



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Trial Excavation Phase 3

at Rochford Nurseries

Stansted Mountfichet,

Essex

August 2007



Stephen Morris

September 2007

Report 07/133

Northamptonshire Archaeology

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Trial Excavation Phase 3 at Rochford Nurseries Stansted Mountfichet, Essex	
Short description	Phase 3 evaluation comprised the excavation of 31 trial trenches. Phases 1 and 2 of the site had been previously evaluated with negative results. Fourteen of the trenches contained archaeological features comprising pits, ditches and gullies. Most were undated, and those that did produce diagnostic material were post-medieval in date, with the exception of one pit which produced a single small sherd of abraded Iron Age pottery.	
Project type	Trial trenching	
Site status	Rural development, abandoned garden nursery	
Previous work)	DBA (Chadwick 2004) Evaluation (OA 2006)	
Current Land use	Waste ground/ scrub	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Unknown	
Significant finds	Iron Age pottery (1 sherd)	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Essex	
Site address	Rochford Nurseries, Foresthall Road' Stansted Mountfichet, Essex	
Study area	Approx 15ha	
OS Easting & Northing	514500 241500	
Height OD	85m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	CgMs Consulting (Chadwick 2003)	
Project Design originator	Oxford Archaeology (OA 2003)	
Director/Supervisor	Stephen Morris	
Project Manager	Paul Chadwick (CgMs) Adam Yates (NA)	
Sponsor or funding body	Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	August2007	
End date	September 2007	
ARCHIVES	Location (SAFWM.2007.90)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	3 b/w film, 3 cs film	Pottery, clay tobacco pipe
Paper	1 file, 3 section sheet, 3plan sheet	
Digital	Photo's	
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Trial trenching on land at the Rochford Nurseries , Stansted Mountfichet, Essex, Phase III	
Serial title & volume	07/133	
Author(s)	Stephen Morris	
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Date	September 2007	

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TRIAL EXCAVATION PHASE 3
AT ROCHFORD NURSERIES
STANSTED MOUNTFICHET, ESSEX
REPORT 07/133

Abstract

A total of 31 trial trenches were excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of CgMs Consulting acting for Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd, on land at the Rochford Nurseries Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. The land had previously been used as a plant nursery and is now designated for residential development. Phases 1 and 2 of the site had been previously evaluated by Oxford Archaeology (OA 2006) with negative results; the current works form Phase 3 of the evaluation.

Originally 30 trenches were specified, however, an additional Trench (No 77) was agreed by Essex County Council and CgMs to try and resolve some outstanding queries. Fourteen of the trenches contained archaeological features. Most were undated, and those that did produce diagnostic material were post-medieval in date, with the exception of one pit which produced a single small sherd of abraded pottery of probable Iron Age date.

The features were grouped into two areas at the western and eastern end of the evaluated areas. Two large pits may have been quarries or watering holes, one of which produced probable Iron Age pottery. A series of shallow undated gullies, may relate to previous land boundaries or agricultural activity. Other features included post-medieval ditches and pits and features or areas of disturbance associated with the nursery.

Most features cut the sub-soil, where it was present and all were sealed by top soil. No dating evidence was retrieved from the sub-soil, but frequent 19th/20th century red earthenware garden pottery and fragments of brick were recovered from the topsoil.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the CgMs Consulting on behalf of Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd to undertake a trial trench evaluation on land at the Rochford Nurseries, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex, (NGR: TL 154 415, Fig 1) prior to residential development (Planning application ref: UTT/0443/98/OP). The general objective of the evaluation was to identify any evidence for the survival of buried archaeological remains that may be threatened by development of the site, and to determine the depth of burial, character, date, extent and state of preservation of any such remains.

Phases 1 and 2 of the site had been previously evaluated by Oxford Archaeology (OA 2006) with negative results; the current works form Phase 3 of the evaluation.

2 BACKGROUND

The development site is situated on the south side of Stansted Mountfitchet at approximately 85m AOD. It occupies a roughly rectangular area of 15ha, bounded to the north by the rear of properties fronting north onto Manor Road and Stoney Common, to the west by an undefined boundary running through the Rochford Nursery site, to the south by Foresthall Road, and to the east by Church Road.

The geology of the site was glacial sand and gravels (of Pre- Anglian date) over London Clay (Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 222: Great Dunmow). Immediately beyond the site boundary to the south-east Boulder Clay (deposited by the Anglian phase of glaciation) overlies the sand and gravel deposit although this Clay does not appear to extend into the site itself.

Phase 1 and 2 of the evaluation of the site did not identify any archaeological features, although extensive modern disturbance associated with the former nursery was evident (OA 2006).

The 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey of late 19th century Stansted Mountfitchet, shows the site to be largely open fields, except for north-south aligned field boundaries and a track. The site appears to have remained unchanged until the end of the 19th century, when the nurseries were being developed. The nurseries continued into the early 20th century, when they were abandoned, until the site was cleared in preparation for the proposed development.

No archaeological evidence has been identified on or close to the site and archaeological finds in the immediate area is very limited. A number of archaeological investigations have been carried out in the region (Stansted Airport, A120 Braintree to Stansted Trunk Road), revealing a landscape with extensive settlement activity dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman periods. This evidence indicates that the site has a potential to contain undiscovered sites, particularly of later prehistoric or Roman-British date (Chadwick 2002).

3 METHODOLOGY

Thirty-one trenches were excavated totalling 745 linear metres, numbered 47 to 77 following on from the numbering sequence used on previous works on the site (Fig 2). The

trenches were randomly distributed across the unevaluated part of the site avoiding the new subterranean services, overhead cables, natural obstructions and areas of asbestos contamination.

The trenches were machine-excavated using a 2m wide flat bladed ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision in shallow spits. Each trench was excavated to the level of the natural subsoil or the exposure of archaeological deposits, at which point hand-excavation was undertaken.

Excavation conformed to the requirements and with the standards set out in the IFA's Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (IFA 1999). The methodologies employed were set out in the Specification and Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by CgMs Consulting (Chadwick 2003) and Oxford Archaeology's Project Design (OA 2003).

The trenches were sufficiently cleaned by hand in order to determine the nature of deposits present. Archaeological deposits were hand excavated and fully recorded by written, drawn and photographic records. Sections and plans were drawn at appropriate scales and levelled to Ordnance Datum. No environmentally distinctive deposits with potential to address palaeo-environmental issues were present. The location of the trenches was accurately surveyed and related to the Ordnance Survey grid and Ordnance Datum, using survey grade GPS.

4 EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

Features of archaeological interest appeared to be located in two areas of the evaluation; the trenches to the western part of the site (Trenches 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57 and 77, Fig 3) and the trenches to the east (Trenches 68, 69, 72, 73, 74 and 75, Fig 4). The remaining trenches contained no archaeological features.

General stratigraphic sequence

The natural geology throughout the site generally comprised orange/yellowish-brown coarse glacial sand/silt, with frequent angular to sub-rounded gravels, including moderate/large sized flint nodules. To a lesser extent areas or patches of natural light yellowish/buff coloured clay were also identified.

The subsoil consisted largely of an orange brown sandy/silty loam with moderate angular and sub-rounded gravel inclusions and a depth between 0.10 to 0.33m. No finds were recovered from the subsoil. The subsoil deposit was not present or was negligible in Trenches 47, 48, 58, 60, 61 62, 74 and 76, which were located on the periphery of the

evaluation area, where the escarpment sloped to the north and on the eastern side. The subsoil appeared to be cut by all the archaeological features, but for a single linear feature located in Trenches 69 and 75, which may have been sealed by it.

The topsoil was fairly consistent across the site, comprising of a mid grey brown silty/sandy loam, with few to moderate angular and sub-rounded gravel inclusions and a depth between 0.10 to 0.33m. A frequent amount of 19th/20th century pot debris was recovered from the top soil of most trenches, including the occasional brick and tile fragments. The amount of artefactual remains clearly relate to the period when the nursery was in use. The topsoil sealed all the archaeological features, except where otherwise stated.

Trench 49

Trench 49 contained a post-medieval pit and an undated ditch.

Pit [4904]

Sub-circular pit [4904] had steep sloping sides, with a flattish base, up to 1.3m in diameter and 0.5 -0.6m deep. The fill (4905) was a light to mid grey brown sandy-silt, with a moderate amount of gravel. A frequent number of 19th/20th century red earthenware garden pottery sherds and iron nails were recovered from the pit fill, suggesting it probably related to the nursery activity, either as rubbish pit, but it may have been a tree bole as the sides were uneven and undercut in part.

Ditch [4906]

Ditch [4906] was aligned approximately north-south. It had a broad U-shaped profile, 1.4m wide and 0.6m deep, with two fills; mid-grey brown sandy-silt primary fill (4907) containing frequent gravel and an upper fill (4908) of mid-grey brown sandy-silt, up to 0.4m in depth. Neither of the fills included any artefacts, but the upper deposit had a similar appearance to the subsoil.

Trench 50

Trench 50 contained a single modern feature and a disused east-west aligned iron water pipe was located in the north end of the trench, which was probably part of the nursery water system.

Ditch [5004]

An unexcavated irregular linear feature [5004], aligned east-west was 0.6m wide, cut the subsoil and topsoil and contained a grey-brown sandy loam (5005) similar to the topsoil,

including decayed timber fragments. No finds were recovered, but the nature of the fill and its stratigraphic position indicate that it related to nursery activity.

Trench 51

Trench 51 contained a single undated ditch.

Ditch [5104]

Located at the east end of the trench was a ditch [5104], aligned approximately south-west to north-east, with a rounded butt-end forming a south-west terminal. It had a broad U-shaped profile 0.52m deep and 1m wide. The ditch had a single fill (5105) of dark yellowish/orange brown sandy-silt, with frequent small to medium gravel. No finds were recovered. This ditch may relate to a similar orientated ditch terminal [5508] located in Trench 55.

Trench 52

Trench 52 contained a single undated pit.

Pit [5204]

The pit was a very large steep sided circular/oval feature at least 3.75m wide and was excavated to depth of 1.15m, although the base was not reached (Figs 3 and 5, section 1, Plate 1). The pit had at least two fills, the lower fill (5202) of light reddish brown silty-sand with frequent gravel and large flint nodules, at least 0.8m deep, overlain by light grey brown sandy-silty loam (5206). No finds were recovered from the fills.

Trench 53

Trench 53 contained a single undated pit. A small brick pier and an asbestos pipe are related to previous nursery activity.

Pit [5304]

A small shallow pit was excavated that was 0.6m in diameter and at least 0.1m deep, with light grey brown sandy loam fill (5305), which contained recent brick and glass fragments. The feature probably related to the nursery activity.

Trench 55

Trench 55 contained four ditches, a pit and a disused water pipe.

Ditch [5514]

Ditch [5514], was the earliest of a sequence ditches in this trench. It was aligned south-east to north-west, and was 0.55m wide and 0.20m deep with a shallow broad, flat-based cut.

The single fill (5515) was dark reddish brown sandy loam, from which no finds were recovered. It was cut at its northwest end by ditch [5510], with the southeast end continuing beyond the edge of excavation.

Ditch [5510]

Ditch [5510] was orientated south-west to the north-east and had a V-shaped profile, 1.2m wide and 0.6m deep (Figs 3 and 5, Section 2). The primary fill (5511) was a light yellowish/grey brown sandy-silt with frequent small angular and sub-rounded gravel. Overlying the primary deposit was an almost stone free fill (5512) of mid brown silty loam, 0.1m thick. The upper fill (5513) was silty-sand with moderate gravel inclusions. No finds were present in any of the fills.

Ditch [5508]

Ditch [5508] lay 1.5m to the north of ditch [5510] on a similar alignment with a rounded butt-end forming a northeast terminal. The ditch had a U-shaped profile and was 1.15m wide and 0.55m deep. The fill (5509) was mid orange brown silty sand, which contained no finds. The ditch was the possible north-east terminal of ditch [5104] in Trench 51.

Pit [5506]

This pit was a shallow, flat based feature 0.5m in diameter and 0.1m deep, filled by (5507); a mid grey brown silty-sand and the occasional gravel. No finds were recovered. The north edge of the pit was cut by ditch [5504].

Ditch [5504]

The ditch was aligned approximately east-west, with steep sloping sides and a concave base, 1.5m wide and 0.4m deep. The main fill (5505) of the ditch was mid grey brown silty sand, with moderate gravel content, including a large lens of light orange brown sandy/silty loam (5517), which had modern glass within it. Fill (5505) contained fragments of 19th/20th-century red earthenware garden pottery and brick fragments. Overlying fill (5505) was a very thin layer (5516) no more than 0.05m thick, which formed the upper fill, comprising a yellowish/orange brown sandy-silt, which contained no finds. The ditch [5504] partially cuts the pit [5506], and both features probably related to the activity in the nursery.

Trench 56

Trench 56 contained a single post-medieval ditch.

Ditch [5604]

Ditch [5604] was aligned north-south, with moderately steep sloping sides and a slightly rounded base, 0.8m wide and 0.35m deep. The fill (5605) was light greyish brown sandy silt with few small gravel and the occasional large flint cobble inclusions which produced a fragment of 19th century clay tobacco pipe. This continued into Trench 57 as ditch [5705].

Trench 57

Trench 57 contained a post-medieval ditch and spread of recent building rubble.

Ditch [5705]

Ditch [5705] was a continuation of ditch [5604] in Trench 56 and was not excavated. The fill (5706) was similar to fill (5605) of ditch [5604].

Layer (5702)

At the west end of the trench there was a small spread of building rubble and tile up to 0.1m thick, between the subsoil and topsoil layers. This layer probably related to activity that occurred during the life of the nursery.

Trench 68

Trench 68 contained a large pit (Fig 4).

Pit [6804]

Pit [6804] was probably a large feature, with straightish edges giving it a sub-square appearance. It was at least 7.5m wide, with moderately steep sides, increasing to near vertical on the east side and was excavated to a depth of 1m but not bottomed (Figs 4 and 5, section 3). The pit had a single fill (6805) comprising mid reddish brown silty-sand, with frequent small gravel/pebble, the occasional flint nodule and charcoal fleck. A single small abraded fragment of probable Iron Age pottery was recovered from the pit fill, although it was possibly residual.

Trench 69

Trench 69 contained an undated gully.

Gully [6905]

At the east end the trench a narrow 0.4m wide north-south gully was located. This was a continuation of gully [7507] was excavated in nearby Trench 75. The fill (6905) was light grey sandy gravel. It was not excavated.

Trench 72

Trench 72 contained two undated and one post-medieval ditch.

Ditch [7205]

Ditch [7205] was a shallow, flat-based feature aligned north-east to south-west, up to 1m wide and 0.15m deep. The fill (7204) was orange brown sandy/silty loam, containing frequent small gravel. No finds were recovered.

Ditch [7207] / [7209]

At the east end of the trench, ditch [7207] was orientated north-west to south-east. It was a shallow, flat based feature, 0.14m deep and 0.45m wide, filled with orange-brown sandy gravel (7206). Recut [7209] along the northern side also had a flat base, although it was considerably more substantial, 0.75m wide and 0.33m deep, filled with orange brown silty sand (7208). A single sherd of 19th-century red earthenware garden pottery was recovered from fill (7208).

The similarities of the ditches [7205] and [7207] and their perpendicular setting to each other, suggests they may be contemporary.

Trench 73

Trench 73 contained an undated ditch.

Ditch [7304]

Ditch [7304] was aligned north-east to south-west. It had a U-shaped profile 0.8m wide and 0.7m deep, filled by mid orange brown silty sand, including frequent rounded and sub-angular gravel and flint nodules (7305) (Figs 4 and 5, section 4, Plate 2). No finds were recovered.

Trench 74

Trench 74 contained an undated ditch and gully.

Ditch [7403]

The ditch was a shallow flat-based feature aligned approximately north-west to south-east, 1.18m wide and 0.24m deep. The fill (7404) was light reddish brown coarse sand, with frequent rounded and sub-angular gravel and flint nodules. No finds were recovered. The ditch possibly corresponds with field boundary on the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map of late 19th-century Stansted Mountfitchet.

Gully [7405]

To the east of ditch [7403] on a similar alignment was a narrow gully [7405], 0.25m wide but not excavated. The fill (7406) was a light grey brown sandy-silt, with frequent gravel inclusions, similar to fill (7508). Although not aligned with gullies [7507] and [7405], it lay on parallel course and appeared to be a comparable feature.

Trench 75

Trench 75 contained an undated gully.

Gully [7507]

The shallow, narrow gully was 0.3m wide and 0.1m deep, located at the south-west end of the trench, aligned north-west to south-east. The fill (7508) was light grey brown, sandy gravel and flint nodules. This was a continuation of gully [6904].

Trench 77

Trench 77 contained a large undated feature (Fig 3).

Feature [7704]

East-west aligned feature [7704] was broad and flat based, 4m wide and 0.9m deep. The feature had near vertical sloping sides, with shallower slopes at the upper edge. There were three fills (7705), (7706) and (7707). The primary fill (7705) was mid brown sandy-silt with moderate gravel content, up to 0.2m thick. Overlying (7705) was layer (7706), mid orange brown sandy-silt, with a small amount of gravel inclusions up to 0.40m thick. The upper fill (7707) was light to mid brown silty loam with few gravel inclusions. No finds were retrieved from any of the fills. The feature was possibly recent gravel borrow pit, or more probably a bedding trench relating to activity of the nursery.

5 THE FINDS**Prehistoric Pottery**

by Andy Chapman

A single sherd of pottery, weighing 2g, was recovered from context [6805]. The sherd is from a hand-built vessel in a fabric containing voids from leached inclusions as well as occasional small rounded quartz grains, no more than 1mm in diameter, and fine specks possibly of mica. The core of the fabric is grey-brown with brown surfaces.

The small size of this sherd and the resultant lack of diagnostic features make it impossible to provide anything other than a prehistoric date for this vessel, although a broad Iron Age date may be tentatively suggested.

Post-medieval ceramics

by Tora Hylton

Sixty ceramic sherds weighing 1,500kg were recovered. The entire assemblage is post-medieval in date and is dominated by garden ceramics (flower pots). Domestic pottery is represented by three undiagnostic coarseware sherds in glazed red-earthenware which date to the 17th and 18th centuries. All three sherds were recovered from topsoil deposits overlying Trench 50. In addition there is a small group of undiagnostic tile (108gm) and brick (461gm).

The flowerpots are abraded, fragmentary and largely comprise undiagnostic body sherds. All the examples are manufactured from fine sand-tempered clays which have been fired to a hard, orange coloured fabric. Part of the assemblage is represented by rim, body and base fragments from large heavy flower pots measuring in excess of 300mm in diameter. They have thick bases and one example is perforated at the junction of the wall and base, a feature which is common on flower pots dating from the 18th century (Dix, Soden and Hylton 1995, fig 42) through to the 19th and early 20th centuries (Dix and Parry 1995, fig 146, 11). In addition some fragments indicate the use of external treatments to change the colour of the fabric; blue, maroon and brown slips have been noted on some fragments. Such treatments are known to have been a Midland tradition (Currie 1993, 238), possibly suggesting that these fragmentary examples, had originally been used as containers for the transport of plants from other regions. Other flowerpot forms include small pots measuring up to 100mm in diameter, with upright rims.

Clay tobacco pipe

by Tora Hylton

A single small fragment of clay tobacco pipe stem was recovered from context [5605]. The small size of the central bore (5/64 of an inch) suggests an 18th-century or later date (cf Walker 1967), otherwise this object is undiagnostic.

6 DISCUSSION

This phase of trial excavation resulted in the identification of a broad spread of pits, ditches and gullies across the evaluation area, although not in any great concentration and of a probable limited significance. The archaeological features identified appeared to be grouped in two areas at the eastern and western ends of the evaluated area.

Of these features, the most significant was the large pit [6804], in Trench 68 on the north side of the evaluation, from which a small fragment of prehistoric pottery was recovered, although this may be a residual find. The pit appears to be isolated, but a similar sized pit was located on the west side of the site in Trench 52, but no finds were recovered from it. Three smaller pits were also excavated but these were identified as nursery dated features.

Sixteen ditches and gullies were recorded across the site, of which three [5506], [5608] and [5209] are of recent date and another three [5705], [7205] and [7207] can be related to them by re-cutting, alignment, form and composition. These features were probably connected to activities of the nursery. Ditch [7403] in Trench 74 may be a field boundary identified on the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map of late 19th-century Stansted Mountfitchet.

The remaining ditches were undated, but this not to say that some or all of them were not also of recent date. These ditches were located to the east and west side of the site, but all had an approximately north-east to south-west or north-west to south-east alignment, indicating the possibility that they formed part of a coherent system.

The stratigraphic position of many of the undated features, cutting the subsoil, would imply a relatively late date. In the west side of the site a 40m length of ditch can be suggested to extend between the ditch terminals [5104] and [5508] in respective Trenches 51 and 55. The east side of the site also has possible gully [6904] and [7507] extended for 15m between Trenches 69 and 75. This gully may be significantly earlier features as it appeared to be sealed by the subsoil.

The lack of finds clearly suggests that whatever period the undated landscape features belong to, there was unlikely to be any major settlement or intensive activity on the site.

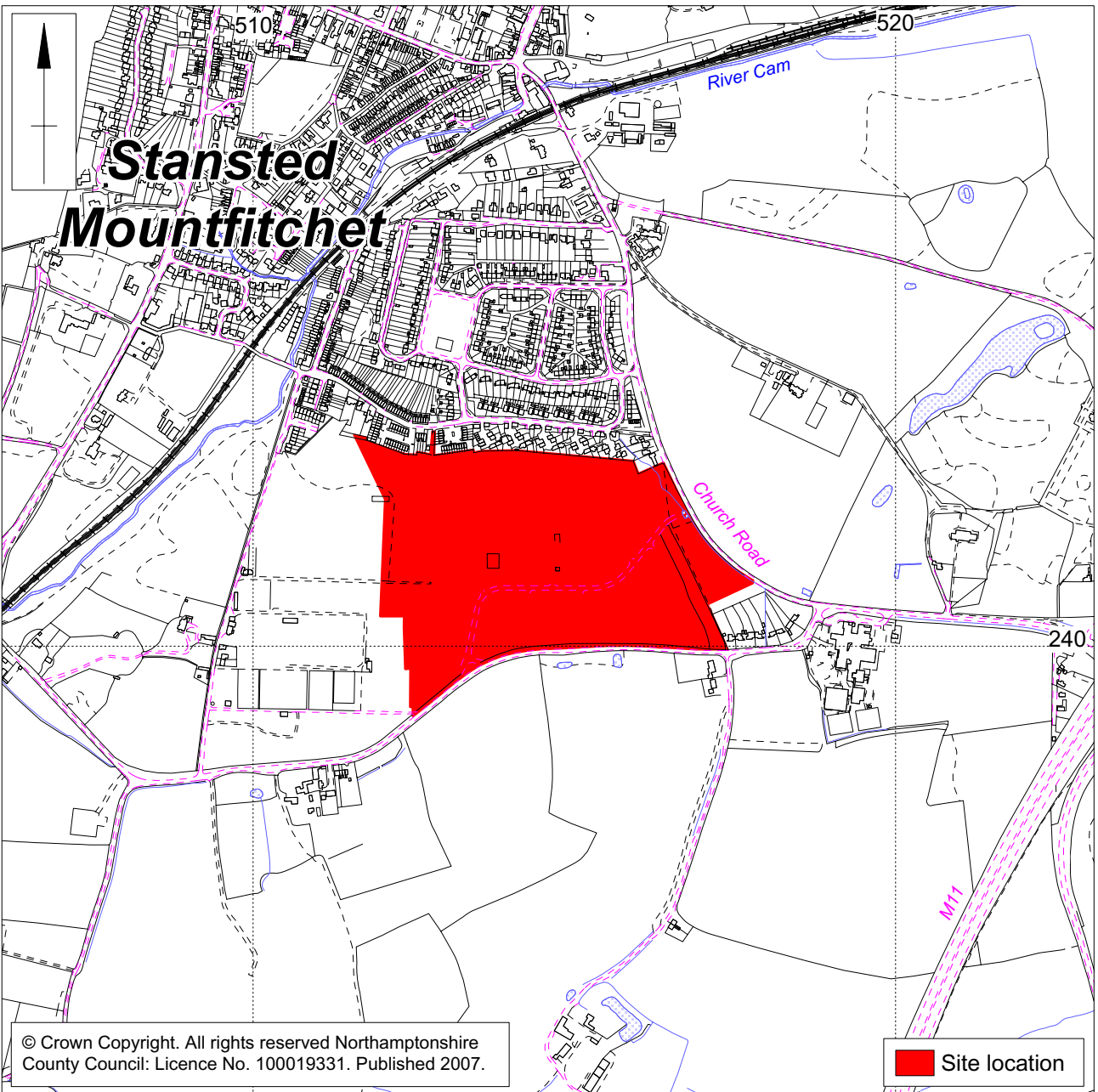
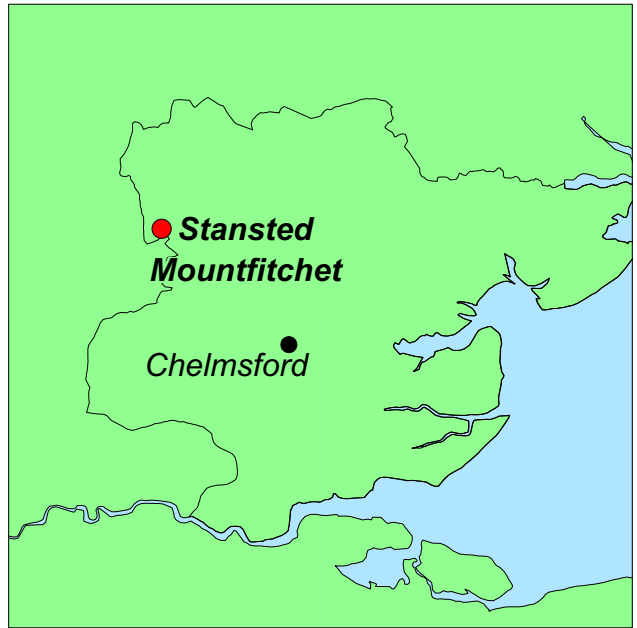
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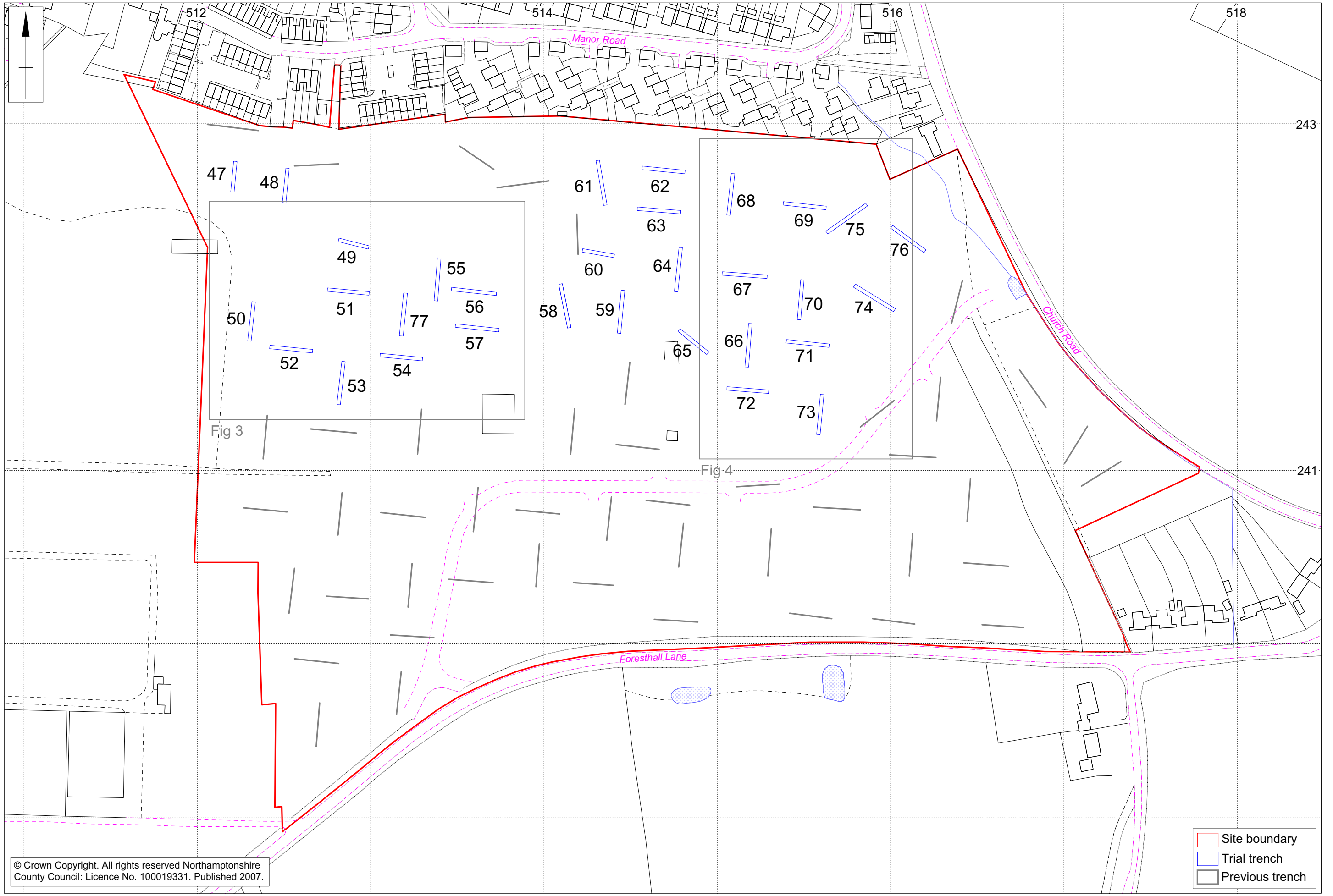
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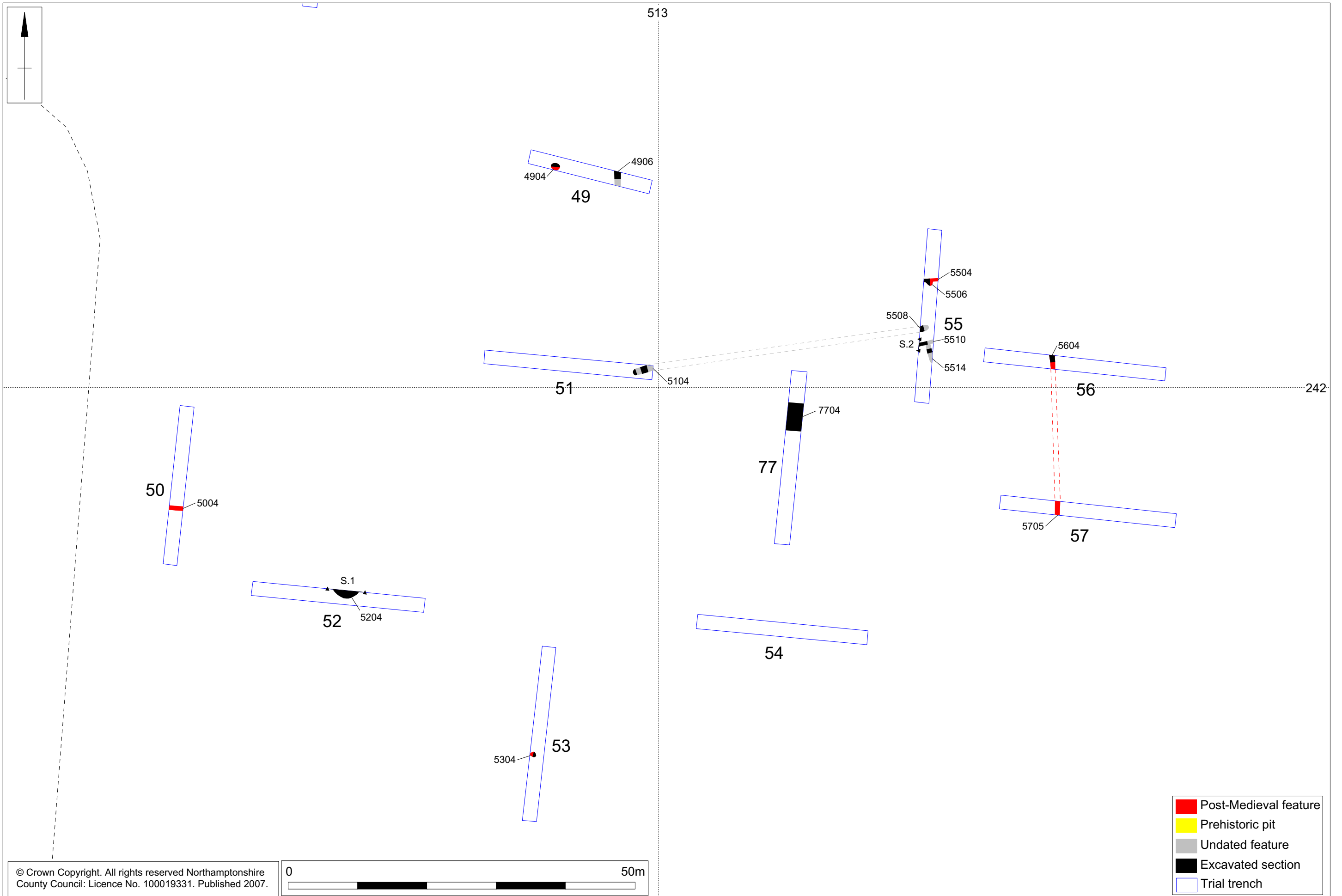
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Site location Fig 1



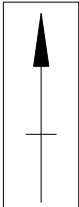
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Trench locations Fig 2

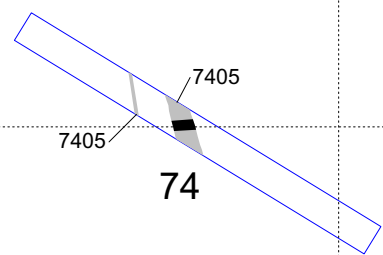
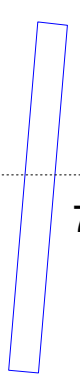
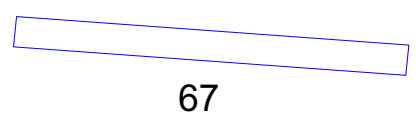
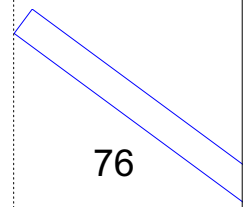
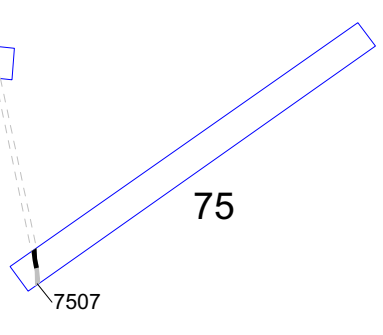
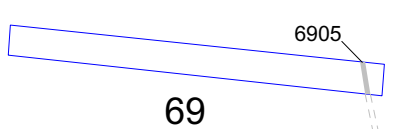
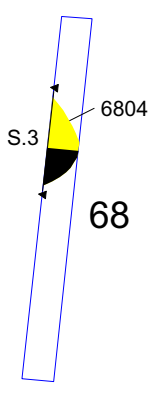


Trenches 49-57 and 77 Fig 3

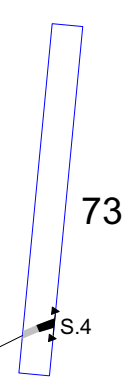
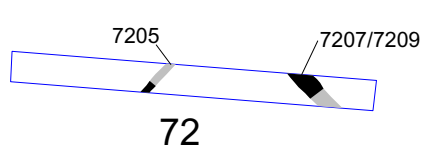
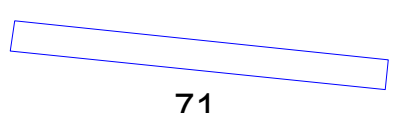
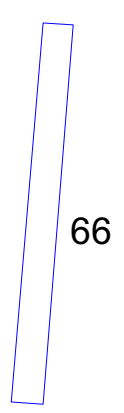
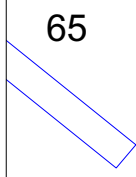
Scale 1:500



515



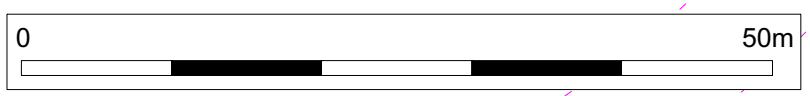
242



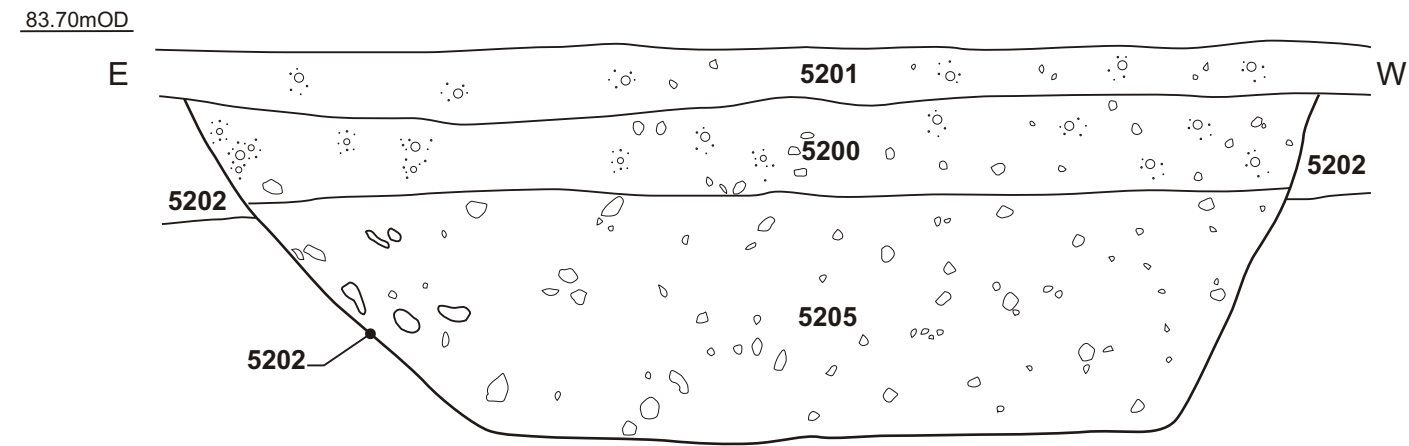
- Post-Medieval feature
- Prehistoric pit
- Undated feature
- Excavated section
- Trial trench

Trenches 68, 69, 72, 73, 74 and 75 Fig 4

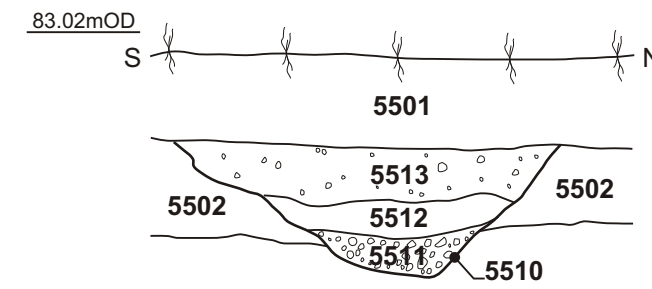
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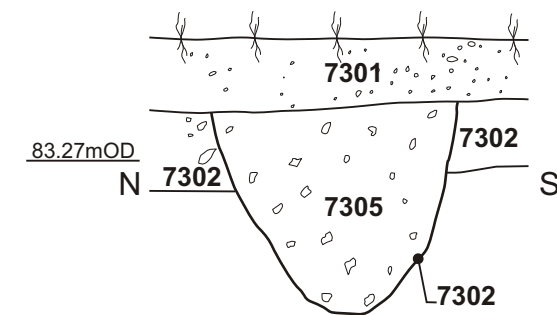
Section 1 - Trench 52



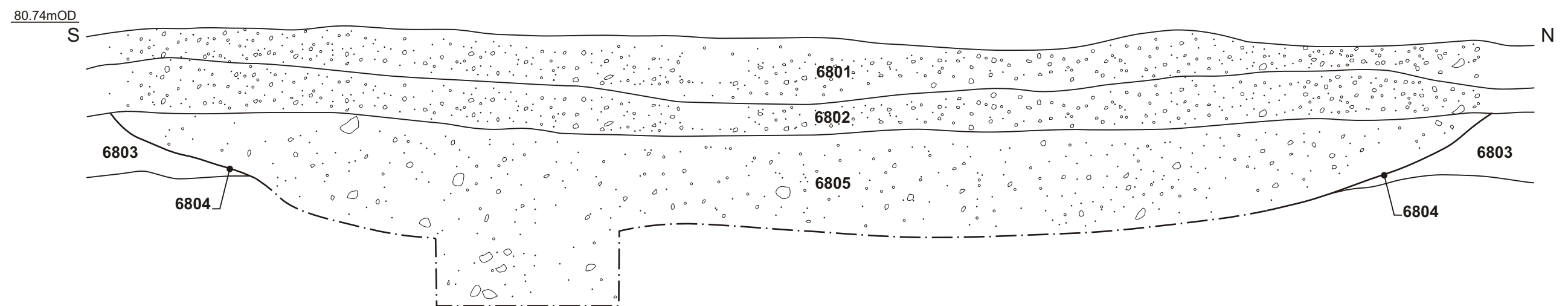
Section 2 - Trench 55



Section 4 - Trench 73



Section 3 - Trench 68



Sections 1-4 in Trenches 52, 55, 68 and 73 Fig 5



Plate 1: Pit [5204], facing north.



Plate 2: Ditch [7304], facing east.