

**LAND AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF BEDFORDSHIRE
PARK SQUARE, LUTON**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRIAL TRENCHING**

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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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The project was commissioned by Alan Hardwick of AIMS Ltd on behalf of the University of Bedfordshire, and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Martin Oake of Central Bedfordshire Council Conservation and Design Team.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Turner (Archaeological Supervisor) and Kathy Pilkinton (Assistant Supervisor). This report has been prepared by Ian Turner with contributions from Jackie Wells (Finds Officer) and Joan Lightning (CAD Technician).

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Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used

| | |
|-----|------------------------------|
| CDT | Conservation and Design Team |
| HER | Historic Environment Record |
| IfA | Institute for Archaeologists |



Non-Technical Summary

A planning application was submitted to Luton Borough Council by the University of Bedfordshire for the construction of a new student centre within the university campus at Park Square, Luton.

The site is located within the medieval core of Luton close to both the Church of St Mary, which is 12th century in origin, and the location of one of Luton's two medieval castles, that of Fulk de Breaute, which was built in the 1220's. The church is said to have been founded in the 10th century although not necessarily on the same site as the present church.

Because of the site's archaeological potential, a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation. The initial stage of this programme comprised the excavation of two trial trenches within the boundaries of the site and Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out this work.

The trenches contained two human burials and a considerable depth of post-medieval stratified archaeological deposits probably contained within a large pit or ditch.

The two burials suggest either that the churchyard may have shrunk in size, or that the church had moved. The latter explanation provides support for the theory that the existing church was rebuilt in a different location to the original 10th century church.

The large pit or ditch may represent a quarry feature or the moat of de Breaute's castle. Its location in the approximate position of the moat's projected route and the dating evidence lend support to this hypothesis.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Project Background*

A planning application (LB/TP/2008/1113) has been submitted to Luton Borough Council by the University of Bedfordshire for the construction of a new student centre within the university campus at Park Square, Luton.

Because of the site's archaeological potential, a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation. This was in accordance with advice received from the local planning authority's archaeological advisors, Central Bedfordshire Council's Conservation and Design Team (CDT).

The CDT issued a brief (BCC 2009a) outlining the requirement for a three-staged approach to the archaeological work:

- Stage I – archaeological field evaluation.
- Stage II – appraisal of the results of the archaeological field evaluation.
- Stage III – implementation of an agreed programme of archaeological investigation and recording (if required, following completion of Stage II).

The CDT issued a further brief for the Stage I archaeological field evaluation (BCC 2009), detailing the requirements for trial trenching at the site.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by AIMS Ltd on behalf of the University of Bedfordshire to undertake the trial trenching. In accordance with the brief, a project design was prepared (Albion Archaeology 2009) which was approved by the CDT prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

1.2 *Site Location and Description*

The site is located in the centre of Luton, within the University's Park Square Campus and centred on OS grid reference TL0952 2111 (Figure 1).

The site measures approximately 0.38ha in area and, prior to its demolition, contained a workshop and hard surfaced parking areas.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

The site is located within the medieval core of Luton (HER 16993).

The site lies close to both the Church of St Mary, which is 12th century in origin, and the location of one of Luton's two medieval castles, that of Fulk de Breaute, which was built in the 1220's (Figure 4). The castle stood on the south side of the church and was surrounded by a moat. A substantial mound of earth apparently still covered the area at the beginning of the 20th century (Albion Archaeology 2003).

The church is said to have been founded in the 10th century although not necessarily on the same site as the present church. It is supposed to have been moved to its new site in 1121 and there is speculation as to the site of the original



Saxon church. It is suggested that the footprint of the original building may be within or very close to that of the present church (Albion Archaeology 2003).

Late 19th century and later Ordnance Survey maps show the site to be occupied by terraced housing and back yards. An archaeological and historical survey of Luton (Albion Archaeology 2003) noted that although medieval deposits have been lost during the development of the town in the 18th to 20th centuries there is still the potential for medieval deposits to survive.

An archaeological investigation undertaken in 2008 at nearby Vicarage Street identified medieval activity of 13th-14th century date to the west of College House (ASE 2008). This confirmed that significant remains did survive within previously developed areas.

1.4 Project Objectives

Given that development of the site is likely to have a significant impact on any archaeological remains present, and in order to assess that impact and to devise an appropriate mitigation strategy if required, the project aimed to gather information on the following:

- 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

2.1 Standards

Throughout the project the standards set out in the following documents were followed:

- Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual for Archaeological Fieldwork*
- English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991)
- IfA's *Code of Conduct* (1999)
- IfA's *Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation* (1999)

2.2 Trial Trenching

The archaeological works took place between 6th and 9th April 2009. Two trenches were excavated within the boundary of the site (Figure 1). They were located in the northern half of the site, within a disused carpark, where it was hoped that disturbance from modern development would be minimal. Each trench measured approximately 11m x 1.8m, totalling a c.40m² sample of the site.

The location of the trenches was agreed with the CDT and marked out on the ground in advance of machine excavation. Overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under close archaeological supervision. The overburden was removed down to either the top of archaeological deposits or undisturbed geological deposits, whichever was encountered first.

The bases and sections of all trenches were cleaned by hand in order to identify and/or clarify the nature of exposed deposits. All potential archaeological remains were investigated and excavated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's pro forma sheets. The trenches were subsequently drawn, and photographed as appropriate. All deposits and features were recorded using a context number sequence commencing at 100 for Trench 1 and 200 for Trench 2. Information on contexts is summarised in the discussion below with full details provided in Appendix 2.

The trenches were inspected by a member of the CDT prior to backfilling.

2.3 Archive

The archive for the site comprising original records, photographs, plans, finds and supporting documentation will be deposited with Luton Museum under the accession number 2009.13. A copy of this report will also be submitted to the Archaeology Data Service's online OASIS database.



3. RESULTS

3.1 Trench 1

3.1.1 Overburden and Geological Deposits

The overburden consisted of a 0.10m thick tarmac surface (100) overlying a levelling layer (101) of loose modern brick fragments and grey brown sand (Figure 2). Below this was an additional levelling layer (111) of orange yellow silty clay (101) at the southern end of the trench.

Below these, a 0.28m thick buried subsoil of orange brown silt (102) overlying geological deposits that comprised mid brown orange silt (103) and orange yellow silt (104).

3.1.2 Archaeological Remains

Trench 1 was excavated to a depth of around 0.85m at which point archaeological features were confirmed cutting into geological deposits.

Two human burials [105] and [112] were identified in trench 1. The burials were situated 1m apart and were in line, head to toe with the heads to the south-west.

Burial [105] was partially exposed in the trench at the south-west end. Its fill and cut was visible in the trench side originating at a depth of c.0.45m below ground level, with the skeleton being at a depth of around 0.85m. Burial [112] was only visible in the south-east facing trench side and was much shallower than grave [105]. As a result, the grave had been heavily truncated by later levelling of the site prior to the deposition of deposit (101).

The burials were left *in-situ* and no further archaeological investigation was carried out on them. No artefacts were recovered from the graves.

3.1.3 Modern Intrusions

A rectangular pit [108] with a steel frame at the base was identified towards the north-east end of the trench.

3.2 Trench 2

3.2.1 Overburden and Geological Deposits

The overburden in trench 2 was similar to that found in trench 1 and comprised a tarmac surface (200) overlying a levelling layer (201) of loose modern brick fragments and grey brown sand (Figure 3).

Undisturbed geological deposits were not encountered within the trench.

3.2.2 Archaeological Remains

Trench 2 was excavated to a depth of around 0.60m at which point it became apparent that the trench contained extensive stratified archaeological deposits. These deposits appeared to comprise multiple layers and dumps, many sloping and



possibly infilling a large feature, the edges of which lay beyond the limits of the trench.

A machined sondage was excavated into the deposits to ascertain their maximum depth but was halted for safety reasons at 2.10m below ground level without undisturbed geology being encountered.

A number of the deposits were investigated and artefacts comprising quantities of post-medieval roof tile, brick and pottery were recovered from most (see Appendices for full details).

3.2.3 Modern Intrusions

The modern brick foundations (203) of the terrace of 19th century houses known to have been located at the site were identified in the trench, beneath the levelling layer (201) and cutting into deposit (202).



4. SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Discussion

The trial trenching identified significant archaeological deposits beneath modern tarmac and levelling layers. The archaeological remains comprised two human burials and a considerable depth of probable infill deposits.

The disposition of the burials indicate that they are likely to be formal Christian inhumations and this, together with their close proximity to each other, suggests that more burials are likely to be present in the area. Their date is uncertain but the lack of coffins and their position outside of the present churchyard suggests they are of some considerable age.

The infill deposits are likely to be contained within a large pit or ditch located towards the northern boundary of the site. Artefact evidence shows that this infilling occurred during the post-medieval period (AD1500-1750), therefore, the feature itself could be of this date or of earlier origin.

The archaeological deposits in the trenches appeared well preserved beneath a reasonable depth of modern overburden although some truncation of remains has occurred during levelling of the site prior to the recent development of the site.

Modern intrusions into archaeological remains and/or geological levels were noted and these are likely to be fairly extensive across the site as a result of building foundations and service runs.

4.2 Interpretation

The finding of the two formal burials some 20m beyond the boundaries of the existing churchyard is of considerable interest. Two possible scenarios may explain this circumstance. Firstly the churchyard may have shrunk in size, or the site of the church has moved. Both are plausible explanations with the latter providing support for the theory that the existing church was rebuilt at a different but nearby location to the original 10th century church.

The probable presence of a large pit or ditch located towards the northern boundary of the site is also potentially of significance. If the deposits are contained within a pit it would be one of considerable size, possibly a quarry pit. Similarly, if they are within a ditch it would be an equally large but more unusual feature and this raises the possibility that the infilled feature represents the moat of de Breaute's castle. Its location in the approximate position of the moat's proposed route and the dating evidence lend support to this hypothesis. In either situation, the deliberate infilling of this area of the site in the post-medieval period provides a date for the possible expansion or intensification of settlement in this part of Luton's historic core.



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6. APPENDIX 1: ARTEFACT SUMMARY

6.1 Introduction

The evaluation produced a finds assemblage comprising mainly pottery and ceramic building material, the majority deriving from a single feature (Table 1). The finds were scanned to ascertain their nature, condition and, where possible, date range.

| Tr. | Feature | Type | Context | Spot date* | Finds summary |
|--------|---------|-------|---------|---------------|---|
| 1 2 | 108 | Pit | 109 | Modern | Pottery (108g); brick fragment (16g) |
| | 202 | Layer | 202 | Post-medieval | Pottery (19g); brick & tile (640g) |
| | 207 | Layer | 207 | Post-medieval | Brick & tile (189g); animal bone (23g); clay pipe (2g); oyster shell (11g) |
| | 208 | Layer | 208 | Post-medieval | Pottery (75g); brick & tile (422g); animal bone (45g); roofing slate (8g) |
| | 209 | Layer | 209 | Post-medieval | Roof tile (25g) |
| | 211 | Layer | 211 | Post-medieval | Pottery (52g); roof tile (200g) |
| | 213 | Layer | 213 | Post-medieval | Pottery (12g); brick & tile (86g) |
| | 215 | Layer | 215 | Post-medieval | Pottery (19g); roof tile (364g); animal bone (53g); vessel glass (26g); oyster shell (8g) |
| | 216 | Layer | 216 | Post-medieval | Pottery (6g); roof tile (52g); animal bone (15g); lead offcut (6g) |
| | 217 | Layer | 217 | Post-medieval | Pottery (4g); roof tile (330g); animal bone (6g); worked flint (2g) |
| | 221 | Layer | 221 | Post-medieval | Roof tile (518g) |

* spot date based on date of latest artefact in context

Table 1: Artefact summary by trench and feature

6.2 Pottery

Twenty-two pottery sherds (295g), predominantly of post-medieval date were recovered. Although unabraded, the sherds are fairly small, with an average weight of 13g. Seven fabric types were identified using common names and type codes in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently held by Albion Archaeology (Table 2).

Pottery derived almost entirely from the deposits in trench 2. The earliest material comprises two residual sand and flint tempered body sherds (type C63) of early medieval date, and a sherd of late medieval reduced ware (E01). Post-medieval pottery comprises two sherds of glazed red earthenware (P01) and a piece of tin-glazed earthenware (P33). Modern creamware (P38), transfer-printed ware (P45) and hard fired earthenware fragments likely to derive from plant pots constitute the remainder of the assemblage.

Layer (202) yielded three sherds of post-medieval glazed earthenware (19g). A sherd of transfer-printed ware and two flower pot fragments (total weight 108g) derived from the fill of pit [108].



| Fabric type | Common name | Sherd No. | Context / Sherd No. |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| <i>Medieval</i> | | | |
| Type C63 | Sand and flint | 2 | (216):1, (217):1 |
| Type E01 | Late medieval reduced ware | 1 | (215):1 |
| <i>Post-medieval</i> | | | |
| Type P01 | Fine glazed red earthenware | 5 | (202):3, (211):1, (213):1 |
| Type P33 | Tin-glazed earthenware | 1 | (215):1 |
| <i>Modern</i> | | | |
| Type P38 | Creamware | 1 | (215):1 |
| Type P45 | Transfer-printed ware | 3 | (108):1, (206):2 |
| MOD | Flower pot | 9 | (109):2, (208):3, (211):4 |

Table 2: Pottery type series

6.3 Ceramic building material

Thirty-five flat roof tile fragments and four pieces of brick (total weight 2.2kg) were recovered from the deposits in trench 2. All occur in a hard fired, oxidised sand tempered fabric, and are of post-medieval and/or later date. Roof tiles range in thickness between 15-17mm, and one example measures 180mm in width.

Layer (202) yielded a hand-made brick fragment and a piece of flat roof tile (total weight 640g) datable to the post-medieval period. A piece of modern brick (16g) derived from the fill of pit [108].

6.4 Other artefacts

Deposits from trench 2 yielded a post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem fragment (207), an undatable lead or lead alloy offcut (216), a patinated flint flake with secondary damage (217), a piece of modern roofing slate (208), and two vessel glass fragments (215), one of which derives from a wine bottle rim in clear 'olive' green glass, datable to 1770-1800.

6.5 Animal bone

Faunal remains comprise ten fragments (142g), recovered from the deposits in trench 2. Pieces survive in good condition, although are small, with an average weight of 14g. Diagnostic elements are mainly long bone fragments from large mammals of indeterminate species.



7. APPENDIX 2: TRENCH SUMMARIES

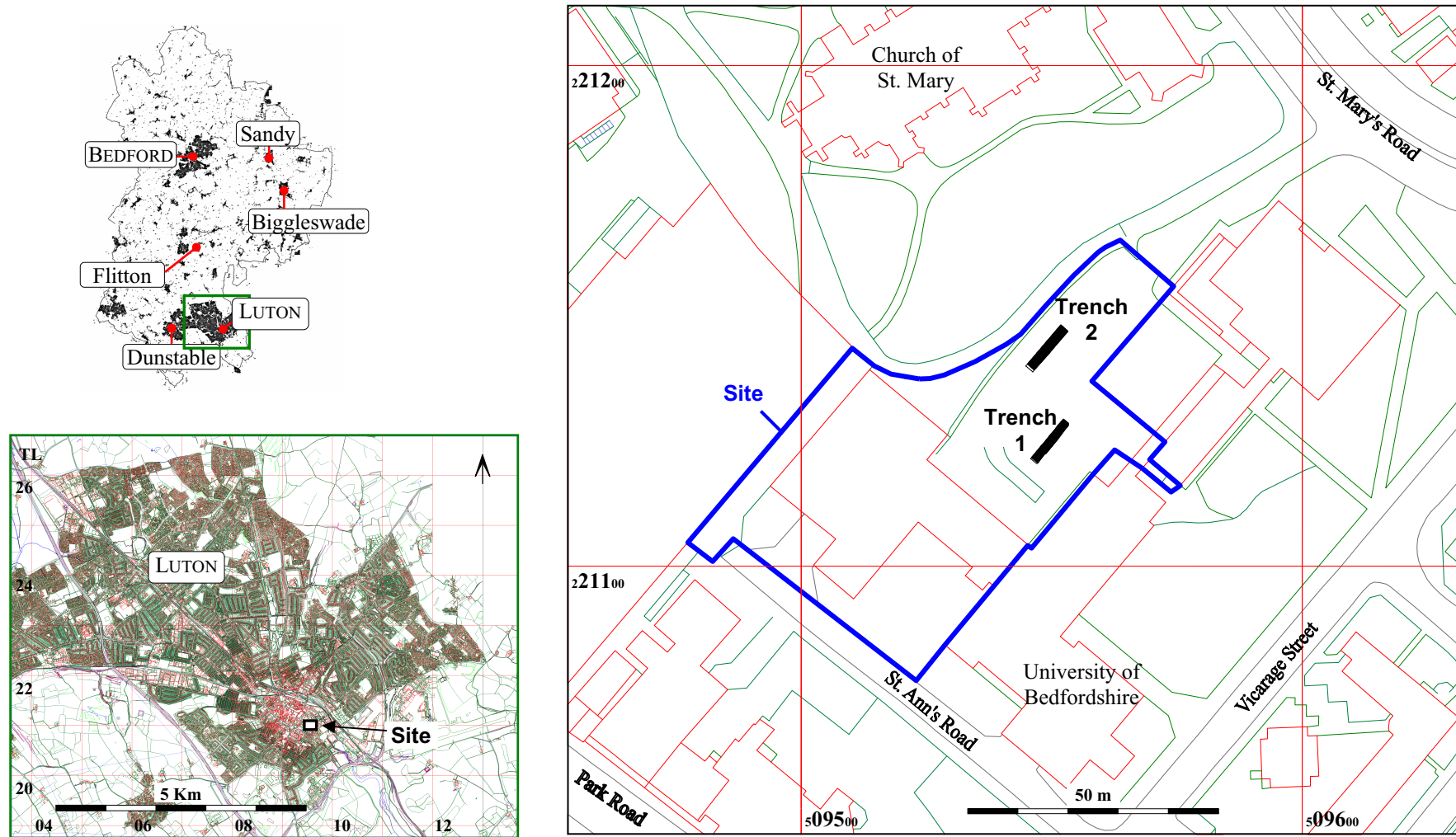
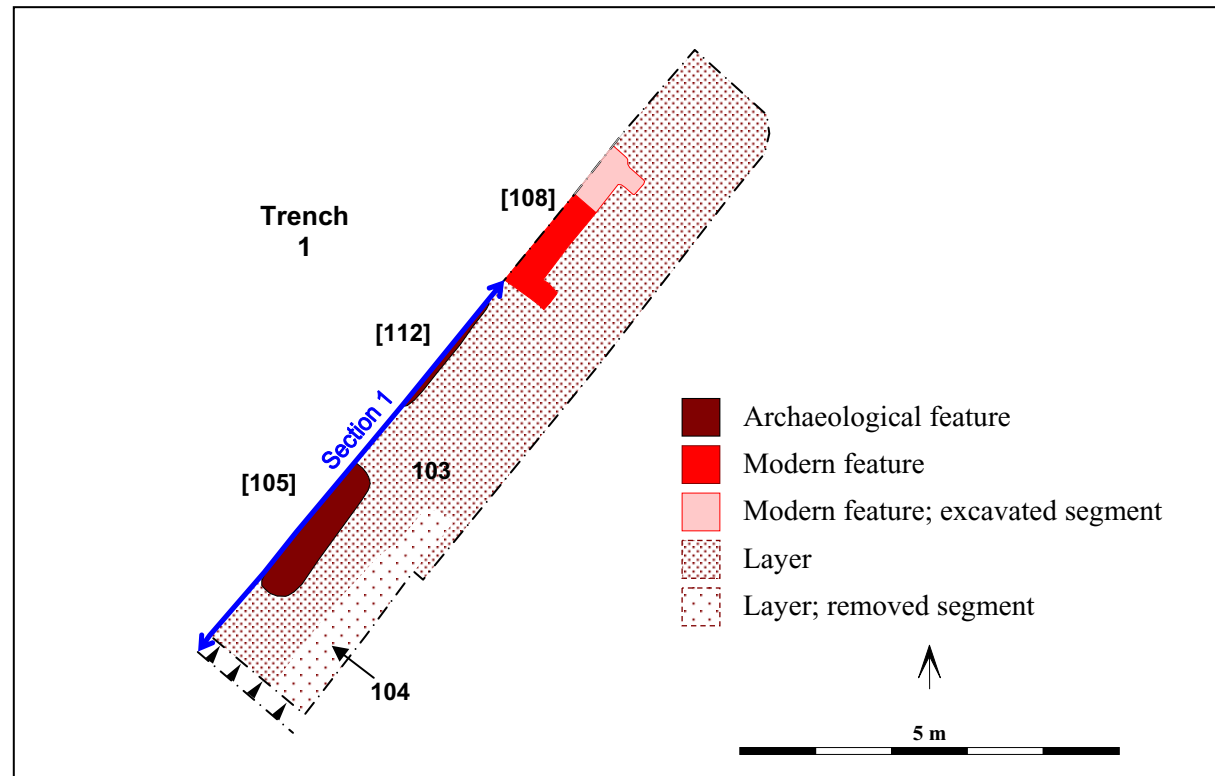
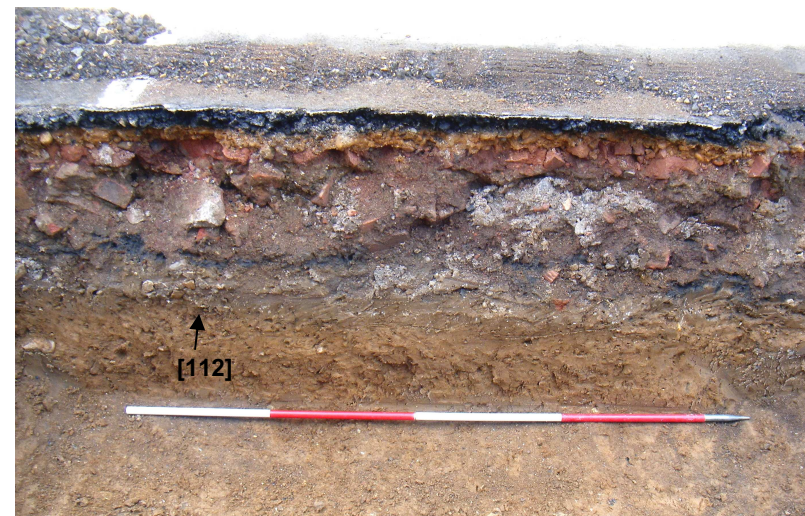


Figure 1: Site location and trench plan

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Grave [105]. Scale 1m
(Photograph colours enhanced for clarity)



Grave [112]. Scale 2m
(Photograph colours enhanced for clarity)



Trench 1, looking south west. Scale 1m

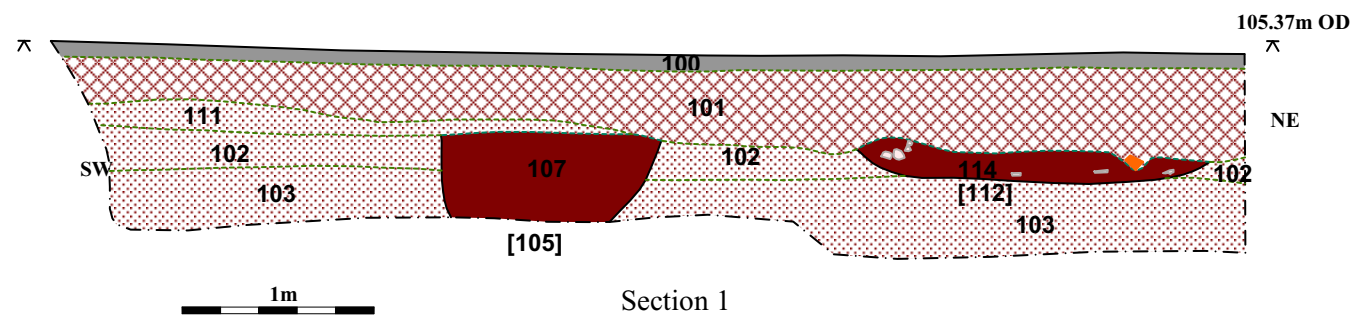
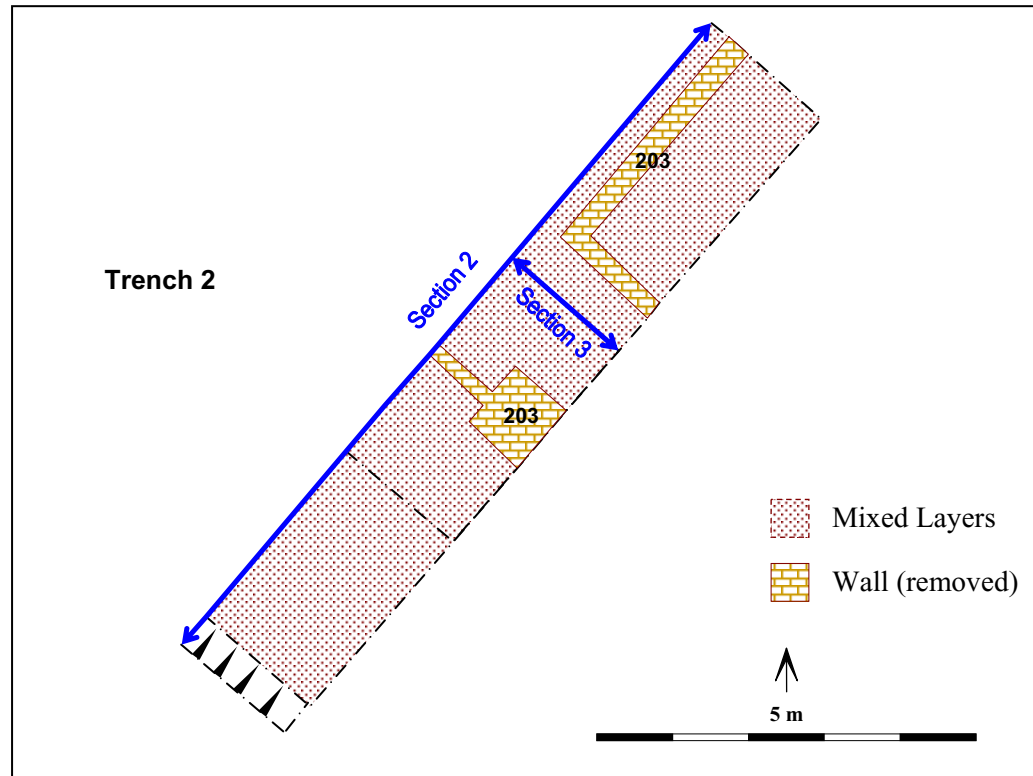


Figure 2: Trench 1, plan and sections

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Trench 2, looking north east. Scale 1m



Sondage, looking north west. Scale 2m

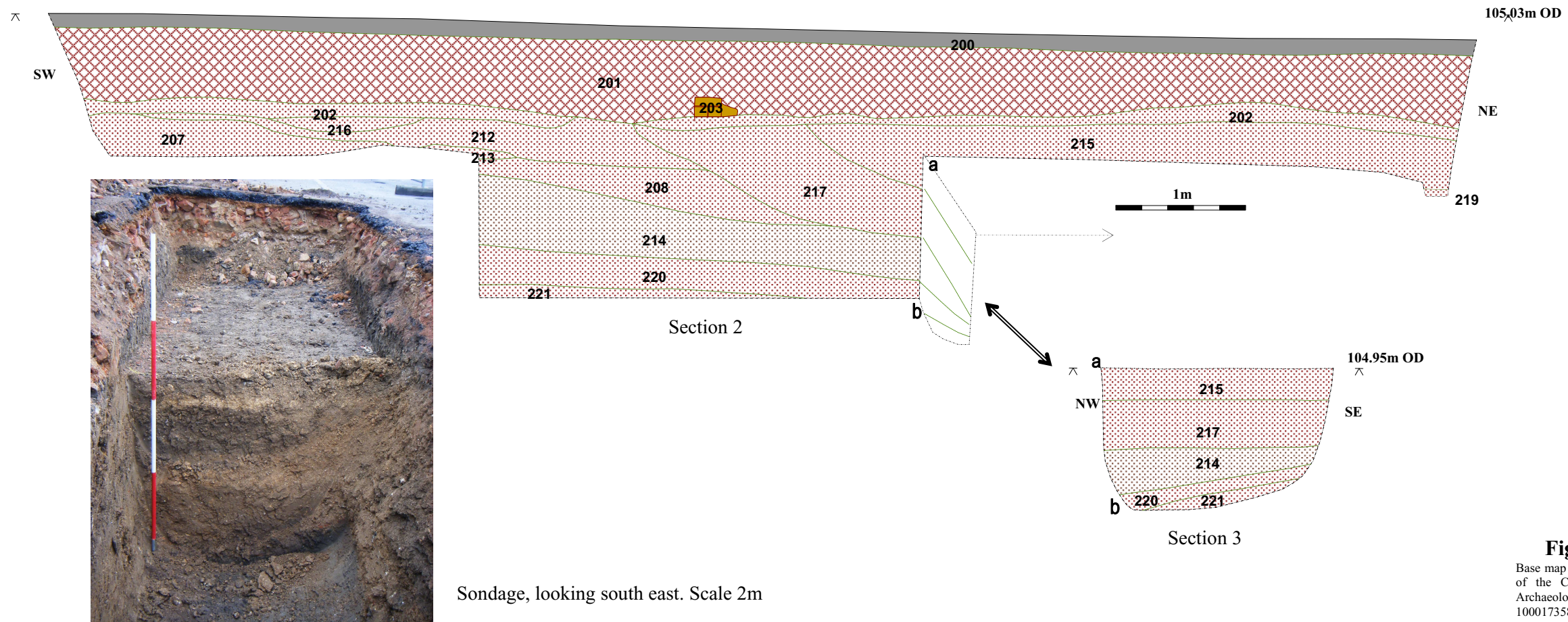


Figure 3: Trench 2, plan and sections

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