



TREMBATHS
Talbot Way
Letchworth

Hertfordshire

An archaeological evaluation report

March 2009

**TREMBATHS
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Letchworth**

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An archaeological evaluation report

Site Code: LRT-HE-TMB09

National Grid Reference: 522936 234101

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**Museum of London Archaeology
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Summary (non-technical)

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service on the site of Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1UA. The report was commissioned from MOL Archaeology by Alaway Construction Ltd.

Following the recommendations of Andy Instone, County Planning Archaeologist, Historic Environment Unit, Hertfordshire County Council, two evaluation pits/trenches were excavated on the site.

The results of the field evaluation have helped to refine the initial assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. Only one natural feature, the remains of a tree hole, was located on site and two residual pieces of Roman pottery were found in the subsoil.

In the light of revised understanding of the archaeological potential of the site the report concludes the impact of the proposed redevelopment is low.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The evaluation took place at Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1UA, hereafter called 'the site'. It is located at an existing care home, Trembaths, and is bounded by Talbot Way to the south, by the gardens of adjoining properties to the west, by allotment gardens to the east and by open ground to the north. The centre of the site lies at National Grid reference 522936 234101. Modern pavement level near to the site lies at c 88.95m OD. The site code is LET-HE-TMB09.

Letchworth Garden City was formed in 1903, of three pre-existing villages; Letchworth, Norton and Willian. The site lies 1.6km to the north-east of the original centre of Letchworth, but is only 100m directly south of the historic centre of Norton.

An archaeological field evaluation was subsequently carried out on two trenches, by two Senior Archaeologists within the rear garden of the existing nursing home from the 4th-6th February 2009.

Fig 1 Site location

1.2 Planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Method Statement* which formed the project design for the evaluation (see Section 1.2 and 1.3, MOL Archaeology, 2009).

1.3 Planning background

Planning permission has been granted (Application 1/02803/08) subject to a condition for archaeological fieldwork, recommended by the Historic Environment Unit, Hertfordshire County Council.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Alaway Construction Ltd and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOL Archaeology). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (IFA, 2001).

Field evaluation, and the *Evaluation report* which comments on the results of that exercise, are defined in the most recent English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) as intended to provide information about the archaeological resource in order to contribute to the:

- formulation of a strategy for the preservation or management of those remains; and/or
- formulation of an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may adversely affect such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or
- formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigations within a programme of research

1.5 Aims and objectives

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002.

The following research aims and objectives were established in the *Method Statement* for the evaluation (Section 2.3):

- What is the nature and level of natural topography?
- What are the earliest deposits identified?
- What are the latest deposits identified?
- What evidence is there for the continuation of the Iron Age?

2 Topographical and historical background

2.1 Topography

North Hertfordshire forms part of the upland area of the Chiltern plateau; the escarpment extends from west to east outside of the county boundary and slopes gently downwards towards the south (Thompson 2005). The closest river is the Ivel which starts from Baldock and flows north through the Blackhorse Farm area, approximately 1.25km north-east of the site.

The site is located on glacial till, consisting of chalky, sandy, stony clay, with the underlying solid geology of Cretaceous chalk (BGS 1995).

2.2 Prehistoric

There is little evidence for the earlier prehistoric (Palaeolithic and Mesolithic) periods in the region with only residual flints found (Thompson 2005). However by the Neolithic period (c 4000–2000 BC) which is traditionally seen as the time when hunter gathering gave way to farming and settled communities, the north Hertfordshire area is known to have been extensively occupied with excavations and cropmark evidence for numerous settlements, field systems and barrows.

To the south of the site in Blackhorse Road, a series of Neolithic pits were found and dated to the later 3rd millennium BC. The Icknield Way which also lies to the south of the site is a prehistoric trackway through East Anglia; this would have been an important means of communication linking the Cambridge and Oxford areas. Excavations in 1963 (Moss-Eccardt 1988) on the line of the A1 (M) to the north-east of the site, located parallel V-shaped ditches and banks seven metres apart. This may be a cursus (SMR 7422-3) possibly over 500m long.

The Bronze Age (c 2,000–600 BC) is characterised by technological change, when copper and then bronze eventually replaced flint and stone as the main material for everyday tools. It is traditionally seen as a period of increasing social complexity and organised landscapes, possibly due to increasing population and pressure on available resources.

The site may lie within an area designated as a possible barrow cemetery, stretching between Norton and the railway line, Moss-Eccardt excavated a 17m diameter barrow in 1959-61 in the vicinity (1988; SMR 4765), which contained a biconical urn, suggesting a date of 1800–1600 BC. Another barrow has been recorded at the eastern end of Works Road to the south of the site (Ashworth 1997, in Thompson 2005). Other cropmarks are recorded in aerial photographs to the north-east of the site (Fenton and Langford 1993, SMR2425-6).

During the Iron Age (c 600 BC–AD 43), the climate deteriorated with colder weather and more rainfall. The period is characterised by expanding population, necessitating the utilisation of previously marginal land, reflected in the intensification of agricultural practices. Baldock, to the south-east, was an important settlement, probably due to its location at the crossing of natural routes like the Icknield Way. Excavations in Baldock have provided extensive details into the life of a large settlement (20ha) with cemetery (Stead and Rigby 1986). Surrounding Baldock, were several outlying settlements such as Blackhorse Farm to the north-east of site (Fenton 1994). Closer to site are the excavations at Blackhorse Road (Moss-Eccardt 1988, Burleigh,

Richmond, Went 1993) which located several small Iron Age enclosures although fieldwork in 1988 suggests a northern limit to this activity suggesting that the site lies in the periphery of this (Godwin 1988). Fieldwork directly adjacent to the site found scattered activity from the Iron Age and Roman including one feature within 10m of the site (Historic Environment Unit Design Brief 2009)

2.3 Roman

The importance of the area continued through to the Roman period, several small urban centres developed from Iron Age origins around larger towns such as Verulamium, (modern St Albans). The site is 2km north-west of Baldock which lies on the projected lines of two Roman Roads and expanded into a small Roman town during this period. The centre of activity lies around Walls Field and Clothall Common which has been extensively excavated (Stead and Rigby 1986, SAM27913). Due to a considerable number of religious 'or ritual finds' (Niblett 1995, 54) it has been suggested that Baldock may have been important as a religious focus (Thompson 2005).

Some ribbon development along the roads out of the settlement is likely, and a farmstead lay at Blackhorse Farm, 1.25km north-east of the site between the river Ivel and the Roman road (North Road) to Biggleswade (Fenton 1994, Thompson 2005). Many rich finds have been located in the surrounding area suggesting a relatively affluent area.

2.4 Saxon and medieval

Following the withdrawal of the Roman army from Britain early in the 5th century AD the country fell into an extended period of socio-economic decline. The Roman settlement system gradually disappeared and settlement became dispersed although the Roman roads and the Icknield Way probably continued to be used.

To the south of the site there is evidence from Blackhorse Road/ Green Lanes area (SMR1618) for a Saxon cemetery excavated in 1971 and found to contain nine inhumations of probable pre-Christian date. A seax, spearhead, pin and two knives accompanied the burials (Moss-Eccardt 1970). Subsequent excavation at Green Lane/ Kristiansand Way in the late 1980s revealed a Saxon and medieval settlement, composed of Grubenhaeuser and cellared buildings (Burleigh and Stevenson 2000). This may be the deserted settlement of Rodenhanger, mentioned in documents from 1007 referring to the reign of Ethelred II and in Domesday Book (Norton Community Archaeology Society). After the Domesday Survey there is no further known documentary mention of this settlement.

Norton, Willian and Letchworth villages are all mentioned in the Domesday Book, unlike Baldock. Excavations at St Nicholas School, Norton in 1995 and 1998 found evidence for occupation from the 10th–13th centuries (Fenton 1995) and Letchworth's church is dated from the 13th century. However there is evidence for the shrinkage of Norton village from the 13th century onwards. The site does not appear to have been occupied from this period.

2.5 Post-medieval

Little change occurred through this period on the site, with no known occupation in the immediate vicinity of the site. Historic maps show the site as undeveloped since 1880, possibly associated with Norton Hall to the north-west with footpaths running across the site. The development of Letchworth as the first Garden City from 1903 (Norton Community Archaeology Group) amalgamated the three villages of Letchworth, Norton and Willian and significantly changed the area although the site

remained on the far east of the development until recently. Trembaths Nursing Home was constructed from 1986 onwards (JPB 2008).

3 The evaluation

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and monitoring during the evaluation was carried out in accordance with the preceding *Method Statement* (MOL Archaeology, 2009), and the *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoLAS, 1994).

Two evaluation trenches were excavated within the footprint of the new building, Trench 1 was oriented north-west–south-east and Trench 2 oriented south-west–north-east.

The ground was broken out and cleared by contractors under MOL Archaeology supervision. Trenches were excavated by machine by the contractors, and monitored by a member of staff from MOL Archaeology.

The locations of evaluation trenches were recorded by MOL Archaeology offsetting from adjacent standing walls and plotted on to a survey of site investigation (Drg. No.G/IC355/100, Johnson, Poole & Bloomer Ltd 2008). This information was then plotted onto the OS grid.

A written and drawn record of all archaeological deposits encountered was made in accordance with the principles set out in the MOL Archaeology site recording manual (MoLAS, 1994). Levels were calculated by traverse from the survey provided by the client (Drg. No.G/IC355/100, Johnson, Poole & Bloomer Ltd 2008).

The site has produced: one trench location plan; four context records; one section drawings at 1:10; and seven photographs. In addition one small bag of finds was recovered from the site.

The site finds and records can be found under the site code LET-HE-TMB09 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the evaluation

For trench locations see Fig 2.

Fig 2 Areas of evaluation

| <i>Evaluation Trench 1</i> | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Location | Rear garden of Trembaths |
| Dimensions | 10.30m by 2m by 0.48m depth |
| Modern ground level | 88.92m OD in NW, 88.86m OD in SE |
| Base of subsoil | 88.66–88.6m OD |
| Depth of archaeological deposits seen | None |
| Level of base of deposits observed and/or base of trench | 88.54–88.38m OD |
| Natural observed | 88.58–88.44m OD |

Undisturbed natural ground was of glacial till deposits, consisting of mid-light yellow brown sandy silt with moderate sub angular gravels [4]. This was located at 88.54–

88.58m OD and contained frequent small tree roots. Overlying the natural was a subsoil of dark–mid grey brown sandy silt with occasional gravel and flint inclusions, averaging 0.26m deep, this in turn was overlain by topsoil and turf. No archaeological features or finds were located in this trench.

Fig 3 Trench 1, looking south

| <i>Evaluation Trench 2</i> | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Location | Rear garden of Trembaths |
| Dimensions | 10.20 by 2m by 0.46m max depth |
| Modern ground level | 88.94m OD in SW, 88.92m OD in NE |
| Base of subsoil | 88.65–88.60m OD |
| Depth of archaeological deposits seen | None |
| Level of base of deposits observed and/or base of trench | 88.51–88.46m OD |
| Natural observed | 88.54–88.52m OD |

Undisturbed natural ground was of glacial till deposits, consisting of mid-light yellow brown sandy silt with moderate sub angular gravels [4]. This was located at 88.52–88.54m OD. However, lightly disturbed soils consisting of natural glacial till with the addition of frequent chalk particles [2] were located in the central part of the trench; this was in turn disturbed by tree root activity [3] and a tree hole [1] in the southern limit of the trench. The tree hole was 1.65m long by 0.55m wide, with a diffuse border with the surrounding disturbed ground. Roots were observed to lie within the feature which was only 0.10m deep.

Overlying the natural was a subsoil of dark–mid grey brown sandy silt with occasional gravel and flint inclusions, averaging 0.24m deep, this in turn was overlain by topsoil and turf. No archaeological features were located in this trench, however small residual pieces of Roman pottery were located from the subsoil.

Fig 4 Trench 2, plan of tree hole [1]

Fig 5 Trench 2, section of tree hole [1]

3.3 Assessment of the evaluation

GLAAS guidelines (English Heritage, 1998) require an assessment of the success of the evaluation ‘in order to illustrate what level of confidence can be placed on the information which will provide the basis of the mitigation strategy’. In the case of this site the trenches excavated cover a good percentage of the area to be developed; they were excavated to natural ground and uncovered no horizontal archaeology or cut features, with only one natural feature investigated. This allows a confident assessment of the potential for archaeology on the site.

4 Archaeological potential

4.1 Realisation of original research aims

- *What is the nature and level of natural topography?*

Natural ground composed of glacial till lies between 88.58–88.44m OD.

- *What are the earliest/latest deposits identified?*

No archaeology was identified, with the exception of residual pottery from the topsoil.

- *What evidence is there for the continuation of the Iron Age?*

The pottery located was of Roman date.

4.2 General discussion of potential

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of ancient ground surfaces (horizontal archaeological stratification) or cut features on the site is low.

4.3 Significance

No archaeological features were located, only residual Roman pottery was recovered from the topsoil.

5 Proposed development impact and recommendations

The proposed redevelopment at Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1UA involves the construction of a new extension onto the existing nursing home. The evaluation has shown that no archaeological deposits appear to survive within the footprint of the new building. Although archaeology was located to the east of the site, this does not appear to continue further onto the site.

MOL Archaeology recommends that no further archaeological work is necessary within the footprint of the new building.

The decision on the appropriate archaeological response to the deposits revealed within Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1UA rests with the Local Planning Authority and their designated archaeological advisor.

A summary note on the evaluation and its findings will be published in Hertfordshire Archaeology and History within six months of the end of fieldwork.

6 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Alaway Construction Ltd for their assistance with the project.

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8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

OASIS ID: molas1-55074

Project details

| | |
|--|--|
| Project name | Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1UA |
| Short description of the project | Two evaluation trenches were excavated on the site within the rear garden of the existing nursing home. Only one natural feature was located on site consisting of the remains of a tree hole. Two residual pieces of Roman pottery were found in the subsoil. |
| Project dates | Start: 04-02-2009 End: 06-02-2009 |
| Previous/future work | No / No |
| Any associated project reference codes | LET-HE-TMB09 - Sitecode |
| Type of project | Field evaluation |
| Current Land use | Other 5 - Garden |
| Monument type | TREE HOLE Modern |
| Significant Finds | POTTERY Roman |
| Methods & techniques | 'Sample Trenches' |
| Development type | Rural commercial |
| Prompt | Planning condition |
| Position in the planning process | After full determination (eg. As a condition) |

Project location

Country England

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Site location | HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE LETCHWORTH Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth |
| Postcode | SG6 1UA |
| Study area | 2000.00 Square metres |
| Site coordinates | TL 22936 34101 51.9912964846 -0.209353456244 51 59 28 N 000 12 33 W Point |
| Height OD / Depth | Min: 88.54m Max: 88.58m |

Project creators

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Name of Organisation | MOL Archaeology |
| Project brief originator | Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body |
| Project design originator | MOL Archaeology |
| Project director/manager | Mark Beasley |
| Project supervisor | Sian Anthony |
| Name of sponsor/funding body | Alaway Construction Ltd |

Project archives

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Physical Archive recipient | North Herts Museum Service |
| Physical Archive ID | LET-HE-TMB09 |
| Digital Archive recipient | North Herts Museum Service |
| Digital Archive ID | LET-HE-TMB09 |
| Paper Archive | North Herts Museum Service |

recipient

Paper Archive ID LET-HE-TMB09

Project bibliography

1

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Publication type | Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript) |
| Title | Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire. An archaeological evaluation report |
| Author(s)/Editor(s) | Anthony, S. |
| Date | 2009 |
| Issuer or publisher | MOL Archaeology |
| Place of issue or publication | London |

| | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| Entered by | Sian Anthony (santhony@molas.org.uk) |
| Entered on | 9 February 2009 |

9 Historic Environment Record Summary Sheet

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Site name and address: Trembaths, Talbot Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1UA | | |
| County: Hertfordshire | | District: North Hertfordshire |
| Village/Town: Letchworth Garden City | | Parish: Letchworth Garden City |
| Planning application reference: 1/02803/08 | | |
| Client name, address, and tel. no.: Alaway Construction Ltd, Cornford House, Cornford Lane, Pembury, Tunbridge-Wells, Kent, TN2 4QS 01892 825650 | | |
| Nature of application: Extension of existing Nursing Home | | |
| Present land use: Garden | | |
| Size of application area: 250m ² | | Size of area investigated: 40m ² |
| NGR (to 8 figures): 522936 234101 | | |
| Site code (if applicable): LET-HE-TMB09 | | |
| Site director/Organization: Sian Anthony, MOL Archaeology | | |
| Type of work Evaluation | | |
| Date of work: | Start: 4th February 2009 | Finish: 6th February 2009 |
| Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: North Herts Museum Service | | |
| Related HER Nos: | | Periods represented: Roman |
| Relevant previous summaries/reports | | |
| <p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p>Two evaluation trenches were excavated on the site within the rear garden of the existing nursing home. Only one natural feature was located on site consisting of the remains of a tree hole. Two residual pieces of Roman pottery were found in the subsoil.</p> | | |
| Author of summary: Sian Anthony | | Date of summary: February 2009 |

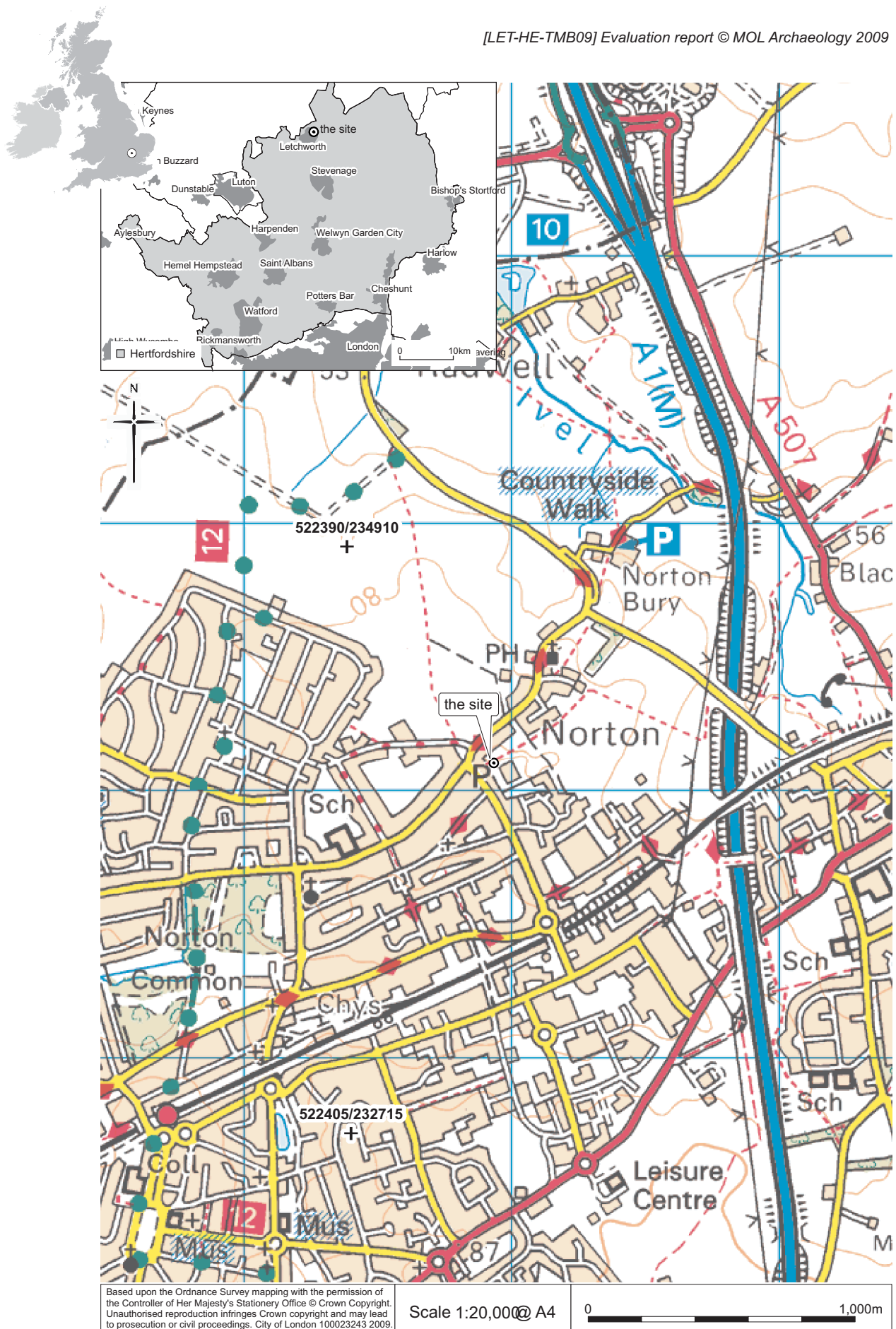


Fig 1 Site location

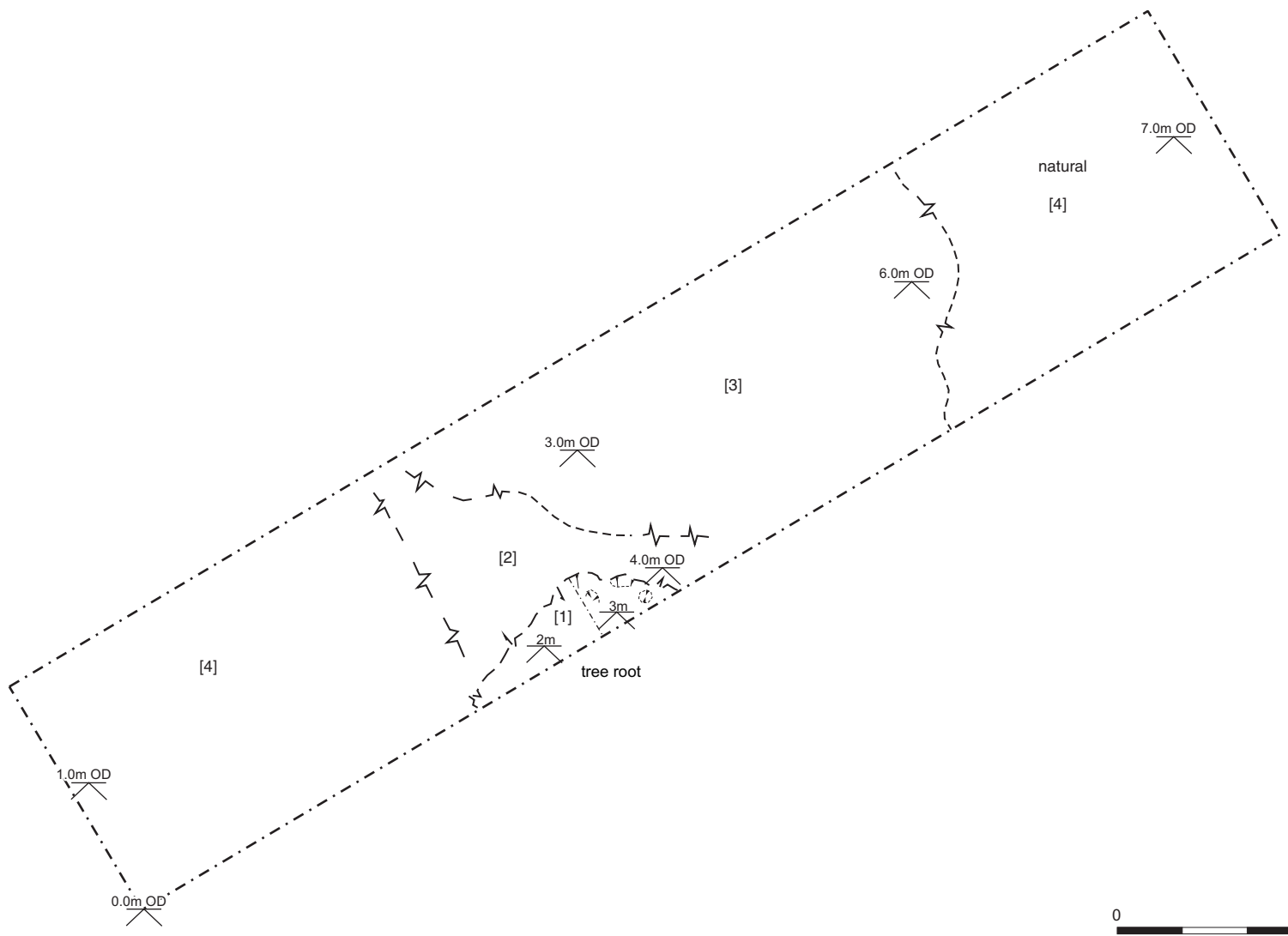
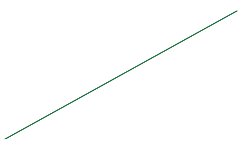
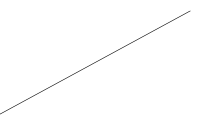


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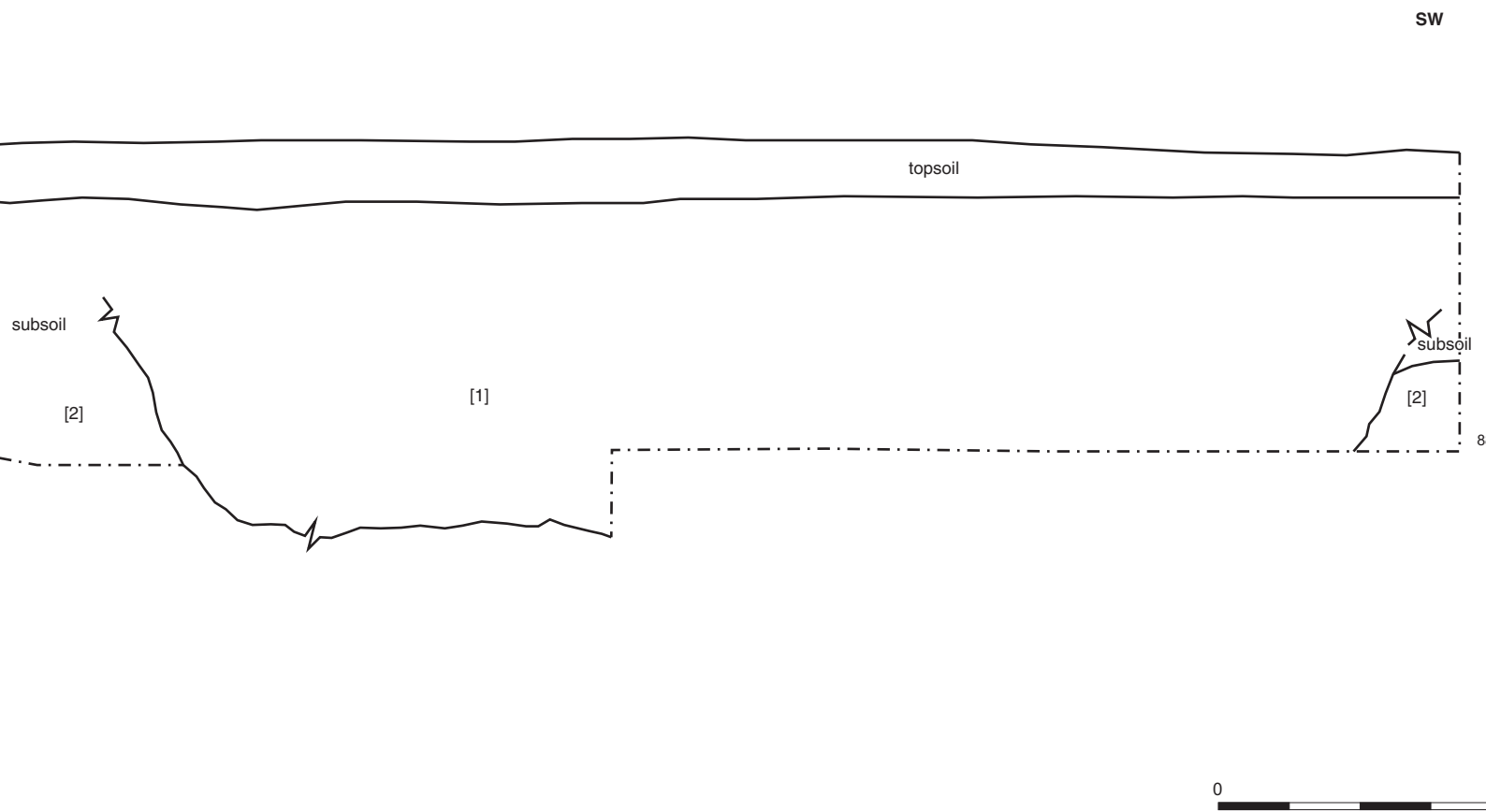
as of evaluation



Fig 3 Trench 1, looking south



ch 2, plan of tree hole [1]



ch 2, section of tree hole [1]