LAND OFF ALBANY ROAD, BEDFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the specification. 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.

This report has been prepared by Joanne Archer BSc, (Project Supervisor). The evaluation was carried out by Wesley Keir (Project Officer) and Joanne Archer (Archaeological Supervisor). Jackie Wells (Finds Officer) commented on the finds assemblage. Joan Lightning (CAD Operative) digitised the plans and produced the figures. All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

Albion Archaeology would like to acknowledge the assistance of the client, The Thomas Christie Trustees and Margaret Blake, the Warden of the Thomas Christie Almshouses. Plant was supplied by John Lydon Ltd.

References to cartographic sources are used in this report with the permission of Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service.

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Structure of this report

After the introductory Section 1, this report presents the results of the archaeological evaluation. The results of the trial excavation are presented in Section 2 together with a discussion on the artefact assemblage. A synthesis of the results and their significance is presented in Section 3. Section 4 is a bibliography. A summary of the evidence recovered in each trench is included in the Appendix (Section 5).

Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
BCC CAO	Bedfordshire County Council County Archaeological Officer
Client	The Thomas Christie Trustees
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
Procedures Manual	*Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork, 2nd Edition 2001*. Bedfordshire County Council

Non-Technical Summary

In February 2006 Albion Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation, in advance of planning application, on land to the west of Albany Road, Bedford. The work was carried out on behalf The Thomas Christie Trustees. The Site comprises an area of c.0.1 hectares of land centred on NGR TL 0538 4969. At the time of the fieldwork the Site consisted of an enclosed area of grass and small patches of scrub.

The Site is located outside the main historic core of Bedford, although it is only c. 60m east of Bedford Castle Mound. Newnham Road, to the west of the Site, is thought to mark the eastern extent of the historic town from Saxon times until the early 19th century. To the south lies the River Great Ouse.

Four trial trenches were evenly distributed across the Site. These enabled a full assessment of the potential for surviving remains associated with historical Bedford, in particular activities outside the town limits and next to the river frontage.

No remains dating from before the 19th century were found, confirming that the Site lies outside the historic core of the town.

The earliest feature was an east-west ditch, which corresponds with a boundary on the 1884 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. It formed the southern boundary of a square enclosure fronting onto Albany Road.

The ditch was sealed by a thick dump of orange clay and silt, which was recorded in all four trenches and overlay the original land surface. This material is not derived from local sources and is therefore, likely to have been brought in during building activity along Albany Road around 1900. It probably represents an attempt to raise the ground level to prevent flooding of the new houses.

Evidence for modern, small-scale gravel extraction was identified in the form of a possible quarry pit, which was cut through the levelling layer.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

The Thomas Christie Trustees are considering applying for planning permission to develop an area of land off Albany Road, to the east of the Thomas Christie Almshouses on Newnham Road (Figure 1). The County Archaeological Officer of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC CAO) has advised that an archaeological field evaluation would be required before any planning application to develop this site can be determined.

The BCC CAO declined to issue a formal brief for the evaluation, but indicated that the scope and methodology of the investigation would need to be set out in a written Project Design to be submitted an approved in advance of commencement of the fieldwork.

Albion archaeology was therefore commissioned to prepare the Project Design, which has been approved by the BCC CAO, and undertake the required fieldwork.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The Site is located close to the centre of Bedford, north of the River Great Ouse. It comprises an enclosed area bounded by Albany Road to the east and the Thomas Christie Almshouses on Newnham Road to the west. At the time of fieldwork it was open grass and scrub land, with a garage in the south-eastern corner. Accurate cartographic sources show this land has been undeveloped since at least 1807.

The topography of the Site is level, lying approximately 26.50m OD. The underlying geology comprises river gravels.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The history and archaeology of Bedford have been comprehensively summarised in the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS), undertaken for English Heritage and Bedfordshire County Council (Albion Archaeology 2001b). For the land west of Newnham Road, more recent studies have been undertaken for the Castle Mound and Castle Lane Regeneration projects (Albion Archaeology 2002, 2004, and two reports in prep.). A desk-based study of Albany Road and the surrounding area was also carried out and integrated into the Project Design for this evaluation (Albion Archaeology 2006).

The Site is located outside the main historic core of Bedford, *c*. 60m east of Castle Mound (the site of Bedford Castle's motte). Newnham road, *c*.40m to the west of the Site, is thought to mark the eastern extent of the Saxon *burh*, Bedford Castle and the medieval/post-medieval town, respectively. As a result, any archaeological deposits encountered within the Site would be more likely to be associated with extra-urban activity, such as animal husbandry, tanning, etc, rather than settlement.

It is also to be noted that there was a 'satellite' focus of medieval and later settlement around St Cuthbert's Church (*c.* 100m to the north of the Site), while less intensive settlement extended along the riverbank in the post-medieval period. However, cartographic evidence from 1807 onwards shows that the Site remained undeveloped until *c.* 1900, when houses were constructed along Albany Road and Newnham Road. This suggested that there had been relatively little post-medieval ground disturbance and, prior to the evaluation, it was anticipated that any archaeological features within the Site would be relatively well preserved.

2. TRIAL EXCAVATION

2.1 Introduction

The evaluation was carried out in February 2006 in dry and bright conditions. Four trenches, 9m in length and 1.6m wide, were positioned evenly across the Site, avoiding walls, building footings and trees (Figure 2).

The aim of the trial trenching was to assess the potential for surviving remains associated with the historic core of Bedford; in particular activities outside the town limits and close to the river frontage.

Detailed technical information on all deposits and archaeological features discussed below can be found in Appendix 1.

2.2 Method Statement

Throughout the project the standards set in the IFA *Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation* have been adhered to. Also those standards outlined in Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual for Archaeological Fieldwork and the Analysis of Fieldwork Records* (1996), the IFA Code of Conduct and English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991) were adhered to.

The main points with regard to the trial excavation methodology were as follows:

- All machine excavation was supervised by an archaeologist and was undertaken using a mini-digger (a small 360-degree tracked excavator) fitted with a toothless bucket.
- Topsoil and modern overburden was removed by machine down to the top of archaeological deposits, or clean natural deposits, whichever was encountered first.
- The spoil tips and any archaeological features were scanned for artefacts. Artefacts recovered from spoil tips, were assigned to the relevant context number for the trench.
- Recording took place on pro-forma sheets in accordance with Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual*.
- The trenches were inspected by the BCC CAO, prior to being backfilled.

The position of the trenches was discussed and agreed with the BCC CAO in advance of trial trenching. These were then located with tapes and marked on the ground. After the trenches had been excavated they were tied into the national grid using an Electronic Distance Meter (EDM).

Topsoil and overburden were removed mechanically under archaeological supervision. Due to the depth of an extensive layer of late Victorian (i.e. late 19th century) overburden, for health and safety reasons the trenches were stepped at a depth of 1.0m in order to reach the natural strata, which lay at *c.* 1.6m below the ground surface.

The trenches were then cleaned by hand in order to expose any archaeological features and deposits. Subsequently, each trench was planned and photographed. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence commencing at 100 for Trench 1, 200 for Trench 2 etc.

All archaeological and geological deposits and features (known as 'contexts') were assigned an individual number. Numbers in brackets within the text refer to the context number issued to each deposit of feature on site. Within this report context numbers referring to cut features (i.e. pits, ditches etc.) are expressed [***], layers and deposits within cut features are expressed (***).

2.3 Results of the Trial Excavation

2.3.1 General deposit model (Plates 1 and 2)

All four trenches were excavated down to the natural strata, at c. 25.64m OD. These comprised silty sand with frequent stones, which is typically encountered on top of river terrace gravels in the area.

Overlying the natural was a buried soil, comprising layers (102), (202), (203), (302), and (402). This was between 0.34m and 0.55m thick. It contained a large quantity of charcoal and also ceramic building material, clay pipe, pottery and glass, dated to the modern period. The soil was made up of a single horizon, except in Trench 2, where a subsoil (203) was identified (Plate 2).

In each trench the buried soil was sealed by layers of dumped material (described below, Section 2.3.3). The whole site was covered in a modern topsoil layer (100, 200, 300, 400) ranging from 0.30m to 0.63m thick. Large quantities of brick, tile and stone rubble, were found in the topsoil around Trenches 1, 2 and 4, suggesting it was a recently disturbed deposit.

2.3.2 Boundary ditch

In Trench 3 an east-west boundary ditch [306] was visible at a depth of 1.00m below ground level. It was cut through the buried topsoil (302) and sealed by levelling layer (301) (Figure 2, Plate 3). The ditch fill consisted of material similar to layer (301), suggesting it was backfilled in the late Victorian period, when layer (301) was levelled across the site (see below). (307) contained a small brick fragment. One side of the ditch had been damaged by a later pit [304] (see below) but extensive root disturbance on the other side suggests it had supported a hedgerow. The ditch corresponds with a boundary running on a similar alignment that is marked on the 1884 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (Figure 3).

2.3.3 Site-wide levelling layer

Layers of clay and silt (101, 201, 301, 401) were encountered across the area at a depth of between 26.35m and 26.71m OD. These are interpreted as deliberate dumping probably to raise the level of the land. The dumped material was relatively modern. It contained fragments of brick and tile and overlay the late Victorian buried soil (see above, Section 2.3.1). This evidence suggests that this layer corresponds with late Victorian development along Albany Road and Newnham Road and it is thought that the material was

imported onto the site to raise the ground level in an attempt to prevent flooding.

2.3.4 Quarry pit (Figure 2)

A pit [304] was recorded in Trench 3, cutting Victorian levelling layer (301). It was 1.30m deep, but the full extents are unknown. One sherd of 20th century decorated china was also retrieved from the fill. The pit's irregular shape and depth suggest it was a quarry pit for the extraction of gravel.

2.3.5 Modern pit (Figure 2)

The south-eastern end of the Trench 1 revealed a shallow pit [104], 0.55m deep (Figure 2). It contained a large deposit of brick, tile and stone rubble and was therefore likely to have been a pit for the disposal of rubbish. It was cut into late Victorian layer (101) and sealed by the modern topsoil (100). The pit extended beyond the limits of excavation.

3. SYNTHESIS

3.1 Discussion

Trial trenching has demonstrated that the present land-surface was raised as part of a deliberate levelling, probably during the late Victorian development along Albany Road. Thick, clay-rich layers overlying a buried topsoil suggest the land surface was originally *c.* 1.20m lower than at present.

Only three features were identified and these were all post-medieval or modern. No earlier features or deposits were encountered in any of the trenches.

Accurate cartographic evidence, available from 1807 onwards, demonstrates that the area has not been developed since the late post-medieval period. This means that any archaeological evidence for earlier settlement within the Site is likely to have been relatively well preserved. Despite this, the trial trenching did not encounter any features dating from before the 19th century and no artefacts of earlier periods were recovered from the later deposits. However, the limitation of trial trenching is that its purpose is only to examine a sample of the deposits, and there is a slight possibility that one or two small isolated features survive in the areas not tested by the trenches.

3.1.1 Post-Medieval

The only indication of past land use was recorded in Trench 3, where an east-west aligned boundary ditch was recorded. Figure 3 illustrates that this ditch formed part of the southern boundary of a square enclosure seen on the 1884 1st Edition Ordnance Survey. The map depicts the enclosed area as open ground, noticeably free of trees. It is possible that it functioned as a field or animal paddock.

A Victorian levelling layer was recorded in all four trenches. This material was not derived from the natural geology observed in the trenches and must therefore have been imported onto the site. It is also unlikely to have been material deposited during flooding, as it was different in character from alluvial deposits encountered elsewhere on the River Great Ouse in the Bedford area. The most likely explanation is that it was dumped deliberately during building activity along Albany Road sometime around the year 1900 to raise the ground level to prevent flooding of the newly developed area. Further investigation on the Site is unlikely to provide any more information about the nature of this dumping, but future investigations along Albany Road and Newnham Road may help to identify its extent.

3.2 Summary of Significance

The results of the trial trenching tend to confirm that the Site lies outside the historic core of Bedford and that significant Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval settlement did not extend to the east of Bedford Castle (i.e. beyond the line of Newnham Road. It is therefore very unlikely that the Site has any potential to contribute to national or regional archaeological research objectives.

It has also confirmed that no major ground disturbance has occurred in this area; so had any archaeological deposits and features been encountered they should have been well preserved.

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IFA 1999a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct.*

5. APPENDICES

5.1 Trench Summary

Trench: 1
Max Dimensions: Length: 9.20 m. Width: 2.70 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 1.48 m. Max: 1.6 m.
OS Co-ordinates: Ref. 1: TL0537949711 Ref. 2: TL0538449704
Reason: To test for buried deposits in the north-eastern quarter of the site

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black sandy silt frequent large ceramic building material Topsoil laid down recently, probably since the late victorian period. 0.63m thick.	☑	☑
101	Dump material	Firm mid yellow brown silty clay occasional small ceramic building material Layer of clay brought onto the site and then levelled across the areato raise the gorund level. 0.63m deep, 0.55m thick	☑	☐
102	Buried topsoil	Friable mid grey brown sandy silt frequent medium stones Buried topsoil. 1.18m deep, 0.37m thick.	☑	☐
103	Natural	Loose mid orange brown silty sand frequent medium stones, frequent small stones Natural. 1.55m deep.	☐	☐
104	Pit	Sub-circular profile: concave base: concave dimensions: min length 3.2m, min breadth 2.7m, min depth 0.55m Cut of rubbish pit, backfilled with victorian brick and tile rubble. Cuts clay layer (101).	☑	☐
105	Fill	Friable dark grey black sandy silt frequent large ceramic building material, occasional flecks charcoal Deliberate backfill of modern rubble. 0.55m thick	☑	☐

Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: 8.50 m. Width: 1.90 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 1.5 m. Max: 1.67 m.

OS Co-ordinates: Ref. 1: TL0537849706 Ref. 2: TL0537249698

Reason: To test for buried deposits in the north-western quarter of the site

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black sandy silt frequent large ceramic building material Post-med topsoil. Same as 100, 300 and 400. 0.56m thick.	☑	☐
201	Dump material	Firm mid yellow brown silty clay occasional medium ceramic building material Dump of clay material, levelled across site at a later date. Same as 101, 301 and 401. 0.56m deep, 0.50m thick.	☑	☑
202	Buried topsoil	Friable mid grey brown sandy silt frequent medium stones Buried topsoil. Same as 102, 302 and 402. 1.06m deep, 0.34m thick.	☑	☐
203	Subsoil	Loose mid orange brown silty sand frequent medium stones Buried subsoil. 1.40m deep, 0.32m thick.	☑	☐
204	Natural	Loose mid grey brown silty sand frequent medium stones natural 1.72m deep.	☐	☐

Trench: 3
Max Dimensions: Length: 7.20 m. Width: 1.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 1.6 m. Max: 1.6 m.
OS Co-ordinates: Ref. 1: TL0537849690 Ref. 2: TL0538649685
Reason: To test for buried deposits in the south-eastern quarter of the site

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
300	Topsoil	Friable dark brown grey sandy loam topsoil laid down recently. 0.30m thick.	☑	☐
301	Dump material	Friable mid orange brown clay silt Deliberate dump of material that has been levelled across the site. 0.30m deep, 0.76m thick.	☑	☐
302	Buried topsoil	Loose mid grey brown sandy silt frequent flecks charcoal, frequent medium stones buried topsoil underlying dump material 301. Containing painted china, brick and tile fragments. 1.06m deep, 0.40m thick.	☑	☑
303	Natural	Loose dark orange brown silty sand frequent medium stones Natural. 1.46m deep.	☐	☐
304	Quarry	Sub-circular profile: concave base: concave dimensions: min length 3.5m, min breadth 1.6m, min depth 1.3m Possible quarry pit for gravel extraction. Later than layer 301. This cut may therefore be late victorian in date.	☑	☐
305	Quarry	Friable dark grey black sandy silt frequent small stones Deliberate backfill consisting of topsoil mixed with layer 301. Containing painted china and brick fragments. 1.30m thick.	☑	☑
306	Ditch	Linear NNE-SSW profile: irregular base: uneven dimensions: min length 2.15m, max breadth 0.5m, max depth 0.3m Possible hedge line associated with boundary ditch marked on ordnance survey maps.	☑	☐
307	Ditch	Plastic light yellow brown silty clay occasional small ceramic building material Deliberatley backfilled with a mixed fill containing fragments of brick. 0.30m thick.	☑	☑
308	Dump material	Compact light yellow white silty sand A layer of mortar found in patches underlying layer 301. 0.32m deep, 0.02m thick.	☑	☐

Trench: 4
Max Dimensions: Length: 7.00 m. Width: 1.10 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 1.3 m. Max: 1.5 m.
OS Co-ordinates: Ref. 1: TL0537949683 Ref. 2: TL0537549677
Reason: To test for buried deposits in the south-western quarter of the site

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
400	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black sandy silt frequent small ceramic building material, frequent small stones Topsoil. 0.46m thick.	☑	☐
401	Dump material	Friable mid orange brown clay silt A deliberate dump of material levelled across the site. 0.46m deep, 0.47m thick.	☑	☐
402	Buried topsoil	Friable mid grey brown sandy silt frequent flecks charcoal, frequent medium stones Buried topsoil. 0.93m deep, 0.55m thick.	☑	☐
403	Natural	Loose dark orange brown silty sand frequent medium stones Natural. 1.48m deep.	☐	☐

Figure 1: Site location map

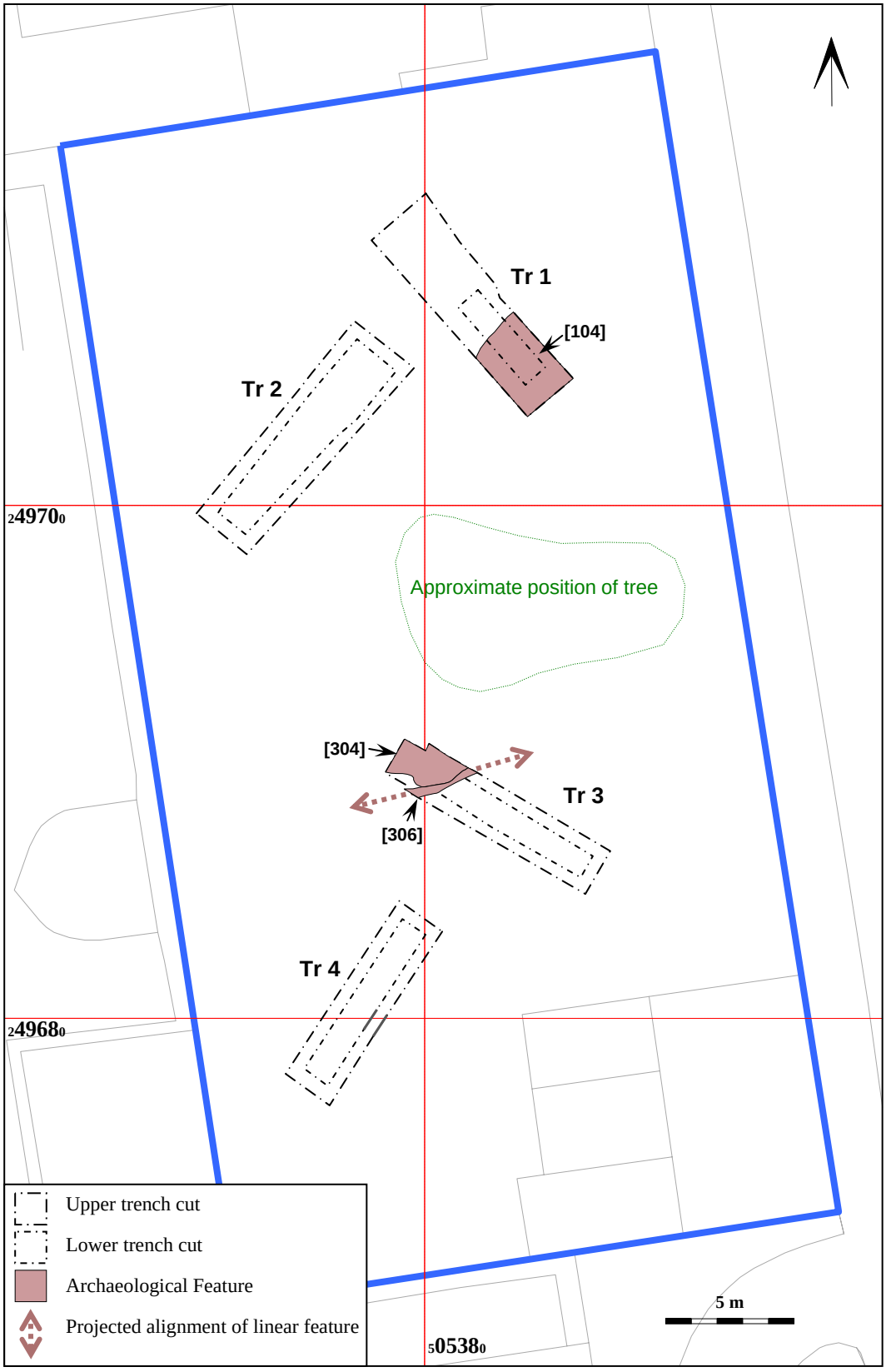

Figure 2: All features plan

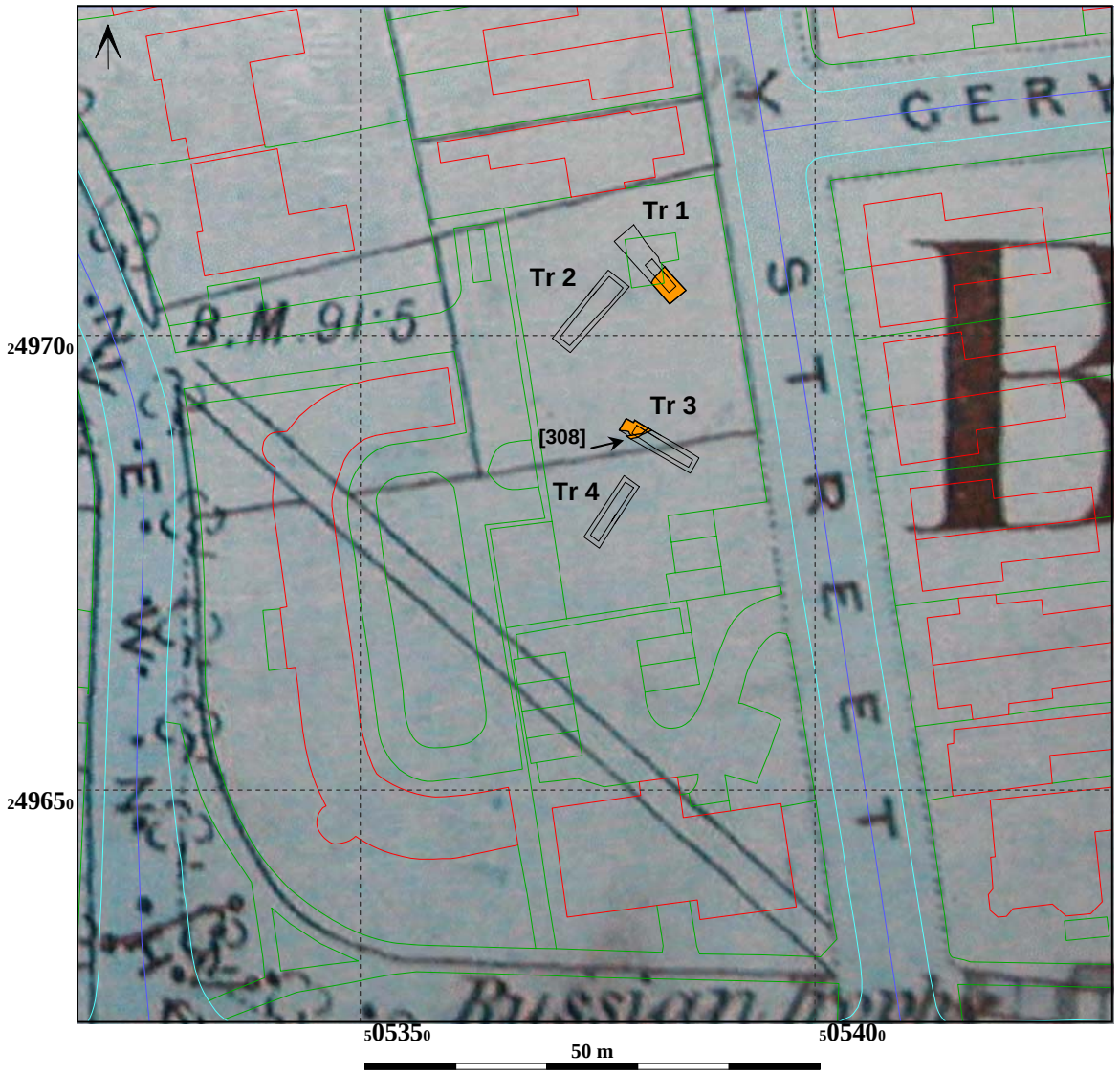

Figure 3: Trenches and modern map overlaid onto 1st Edition OS map 1884

Trench 1, looking SSE

Trench 2, looking SSW

Trench 4, looking SSW

Trench 3, looking SSE

Plate 1: Photographs of the trenches

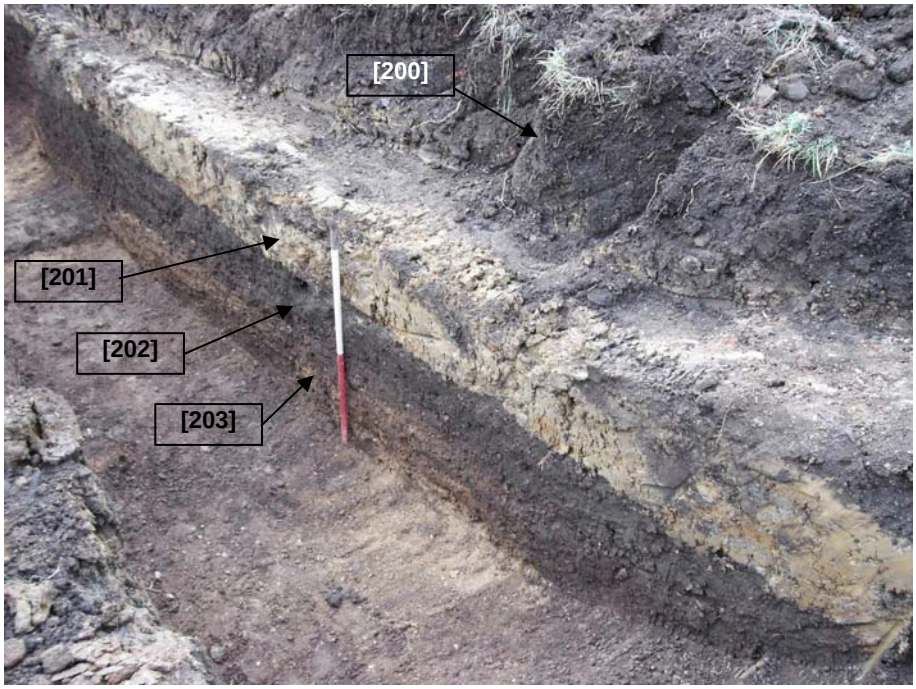

Plate 2: Trench 2, south-facing section showing layers
(scale 1m)

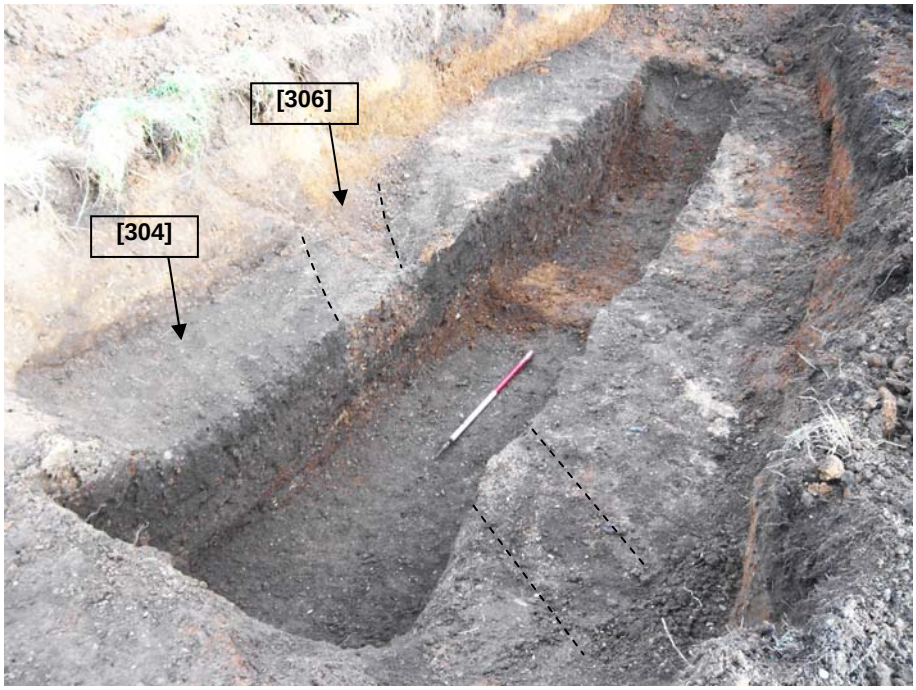

Plate 3: Trench 3, ditch [306] and pit [304]
(scale 1m)