

# St Clare's College Oxford



## Archaeological Evaluation Report


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## **St Clare's College, 121 Banbury Road, Oxford**

### *Archaeological Evaluation Report*

*Written by Robin Bashford*

*with contributions from John Cotter, Lena Strid and Ian R Scott and illustrated by Markus Dylewski*

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## Summary

*In August 2014, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a trial trench evaluation at St Clare's College, 121 Banbury Road, Oxford (SP 5092 0816). The evaluation comprised two trenches, the first of which revealed that significant truncation had occurred during the early 20th century construction of the building which currently fronts on to the Banbury Road. However, the second trench to the rear of the property revealed three east-west aligned linear features which are likely to represent the remnant of an 18th century ridge and furrow field system. The fills of these features primarily comprised re-deposited post-glacial loessic subsoil which overlies the second gravel terrace. Although this deposit was not observed in-situ, it seems likely that it was extant when these furrows began to silt up. The deposit which overlay the fills of the furrows may have represented a later ploughsoil which derived from the ploughing out of the ridges, tops of the furrows and presumably the loess through which the furrows were cut.*

*The ploughsoil and the fills of at least two of the furrows appeared to have been cut by narrow, rubble-filled linear features which are likely to represent rudimentary field drains, probably contemporary with the ploughsoil, which were installed to replace the redundant furrows.*

*A series of small late 19th-early 20th century pits of indeterminate function were seen to truncate the furrows, and almost certainly the ploughsoil. As the cartographic sources show the area around the site as enclosed fields until the late 19th century development at the northern end of the Banbury Road, it is possible that these relate to the construction of either the adjacent property to the north (constructed between 1878 and 1899), or 121 Banbury Road itself (constructed 1903).*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Hodder and Partners to undertake a trial trench evaluation of the site of proposed student accommodation and a new art facility at St Clare's College, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 11/01601/EXT). A brief for the work was set by David Radford of Oxford City Council (OCC) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. OA then produced a written scheme of investigation (WSI) which outlined how OA would implement those requirements.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located at 121 Banbury Road, Oxford, and is centred on SP 5092 0816 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development was formerly an old people's home, with lawn and mature trees to the rear.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is the Upper Thames second (Summertown-Radley) gravel terrace. In and around Oxford, the second terrace gravels are invariably overlain by a post-glacial loessic subsoil.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The specific archaeological background and current research agendas are detailed in the various Oxford Archaeological Resource Assessments (Beckley and Radford 2012), and more generally in the Solent Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Hey and Hind, 2014).
- 1.3.2 Aerial photographic information and several archaeological investigations in the area have demonstrated the presence of an extensive middle Neolithic to early Bronze Age funerary landscape. Remnants of Iron Age and Roman agricultural field systems and rural settlement have also been noted across the terrace. The site lies between areas of recorded crop marks to both the north and south.
- 1.3.3 The ordnance survey 1st edition mapping of 1878 shows the area as enclosed fields to the south of Diamond Farm and to the west of Blackhall Farm. By 1899, Staverton Road has been established, and significant development occurred on either side of the Banbury Road. By 1921, this development became considerably more intensive, and the layout of streets and properties was similar to that which survives today.



## 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

#### 2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were:

- (i) To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.
- (ii) To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains.
- (iii) To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.
- (iv) To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- (v) To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- (vi) To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- (vii) To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive.
- (viii) To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- (ix) To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

#### 2.1.2 The site specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- (x) To establish the character and extent of any prehistoric or Roman activity and interpret the results in relation to the known archaeology of the second gravel terrace.

### 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI. Standard methodologies for geomatics and survey, environmental evidence, artefactual evidence and burials can also be found in that document (Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).

#### 2.2.2 Site specific methodologies were as follows:

- (i) Trenches were set out with with tapes and tied into the existing structures on the site which are to be retained.
- (ii) Trenches were opened by a JCB fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant close archaeological supervision.
- (iii) Machine excavation ceased at the top of the natural geology, which proved to be the first significant archaeological horizon.
- (iv) Revealed archaeological features were hand cleaned and excavated. Recording was in line with standard OA procedures (see appendices to WSI).
- (v) No significant archaeological features were uncovered within the trenches that could not be excavated and recorded to sufficient standard within the two day programme.



### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 Detailed context descriptions are presented in the context inventory (Appendix A), and within the descriptive text in Section 3.2 below.
- 3.1.2 Finds reports are presented in Appendix B. A discussion and interpretation of the results can be found in Section 4.

#### 3.2 Trench 1

- 3.2.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was excavated to the south of the retained element of 121 Banbury Road, within the footprint of the demolished southern wing. The trench measured 20m in length and was 1.8m wide. Natural geology was encountered at between 0.4m and 0.9m below ground level at an average of 62.79m OD, although this had been heavily truncated by the foundations of the recently demolished structure (Plate 1).
- 3.2.2 The gravel was overlain by a layer of mixed demolition material, which was the same in composition as the fill of the foundation trenches which truncated the gravel and both originate from the recent phase of demolition.

#### 3.3 Trench 2

- 3.3.1 Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 3) was excavated at the western end of the rear garden of the property. The trench was 20m in length and 2m wide. Natural gravel (225) was encountered at approximately 0.3m below ground level at an average of 62.99m OD. The gravel had been truncated by three roughly north-south aligned linear features (226, 210 and 216) which, based on the artefactual evidence recovered, are likely to represent the remnant of an 18th century ridge and furrow field system. The composition of the fills of these features (227, 211/213 and 215 respectively) was predominantly a mid reddish brown clay silt which is likely to represent re-deposited loessic subsoil.
- 3.3.2 The fills of the furrows and the natural gravel were directly overlain by a buried soil (224) which was an average of 0.1m thick (Fig. 3, Sections 200 and 201). This also appeared to overlie the fills of two other possible features (200 and 220). Feature 200 had been heavily truncated by later pits (see below), although where visible, it was relatively regular in plan and profile and may have represented the remnant of a pit (Fig. 3, Section 200). No dating evidence was recovered from the single fill (201). Feature 220 was very irregular in plan and profile and was almost certainly the result of a geological variation or bioturbation (Fig. 3, Section 202).
- 3.3.3 The ploughsoil and the fills of at least two of the furrows appeared to have been cut by narrow, rubble filled linear features (212 and 218) which are likely to represent rudimentary field drains.
- 3.3.4 The buried soil and the fills of the features described above had been cut by a series of pits (202, 204, 206, 208, 222). The fills of these features (203, 205, 207, 209 and 221 respectively) all produced pottery and other objects dating to the late 19th-early 20th century, although the function of the features was unclear.
- 3.3.5 The fills of the 19th-20th century pits and the buried soil (224) were all overlain by 0.2m of existing topsoil and turf (223) (Fig. 3, Sections 200, 201 and 203).

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 The level on the top of the gravel in Trenches 1 (62.79m OD) and 2 (62.99m OD) would suggest that the topography slopes gently from west to east, which would be consistent with the location of the River Cherwell to the east of the site. However, it was unclear whether the truncation from the recently demolished south wing of 121 Banbury Road was confined to the foundation trenches, or whether a more general truncation had occurred within the footprint of the building. As no in-situ subsoil deposits were encountered, and the recently deposited demolition material directly overlay the remaining gravel, it is probable that some truncation has occurred.
- 4.1.2 The post-medieval, east-west aligned furrows in Trench 2 are consistent with a 1769 *terrier* field survey held by St John's college (Julian Munby, pers. comm.), which shows the boundary between the extant ridge and furrow to the south, and the already inclosed fields to the north (alternatively these had always been pasture rather than arable). This boundary appears to lie immediately to the north of the site.
- 4.1.3 Further evidence for pre-inclosure ridge and furrow may survive in the layout of the later streets. The reason for the sinuous nature of the Staverton Road is unclear, as on the early OS mapping it does not appear to follow any pre-existing field boundary or stream. However, sinuous alignments of ridges and headland boundaries between different orientations of ridge and furrow are characteristic of some open field cultivation, and reflect the direction of the plough-team as they prepared to turn at the end of a strip. Although the later field boundaries shown on the OS first edition appear to be approximately parallel with, or perpendicular to, the Banbury Road, it is possible that the sinuous nature of Staverton Road, and subsequently (although to a lesser extent) Lathbury Road and Moreton Road to the north (Fig. 1), may reflect the fact that a headland or prominent ridge has survived beneath the post-inclosure field boundaries. It is possible that this prominent feature may be the northern boundary of the ridge and furrow as shown on the St John's *terrier*, although this is highly conjectural and there is no indication of a boundary curving to the extent of Staverton Road on that document.
- 4.1.4 The composition of the fills of the furrows was consistent with them having originated from a re-deposition of the post-glacial loessic subsoil. In fact, the furrows at the northern (226) and southern (216) end of the trench were inadvertently over-machined as it was initially thought that the fills were in-situ loess. However, no *in-situ* loess appears to have survived, and the buried soil which overlay the fills of the furrows also directly overlay the natural gravel. It is possible that the buried soil represents post-inclosure cultivation which has resulted from the ploughing out of the plough ridges, loess and tops of the furrows to create a later ploughsoil.
- 4.1.5 The function of the pits in Trench 2 is unclear, although the artefactual evidence would suggest that they date to the period between the initial phase of development of the farmland at the northern end of the Banbury Road in the late 19th century, and the more intensive development of the early 20th century of which the construction of number 121 in 1903 was a part. They perhaps represent utilisation of what had effectively become an empty plot between properties of the earlier phase of development.



## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
<b>General description</b>				<b>Orientation</b>		E-W
Natural gravel truncated and overlain by features and deposits associated with the recently demolished south wing of 121 Banbury Road.				<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>		0.44
				<b>Width (m)</b>		1.80
				<b>Length (m)</b>		20.00
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
100	Deposit	-	-	Demolition material	-	-
101	Cut	-	-	Cut of foundation trenches filled with demolition rubble	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel	-	-

Trench 2						
<b>General description</b>				<b>Orientation</b>		E-W
Natural gravel truncated by 3 east-west aligned post-medieval plough furrows overlain by later ploughsoil which was in turn cut by 19th-20th century pits of indeterminate function.				<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>		0.30
				<b>Width (m)</b>		2.00
				<b>Length (m)</b>		20.00
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
200	Cut	0.6	0.45	Pit	-	-
201	Fill	0.6	0.45	Fill of 200	-	-
202	Cut	1.2	0.45	Pit	-	-
203	Fill	1.2	0.45	Fill of 202	Pot, clay pipe, glass	1830-1900
204	Cut	2	0.45	Pit	-	-
205	Fill	1	0.45	Fill of 204	Pot	1780-1900
206	Cut	0.9	0.45	Pit	-	-
207	Fill	0.9	0.45	Fill of 206	Pot, glass	1805-1900
208	Cut	0.8	0.4	Pit	-	-
209	Fill	0.8	0.4	Fill of 208	Pot, CBM, metal	1700-1850
210	Cut	2.8	0.22	Furrow	-	-
211	Fill	2.8	0.22	Fill of furrow 210	Animal bone	-
212	Cut	0.35	0.2	Field drain	-	-
213	Fill	-	-	Fill of furrow 210	Pot, clay pipe, animal	18thC



					bone	
214	Fill	0.35	0.2	Fill of field drain 212	-	-
215	Fill	1.3	0.12	Fill of furrow 216	-	-
216	Cut	1.3	0.12	Furrow	-	-
217	Fill	2	0.15	Fill of field drain 218	-	-
218	Cut	2	0.15	Field drain	-	-
219	Fill	4	0.14	Fill of geological variation	-	-
220	Cut	4	0.14	Geological variation	-	-
221	Fill	0.75	0.52	Fill of pit 222	Pot, clay pipe, CBM	Late 18th -19 <sup>th</sup> C
222	Cut	0.75	0.52	Pit	-	-
223	Deposit	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
224	Deposit	-	0.4	Ploughsoil	-	-
225	Deposit	-	-	Natural gravel	-	-
226	Cut	3	0.2	Furrow	-	-
227	Fill	3	0.2	Fill of furrow	-	-

## APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

### B.1 Pottery

by John Cotter

#### **Introduction and methodology**

**B.1.1** A total of 13 sherds of post-Roman pottery weighing 146g was recovered from six contexts (Table 1 below). The pottery was examined and spot-dated during the present assessment stage. This is all of post-medieval date. For each context the total pottery sherd count and weight were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet, followed by the context spot-date which is the date-bracket during which the latest pottery types in the context are estimated to have been produced or were in general circulation. Comments on the presence of datable types were also recorded, usually with mention of vessel form (jugs, bowls etc.) and any other attributes worthy of note (eg. decoration etc.). Post-medieval pottery fabric codes noted in the spreadsheet or below are those of the Museum of London (LAARC 2007).

#### **Date and nature of the assemblage**

**B.1.2** The assemblage mostly comprises small and very worn sherds which are likely to be residual/redeposited in their contexts. These comprise a range of commonplace post-medieval wares with an emphasis on 18th and 19th-century Staffordshire-type whitewares including transfer-printed ware (TPW, c 1830-1900). Sherds of local post-medieval red earthenware (PMR) are also present. The earliest piece is from the worn base of a probable chamber pot in Surrey/Hampshire green-glazed border ware (BORDG) which dates to c 1550-1700. No further work is recommended.

Table 1. Pottery

Context	Spot-date	No	Wt (g)	Comments
203	c 1830-1900	2	10	1x small worn bo (body sherd) transfer-printed whiteware (TPW). 1X worn bo post-med red earthenware (PMR) probably from 17/18c jug/jar
205	c1780-1900	2	8	1x small worn bo PMR flowerpot? 1X worn bo small cylindrical? Drinking vessel in Staffs type black-glazed ware with very glossy black glaze (STBL, c1700-1780)
207	c 1805-1900	2	5	Very worn joining bos from a ?dish in refined white earthenware (REFW), glazed flaked off in places
209	c 1700-1850	1	6	Very worn basal sherd PMR, probably from cup or small dish
213	c 1650-1800	1	85	Thick flat base/lower wall from a large jar (diam 220mm) in over-fired purplish-brown earthenware with a glossy black glaze all over int- possibly Brill (PMBL) or Midlands purple ware butter pot (MPUR)?
221	c 1720-1780	5	32	All worn. 1X bo from bish floor in Staffs white salt glazed stoneware (SWSG). 3X worn scraps glazed PMR (18C). 1x pad base possibly from chamberpot in green glazed border ware (BORDG, c 1550-1770)
<b>Total</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>146</b>	



## **B.2 Clay tobacco pipe**

*by John Cotter*

- B.2.1** Three small and worn (probably residual) pieces of clay pipe weighing 11g were recovered from three contexts. These have not been separately catalogued but are fully described here.

**Context (203) Spot-date: Late 18th or 19th century**

- B.2.2** Description: 1 piece (3g): A very worn piece from the base of a pipe bowl with a short length of attached stem. The bowl has a trace of a spur. The stem has a fairly narrow stem bore of c 2mm suggesting a fairly late dating.

**Context (213) Spot-date: 18th century**

- B.2.3** Description: 1 piece (6g): Worn stem fragment. Fairly thick early 'chunky' type with fairly narrow stem bore of c 2.2mm; together suggesting an 18th-century date.

**Context (221) Spot-date: Late 18th or 19th century**

- B.2.4** Description: 1 piece (2g): Worn stem fragment. Fairly slender with a fairly narrow stem bore of c 2mm suggesting a fairly late dating.

## **B.3 Ceramic building material (CBM)**

*by John Cotter*

- B.3.1** Six pieces of CBM weighing 79g were recovered from three contexts. These have not been separately catalogued but are described below. No further work is recommended.

**Context (207) Spot-date: 15th-17th century?**

- B.3.2** Description: 3 pieces (41g). Two joining pieces from the upper right-hand corner of a 13th-14th century peg tile with a circular nail hole. Fine sandy pink-buff fabric (Oxford Fabric VIIB), fairly worn. 1x small very worn scrap possibly from a late medieval/early post-medieval roof tile?

**Context (209) Spot-date: 17th-19th century**

- B.3.3** Description: 1 piece (9g). Worn flake of fine orange sandy post-medieval roof tile.

**Context (221) Spot-date: 17th-19th century**

- B.3.4** Description: 2 pieces (29g). Worn corner fragment (2 joining pieces) fine orange sandy post-medieval brick. Fairly neatly made.



## B.4 Animal bone

*by Lena Strid*

B.4.1 All bones are fragments unless stated otherwise.

Table 2. Animal bone

Context	Description
211	5 fragments of large mammal long bone, 22g
213	2 fragments of large mammal long bone, 24g

B.4.2 The small animal bone assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

## B.5 Metal finds

*By Ian R Scott*

B.5.1 There are just four metal finds from three contexts. They are a probable incomplete cut nail (two refitting fragments, not measured) from context 203, two pieces of drawn thick hard wire (L: 125mm & 120mm; D: 4mm) from context 209 and a small drawn wire nail (L: 32mm) from context 221. The cut nail is not closely datable. The fragments of wire and the wire nail possibly date no earlier than the 19th century.

## B.6 Glass

*By Ian R Scott*

B.6.1 The glass comes from two contexts and comprises a piece each of window glass and vessel glass. The window glass (context 207) is in a green metal and is of even thickness and has regular surfaces (31mm x 24mm; Th: 2.5mm). It could be post medieval or more modern. Window glass is not readily datable. The vessel glass (context 203) is body sherd from a cylindrical bottle in pale blue green glass and probably moulded. It is likely to be of later 19th-century date but not more closely datable.



## APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Beckley and Radford            2012   Oxford Archaeological Resource Assessment.  
<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordArchaeologicalPlan.htm>
- Hey, G and Hind, J (eds)       2014   Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic  
Environment. Resource Assessments and Research  
Agendas. Oxford-Wessex Monograph 6.
- Oxford Archaeology            2014   *St Clare's College, 121 Banbury Road, Oxford*. Written  
Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching  
Brief





## APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

<b>Site name:</b>	St Clare's College, 121 Banbury Road, Oxford
<b>Site code:</b>	OXSCL14
<b>Grid reference:</b>	SP 5092 0816
<b>Type:</b>	Evaluation
<b>Date and duration:</b>	4th-5th August 2014
<b>Area of site:</b>	c.0.25 ha

**Summary of results:** Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a two trench evaluation at St Clare's College, 121 Banbury Road, Oxford. The first evaluation trench revealed that significant truncation had occurred during the early 20th century construction of the building which currently fronts on to the Banbury Road. However, a second trench to the rear of the property revealed three east-west aligned linear features which are likely to represent the remnant of a 18th century ridge and furrow field system.

The ploughsoil and the fills of at least two of the furrows appeared to have been cut by narrow, rubble filled linear features which are likely to represent rudimentary field drains - possibly contemporary with the ploughsoil - which had been installed to replace the redundant furrows.

A series of small late 19th-early 20th century pits of indeterminate function were seen to truncate the furrows, and almost certainly the ploughsoil. As the cartographic sources show the area around the site as enclosed fields until the late 19th century development at the northern end of the Banbury Road, it is possible that these relate to the construction of either the adjacent property to the north (constructed between 1878 and 1899), or 121 Banbury Road itself (constructed 1903).

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS: 2014.159



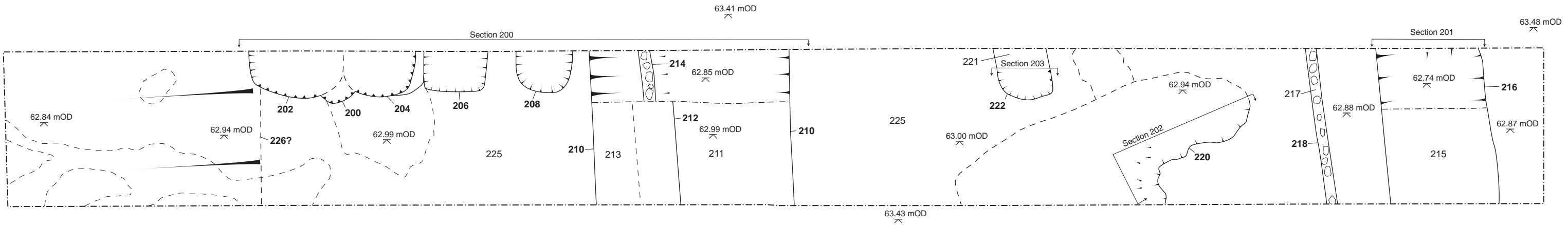
Scale 1:10,000

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Figure 1: Site location



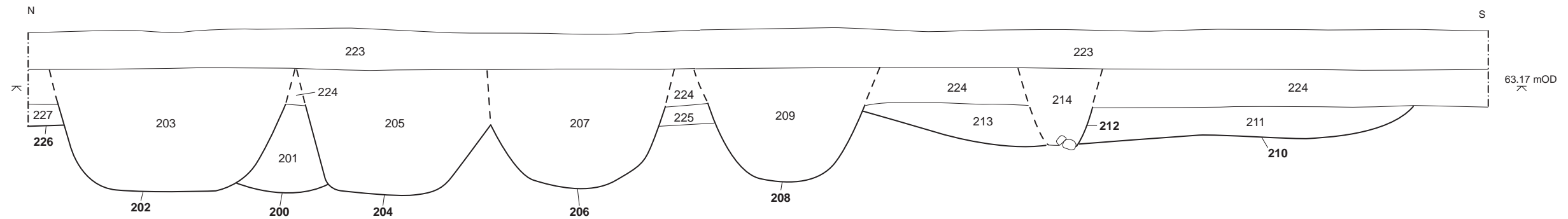
Trench 2, Plan 200



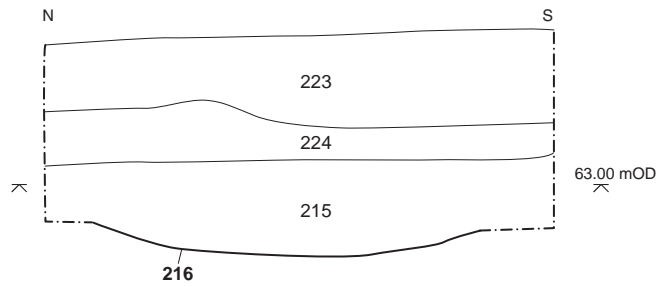
Sandy geological variation

0 2 m  
Plan 1:50

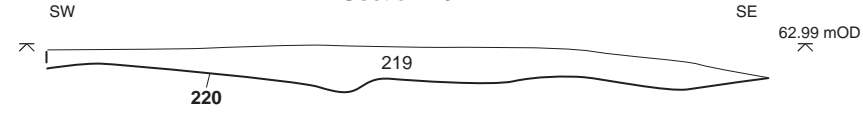
Section 200



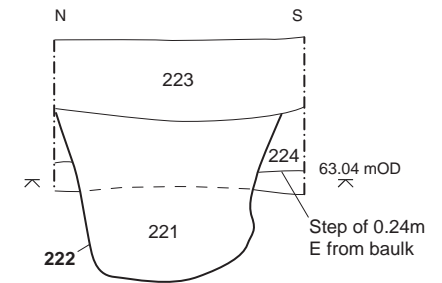
Section 201



Section 202



Section 203



0 1 m  
Sections 1:25

Figure 3: Plan 200 and sections 200 - 203





Plate 1: Trench 1: showing modern truncation of gravel by footings of demolished southern wing



Plate 2: Trench 2: Section 200