

# The Angel Cinema Site Lewis Lane Cirencester Gloucestershire



## Archaeological Evaluation



**Oxford Archaeology**

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# THE ANGEL CINEMA SITE, LEWIS LANE, CIRENCESTER, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

NGR SP 0263 0178

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*Between the 20th and 25th May 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the Angel Cinema site in Cirencester on behalf of Heritage Homes Wessex/Capital Consultancy Group. Three test pits were excavated on the site, which is known to lie at the eastern extent of the forum of Roman Corinium. A layer of limestone rubble thought to be associated with the late-Roman abandonment of the forum was revealed in one of the test pits. The remaining test pits both contained a disturbed horizon of 'dark earth' of probable medieval origin. Test Pit 8 also contained a substantial cellar wall and floor associated with Chester House, a building known to have occupied the site during the 19th century.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In May 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the Angel Cinema site, Lewis Lane, Cirencester, Gloucestershire on behalf of Heritage Homes Wessex/Capital Consultancy Group (Fig. 1). Three test pits were excavated (Fig. 2). The work was undertaken according to a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA March 2002) prepared by OA and approved by Charles Parry, Senior Archaeological Officer with Gloucestershire County Council, Planning and Development Department.

1.1.2 It is proposed to redevelop the land at the site, a plot which is bounded to the north-west by Lewis Lane and to the south by The Avenue (NGR SP 0263 0178, Fig 1). The proposal involves the construction of 24 town houses, with accompanying access road, landscaping including paved areas and some tree planting, and services. The existing Coach House will be retained and refurbished.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The underlying geology consists Jurassic cornbrash limestone overlain by up to 8 m of river terrace gravel. The gravels are overlain by up to 4m of post-Roman made ground.

1.2.2 The site is currently occupied by the cinema and a Tarmac car park. The topography slopes gently downwards from north to south with an average current ground level of 110.5 OD at the north and 109.2 at the south.

### 1.3 General project background

1.3.1 The detail of the re-development proposal, the planning background and the archaeological and historical background for the proposal area are located in the document titled 'The Angel Cinema Site, Lewis Lane, Cirencester, Gloucestershire; Archaeological Impact Assessment and Strategy for Monitoring and Mitigation of

Proposed Impact' produced by OA in December 2001, and due for revision. The present document provides supplementary information and should be read in conjunction with the previous document or its revision.

## 2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Scope of fieldwork

2.1.1 Three test pits were excavated (Fig. 2). The Tarmac and made ground of the car park was removed by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision; this process was followed by hand cleaning and sample excavation of archaeological deposits and sections.

2.1.2 The test pits measured 1.2 m x 5.40 m (TP 8); 2 m x 4.80 (TP 9); and 1.3 m x 1 m (TP 10). Test pits 8 and 9 were located in the car park to the front of the cinema and orientated NNE-SSW. Test Pit 10 was located at the rear of the cinema. Test Pits 8 and 9 were located to establish the nature, extent and state of preservation of the basement retaining walls and floors of a building known as Chester House that previously occupied the site. Test Pit 10 was located to establish the nature and level below ground of the late-Roman archaeological horizon immediately to the south of the cinema building. In addition, the thickness of the overlying 'dark earth' was to be investigated.

### 2.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

2.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20.

2.2.2 All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 2.3 Finds

2.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

### 2.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

2.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental analysis were encountered during the evaluation.

### 2.5 Presentation of results

2.5.1 In the following sections the deposits are described trench by trench; the stratigraphy of each trench is described individually, from earliest to latest. There is additional

comment on the finds. A discussion and interpretation of the archaeology then follows.

- 2.5.2 An inventory, with further detail for each individual context, is included as Appendix 1.

### 3 RESULTS: GENERAL

#### 3.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 3.1.1 The soils consist of silty and organic loams (garden soils) overlying river gravels. The site is currently occupied by the Angel Cinema and a tarmac surfaced car park .

### 4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

#### 4.1 Description of deposits

##### *Test Pit 8 (Fig. 3)*

- 4.1.1 Test Pit 8 was oriented north-north-west/south-south-east. It was 5.4 m long, 1.8 m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8 m. At the south-eastern end of the test pit a sondage, 2.15 m deep, was excavated adjacent to a basement retaining wall in order to investigate its nature and full depth (see below).
- 4.1.2 The earliest deposit revealed was a compact, dark-brown silty-loam (803). It was revealed at a depth of 0.8 m towards the north-western end of the trench. The surface of 803 was cleaned but the deposit was not excavated. No finds were retrieved from this layer.
- 4.1.3 Towards the south-eastern end of the test pit a stone-built cellar wall (806) was revealed. Beneath the rubble backfill of the cellar (808, 811) an associated brick floor (807) was also revealed but due to safety restrictions imposed by the loose backfill of the cellar a more extensive inspection of this surface could not be made.
- 4.1.4 The cellar wall was orientated north-east to south-west and truncated earlier deposits (?including the 'dark earth' (803)) to a depth of 2.15 m below current ground level (108.58 m OD). The top of the wall was located immediately beneath the Tarmac surface of the current car park (800). The cellar wall was constructed of rectangular limestone blocks measuring 0.3 m x 0.2 m x 0.12 m. Sixteen courses of the internal face of the wall were revealed, constructed in English bond. A light grey-brown sandy mortar was used for bonding the blocks. The wall was revealed for 1.37 m of its length and was 0.4 m wide. Two vertical window jambs (809, 810) of finely finished limestone were present in the south-east section of the test pit. The western (external) face of the wall was revealed to depth of 0.4 m and was formed of roughly hewn limestone blocks (814), where it retained earlier deposits and imported garden soil (see below). A deposit of light orangey brown clay (815) abutted 814.

- 4.1.5 The cellar (806/807) was backfilled with loose limestone rubble (808, 811) to its full depth of 2.15 m below ground level. Some of the rubble was removed in order to create a narrow sondage to locate the brick floor of the cellar (807).
- 4.1.6 A dark brown loam (802), interpreted as imported garden soil, overlaid 815 and abutted 814. The soil was 0.20 m thick and extended 1.30 m to the north west of the wall. It contained post-medieval pottery sherds of blue and white china.
- 4.1.7 The garden soil (802) and cellar backfill (811) were overlaid by three make-up layers of crushed brick and mortar (801, 812 and 813) measuring around 0.3 m in total.
- 4.1.8 The make up layers (801, 812 and 813) were truncated by a narrow linear feature (804), located towards the north-western end of the trench, orientated north/south and measuring 0.50 deep. The sides of the cut 804 were vertical and the base was flat. The feature was filled with a sandy clay (805). The feature 804 was also revealed in Test Pit 9, as 913. It probably once contained a service pipe although none was revealed in the evaluation.
- 4.1.9 A Tarmac surface (800), 0.20 m thick, overlaid the make up (801, 812 and 813) and the backfill of the probable service trench 805.

#### *Test Pit 9 (Fig.4)*

- 4.1.10 Test Pit 9 was orientated WNW/ESE. It was 4.8 m long and approximately 2 m wide and excavated to a general depth of 1 m.
- 4.1.11 The earliest context revealed consisted of dark blue-grey clay-loam containing numerous limestone fragments (909). The deposit was only seen in section following the removal of two backfills (911 and 912) of a modern service trench (910) to a depth of 1.50 m below current ground level. The upper surface of deposit 909 was located approximately 1.10 m below ground level (109.4 m OD) and it was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.46 m thick. No pottery was recovered from this deposit, which is tentatively interpreted as 'dark earth'.
- 4.1.12 A dark grey clay loam (908) ('dark earth'/garden soil) containing frequent gravel and occasional charcoal, overlaid deposit 909. It extended throughout the test pit where not truncated by modern services. A small assemblage of pottery dating to the post-medieval period was retrieved from the surface of this deposit.
- 4.1.13 A surface of compact light brownish-white mortar (907) overlaid the 'dark earth' deposit 908. It was 0.05 m thick and may have extended throughout the trench where not truncated by modern services. The upper surface of 907 was somewhat irregular possibly due to the removal of flagstones for which it may have been a foundation.
- 4.1.14 Two substantial layers of rubble (906 and 904) comprising fragments of limestone and brick overlaid the mortar surface (907) to a depth of 0.40 m.

- 4.1.15 A discrete area of dark brown clay loam (905), 0.17 m thick, overlaid rubble horizon 904 towards the north western end of the test pit. This was similar to deposit 908 and may have been re-deposited.
- 4.1.16 A narrow band of greenish clay (903), 0.02 m thick, overlaid the clay loam 905.
- 4.1.17 A make up layer of loose sandy gravel (902), 0.18 m thick, overlaid context 903 and extended throughout the trench where not truncated.
- 4.1.18 A service trench (910) orientated north/south cut through all of the deposits described above. It was approximately 1 m wide and was excavated to a depth of 1.50 m. Two fills (911 and 912) of very mixed re-deposited 'dark earth' were removed from the service trench. Fill 911 contained several sherds of pottery dating to the medieval period.
- 4.1.19 The service trench backfill 912 was overlaid by an horizon of gravel make up (901) which was 0.18 m thick throughout the test pit.
- 4.1.20 The make up horizon 901 was truncated by a second linear feature (913) also on a north/south alignment and measuring 0.63 m wide and 0.6 m deep. The feature contained a single fill of mixed gravel (914).
- 4.1.21 The Tarmac surface of the car park (900), 0.20 m thick, overlaid the backfill of the service trench (914).

*Test Pit 10 (Fig.5)*

- 4.1.22 Test Pit 10 was located in the car park immediately to the rear of the present cinema building. It was 1.30 m long by 1.10 m wide. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.85 m.
- 4.1.23 An horizon of limestone rubble in a matrix of dark-grey clay-silt (1007) was located at between 0.55 and 0.75 m below current ground level (108.87 m OD). The limestone was sub-angular and either roughly hewn or unworked with an average block size of 0.10 m<sup>3</sup>. In addition, a large rectangular piece of relatively finely worked limestone measuring 0.68 m long x 0.26 m wide x 0.24 m thick was revealed laying horizontally upon the smaller stones. A mixed finds assemblage comprising pottery (of Roman, medieval and post-medieval date), glass (Roman and post-medieval), animal bone and clay pipe (see Section 4.2) was recovered during the hand cleaning of Context 1007.
- 4.1.24 A layer of dark brown clay silt (1006) ('dark earth'), 0.30 m thick, overlaid the rubble horizon (1007). The deposit contained pottery (of Roman, medieval and post-medieval date), glass (post-medieval) and numerous fragments of ceramic building material.



- 4.1.25 A thin horizon of clay-silt and gravel (1005) overlaid the dark earth (1006). This deposit also contained pottery of Roman and post-medieval date, and post-medieval glass.
- 4.1.26 A further layer of silt clay (1004), 0.20 m thick, containing pottery dating to the 19th and early 20th centuries was overlaid by three make up layers of sandy gravel (1003, 1002 and 1001) to a combined thickness of 0.20 m. These were overlaid by a Tarmac surface (1000).

## 4.2 Finds

### *Ceramic finds by Paul Booth*

#### *Introduction*

- 4.2.1 The test pit excavations produced some 87 sherds of pottery weighing 1239 g, assignable to three main periods: Roman, medieval and post-medieval. The pottery was examined rapidly and the Roman material was recorded using codes in Oxford Archaeology's recording system for Iron Age and Roman pottery. Post-Roman pottery was noted by period but specific fabrics or wares were not identified. Quantities of finds by type, period and context are given below in Table 1.

#### *Condition of material*

- 4.2.2 The pottery was generally in good condition. Surfaces were well preserved and most sherds had quite unabraded edges. This characteristic was noticeable in material of all periods, so despite the fact that the average sherd weight of the Roman material (25 g) was substantially higher than that of the medieval and post-medieval sherds (8.5 g and 6.8 g respectively) there was no other difference in their preservation characteristics.

#### *Roman pottery*

- 4.2.3 The Roman fabrics represented were as follows:

S30. Central Gaulish samian ware. 7 sherds, 430 g.  
F50. Red-brown colour-coated ware, uncertain source. 1 sherd, 12 g.  
F51. Oxford red-brown colour-coated ware. 3 sherds, 26 g.  
F61. ?Gloucestershire brown colour-coated ware (Cirencester 105). 1 sherd, 6 g.  
A00. Unspecified amphora fabric. 1 sherd, 41 g.  
M22. Oxford white mortarium fabric. 2 sherds, 28 g.  
M31. Oxford white-slipped oxidised mortarium fabric. 1 sherd, 104 g.  
M41. Oxford red colour-coated mortarium fabric. 1 sherd, 12 g.  
Q21. Oxford oxidised white-slipped fabric. 2 sherds, 22 g.  
R30. Moderately sandy reduced coarse wares. 10 sherds, 127 g.  
R95. Savernake ware. 2 sherds, 10 g.  
B10. Black-burnished type ware. 2 sherds, 13 g.  
B11. Dorset black-burnished ware (BB1). 1 sherd, 23 g.

- 4.2.4 The chronologically diagnostic components of this group consist principally of fabrics and forms typical of the mid 3rd-4th centuries, though Savernake ware certainly and some of the R30 sherds possibly were earlier. The occurrence of large samian ware sherds (all in context 1007) is notable. While their production can be dated to the second half of the 2nd century the vessels represented (forms 79 and ?31R - the latter represented only by body sherds) not infrequently remained in use much later, even into the 4th century as may be suggested here. Fine and specialist

wares mainly comprised Oxford products, with forms C75, C100, M22, WC3 (base only) and WC7 all represented. All date after *c* AD 250 and C75 and C100 are exclusively 4th century types. Coarse ware forms included a jar, a flanged bowl and a straight sided dish in fabric R30. The bowl and the dish were diagnostically late Roman, as was the single sherd of Dorset BB1, a body fragment from a 'cooking pot type' jar.

#### *Medieval pottery*

- 4.2.5 The medieval sherds were almost entirely in calcareous tempered fabrics of relatively local origin. One glazed fragment was present, but there were no other diagnostic pieces and most of the sherds were probably from cooking pots.

#### *Post-medieval pottery*

- 4.2.6 The post-medieval material was very mixed, containing flower pot fragments and a range of glazed fabrics. Much of the material appeared (subjectively) to be of 19th century rather than earlier date.

#### *Ceramic building material*

- 4.2.7 This was quantified by fragment count and weight per context in terms of major period. The latter was determined on the basis of general fabric characteristics and (in the case of some post-medieval/modern material) diagnostic forms. No such Roman material was present, however, and the four fragments assigned to this period were identified on fabric criteria alone. As with the pottery, the post-medieval material appeared to be largely of 19th-20th century date rather than earlier. Five small fragments (48 g) had no particular diagnostic characteristics and were classified as undated.

#### *Discussion*

- 4.2.8 The ceramic material was mixed. No context group contained solely Roman material and all the groups which contained medieval pottery also produced later pottery or ceramic building. As noted above there was no means of distinguishing clearly 'residual' or 'intrusive' material on the basis of different amounts of wear and the only characteristic which distinguished the Roman pottery from the later material was a higher average sherd weight. In view of the very small total number of sherds, however, the significance of this, if any, must remain uncertain.
- 4.2.9 The relative absence of abrasion does suggest that whatever else the character of the deposits examined they had not undergone a long term process of repeated redeposition, since this would have resulted in sherds of very different condition from that generally observed. Nevertheless it is clear that the deposits were quite consistently mixed. No chronological sequence of deposits is therefore demonstrable, a conclusion similar to that of the previous CAT evaluation of the site.

4.2.10 There were no other characteristics of the Roman or later ceramics that illuminate particular aspects of the site and its history.

Table 1: Dating evidence (by number of fragments or number of fragments/weight (g))

Context	Pottery			Ceramic building material			Glass		Clay pipe	Other
	Roman	medieval	post-medieval	Roman	post-medieval	undated	Roman	post-medieval		
802	1/18	8/77	5/65			1/25			2	
908		1/19		2/156						
911	5/93	3/16		1/280?	3/16					
1004			9/74		11/2109					2 lum of con cret
1005	2/12		4/22			3/16		3	4	
1006	4/46	1/10	15/75	1/66	1/12	1/7		9?	3	
1007	22/683	4/22	3/7		1/91		7 (window)	1	1	
TOTAL	34/852	17/144	36/243	4/502	16/2228	5/48	7	13	10	

#### *Animal bone by Beth Charles*

4.2.11 A total of 24 fragments (309g) of animal bone was recovered by hand during the evaluation (Table 2), all of which were recovered from post-medieval deposits. The calculation of the species recovered from the site was done through the use of the total fragment method (The primary recording data can be found with the archive for the site).

4.2.12 The bone was in good condition and butchery cut marks were visible on eight of the fragments recovered. This included evidence of sagittal cleaving of a cattle carcass.

4.2.13 The small number of bones recovered limits interpretation of the site. It is likely that cattle, sheep and pig provided the majority of meat to the inhabitants, the remains of which appear to be represented as domestic waste.

Table 2: Number of animal bones according to context

Context	Cattle	Sheep	Pig	Unidentified	Total
1004	2	0	0	0	2
1005	1	0	0	2	3
1006	0	0	0	3	3
1007	6	2	1	7	16
Total	9	2	1	12	24

## 5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 5.1.1 The retaining wall of a structure associated with Chester House (a building of ?late 18th-century date which occupied the site prior to construction of the cinema in 1938) was revealed in Test Pit 8. The wall was in very good condition throughout. A small area of associated floor was also revealed. The floor was brick-built and also in very good condition. The structure, interpreted as a light-well designed to allow natural light into a basement, had been backfilled with rubble from the demolition of the above ground structure, prior to construction of the cinema. The light-well wall truncated a much disturbed soil horizon located to the north west. This soil probably represents the reworked remains of a 'dark earth' of post-Roman origin.
- 5.1.2 Two similar soils 'dark earth' or garden soils were also revealed in Test Pit 9. These were overlaid by a surface of mortar. The surface was probably foundation material for an area of external paving also associated with Chester House.
- 5.1.3 An horizon consisting of limestone blocks was revealed at approximately 0.75 m below ground in Test Pit 10. The majority of the pottery assemblage from this surface of this deposit dated to the mid 3rd-4th centuries, although medieval and post-medieval sherds were also present. It therefore seems likely that the deposit is associated with the demolished remains of the Roman Forum of Corinium, albeit disturbed by post-medieval cultivation of the site. The overlying deposit of dark grey clay-silt was very mixed and contained pottery of post-medieval century date. This deposit probably represents the much disturbed remnants of the 'dark earth' of post-Roman origin.

### 5.2 Reliability of field investigation

- 5.2.1 The integrity of the stratigraphic evidence encountered during the evaluation is believed to be good.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
008	800	Layer		0.20	Tarmac
008	801	Layer		0.30	makeup
008	802	Layer		0.20	subsoil/darkearth
008	803	Layer			Dark earth
008	804	Cut		0.50	Service Trench ?
008	805	Fill			fill of 804
008	806	Struct	0.40		Cellar wall
008	807	Struct			Brick floor
008	808	Layer			Cellar back fill
008	809	Struct			Window?
008	810	Struct	0.25		Window?
008	811	Layer			Cellar back fill
008	812	Layer		0.04	makeup
008	813	Layer		0.15	makeup
008	814	Struct			foundation
008	815	Layer			Clay back fill
009	900	Layer		0.07	Tarmac
009	901	Layer		0.14	Makeup
009	902	Layer		0.20	Makeup
009	903	Layer		0.04	Makeup
009	904	Layer		0.22	Demolition
009	905	Layer		0.14	Dark earth
009	906	Layer		0.34	Demolition
009	907	Layer		0.05	Mortar surface
009	908	Layer		0.32	Dark earth
009	909	Layer		0.46	Dark earth
009	910	Cut		1.30>	Service
009	911	Fill			fill of 910
009	912	Fill			fill of 910

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
009	913	Cut		0.62	Service
009	914	Fill		0.39	fill of 913
009	915	Layer			Makeup
009	916	Cut		0.15	Pit
009	917	Fill		0.15	fill of 916
010	1000	Layer		0.06	Tarmac
010	1001	Layer		0.03	Makeup
010	1002	Layer		0.07	Makeup
010	1003	Layer		0.10	Makeup
010	1004	Layer		0.22	Soil
010	1005	Layer		0.20	Soil and gravel
010	1006	Layer		0.30	Clay silt
010	1007	Layer			Limestone rubble

**APPENDIX 2    BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

- OA December 2001,    The Angel Cinema Site, Lewis Lane, Cirencester: Archaeological Impact Assessment and Strategy for Monitoring and Mitigation of Proposed Development
- OA March 2002,        The Angel Cinema Site, Lewis Lane, Cirencester: Archaeological Evaluation - Written Scheme of Investigation
- Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)



**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS****Site name:** The Angel Cinema Site, Lewis Lane, Cirencester**Site code:** CIRCIN02**Type of evaluation:** Three test pits**Date and duration of project:** 20-25/05/02

**Summary of results:** The retaining wall of a cellar and associated cellar floor associated with a 18th century building known as Chester House was revealed. The wall was in very good original condition throughout. The cellar had been backfilled with rubble from the demolition of the above ground structure. An horizon consisting of limestone blocks was revealed at approximately 0.80 m below ground in Test Pit 10. It seems likely that the deposit is associated with the demolished remains of the Roman Forum. The overlying deposit of dark grey clay silt (1006) was very mixed and contained pottery of 19 th century date. This deposit probably represents the much disturbed remnants of the 'dark earth' of possible medieval origin.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with an appropriate museum in due course.

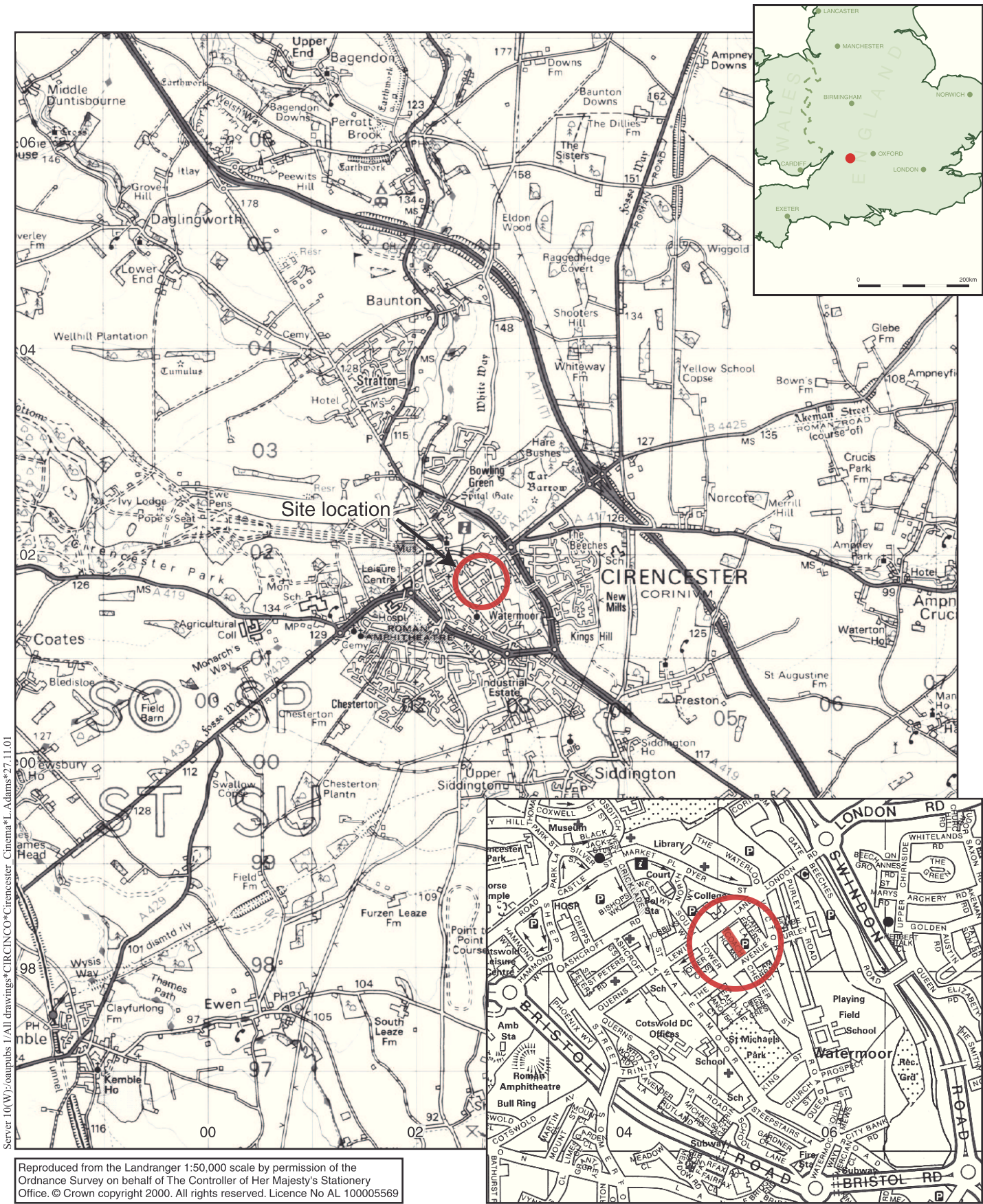


Figure 1 Site location plan.

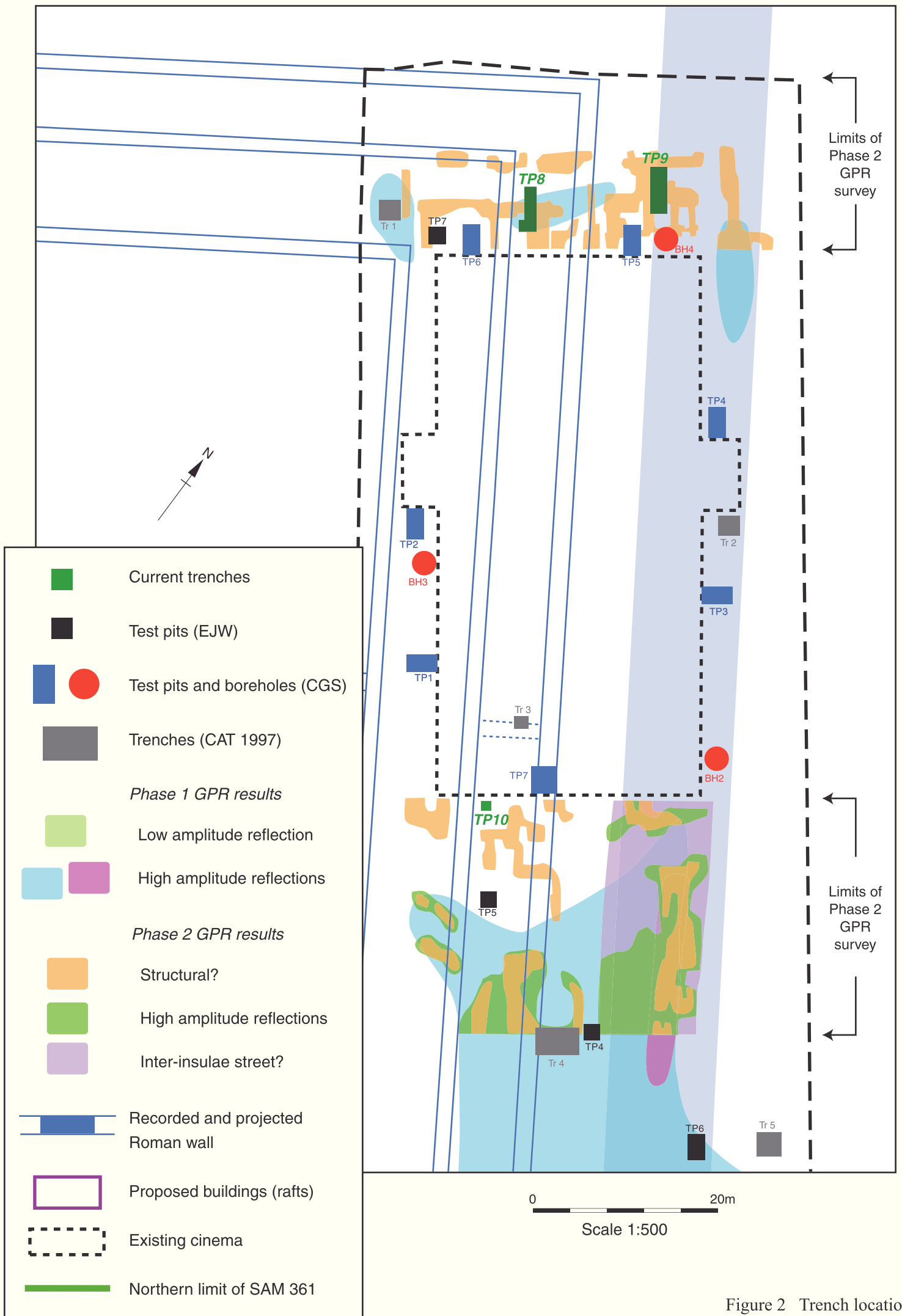


Figure 2 Trench locations.

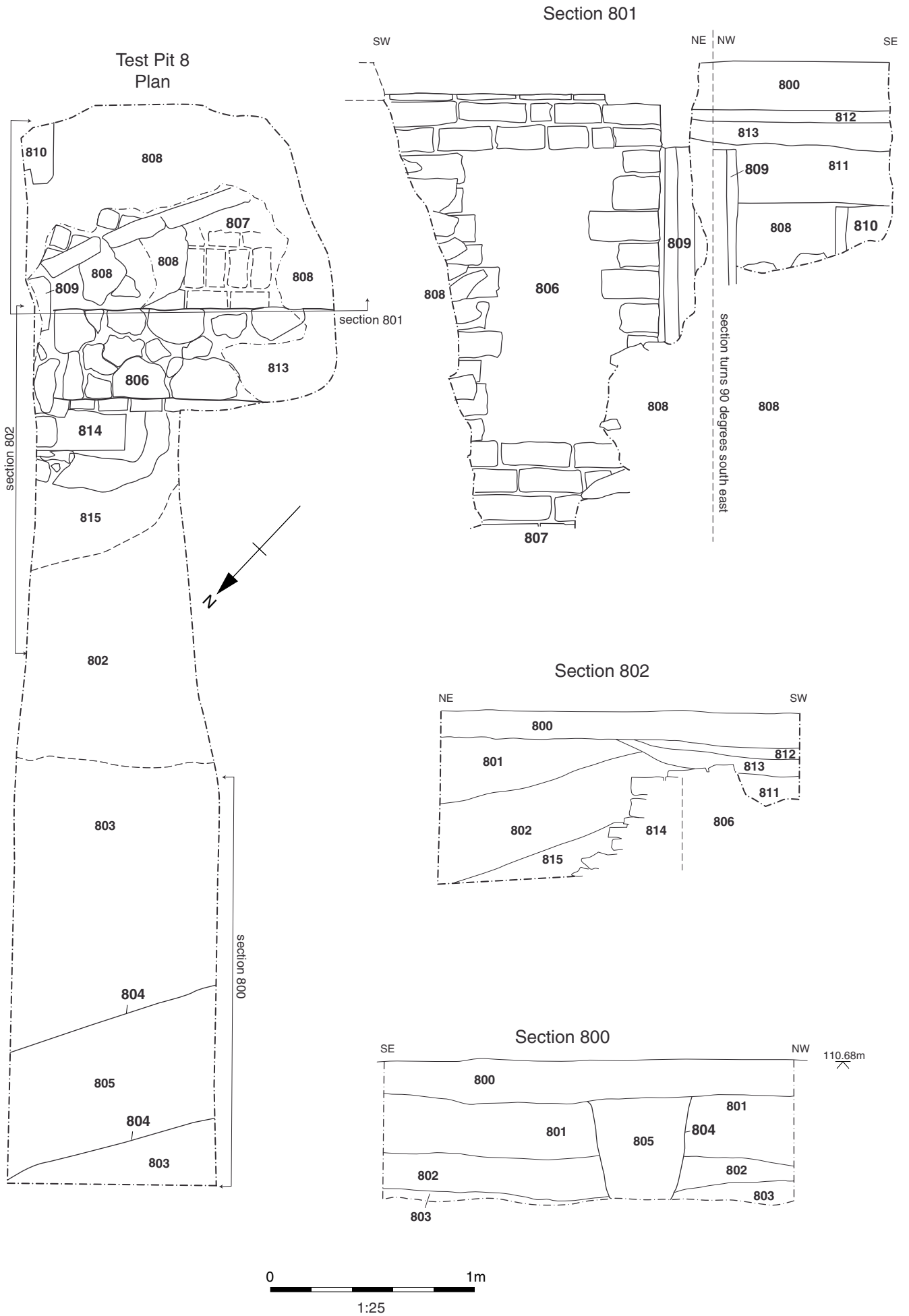


Figure 3 Trench 8, plan and sections.

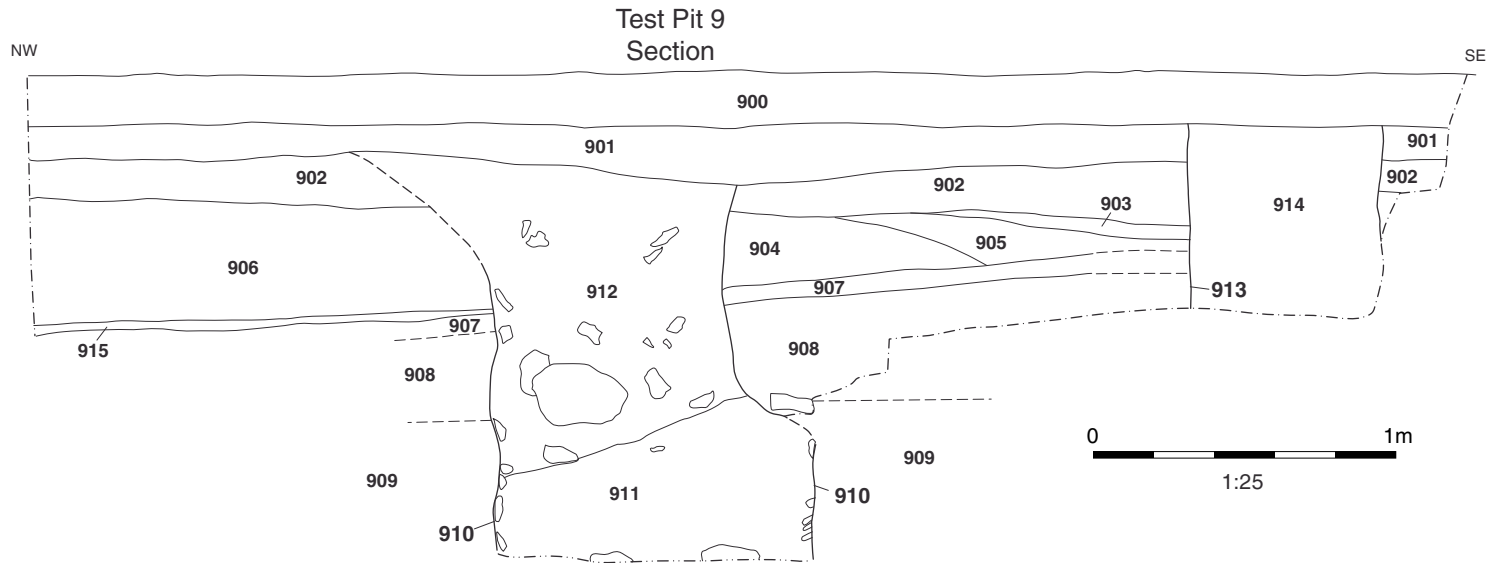
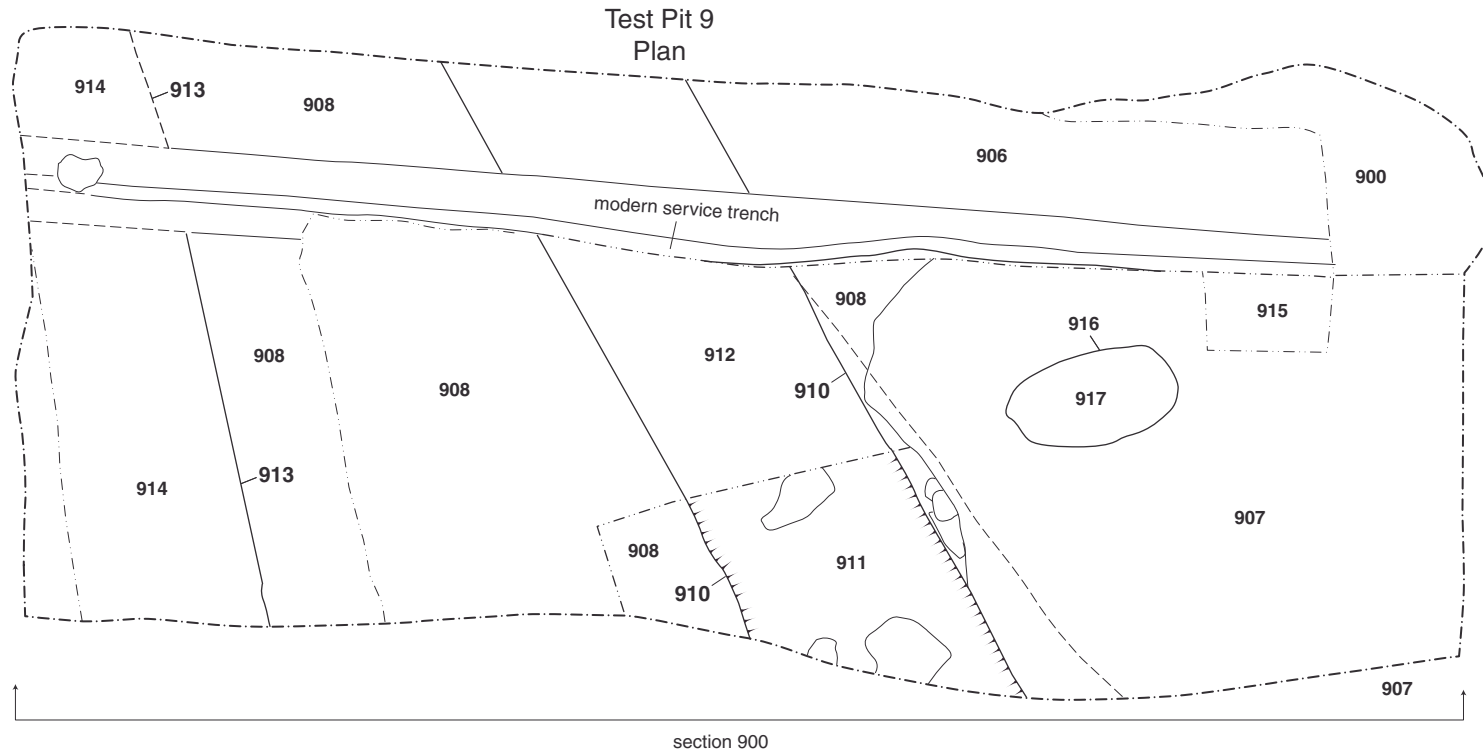
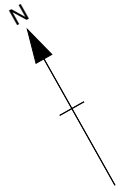


Figure 4 Test Pit 9, plan and section.

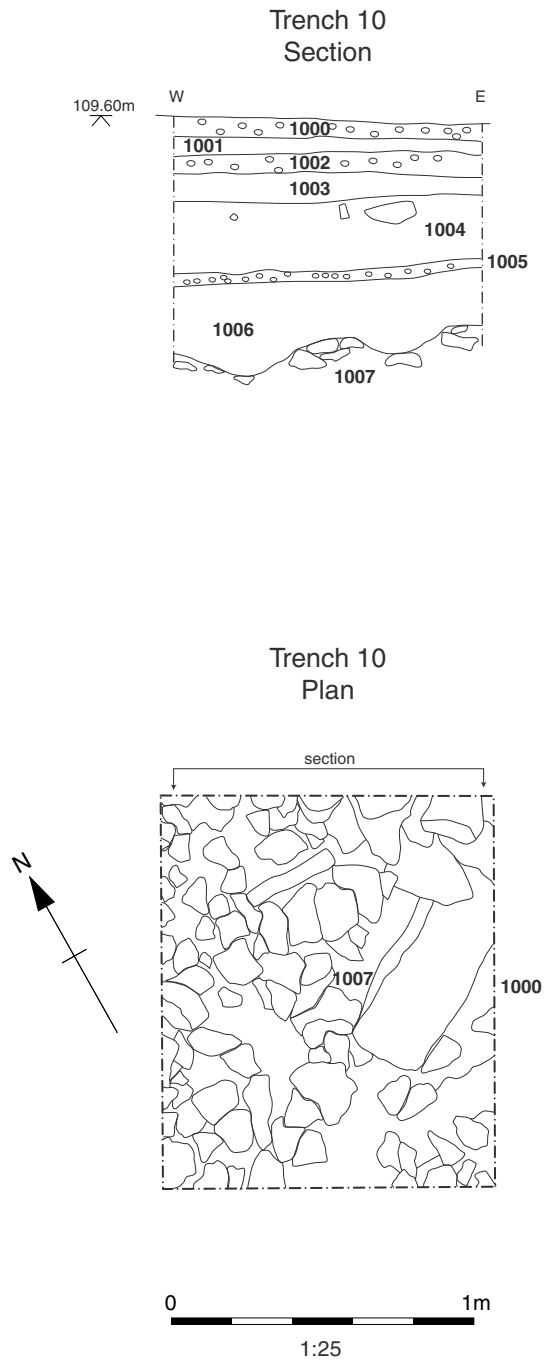


Figure 5 Test Pit 10, plan and section.



Plate 1 Test Pit 8; wall 806 and floor 807.



Plate 2 Test Pit 10; late Roman rubble horizon 1007.