

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT:
TRIAL TRENCHING AT THE COPPICE SITE, PERRY BARR, BIRMINGHAM**

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AAL Site Code: PBCS 19
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Report prepared for WYG Environment Planning Transport Ltd
On behalf of Birmingham City Council

By
Allen Archaeology Limited
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Cover image: General view of the site, looking northwest

Executive Summary

- Allen Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by WYG Environment Planning Transport Ltd, on behalf of Birmingham City Council to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land at the Coppice Site, Perry Barr, Birmingham, as a condition of planning consent for the proposed demolition of eleven student accommodation blocks and former WDM Cars Ltd building.
- The proposed development area is located on the western margin of the line of Ickniel Street, a major northeast-southwest aligned Roman road between the Fosse Way and Templeborough. The alignment of parallel ditches possibly associated with the road has been proven during fieldwork that took place immediately adjacent to the Coppice site.
- The excavation methodology comprised six evaluation trenches, originally specified as 3 x 10m, 1 x 20m, 1 x 15m and 1 x 5m. Due to difficulty of access for the machine, the 15m trench, Trench 5, was reduced in length to 10m.
- All trenches produced negative results, the only recorded activity relating to modern services and demolition deposits.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Allen Archaeology Ltd (AAL) was commissioned by WYG Environment Planning Transport Ltd, on behalf of Birmingham City Council, to undertake an archaeological evaluation, on land at the Coppice Site, Perry Barr, Birmingham, as a condition of a planning consent for the proposed demolition of eleven student accommodation blocks and former WDM Cars Ltd building.
- 1.2 All fieldwork and reporting has been undertaken in line with the recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists '*Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluations*' (ClfA 2014) and the Historic England document '*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*' (Historic England 2015), and a specification prepared by WYG Ltd (WYG 2019).
- 1.3 The documentary archive will be submitted to Birmingham Museums Trust within six months of the completion of the report. The museum has been contacted for an accession code and a response is awaited.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The proposed development site is located in Perry Barr, Birmingham, in the administrative district of Birmingham City Council. It is situated c.4.5km north of Birmingham city centre. The site is located to the east of Aldridge Road and to the north of Wellhead Lane. It is centred at NGR SP 07174 91325 and is c.100m above Ordnance Datum.
- 2.2 The bedrock geology comprises Chester Formation sandstones and conglomerates formed c.247-250 million years ago in the Triassic Period, in an environment dominated by rivers. The superficial geology comprises fluvial river terrace deposits formed up to 3 million years ago in the Quaternary Period (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

3.0 Planning Background

- 3.1 Planning permission has been granted for '*the proposed demolition of 11 no. student accommodation blocks and former WDM Cars Ltd. building*' (Reference 2019/03140/PA). Permission was granted subject to conditions, including for the undertaking of a programme of evaluation trenching and recording, in advance of demolition.
- 3.2 The approach adopted is consistent with the recommendations of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with the particular chapter of relevance being '*Section 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2019), and with local planning policy, as set out in the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) 2031, adopted by Birmingham City Council in January 2017 (BCC 2017), in particular policy TP12 – *Historic Environment*.

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 4.1 No prehistoric sites or find spots have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development area, although Mesolithic flint scatters are known from the wider area (Birmingham Archaeology, 2008). Environmental analysis of the fills of a palaeochannel of the river Tame from a site to the east of Aldridge Road produced evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity (*ibid*).

- 4.2 The course of Icknield Street or Ryknild Street, a major Roman road, has been suggested by geophysical survey immediately to the northeast of the site, and identified by subsequent evaluation, although the road was heavily truncated. No deposits representing the surface of the road were recorded, although two undated ditches were interpreted as the roadside ditches. The position of the ditches suggested that the road was c.18m in width (Worcestershire Archaeology 2014).
- 4.3 A programme of archaeological evaluation and excavation immediately to the east of the proposed development was undertaken in 2008, and identified a northeast to southwest aligned ditch interpreted as the eastern roadside ditch of Icknield Street. Once again, no deposits associated with the surface of the road were recorded, and the ditch was undated by finds, suggesting an absence of occupation adjacent to the road in this area (Birmingham Archaeology 2008).
- 4.4 The location and alignment of the ditches interpreted as being associated with Icknield Street in the vicinity suggested that elements of the road may be present on the eastern edge of the proposed development area.
- 4.5 Perry Barr, although now a suburban area of Birmingham, developed initially around the hamlet of Perry Barr. Two settlements are recorded in the Domesday survey, *Pirio* and *Barra*, both in the ownership of William FitzAnculf and the tenancy of Drogo of Whitley (Morris 1976). The two manors were later amalgamated.
- 4.6 In the 16th century, Perry Barr became an important centre of the charcoal iron industry, with reference to a bloomsmithy in the tenure of William Wirley of Handsworth and operated by Henry Grove in 1543 (Schubert 1957) followed later in the century by an early blast furnace in what was then South Staffordshire, owned and operated by William Whorwood of Sandwell and Thomas Parkes of Wednesbury, and extant by 1596 (King 2006). There is also a record of a paper mill at Perry Barr in 1648, with a second paper mill attested to later in the century. Additionally, a number of other mills associated with the iron industry, including blade mills and wire mills, are known from the 17th century (*Ibid.*). The mills were all operated by water power, and were situated on the River Tame to the north and west of the proposed development area, or on the Hol Brook, to the north. However the area did not become heavily industrialised until the 19th century, and was still predominantly agricultural at the census of 1801.
- 4.7 Historic mapping shows that the proposed development area was occupied in the 19th century by a malthouse, which developed into the Wellhead Brewery in the late 19th – early 20th century. Between the First and Second World Wars the brewery was incorporated into the Aldridge Works of Charles Twigg and Co. The works comprised a ‘metal works’ in the southern part of the site, which included the former brewery, and a ‘brassware works’ in the northern part. Charles Twigg and Co. produced bicycles, prams, portable stoves and blowtorches among other light metal manufactures.
- 4.8 The most recent land use on the site was student accommodation blocks which were part of Birmingham City University.

5.0 Methodology

- 5.1 A written scheme of investigation was produced by WYG Ltd, specifying three 10m x 2m trenches, plus a further three trenches measuring 20m x 2m, 15m x 2m and 5m x 2m. Due to logistical issues the 15m trench had to be reduced to 10m in length. The fieldwork was

supervised by the author, assisted by Jedlee Chapman and Vincenzo Zoppi over a period of four working days, between 14th and 17th January 2020.

- 5.2 The evaluation trenches were located on site using a survey grade Leica GS08 RTK NetRover GPS. In each trench, topsoil, subsoil and underlying non-archaeological deposits were removed by mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket in spits no greater than 0.1m in thickness. The process was repeated until the first archaeologically significant or natural horizon was exposed. All further excavation was then by hand.
- 5.3 A full written record of the archaeological deposits was made on standard AAL context recording sheets. Archaeological deposits were drawn to scale, in plan and section (at scale 1:20 or 1:50), with Ordnance Datum heights displayed on each class of drawing. Digital photography formed an integral part of the recording strategy, and all photographs incorporated scales, an identification board and directional arrow.
- 5.4 Each deposit or layer was allocated a unique identifier (context number) and accorded a written description, a summary of these are included in Appendix 1.

6.0 Results (Figure 2–Figure 4)

- 6.1 Throughout the site, the stratigraphic sequence was broadly consistent, comprising a dark brown silty sand topsoil, averaging 0.30m in thickness, sealing deposits of made ground associated with recent demolition activity across the site. Some areas lacked a topsoil horizon, with demolition spreads representing the uppermost layer. Throughout the site the natural geology was an orange brown gravelly sand.

Trench 1

- 6.2 Trench 1 measured 10m x 2m. It was located in the western part of the proposed development area and was not targeted on any projected archaeological features. The natural subsoil 102, comprising mid orange brown sand and gravel, was recorded at a maximum level of 100.01m OD (Plate 1).
- 6.3 The natural geology was cut by a modern intrusion on the northeast side of the trench, the fill of which contained 20th century brick, glass and wire, which was not retained.



Plate 1: Northeast-facing representative section of Trench 1, 1m scale

Trench 2

- 6.4 Trench 2 measured 10m in length and 2m in width and was located on the eastern side of the proposed development area, potentially on the projected line of the western roadside ditch associated with Icknield Street.
- 6.5 No deposits or features of archaeological significance were encountered. The natural sand and gravel 202 was recorded at maximum level of 99.43m OD (Plate 2). Two modern services were recorded in plan at the southwestern end of the trench: an iron pipe and a plastic land drain.



Plate 2: Trench 2, looking southwest, 1m scales

Trench 3

- 6.6 Trench 3 measured 5m in length and 2m in width and was located on the eastern side of the proposed development area, to the south of Trench 2. It was positioned in an area thought to be within the projected corridor of the Roman road.
- 6.7 The natural sand and gravel 302 was recorded at a maximum level of 99.50m OD. A modern service trench was recorded at the northwest end of the trench, dated by finds within the fill to the 21st century (Plate 3).



Plate 3: Trench 3, looking southeast, 1m scales

Trench 4

- 6.8 Trench 4 measured 20m x 2m and was located on the eastern side of the proposed development area, to the southwest of Trench 3. It was positioned across the line of the projected western roadside ditch of the Roman road.
- 6.9 No archaeologically significant deposits or features were recorded in Trench 4. At the northeast end of the trench, on the projected line of the ditch, was a live power cable, presumed to be supplying the Doug Ellis Sports Centre, part of Birmingham City University. For reasons of safety, no attempt was made to excavate in the area where the power cable was located (Plate 4).
- 6.10 Elsewhere in the trench, the natural sand and gravel 402 was recorded at a maximum level of 99.65m OD. The natural substrate was cut by a modern intrusion towards the centre of the trench, the fill of which contained modern brick, glass and plastic fragments (not retained).



Plate 4: Trench 4, looking southwest, showing service trench for live power cable at near end of trench, 1m scales

Trench 5

- 6.11 Trench 5 was originally to have measured 15m x 2m and was located in the southeast part of the proposed development area, to the southwest of Trench 4. It was not targeted on any potential archaeological features. Due to difficulty of access to the trench position, and concerns about the stability of the machine, the trench could only be excavated to a length of 9m. The natural sand and gravel 502 was recorded at a maximum level of 99.98m OD. A modern service trench, associated with drainage ran along the length of the trench from northwest to southeast.



Plate 5: Trench 5, looking southeast 1m scale

Trench 6

- 6.12 Trench 6 measured 10m x 2m and was located on the western side of the proposed development area, to the southwest of Trench 1. It was not targeted on any potential archaeological features. The natural sand and gravel was recorded at a maximum level of 100.22m OD. No archaeologically significant features or deposits were encountered (Plate 6).



Plate 6: Trench 6, looking northeast, 1m scales

7.0 Discussion and Conclusions

- 7.1 No archaeologically significant features or deposits were recorded in any of the trenches, including those targeted on the projected line of the ditches identified in previous fieldwork and interpreted as being associated with Roman Icknield Street.
- 7.2 In Trench 4 there is some possibility that the ditch may have been masked by the presence of a live service on the same position and alignment as the presumed ditch. It is also possible that the more intensive development of the Coppice Site in the 20th century, compared to the sites where the possible roadside ditches were identified, resulted in the complete truncation of deposits and features associated with the road. In the areas where such features have been previously identified, they had also suffered from horizontal truncation. It is also possible, due to the proximity of the projected course of the Roman road to the eastern edge of the proposed development area that the course of the road lies entirely to the east of the site.
- 7.3 Overall therefore, the proposed development area is considered to have a negligible archaeological potential.

8.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

- 8.1 The trial trenching methodology employed was suited to the scale and nature of the project in determining the nature of the archaeology present, and the potential impacts of the proposed development upon the archaeological resource. Alterations were made to the position of Trench 3 and the position and size of Trench 5 for logistical and safety reasons.

9.0 Acknowledgements

- 9.1 Allen Archaeology Ltd would like to thank WYG Limited, and their client Birmingham City Council for this commission, and Carl Homer of DSM Group for his cooperation during the fieldwork.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary List

Trench 1

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
101	Layer	Soft, dark brown sandy silt with occasional sub-angular poorly sorted stone and angular brick inclusions	>10	>2	0.3	Topsoil
102	Layer	Friable, mid greyish brown silt with moderate angular brick inclusions and occasional flecks and fragments of mortar	>10	>2	0.6	Demolition spread
103	Layer	Soft, mid orange brown gravelly sand	>10	>2	n/a	Natural geology

Trench 2

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
200	Layer	Soft, dark brown sandy silt with occasional sub-angular poorly sorted stone and angular brick inclusions	>10	>2	0.3	Topsoil
201	Layer	Soft, very dark grey sandy silt with moderate small sub-rounded stone inclusions	>10	>2	0.4	Made ground
202	Layer	Soft, mid orange brown gravelly sand	>10	>2	n/a	Natural geology

Trench 3

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
300	Layer	Soft, dark brown sandy silt with occasional sub-angular stone and angular brick inclusions	>5	>2	0.35	Topsoil
301	Layer	Firm, very dark grey silt with very frequent angular brick inclusions	>5	>2	0.16	Demolition spread
302	Layer	Soft, mid orange brown sand	>5	>2	n/a	Natural geology

Trench 4

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
400	Layer	Soft, dark brown sandy silt with occasional rounded to sub-angular stone inclusions	>20	>2	0.3	Topsoil
401	Layer	Firm, dark brownish grey silt with occasional angular brick and stone inclusions	>20	>2	0.55	Demolition spread

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
402	Layer	Soft, mid orange brown gravelly sand	>20	>2	n/a	Natural geology

Trench 5

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
500	Layer	Soft, dark brown sandy silt with occasional rounded to sub-angular stone inclusions	>9	>2	0.35	Topsoil
501	Layer	Soft, dark greyish brown sandy silt with frequent rounded stone inclusions	>9	>2	0.6	Demolition spread
502	Layer	Soft, mid orange brown sand	>9	>2	n/a	Natural geology

Trench 6

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
600	Layer	Soft, dark brown sandy silt with occasional rounded to sub-angular stone inclusions	>10	>2	0.35	Demolition spread
601	Layer	Soft, mid orange brown sand	>10	>2	n/a	Natural geology

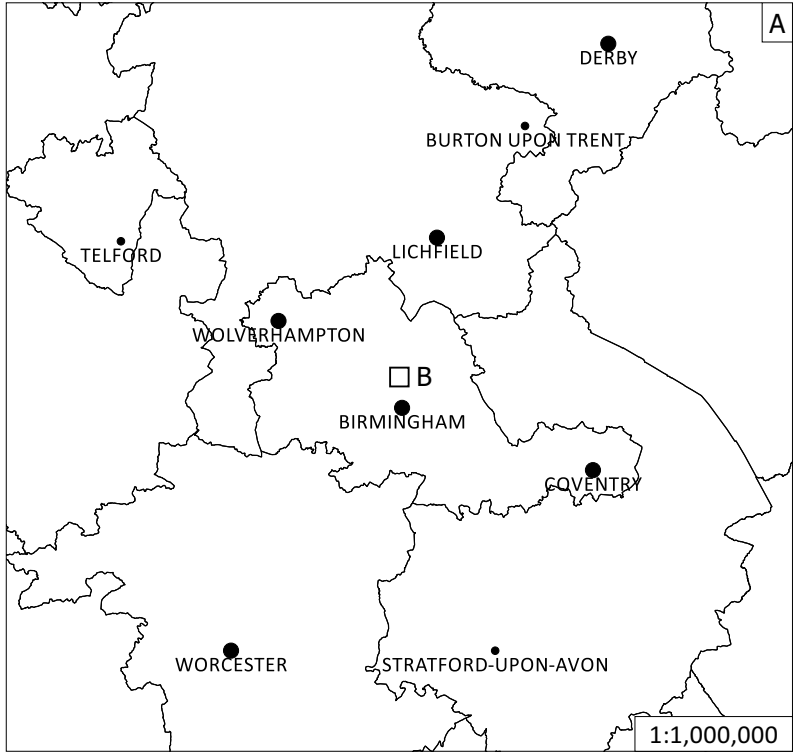
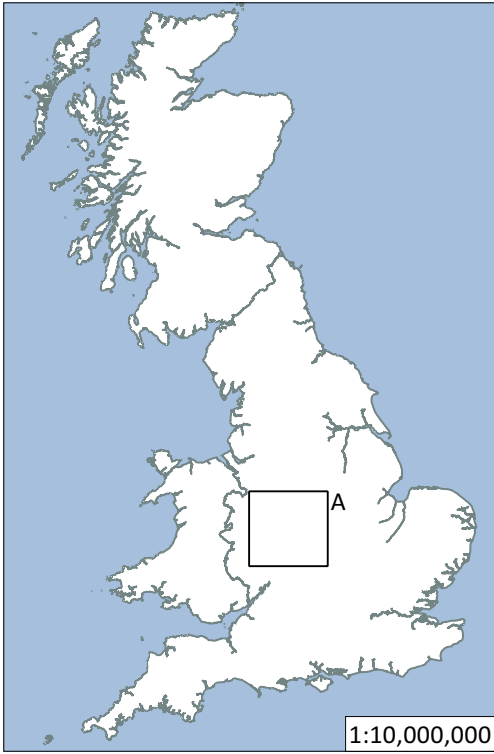


Figure 1: Site location outlined in red

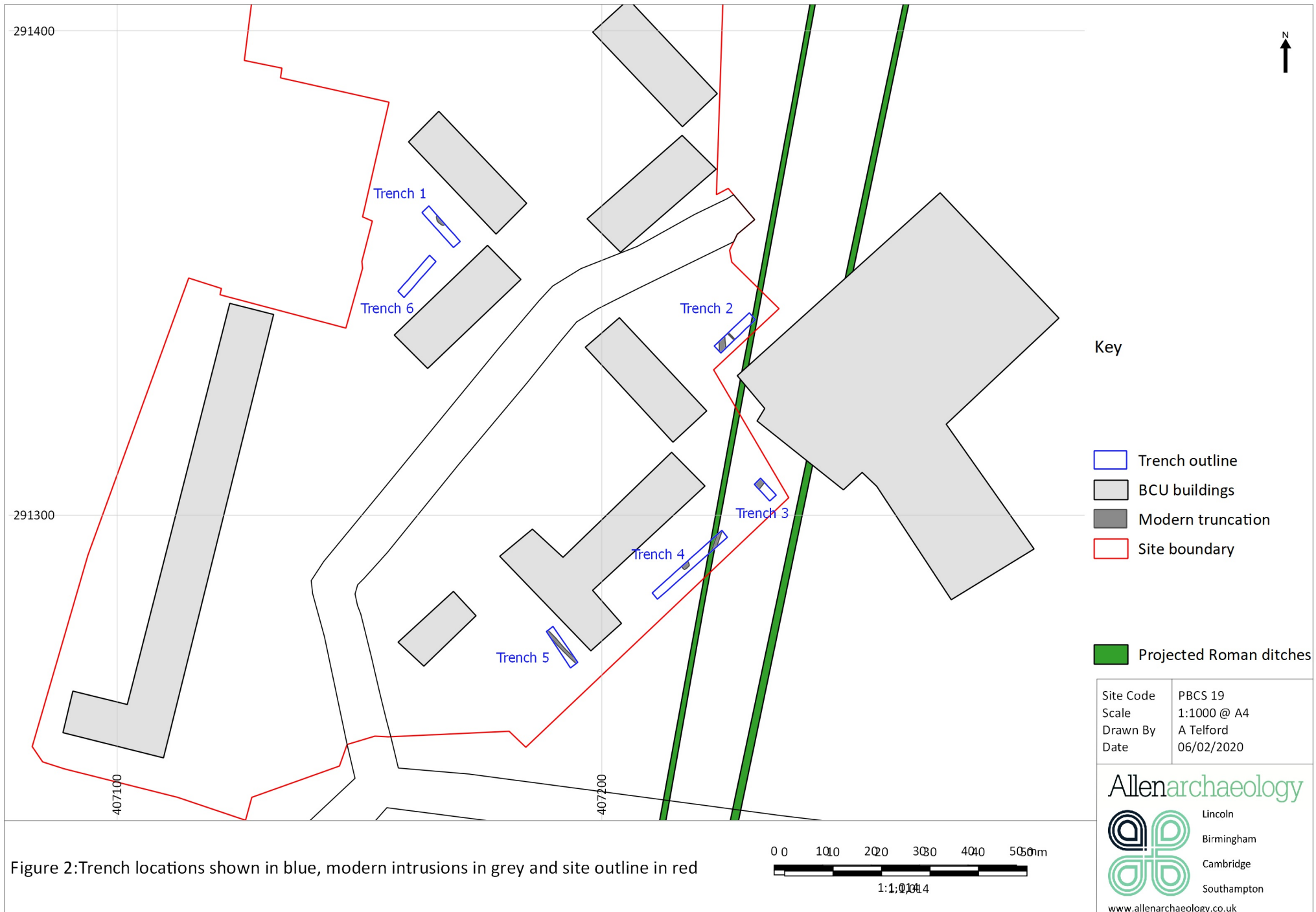
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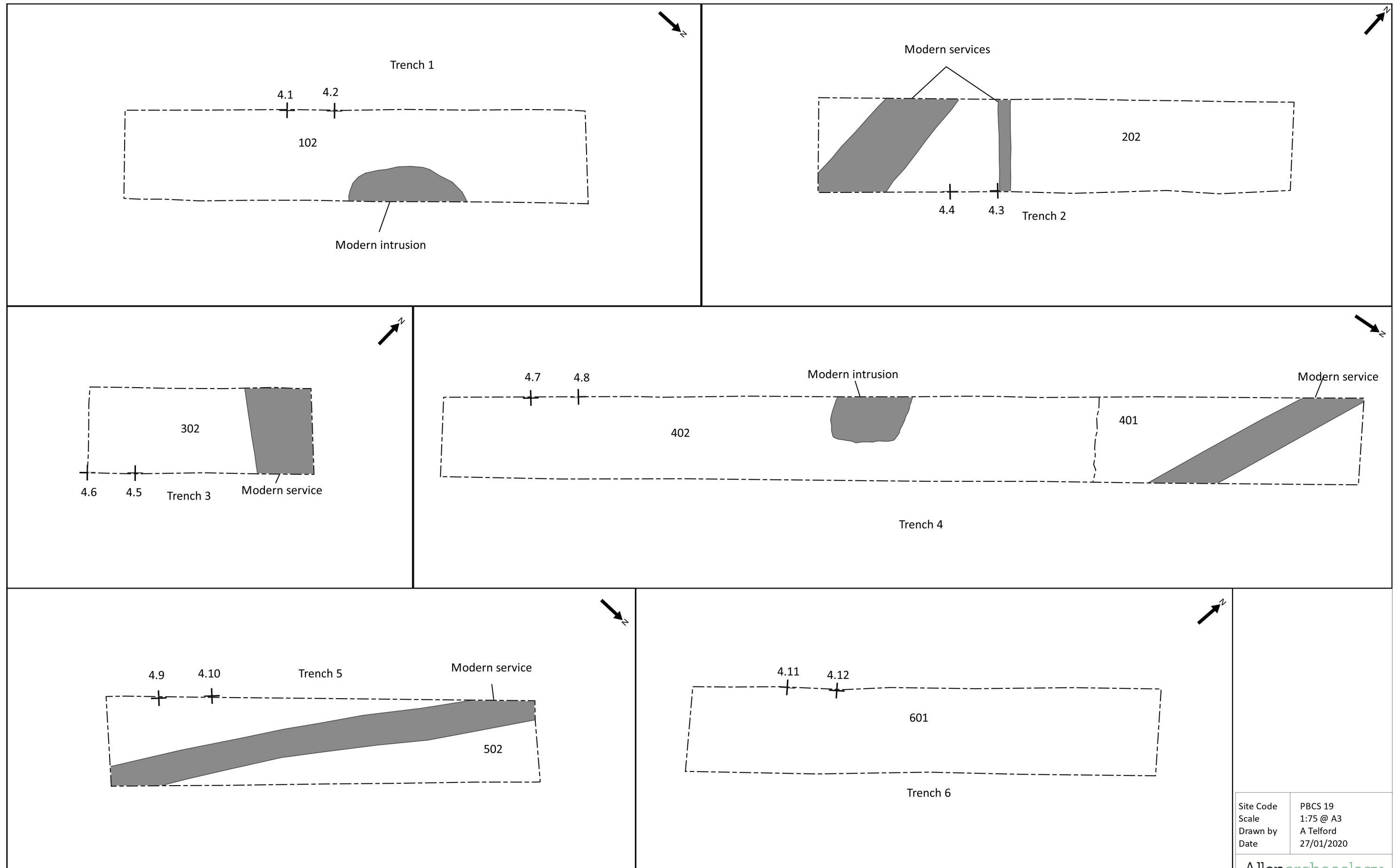
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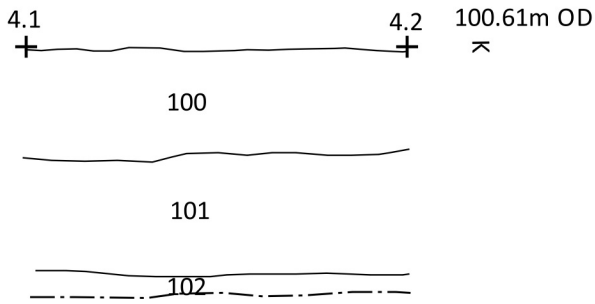


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Date	27/01/2020

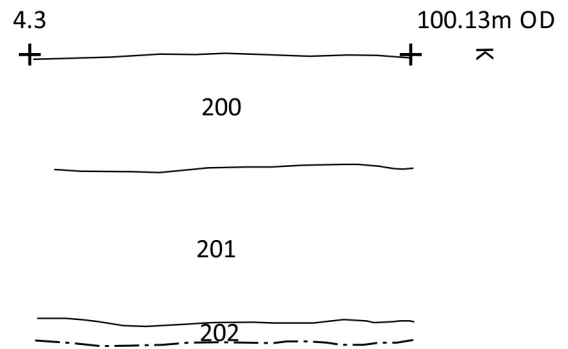
Figure 3: Trench plans showing locations of representative sections



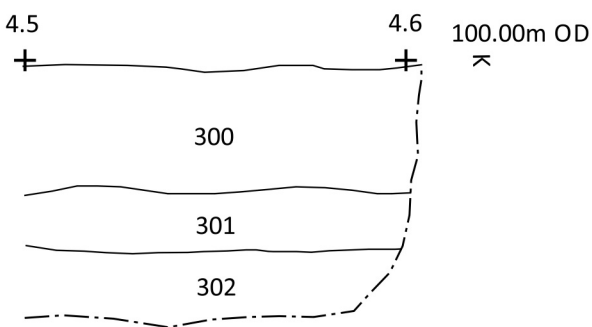
Northeast-facing representative section of Trench 1



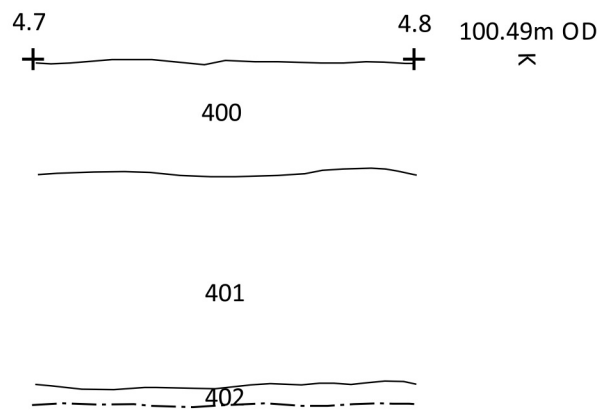
Northwest-facing representative section of Trench 2



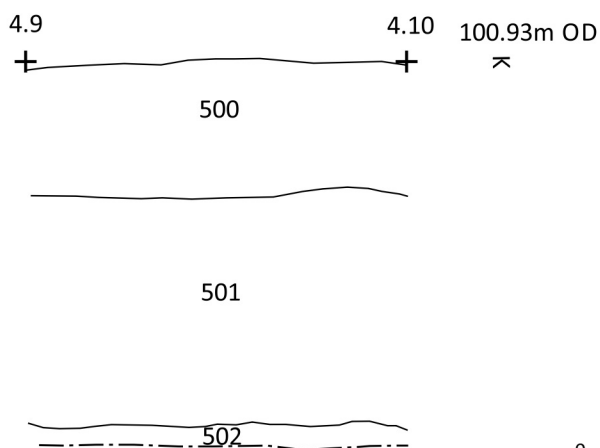
Southwest-facing representative section of Trench 3



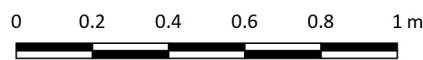
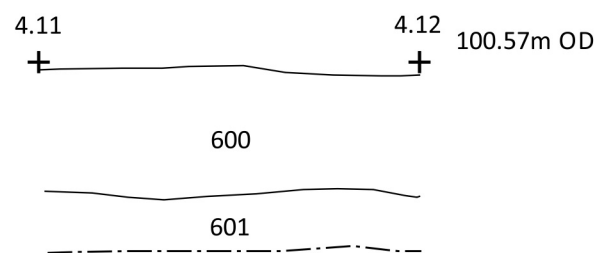
Southeast-facing representative section of Trench 4



Northeast-facing representative section of Trench 5



Southeast-facing representative section of Trench 6



Site Code	PBCS 19
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Figure 4: Representative sections of Trenches 1-6



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