

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT:**

**TRIAL TRENCHING ON LAND OFF WELLHEAD LANE, PERRY BARR, BIRMINGHAM**

Planning Reference: 2020/06904/PA  
NGR: SP 07183 91150  
AAL Site Code: PEBA 20  
OASIS Reference Number: allenarc1-421176



Report prepared for Tetrattech Limited  
By  
Allen Archaeology Limited  
Report Number AAL2021060

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Allenarchaeology



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	2
2.0 Site Location and Description.....	2
3.0 Planning Background.....	2
4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.....	2
5.0 Aims and Objectives .....	3
6.0 Methodology For The Evaluation .....	3
7.0 Results .....	4
Trench 1 .....	4
Trench 2 .....	4
Trench 3 .....	4
Trench 4 .....	5
Trench 5 .....	5
Trench 6 .....	5
Trench 7 .....	6
Trench 8.....	7
8.0 Discussion and Conclusions.....	8
9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology.....	8
10.0 Acknowledgements .....	8
11.0 References.....	9

### List of Plates

Plate 1: Trench 3 looking south. 1m scale.....	5
Plate 2: Trench 6 looking east. 1m scale .....	6
Plate 3: Trench 7, modern disturbance 702, looking south. 1m scale .....	7

### List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Context Summary.....	9
Appendix 2: Figures .....	11

### List of Figures

Figure 1: Site location outlined in red .....	11
Figure 2: Trench location plan.....	12
Figure 3: Trench 2 plan.....	13
Figure 4: Trench 5 and 6 plans .....	14
Figure 5: Representative sections .....	15

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*Cover image: General shot of the northern part of the site, showing Trench 4 being opened, looking north-northwest*

## Executive Summary

- Tetrattech Limited commissioned Allen Archaeology Limited to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching as a condition of planning consent for a residential development on land off Wellhead Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham.
- The site is located in an area of archaeological interest, with a Roman road, Ryknild Street, believed to pass through the site. This hypothesis is based upon investigations to the north of the application site, where the Roman road has been revealed, along with post-medieval gullies. To the south of the application area have been found brick foundations, believed to be part of a former switchgear works.
- Eight trenches were excavated across the proposed development area. No archaeological finds or features were identified. There was no evidence for the continuation of Ryknild Street across the site.
- The results suggest a negligible archaeological potential for the proposed development area.

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Tetrattech Limited commissioned Allen Archaeology Limited (AAL) to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land off Wellhead Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham, as a condition of planning consent for a residential development.
- 1.2 The excavation, recording and reporting conformed to current national guidelines, as set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists '*Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*' (CIfA 2020a), and the Historic England document '*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*' (Historic England 2015), Policy TP12 of the Birmingham Development Plan 2017 and a previously approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WYG 2020). All Historic England guidelines on archaeological best practice were also followed ([www.historicengland.org.uk/advice](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice)).
- 1.3 The documentation and records generated during the project will be prepared in accordance with guidelines set out in '*Archaeological Archives: a Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation*', *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (Brown 2014). The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery have declined to take the site archive due to a shortage of space.

## 2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The site measures approximately 0.9 hectares, and is located to the east of Wellhead Lane, and the north of Oscott Road, in the Perry Barr district of Birmingham. A branch of Wellhead Lane also runs east from the main road, dividing the site into two unequal parts. The site was occupied by terraced houses, which were being demolished as the archaeological works were undertaken (Figure 1). The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) SP 07183 91150.
- 2.2 The bedrock geology comprises Chester Formation, a mixture of interbedded sandstone and conglomerate, formed in the Triassic Period, approximately 247 to 250 million years ago.
- 2.3 The superficial geology comprises fluvial river terrace deposits that formed in the Quaternary period, approximately 3 million years ago (NERC 2021). Within the application site the soils are loamy, with high groundwater (Soilscape 22) (Cranfield University 2021).

## 3.0 Planning Background

- 3.1 A planning application has been submitted for '*Prior Notification for the proposed demolition of existing residential properties*' at 64-146 Wellhead Lane (Reference 2020/06904/PA). As a condition of planning consent, a programme of trial trenching was requested in order to provide further information concerning the nature and extent of the archaeological resource, particularly with reference to whether there was any evidence for the Roman road Ryknild Street running through the site.
- 3.2 The approach adopted is consistent with the recommendations of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with the particular sections of relevance being Paragraphs 187 and 189 of '*Section 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*' (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2019).

## **4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 4.1 Archaeological investigations within the surrounding area have found evidence of Roman activity. A geophysical survey to the north of the site recorded a possible Roman Road, known as Ryknild Street. An evaluation recorded two roadside ditches 18m apart, but no actual road surfaces or finds were noted. The distance between the ditches is similar to that found at an evaluation northeast of the site at the junction of Ryknild Street with Watling Street. Lack of dating material has been attributed to the road cutting through a rural stretch between settlements (Worcestershire Archaeology, 2019).
- 4.2 Approximately 300m south of the application site were brick foundations, believed to be part of a former switchgear works (Allen Archaeology 2020a). An evaluation to the north of the site recorded no archaeology (Allen Archaeology 2020b).
- 4.3 Investigations at Wellhead Lane, c.100m north of the application site, identified a north-east/south-west aligned ditch interpreted as the eastern flanking ditch of the Roman Road and a north-south and east-west orientated gully of post-medieval in date. The absence of Roman settlement adjacent to the Roman road suggested the area was used for agricultural or grazing purposes (Birmingham Archaeology 2008).
- 4.4 The route of Ryknild Street is believed to pass through the site on a broadly south-southwest to north-northeast alignment (Figure 2), whilst another Roman Road is believed to be further east (AAL 2020b).
- 4.5 Mapping from 1890 shows two fields within the current application site along with terraced buildings to the west and southwest. Located to the south is a pavilion, cricket ground and Brookfield House.

## **5.0 Aims and Objectives**

- 5.1 The purpose of the investigations was to gather sufficient information for The Principal Conservation Officer for Birmingham City Council to be able to make a decision regarding the management of sub-surface heritage assets at the site.
- 5.2 Evidence was gathered to establish the presence/absence, nature, date, depth, quality of survival and importance of any archaeological deposits to enable an assessment of the potential and significance of the archaeological remains, and to allow for the determination of any appropriate strategies to mitigate the effect of the proposed development upon the archaeological resource.

## **6.0 Methodology**

- 6.1 The trial trenching methodology entailed the excavation of nine trenches across the east of the application site. The WSI (WYG 2020) required the trenches to be 2no. 30m x 1.5m, 5no. 20m x 1.5m, 1no. 15m x 1.5m and 1no. 25m x 1.5m. The fieldwork was undertaken by a team of experienced field archaeologists. Work commenced 29/03/2021 and was completed on 10/04/2021.
- 6.2 The evaluation trenches were accurately located using a survey grade GPS receiving RTK corrections. However, two trenches, Trench 1 and Trench 2, were hand plotted as there were issues with the GPS data.

- 6.3 Slight alterations to the size and orientation of the trenches were necessary due to numerous site constraints, including the presence of asbestos, trees, buildings that were being demolished, and a compacted brick rubble haul road that was in constant use by the demolition contractors. Trench 1 was reduced in length to 16m, due to the haul road, Trench 2 was adjusted to avoid known asbestos in the area, Trench 3 could only be excavated for 12m, Trench 4's orientation was adjusted due to the haul road to the west and trees to the east. The presence of asbestos meant only 18m of this trench could be opened. Trench 5 was shortened to 11m due to a large amount of waste material at the eastern end of the trench, again including asbestos. Trench 6 was shortened to 10m for the same reason. Trenches 7 (13m long) and 8 (8m in length) were reduced in size because of standing trees and garden fences blocking the targeted locations and Trench 9 had to be abandoned as it was within a haul road (Figure 2).
- 6.4 A mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to remove topsoil, subsoil and underlying non-archaeological deposits in spits no greater than 100mm in thickness. The process was repeated until the first archaeologically significant or natural horizon was exposed. All further excavation was by hand. Machine excavation was monitored at all times by an experienced field archaeologist.
- 6.5 The trenches and all resulting spoil were scanned with a metal detector to aid in the recovery of finds.

## **7.0 Results**

### ***Trench 1***

- 7.1 The topsoil of dark grey brown silty sand containing modern rubble, 100 was 0.10m deep and sealed a 0.40m deep levelling layer, brown silty sand, 101. This was above an orange and yellow white sand natural, 102 At the eastern end of the trench was a large concrete footing, 0.20m deep, 103, which projected c.6m into the trench.

### ***Trench 2***

- 7.2 Black to dark grey brown silty sand topsoil, 200 with a maximum thickness of 0.50m sealed a brown orange silty sand containing rounded stones, 201, 0.30m thick. Two postholes, were recorded in this trench, [202] and [204]. Their fills 203 and 205, were identical to topsoil 200 and contained modern finds. The natural geology was an orange brown sand and gravel, 206.

### ***Trench 3 (Plate 1)***

- 7.3 The topsoil, 300, a dark grey brown silty sand with a maximum thickness of 0.20m sealed a brown orange silty sand containing rounded stones, 301, 0.08m thick. Two modern disturbances, [302] and [304], were noted, at the southern and central area of the trench. The fills, 303 and 305, were identical to topsoil 300. Natural was an orange sand with pebbles, 306.



*Plate 1: Trench 3 looking south. 1m scale*

#### **Trench 4**

- 7.4 The dark grey brown silty sand topsoil, 400, in this trench had a maximum thickness of 0.10m and sealed a brown orange silty sand containing rounded stones, 401, 0.60m thick. A modern linear disturbance, 1.4m wide, was identified in the centre of the trench, [402]. It was not excavated as it contained asbestos-like material, 404. Natural was an orange sand with pebbles, 403.

#### **Trench 5**

- 7.5 Beneath topsoil 500, dark grey brown silt sand, 0.10m thick, and subsoil 504, brown orange silt sand containing rounded stones, 0.50m thick, was a possible linear feature, [501], running north - south. It was not excavated and recorded due to the discovery of frequent asbestos sheeting fragments in the overlying soils. No finds were retrieved from this feature's black to brown silt sand fill, 502. A modern pit-like feature [506] has been noted at the western end of the trench. Natural was orange brown sand and gravel, 505.

#### **Trench 6 (Plate 2)**

- 7.6 Trench 6 was also abandoned due to the presence of asbestos. However, it was noted that there was a pit feature, [602], projecting c.1.5m into the trench, filled by 603, a brown grey silt sand with pebble inclusions, at the western end of the trench. Topsoil in this trench, 600, was 0.10m thick whilst levelling layer 601 was 0.30m in thickness. Natural was an orange sand with pebbles, 604.





*Plate 2: Trench 6 looking east. 1m scale*

### **Trench 7 (Plate 3)**

- 7.7 Below topsoil 700, and levelling layer, 701, both approximately 0.60m thick, was a large, c.1m wide, modern, east-west aligned disturbance in the centre of the trench, [702], filled with topsoil like material, and a large piece of concrete, 703. Natural was an orange sand with pebbles, 704.

### **Trench 8**

- 7.8 Topsoil 800, was a dark grey brown silt sand, 0.10m thick, and sealed 801, a brown orange silty sand containing rounded stones, 0.40m thick. This trench contained a large amorphous feature, 802, probably tree root disturbance, projecting c.2m into the trench, filled with dark brown silty sand, 803. This feature cut the orange sand natural, 804.



*Plate 3: Trench 7, modern disturbance 702, looking south. 1m scale*

## **8.0 Discussion and Conclusions**

- 8.1 The trial trenching did not identify any archaeological evidence for the Ryknild Street Roman Road. All of the features identified in the trenches were likely to be modern in date, containing modern demolition rubble and fills very similar to the modern topsoil.
- 8.2 There is negligible archaeological potential for the proposed development area.

## **9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology**

- 9.1 The trial trenching methodology was generally appropriate for the site. However, site conditions were far from ideal, it being an active demolition site. The presence of a compacted rubble haul road, as well as trees and other obstructions, plus large piles of spoil and frequent asbestos limited the ability to position trenches and investigate features. Nonetheless, it was possible to confidently determine that there was no surviving evidence for Ryknild Street.

## **10.0 Acknowledgements**

- 10.1 AAL would like to thank Tetrattech for this commission.

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## Appendix 1: Context Summary

### Trench 1

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
100	Layer	Dark grey brown silt sand containing rubble	Topsoil	0.10m thick
101	Layer	Brown silt sand	Levelling layer	0.40m thick
102	Layer	Orange and yellow white sand	Natural geology	0.50m thick
103	Structure	Concrete slab	Foundation slab	0.20m thick

### Trench 2

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
200	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Topsoil	0.50m thick
201	Layer	A brown orange silt sand	Levelling layer	0.30m thick
202	Cut	Circular, not excavated	Post hole	-
203	Fill	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Backfill of 202	-
204	Cut	Circular, not excavated	Post hole	-
205	Fill	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Backfill of 204	-
206	Layer	Orange sand	Natural geology	-

### Trench 3

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
300	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Topsoil	0.20m thick
301	Layer	A brown orange silt sand	Levelling	0.08m thick
302	Cut	Circular, not excavated	Possible pit	-
303	Fill	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Backfill of 302	-
304	Cut	Circular, not excavated	Possible pit	-
305	Fill	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Backfill of 304	-
306	Layer	Orange sand	Natural geology	-

### Trench 4

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
400	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Topsoil	0.20m thick
401	Layer	A brown orange silt sand	Levelling	0.80m thick
402	Cut	Linear, not excavated	Modern disturbance	1.5m wide
403	Layer	Orange sand with pebbles	Natural geology	-
404	Fill	Asbestos like material	Fill	1.5m wide

## Trench 5

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
500	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Topsoil	0.10m thick
501	Cut	Possible ditch	Possible ditch	c.1m wide
502	Fill	Black to brown silt sand	Backfill of 501	c.1m wide
503	Layer	Very dark grey brown sand	Levelling layer	0.90m thick
504	Layer	Brown orange sand with frequent sub-rounded stones	Levelling layer	0.50m
505	Layer	Very dark grey brown sand	Natural geology	-
506	Cut	Possible pit, not excavated	Possible pit	Over 1.5m wide
507	Fill	Dark orangey brown silt sand	Backfill of 506	Over 1.5m wide

## Trench 6

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
600	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Topsoil	0.10m thick
601	Layer	Very dark grey brown sand	Levelling layer	0.30m thick
602	Cut	Possible oval feature, not excavated	Pit	c.1m long
603	Fill	Brown grey silt sand with pebble inclusions	Backfill of 602	c.1m long
604	Layer	Brown orange sand with frequent sub-rounded stones	Natural geology	-

## Trench 7

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
700	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Topsoil	0.60m thick
701	Layer	Very dark grey brown sand	Levelling layer	0.60m thick
702	Cut	Linear, not excavated	Modern ditch	c.1m wide
703	Fill	Black to dark grey brown silt sand and concrete	Backfill of 702	c.1m wide
704	Layer	Brown orange sand with frequent sub-rounded stones	Natural geology	-

## Trench 8

Context	Category	Description	Interpretation	Dimensions
800	Layer	Very dark grey brown sand	Topsoil	0.10m thick
801	Layer	Black to dark grey brown silt sand	Levelling layer	0.40m thick
802	Cut	Pit, not excavated	Pit	Over c.2m wide
803	Fill	Black to dark grey brown silt sand and concrete	Backfill of 802	Over c.2m wide
804	Layer	Brown orange sand with frequent sub-rounded stones	Natural geology	-

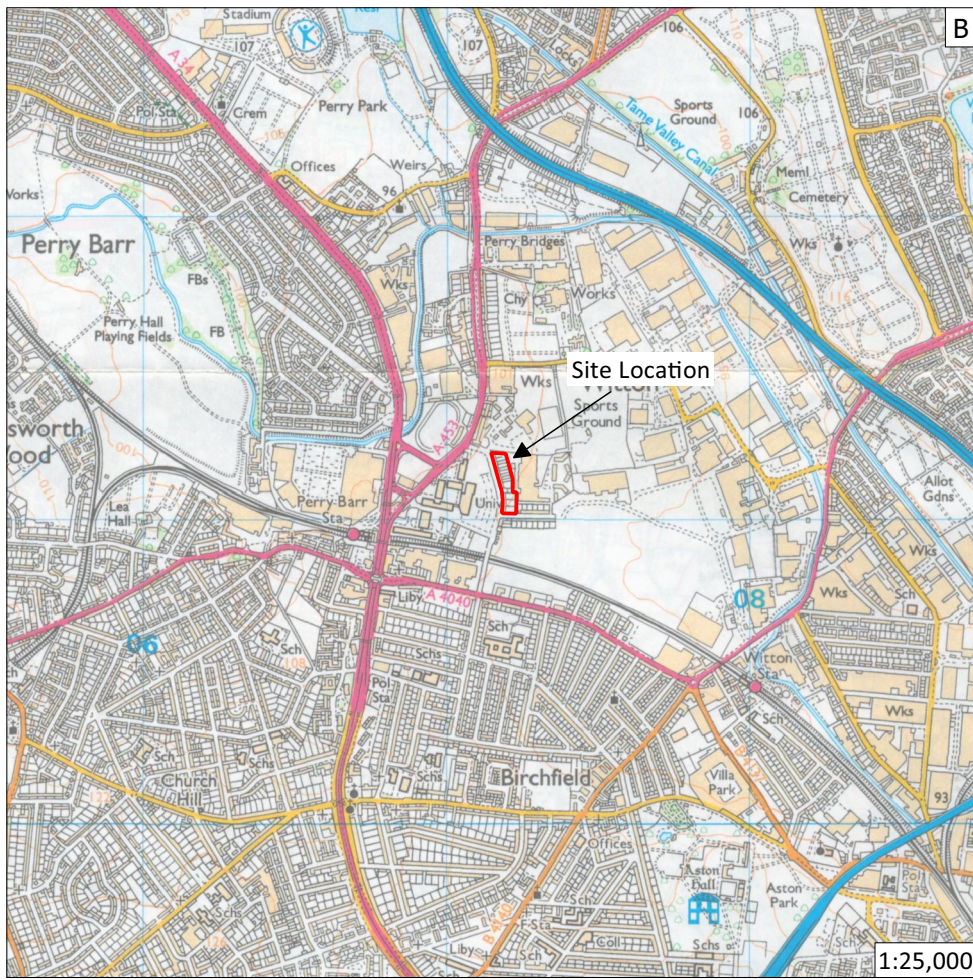
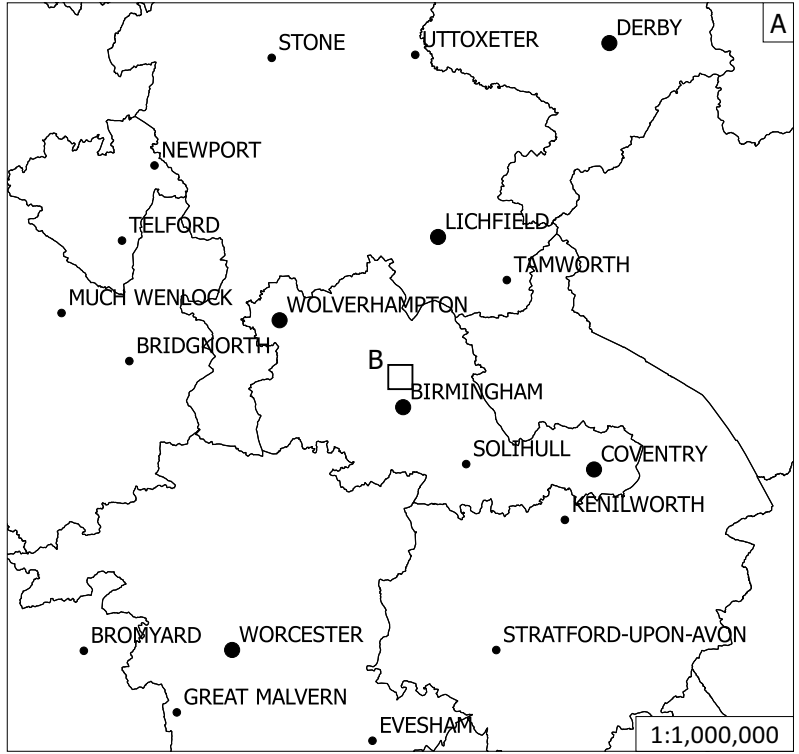
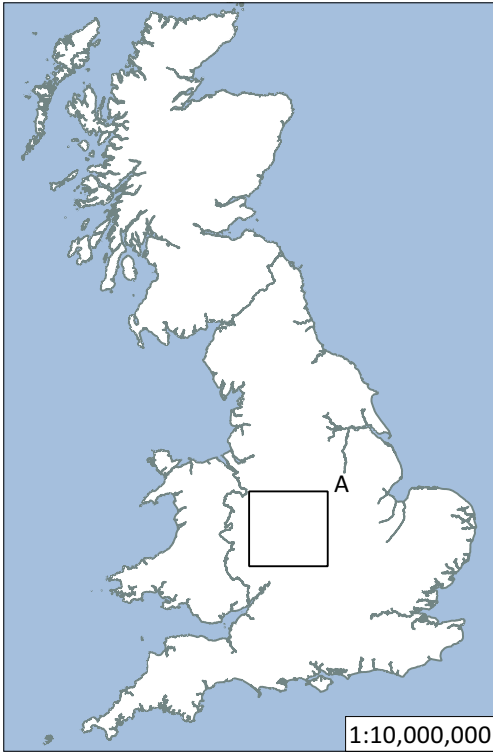


Figure 1: Site location outlined in red

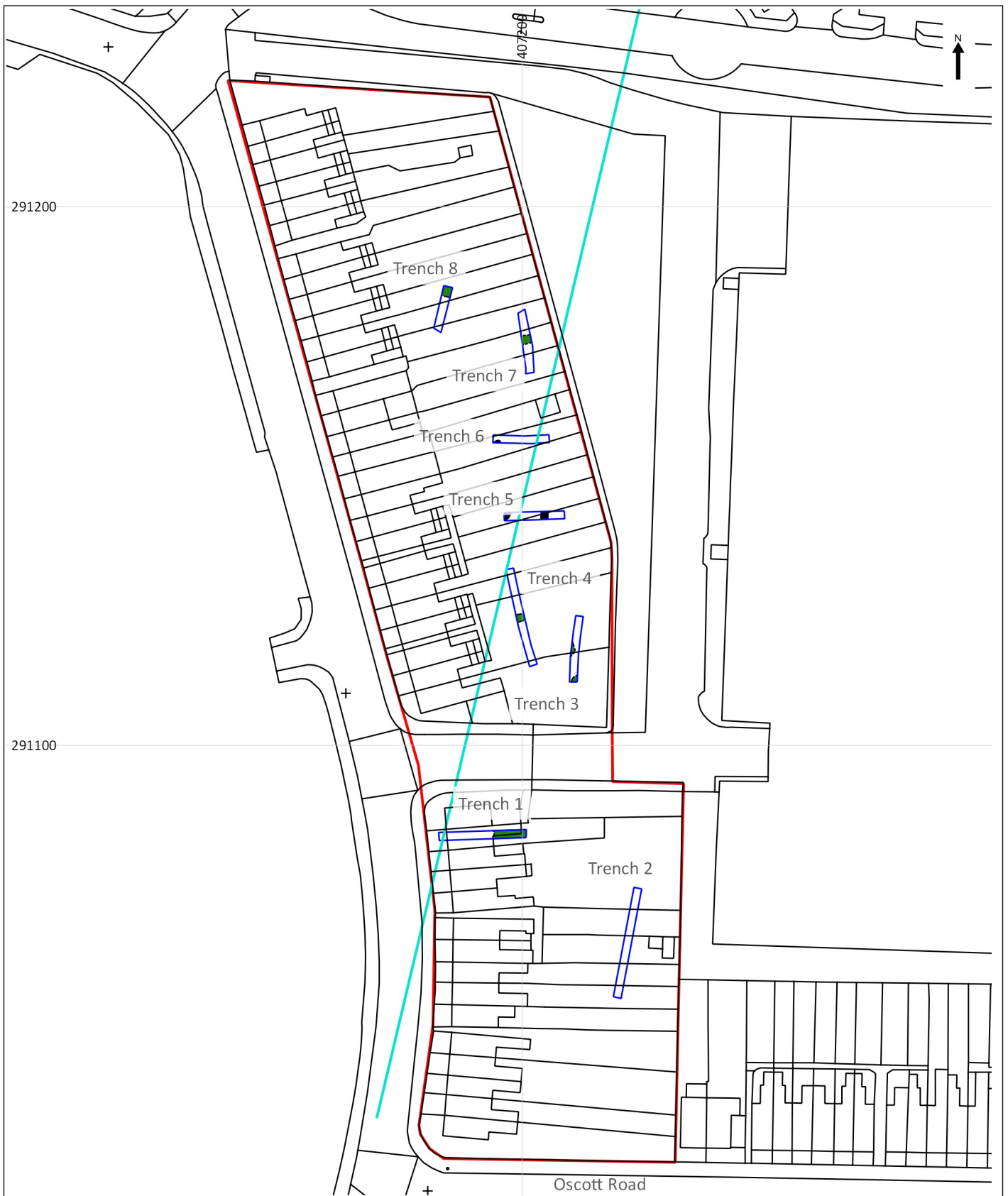
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Drawn by	V Zoppi
Date	29/04/2021






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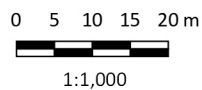
- Lincoln
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Key

-  Archaeological feature
-  Trench
-  Site boundary
-  Truncation
-  Ryknild Street (projection)



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Scale	1:1000 @ A4
Drawn By	M Stockdale
Date	12/05/2021

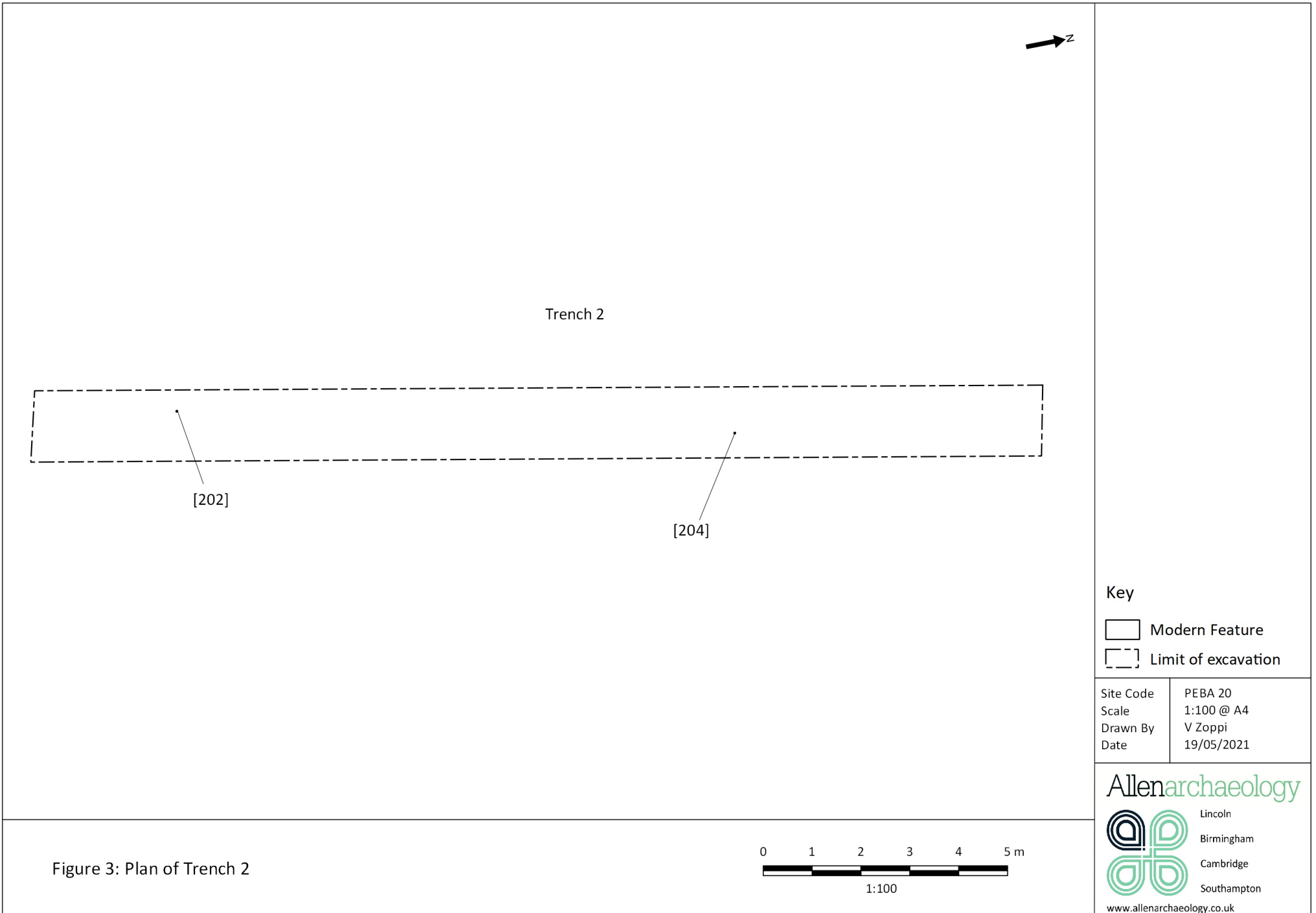
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Figure 2: Trench location plan



**Key**

- Modern Feature
- Limit of excavation

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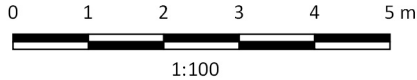
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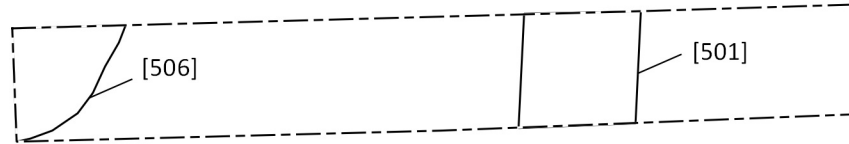
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Figure 3: Plan of Trench 2

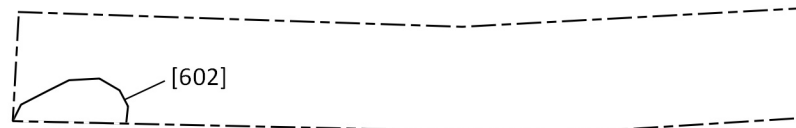






Trench 5



Trench 6



Key

-  Archaeological feature
-  Limit of excavation

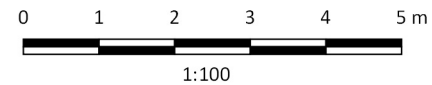
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Figure 4: Plan of Trenches 5 and 6



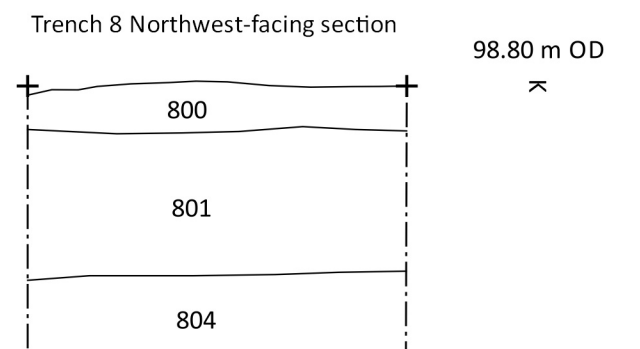
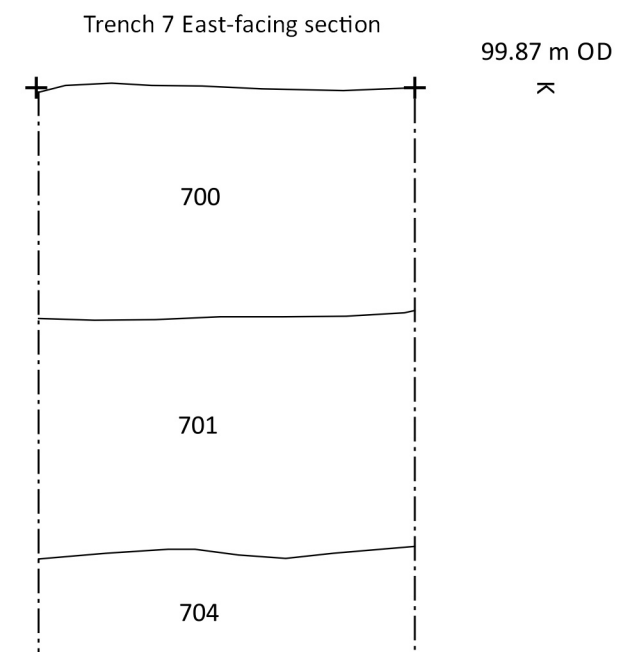
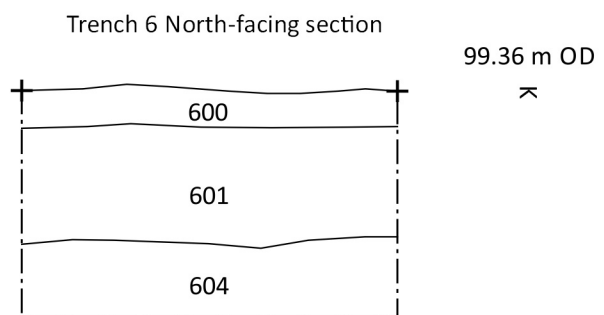
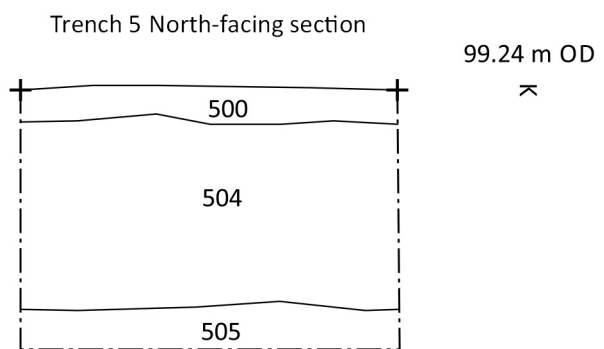
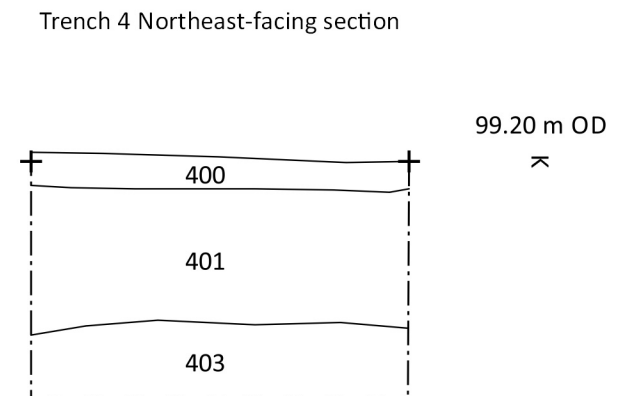
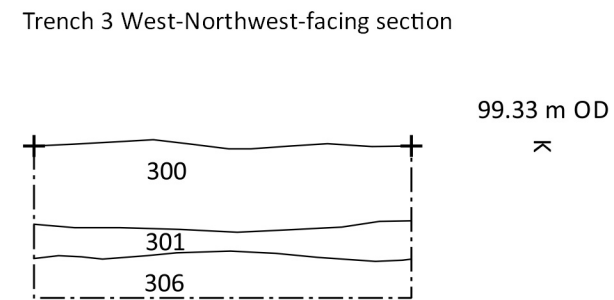
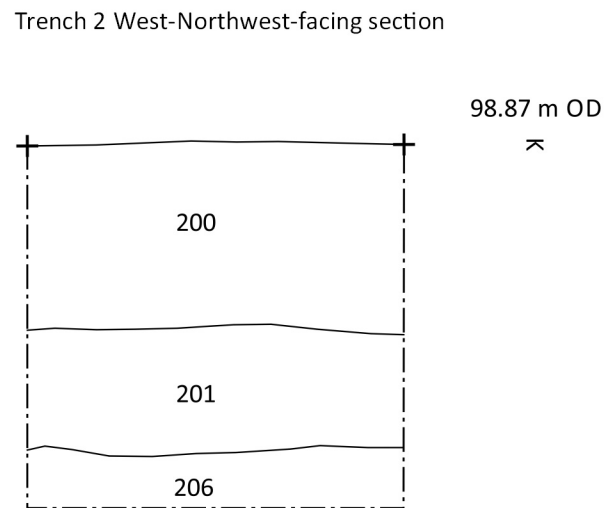
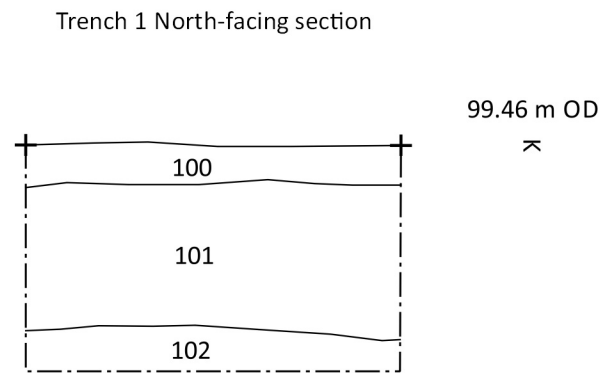
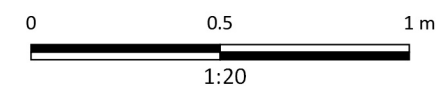


Figure 5: Representative sections of trenches 1-8



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