

**THE LAWNS
KINGS WALDEN ROAD
GREAT OFFLEY
HERTFORDSHIRE**

**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.

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Structure of this Report

The project and its background are introduced in Section 1. This is followed by an outline of the methodology employed during the project in Section 2 with the results of the fieldwork presented in Section 3. Section 4 is a bibliography. Appendix 1 contains a finds summary and Appendix 2 detailed descriptions of the trenches.

Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

ALGO	Association of Local Government Officers
CHEU	County Historic Environment Unit
HER	Historic Environment Record
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists



Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Andy Instone of Hertfordshire County Historic Environment Unit.

This report was prepared by Matthew Smith AIFA (Project Officer) with contributions by Joan Lightning (illustrations) and Jackie Wells (finds).



Non-Technical Summary

In October 2007, Albion Archaeology carried out an archaeological field evaluation on land at The Lawns, Kings Walden Road, Great Offley, Hertfordshire.

The 0.4ha evaluation area lies within the centre of Great Offley. Great Offley is potentially an important medieval settlement. It is recorded in the Domesday Book and the Historic Environment Record notes that Offley has Anglo-Saxon origins. There is also a tradition that King Offa of Mercia built a palace at Offley, and the village was named for him as 'Offanlege'.

The evaluation comprised the excavation of six trial trenches covering approximately 200m² in area. Between 0.3m and 0.7m of overburden was removed from the trenches down to the undisturbed geological deposits.

No archaeological features were encountered. A small quantity of abraded medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

A planning application has been submitted for the construction of six dwellings, garages and access road on land within the grounds of The Lawns, Kings Walden Road, Great Offley, Hertfordshire.

Because of the archaeological potential of the site the County Historic Environment Unit (CHEU), the local planning authority's archaeological advisor, recommended that an archaeological field evaluation in the form of trial trenching be carried out prior to determination of the planning application. This was to assess the archaeological impact of the proposed development. The results of the investigation given in this report will determine the advice given by the CHEU on any mitigation measures that may be necessary to safeguard any remains present.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to undertake this work in accordance with a Brief (HCC 2007) and subsequent Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2007) which was approved by the CHEU prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

1.2 *Site Location and Description*

The development area lies in the centre of Great Offley, within the grounds of The Lawns (Figure 1). The Lawns house itself lies to the north-east of the evaluation area and fronts Kings Walden Road.

The evaluation area measures approximately 0.4ha and is centred on OS grid reference TL1431/2685, with the ground at a height of around 156m OD. The Lawns house is currently abandoned and the site is covered by overgrown lawns, scrub and trees.

The underlying geology comprises glacial till, which is a sandy stony clay (BGS 1994).

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

The site lies within an Area of Archaeological Significance (no. 139) as identified in the Local Plan. This notes that Great Offley is a medieval settlement recorded in Domesday Book as *Offelei*. The parish church of St Mary Magdelene dates to the 12th century. The Historic Environment Record notes that Offley has Anglo-Saxon origins, and is first recorded in *c.*990. There is also an early tradition, recorded in *c.*1230 by Matthew Paris, that King Offa of Mercia (AD 757-796) built a palace at Offley, and that the village was named for him as '*Offanlege*'. If the tradition is genuine, an important settlement, possibly a royal palace may have existed in Offley.

Archaeological evidence for the early medieval (*e.g.* Anglo-Saxon) period is relatively rare in Hertfordshire and Offley may, therefore, have the potential to contain extremely significant archaeological remains.



The Lawns, its linked outbuildings and the walls and gates of the walled garden are Listed as being of architectural and historic significance and date to the 18th century.

A Desk-Based Assessment (CgMs 2006) concluded that there was good potential for remains of the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods to be present at the site. The report assessed the impact of previous construction activities on any potential remains to be limited and any horticultural impact to be moderate.

1.4 Project Objectives

Given that parts of the development are likely to have a significant impact on any archaeological remains present at the site, and in order to assess that impact and to devise an appropriate mitigation strategy, the evaluation was designed to gain information on:

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



2. METHODOLOGY

Throughout the project the standards set out in the following documents were adhered to:

- ALGAO Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England;
- Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork* (2nd edn, 2001);
- CHEU Design Brief;
- IFA's *Codes of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation*.

The purpose of the trial trenching was to locate and characterise any sub-surface archaeological remains within the evaluation area. This was to be achieved by sampling up to *c.*200m² (5%) of the site in 6 separate trenches measuring approximately 21m in length and 1.6m in width.

The site lay within a Conservation Area and a number of trees were present on the perimeter and within the evaluation area, particularly within its northern extension. The trenching plan was, therefore, designed to avoid any trees and minimise the possibility of accidental damage by placing trenches no closer than 3-4m to branch canopies. In effect, this precluded the placing of any trenches in the northern extension of the site and meant that those in the remainder of the site were concentrated within the middle of the accessible open area.

The 6 trenches were marked out on the ground in advance of machine excavation. Topsoil and modern overburden were removed using a mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and operating under close archaeological supervision. These deposits were removed down to the top of undisturbed geological deposits.

The bases and sections of relevant trenches were cleaned by hand where necessary. The revealed deposits were noted, cleaned by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. The trenches were subsequently drawn, and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique recording number sequence commencing at 100 for Trench 1, 200 for Trench 2 etc.



3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

Deposits recorded within the trenches are summarised below. Allocated context numbers are prefixed with the relevant trench number, *i.e.* contexts (101), (102) are from Trench 1 *etc.*

Detailed information on all deposits can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 Overburden and undisturbed geological deposits

The overburden was homogenous across the site. It comprised grey brown silty clay topsoil varying in thickness from 0.15m to 0.3m, the thicker deposits being located within the lower ground to the south-west (Figure 2). One abraded sherd of pottery dating to the medieval period was found in the topsoil of Trench 1; four similarly worn, medieval sherds were recovered from the topsoil of Trench 6.

Beneath the topsoil was a mid brownish grey silty clay subsoil which was also present in all trenches. This varied in depth from 0.2m to 0.5m, the thicker deposits also being located to the south-west.

Undisturbed geological deposits comprised a reddish brown stony clay. Such deposits were encountered in all trenches (Figures 3 and 4).

No archaeological features or deposits were found in any of the trenches. There was also no evidence for any modern disturbance or agricultural activity such as plough scaring or field drains within the trenches.



4. SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

4.1 *Summary of Archaeological Remains*

Five small sherds of abraded 13th century pottery were recovered from the topsoil in Trenches 1 and 6. The majority of sherds (4) came from Trench 6.

Pottery contained within topsoils and subsoils is subject to movement from its point of original deposition, especially in previously ploughed areas. The abrasion of the pottery located within the topsoil at Great Offley is a typical result of this process. Such evidence can only be used to indicate that some medieval activity has taken place in the vicinity. However, that activity cannot be characterised further.

4.2 *Conclusion*

Although the proposed development lay within an area of archaeological potential, no archaeological deposits or features were found in the evaluation trenches.

Artefacts were recovered from the topsoil but they do not suggest archaeological remains are present in the immediate vicinity of the trenches.

The results of the trial trenching suggest that the evaluation area lies outside the area of settlement associated with the medieval village.



5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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CgMs Consulting, 2007, *The Lawns, Kings Walden Road, Great Offley, Hertfordshire: Archaeological Desk-based Assessment*.

IFA 1999a, *Code of Conduct*.

IFA 1999b, *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings)*.



6. APPENDICES

6.1 *Appendix 1: Finds Data*

Five unstratified, abraded pottery sherds (35g) were recovered from Trenches 1 and 6 (Table 1). They comprise four sand tempered sherds in the Hertfordshire greyware tradition, and a glazed jug sherd of uncertain provenance. All are broadly datable to the 13th century.

Tr.	Context	Context type	Spot date	Find type
01	100	Topsoil	13th century	Pottery sherd (3g)
06	600	Topsoil	13 th century	Pottery sherds x4 (32g)

Table 1: Finds Summary by feature



6.2 Appendix 2: Trench Summaries



Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 21.60 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0. m. Max: 0. m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: WEST END (Easting: 51429915: Northing: 22683544)

OS Grid Ref.: EAST END (Easting: 51431669: Northing: 22684851)

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable mid brown silty clay occasional large stones 0.19m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
101	Subsoil	Friable mid grey brown silty clay occasional flecks manganese staining 0.18m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Natural	Firm mid red brown silty clay occasional small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: 21.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0. m. Max: 0. m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: WEST END (Easting: 51429424: Northing: 22684277)

OS Grid Ref.: EAST END (Easting: 51431123: Northing: 22685527)

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Friable dark brown black clay silt occasional small stones 0.35m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
201	Subsoil	Firm mid brown grey silty clay occasional medium ceramic building material, occasional small stones 0.5m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
202	Natural	Firm light red brown silty clay frequent small stones, occasional medium stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 3

Max Dimensions: Length: 20.30 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0. m. Max: 0. m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: WESTEND (Easting: 51428895: Northing: 22684995)

OS Grid Ref.: EAST END (Easting: 51430533: Northing: 22686231)

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
300	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown silty clay 0.19m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
301	Subsoil	Friable mid grey brown silty clay occasional small stones 0.31m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
302	Natural	Firm mid red brown silty clay occasional small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 4

Max Dimensions: Length: 21.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0. m. Max: 0. m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SOUTH END (Easting: 51432505: Northing: 22685182)

OS Grid Ref.: NORTH END (Easting: 51431209: Northing: 22686878)

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
400	Topsoil	Friable dark brown black silty clay occasional small stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
401	Subsoil	Firm light grey brown silty clay occasional small stones 0.5m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
402	Natural	Firm light red brown silty clay moderate small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 5

Max Dimensions: Length: 21.40 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0. m. Max: 0. m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: WEST END (Easting: 51432574: Northing: 22686763)

OS Grid Ref.: EAST END (Easting: 51434285: Northing: 55988071)

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
500	Topsoil	Friable mid grey brown silty clay 0.15m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
501	Subsoil	Friable mid grey brown silty clay occasional small stones 0.24m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
502	Natural	Firm mid red brown silty clay occasional small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 6

Max Dimensions: Length: 20.70 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0. m. Max: 0. m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: WEST END (Easting: 51433049: Northing: 22686188)

OS Grid Ref.: EAST END (Easting: 51434673: Northing: 22687438)

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
600	Topsoil	Friable mid grey brown silty clay 0.17m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
601	Subsoil	Friable mid grey brown silty clay 0.26m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
602	Natural	Firm mid red brown silty clay frequent small-medium stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

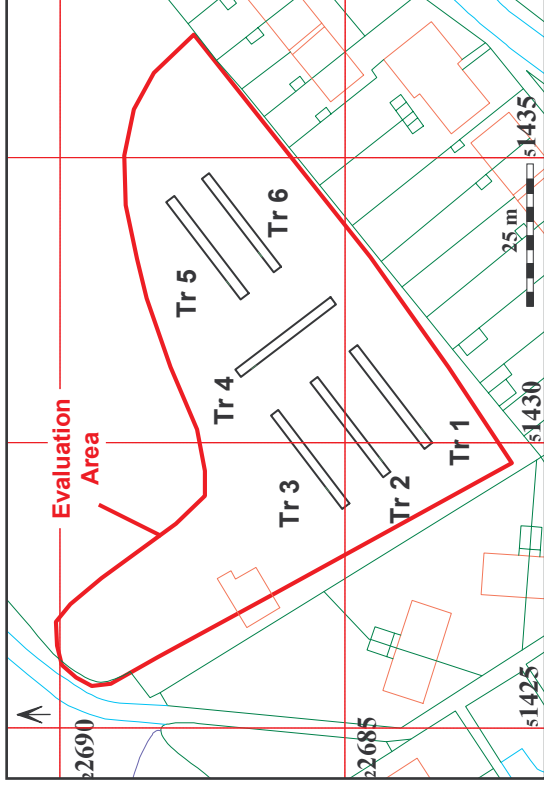
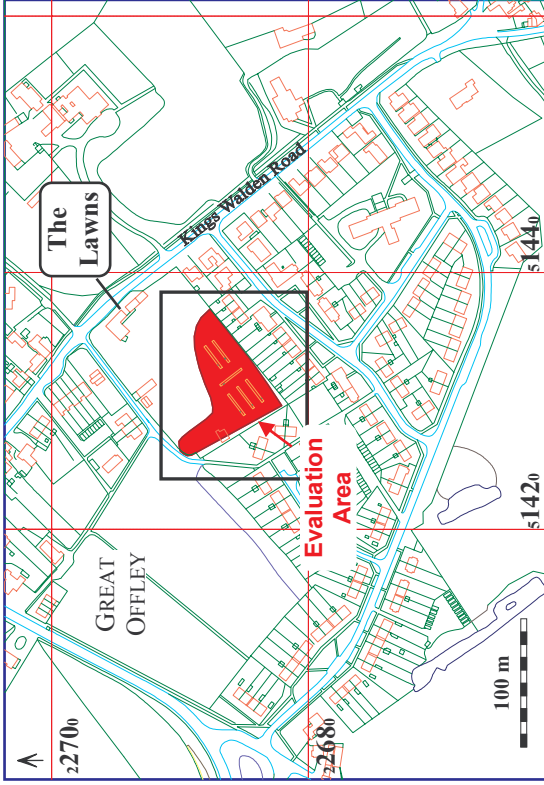
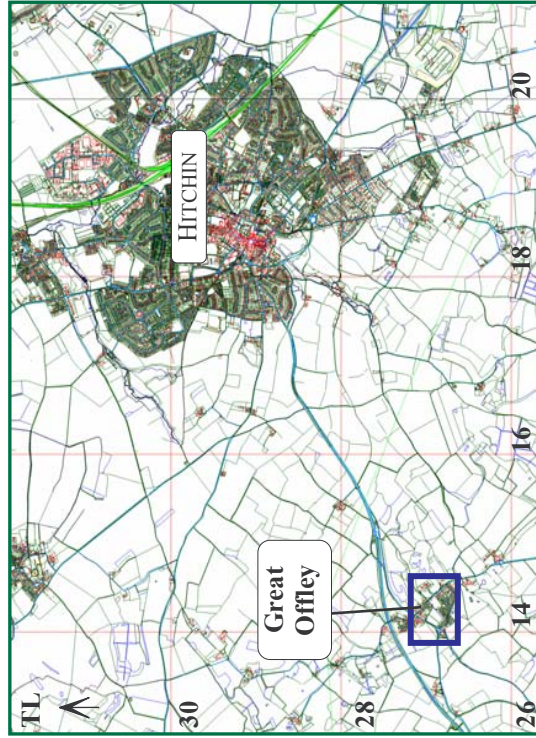
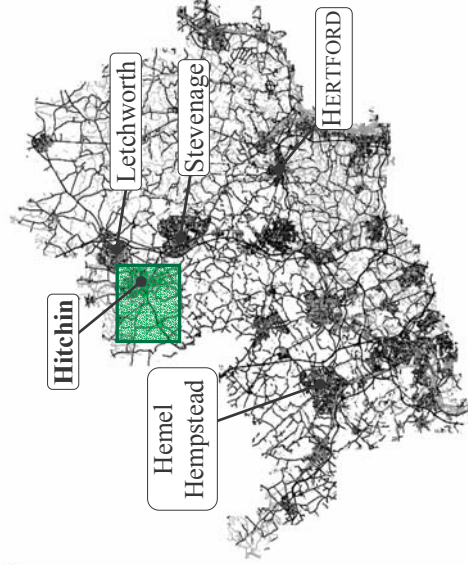


Figure 1: Site and trench location map

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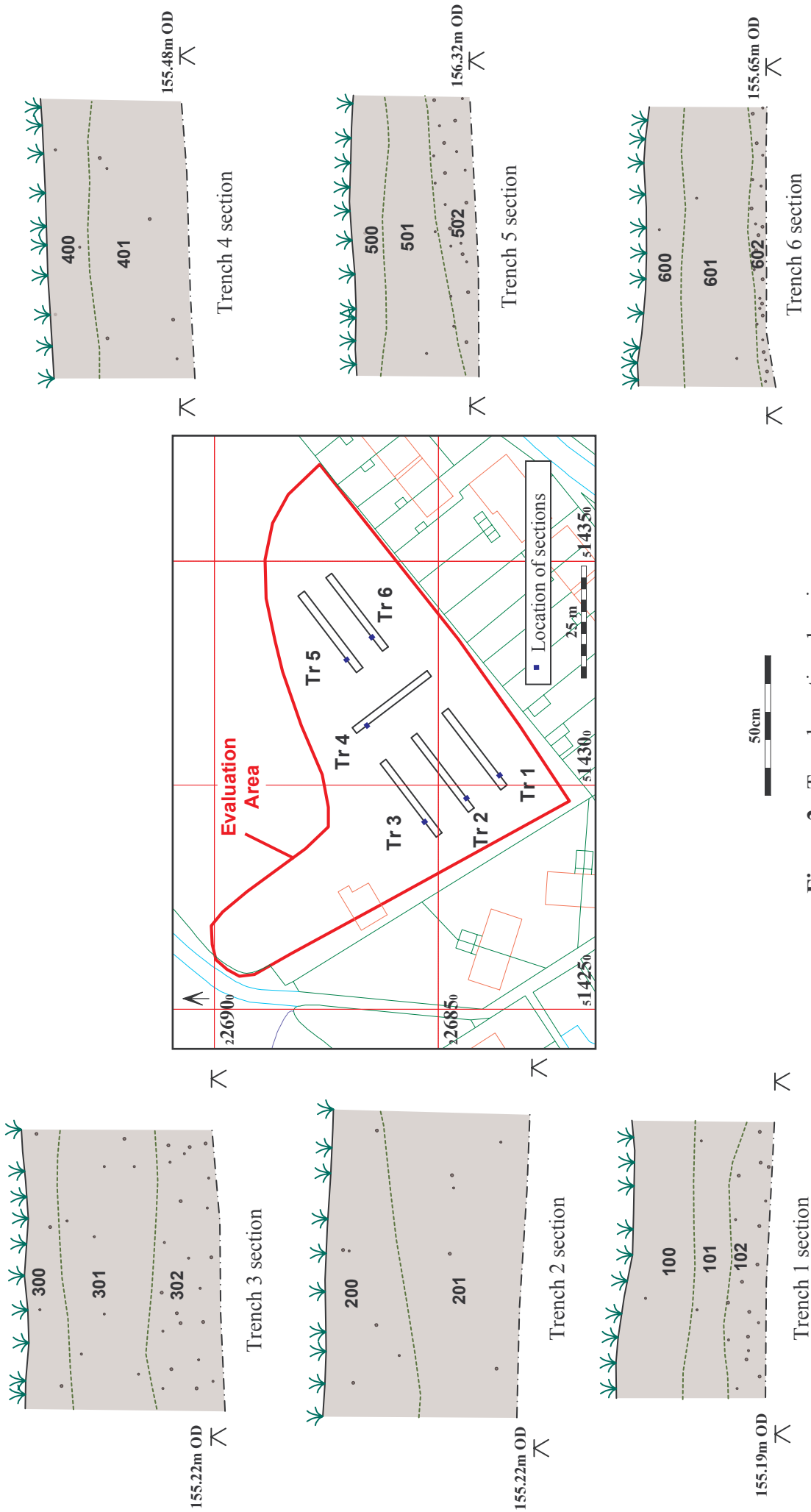


Figure 2: Trench section drawings

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Trench 1, looking east.



Trenches 2 and 3, looking south-west



Trench 4, looking north-west

Figure 3: Trenches 1-4, photographs



Trench 5, looking south-west.



Trench 6, looking north-east

Figure 4: Trenches 5 and 6 photographs