion Archaeology 2011a: *Land to the Rear of Ramsmead, Church End, Biddenham, Bedfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation* (Report 11/69)
- Albion Archaeology 2011b: *Land to the Rear of Ramsmead, Church End, Biddenham, Bedfordshire: Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation* (Report 11/116)
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- CPM 1991: *Biddenham Loop, Bedfordshire: Archaeological Assessment* (unpublished Countryside Planning Management report)
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- Luke, M. 2008: *Life in the Loop: Investigation of a Prehistoric and Romano-British Landscape at Biddenham Loop, Bedfordshire*, EAA Monograph 125



6. APPENDIX

6.1 Context Summary

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100/200	Topsoil	Friable mid brown grey sandy silt, occasional small-medium stones	✓	
101/201	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown clay silt, moderate small stones	✓	
102/203	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		
202	Natural	Plastic mid grey orange silty clay		
204	Natural	Hard dark blue clay		
205	Natural	Hard light grey limestone		
206	Ditch	Linear; N-S; sides: concave; base: concave; dimensions: max width 1m, max depth 0.4m		
207	Fill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt, occasional small-medium stones		

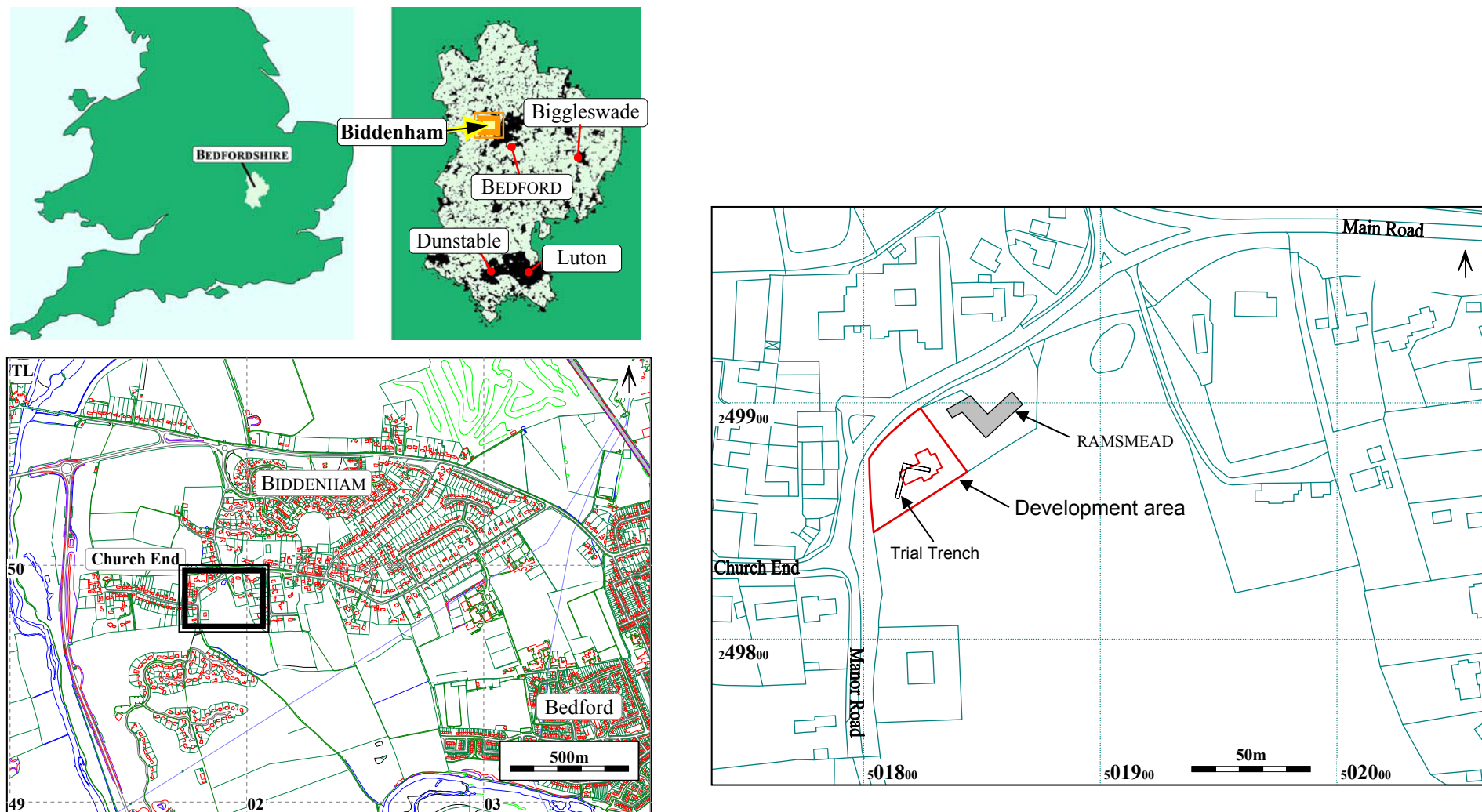
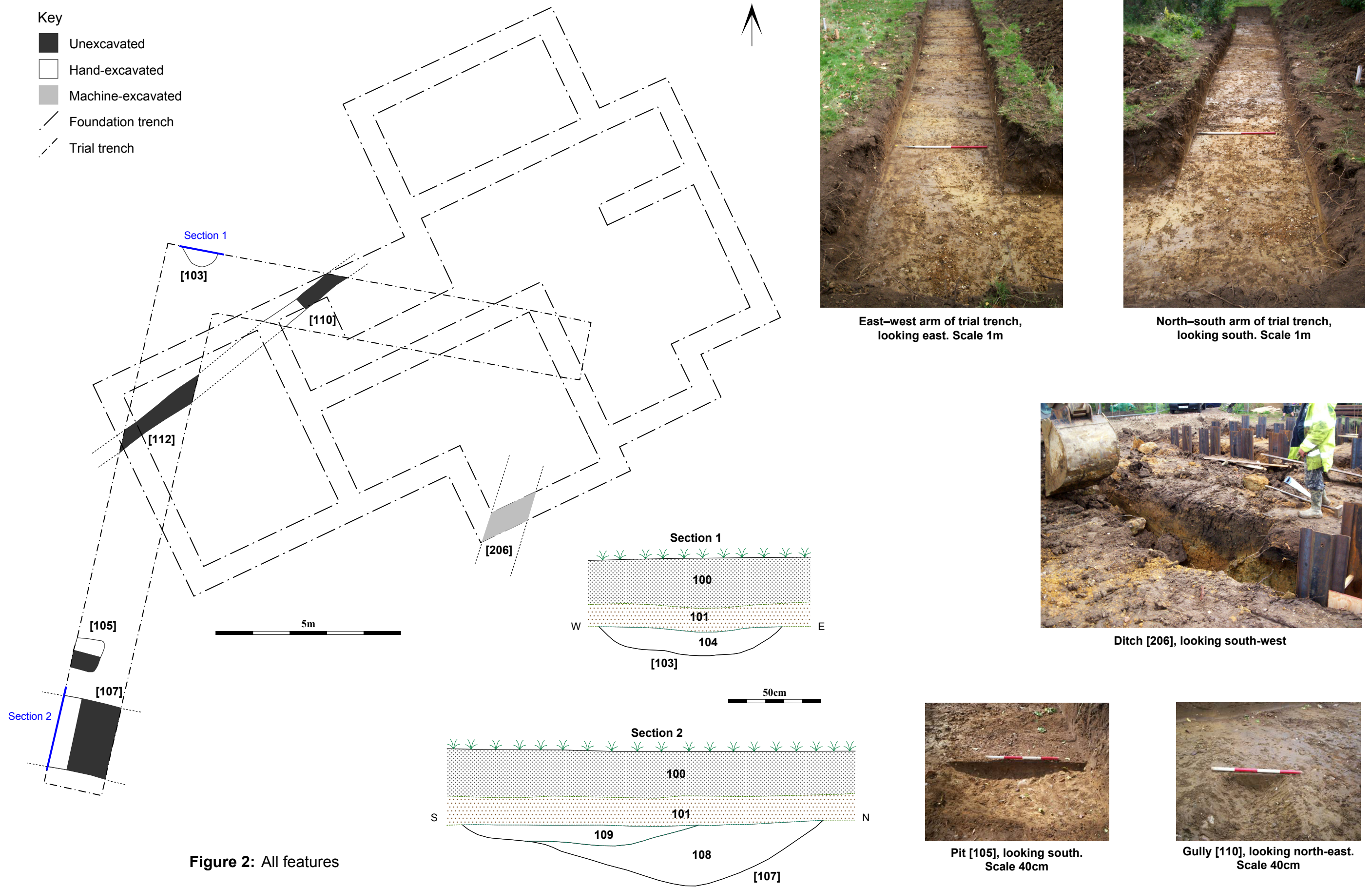


Figure 1: Site location plan

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