

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Evaluation of
Land to the Rear of
20 Church Street, Stilton
Cambridgeshire
October 2007



Yvonne Wolframm-Murray

October 2007

Report 07/169

Event no. ECB 2722

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QUALITY CONTROL

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(Front page illustration: General view of Trench 1, facing west)

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological Evaluation of the Land to the Rear of 20 Church Street, Stilton, Cambridgeshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological evaluation was carried out on land to the rear of 20 Church Street, Stilton, Cambridgeshire. The earliest stratigraphic feature, which was otherwise undated, was a large, shallow hollow, at least 6m across; this feature may have been a pond, or possibly a watering hole for livestock. A farm track, shown on an aerial photograph dating to the mid 1980s, was identified in the north-west corner of the site. The track appears to have been in use for a considerable period and may date back to the post-medieval period. The track was used to drive livestock from the farm to the former pasture fields to the north. Two ditches of a similar date were encountered to the east of the track. A layer of demolition rubble, possibly from former farm buildings and a boundary wall, was spread over a large area beneath the topsoil.	
Project type	Trial trench evaluation	
Previous work	None	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type and period	None	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address (including postcode)	20 Church Lane, Stilton, Cambridgeshire PE7 3RF	
National grid reference	TL 1616 8938	
Height OD	13m aOD	
Site area	0.32ha	
Land use	Rough grazing	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Cambridgeshire CC	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Yvonne Wolfram-Murray	
Project Manager	Simon Carlyle	
Sponsor or funding body	Williams & Sons	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	04/10/07	
End date	05/10/07	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no. ECB 2722)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title	Archaeological Evaluation of Land to the rear of 20 Church Street, Stilton, Cambridgeshire	
Serial title and volume	07/169	
Author(s)	Yvonne Wolfram-Murray	
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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	BACKGROUND.....	2
3	EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY.....	3
4	EXCAVATION RESULTS.....	4
5	DISCUSSION.....	5
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	
	APPENDIX	

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1: Site location 1:10,000

Fig 2: Trench location 1:5000

Fig 3: Plans of Trenches 1 and 3, and sections of ditches [306] and [308]

PLATES

Plate 1: Aerial view of the site in the 1960s

Plate 2: Rubble layer beneath topsoil, Trench 1

Plate 3: Ditch [308], looking south-east

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF
LAND TO THE REAR OF
20 CHURCH STREET, STILTON
CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Event no. ECB 2722

Abstract

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on land to the rear of 20 Church Street, Stilton, Cambridgeshire. The earliest stratigraphic feature, which was otherwise undated, was a large, shallow hollow, at least 6m across; this feature may have been a pond, or possibly a watering hole for livestock. A farm track, shown on an aerial photograph dating to the mid 1980s, was identified in the north-west corner of the site. The track appears to have been in use for a considerable period and may date back to the post-medieval period. The track was used to drive livestock from the farm to the former pasture fields to the north. Two ditches of a similar date were encountered to the east of the track. A layer of demolition rubble, possibly from former farm buildings and a boundary wall, was spread over a large area beneath the topsoil.

1 INTRODUCTION

In October 2007, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on the land to the rear of 20 Church Street, Stilton, Cambridgeshire (site centred on NGR TL 1616 8938; Fig 1). The evaluation, which comprised the excavation of three trial trenches (a total of 80 linear metres; 160m²), was commissioned by Wythe Holland Partnership LLP, who were acting on behalf of clients.

As the site lies within an area of significant archaeological potential, an evaluation was requested by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA) in order to mitigate against the impact of the development on buried archaeological remains, should they have been encountered. The specific aims of the evaluation were to:

- Determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains on site
- Ensure the preservation of the remains by record through a programme of archaeological excavation and recording
- Obtain a chronological sequence for the human activity on the site and to place it within its regional context(s).
- To assess the environmental and economic potential of the site through an examination of suitable deposits and faunal remains.

Reference has been made to the national framework for research, as set out by English Heritage (EH 1997), and to the archaeological resource assessment and regional research framework for the Eastern Counties of England (Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000).

The work was carried out in accordance with the project design prepared by NA (2007) to the requirements of the brief issued by CAPCA (2007). The project design also complied with Appendix 2 of the English Heritage procedural document *Management of Archaeological Projects* (EH 1991) and appropriate national standards and

guidelines, as recommended by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). This report details the results of the trial trench evaluation.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The village of Stilton is situated *c* 8km south-west of Peterborough, adjacent to the A1(M) motorway (Fig 1). The proposed development site is located near the centre of the village, approximately 200m east of the medieval parish church of St Mary Magdalene and immediately west of North Street, which follows the route of the Roman road known as Ermine Street.

The site comprises a roughly square field of coarse pasture with several farm buildings in the south-west corner, and an adjoining access road leading from Church Street to the rear of the properties fronting on to the street (Fig 2). The overall development area, including the area of the access road, covers *c* 0.32ha. The site lies at an approximate height of 13m aOD and slopes slightly to the north. The underlying solid geology comprises Oxford Clay, with superficial deposits of glacial till (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex). The overlying soil on the site belongs to the Evesham 3 (411c) soil association, comprising slowly permeable calcareous clayey, and fine loamy over clayey soil (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

There is no record of any previous archaeological interventions or finds on the proposed development site. Aerial photographs taken in the 1960s (Plate 1) and mid 1980s, copies of which were kindly provided by the landowner, show the site as rough pasture at these times; a number of small sheds, farm machinery and piles of farm refuse are also shown on the earlier photograph.

Some of the earliest human activity recognized in the general area dates to the late Mesolithic/early Neolithic period, and comprises a small assemblage of flint flakes and cores, found on a gravel island in the fens, *c* 1km north-east of the application site (HER 17147). Approximately 0.7km to the west of the site, a flint thumb nail scraper and flake, identified as early Bronze Age in date, were found during fieldwalking in Bridle Field (HER 14698).

The Roman period is represented by Ermine Street (HER CB15034), the Roman road that passes through the village along the line of North Street. An evaluation of the road was carried out as part of the A1 road widening programme to the north of Stilton, near Folksworth, where the road consisted of two flint cobble layers overlying made-ground, with no roadside ditches. At the south end of King Street, Godmanchester, at the junction with Ermine Street, the Roman road was visible as a gravel track without an agger. Roman settlement has been located in the area at Stilton Dyke, on the gravel fen island mentioned above. Following the discovery of a quantity of 2nd- and 3rd-century pottery, further investigation and excavation revealed three probable pottery kilns. These kilns formed part of a larger settlement, as identified by geophysical survey (HER 17147).

The site lies close to the medieval parish church of St Mary Magdalene (HER01723). The nave arcades date to the mid-13th century but the church was largely reconstructed in the 15th century, with later restorations in 1887-1888 and 1908. There are also the remains of a medieval cross (HER01456) and a medieval gravestone (HER01576) nearby. Furthermore, medieval ridge and furrow, hollow ways and a medieval pit and ditch have been identified in the immediate area (HER11619, 11620, 09933, 10497, 10197 and 14635). The post-medieval period is represented by a number of Grade II listed buildings and the Grade II* Bell Inn (HER01341), which was built in 1642. There is also evidence of quarrying to the north of Stilton in the 18th and early 19th centuries (HER9935).

3 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Three 1.8m wide trenches were excavated within the proposed development area, two measuring 30m long and one 20m long (a total of 80 linear metres). The topsoil, subsoil and non-structural post-medieval and later deposits were removed by mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, to reveal significant archaeological remains or, where these were absent, the natural substrate. The topsoil was stacked separately from the subsoil and other deposits. This work was carried out under archaeological supervision.

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. Archaeological features were sample-excavated by hand; sections excavated through linear features were at least 1m wide and discrete features were half-sectioned. Each feature or deposit was given a unique number consisting of the trench number and an individual context number (eg 302, Trench 3, 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 (between 1:10 and 1:50). 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 OS National Grid. A photographic record was made of the excavation, using both 35mm colour transparency and black and white negative film, supplemented with digital photographs.

All works were carried out accordance with the IFA *Code of Conduct* (1985, revised 2006) and the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1994, revised 2001). In addition, all works complied with the guidelines set out in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2002). All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

The programme of trial trench evaluation was monitored by CAPCA. Arrangements have been made with Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Office for the deposition of the site archive and finds (accession/event no. ECB 2175). The guidelines of the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA 1993) will be followed in the preparation of the archive.

4 EXCAVATION RESULTS

4.1 General stratigraphy

The natural substrate was glacial till, comprising light brownish yellow or orangey brown sandy silty clay, with veins of bluish grey sandy clay. There were patches of angular to rounded pebbles and small cobbles, mostly flint, throughout the natural substrate. The overlying subsoil, which varied in thickness between 0.3 and 0.6m, was mid brown silty clay, containing occasional pebbles and charcoal flecks. Either directly on top of the subsoil or spread as a layer within the topsoil, there was an intermittent layer of demolition rubble, comprising brick, tile and limestone rubble (Plate 2). This layer was up to *c* 0.5m thick. The topsoil was generally 0.3m thick across the site, although it was up to 0.5m thick in the centre of Trench 2, and comprised dark brownish grey organic, slightly sandy clayey silt, supporting coarse, tussocky grass and weeds. With the exception of 19th- and 20th-century pottery, glass and building materials (not retained) from the topsoil, there were no archaeologically significant finds.

4.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 30m long, aligned from east to west and located close to the northern edge of the site, roughly parallel to the northern boundary fence. The natural substrate (103) was encountered at a depth of *c* 0.8m below ground level. The overlying subsoil (104) was up to 0.6m thick. This was sealed by a layer of demolition rubble (102) that was between 0.10m and 0.48m thick. According to the landowners, a stone wall once ran along the northern boundary of the field; it was demolished when the houses to the north of the site were built in the 1980s. It is likely that this accounts for much of the rubble in this area. The topsoil (101) was between 0.05m and 0.25m thick.

At the western end of the trench there was a shallow, linear hollow [110], the base of which lay approximately 1.1m below ground level (Fig 3). It was not possible to determine the full width of the hollow due to the presence of a concrete drain [111] at the western end of the trench, but it was at least 4.5m wide. It was aligned from north to south and lay directly beneath the modern track, now grassed over but visible in section, suggesting that the hollow was probably created by the driving of livestock along a well-worn route over several centuries. The base of the hollow was roughly lined with loose cobbles, covered with dark brownish grey clay (109), which was up to 0.34m thick. This deposit was waterlogged and contained well-preserved branch and twig fragments, suggesting that attempts had been made to consolidate the ground. This layer was overlain by a 0.20m thick sterile layer of mid orangey brown sandy clay, containing moderate limestone pebbles. The uppermost layer comprised 19th/20th-century demolition rubble (105), which was up to 0.55m thick near the centre of the buried track. A relatively modern posthole [107], with a diameter of *c* 0.3m and filled with a 'woody' mid brown silt (106), lay 8.5m to the east of the track.

4.3 Trench 2

This trench was 30m long, aligned from north to south, and located on the eastern side of the site. The natural substrate (206) was encountered at a depth between 0.7m and 1.0m below ground level.

Near the centre of the trench there was a comparatively shallow, irregular hollow [205], up to 0.51m deep and approximately 6.2m wide. The base of the hollow was stony, with a thin, intermittent layer of angular and sub-angular flint pebbles and small cobbles. This was covered with a sterile layer of mid bluish grey silty clay (204), with frequent orangey brown mottles and very occasional charcoal flecks. The deposit was probably water-lain, suggesting that the hollow may have been a small, natural or artificial pond, or perhaps a watering hole for livestock.

The hollow was sealed by the subsoil (203), which was between 0.16m and 0.53m thick, reaching its maximum thickness over the hollow. The topsoil (202) was approximately 0.36m thick, and near the centre of the trench the ground surface had been levelled with a mixed layer of topsoil and building rubble (201), to a maximum thickness of *c* 0.25m, sealing the original topsoil.

4.4 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 20m long, aligned from north-west to the south-east and located near the centre of the site, *c* 15m north-east of the farm buildings. The natural geology (303) was encountered at a depth of between 0.66m and 1.07m below ground level, the greater depth occurring at the north-west end of the trench. The subsoil (304) was only encountered at the north-west end of the trench, where it was up to 0.56m thick; it appears to have been truncated at the south-east end by demolition and earth-moving activity in the late 20th century.

In the north-western half of the trench and cutting the subsoil were two small, roughly parallel ditches, aligned from north to south (Fig 3, Sections 1 and 2). Ditch [306], the more easterly of the two, measured *c* 1.2m wide, 0.59m deep, and was filled by dark brownish black sandy clay (307). Ditch [308] had been truncated and had a surviving width of *c* 0.6m and depth of 0.24m (Plate 3). It was filled by light brownish yellow silty clay (309). Neither feature produced any artefactual dating evidence, although they both cut the subsoil, suggesting that they are relatively recent in date and are probably associated with the farm track identified in Trench 1.

The ditches were sealed by a layer of building rubble (302), approximately 0.2m thick. At the south-east end of the trench the rubble lay directly over the natural substrate and was up to 0.59m thick. The landowners thought that the rubble may derive from a building that is shown on an aerial photograph from the 1960s (Plate 1), which was demolished in the 1980s. The rubble was covered with a thin layer, 0.05m thick, of topsoil (301).

5 DISCUSSION

No significant archaeological remains or artefacts were identified or recovered from the proposed development site.

The earliest feature, which was sealed by the subsoil but otherwise undated, was a large, shallow hollow, at least 6m across; given the sterile nature of the fill, this feature may have been a pond, although it is possible that it was used a watering hole for livestock. The hollow was still visible as a surface feature until it was backfilled with topsoil and building rubble in the late 20th century.

A farm track was identified in the north-west corner of the site; it appears to have been in use for a considerable period and may date back to the post-medieval period. According to the landowner, the track was used to drive livestock from the farm to the former pasture fields to the north, in the area now occupied by modern housing. The track is clearly visible on aerial photographs which date to the 1960s (Plate 1) and the mid 1980s.

Two ditches of a similar date were encountered to the east of the track, near the centre of the site; they may have been side ditches associated with the track. A layer of demolition rubble, possibly from former farm buildings and a boundary wall, was spread over a large area beneath the topsoil.

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Maps

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1:250,000

APPENDIX

Summary of features

Trench no.	Context no.	Feature type	Date
1	101	Topsoil	Modern
	102	Demolition rubble	Modern
	103	Natural substrate	-
	104	Subsoil	-
	106 [107]	Posthole?	Modern
	105 108 109 [110]	Farm track	Post-medieval/modern
	[111]	Concrete drain	Modern
	2	201	Topsoil/rubble
202		Topsoil	Modern
203		Subsoil	-
204 [205]		Hollow/pond/waterhole?	Undated
206		Natural substrate	-
3	301	Topsoil	Modern
	302	Demolition rubble	Modern
	303	Natural substrate	-
	304	Subsoil	-
	305 [306]	Ditch	Post-medieval/modern
	307 [308]	Ditch	Undated



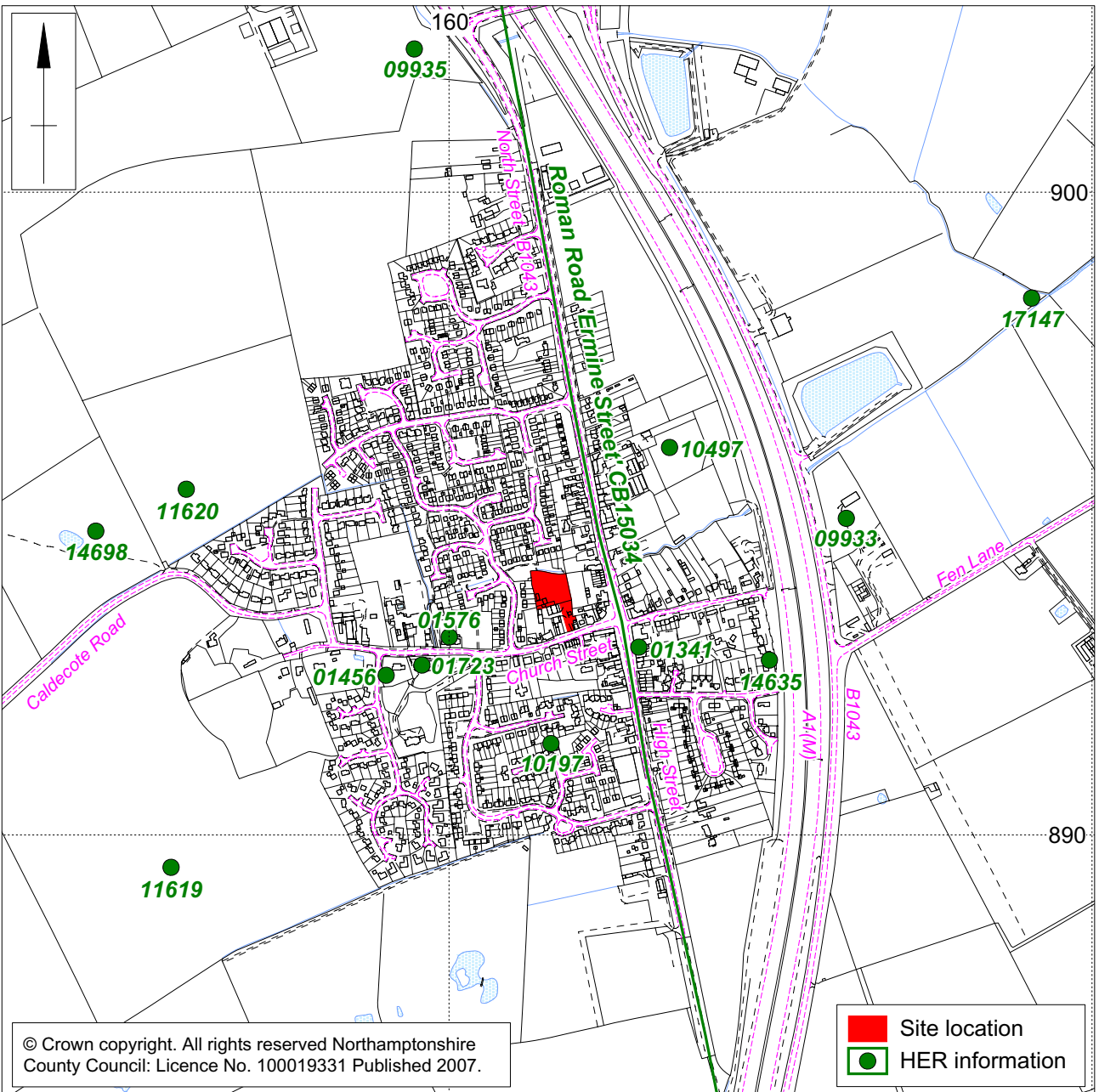
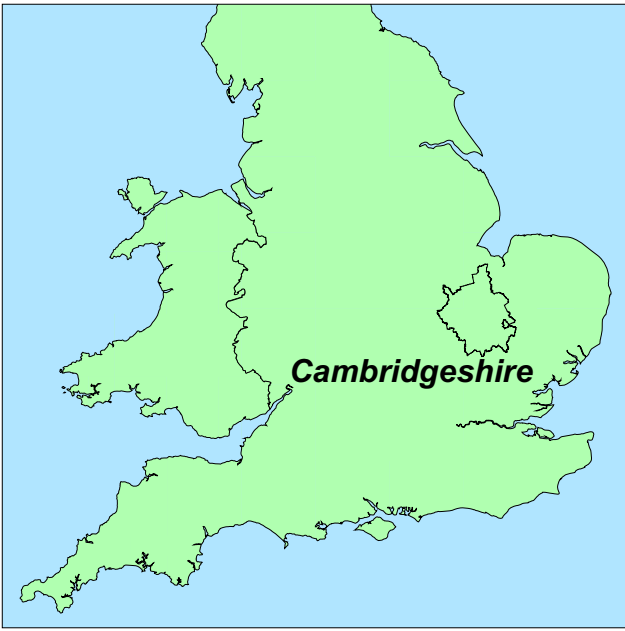
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0 20m

Site boundary
Trenches

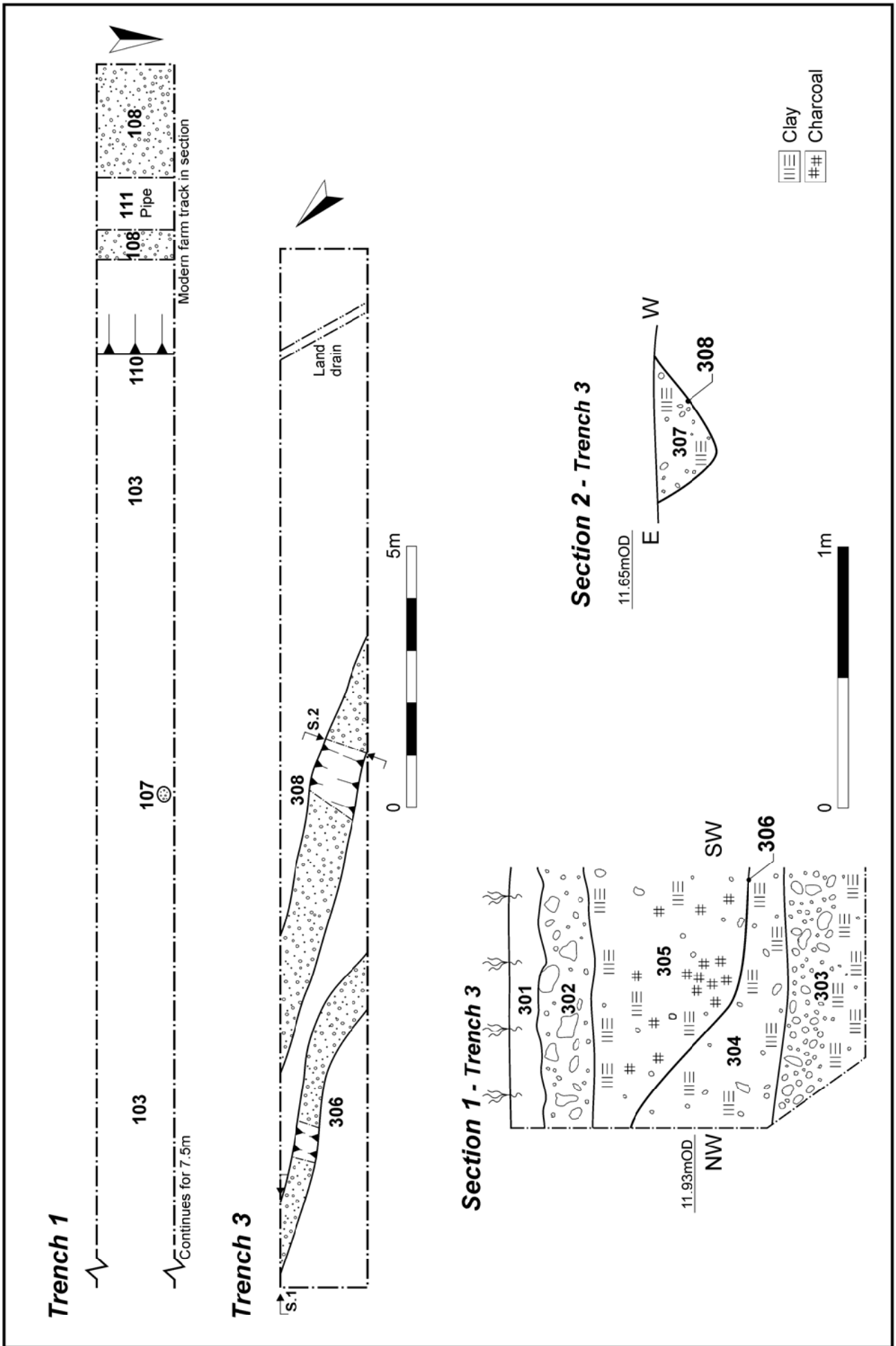
Scale 1:5000

Trench location Fig 2



Scale 1:10,000

Site location and Historic Environment Record (HER) Fig 1



Plans of Trench 1 and 3 and sections from trench 3 Fig 3



Plate 1: Aerial view of site in the 1960s.



Plate 2: Rubble layer beneath topsoil, Trench 1.



Plate 3: Ditch [308], looking south-east.