

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION:
LAND AT POPLAR FARM,
HIGH STREET
EATON BRAY,
BEDFORDSHIRE**

on behalf of RM Tomlin & Sons



by

Nicholas A Crank BSc AIFA

October 2004

ASC: 612/EBP/02

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	EBP	<i>Project no:</i>	612
<i>County:</i>	Bedfordshire		
<i>District:</i>	South Bedfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Eaton Bray		
<i>Parish:</i>	Eaton Bray CP		
<i>NGR:</i>	SP 9715 2077		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Residential gardens		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Erection of two detached houses and garages		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	0.23ha		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	04/0923		
<i>Client:</i>	RM Tomlin & Sons South End Farm Dunton Road Stewkley Leighton Buzzard LU7 0HY		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Graham Tomlin		
<i>Telephone</i>		<i>Fax:</i>	N/A

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Nicholas A Crank	<i>Date:</i>	18 th October 2004
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Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

During October 2004 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC) carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on a site at Poplar Farm, High Street, Eaton Bray, Bedfordshire. The work was undertaken in advance of proposed residential redevelopment of the site.

A total of five trenches were excavated. Trenches 3, 4 and 5 revealed a Medieval ditch representing a probable field or property boundary, from which a small quantity of 12th to 13th century pottery and animal bone was recovered. No archaeological features were observed in trenches 1 and 2 and no evidence for significant truncation or subsoil disturbance was revealed.

In conclusion it seems likely that the area has, with the exception of the apparently isolated Medieval ditch, remained largely undisturbed and undeveloped until now.

1 Introduction

1.1 During October 2003 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC)* carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on a site at Poplar Farm, High Street, Eaton Bray, Bedfordshire (NGR SP 9715 2077, Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by RM Tomlin & Sons, and was carried out according to a brief (dated 06/09/04) prepared by the Bedfordshire County Archaeology Office (BCAO), and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ASC (612/EBP/01).

1.2 *Reason for Work*

The work was required as part of a planning condition required by BCAO acting on behalf of the local planning authority, *South Bedfordshire District Council* (planning ref 04/0923). The site lies within the historic core of the village of Eaton Bray, which has its origins in the Saxon period or earlier. As such the development area is regarded as having the potential to contain archaeological remains relating to the origins and development of the settlement at Eaton Bray (Brief: Paras. 3.1-3.4).

1.3 *Setting*

1.3.1 *General*

The site is located in the centre of Eaton Bray village c.5km to the south east of Leighton Buzzard at NGR SP 9715 2077. The site comprises a corner of the existing Poplar Farm yard and occupies an area of c.0.23ha. The area is bounded by the vicarage gardens to the northwest, the High Street to the south west and by the remainder of Poplar Farm on the other two sides. Access is gained from Wallace Drive via the High Street.

1.3.2 *Geology & Topography*

The site lies on a gentle south west facing slope at c.100m AOD, above the headwaters of the river Ouzel, which flows in a westerly direction c.1km to the

north west. Soils in the area of the site are assigned to the BLOCK association, described as 'moderately permeable calcareous loamy soils over chalky gravel variably affected by groundwater'. The underlying drift geology in the area is Chalky Till (Soil Survey 1983, 512e).

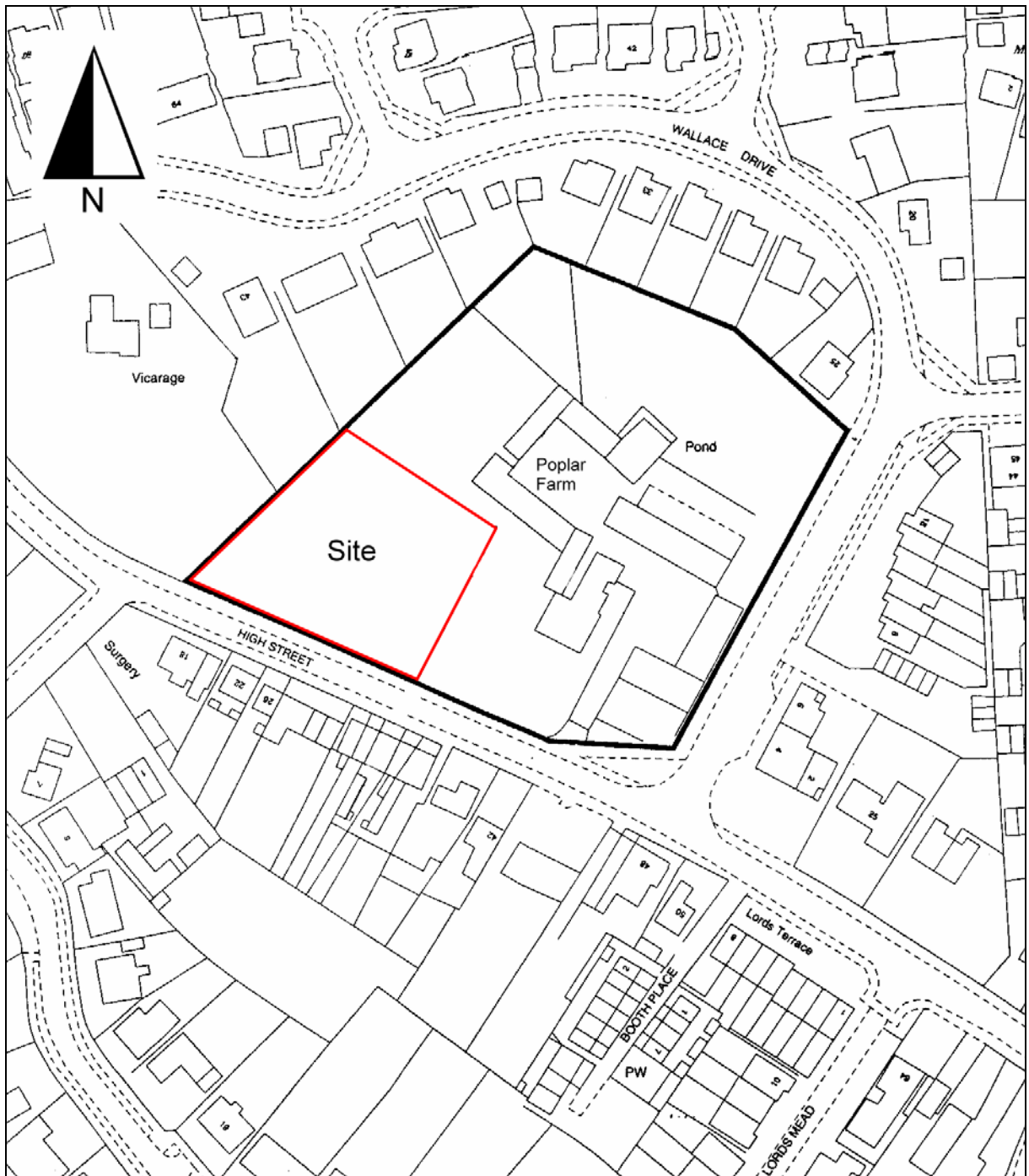


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 2), the aims of the evaluation were:

- to determine the location, extent, nature and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present in the development area;
- to ascertain the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present in the development area.

2.2 Methods

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 3), which required:

- Trial trenching of up to a maximum of 5% of the area of development (para. 3.7.2);

Trench locations are shown in Fig. 3. The trench pattern was set out to target the footprints of the proposed house and garage plots as required in the brief (para 3.7.1). The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision, with a mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket.

2.3 Standards

The work conforms to the project design, to the requirements of the *Brief*, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001) and *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

(HER = Bedfordshire County Historic Environment Record)

3.1 Prehistoric *(before AD43)*

The site is located within the historic core of Eaton Bray village in the parish of Eaton Bray, a sizeable parish of some 979ha in the ancient hundred of Manshead.

The Icknield Way crosses the chalk downs to the south of the parish. However, little archaeological evidence has been recorded from the prehistoric period, and no sites have been recorded within 1 km of the development site.

3.3 Roman *(AD43-c.450)*

With the exception of a poorly located find spot of a sandstone quern (HER 1402) no Roman activity is recorded within the village core. Field walking in the north east of the parish has recovered Roman pottery probably related to a villa site in the neighbouring parish of Totternhoe (HER 534).

3.4 Saxon & Medieval *(c.450-1500)*

Despite the probable Saxon origin of the settlement no archaeological sites or artefacts have been recorded from this period. The village was assessed in the Domesday survey as EITON, meaning 'River Farm', a reference to the landscape dominated by the chalk streams (Mawer & Stenton 1926, 121). The Bray suffix dates from the 15th century when the manor was granted to Sir Reginald Bray. The 12th century church of St Mary lies close to the south west of the development site.

The most notable medieval site in the vicinity is Park Farm, a 13th century moated manor with a deer park pale and fishpond (HER 531, 13970 & 10652). These three elements constitute the only scheduled monuments within the parish. It is also suggested within the HER that the L-shaped pond adjacent to Poplar Farm is possibly a remnant of an infilled moat (HER 11779). However this suggestion appears to be based solely on its form and not on any archaeological or historical evidence.

3.6 Post-Medieval & Modern *(1500-present)*

The development site itself occupies the south west corner of Poplar Farm which consist of a roughly rectangular plot occupied by a range of post-Medieval and early modern farm buildings in its central and south eastern parts (HER 15806, 16146 & 16054). The area of the development site is free of buildings on the 1849 tithe map, 1860 enclosure map and all subsequent Ordnance Survey maps. It appears to have been orchard during the first half of the 20th century.

4 Results

4.1 The following paragraphs provide a summary of the results of the trial trenches. A full description of the trenches with illustrations, is provided in Appendix 1.

4.2 *Results*

A northeast to southwest aligned ditch traversed trenches 3,4 and 5 (F302, 402, & 502). With a projected minimum length of *c.* 18m it was sealed by the topsoil and cut the natural Chalky Till. Three segments were excavated across the ditch revealing a degree of variation in depth and profile between the trenches, although this may be the result of plough truncation. A small quantity of Medieval pottery and animal bone was recovered from the upper fill of the ditch in trenches 3 and 4 (L303 & L404).

The pottery assemblage was examined by Anna Slowikowski and related to the Bedfordshire type series. Of the 5 sherds recovered 2 are Hertfordshire Greywares, 2 a local coarse sandy ware, and the remainder an unsourced flinty ware. A suggested date range for the assemblage is late 12th to early 13th century. (Slowikowski, pers. comm.). A summary of the assemblage with type series codes is presented in Appendix 3.

4.3 The trenches revealed a consistent pattern of soil formation. The topsoil comprised a soft dark greyish brown silty loam with occasional chalk pebbles. No separate subsoil layer was present and the soil was relatively deep. The depth of topsoil across the site was generally between 0.4 – 0.75m. Parts of the site had been recently levelled and topsoil stripped, however this activity had caused truncation to the topsoil only and not disturbed the natural substrate.

4.4 A mottled pale yellowish brown/off-white Chalky Till consisting of fine chalk gravel in a matrix of soft silty clay was revealed beneath the topsoil, and is interpreted as the natural strata.

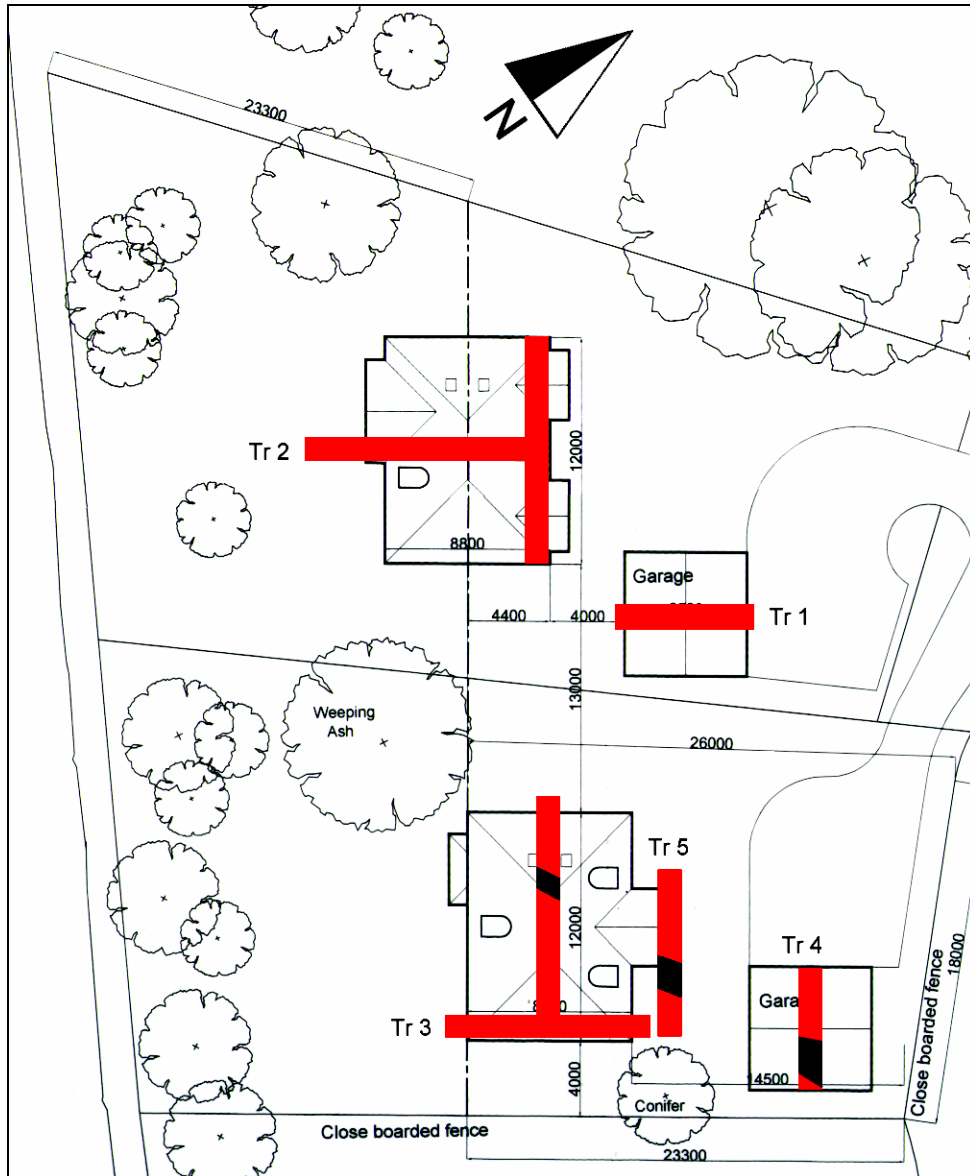


Figure 3: Trench Layout and Feature Location Plan (scale 1:400)

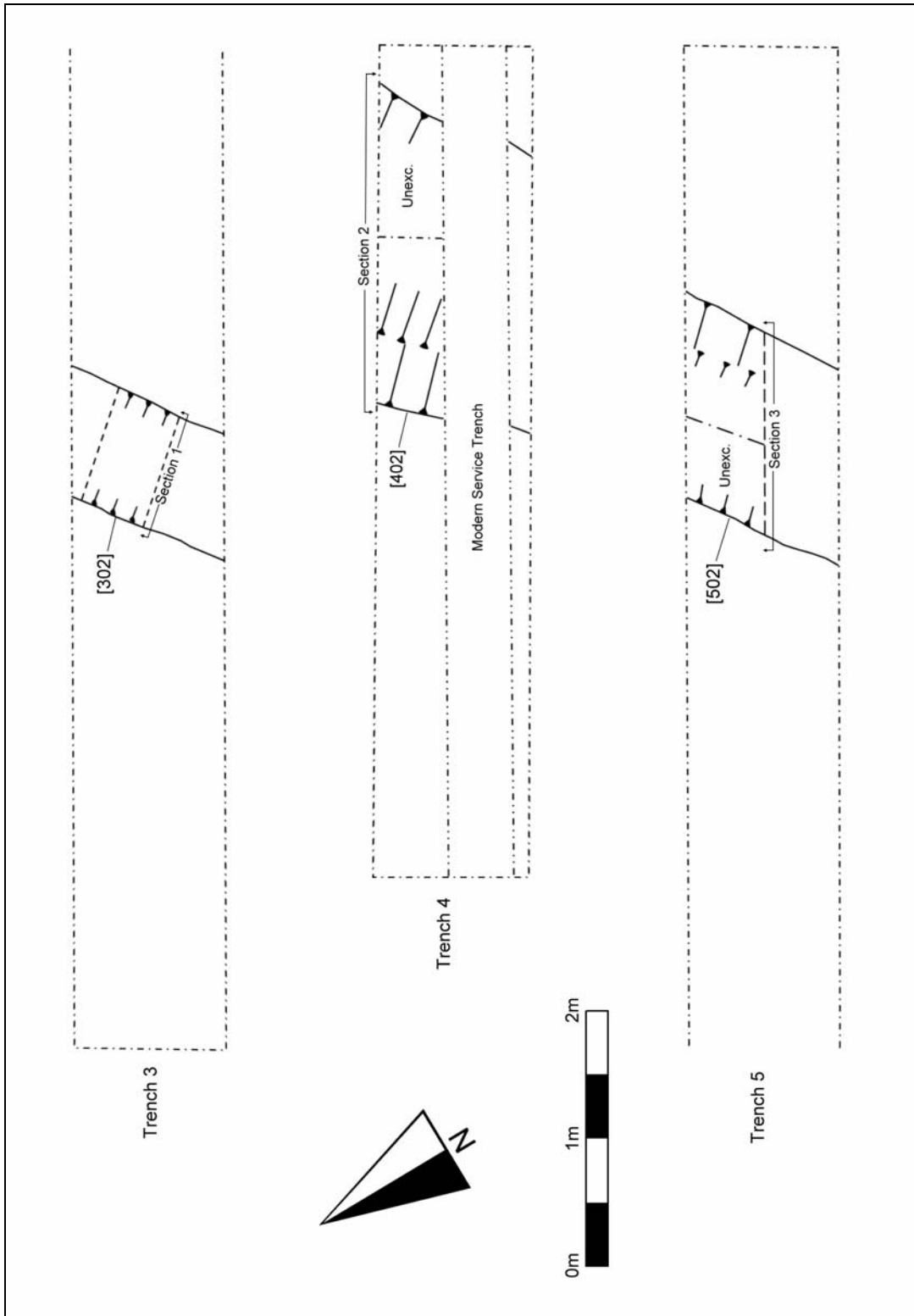


Figure 4: Trench Plans (scale 1:50)

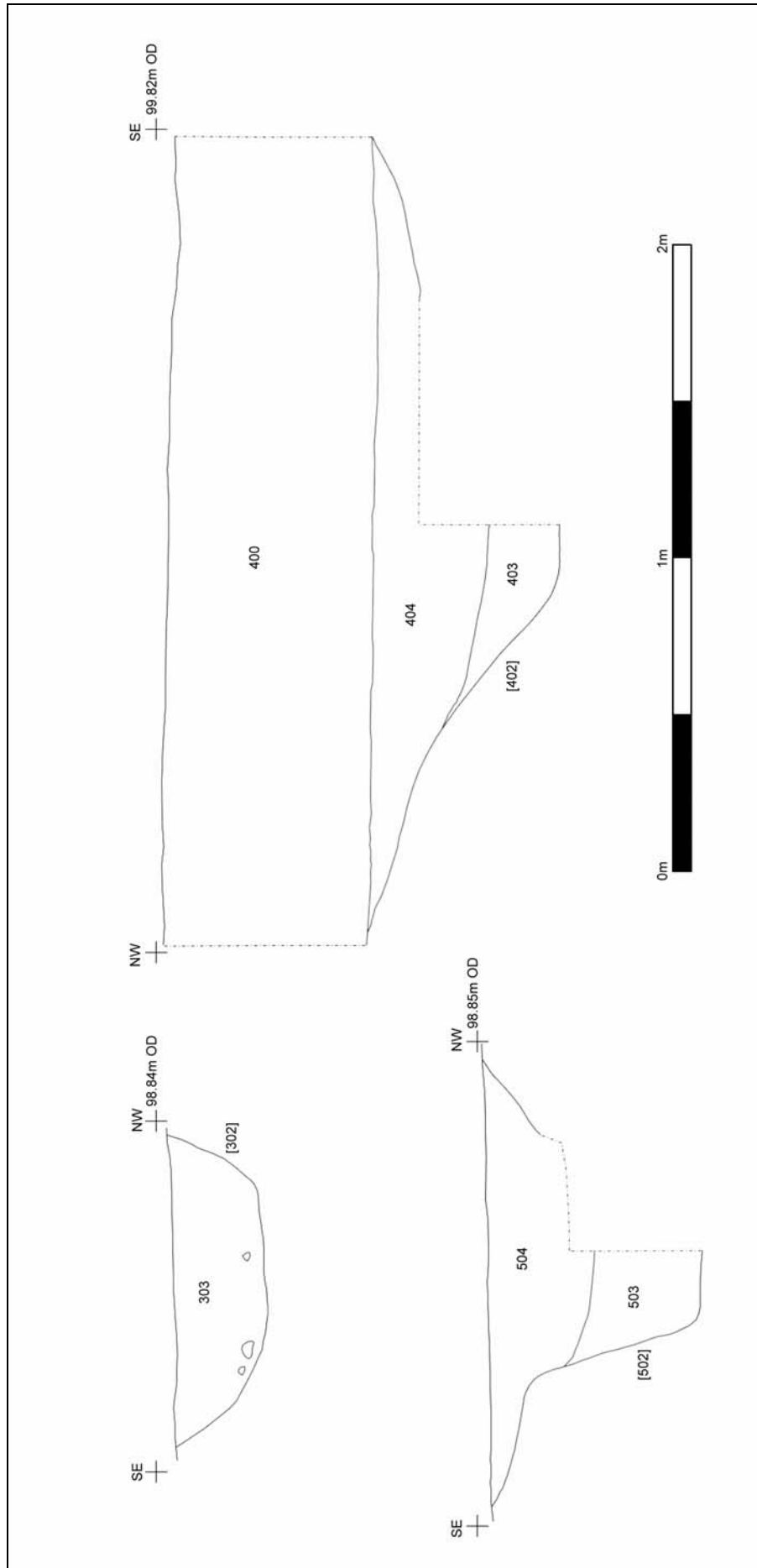


Figure 5: Sections (Scale 1:20)



Plate 1: Trench 3, ditch section [302] looking southwest



Plate 2: Trench 4, ditch section [402] looking northeast



Plate 3: Trench 5, ditch section [502] looking northeast

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 A northeast to southwest aligned ditch of probable late 12th to early 13th century date traversed trenches 3, 4 and 5. The fairly substantial size of the ditch suggests it probably represents a field or property boundary and this interpretation is supported by the relatively small amount of artefactual material recovered from its fills, in addition to the absence of features within the remaining trenches.
- 5.2 A comparison of the ditch alignment with existing boundaries and those indicated on the available cartographic sources from the 1849 Tithe Map onwards demonstrates that no nearby features share the same alignment, although the similarity in alignment of the northwest site boundary is noteworthy.
- 5.3 The lack of archaeological features in the other trenches is probably representative as no truncation of deposits other than the topsoil was apparent.
- 5.4 In conclusion it seems likely that the areas subject to investigation have remained largely undeveloped during the past with the exception of the probable Medieval boundary ditch observed in trenches 3, 4, and 5. The significance of this apparently isolated feature should not be exaggerated. However, it is of some local importance as it represents the only excavated evidence for the Medieval period within Eaton Bray.
- 5.5 It is unlikely that further significant quantities of archaeological remains are present on the site, although the potential presence of occasional isolated remains away from the evaluation trenches should not be entirely excluded.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Mr Graham Tomlin of *R.M. Tomlin & Sons* for commissioning the evaluation. Martin Oake, Archaeological Officer of *Bedfordshire County Council* acted as curatorial officer. Access to the Historic Environment Record was provided by Steve Coleman. Thanks are also due to Anna Slowikowski who examined and commented on the pottery.

The work was supervised for *ASC Ltd* by Nicholas A Crank BSc AIFA, assisted by Jonathan Hunn BA PhD MIFA. The report and illustrations were prepared by Nicholas A Crank. The report was edited by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Clients site plans
5. Site records
6. Finds records
7. Finds
8. Site record drawings
9. List of photographs/slides
10. Colour slides
11. B/W prints & negatives
12. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with Luton Museum.

8. Bibliography

IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.


IFA 2000b Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology*.


IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance* documents (*Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds*).


Mawer & Stenton 1926 *The Place Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire*. English Place Names Survey Vol III (Cambridge)


Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).


Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

Trench 1						
	Max Dimensions					
	Length	7.0m	Width	1.2m	Depth	0.65m
	Levels					
	Trench base northeast		99.716 OD			
	Trench top northeast		99.71m OD			
	Trench base southwest		99.11m OD			
	Trench top southwest		99.74m OD			
	Orientation		Northeast to southwest			
	Reason for Trench		General evaluation			
	Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
100	Layer	Topsoil -	-	650	-	
101	Layer	Chalky Till. Natural Strata.	-	580+	650	

Trench 2						
	Max Dimensions					
	Length	25.5m	Width	1.2m	Depth	0.75m
	Levels					
	Trench base northwest		99.07m OD			
	Trench top northwest		99.80m OD			
	Trench base southeast		98.92m OD			
	Trench top southeast		99.73m OD			
	Trench base southwest		99.13m OD			
	Trench top southwest		99.58m OD			
	Orientation		Northeast to southwest Northwest to southeast			
Reason for Trench		General evaluation				
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)	
200	Layer	Topsoil -	-	750	-	
201	Layer	Chalky Till. Natural Strata.	-	520+	750	

Trench 3								
			Max Dimensions					
			Length	22.5m	Width	1.2m	Depth	0.56m
			Levels					
			Trench base northeast		99.11m OD			
			Trench top northeast		99.63m OD			
			Trench base southwest		99.21m OD			
			Trench top southwest		99.51m OD			
			Trench base northwest		99.12m OD			
			Trench top northwest		99.61m OD			
			Orientation		Northeast to southwest Northwest to southeast			
Reason for Trench		General evaluation						
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)			
300	Layer	Topsoil -	-	560	-			
301	Layer	Chalky Till. Natural Strata.	-	400+	560			
302	Ditch	NE-SW aligned, same as [402]/[502]	970	280				
303	Fill	Mid grey chalky clayey silt fill of [302]	970	280				

Trench 4						
	Max Dimensions					
	Length	6.5m	Width	1.2m	Depth	0.65m
	Levels					
	Trench base northwest		99.18m OD			
	Trench top northwest		99.84m OD			
	Trench base southeast		99.21m OD			
	Trench top southeast		99.82m OD			
	Orientation		Northwest to southeast			
Reason for Trench		General evaluation				
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)	
400	Layer	Topsoil -	-	650	-	
401	Layer	Chalky Till. Natural Strata.	-	620+	650	
402	Ditch	NE-SW aligned, same as [302]/[502]	2500	590		
403	Fill	Mid grey chalky clayey silt Basal fill of [402]	>600	230		
404	Fill	Dark greyish brown clayey silt loam Upper fill of [402]	2500	370		

Trench 5						
	Max Dimensions					
	Length	9.0m	Width	1.2m	Depth	0.6m
	Levels					
	Trench base northwest		99.13m OD			
	Trench top northwest		99.77m OD			
	Trench base southeast		98.92m OD			
	Trench top southeast		99.85m OD			
	Orientation		Northwest to southeast			
	Reason for Trench		General evaluation			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)	
500	Layer	Topsoil -	-	600	-	
501	Layer	Chalky Till. Natural Strata.	-	440+	600	
502	Ditch	NE-SW aligned, same as [302]/[402]	1400	670		
503	Fill	Mid grey chalky clayey silt Basal fill of [402]	>340	340		
504	Fill	Dark greyish brown clayey silt loam Upper fill of [402]	1400	330		

Appendix 2: Finds Concordance

Context	Pottery		Animal Bone	
	(no)	(g)	(no)	(g)
303	2	10	2	90
404	3	5	2	30

Appendix 3: Ceramic Catalogue

The following catalogue is based on information supplied by A. Slowikowski, the codes in the fabric column are from the Bedfordshire type series:

Context	Fabric	No. Sherds	Description	Date
303	C60	1	Herts. Greyware, body sherd	13 th -14 th C
	C63	1	Un sourced medieval flinty ware, body sherd	L12 th -13 th C
404	C60	1	Herts. Greyware, body sherd	13 th -14 th C
	C59A	2	Local coarse sandy ware, body sherds	L12 th -13 th C