



Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological evaluation of land off
Station Road, Scraptoft
Leicestershire

September 2010



Northamptonshire Archaeology

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Northamptonshire
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Report 10/145

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QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Verified by	Simon Carlyle		
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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Scraptoft, Station Road	
Details	Geophysical survey had identified the remains of a medieval open field system and a number of anomalies of possible archaeological significance. Excavation demonstrated that the majority of these anomalies were caused by variations in the glacial clays and silts, although at the northern end of the site a large early/middle Saxon pit containing pottery and animal bone was encountered, and one of the curvilinear anomalies in the same trench was shown to be a small gully that may be of the same date. The medieval field system was heavily denuded and furrows were only clearly identified in one trench.	
Project type	Evaluation	
Site status	-	
Previous work	Geophysical survey (Fisher 2010), DBA (Dawson 2010)	
Current land use	Pasture	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Saxon pit and gully	
Significant finds	Saxon pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address	Station Road, Scraptoft	
Evaluation area	4ha	
OS Easting & Northing	4648 3054	
Height aOD	95-115m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	-	
Project design originator	NA	
Director/supervisor	Tim Upson-Smith (NA)	
Project manager	Simon Carlyle (NA)	
Sponsor or funding body	CgMs Consulting Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	31st August 2010	
End date	6th September	
ARCHIVES		
	Location	Content
Physical	Leicestershire Museums Accession no. X.A129.2010	Pottery, cbm and animal bone (1 box)
Paper		1 archive box of site documents
Digital		1 CD Digital Photographs, report, DXF Data
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	An archaeological evaluation of land off Station Road, Scraptoft, Leicestershire	
Serial title & volume	10/145	
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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND
OFF STATION ROAD, SCRAPTOFT
LEICESTERSHIRE
SEPTEMBER 2010**

X.A129.2010

Abstract

In September 2010, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on a plot of land to the east of Station Road, Scraptoft, Leicestershire. The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd, acting on behalf of Pegasus Planning, and was carried out prior to the development of the land for housing and a recreation area. Geophysical survey had identified the remains of a medieval open field system and a number of anomalies of possible archaeological significance. Excavation demonstrated that the majority of these anomalies were caused by variations in the glacial clays and silts, although at the northern end of the site a large early/middle Saxon pit containing pottery and animal bone was encountered, and one of the curvilinear anomalies in the same trench was shown to be a small gully that may be of the same date. The medieval field system was heavily denuded and furrows were only clearly identified in one trench.

1 INTRODUCTION

In September 2010, Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation of a plot of land off Station Road, Scraptoft, Leicestershire (site centred on NGR: SK 648 054; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd (CgMs), acting on behalf of Pegasus Planning, and was carried out prior to the development of the land for housing and a recreation area.

The trial excavation formed part of a programme of archaeological evaluation, which also included a desk-based assessment (Dawson 2010) and geophysical survey (Fisher 2010). The trenches were positioned to target possible archaeological features identified by the geophysical survey and apparent blank areas where only ridge and furrow cultivation strips were shown (Fig 2).

The main aim of the evaluation was to investigate the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey so that a suitable mitigation strategy could be designed and implemented if significant archaeological remains were encountered.

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- Determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of archaeological remains on site
- Place the remains within their cultural, historical and environmental setting.
- Assess the environmental and economic potential of the site through an examination of suitable deposits and faunal remains.

This report, which has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in English Heritage's procedural documents *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (1991) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (EH 2006), details the results of the trial trench evaluation.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The village of Scraptoft is situated in the suburbs on the eastern edge of Leicester, approximately 5.6km from the city centre. The proposed development site, which covers an area of c 4ha, comprises two fields of pasture on the eastern edge of the village, to the east of Station Road and south of Covert Lane. The historic core of the village lies c 200m to the north of the site. It is bordered to the south and west by housing, and arable fields to the north and east. At the time of fieldwork the pasture was being used to graze horses and was divided into small paddocks by electric fences.

Topographically, the site is located on the south-facing slope of a small tributary valley, with a small stream rising at the head of the valley to the east and flowing westwards towards the River Soar. The ground descends from c 115m aOD near Covert Lane to c 95m aOD at the southern edge of the site. The underlying geology consists of Jurassic rocks, predominately limestones, mudstones and siltstones of the Lias Group, overlain by glacial silts and clays in the southern and sand and gravel in the northern parts of the site (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex). The soils generally belong to the Ragdale (712g) Soil Association, comprising slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged fine loamy over clayey soils; however, on the lower slope the soils change to the Denchworth (712b) Soil Association, which are more clayey (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The archaeological and historical background to the site has been presented in detail in the desk-based assessment prepared by CgMs (Dawson 2010). This found no indication of any previous archaeological work having been carried out on the site, although a 3rd-century Roman pot was found in a garden in Station Road, close to its western edge (MLE7904). Cropmarks in the fields to the east indicate possible prehistoric or Roman enclosures (MLE2285) and fieldwalking in the same area has identified Roman settlement and a possible Saxon cemetery (MLE2280 and 2281). A Saxon metal-working hoard was recently found in the adjacent field, less than 50m from the eastern edge of the site (Richard Clark, pers comm).

The core of the historic village of Scraptoft, which developed around the parish church of All Saints, is situated less than 200m to the north of the site. The village is first mentioned in a document dating to the mid 11th century, later appearing in the Domesday survey as *Scrapentot*. Earthworks to the west of Nether Hall suggest that the village contracted in the 14th century, possibly due to the impact of the Black Death. The open field system surrounding the village was largely enclosed in the 17th century and map evidence indicates that it was largely used for pasture, although large tracts have now been reconverted to arable. The

development site has remained as pasture and appears not to have been ploughed, at least on a sustained basis, for some considerable time.

A number of large hollows at the north end of the site, near Covert Lane, are probably associated with sand and gravel extraction. The remains of a brick blockhouse near the centre of the site probably dates to the 1930s or early 1940s; the building is shown on an aerial photograph of the area, taken in 1945 (Cartwright 2002, 50).

3 METHODOLOGY

Thirteen trial trenches with a total length of 450 linear metres (c 900m²) were excavated (Fig 2). Trenches 1 to 6 and Trench 13 were located in the northern field (Field 2) and Trenches 7-12 in the southern field (Field 1). The trenches, which were between 30 and 50m long, were marked out using Leica System 1200 GPS and were positioned in accordance with the trench location plan approved by LCCHNET. The trenches were excavated using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. All overburden was stripped under archaeological supervision, with the topsoil and subsoil stacked separately and adjacent to the trenches. Mechanical excavation proceeded to the top of the archaeological deposits or to the natural substrate where no archaeology was encountered.

Archaeological excavation and recording followed the guidelines outlined in the NA *Archaeological Fieldwork Manual* (2003). Trenches containing archaeological remains were cleaned by hand, sufficient to define the features. Each feature or deposit was given a unique number consisting of the trench number and an individual context number (e.g. 402, Trench 4, context 2). The details of each context were recorded on *pro-forma* sheets. The trenches were planned (scale 1:50) and section drawings were made at an appropriate scale (1:10 or 1:20). Levels, which were related to Ordnance Datum, were taken on the trenches at appropriate points, on section datum and on all major features. Trench locations were related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A photographic record was made of the excavation, using both 35mm colour transparency and black and white negative films, supplemented by digital images.

Artefacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (UKIC 1998). The spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained. A 40 litre soil sample was taken from the Saxon pit in Trench 1 to assess the potential for environmental analysis. The archive will be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA 1993).

All works were carried out in accordance with the specification prepared by NA (Carlyle 2010), and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (1985, revised 2009) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1994, revised 2008). All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

Leicestershire Museums have been contacted and an accession number has been obtained (X.A129.2010). The project was monitored by Richard Clark, Senior Archaeologist of the Leicestershire County Council Historical and Natural Environment Team (LCCHNET), and managed for CgMs by Mike Dawson.

4 THE EVALUATION RESULTS

4.1 General stratigraphy

The natural substrate, which occurred at an average depth of c 0.55m below ground level, was of glacial origin and varied considerably across the site. Near the top of the slope it comprised fine-coarse calcareous gravel in a sandy matrix; a number of large pits close to Covert Lane indicate possible quarrying in the past. Elsewhere it ranged between mid brownish-orange silty clay to yellow or bluish-grey clay, with varying inclusions of pebbles. The subsoil, which was mid brown sandy silt, was approximately 0.25m thick, although it was up to 0.50m thick where it had filled natural hollows or had accumulated at the base of the slope (colluvium). The topsoil was approximately 0.25m thick and comprised dark grey organic sandy silt with occasional small pebbles. The topsoil appears to have been out of cultivation for a considerable period as the majority of the pebbles had dropped out of the topsoil horizon and formed a distinct layer at its base.

4.2 Trench 1

Situated near the top of the slope in Field 2, Trench 1 targeted a large, indistinct discrete and a curvilinear geophysical anomaly (Fig 2). The former was a large pit, 104, which was 3.0m wide and approximately 0.7m deep (Fig 3, Section 1). From the geophysical survey plot, the pit appears to measure c 6-8m long from north to south. The basal fill, 106, was up to 0.34m thick and comprised gravelly mid brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks. Animal bone, including part of a cattle skull, fragments of possible Roman brick and tile, and a sherd of early/middle Saxon pottery were recovered from this deposit, and at its base there was a large number of rounded sandstone cobbles, measuring up to 400mm. The upper fill, 105, which appears to be backfill, was of a similar thickness and comprised dark, orangey-brown sandy clay with frequent pebbles. Excavation of the feature was hampered by the rapid ingress of groundwater.

Approximately 7m to the west of the pit there was a slightly curvilinear gully, 107, with a V-shaped profile, measuring 0.58m wide by 0.44m deep (Fig 3, Section 2). It was filled with mid greyish-brown sandy silt, 108, with moderate pebbles. The feature is undated but was sealed by the subsoil, suggesting that it may be broadly contemporary with the pit.

4.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 30m long and was positioned to investigate a pattern of linear anomalies, interpreted as furrows, shown on the geophysical survey plot. Excavation confirmed the presence of four furrows, which were aligned north to south, measured c 2.5m wide and were spaced c 5m apart. One of the furrows was excavated and was shown to be no more than 0.09m deep.

4.4 Trench 13

During the monitoring meeting and at the request of LCCHNET, it was decided to shorten two of the trenches that had yet to be opened and open a new 25m long trench to the north of Trench 1, where evidence had been found for Saxon activity. There were no archaeological remains in the new trench, other than an undated post-hole, 1304 (Fig 3, Section 4). This had a diameter of 0.32m, a depth of 0.18m and had vertical sides and a flat base. It was filled with dark grey sandy silt and calcareous pebbles (1305).

4.5 Trenches 3-12

No archaeological remains were encountered in Trenches 3-12, even in areas where furrows were indicated by the geophysical survey. The remains of the medieval field system were so denuded that they were indiscernible. Two modern features were encountered: a land drain passing through Trenches 5 and 6 and the end of a galvanised iron pipe at the northern end of Trench 6. An animal burrow containing 18th/19th-century pottery was identified near the centre of Trench 5.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 Saxon pottery

A single bodysherd of hand-made pottery, weighing 19.2g, was recovered from pit 104. The sherd, which has a black fabric with few inclusions, is undecorated although the surface has random striations indicating that it had been wiped, probably with grass, prior to firing. There are no indications as to the form of the vessel. The sherd dates to the early/middle Saxon period (Paul Blinkhorn pers comm).

5.2 Ceramic building material by Pat Chapman

There are three small sherds from deposit 106, weighing 142g, comprising a fragment from the side of a brick, possibly 40mm thick (1½ inches), made from a hard fine sandy red-brown fabric; a sherd of slightly curved tile c 15mm thick made hard sandy red-brown clay with occasional small gravel, and a surface fragment, probably from a tile. The curved tile sherd could be from a Roman *imbrex* roof tile; the remaining tile and brick could date from the Roman to the late 18th to early

19th centuries, although the presence of a sherd of Saxon pottery in the same pit suggests that all of the material is probably Roman in date.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE by Karen Deighton

6.1 Animal bone

A total of 1.502kg of animal bone was collected from the lower fill (106) of an early/middle Saxon pit, 104. This material was assessed to determine the level of preservation and the taxa present.

Fragments of animal bone that could be identified to taxa comprised: a cattle frontal bone with the base of the horn cores attached; a horse molar; and several fragments of large ungulate rib. The bone was well-preserved, the degree of fragmentation and surface abrasion was moderate and there was no evidence for canid gnawing, butchery or burning. Due to the size of the assemblage it is impossible to make any statements about the diet or animal economy of the site.

6.2 Plant macrofossils

A 40 litre sample was collected from the lower fill (106) of an early/middle Saxon pit, 104, to assess the presence, nature and level of preservation of ecofacts.

The sample was processed using a modified siraf tank fitted with a 250µm mesh and flot sieve. The resulting flots were dried and examined under a microscope (x10 magnification) and the residues were sorted and scanned.

Ten fragments of charcoal were recovered from the sample, although they were heavily fragmented and abraded, preventing further identification.

7 DISCUSSION

The trial trench evaluation broadly supported the results of the geophysical survey, although several of the weaker anomalies that were interpreted as possible archaeological features were shown to relate to variations in the natural geology, which was extremely changeable across the site.

The only significant archaeological remains were encountered in Trench 1, where there was a large pit containing animal bone, large cobbles, early/middle Saxon pottery and fragments of probable Roman building material. A small, slightly curvilinear gully to the west of the pit may be contemporary as both features were sealed by the subsoil, which is a mineralised medieval ploughsoil. Finds of other Saxon material in the vicinity, including evidence for a possible cemetery to the east of the site, suggest settlement in the area in the early/middle Saxon period, although the location of the focus of settlement has yet to be determined.

In the medieval period the site formed part of an open field system, which was eventually enclosed and converted to pasture, possibly in the 17th century. The almost stone-free topsoil suggests that the fields have not been ploughed on a regular basis for many years, although the absence of ridge and furrow earthworks, which are usually evident in fields that have been put under pasture at an early date, suggests that the land has been improved or disturbed at some time in the past, probably in the first half of the 20th century. An aerial photograph of the area, taken in 1945, shows that the southern field was under cultivation during the war years (Cartwright 2002, 50).

The remains of a brick and concrete building near the centre of the site (Fig 4) are those of a small blockhouse that was built around the time of the Second World War.

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Maps

SSEW 1983 *Soils of Eastern England*, Sheet 4, Soil Survey of England and Wales,
1:250,000

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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF FEATURES

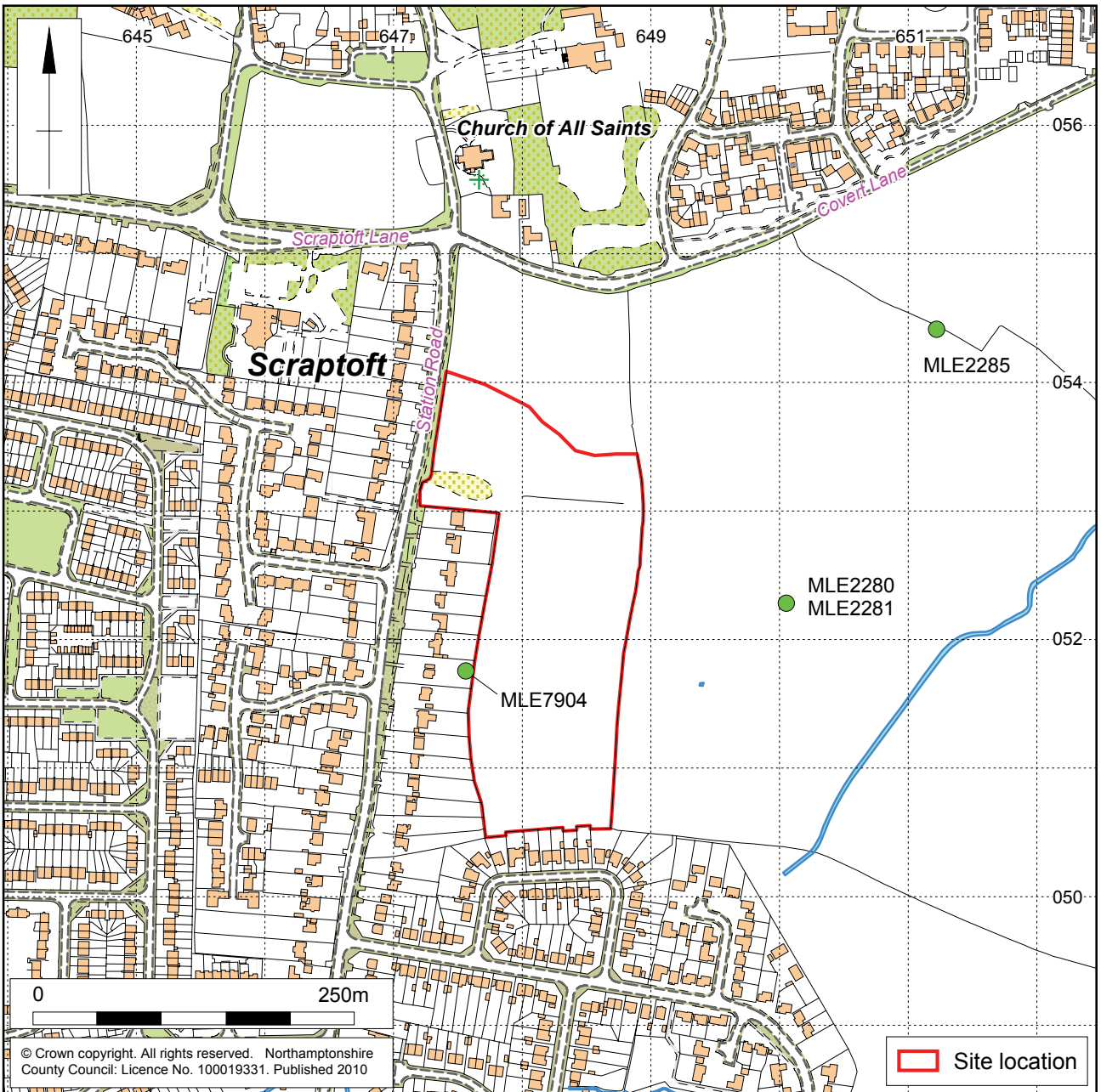
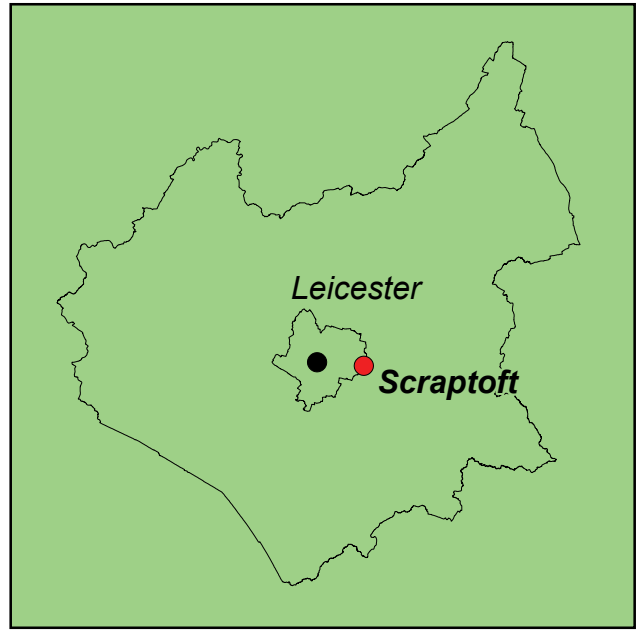
Key: B bone; P pottery

Trench no.	Context no.	Feature type	Date of feature	Findings	Depth ¹ (m)
1	101	Topsoil	-	-	0.51-0.74
	102	Subsoil	-	-	
	103	Natural	-	-	
	105	Pit	Saxon	-	
	106			P B	
	[104]				
108	Gully	Saxon?	-		
[107]					
2	201	Topsoil	-	-	0.44
	202	Subsoil	-	-	
	203	Natural	-	-	
	204	Furrow	Medieval	-	
	[205]				
	206	Furrow	Medieval	-	
	[207]				
208	Furrow	Medieval	-		
[209]					
210	Furrow	Medieval	-		
[211]					
3	301	Topsoil	-	-	0.50-0.68
	302	Subsoil	-	-	
	303	Natural	-	-	
4	401	Topsoil	-	-	0.55
	402	Subsoil	-	-	
	403	Natural	-	-	
5	501	Topsoil	-	-	0.59
	502	Subsoil	-	-	
	503	Natural	-	-	
6	601	Topsoil	-	-	0.50-0.70
	602	Subsoil	-	-	
	603	Natural	-	-	
7	701	Topsoil	-	-	0.46
	702	Subsoil	-	-	
	703	Natural	-	-	
8	801	Topsoil	-	-	0.55
	802	Subsoil	-	-	
	803	Natural	-	-	
9	901	Topsoil	-	-	0.40-0.55
	902	Subsoil	-	-	
	903	Natural	-	-	
10	1001	Topsoil	-	-	0.45
	1002	Subsoil	-	-	
	1003	Natural	-	-	
11	1101	Topsoil	-	-	0.51
	1102	Subsoil	-	-	

SCRAPTOFT, STATION ROAD

Trench no.	Context no.	Feature type	Date of feature	Finds	Depth ¹ (m)
	1103	Natural	-	-	
12	1201	Topsoil	-	-	0.49
	1202	Subsoil	-	-	
	1203	Natural	-	-	
13	1301	Topsoil	-	-	0.40
	1302	Subsoil	-	-	
	1303	Natural	-	-	
	1305 [1304]	Posthole	Undated	-	

¹ Average depth of archaeological features, or natural substrate where no archaeology present, below ground level



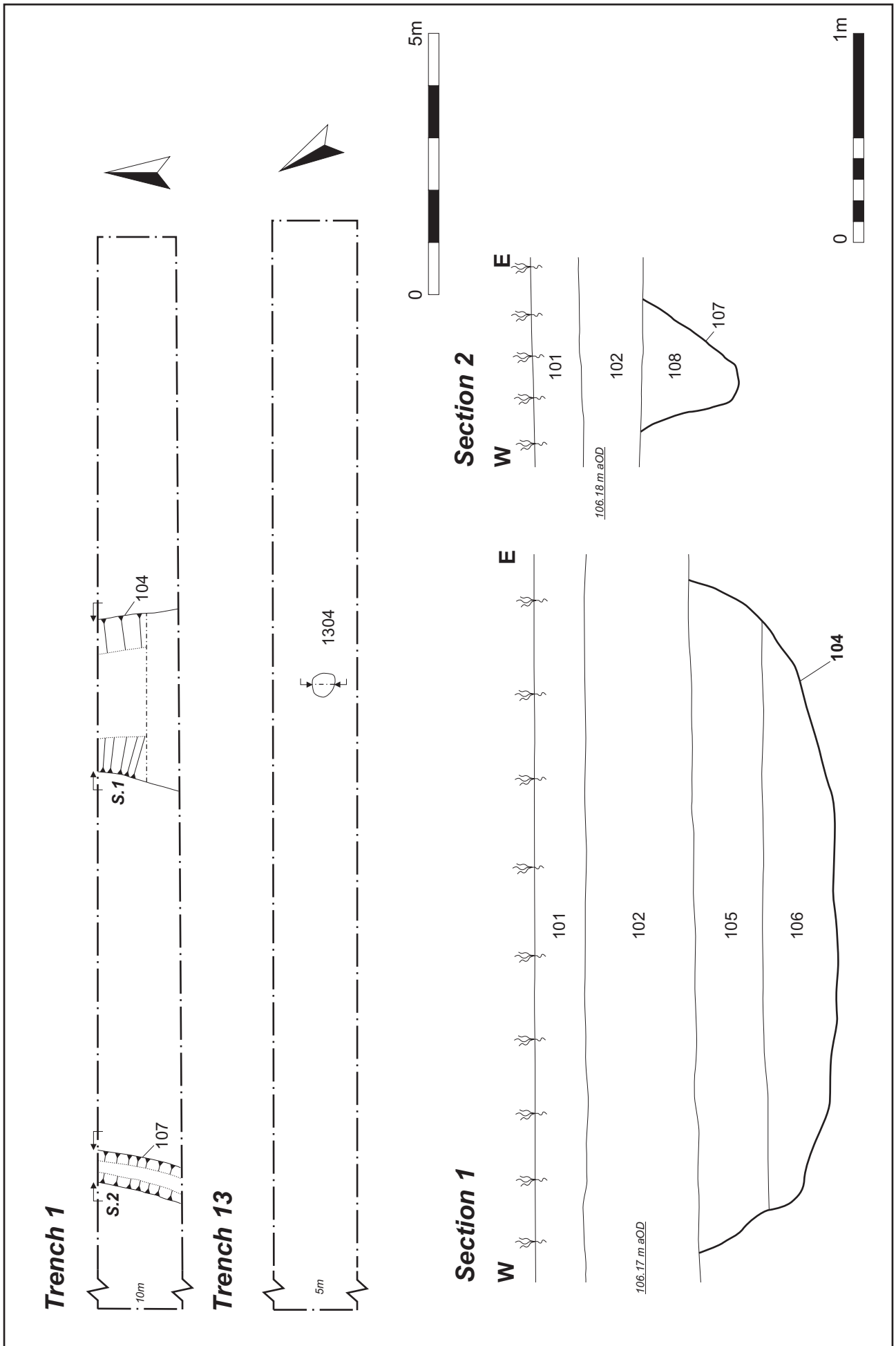
Scale 1:5000

Site location and Historic Environment Record (HER) sites Fig 1



Scale 1:2500

Trench locations and geophysical survey results Fig 2



Scale, Plans 1:100, Sections 1:25

Trenches 1 and 13, plans and sections Fig 3



Fig 4: Remains of brick and concrete building, dating to the 1930s/early 1940s



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