

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Trial trenching on
land at the Star Service Station
Great North Road (A1), Sandy,
Bedfordshire



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July 2007

Report 07/112

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SANDY, STAR SERVICE STATION

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QUALITY CONTROL

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SANDY, STAR SERVICE STATION

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Sandy, Star Service Station	
Short description (250 words maximum)	<i>Trial trenching was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land at the Star Service Station, Sandy, Bedfordshire. Two trenches totalling 38m² were excavated. Post-medieval layers possibly associated with the former Girtford House were identified. These remains were truncated by the 1950s petrol station and roadside café that subsequently occupied the site.</i>	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Trial trenching	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	Commercial development	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	Unknown	
Current Land use	Disused Service Station	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	post-medieval soils	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Bedfordshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Sandy, Star Service Station	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	Approx 0.4ha	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. numbers)	5164 2490	
Height OD	23m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Heritage and Environment Section	
Project Design originator	Bedfordshire County Council	
Director/Supervisor	Stephen Morris	
Project Manager	Mark Holmes	
Sponsor or funding body	Azure Property LLP	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	9 th July 2007	
End date	10 th July 2007	
ARCHIVES		
	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		Pottery, brick, tile, mortar, shell 1b/w film, 1colour film
Paper		1 file, 2 plan/section sheet
Digital		Photo's
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Trial Trenching on land at the Star Service Station, Great North Road(A1), Sandy, Bedfordshire July 2007	
Serial title & volume	REPORT 07/122	
Author(s)	Stephen Morris	
Page numbers	7	
Date	2707/07	

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**TRIAL TRENCHING ON
LAND AT THE STAR SERVICE STATION,
GREAT NORTH ROAD (A1), SANDY, BEDFORDSHIRE
JULY 2007**

Abstract

Trial trenching was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land at the Star Service Station, Sandy, Bedfordshire. Two trenches totalling 38m² were excavated. Post-medieval layers possibly associated with the former Girtford House were identified. These remains were truncated by the 1950s petrol station and roadside café that subsequently occupied the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Rapleys Commercial Property and Planning Consultants to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at the disused Star Service Station, Sandy, Bedfordshire prior to the development of a new service station at the site (NGR SK 164 490, Fig 1).

The site occupies an area of some 0.4ha and is situated on the western outskirts of Sandy town centre. It is bounded by the Great North Road (A1) to the east and by the A6803 road to the south. The River Ivel flows close to the western side of the development area. The site is set on generally level ground at an average height of 23m above Ordnance Datum. The geology of the area is predominantly river terrace sand and gravels, over Ampthill and Oxford clays (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>). The soils were of the Efford 1 (571s) association which is confined to the flood plain of the River Ivel (SSEW 1984).

The fieldwork was carried out between 9 July and 10 July 2007 in accordance with a specification agreed with Bedfordshire County Council (NA 2007). The objectives of the evaluation were set out in a brief issued by Bedfordshire County Council's Heritage and Environment Section and dated 23 February 2007 (BCC 2007). They comprised:

- Establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the site
- Recovering artefacts to assist in the development of a type series within the region
- Recovering palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environment conditions

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the excavation there was no known evidence of archaeological activity from the development site. However, archaeological sites and find spots are known in the immediate vicinity and listed in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment record (HER).

Undated crop marks have been mapped to the south and west of the site (HER 625; 15093; 15094, 17125). The closest of these (HER 17125) is located *c* 600m to the west.

A Roman road is known to have passed across the Ivel Valley from west to east, in a course from Bedford to Sandy. The Bedfordshire HER identifies two possible routes (HER 738 and 11984). In both cases these routes pass within *c*250m south of the site. An Iron Age coin (HER 439) and a Roman coin (HER 14815) were found *c*200m south-west of the site whilst Roman pottery was found *c* 450m to the north (HER 11310).

The development site was considered to have particular potential for medieval remains, since it lies within the perimeter of the medieval settlement of Girtford (HER 17130).

Listed buildings are recorded nearby that include the local public house, located *c*200m to the north-east (HER 16453) and a building at Bridge Farm, *c*300m to the west (HER 12614). Both are of likely post-medieval origin. Three bridges have also been recorded along the Bedford Road as being of historical interest. Two of these lie *c*180-200m west of the site, one of which is Girtford Bridge, where the A603 crosses the River Ivel (HER 15168; 2044). The third bridge is located adjacent to the site on its north-west side where the Bedford Road crosses a small watercourse (HER 15167).

3 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation comprised the excavation of two trial trenches totalling 38m² (Fig 2). The trenches were located primarily within the footprint of the new-build. Trench 1 was positioned in the area of the proposed sales building on the south side of the site whilst Trench 2 was located in the north-east corner of the site, where the new fuel storage tanks would be established.

Machine-excavation removed the modern overburden consisting of a tarmac/concrete surface and a make-up/levelling layer of modern building debris. In addition homogeneous soils were removed by machine using a flat bladed ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. The

trench was excavated to the level of the natural sub-soil or the exposure of archaeological deposits, at which point hand-excavation was undertaken.

The trenches were cleaned by hand and the archaeological deposits were fully recorded by written, drawn and photographic records. Sections and plans were drawn at appropriate scales and levelled to Ordnance Datum. The location of the trenches was accurately surveyed and related to the Ordnance Survey grid by hand-measured survey.

4 THE TRIAL TRENCHING RESULTS

General stratigraphic sequence

In both trenches the natural geology comprised river terrace gravels. There were no surviving archaeological features cut into these gravels but post-medieval layers were deposited immediately above. Twentieth-century activity, associated with the former garages and service areas that occupied the site, cut through and truncated these deposits. Many of the layers were stained with associated hydrocarbon contamination. The modern surface comprised 0.30m of reinforced concrete and tarmac.

4.1 Trench 1 (Fig 3, Section 1; Plate 1)

Natural geology

In Trench 1 the natural was found at a depth of between 1.40m and 1.62m below modern ground surface. It comprised dark yellowish brown, very sandy gravel that was contaminated with greenish grey-black hydrocarbons.

Post-medieval deposits

The natural was overlaid by a dark orange brown very sandy loam, up to 0.45m deep, with occasional gravel and small pebble inclusion (102). It was a level layer that extended 2.30m from the south-east end of the trench. A single sherd of 17th-century glazed earthen-ware pottery was recovered from the layer along with post-medieval brick and tile fragments and a few fragments of coal and shell. The layer was cut by feature [114].

Feature [114] comprised a shallow east –west orientated scoop. Only its south east side was present, its north-west side having been truncated by modern construction trench [115]. It was filled by a mixed yellow/orange sand (103), possibly representing a deliberate in-filling in order to create a level surface. The fill contained no finds.

Layer (106) overlaid sand deposit (103). It comprised of a mixed orange brown and dark yellowish brown very sandy/gritty loam, with the few gravel and small pebble inclusions. It was approximately 4m wide, truncated on its north-west side by construction trench [115]. This layer may have been introduced as a make-up and levelling layer and contained post-medieval brick and tile fragments.

Twentieth-century construction

A brick structure, containing a large cylindrical steel oil tank/drum cut through the underlying deposits. The structure comprised two brick wall foundations (104) and (113) set in a vertically sided, 1m deep construction trench [115]. Northern wall [104] survived to 1.2m high and 0.35m wide whilst southern wall [113] was truncated and disturbed by cut [116]. The oil tank was concreted into position between them and infilled with a light grey sandy loam containing large amounts of tile and mortar fragments, and occasional brick and stone (105). The construction cut for the walls was backfilled with a mixed dark yellowish brown to grey brown very sandy gritty loam on its southern side (110) and a light grey sandy loam with frequent tile and mortar fragments on its northern side (112). The feature was aligned approximately north-east to the south-west and appeared to extend beyond the north-west end of the trench. It probably represents part of the garage which occupied the site in the 1950s.

The brick structure appears to have been modified by the being cut through by pit [116]. This was filled with a light grey sandy loam containing frequent building debris (111) and overlaid by a brick surface [107]. This comprised a single layer of close packed unmortared bricks 0.10m thick. It abutted wall [104] and extended 3m to the south-west.

Modern surface

The modern surface make-up sealed all earlier layers. Layer (108) was an extensive covering of reinforced concrete up to 0.20m thick which was overlaid by 0.10m of tarmac (109).

4.2 Trench 2

Natural geology

The natural geology was yellowish brown sand and gravel, contaminated with green/grey to black hydrocarbons (201). It was located *c*1.40m below the modern ground surface. As in Trench 1 there were no features cutting through it but it was sealed by post-medieval layers.

Post-medieval deposits

Overlying the natural was an orange brown to yellowish brown, very sandy loam, with occasional gravel, small pebbles and charcoal flecks (202). It was up to 0.50m deep and was discoloured by hydrocarbon contamination. It had a very slight slope to the north-west and extended the length of the trench. This layer contained three sherds of 17th to 18th-century glazed earthen-ware pottery and post-medieval brick and tile fragments. It probably equates to layer (102) in Trench 1.

Layer (202) was overlaid by layer (203) which comprised yellowish brown to dark yellowish brown sandy/gritty loam, 0.40m-0.50m deep, with narrow bands and lenses of gravel and small pebbles. Post-medieval brick and tile was recovered from the deposit. The layer was truncated at south-east end of the trench by a modern concrete filled feature. Overlying layer 203 was layer (204) which comprised a dark orange brown very sandy loam, with small yellow bands and lenses of gravel. Rather than a separate layer (204) may simply represent a variation or a separate dumping episode. Both layers were probably part of a make-up and levelling layer, equating to layer (106) in Trench 1.

Twentieth-century deposits

Sealing both layers (203) and (204) was a mixed, friable layer of dark grey brown sandy gritty loam, up to 0.15m thick, containing modern building debris of brick, tile and glass (205). The surface of this layer had a deposit of charcoal and burnt wood. This layer had the appearance of 'trample' with the indication of bonfire remains on the surface.

Modern surface

Overlying layer (205) was a base make-up layer of hard core stone and brick debris 0.20m thick (206). The base make-up layer supported tarmac surface (207), which was up to 0.15m thick.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Iain Soden

A total of four sherds of pottery were recovered from the site, all non-diagnostic body sherds.

From Trench 1 (102) comes a single sherd of a tan-glazed redware, glazed both inside and out, probably of the 17th or 18th century. The curve of the body suggests it may be from a jug, possibly from the Bedfordshire type PO2.

From Trench 2 (202), probably equating to (102), derives three very small sherds (2g) of a similar coarse redware, black/brown glazed on the interior. These are very abraded but may be attributable to the Bedfordshire type PO3, of a similar date to that mentioned above.

These sherds have no value other than to note that the soil may have been formed as early as the 17th century but the abrasion of the sherds means that they may have been exposed for many decades before the soil was buried, perhaps into the 20th century.

5.2 **Building material** by Pat Chapman

Brick

There was a small collection of 16 brick fragments, weighing 363g. The bricks would appear to be handmade, the earliest probably being the slightly coarse pale brown fragment with creamy yellow streaks from context (102). From contexts (106) and (203) were four pale brown fragments and a reddish brown fragment with frequent calcareous inclusions. Six small fragments of softer orange brick came from (205). Finally, from context (204) was a fragment of hard coarse sandy orange brown with occasional grog up to 15mm and occasional fine crushed shell, with an 8mm layer of mortar, the same as a fragment from (202). With this were two fragments of brick overfired to dark red and purple, this was often done deliberately to provide different coloured bricks for patterns such as the diamond or diaper shape on walls of higher status houses. These fragments would suggest a date between the 14th to 18th centuries.

Roof tile

These twelve fragments weighed 280g. All but one of these fragments is 12mm thick. One fragment from context (202) has part of a peghole surviving and, like the fragment from context (102) is made from a coarse sandy dark red fabric with flint and fine crushed inclusions. Other fragments from context (202) are in a coarse sandy orange fabric with shell and ironstone inclusions. Two tile fragments from context (205) are in a fine hard yellow fabric, one with grog inclusions, the other paler with pink streaks. A pale red brown fragment from (205) has a curve, suggesting that it might be part of a ridge tile. A fragment from context (106) made in a fine orange fabric may be part of a pantile. Where the underside survived with these tile fragments it was sandy from the mould or drying area. The different tile colours suggest possible roof decoration. As yellow bricks started to appear in the 18th century, it is likely that the yellow tiles are of the same date or later. The other tile fragments would be no later than the 19th century and could be a lot earlier, as they did not change over a long period of time.

6 CONCLUSION

The lack of finds and features pre-dating the 17th to 18th centuries would suggest that the landscape may have been cleared and levelled at some time in the past, possibly during the construction of Girtford House that stood on the site until the early 20th century.

The earliest deposits (102) and (202) appeared to constitute the only significant archaeology at the site. They contained heavily abraded pottery from the 17th to 18th centuries and may be associated with the former Girtford House, possibly representing contemporary garden soils or construction make-up layers. If the two layers equate with each other then they may cover a relatively extensive area of the site.

The later layers (106), (203) and (204) appeared mixed and contained frequent brick and tile, possibly suggesting they represent make-up layers again either contemporary with Girtford House or possibly relating to its demolition. However, the absence of modern finds from these layers tends not to support this latter theory.

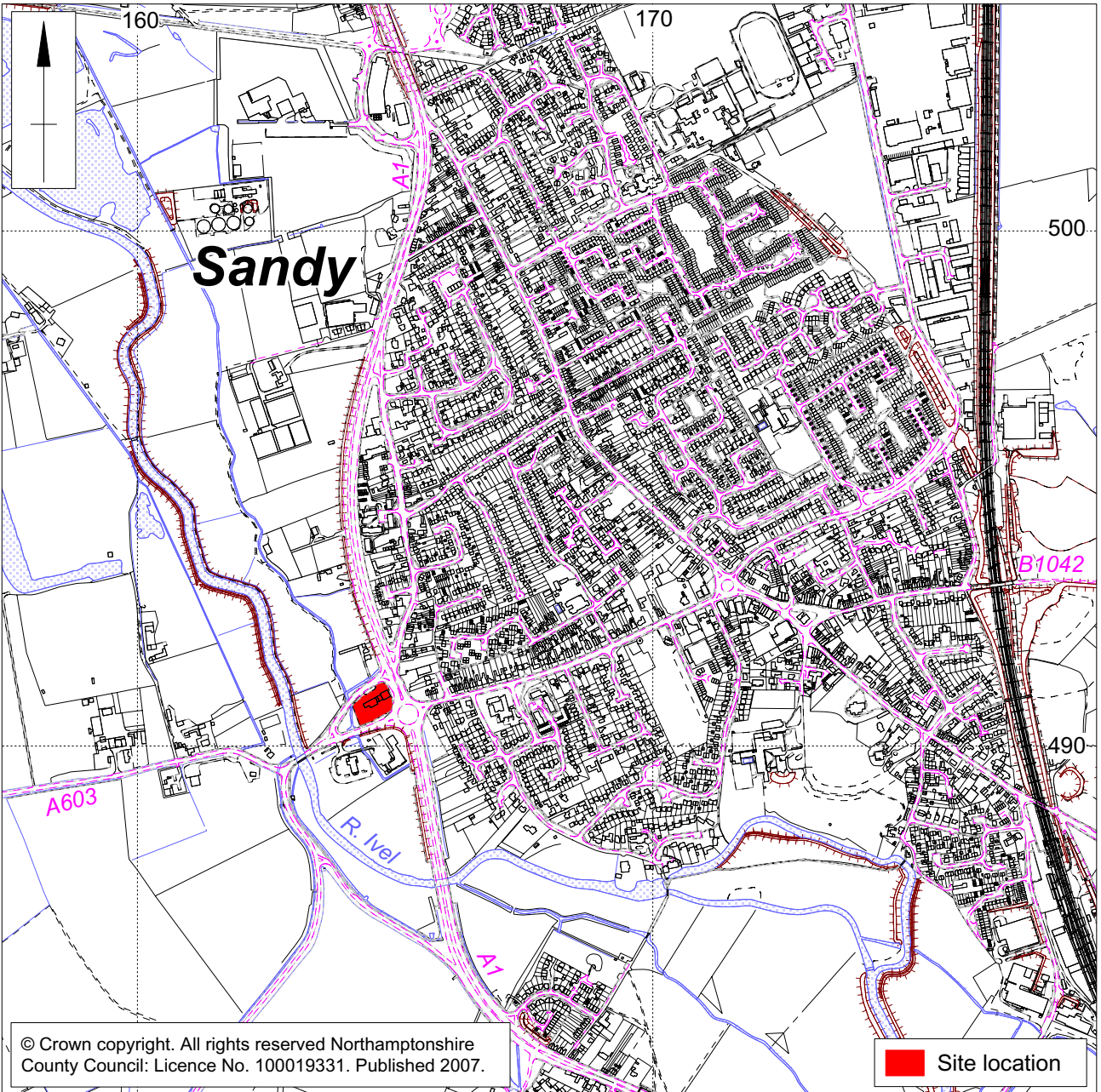
The construction trench, the brick wall foundations, the steel oil tank and the related backfills all relate to the construction of a petrol station and roadside café, after the demolition of Girtford House in the mid 1950s (http://www.sandy_bedfordshire.co.uk/history_of_sandy_Bedfordshire_uk8.htm). These services were subsequently replaced by the Texaco Star Service Station and Little Chef that currently stand at the site and which are to be replaced by the proposed development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BCC 2007 *Brief for an archaeological field evaluation of land at Texaco, Great North Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire*, Bedfordshire County Council

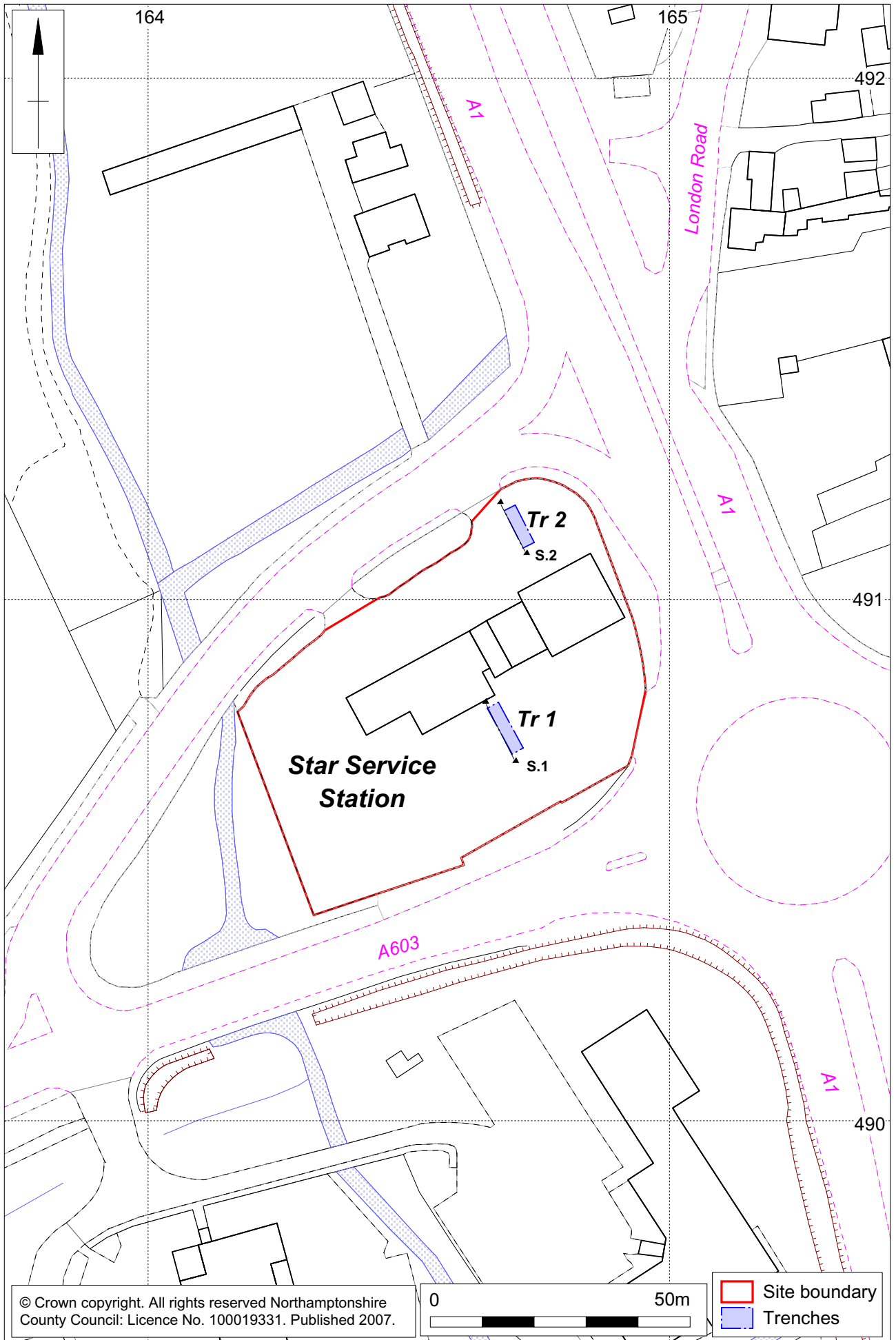
SSEW 1984 *Soils of England and Wales Sheet 3, Midland and Eastern England*, Ordnance Survey, Southampton

NA 2007 *The Star Service Station, Great North Road, Sandy Bedfordshire, Project Design For Archaeological Evaluation*, Northamptonshire Archaeology



Scale 1:12,500

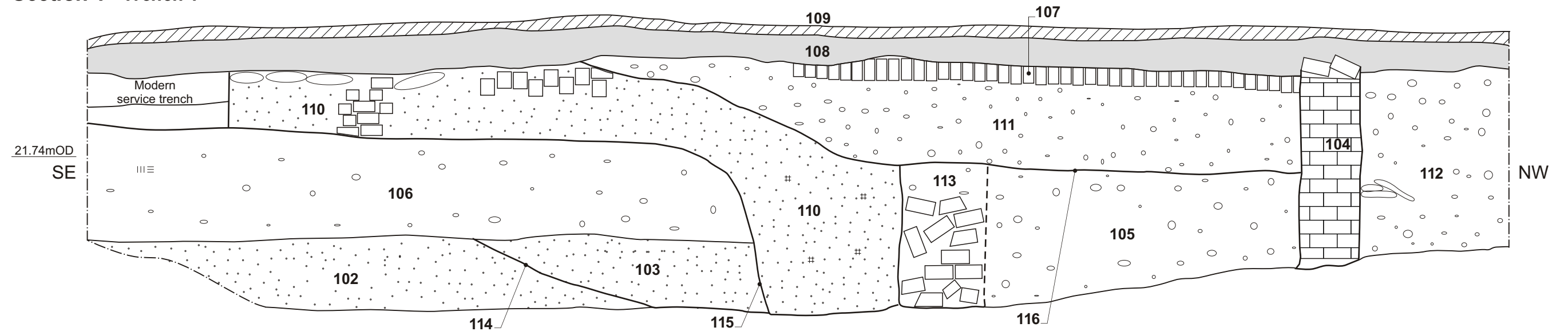
Site location Fig 1



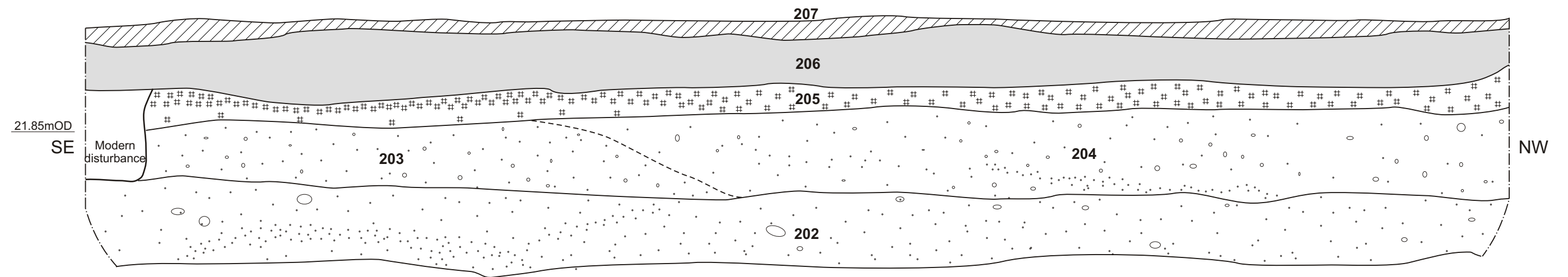
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
Trench location Fig 2

Section 1 - Trench 1



Section 2 - Trench 2



-  Tarmac
-  Concrete
-  Clay
-  Charcoal



Sections of Trenches 1 and 2 Fig 3



Plate 1: Trench 1, south-west section facing south.



Plate 2: Trench 2, south-west section facing south.