

**THE MOATHOUSE  
SAND LANE  
NORTHILL  
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH  
EVALUATION**

**Albion  
archaeology**



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EVALUATION**

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Produced for  
Mr & Mrs Nizzardi  
The Moathouse  
Sand Lane  
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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 brief. 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.*

## Acknowledgements

*The project was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Nizzardi of The Moathouse, Sand Lane, Northill and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Julian Watters, Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist.*

*The fieldwork was undertaken by Marcin Koziminski (Archaeological Supervisor) and Gary Manning (Assistant Supervisor). The report has been prepared by Marcin Koziminski with contributions from Joan Lightning (CAD Technician) and Jackie Wells (Finds Officer). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).*

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## Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

BLARS	Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service
CBC	Central Bedfordshire Council
CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
CIJfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
HER	Central Bedfordshire and Luton Historic Environment Record
PDA	Proposed development area
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



## Non-Technical Summary

Planning permission (CB/15/01218/FULL) was granted for the erection of a single detached dwelling and a new access drive to connect Sand Lane with the dwelling at The Moathouse, Sand Lane, Northill. A heritage statement was compiled in February 2015 to support the planning application. Due to the archaeological potential of the site a condition (no. 8) was attached to the planning permission requiring a scheme of staged archaeological investigation, which was in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. The stages comprise:

1. Trial trench evaluation.
2. Appraisal of results of the evaluation and their significance in terms of identified research frameworks.
3. If required, the implementation of an agreed programme of archaeological investigation and recording, based on a further brief drawn up by CBCA, or preservation in situ.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the first stage of the investigation. Four trenches measuring 12m long and 2m wide were excavated within the footprint of the proposed building and the access drive.

The evaluation has demonstrated that the proposed development area (PDA) does retain some archaeological potential. Part of a possible sub-oval, post-medieval pond was identified in Trenches 3 and 4 in the northern half of the PDA. It was located immediately to the east of, but separated by a narrow gap from, a medieval fishpond (HER 15371), with which it may have been associated. It provides some insight into the character of the immediate surroundings of the fishpond and limited information about the development of Northill around the edge of the existing settlement in the post-medieval period.

Across the southern part of the PDA a single ditch was identified. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature, but it is interpreted as being of some antiquity as it was sealed by a substantial thickness of overburden. The presence of the ditch indicates former human activity within the PDA. However, the lack of finds suggests this activity was located some distance away from any potential settlement focus.

The revealed archaeological features are of no more than local significance and have limited potential to address regional research priorities relating to the development of medieval settlement.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background

Planning permission (CB/15/01218/FULL) was granted for the erection of a single detached dwelling in the northern part of land at The Moathouse, Sand Lane, Northill. As part of the works a single garage adjacent to The Moathouse was demolished to make way for a new access drive to connect Sand Lane with the new dwelling.

A heritage statement was compiled in February 2015 to support the planning application (GCPP Planning Partnership Ltd 2015). Due to the archaeological potential of the site a condition (no. 8) was attached to the planning permission requiring a scheme of archaeological investigation, using a staged approach of evaluation and, if necessary, mitigation prior to the construction works. This was in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework – Section 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment* (DCLG 2012). The potential stages of work comprise:

1. Trial trench evaluation.
2. Appraisal of the results of the evaluation and their significance in terms of identified research frameworks.
3. If required, the implementation of an agreed programme of archaeological investigation and recording, based on a further brief drawn up by CBCA, or preservation *in situ*.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the first stage of the investigation in accordance with a brief issued by a Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist (CBCA), detailing the requirements of a trial trench evaluation (CBC 2016).

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) (Albion 2016), which was approved by the CBCA prior to the commencement of the works.

### 1.2 Status and Purpose of this Document

This document presents the results of the archaeological trenching works and appraises the significance of archaeological heritage assets found within the PDA in terms of identified research frameworks.

### 1.3 Site Location, Topography and Geology

The village of Northill lies in the eastern part of Bedfordshire, c. 4km south-west of Sandy and 4km north-west of Biggleswade. The River Ivel and A1 Great North Road are situated c. 3km to the east. Northill consists of the parish church, houses and a pub along the main road from Thorncote Green to Ickwell and its junction with the road to Cople.

Sand Lane is a minor road coming off Thorncote Road roughly opposite The Crown public house. The lane is lined with 19th-century houses near the main road and modern dwellings towards the edge of the village. The Moathouse is one of those modern properties. It lies on the northern side of the lane and comprises the dwelling, set back a short distance from the lane, and a large



rear plot including an elongated medieval pond. The front of the plot has neighbouring residential properties while the rear of the plot borders pasture in the north and scrubland in the east.

The site is centred on grid reference TL 1513 4652 and lies on fairly level ground at c. 30m OD. The underlying geology is Stewartby Member and Weymouth member Formation Mudstone with possible superficial gravel deposits (British Geological Survey 2016).

#### **1.4 Archaeological Background**

The following summary is based upon data for a 500m radius around the site obtained from the Central Bedfordshire and Luton Historic Environment Record (enquiry no: 201617/12), the Heritage Statement (GCPP Planning Partnership Ltd 2015) and the CBCA brief (CBC 2016).

Few archaeological heritage assets have yet been found within the village of Northill. However, this is more likely due to a lack of investigation, than a lack of actual remains. A quantity of Roman pottery and animal bone (HER 430) was found near the Home Wood earthworks (HER 429) and five Roman coins were found at Copelands Farm (HER 15993).

Extensive Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement remains were excavated at Broom Quarry c. 3.5km to the south-east of Northill village (HER 9095, Knight and Cooper 2004), indicating that Saxon settlement is in evidence in this part of Bedfordshire.

Northill is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, and its Domesday name, *Nortgive* or *Nortgivale*, suggests that the settlement of Northill has its origins in at least the late Saxon period. The name probably derives from the tribal name Gifle, which was recorded in Tribal Hidage between the 7th and 9th centuries AD. The territory of the Gifle has been identified with the area of Northill, Southill and Old Warden (Wood 1985, 3) and archaeological evidence for settlement of this period has been found in Broom Quarry (see above).

The descent of the early medieval manor of Northill was closely linked with that of the neighbouring manor of Old Warden. Northill manor remained with the immediate Espec family until the late 12th century when it passed to the de Trailly family. The manor was held by the de Traillys until 1401, after which it passed through a succession of owners. It comprised reasonable quantities of arable land, meadow, pasture and woodland (CBC 2016). Northill Manor (HER 14910) is thought to lie close to the parish church. A complex of medieval fishponds and a warren (HER 429, NHLE 1018455), a short distance to the west of Northill village, are thought to have been part of the manorial estate.

The medieval core of the village most likely centres around the parish church of St Mary (HER 2085, NHLE 1221856), which dates from the 14th century and stands at the junction of roads leading to Ickwell in the south, Thorncote Green in the north and Cople in the west.



While the site lies outside the envelope of the medieval village (HER 17121) as drawn by the HER, the fishpond (HER 15371) in the grounds of The Moathouse is also thought to be medieval in date. Other probable medieval fishponds nearby include ‘College ponds’ (HER 15372), situated in woodland 500m to the north-east.

Listed Buildings and non-listed buildings identified as heritage assets mainly lie along the main roads of the village. They date from the 17th–19th centuries and include cottages, farmhouses, a school, public house and a dovecote. A Grade II listed block of 18th- and 19th-century cottages lies diagonally opposite the site on the southern side of Sand Lane (HER9589, NHLE 1221865). A 17th- and 18th-century thatched farmhouse lies to their rear at 14 & 15 Sand Lane (HER12763, NHLE 1222052).

An archaeological evaluation (EBD1113) at the rear of 33-43 Ickwell Road, the only archaeological investigation within a 500m radius of the site, recorded evidence of brick-making (HER 19794). A large pit or pond feature and the edge of a possible brick clamp kiln were revealed in Trench 3. Brick wasters, pottery sherds, and clay pipe dating to the late 17th/early 18th century were recovered during the course of this investigation.

### **1.5 Project Objectives and Research Aims**

The principal purpose of the archaeological field evaluation was to recover information on the:

- location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that were present within the PDA;
- integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that were present within the PDA.

The evaluation provides the information needed to assess the potential archaeological impact of the proposed development and thus assist in the formulation of any mitigation measures that might be required.

The local research framework for Bedfordshire states that recent work at Marston Moretaine and Yielden shows the potential for acquiring information about the origins and development of villages from within or around the edges of existing settlement (Oake 2007, 14). Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement evidence has also been excavated around the edges of villages at Stratton Park, Biggleswade 3.7 miles to the east (Oake 2007, 14) and at Stotfold 7 miles to the south (Albion in prep), confirming that there is potential for settlement remains from the edges of existing villages within Bedfordshire.

The investigations therefore had potential to inform the following research aims (Wade 2000; Oake 2007, 14; Medlycott 2011, 70):

- examination of diversity and distribution of rural Saxon and medieval settlements;
- characterisation of settlement forms to understand how they appear, grow, shift and disappear;



- establish further information on the character of the medieval fishpond and its immediate surroundings.



## 2. RESULTS OF TRIAL TRENCHING

### 2.1 Methodology

A full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion 2016).

The standards and requirements set out in the following documents were adhered to throughout the project:

• Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (2nd edn, 2001).
• Bedford Museum	<i>Procedure for Preparing Archaeological Archives for Deposition with Registered Museums in Bedfordshire. Version 2.8</i> (2010).
• CIIfA	<i>Charter and by-law; Code of conduct</i> (2014) <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation</i> (2014) <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> (2014)
• EAA	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> (2003)
• Historic England (formerly English Heritage)	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment PPN3: Archaeological Excavation</i> (2015) <i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation.</i> 2nd ed. (2011)

Trial trenching took place between 16th and 18th May 2016. Four trenches measuring 12m long and 2m wide were excavated within the footprint of the proposed building and the access drive. The position of the SW end of Trench 3 was shifted northwards by 3m to avoid a garden pergola (Figure 1).

The trenches were opened by a mechanical excavator fitted with a flat-edged bucket, operated by an experienced driver under close archaeological supervision. The machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeological deposits or undisturbed natural subsoil, whichever was encountered first. All hand excavation and recording was carried out by experienced Albion staff. The spoil heaps were also scanned for artefacts.

Any potential archaeological features were investigated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. An archaeological feature in Trench 4 was augered to reveal its full depth as hand excavation had to be halted due to the ingress of groundwater. Each trench was subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence, commencing at 100 for Trench 1, 200 for Trench 2 etc. Context numbers in square brackets refer to the cuts [\*\*\*] and round brackets to fills or layers (\*\*). The trenches were inspected twice by the CBCA prior to their backfilling.



## **2.2 Trial Trenching Results**

Features and deposits revealed are described chronologically below and shown in Figures 2 and 3. Any artefacts recovered from features are referenced in the text.

Detailed contextual information on all deposits and features can be found in the Appendix.

### **2.2.1 Overburden and geological deposits**

Overburden across the PDA was similar and comprised dark grey-black clay silt topsoil underlain by mid grey-brown silty clay subsoil with a combined thickness of 0.5–0.71m, generally increasing towards the south. Additionally, an orange-grey silty clay layer of buried subsoil was identified in Trench 1; it was 0.4–0.5m thick.

The undisturbed geological deposits across the PDA comprised mid orange and grey-orange to orange-brown silty clays with sandy clay revealed in Trench 1. Small amounts of superficial gravel deposits were also encountered.

### **2.2.2 Post-medieval (1500–1750) pond**

Part of a possibly sub-oval feature [403/405] was revealed in Trench 4 (Figure 2, Sections 1 and 2; Figure 3, Images 4 and 5). It was 7.4m wide and appeared to be on a N-S alignment; its full depth of 0.65m was established by augering after hand-excavation ceased at a depth of 0.44m.

The feature was infilled by a homogeneous deposit (404/406) that had formed naturally in waterlogged conditions, suggesting the feature may have been a pond. It produced two abraded brick fragments (368g), one sherd of mortared peg tile (79g) and a flat roof tile fragment (39g). Sheep/goat mandible fragments (40g), an oyster shell (7g) as well as undiagnostic animal long bone and vertebrae fragments (23g) were also collected during excavation.

### **2.2.3 Undated**

An E–W aligned ditch [103] crossed Trench 1 (Figure 2, Section 4; Figure 3, Image 2). It was 1.15m wide by 0.32m deep and had a concave profile that was obscured by heavy rooting activity. Moreover, the western part of the feature was truncated by a modern land drain along the western edge of the trench. The ditch produced no finds; however, it is believed to have originated in antiquity as it was sealed beneath overburden that was up to 1.0m thick.

A possible sub-oval feature [303] was revealed in Trench 3 (Figure 2, Section 3; Figure 3, Images 1 and 3). It was 0.38m deep, at least 5.8m wide and continued beyond the SW end of the trench. Although undated, the remains are thought to form part of the same feature as [403/405] to the north — they were similar in size, profile and alignment and were filled by similarly uniform deposits. The combined length of the postulated feature would be in excess of 13m on a N-S axis.



### 3. CONCLUSIONS

#### 3.1 Summary

Trial trench evaluation has demonstrated that the PDA does retain some archaeological potential. Part of a possibly sub-oval, post-medieval pond was identified in Trenches 3 and 4 in the northern half of the PDA. It was located immediately to the east of, but separated by a narrow gap from, the medieval fishpond (HER 15371).

In the southern part of the PDA a single ditch [103] was identified. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature, but it is interpreted as being of some antiquity as it was sealed by a series of substantial layers of overburden.

No archaeological features were present in Trench 2.

#### 3.2 Significance of the Archaeological Remains

The evaluation showed that archaeological features were sealed by overburden of considerable thickness, particularly in the south of the site.

The possible pond that was identified by the trenching may have been associated with the adjacent fishpond. It provides some insight into the character of the immediate surroundings of the fishpond and limited information about the development of Northill around the edge of the existing settlement in the post-medieval period.

The presence of the undated ditch indicates former human activity. However, the lack of finds suggests this activity was located some distance away from any potential settlement focus.

In summary, the revealed archaeological features are of no more than local significance and have limited potential to address regional research priorities relating to the development of medieval settlement of Northill.



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## 5. APPENDIX: TRENCH SUMMARIES

### Trench: 1

**Max Dimensions:** Length: 12.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.9 m. Max: 1. m.

**Co-ordinates:** OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15148; Northing: 46521)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15150; Northing: 46510)

**Reason:** To assess archaeological potential of site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black clay silt occasional small-medium stones. Occasional CBM fragments (not retained) and moderate amount of roots. Up to 0.3m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown silty clay occasional small-medium stones. Up to 0.25m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Natural	Firm mid orange sandy clay occasional small-medium stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Ditch	Linear E-W sides: U-shaped base: concave dimensions: max breadth 1.15m, max depth 0.32m, min length 2.m Truncated by modern land drain.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Fill	Friable mid brown grey silty clay occasional small-medium stones And moderate rooting activity.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
105	Buried subsoil	Firm mid orange grey silty clay occasional small-medium stones And occasional rooting activity. Up to 0.5m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Trench: 2

**Max Dimensions:** Length: 12.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.63 m. Max: 0.71 m.

**Co-ordinates:** OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15147; Northing: 46543)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15147; Northing: 46531)

**Reason:** To assess archaeological potential of site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black clay silt occasional small-medium stones And moderate rooting activity. Up to 0.32m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
201	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown silty clay occasional small-medium stones And moderate rooting activity. Up to 0.39m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
202	Natural	Firm mid grey orange silty clay occasional small-medium stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Trench: 3**

**Max Dimensions:** Length: 12.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.51 m. Max: 0.57 m.

**Co-ordinates:** OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15140; Northing: 46553)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15151; Northing: 46557)

**Reason:** To assess archaeological potential of site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
300	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black clay silt occasional small-large stones And occasional CBM fragments (not retained) and moderate rooting activity. Up to 0.28m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
301	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown silty clay occasional small-medium stones And moderate rooting activity. Up to 0.29m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
302	Natural	Firm mid orange brown silty clay occasional small-medium stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
303	Pond	Sub-oval N-S sides: concave base: uneven dimensions: min breadth 5.8m, max depth 0.38m, min length 2.m Possibly the same feature as [403/405] to the North.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
304	Fill	Friable mid brown grey silty clay occasional small-medium stones And occasional rooting activity.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Trench: 4**

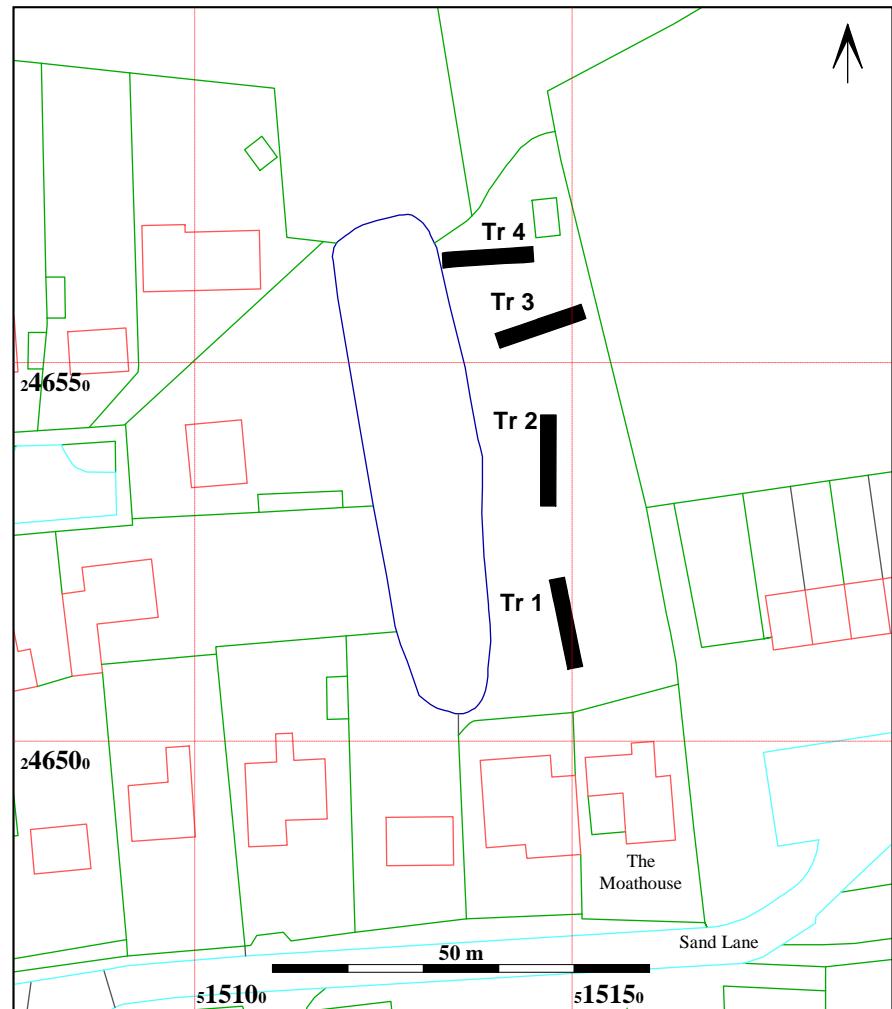
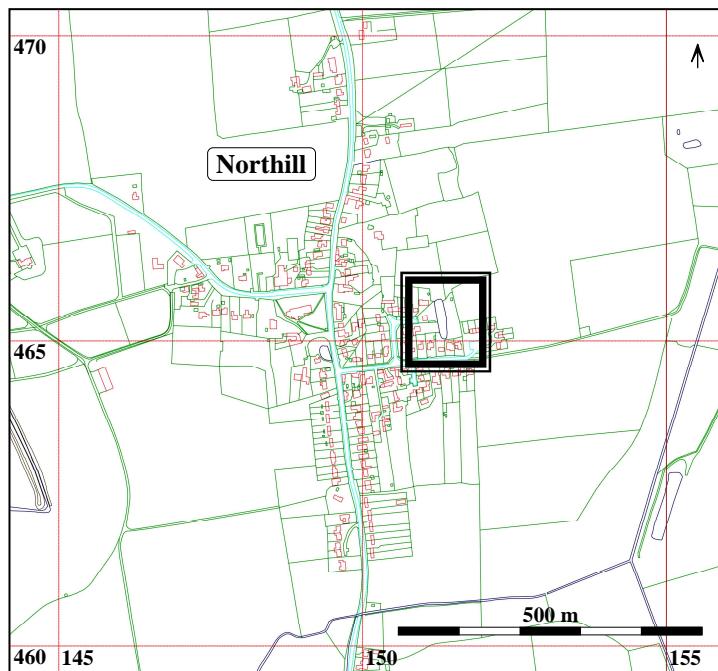
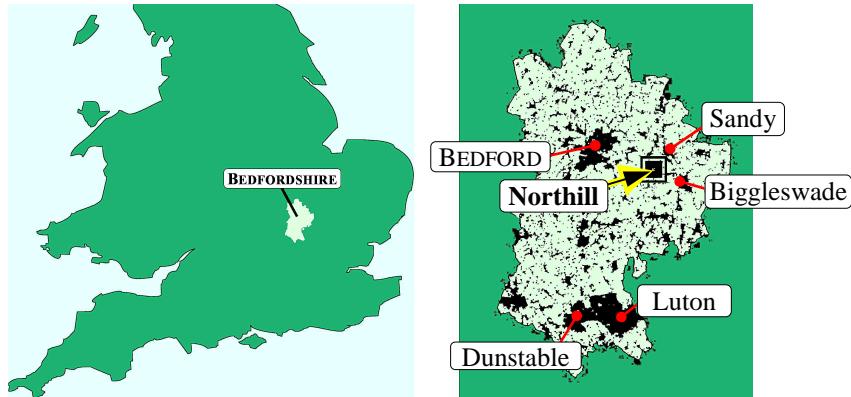
**Max Dimensions:** Length: 12.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.5 m. Max: 0.55 m.

**Co-ordinates:** OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15133; Northing: 46563)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 15145; Northing: 46564)

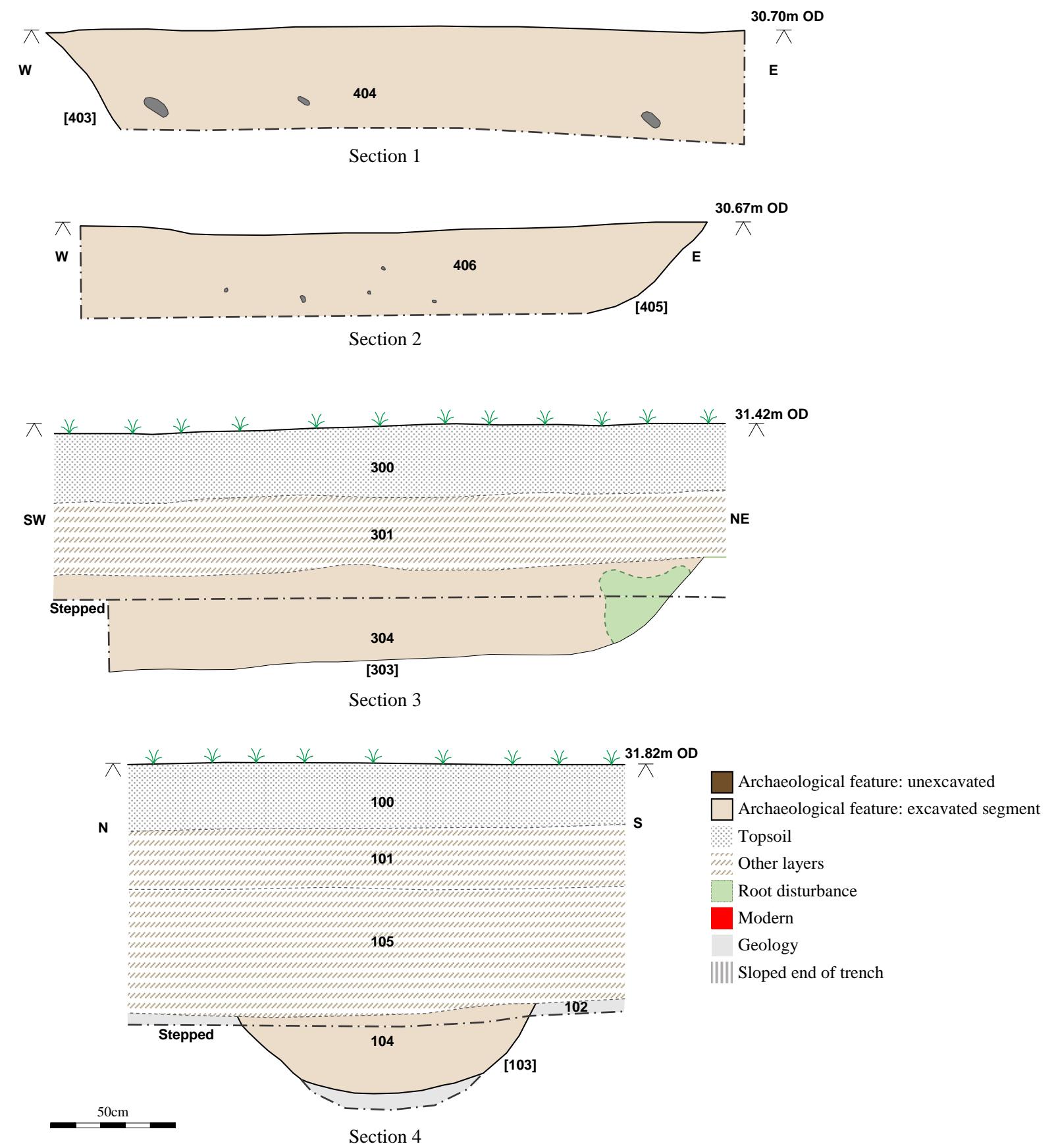
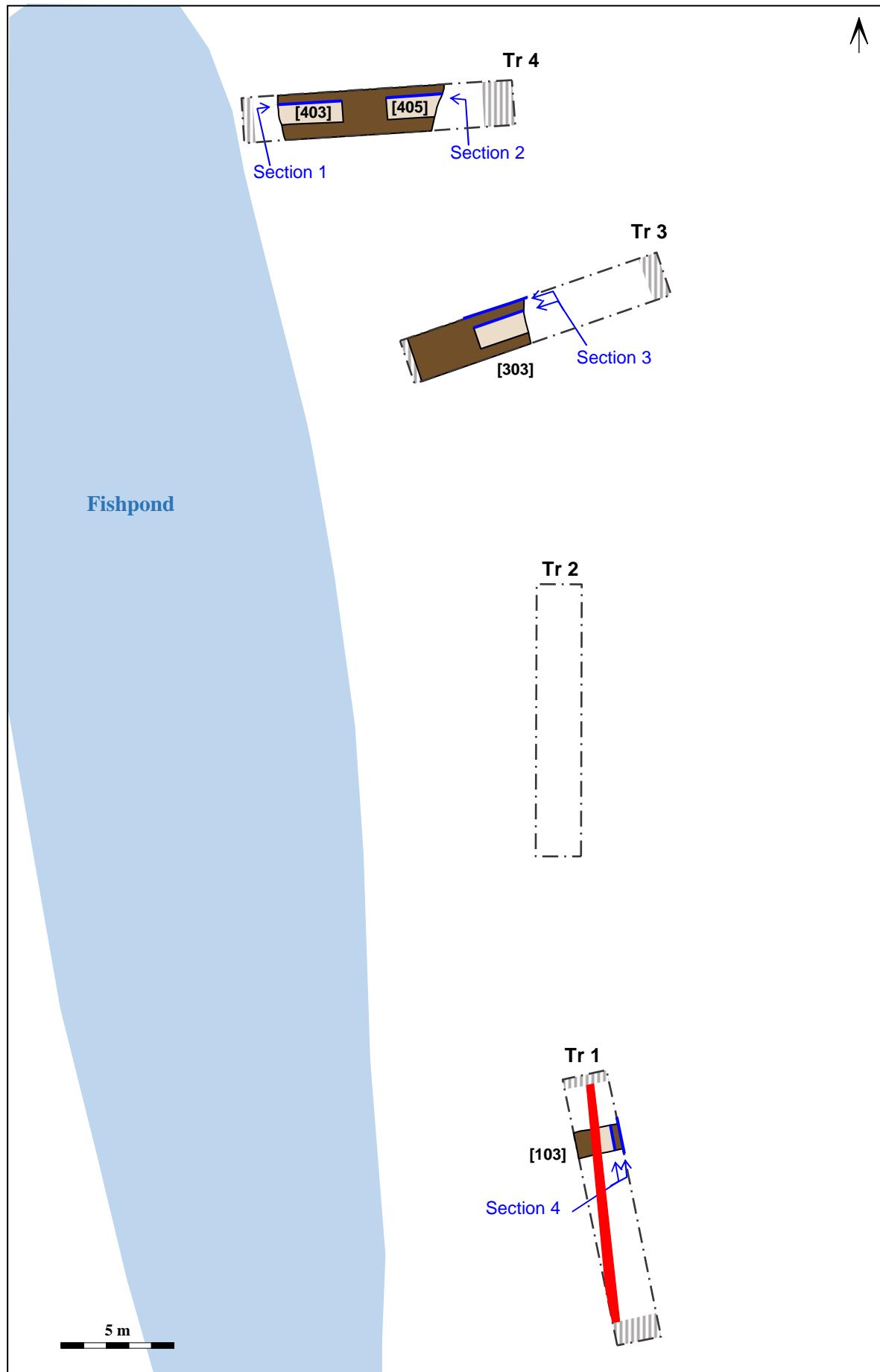
**Reason:** To assess archaeological potential of site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
400	Topsoil	Friable dark grey black clay silt occasional small-medium stones And occasional CBM fragments (not retained) and moderate rooting activity. Up to 0.25m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
401	Subsoil	Firm mid grey brown silty clay occasional small-medium stones And occasional rooting activity. Up to 0.3m thick deposit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
402	Natural	Firm mid orange brown silty clay occasional small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
403	Pond	Sub-oval N-S sides: U-shaped dimensions: max breadth 7.4m, max depth 0.65m, min length 2.m Only excavated to a depth of 0.44m, then augered to reveal its true depth. Same as [405] and, possibly, as [303].	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
404	Fill	Friable mid brown grey silty clay occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-medium stones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
405	Pond	Sub-oval N-S sides: U-shaped dimensions: max breadth 7.4m, max depth 0.65m, min length 2.m Only excavated to a depth of 0.34m, then augered to reveal its true depth. Same as [403] and, possibly, as [303].	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
406	Fill	Friable mid brown grey silty clay occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-medium stones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



**Figure 1:** Site location

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**Figure 2:** All-features plan and sections



**Image 1:** View of Trench 3 – pre-excavation; looking NE.  
Scale 1m



**Image 2:** Ditch [103] in Trench 1;  
looking E. Scale 1m



**Image 4:** Possible pond [403] in Trench 4;  
looking N. Scale 1m



**Image 3:** Possible pond [303] in Trench 3;  
looking NW. Scale 1m



**Image 5:** Possible pond [403]/[405] in  
Trench 4; looking NW. Scale 1m

**Figure 3:** Selected images

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