Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Evaluation on Land at
Newark Road, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire
September 2007

Paul Mason and Simon Carlyle

October 2007

Report 07/152

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Newark Road, Peterborough	
Short description (250 words maximum)	The original ground level across the eastern half of the site had been significantly reduced when the buildings currently occupying the site were built in the 1970s. The reduction in ground level on the western part of the site, in the area currently used as a builder's yard, was less severe and the base of a buried soil horizon (palaeosol) was observed. Prehistoric features, probably dating to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age, were encountered close to the western edge of the site, cut into the truncated remnants of the buried soil. The remains comprised a small ditch, a gully, a small pit containing charred hazelnut shells and a possible posthole containing undiagnostic sherds of prehistoric pottery. A post-medieval field boundary, which probably dates to the 18th/19th centuries, and shown on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888, was identified in the south-east corner of the site.	
Project type	Evaluation	
Site status	None	
Previous work	Desk-based assessment, CgMs Consulting (2007)	
Current land use	Builder's merchant's yard	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	None	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Peterborough District, Cambridgeshire	
Site address	Newark Road, Peterborough	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	*c* 2.8ha	
National grid reference	TL 211 989	
Height aOD	*c* 4.3m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Peterborough City Council	
Project Design originator	CgMs Consulting	
Director/Supervisor	Paul Mason	
Project Manager	Simon Carlyle	
Sponsor or funding body	Travis Perkins	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	17/9/07	
End date	21/9/07	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological Evaluation on Land at Newark Road, Peterborough	
Serial title & volume	NA Report 07/152	
Author(s)	Paul Mason and Simon Carlyle	
Page numbers	7 text, 5 figs, 6 plates	
Date	October 2007	

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON LAND AT

NEWARK ROAD, PETERBOROUGH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

SEPTEMBER 2007

Abstract

In September 2007, an archaeological evaluation, comprising the excavation of eight trial trenches, was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land at Newark Road, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, acting on behalf of Travis Perkins and their planning consultant, RPS Planning. The original ground level across the eastern half of the site had been significantly reduced when the buildings currently occupying the site were built in the 1970s. The reduction in ground level on the western part of the site, in the area currently used as a builder's yard, was less severe and the base of a buried soil horizon (palaeosol) was observed. Prehistoric features, probably dating to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age, were encountered close to the western edge of the site, cut into the truncated remnants of the buried soil. The remains comprised a small ditch, a gully, a small pit containing charred hazelnut shells and a possible posthole containing undiagnostic sherds of prehistoric pottery. A post-medieval field boundary, which probably dates to the 18th/19th centuries, and shown on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888, was identified in the south-east corner of the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

In September 2007, Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) undertook an archaeological evaluation on land at Newark Road, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire (site centred on NGR: TL 211 989; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting (CgMs), acting on behalf of Travis Perkins and their planning consultant, RPS Planning. The site has not been subject to previous archaeological intervention, although excavations carried out in close proximity to the site have identified archaeological remains and artefacts dating back as far as the late Mesolithic. As the site lies in an archaeologically sensitive area, the Peterborough City Archaeologist advised that a programme of archaeological work should be carried out in order to mitigate against the impact of the development on buried archaeological remains, in accordance with *Planning Policy Guidance: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16), section 30*. An archaeological desk-based assessment of the site and its environs has been prepared by CgMs Consulting (Bourn 2007).

The aims and objectives of the evaluation, as defined in the specification prepared by CgMs (Dicks and Bourn 2007), are summarised as follows:

General aims

- To determine, as far as reasonably practicable, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains.
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features encountered.

Site specific aims

- To determine the presence or absence of Mesolithic activity on the fen-edge zone.
- To determine the presence or absence of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity and settlement.
- To determine the character and extent of Iron Age and Roman settlement and activity.
- To clarify the impact of medieval, post-medieval and modern agriculture and hence assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits.
- To clarify the impact of more recent developments and hence the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits.

This report, which was prepared in accordance with the specification (ibid) and the English Heritage procedural document *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH 1991), presents the findings of the evaluation.

2 SITE BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site is situated on an industrial estate in the Fengate area on the eastern outskirts of Peterborough, to the east of the A1139 (Fig 1). It covers an area of *c* 2.8ha and is bounded to the north by a plot of vacant ground, to the south and east by Newark Road and to the west by industrial units. The ground is relatively flat (*c* 4.3m aOD) although a slight rise is evident to the north-west. The site is currently being used as a builder's merchant's yard and is surfaced with tarmac, concrete hard-standing, road stone and crushed limestone.

The old course of the River Nene lies approximately 3km to the south of the site and the local geology is mapped as River Terrace deposits (sand and gravel) overlying Oxford Clay and Kellaway Beds (www.bgs.ac.uk).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The historical and archaeological background of the site and its environs has been considered in the desk-based assessment prepared by CgMs (Bourn 2007). The locations of the relevant archaeological sites in the area of Newark Road are shown in Figure 1.

To summarize, extensive archaeological excavations have been carried out in the immediate area, particularly to the east of the site, which have identified evidence for prehistoric settlement and activity on the Fen edge dating from the late Mesolithic through to the Iron Age periods.

A late Mesolithic/Neolithic flint assemblage was recovered from tree throw-hollows during recent excavations on the Elliot's site (E), *c* 300m to the south-east of the application site, and a possible Neolithic 'house' was identified at the Marshall's Garage site (MG) immediately to the west. Neolithic and Bronze Age remains have been investigated at Padholme Road (PR), to the north-east of the site, and a possible mortuary structure was identified at the Cat's Water site (CW) to the east. Bronze Age agricultural divisions of the landscape have been examined at the Tower Works site (TW), *c* 400m to the south-west, and a droveway of the same date lies immediately to the north, crossing Newark Road (NR).

Late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement has been identified immediately to the east of the site, during excavations in the area of Storey's Bar Road (SBR).

Evidence for Saxon and medieval settlement in the area is sparse, and it is likely that the area was used primarily for grazing livestock during this period. In the post-medieval period the land continued in agricultural use and was eventually enclosed in the 19th century. The area was extensively quarried for gravel in the 19th and 20th centuries and was developed as an industrial estate in the 1970s.

3 TRIAL EXCAVATION

3.1 Introduction

In total, eight (of nine originally planned) trial trenches were excavated (200 linear metres; 340m^2) within the proposed development area, largely in accordance with the trench plan provided by CgMs and approved by the Peterborough City Archaeologist (Fig 2). Slight variations to the trenching scheme had to be made, with the permission of CgMs, due to limited space and the need to maintain access routes, so as not to hinder the day-to-day activities of the businesses operating on the site. Alterations affected Trench 3, which had to be turned at one end to create an L-shaped trench; Trenches 7 and 9, which were joined together to create a single 50m-long trench (Trench 7) and moved to an area clear of obstructions; and Trench 8, which had to be shortened by 5m.

Remnants of a buried soil horizon (palaeosol) and occasional tree throw hollows were identified in Trenches 3 to 7, and archaeological features or artefacts were encountered in Trenches 4, 7 and 8. A summary of the features/deposits encountered in the evaluation trenches is provided in the appendix.

3.2 Methodology

The trenches were surveyed using GPS equipment and related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. The trenches were excavated using a JCB-type mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket. Where necessary, modern surfaces were broken with a hydraulic breaker or cut with a floor saw prior to excavation.

The overburden was excavated under archaeological supervision to reveal significant archaeological remains or, where these were absent, the natural substrate. The excavated spoil was stacked by the side of the trench, with broken tarmac and concrete being kept separate. All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to define any features and a representative sample of the features was then excavated by hand to determine their date and character. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

All archaeological deposits encountered during the course of the evaluation were fully recorded, following standard NA procedures. All archaeological features and deposits were given a separate context number and were described on *pro-forma* context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships and interpretation. Artefacts and ecofacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (Watkinson and Neal 1998). Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained. Soil samples were

taken for flotation from dateable contexts with the potential for the recovery of charcoal and carbonised or water-logged plant remains.

The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50. Sections or profiles through features were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate, and related to Ordnance Datum. A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. On completion the trenches were backfilled, and Trenches 1, 2 and 8 were professionally reinstated with new tarmac/concrete surfaces.

The field data has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing. The final report will be uploaded onto the OASIS III database (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations). A microfilm copy of the site archive and narrative will be made to RCHM(E) standards and submitted to the National Monuments Record.

3.3 Trial trench results

General stratigraphy

The natural substrate comprised fluvial sand and gravel. It was exposed at depths of between 0.35m and 0.70m below modern ground level, but had evidently been truncated across the eastern half of the site by the widespread reduction of ground level, associated with the original development of the site in the 1970s. The truncated base of a buried soil horizon (palaeosol) was identified in section across the western half of the site (Trenches 3 to 7). This deposit was extremely hard, compacted and desiccated, largely due to the mechanical rolling of the site when the depot was constructed and the dewatering of the river gravels by land drainage in the general area. Slight undulations in the base of this deposit, seen occasionally in Trenches 5 to 7, probably represent vegetation hollows. The topsoil had been removed across the entire site, with the exception of the area of scrub at the south-east end (Trench 7), where clearly the topsoil had been redeposited. In the depot areas and car park the reduced surface had been made-up with rolled, crushed stone as a base for the working surfaces (tarmac, concrete or stone chippings).

Archaeological remains were recorded in Trenches 4, 7 and 8 (Fig 2). No archaeological remains were recorded in the remaining trenches.

Trench 4

The river gravel (404), which lay *c* 0.35m below the modern ground surface, was overlain by a thin layer (*c* 0.10m thick) of sandy clayey silt (403), probably the truncated remains of a buried soil. Cutting through this deposit were four features, comprising a small pit, a possible posthole, a small ditch and a gully (Fig 3; Plate 1).

At the north-west end of the trench was a small pit [406] filled with dark grey, almost black silty clay (405) (Fig 3, Section 1; Plate 2). The pit had a diameter of *c* 0.55m and a depth of 0.25m. No artefactual dating evidence was retrieved, but the soil sample taken from the pit contained burnt hazelnut shells and charcoal.

Immediately to the south-east of the pit was another small, elongated pit or posthole [410], 0.45m long, 0.17m wide and 0.15m deep. Its fill, mid greyish brown silty clay (409), was found to contain a single sherd of late Bronze Age or Iron Age pottery.

At the south-eastern end of the trench there was the terminus of a small ditch [408], aligned south-west to north-east, which measured 1.2m wide and 0.55m deep (Fig 3, Section 2: Plate

3). It was filled with mid brown silty clay (407). Approximately 3m to the south-east of this was a linear gully [412], aligned east to west and measuring 0.9m wide and 0.25m deep, filled with greyish brown sandy clay (411) mottled with flecks of orange sand (Fig 3, Section 3). No dating evidence was recovered from either feature, although it is likely that they are prehistoric.

The features were directly overlain by the limestone hardcore (402) underlying the road stone surface of the yard (401).

Trench 7

Overlying the gravel in this trench was the truncated remnants of the buried soil (702), which was *c* 0.2m thick (Plate 4). A shallow, irregular undulation at the base of the buried soil at the north-west end of the trench was investigated and shown to be a probably vegetation mark [705] (Plate 5). Three small, abraded sherds of Roman samian ware pottery were recovered from the buried soil. Given that the buried soil is believed to have accumulated before the onset of peat formation in the Fengate area during the later second millennium BC, it is likely that the sherds are intrusive; their recovery is indicative of the degree of disturbance from earth-moving on the site. The buried soil was sealed by modern topsoil (701), which was very mixed and had been redeposited.

Trench 8

The natural substrate was exposed *c* 0.4m below the modern ground surface. At the south-east end of the trench there was a broad ditch, 2.65m wide and aligned north-east to south-west, which had been recut on two occasions (Fig 4, Section 4; Plate 6). Due to truncation by the most recent recut [807], it was not possible to determine the original cut or profile of the ditch. The fills of the earlier ditches, [805] and [809], comprised dark greyish brown silty clay (804 and 808 respectively); that of the latest recut [807] was almost identical in appearance, although it was a slightly lighter greyish brown (806) and contained a single sherd of 18th century pottery and the neck of a late 18th-century glass bottle. The ditch was truncated by later reductions in ground level and was sealed by *c* 0.4m of modern overburden, comprising crushed limestone hardcore (802) surfaced with reinforced concrete (801).

4 FINDS

4.1 **The prehistoric pottery** by Andy Chapman

There is a single, broken, sherd of pottery, 20mm long and weighing 3g, from context (409), the fill of a small pit or posthole [410].

The sherd is soft, and contains small flat voids from a leached inclusion, probably crushed shell. The inner part of the fabric, which is 7mm thick, is black and the outer half is oxidised orange-brown. This sherd evidently comes from a hand-built vessel of prehistoric date, but there is a lack of other diagnostic features so it can only be broadly dated to somewhere within the late Bronze Age and Iron Age.

4.2 **The Roman pottery** by Tora Hylton

Three small sherds of Samian weighing 1.6gm were recovered from subsoil over lying Trench

7 (Context 2). All the sherds display signs of wear and abrasion and very little of the original red slip remains on the internal and exterior surfaces. Two sherds are undiagnostic and one has a vestige of a slight internal ledge or ridge, suggesting that it may be from a Dragendorf Type 31R bowl, which dates from the mid 2nd w century to mid 3rd century (Webster 1996, 34-5).

4.3 **The post-medieval glass and pottery** by Simon Carlyle and Iain Soden

The neck of a glass bottle was recovered from the fill (806) of a post-medieval ditch [807]. The bottle was hand-blown and manufactured from 'black glass' (dark green) with an average wall thickness of *c* 4mm. Several lenticular air bubbles in the glass indicate the stretching of the molten glass to produce the neck of the bottle, and the ring around the mouth of the bottle had been roughly shaped with a metal tool. The short, stumpy appearance and the curve at the base of the neck (what little remains) of the bottle suggest that it is probably of a form current in the second half of the 18th century (Van den Bossche 2001).

A single sherd of Staffordshire Manganese Mottled Ware pottery, produced between *c* 1680 and 1740, was recovered from the same deposit.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

5.1 **The charred plant remains** by Karen Deighton

A 10 litre sample was collected from the fill (405) of a small pit [406], which probably dates to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age. The sample was processed using a siraf tank fitted with a 500 micron mesh and flot sieve. The flot was air dried and examined under a microscope. The residue was sorted for ecofacts and artefacts.

The flot contained six fragments of hazelnut shell (Corylus sp), along with a large quantity of charcoal fragments, of which a small number (approx. 20 fragments) would be large enough for identification, should this be required.

Unfortunately the paucity of data available means that little can be added to the understanding of the economy or environment of the site.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation demonstrated that the ploughsoil, and it is assumed the underlying alluvium, had been removed across the entire site and that the original ground level across the eastern half of the site had been significantly reduced when the buildings currently occupying the site were built in the 1970s. In this area the truncated surface of the river gravel was exposed beneath the modern overburden that formed the foundation for the working surfaces of the car parks and yards. The reduction in ground level on the western part of the site, in the main storage yard, was less severe and the base of a buried soil horizon (palaeosol) was observed. This deposit has been observed on other sites in the Fengate area (Pryor 1984, 197-201; 2001, 32-33), and is believed to have developed in the later Neolithic and early/middle Bronze Age periods, prior to the onset of peat formation in the late second and first millennia BC (French 2001). Shallow, irregular undulations observed in the base of this deposit were probably formed by natural processes (e.g. vegetation hollows). There was an apparent slight rise in

ground level towards the north-west corner of the site, although this may have been accentuated by the reduction in ground level elsewhere and may not reflect the original topography of the area.

Close to the western edge of the site and cutting the buried soil, there was a small group of features of probable late Bronze Age or Iron Age date. They comprised a small pit, a possible posthole, a ditch terminus and a gully. Two sherds of undiagnostic prehistoric pottery were recovered from the posthole and charred hazelnut shells were obtained from the soil sample taken from the pit. The features probably represent small-scale, localized activity on the fen-edge.

Three small sherds of Roman pottery were found in the buried soil in the area of scrub at the south-western end of the site; they are intrusive and their recovery from this deposit is indicative of the degree of disturbance from earth-moving on the site. Previously, Romano-British features have been discovered to the west of the proposed development area (Bourn 2007, 9).

Near the southern edge of the site there was a post-medieval ditch, probably the remains of a field boundary. The boundary is shown on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888, and it is possible that it dates to the Peterborough Enclosure Awards of 1821, which are known to have affected this part of the site (Bourn 2007, 10). There was no evidence in the trial trenches for large-scale gravel extraction on the site as noted elsewhere in the area (Bourne 2007, 8).

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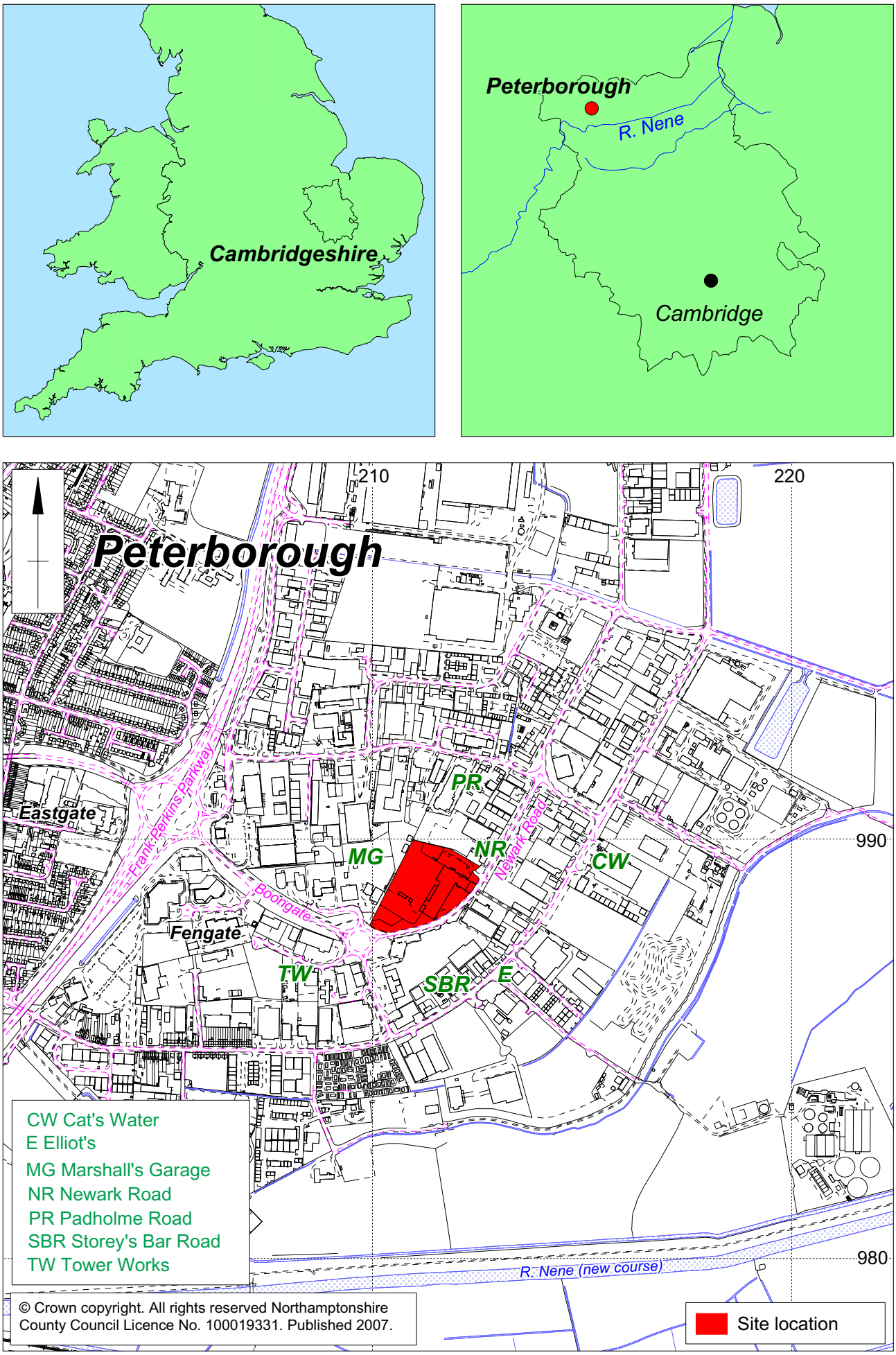
APPENDIX

Summary of features

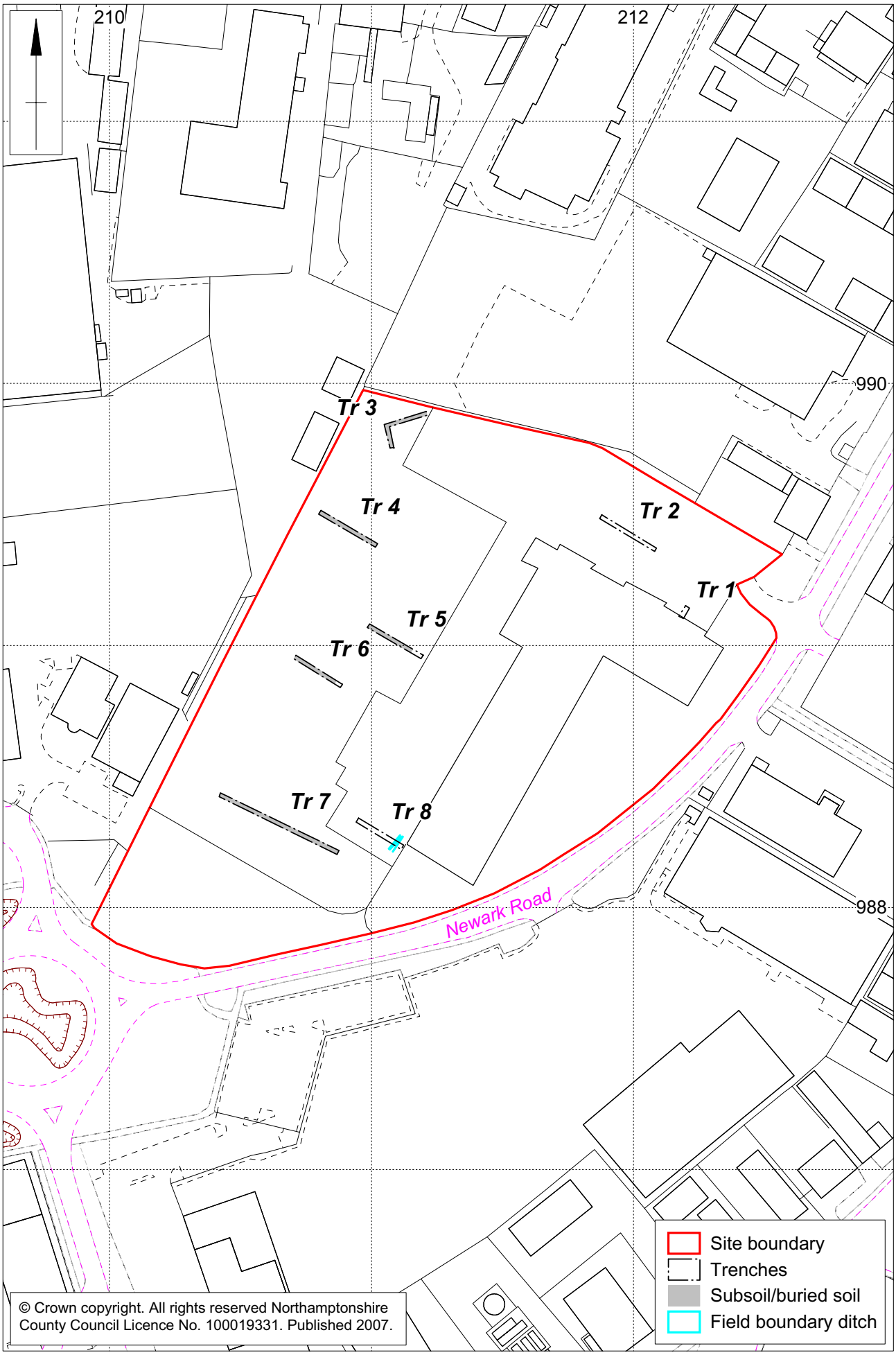
Trench no.	Context no.	Context type	Description	Date
1	101	Car park surface	Tarmac, 0.07m thick	Modern
	102	Layer	Tarmac bedding layer, 0.12m thick	Modern
	103	Layer	Crushed limestone hardcore, 0.17m thick	Modern
	104	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
2	201	Yard surface	Tarmac, 0.25m thick, includes bedding layer as (102)	Modern
	202	Layer	Crushed limestone hardcore, 0.30m thick	Modern
	203	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
3	301	Yard surface	Sand and crushed limestone, *c* 0.30m thick	Modern
	302	Buried soil	Compact orange brown sandy clay, *c* 0.30m thick	Neolithic/Bronze Age
	303	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
4	401	Yard surface	Type 1 road stone, 0.7m thick	Modern
	402	Layer	Road stone bedding, 0.10m thick	Modern
	403	Layer	Crushed limestone hardcore, 0.25m thick	Modern
	404	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
	405 [406]	Pit	*c* 0.55m wide and a 0.25m deep. Contains hazelnut shells	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age
	407 [408]	Ditch terminus	1.2m wide and 0.55m deep	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age
	409 [410]	Pit/posthole	0.45m long, 0.17m wide and 0.15m deep. Contains prehistoric pottery	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age
	411 [412]	Gully	*c* 0.9m wide and 0.25m deep	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age
5	501	Yard surface	Type 1 road stone, 0.07m thick	Modern
	502	Layer	Road stone bedding, 0.10m thick	Modern
	503	Layer	Crushed limestone hardcore, 0.25m thick	Modern
	504	Buried soil	Compact orange brown sandy clay, 0.10m thick	Neolithic/Bronze Age
	505	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
	506 [507]	Vegetation hollow	Shallow, irregular hollow in gravel	-
6	601	Yard surface	Type 1 road stone, 0.10m thick	Modern
	602	Layer	Crushed limestone hardcore, 0.15m thick	Modern
	603	Buried soil	Compact orange brown sandy clay, c 0.20m thick	Neolithic/Bronze Age
	604	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
	605 [606]	Vegetation hollow	Shallow, irregular hollow in gravel	-
7	701	Topsoil	*c* 0.20m thick, redeposited	Modern
	702	Buried soil	Compact orange brown sandy clay, c 0.15m thick	Neolithic/Bronze Age
	703	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
	704 [705]	Vegetation hollow	Shallow, irregular hollow in gravel	-
8	801	Concrete surface	Reinforced concrete, 0.20m thick	Modern

Trench no.	Context no.	Context type	Description	Date
	802	Layer	Crushed limestone hardcore, 0.20m thick	Modern
	803	Natural substrate	Sand and gravel	-
	804 [805] 806 [807]r 808 [809]	Ditch	Recut (r) contains pottery and glass	18th/19th century



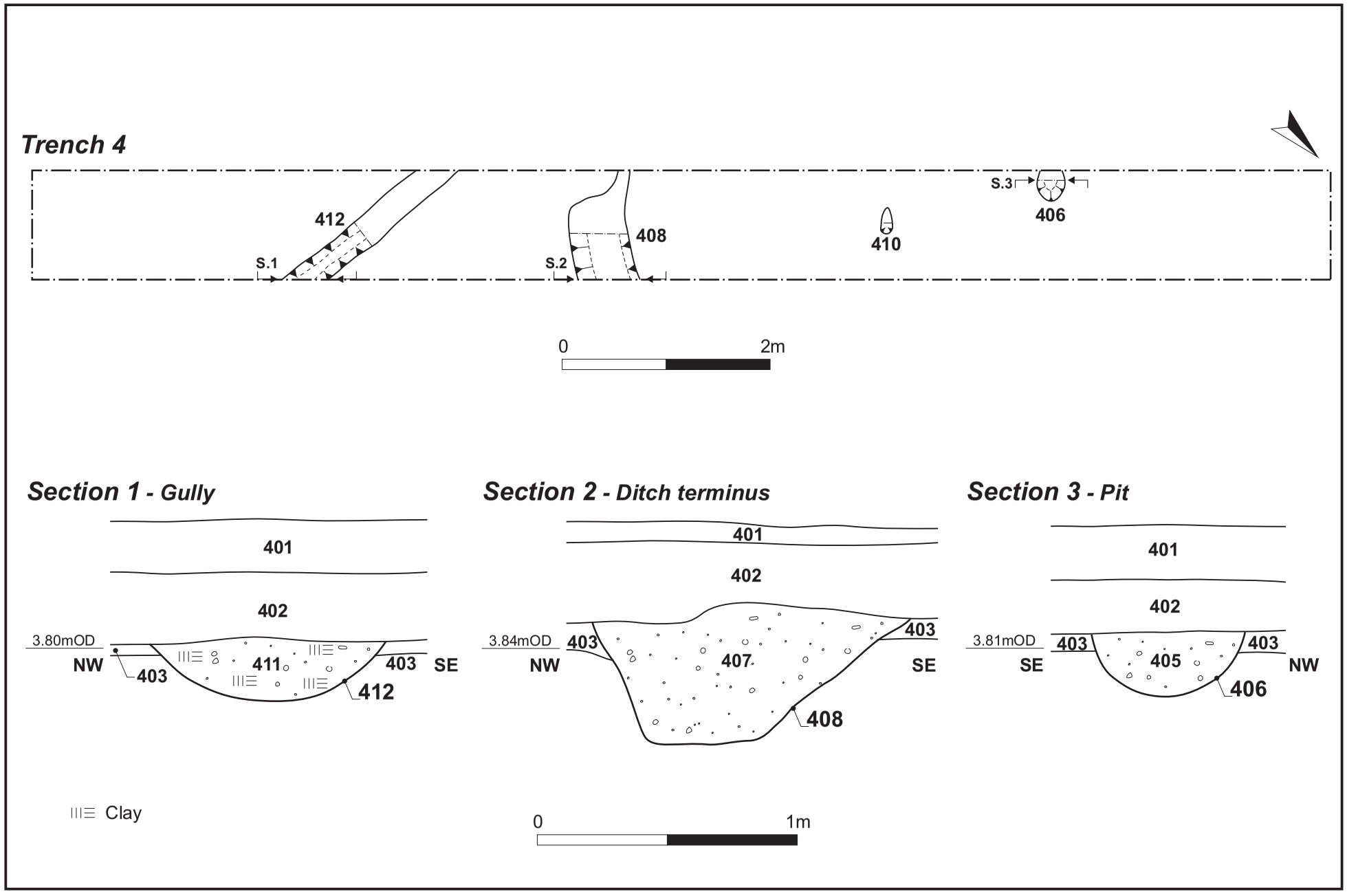
Scale 1:12,500

Site location and sites of previous excavations Fig 1



Scale 1:2000

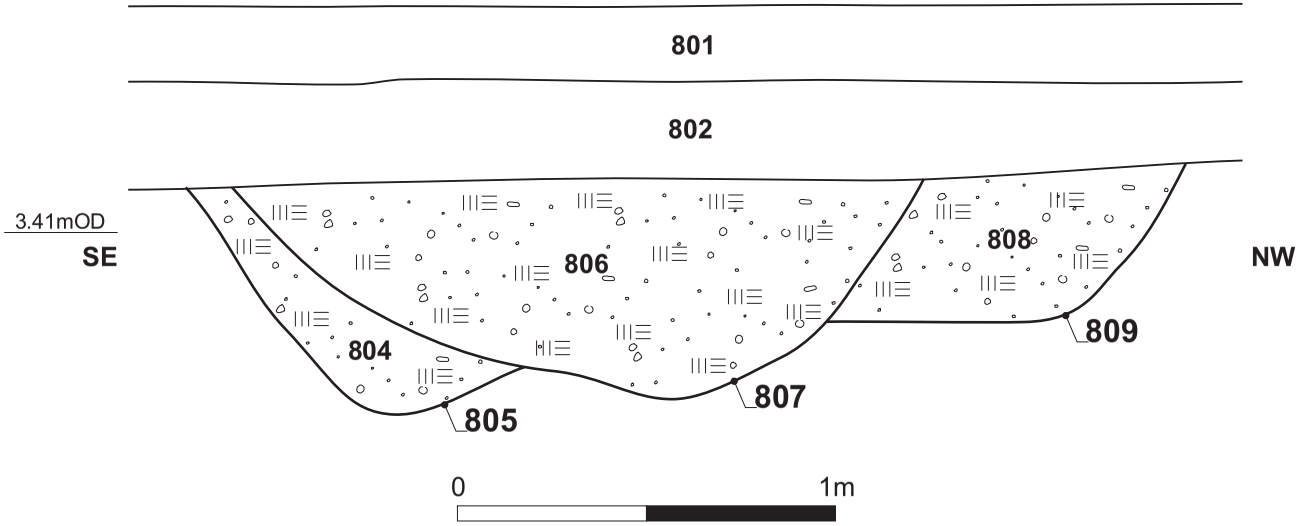
Trench locations Fig 2



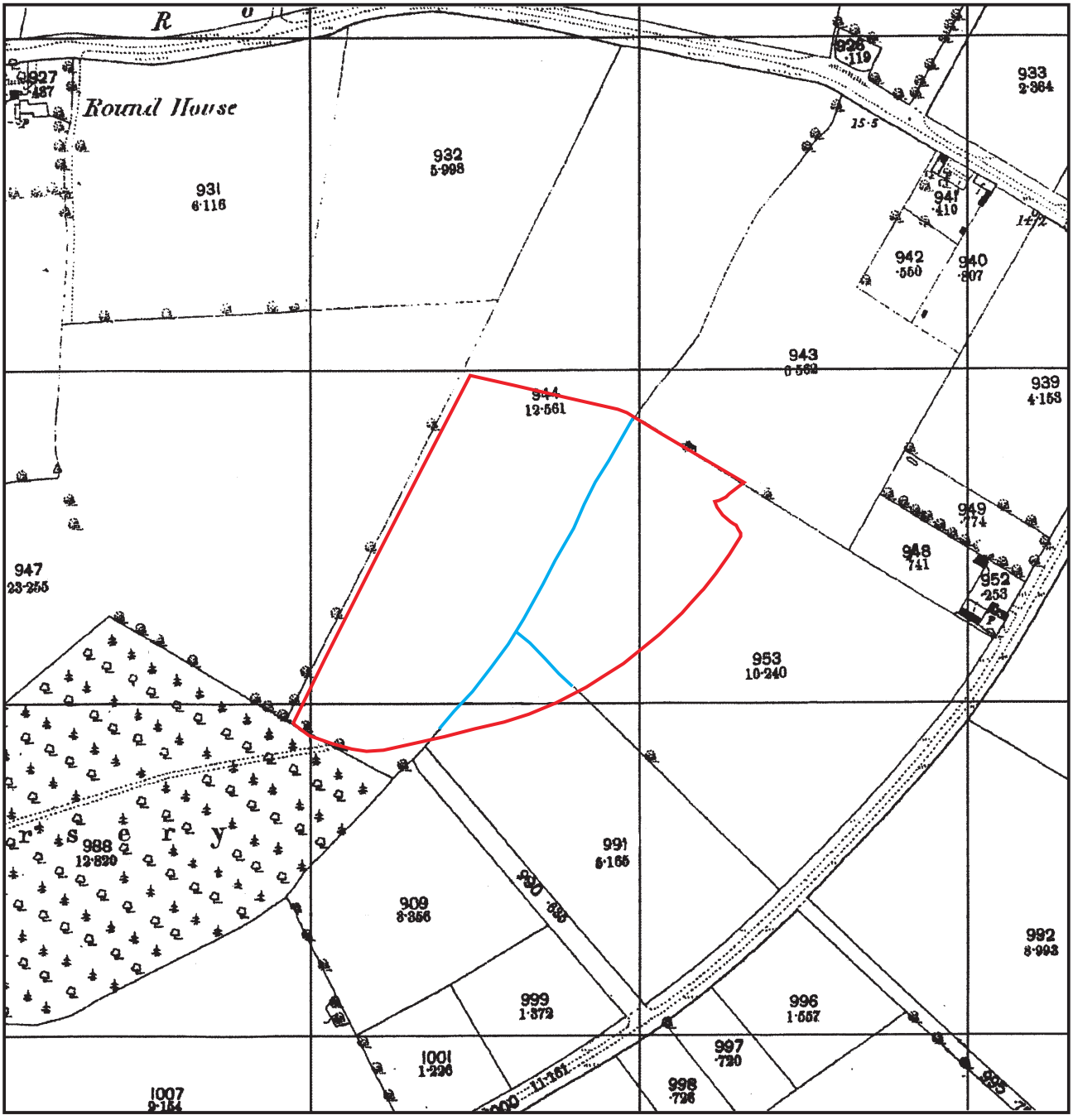
Trench 4, plan and sections 1 - 3 Fig 3

Trench 8

Section 4 - Ditch



Trench 8, plan and section 4 Fig 4



Site boundary
Boundary ditches

2nd Edition 6” Ordnance Survey map 1888 (courtesy of CgMs) Fig 5

Plate 1: Trench 4, general view, looking north-west.

Plate 2: Trench 4, pit [406], looking south-west.

Plate 3: Trench 4, ditch [408], looking north-east.

Plate 4: Trench 7, soil profile showing buried soil (703), looking north.

Plate 5: Trench 7, vegetation hollow [705], looking north-west.

Plate 6: Trench 8, boundary ditch [805], looking south-west.