



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Former Post Sorting Office
Newport Pagnell,
Buckinghamshire
Trial Trench Evaluation

April 2008



Adrian Burrow

May 2008

Report 08/076

Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park

Northampton NN4 8BE

t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822

e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk

w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk



STAFF

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Project Manager | Tony Walsh BA |
| Text | Adrian Burrow MA |
| Fieldwork | Adrian Burrow Adrian Adams Fanny Martin MSc |
| post-medieval pottery | Iain Soden BA |
| Animal bone | Karen Deighton MSc |
| Ceramic Building Material | Pat Chapman BA CMS AIFA |
| Environmental samples | Wallis Lord-Hart MSc |
| Illustrations | Jacqueline Harding BA HND |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Town | Milton Keynes |
| Parish | Newport Pagnell |
| Address | The former Post Sorting Office, High Street, Newport Pagnell |
| Grid Reference | SP 8760 4375 |
| Size of Property | 0.0155 ha |
| Landuse | disused car park |
| Planning Application Number | AC 3153/D1 |
| Client | Old Ginger Developments Ltd |
| Date of commencement | 21/04/08 |
| Date of completion | 24/04/08 |

QUALITY CONTROL

| | Print name | Signed | Date |
|-------------|---------------|--------|------|
| Checked by | Iain Soden | | |
| Verified by | T Walsh | | |
| Approved by | Bill Boismier | | |

OASIS REPORT FORM

| PROJECT DETAILS | | |
|---|---|--|
| Project name | Former Post Sorting Office, Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire | |
| <p>An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in April 2008 on land proposed for residential development on the site of the former Post Sorting Office in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire.</p> <p>Two trenches were excavated, which revealed two undated postholes and a possible rubbish pit, garden soils, made ground, and a nineteenth century brick-built well. The features most likely relate to the nearby Anchor Hotel and its ancillary buildings and gardens established in the seventeenth century.</p> | | |
| Project type | Trial excavation | |
| Site status | None | |
| Previous work | Desktop Assessment Report and Evaluation Proposal BA | |
| Current Land use | Car park | |
| Future work | To be advised | |
| Monument type/ period | None | |
| Significant finds | None | |
| PROJECT LOCATION | | |
| County | Buckinghamshire | |
| Site address | The former Post Sorting Office, High Street, Newport Pagnell | |
| Study area | 0.0155 ha approx. | |
| OS Easting & Northing | SP 8760 4375 | |
| Height OD | 61m OD | |
| PROJECT CREATORS | | |
| Organisation | Northamptonshire Archaeology | |
| Project brief originator | None | |
| Project Design originator | Archaeologica Ltd | |
| Director/Supervisor | Adrian Burrow, Northamptonshire Archaeology | |
| Project Manager | Tony Walsh, Northamptonshire Archaeology | |
| Sponsor or funding body | Old Ginger Developments Ltd | |
| PROJECT DATE | | |
| Start date | 21 April 2008 | |
| End date | 23 April 2008 | |
| ARCHIVES | Location (Accession no.) | Content |
| Physical | | Post-medieval pottery, Ceramic building material, bone |
| Paper | | Site trench record, photographic record, plans, section drawings, levels & client report |
| Digital | | Client Report |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report) | |
| Title | | |
| Serial title & volume | Client report 08/076 | |
| Author(s) | A. Burrow | |
| Page numbers | 11, including illustrations and plates | |
| Date | 5/5/08 | |

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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE
FORMER POST SORTING OFFICE
NEWPORT PAGNELL
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
APRIL 2008**

Abstract

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in April 2008 on land proposed for residential development on the site of the former Post Sorting Office in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire.

Two trenches were excavated, which revealed two undated postholes and a possible rubbish pit, garden soils, made ground, and a nineteenth century brick-built well. The features most likely relate to the nearby Anchor Hotel and its ancillary buildings and gardens established in the seventeenth century.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Archaeologica Ltd, acting on behalf of their clients, Old Ginger Developments Ltd, to conduct an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land proposed for residential development on the site of the former Post Sorting Office in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 8760 4387: Fig 1).

The work was undertaken to meet the requirements of the evaluation proposals prepared by Archaeologica Ltd (Lisboa 2007).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site is located in the historic core of Newport Pagnell. It is bounded by properties fronting the High Street to the north and Silver Street to the east, with the town's Telephone Exchange directly to the south. The site slopes only slightly from the north to south, at an elevation of c61m aOD.

The underlying geology comprises Oxford Clays capping Oolite limestone beds (www.bgs/geoindex.co.uk).

2.2 Archaeological background

The archaeological and historical background of the site is detailed in the desk-based assessment section of the evaluation specification prepared by Archaeologica (Lisboa 2007).

In brief, the assessment concluded that there was negligible potential for prehistoric or Roman remains, but that as the proposed development lay within the area of the Saxon town there was some potential for surviving evidence of settlement from that period. The survival of medieval archaeology (pits and potentially structures) was also likely, based on previous evaluations within the town. In particular the desk-based assessment highlighted the potential to recover structural and artefactual evidence from the late seventeenth century onwards, when part of the site was occupied by the Anchor Hotel and Inn and its associated outbuilding and orchard/gardens.

3 OBJECTIVES

The evaluation was conducted to determine the presence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

More specifically, it targeted;

- Potential Saxon and medieval remains surviving within the area (Lisboa 20007, Section 5)
- The post-medieval buildings which stood in the 17th-19th century (Lisboa 2007, Section 5 & 6).

4 METHODOLOGY

Originally, three trenches were proposed, positioned in accordance with the trench location plan given in the evaluation proposals (Lisboa 2007, fig 8); two being 3m square and the third measuring 6m by 3m. Upon the removal of the car-park tarmac, a brick lined nineteenth century well was found in the location of the northerly trench (Plate 1). With the agreement of the Milton Keynes Planning Archaeologist, the two smaller trenches were amalgamated into a single 6m by 3m trench to the south of the well (Fig 2).

The works were undertaken in accordance to the Fieldwork Methodology set out in the evaluation proposals (section 7.3). The trenches were excavated using a tracked 3 tonne

excavator fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket. All machine operation was carried out under archaeological supervision with the exception of the car park tarmac layer which was removed prior to the archaeological investigation. The trenches were excavated until the first significant archaeological horizon or the natural substrate was encountered.

The base and both long sections of each trench were cleaned by hand and recorded. Potential archaeological features were excavated, photographed, drawn to the appropriate scale in plan and section and recorded on pro-forma registers in accordance with standard Northamptonshire Archaeology practice. Levels were taken across both trenches and related to Ordnance Datum.

All works were carried out according to the IFA Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Evaluation (IFA 1995), and all procedures complied with the Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at work Guidelines.

5 THE EVALUATION EVIDENCE

The locations of the trenches within the development area are shown in Figure 2. Individual trench plans and excavated sections showing the archaeological deposits and features present are depicted in Figures 3 & 4.

5.1 Trench 1 (Fig 3)

Trench 1 was aligned north to south, located within the footprint of the proposed building, on the north side of the development area (Plate 2). It contained deposits most likely related to the gardens/orchards that are documented on the site from at least the 17th century onwards, overlain by more modern demolition layers.

Undisturbed natural yellow clay (108) was present at a depth of 0.65m, at 59.91m aOD.

Cut into the natural substrate were two post-holes. The larger of these [105] was square in plan and well defined, with vertical sides and a flat base (Fig 3, Section 3; Plate 3). It measured 0.45m wide and 0.22m deep. Its fill (104) was dark grey sandy silt containing several large pieces of brick and tile. The posthole was probably part of the foundations of a structure, possibly an outbuilding of the Anchor Hotel.

One metre to the north of [105] was a smaller posthole [107] (Fig 3, Section 4) which was

very shallow with a concave profile and measured 0.35m wide, and only 0.08m deep. It was filled by (106), clean dark grey sandy clay.

Overlying the fills of both postholes and the natural clay at the base of the trench was a thin layer (103) of dark greenish-grey clayey silt up to 0.18m thick. Above this was (102) a similar dark grey clayey silt, 0.25m thick, which contained fragments of brick and tile. At the south end of the western section, several large limestone pieces were present within this layer.

The uppermost layer (101) was a mid grey-brown silty loam containing large amounts of modern demolition material. The former surface layer had been the tarmac of the car park, overlying brick rubble. This was removed before the archaeological evaluation began.

5.2 Trench 2 (Fig 4)

Trench 2 was aligned generally east to west, on the east side of the development area. The general stratigraphic sequence found was similar to that in Trench 1, with the layers being somewhat thicker (Plates 4 & 6).

The natural clay substrate (209) was present at a depth of 1.10m, at 59.89m aOD. Cut into the natural clay was a single pit [207], which was oval in plan, measuring 1.30m in length by 0.44m deep (Fig 4, Section 5; Plate 5). The lower fill of the pit (206) was a mottled green-grey silty clay 0.14m thick. It contained small quantities of burnt seed, mainly cereal grains (section 6.4) and two fragments of cattle bone. The upper fill of the pit (205) was a mid grey silty clay with some green organic content.

Fill (205) was overlain by layer (203), a grey clayey silt up to 0.6m thick (equivalent to (102) in Trench 1). Three sherds of pottery were recovered from layer (203), a single sherd from a glazed red earthenware jar, of seventeenth century date, and two sherds of residual medieval pottery (below section 6.1). Animal bone recovered from (203) included the remains of cow (with knife or tool marks), pig and sheep/goat. The layer also contained brick, tile, oyster shell, charcoal, slate, and coal. On the west side of the southern section layer (203) was overlain by layer (204), which was of similar composition but of a greener hue, and measured 0.32m thick.

At the south-western corner of the trench, at the upper horizon of (204), was the remnant of a possible wall (208) (Fig 4, section 5). The very base of the wall survived as two unbonded courses of irregular, flat limestone pieces. The pieces measured up to 300mm in

length and less than 20mm thick.

Overlying (208) was layer (202) a dark grey clayey silt with frequent small gravel (equivalent to (101) in Trench 1). The pottery recovered from (202) included two sherds of English stoneware dateable to c1900AD as well as three residual sherds, including a single sherd of green glazed Cistercian-type ware and decorated sherd of German 'frechen' stoneware (below 6.1). The layer also contained fragments of brick, clay tobacco pipe stem, charcoal, oyster shell, slate and animal bone.

Above (202) was layer (201) which was the hard-core base bedding layer for the (removed) tarmac surface.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 The post-medieval pottery by Iain Soden

A total of eight sherds of pottery was recovered. The types represented are as follows, by context:

Trench 2 (202)

1 body sherd coarse greyware, c1300-1500

1 body sherd green-glazed Cistercian-type ware, c1450-1600

1 body sherd German 'frechen' ware with stamped, applied decoration, 17th century

2 rim and neck sherds English stoneware, from a probable blacking-pot, c1900

Trench 2 (203)

1 body sherd green-glazed medieval coarseware ?bowl, c1300-1500

1 sherd probable Potterspury-type ware jug, glaze and outer surface frosted off, c1250-1500

1 sherd glazed red earthenware jar, possibly a Potterspury product, 17th century

These sherds are useful only for dating the layers from which they derive, context (202) being no earlier than the late 19th century, (203) being no earlier than the 17th century. None of the sherds has wider significance.

6.2 The Ceramic building material by Pat Chapman

There are eleven fragments of ceramic roof tile and two fragments of brick, weighing 337g, retrieved from contexts (101), (102) and (202). The tile is 13mm thick and made from coarse sandy clay, fired to orange or red brown in colour with a dark grey reduced core. A few fragments still have mortar adhering to their surfaces. There are no diagnostic features such as nibs or pegholes. The brick fragments are very small, made from a similar fabric as the tiles.

6.3 The animal bone by Karen Deighton

Method

A total of 781 grammes of animal bone were recovered from three contexts (202), (203) and (206). This material was examined in order to establish the level of preservation, the species present and any information which contributes to the understanding of the site.

Results

Preservation

Fragmentation was fairly heavy with no complete bones present. Surface condition was reasonable with little evidence of weathering noted, although mottled staining was visible on a single bone from context (202). Canid gnawing was frequent being noted on approximately 50% of the bones. A cattle calcaneum from context (203) exhibited knife/tool marks which could be suggestive of bone working or hide removal.

The species present

Cattle (*Bos*) was the most frequent species with 75% of identified bone assigned to this taxon, including the bone from pit fill (206). A single Pig (*Sus*) humerus shaft was observed in context (203). A fragment of sheep/goat (*Ovicaprid*) mandible was noted from context (203), tooth eruption and wear suggested an animal of 2-3 years (Payne's (1973) tooth wear stage E).

Conclusion

Analysis provides an indication of some of the species utilised on or near the site and shows them to be typical of the post medieval period. Unfortunately too little bone was available to characterise the nature of the deposits.

6.4 The environmental samples by Wallis Lord-Hart

One forty litre soil sample was taken from the primary fill (206) of pit [207] in Trench 2.

Method

The sample was processed by washing the soil on a 1 millimetre flot sieve in a modified siraf tank, and then agitated in order to assist in separation. Any environmental fraction was collected into a 250 micron mesh. This fraction was then dried and sorted under a binocular microscope with a magnification of up to x 20. Several resources were used to identify the seeds (*see references*).

Results

The sample contained a small amount of charred seeds, mostly consisting of cereal grains. Of the 41 seeds recovered, most were identifiable.

Table 1: Seed Quantification

| Sample Number | Sample 1 |
|---|---------------------|
| Fill | Pit |
| Volume (l) | 40 |
| Hulled Barley – <i>Hordeum</i> | 1 |
| Barley – <i>Hordeum Vulgare</i> | 4 |
| Possible Spelt – <i>cf Triticum spelta</i> | 3 |
| Emmer - <i>Triticum dicocum</i> | 1 |
| <i>Avena sativa</i> ? | 1 |
| Bread Wheat - <i>Triticum hexaploid</i> | 15 |
| Cereal Indet. - <i>Cerealea</i> | 2 |
| Total Cereal | 27 |
| <i>Vicia</i> sp. Vetch indet. | 2 partial 1 full |
| Bromes - <i>Bromus</i> (tailend) | 1 |
| Unidentifiable seeds | 10 |
| Total Number of Seeds | 41 |
| Total Seeds per Litre | 1 |

Discussion

Most of the seeds identified from this sample were cereals. This supports the historical research undertaken that states the existence of several outbuildings having been located in the area of the excavation, “including kitchens, cellars, stables, granary, and brewhouse.” (Lisboa, 2007). The activities occurring in the yards associated with such buildings, most especially the granary would leave behind just the type of detritus of burnt grain recovered here or simply the burning of yard waste. There are not enough

seeds to demonstrate purposeful deposition of waste in the pit from the granary, therefore the seeds were most likely blown into this pit over time, or swept into it. There is no evidence for malting on the grains, although malting was documented in the vicinity. The vetch recovered is indicative of the type of plant growth occurring in the house garden. Bromus is a seed that would have occurred as a weed seed in cereal crops, and is often found alongside burnt grain.

7 DISCUSSION

No evidence of Saxon or earlier remains was present on the site. Evidence for medieval occupation was restricted to residual pottery present within later garden deposits.

The evaluation found limited evidence for activity in the form of two postholes and a pit, sealed by deposits of garden soil, overlain by demolition layers and made ground from the mid twentieth century. These remains most likely related to the former Anchor Hotel and its ancillary buildings and gardens established in the seventeenth century. Owing to the fragmentary nature of the surviving remains and the lack of structural activity, it is unlikely that further archaeological works would be needed on the site.

The earliest phase of activity on the site is represented by the undated postholes in Trench 1 and the pit in Trench 2. The postholes are most likely part of the foundations of one of the numerous outbuildings of the Anchor Hotel, well recorded by documentary evidence to have existed from the late seventeenth century. The pit in Trench 2 appeared to have been a rubbish pit, most probably associated with the dense layout of “barns, stables, yards, gardens, orchards” (Lisboa 2007:18) known to exist on the surrounding properties from at least the early eighteenth century onwards. The presence of burnt cereal grains in this pit indicates an association with the granaries, brew house and malting yards that existed during this period, although perhaps indicative of the casual accumulation of general yard detritus rather than purposeful deposition.

Although these features are undated, they can be given a *terminus post-quem* by the overlying garden deposits dating from the late seventeenth century onwards, although these are heavily truncated, doubtlessly disturbed by the subsequent demolition phases and containing residual medieval pottery. Garden and orchard plots are recorded in the vicinity of the site from at least the early seventeenth century to the twentieth century. (Lisboa 2007:16).

The remnants of a possible wall overlying this deposit represented a distinct later phase of

construction, although the nature and extent of these remains cannot be qualified due to their fragmentary, truncated condition and the limited nature of the evaluation. It probably dated to the nineteenth century and the further increase and diversification of the number of buildings present on the site. This structure was truncated and then covered by twentieth century activity, related to the demolition of the earlier buildings, re-levelling and the construction of the post sorting office and car-park.

The general stratigraphy supports the conclusions of the desk-based research that the site was most likely part of a burgage plot in the medieval period, (evidenced by the residual medieval pottery) and contained the outbuilding and gardens associated with the Anchor Hotel and surrounding plots from the late 17th century onwards.

It is obvious that the deposits existing on-site were negatively affected by the demolition and re-development of the building in the 1960's. However, an open well, probably dating from the 19th century, was present less than 0.4m below the modern tarmac surface, covered by a concrete slab indicating that the demolition and re-levelling did not extend below this depth on this part of the site.

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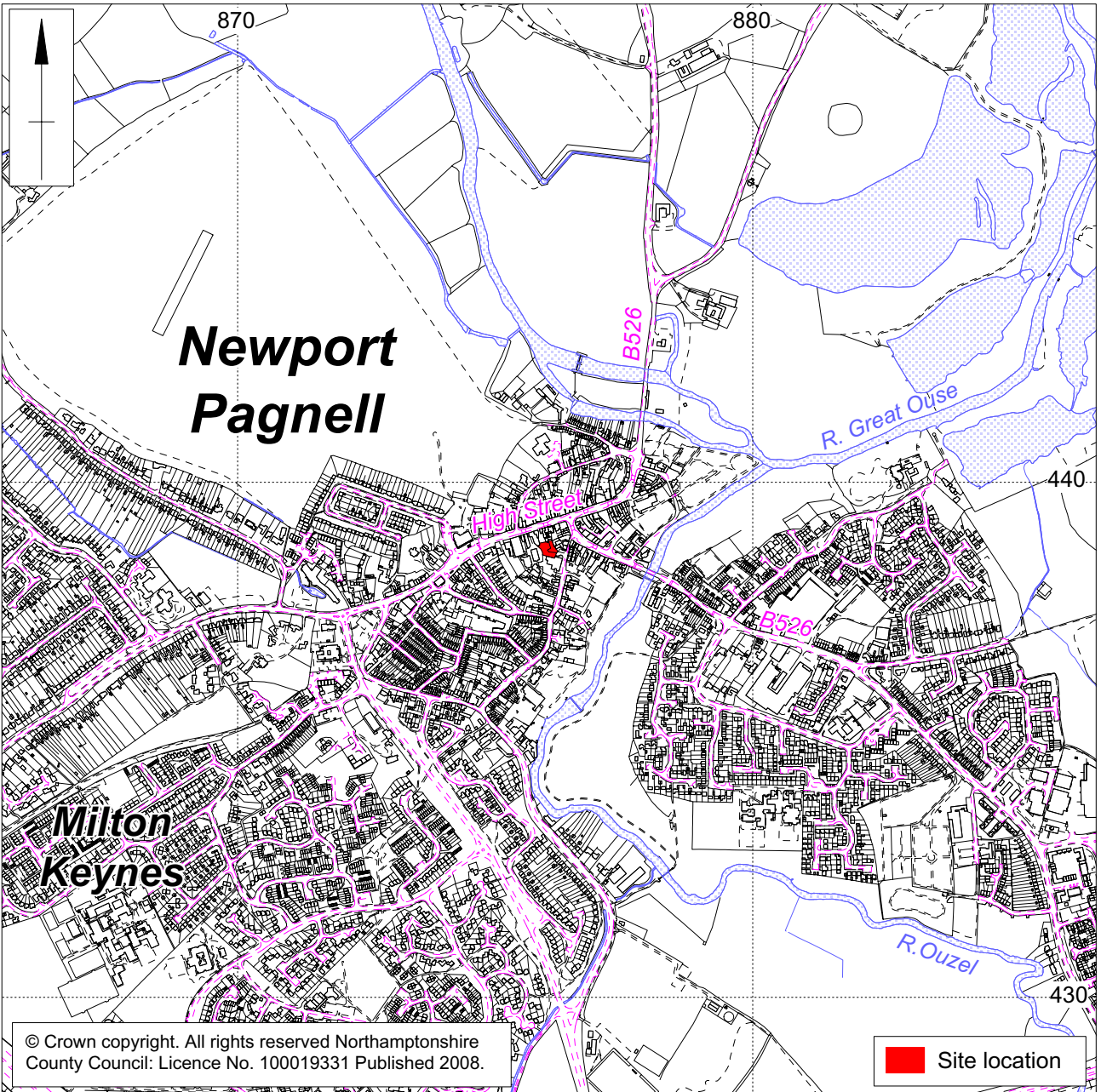
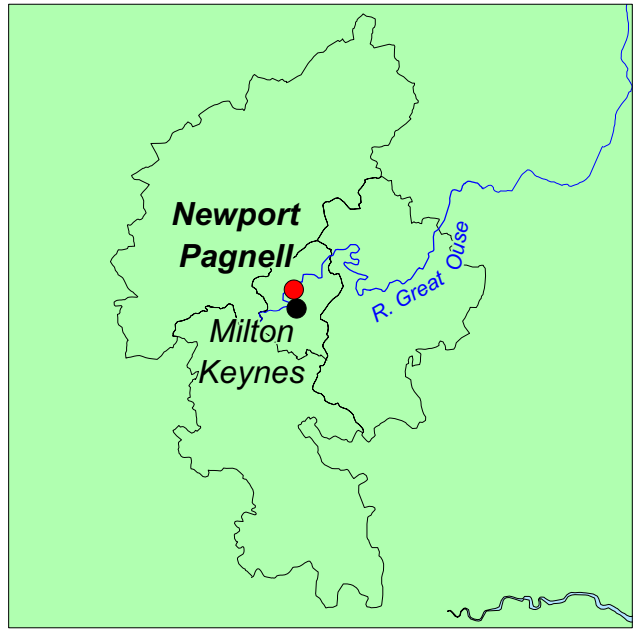
Payne, S, 1973 *Kill off patterns in sheep and goats: the mandibles* from Asvan Kale Anatolian Studies 23 281-303

Stace, C, 1997 *New Flora of the British Isles*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

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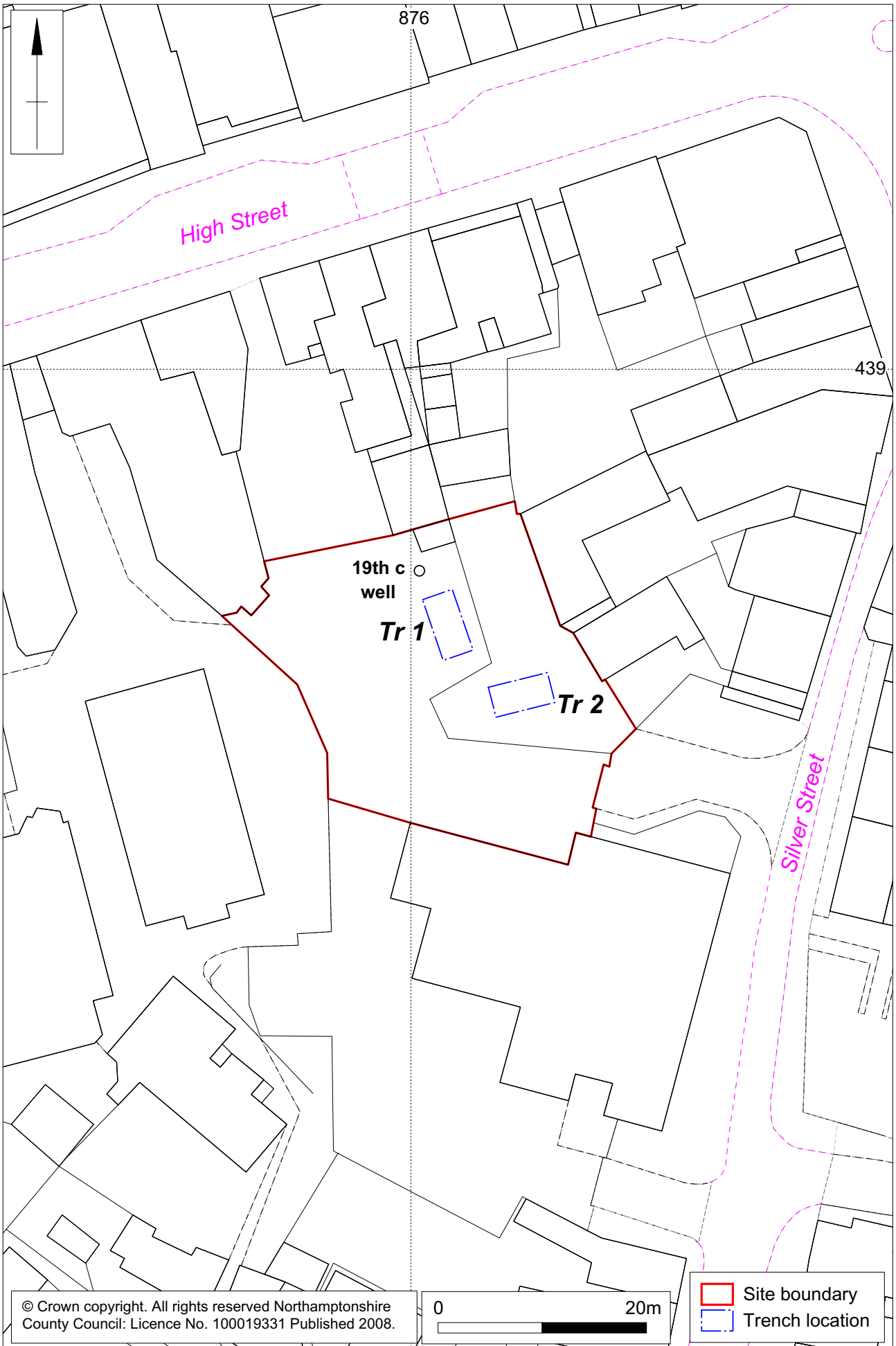
Websites

<http://www.bgs/geoindex.co.uk>



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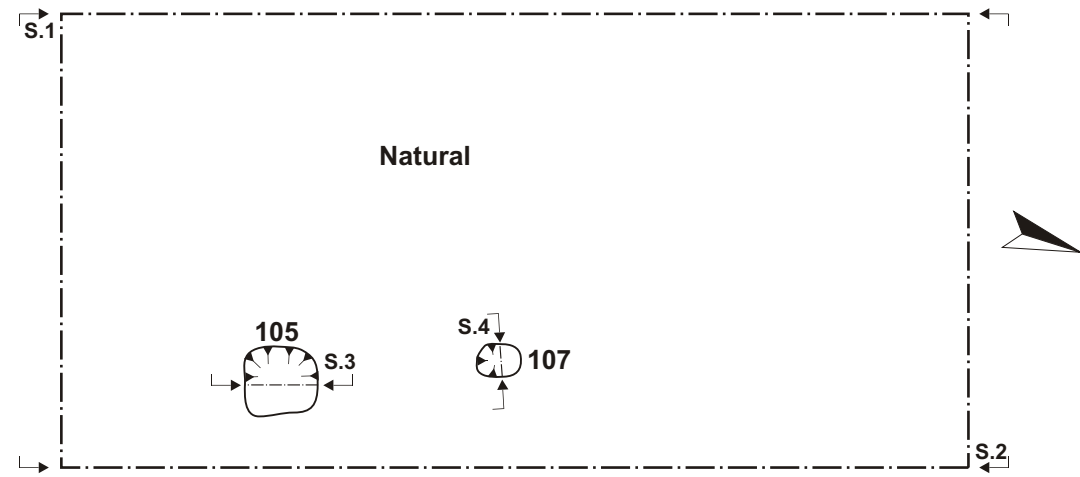
Site location Fig 1



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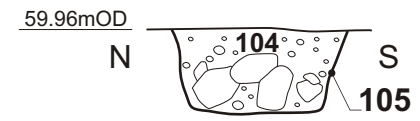
Trench location Fig 2

Trench 1

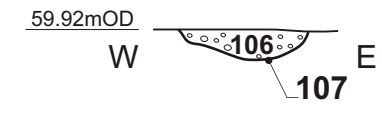


Scale for plan

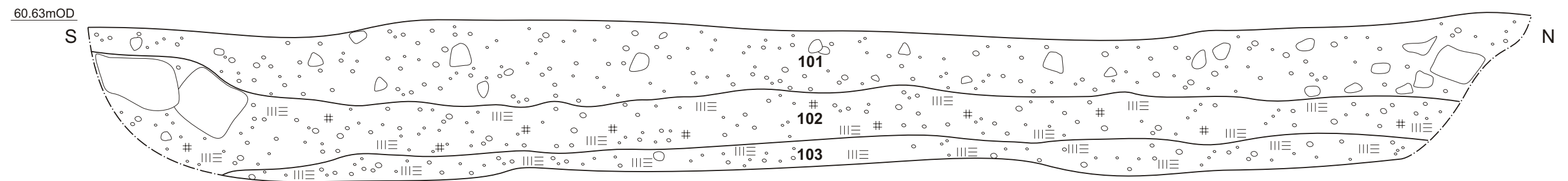
Section 3 - Trench 1



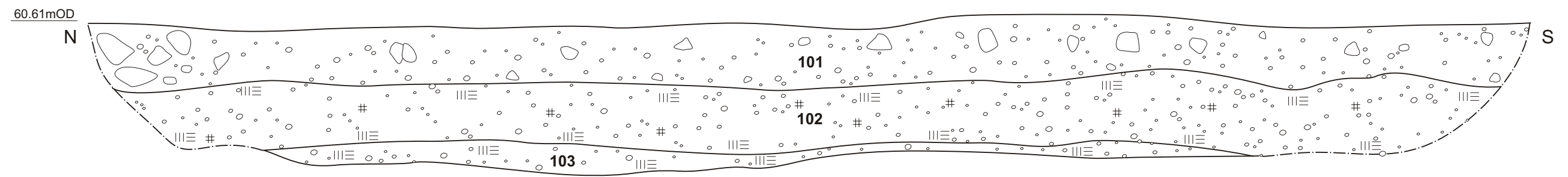
Section 4 - Trench 1



Section 1 - Trench 1

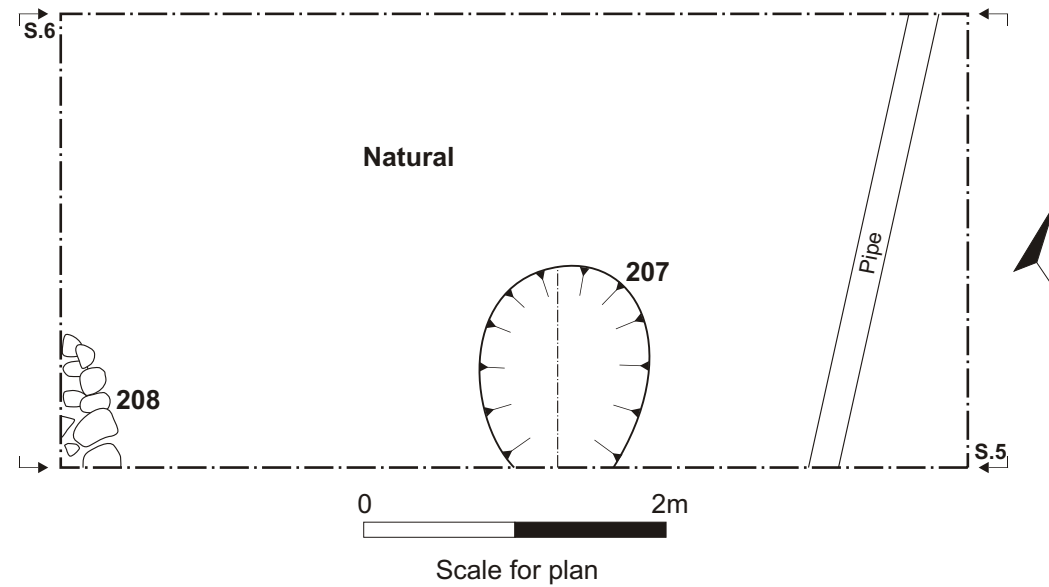


Section 2 - Trench 1



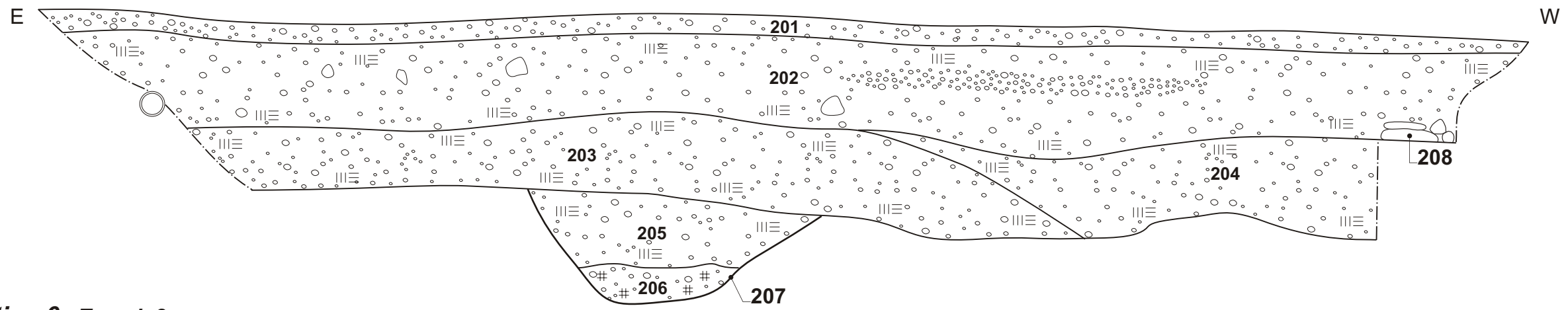
Scale for sections

Trench 2



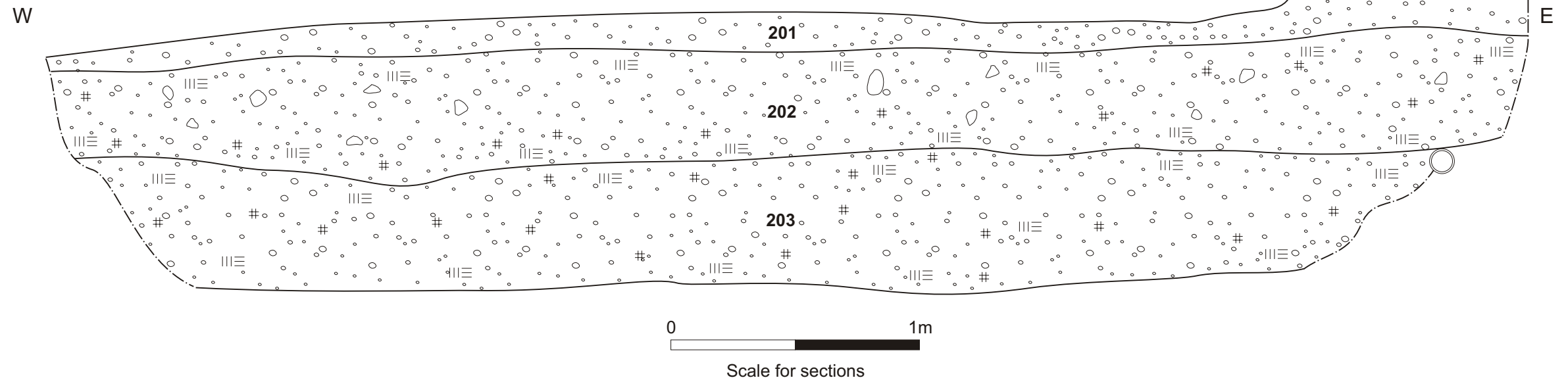
Section 5 - Trench 2

60.93mOD



Section 6 - Trench 2

60.99mOD



Plan and sections for Trench 2 Fig 4



Plate 1: Nineteenth century well



Plate 2: Trench 1 looking north-west, postholes [105] and [107]



Plate 3: Trench 1 looking east, posthole [105]



Plate 4: Trench 2 looking south-east, pit [207] and 'wall' (208)



Plate 5: Trench 2 looking south, pit [207]



Plate 6: Trench 2 looking north, section 6