

**NEW POLICE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING,
WENDOVER ROAD, WALTON, AYLESBURY,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Project: PHA1293

Document: 2008/04
Version 1.0

4th February 2008

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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.

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Version History

| Version | Issue date | Reason for re-issue |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1.0 | 4 th February 2007 | n/a |

Structure of the report

After the introductory Section 1, Section 2 outlines the methodology employed during the watching brief. There is a description of the results of the fieldwork in Section 3, followed by a discussion and conclusion (Section 4). Section 5 is a bibliography. Appendix 1 contains an archaeological context summary.

Key Terms

The following terms or abbreviations are used in this report:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| BCAS | Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service |
| IFA | Institute of Field Archaeologists |
| LPA | Local Planning Authority |
| <i>Procedures Manual</i> | <i>Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> , 2 nd edn, 2001 Albion Archaeology |



Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Peter Moore of Thames Valley Police and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by David Radford of Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service.

This report was prepared by Adam Lodoen with illustrations by Joan Lightning.



Non-Technical Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the groundworks for a new office building at the headquarters of Thames Valley Police, Wendover Road, Walton, Aylesbury.

The site lies in an area of archaeological potential with extensive settlement remains of Bronze Age through to Anglo-Saxon date located nearby. In the immediate vicinity, evidence for late Iron Age and Romano-British agricultural activity has been found.

Previous trial trenching within the development area revealed undated archaeological features.

The groundworks revealed a number of likely quarry pits, a ditch and a furrow. However, none of these features could be dated so their significance remains uncertain. It is possible that the quarrying represents activities associated with the expansion of Aylesbury during the medieval and later periods.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

Planning permission for the construction of three-storey office accommodation at the headquarters of Thames Valley Police on Wendover Road, Walton, Aylesbury (ref. 07/00849) has been granted by Aylesbury Vale District Council.

Because of the archaeological potential of the site, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) attached a condition to the planning permission requiring the development to be subject to a programme of archaeological works. This was in accordance with advice received from their archaeological advisors, Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS),

The archaeological works included a desk-based assessment and trial trench evaluation, both of which were carried out prior to construction works and reported on previously (Albion Archaeology 2007b).

Subsequent to the desk-based assessment and the trial trench evaluation, a Brief was issued by BCAS (2007) requiring a watching brief on the construction groundworks for the proposed office block. Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out this work and a Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2007a) was prepared and approved by BCAS prior to commencement of fieldwork.

1.2 *Site Location, Geology and Land Use*

The development area lies approximately 0.9km south-east of Aylesbury town centre, in the suburb of Walton, and is centred on NGR SP82601317 (Figure 1).

The proposed new office building measures approximately 17m x 21m (357m²) in area and is located to the rear of the existing Police Headquarters complex which is situated on Wendover Road. Before commencement of the groundworks, the site was an open area, covered with tarmac, and used as a car park.

The height of the land in the area lies at around 82m OD, and the soils are derived from the underlying Portland Limestone and Ampthill clay geology (BGS 1994).

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

A number of previous archaeological excavations in the Walton area have revealed the presence of extensive settlement remains of Bronze Age to Anglo-Saxon date in the vicinity of the proposed development. The Saxon settlement excavated at Walton is considered to be of at least regional significance.



At a site 250m to the north-west, excavations revealed middle Bronze Age and middle Saxon settlement remains. Evidence for a pagan Saxon cemetery was also uncovered 400m north-east of the development site.

A watching brief during construction works in the adjacent High School located early to late Iron Age and Roman features suggesting there may be a late Iron Age/Roman farmstead in the vicinity. Further work at the school found additional evidence of Romano-British agricultural activity.

The trial trench evaluation carried out within the development area revealed modern overburden, two undated archaeological features and a number of agricultural furrows (Figure 2).

1.4 Extent and Nature of Groundworks

The footprint of the new office building (Figure 2) measured approximately 17m x 21m (357m²). The groundworks comprised removing the tarmac from the existing car park, and the excavation of strip trenches for storm and foul sewers, and foundations for the office building.

The foul sewer trench was excavated to a maximum depth of around 1.2m below ground level, whereas the storm drain was generally excavated to a depth of 1.1m below ground level. Both were c.0.50m wide

The depth of the foundation trenches were generally 1.0m, however in places where it was thought necessary, the foundations were excavated in excess of 1.2m. The width of these excavations varied.

1.5 Objectives

Although the results of the trial trenching evaluation were inconclusive, the site of the proposed works was within an area of high archaeological potential. The aim of the watching brief was therefore to:

- Observe all significant groundworks associated with the proposed development.
- Investigate and record these works and any archaeological deposits encountered within them.
- Further characterise and determine the nature of the archaeological remains at the site.
- Pay particular regard to the potential for Roman deposits
- Prepare a report of the fieldwork findings for deposition in the Buckinghamshire Sites and Monuments Record (BSMR).



2 METHODOLOGY

The watching brief was undertaken between 18th September and 18th October 2007. During this period all groundworks which required monitoring were completed. A mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket was used for all machine excavation.

The archaeological works adhered to the standards and field methods set out in the Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2007a) and the BCAS Brief (2007). These are summarised below.

- All machine excavation monitored to identify any *in situ* archaeological deposits that were revealed.
- All disturbed soil scanned for artefacts.
- All deposits investigated and recorded in accordance with Albion's *Procedures Manual*.
- All archaeological features plotted at a scale of 1:100 on base plans that were tied in to the OS national grid. Excavated features were planned at a scale of 1:50, and sections drawn at a scale of 1:10.
- All artefacts assigned to their relevant context number.
- An appropriate photographic record maintained for all significant deposits, along with overall photographs of the groundworks undertaken.

Throughout the project, the standards set out in the IFA's *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance* documents (specifically *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, September 1999) were followed.



3 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 Introduction

Due to the nature of the groundworks and conditions on site, archaeological observation and recording was sometimes difficult. The central parts of the groundworks were mostly inaccessible due to flooding.

All identified archaeological features and deposits were recorded and issued with a unique context number, specific to that feature or deposit. Within this report, context numbers referring to cut features are expressed [**], and layers or deposits within cut features are expressed (**).

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

3.2 Overburden and Geological Deposits

The overburden consisted of four distinct horizons (Figure 2):

- modern tarmac surface of the car park (100), 0.13m thick.
- concrete layer (101), 0.08m thick.
- rubble hardcore makeup layer (102), generally 0.30m thick.
- clay silt leveling layer (104), 0.20-0.40m thick.

The tarmac had been stripped from the area before commencement of any excavations. The concrete layer was only observed in the southeast part of the site whereas the consolidation layers were present across the site.

Undisturbed geological deposits, (103), were found beneath the overburden and comprised a mixture of silt and gravel.

3.3 Archaeological Deposits

A number of probable pits, many intercutting, were observed throughout the development area, with a marked concentration of large pits mainly to the west and north.

The full extent of many of these pits was unclear as they were only seen partially within the groundworks. Generally, observable widths ranged between 0.80m and 3.90m, with depths being between 0.20m and 0.66m. The largest of these pits, [138], was at least 5.10m x 10.20m in area and 1.75m deep. The fills were generally mid-grey homogenous silt clay.

These features were initially thought to be ditches. Had they actually been ditches, it is likely that they would have been observed continuing into other adjacent excavations as linear features, however, this was not the case. Thus, these features are more likely to be pits.

The only exception is ditch [130]/[118], which was discovered in the north part of the development area and was aligned northwest to southeast.



A single probable agricultural furrow [122] was uncovered in the southern end of the site. The alignment was northeast to southwest, identical to the direction of the furrows uncovered in the evaluation.

No finds were recovered from any of the features described above.



4 SYNTHESIS

4.1 Discussion

A number of features were uncovered during the watching brief, most of them probably representing pits. A few of these pits were very large, with the largest pit, [138], being quite irregular in shape. There was a scarcity of finds within all features, and all contained similar grey silty fills, probably deposited in a watery environment. This may indicate that all the features are roughly contemporary and backfilled by the same process; i.e. by the flooding and subsequent silting up of open pits.

Perhaps the most likely interpretation of their original function is that they were mineral extraction sites (gravel, clay, limestone). They appear to be too many and too irregularly shaped to be purpose built ponds.

The presence of a furrow in the south corner of the development area, together with the furrows uncovered in the trial trench excavation indicates a phase of agricultural use for the area. Unfortunately, it was not possible to date this phase or any of the other features found at the site either by artefacts or stratigraphic relationships.

The previous trial trench excavation discovered two undated archaeological features; one pit and one gully. Both of these features extended beyond the trial trench and into the area of the current watching brief, however, they were not detected during the watching brief. This does not mean that the features were not present but instead reflects the difficulty of identifying features due to site conditions and methods of construction, i.e. narrowness of trenches.

The layers of modern overburden are associated with the modern car park. It is clear that the ground has been levelled with material that had been brought in.

4.2 Conclusion

The results of the previous archaeological evaluation and assessment of the site demonstrate that archaeological remains are present in the area. However, the evidence from the watching brief indicates that at least in the immediate vicinity of the new office building, the ground has been significantly disturbed probably by extensive quarrying. Further corroborating evidence for such activity in the area may be indicated by the presence of two large ponds, approximately 100m to the south-west and north-west of the site (Figure 1). Ponds in these locations exist today and are also shown on early 19th century maps, with the south-western pond being considerable larger at that time.

The lack of dating evidence from the probable quarry pits makes further interpretation of the site difficult. However, in all likelihood they post-date any prehistoric or Roman activity in the area and may be associated with the medieval and particularly post-medieval expansion of Aylesbury.



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6 APPENDICES

6.1 Appendix 1 - Context Summary



Area: 1
 Extent (ha): 0.036
 OS Co-ordinates: SP4826021317
 Description: Site of new office building

| Context: | Type: | Description: | Excavated: | Finds Present: |
|----------|---------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 100 | Tarmac | Tarmac | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 101 | Concrete | Concrete | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 102 | Make up layer | Modern hardcore | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 103 | Natural | Firm yellow brown sandy gravel | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 104 | Make up layer | Mid blue grey clay silt . Make up layer for car park | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 111 | Pit | Irregular profile: near vertical dimensions: max breadth 0.65m, max depth 1.m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 112 | Fill | Dark grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 114 | Pit | Irregular profile: concave base: flat dimensions: max breadth 3.95m, max depth 0.3m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 115 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 116 | Pit | Irregular profile: concave base: flat dimensions: max breadth 0.9m, max depth 0.2m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 117 | Fill | Dark grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 118 | Ditch | Irregular profile: near vertical dimensions: max breadth 1.55m, max depth 0.45m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 119 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 120 | Pit | Sub-circular profile: concave base: flat dimensions: max breadth 1.6m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 121 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 122 | Furrow | Linear NE-SW profile: concave base: flat | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 123 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 124 | Pit | Irregular profile: concave dimensions: max breadth 3.2m, max depth 0.6m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 125 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 126 | Pit | Assymetrical profile: irregular dimensions: max breadth 3.7m, max depth 0.95m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 127 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 128 | Pit | Profile: concave dimensions: max breadth 0.5m, max depth 0.5m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 129 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 130 | Ditch | Linear profile: concave dimensions: max breadth 1.7m, max depth 0.66m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 131 | Fill | Dark grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 132 | Pit | Profile: concave dimensions: max breadth 0.3m, max depth 0.45m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 133 | Fill | Dark grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 138 | Pit | Assymetrical profile: irregular base: uneven dimensions: max breadth 10.2m, max depth 1.75m, max length 5.1m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 139 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Area: 1
Extent (ha): 0.036
OS Co-ordinates: SP4826021317
Description: Site of new office building

| | | | | |
|-----|------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 140 | Pit | Sub-oval profile: concave base: concave dimensions: max breadth 1.65m, max depth 0.55m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 142 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 143 | Fill | Orange clay silt | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 144 | Fill | Mid grey clay silt | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 145 | Pit | Sub-oval profile: near vertical base: flat dimensions: max breadth 1.8m, max length 5.5m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 146 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 151 | Pit | Profile: stepped dimensions: max breadth 3.5m, max depth 45.m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 152 | Fill | Mid grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 155 | Pit | Profile: concave base: concave dimensions: max breadth 1.6m, max depth 0.8m | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 156 | Fill | Dark grey silty clay | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

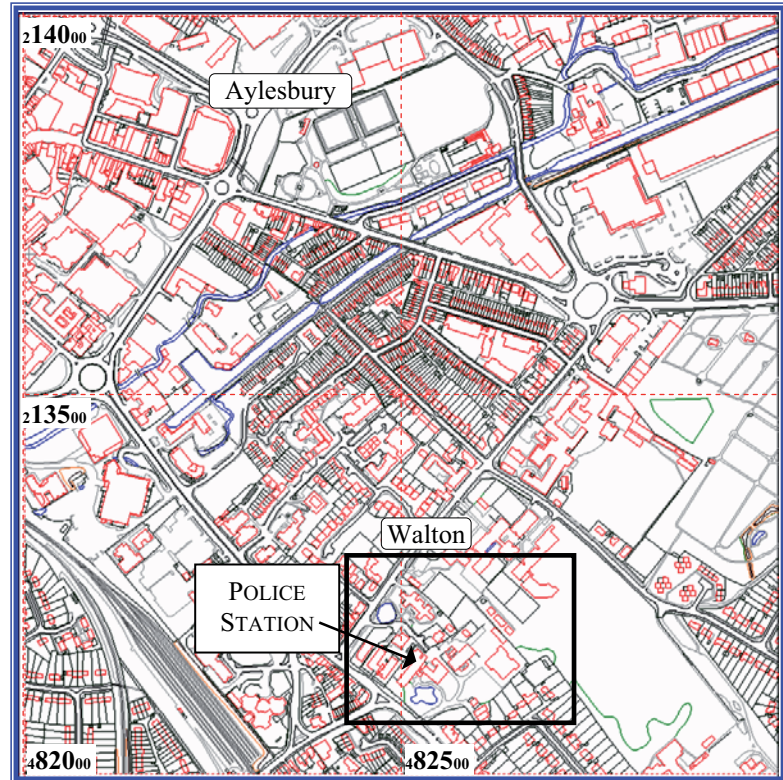
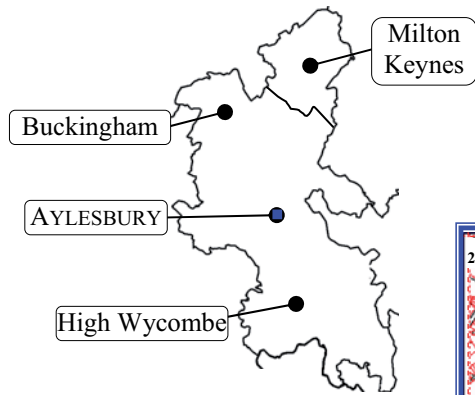


Figure 1: Site location

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Bedford. OS Licence No. 100017358. © Crown Copyright.

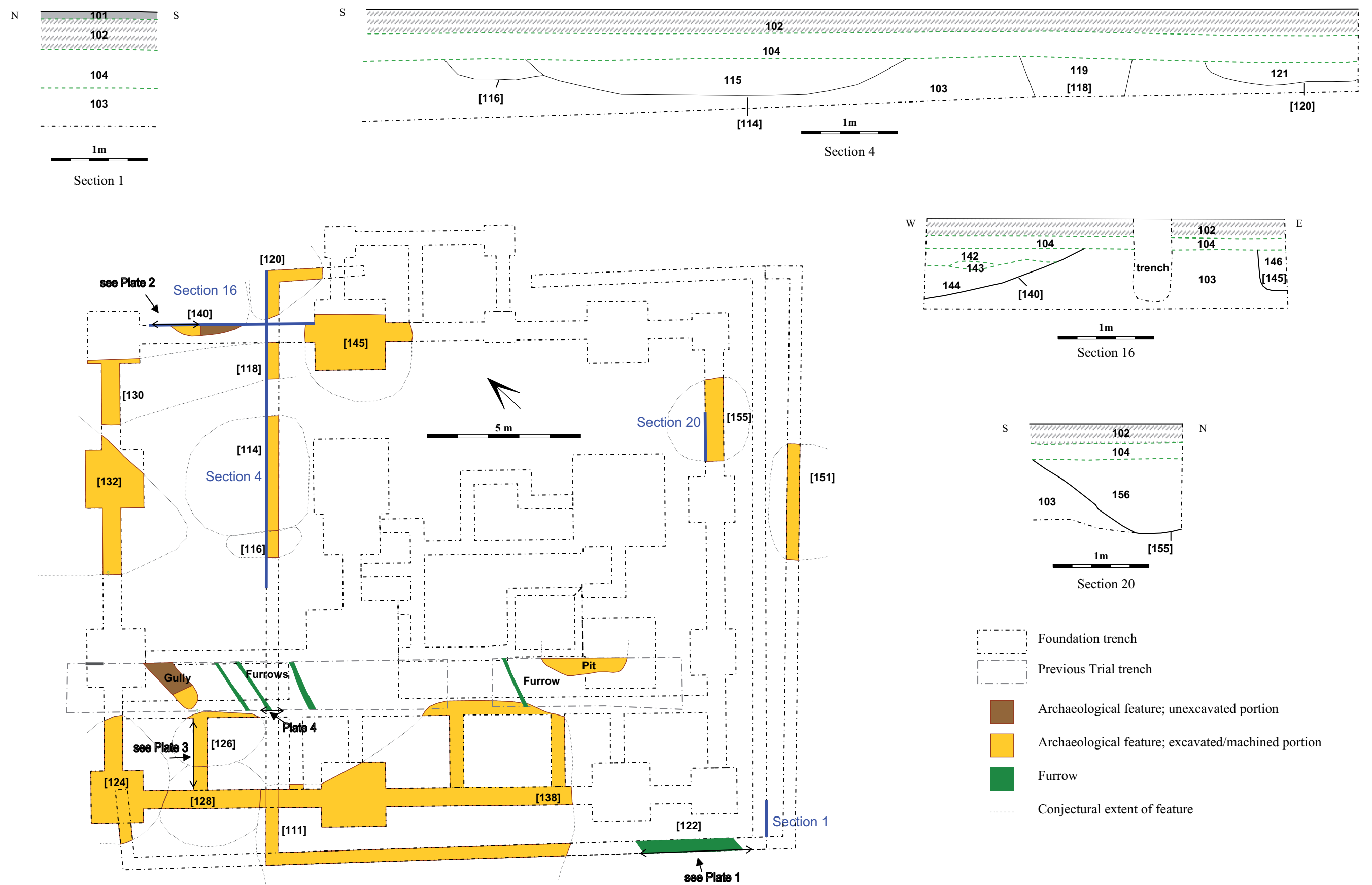


Figure 2: All features plan



Plate 1: Furrow [122]
Scale 1m



Plate 2: Pit [140]
Scale 1m

Figure 3: Photographs



Plate 3: Pits [126] & [128].
Scale 1m



Plate 4: Backfilled trial trench visible either side of drain
Scale 1m

Figure 4: Photographs