



Kings Square, Bitton, South Gloucestershire Archaeological Evaluation Report

June 2018

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Prepared by: Robert McIntosh (Supervisor)
Checked by: Steve Lawrence (Senior Project Manager)
Edited by: Leo Webley (Head of Post-Excavation, OAS)
Approved for Issue by: David Score (Head of Fieldwork, OAS)
Signature:



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OA South
Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East
15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SG

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North
Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w. oxfordarchaeology.com

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Kings Square, Bitton, South Gloucestershire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Robert McIntosh

Illustrations by Ben Brown

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Summary

In May 2018 Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation on the site of a proposed residential development at Kings Square, Bitton, South Gloucestershire. The site is centred on ST 6795 6970.

At the time of the investigation the site enclosed an area of regenerated tree cover with some older former riverside willow trees. All of the trees had preservation orders on them limiting the amount of trench excavation possible.

Four trenches were excavated, each consistently revealing modern truncated or made ground. Aerial photographs chart the modern activity with a 1969 image showing the original line of the River Boyd along with a range of factory structures within the site boundary. An image from 1980 shows the diverted route of the River Boyd and the former infilled channel along with a cleared area of ground.

No archaeological deposits were encountered and the results of the evaluation indicate that the site has a very low potential for any archaeological deposits to be present or to survive.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank JJH (Building Developments) Ltd and SF Planning for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Paul Driscoll who monitored the work on behalf of South Gloucestershire Council for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Steve Lawrence. The fieldwork was directed by Robert McIntosh, who was supported by Camille Guezennec. Survey and digitising was undertaken by Ben Brown. Thanks are also extended to the team of OA staff that prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by JJH (building Developments) Ltd through their planning consultant, SF Planning Limited, to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed residential development.
- 1.1.2 The evaluation was undertaken to provide information to the planning authority on the archaeological potential of the site. A previous planning application was refused in December 2013 (ref:PK13/3837/F) with the archaeological planning officer advising against this in the absence of an appropriate level of assessment of this site. Subsequently, OA completed a Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) in 2017 (OA 2017). Following this, discussions between OA and Paul Driscoll, Natural & Built Environment Team Manager at South Gloucestershire Council, established a scope of work for the evaluation of the site. Prior to the start of the fieldwork OA produced and submitted a written scheme of investigation (WSI) detailing the scope, aims and methods of the evaluation (OA 2018). This document was approved by the planning archaeologist prior to the start of the fieldwork.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies and the requirements of the local authority's tree protection officer.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located within the village of Bitton, less than 6 miles east of Bristol city centre (Fig. 1). The site boundary encloses an area of approximately 0.19ha and is bounded to the north by Bath Road, to the east by the River Boyd, to the south by fields and to the west by Kings Square. A bridge crosses the River Boyd in the southern corner of the site connecting to Harrington Close.
- 1.2.2 Much of the proposed development area consists of relatively flat ground lying at approximately 15m aOD. The only notable exception to this is the southern corner where the ground rises to meet the bridge. The entire site is occupied by fairly dense vegetation including a range of both tree and shrub species.
- 1.2.3 The British Geological Survey (BGS) records the underlying bedrock geology of the site as Charmouth Mudstone Formation (BGS Online). Recorded superficial geological deposits comprise an alluvium made up of clay, silt, sand and gravel.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in the DBA (OA 2017). The following is a summary from that document.
- 1.3.2 No Palaeolithic or Mesolithic period finds or deposits have been recorded within 1km of the site and there is limited evidence of early Prehistoric activity within the vicinity. However, Neolithic flint tools are recorded from a site approximately 700m to the south-west and a probable Bronze Age round barrow is located approximately 300m to the south. The barrow is a scheduled monument comprising a low mound roughly 1m high. These do attest to a presence and activity within the surrounding landscape.

- 1.3.3 No Iron Age remains have been recorded within 1km of the site.
- 1.3.4 The site is situated immediately to the south of Bath Road, thought to have originated during the Roman period. This was a road known as the Via Julia, running from the Roman town of Bath to the Roman port at Sea Mills (Watkins 2015). A second Roman road to the west of the site has also been discovered running between Bitton and Berkely.
- 1.3.5 The Antonine itinerary, dating to the 3rd-century, suggests that the Bitton area contains a settlement but its exact location is unclear (Longman 2008; Watkins 2015). St Mary's Church is to the south-east of the site and the west wall of the nave includes Roman bricks within its construction. Archaeological material from the churchyard and vicarage gardens also includes burning deposits with copious amounts of Roman pottery and coinage. These suggest that a contemporary settlement is located in this area.
- 1.3.6 There are several further Roman discoveries at various locations around the site. In 1862, Scarth records the findings of a bath 165m north-west of the site along the line of the Roman road. The 'bath' was composed of large tight interlacing slabs of stone, with the mortar rendering it watertight. Other artefact discoveries comprise a figurine of a dog found 310m east of the site, a Roman coin hoard 400m south of the site and Romano-British pottery scatter confined to an area approximately 50m across and 650m east of the site.
- 1.3.7 The historic core of Bitton is located 300m to the east of the site. St Mary's church is Grade I listed and has an Anglo-Saxon origin, although only limited evidence of the early church remains visible. The presence of the Anglo-Saxon church certainly points to a contemporary settlement also being present, although physical evidence of this is currently lacking with the core of the village being occupied by existing housing.
- 1.3.8 The origin of the name Bitton derives from three possible origins; Boyd Town, Bertune or de Bitton (Ellacombe 1881). Bitton is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, which included an entry for Bertune. Apart from St Mary's church itself, Church Farmhouse, a Grade II* listed building, located south of the church and 370m south-east of the site, is reputed to be the oldest building within Bitton. It has 12th-century origins and was the former manor house of the village.
- 1.3.9 Archaeological evidence of the medieval settlement at Bitton is also attested to by an enclosure off Golden Valley Lane, approximately 170m to the east of the site. This is a scheduled monument with a surviving rectangular earthwork with rounded corners. It is known as the 'Roman Camp' but excavations in 1952 dated construction to no earlier than the 13th-century. Evaluation trenching in 1998 on land adjacent to the earthwork identified ditches and banks on similar alignments to the earthwork. Combined with geophysical survey data these suggest the presence of two medieval tenements or crofts fronting onto Bitton High Street.
- 1.3.10 The history of the site within the post-medieval and modern periods is relatively limited with no activity shown on the 1st edition 1882 Ordnance Survey (OS) Map. A meander in the River Boyd occupies much of the site and this remains the case until the late 20th century. In the 1970s the river course was diverted and straightened and

the land was used for storage. Much of the existing tree cover relates to the bankside vegetation of the former river course with overgrown pollarded willow present. The land has been vacant for some time and pioneer tree species have established within former storage areas.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to:

- i. establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains,
- ii. determine and confirm the character of any remains present without compromising any deposits that may merit detailed investigation or preservation,
- iii. determine or estimate the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise,
- iv. characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology without significantly impacting upon younger (overlying) deposits where possible,
- v. determine the geo-archaeological and palaeo-environmental potential of suitable archaeological deposits,
- vi. recover suitable materials for scientific dating where appropriate,
- vii. make available the results of the investigation to inform subsequent development designs or mitigation strategies,
- viii. produce a factual report, full archive, OASIS record and HER data submission,
- ix. disseminate the results of the investigation at a level appropriate to their importance,
- x. avoid damage to the existing tree roots whilst fulfilling the general archaeological aims,
- xi. assess the waterlogged deposit preservation of the former river channel where this can be identified in relation to any archaeological activity or evidence.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The excavation and recording methodology followed OA's general approach as outlined in the Appendices to the WSI (OA 2018). These adhere to the relevant Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance notes, Historic England Guidelines and other relevant industry standards.

2.2.2 Prior to the excavation of the trenches the site was assessed in conjunction with the council tree protection officer to establish the locations that would have least impact upon the existing tree and shrub roots. Once agreed the ground cover flora comprising mostly grass and ivy was removed using the machine bucket. Each trench location was then checked for unidentified services using a CAT scanner. The exposed soil was also checked for the presence of any roots greater than 20mm diameter that should be avoided by the following trench excavation.

2.2.3 In the event four trenches were excavated in substantially different locations to those provisionally identified in the WSI. This was due to the significant amount of roots identified and the limitations of manoeuvring the excavator between the trees. Also the CAT scan identified a power cable in the north-western part of the site running from the sub-station to the west of the site boundary towards the A431.

- 2.2.4 Machine excavation also ceased upon encountering obviously modern truncated and made ground. A sondage through the made ground was excavated in Trench 2 to confirm the depth of truncation and limitations for archaeological preservation. A further sondage was attempted in Trench 3 before ceasing after encountering material impenetrable to the excavator within the made ground layer.
- 2.2.5 All trenches were backfilled following confirmation from Paul Driscoll that a site visit was not required due to the absence of any archaeological remains.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below providing a description of all trenches. In addition, summary details of all trenches can be found in Appendix A.
- 3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated e.g. pit 102 would be a feature within Trench 1, while ditch 304 would be a feature within Trench 3.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence between all trenches was consistent and largely comprised made ground deposits. A light grey crumbly mudstone representing the natural geology was observed only at the northern end of Trench 1. A subsoil layer containing quantities of brick and modern debris was present in Trenches 1 and 4. The topsoil was relatively uniform across the site comprising a silty humic soil and leaf litter layer 0.15m to 0.2m thick with many fine roots present. Roots greater than 20mm diameter were avoided by the trench excavation.
- 3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were good, and the trenches remained dry throughout.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 Significant levels of 20th century disturbance were present in all of the trenches and no archaeological deposits were encountered.

3.4 Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 1)

- 3.4.1 Trench 1 was positioned in a small clearing in the central southern part of the site. It was possible to excavate the trench to a total length of 6.5m. The natural geology was exposed within the northern end of the trench. This was the only location where undisturbed geological mudstone deposits were identified. The remainder and greater part of the trench was occupied by a large modern feature (102) with only its northern extent exposed within the trench. The fill (103) comprised an orange-brown clay containing quantities of modern refuse including bricks, concrete, metal objects and plastic. Limited machine excavation of this deposit and feature demonstrated that it had truncated and removed the potential archaeological horizon. The topsoil and leaf litter layer overlay the modern debris and mudstone.

3.5 Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 3, Plates 2 and 3)

- 3.5.1 Trench 2 was located in the central northern part of the site. It was possible to excavate this to a total length of 5m. A machine-excavated sondage was excavated to 0.75m below the current ground level within the south-eastern end of the trench. This revealed a sequence of modern deposits (202 and 201) containing brick and concrete. The uppermost layer (201) was recorded throughout the trench. The silty topsoil and leaf litter layer overlay the modern debris.

3.6 Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 4)

3.6.1 Trench 3 was located in the eastern part of the site partly within the former river channel. It was possible to excavate this to a total length of 3.9m. Increasing densities of tree roots greater than 20mm diameter were encountered within the south-western end of the trench within the topsoil horizon. As a consequence, this part of the trench was not excavated any deeper. A clayey layer with brick and concrete debris (301) almost identical to that found in Trench 2 (201) was revealed within the trench where it was possible to remove the topsoil. A machine-excavated sondage was excavated to maximum depth of 0.5m below the current ground level into this deposit in an attempt to examine the former channel. However, it was not possible to penetrate the concrete and brick rubble beyond this depth with the machine capabilities.

3.7 Trench 4 (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 5)

3.7.1 Trench 4 was located in the south-eastern part of the site. It was possible to excavate this to a total length of 5.5m. The presence of significant roots at both the north-east and south-west ends prevented the trench from being extended any further in either direction. Excavation of this trench revealed a similar compacted clay and debris layer (402) as that exposed in Trenches 2 and 3. A concrete probable foundation (403) was cut into and constructed at this horizon. This was sealed by a layer of mixed clay and modern debris (401) followed by the current topsoil and leaf litter horizon (400).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken during fair weather providing good conditions for the excavation and recording of the trenches.
- 4.1.2 With the exception of Trench 1, the only limitation to the field results was the inability of the machine excavation to penetrate the modern deposits to conclusively encounter geological horizons. However, the geological deposits encountered within Trench 1 provide a reliable marker identifying the elevation that potential archaeological features could be encountered at. The presence of modern deposits substantially below this level elsewhere provides confidence that the results truly reflect the absence of any remains as opposed to these being potentially sealed by the modern horizons.
- 4.1.3 The restrictions to the quantity of trench excavation possible within the site limited by the tree roots also affects the reliability of the investigation to a limited degree. A 5% sample of the site would have equated to approximately 97m². However, in the event it was only possible to evaluate a total 27m² equating to a sample of approximately 1.5%. In mitigation it should be noted that approximately 25% of the site is occupied by the former route of the River Boyd where the potential for encountering archaeological deposits is low. Also, the consistent occurrence of substantial modern truncation and deposits within the trenches strongly indicates that this is a reliable reflection of the site potential.

4.2 Interpretation

- 4.2.1 No archaeological deposits were encountered.
- 4.2.2 Considerable depths of modern debris were consistently present across the site. Within Trenches 1 and 4 these deposits appear most likely to have been related to the factory buildings visible in the 1969 aerial image (Plate 6). Both of these trenches were located beyond the former river channel, although undisturbed geological deposits were only encountered within a small part of Trench 1 at approximately 0.3m below the current ground level. Trench 4 was excavated to approximately 0.5m below the current ground level revealing only modern deposits suggesting that this area had been truncated and built up.
- 4.2.3 The majority of the other activity seen on the site appears to be associated with the 1970s construction of the culvert and the diversion of the River Boyd and the demolition and clearance of the former factory buildings. Aerial photographs from 1980 after the construction works on the river show that the factory buildings had been demolished and the area levelled (Plate 7).

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NNW-SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology, but contained a modern cut feature.					Length (m)	6.5
					Width (m)	1.3
					Avg. depth (m)	0.25
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil, woodland soils.	-	-
101	Layer	-	-	Natural, mudstone.	-	-
102	Cut	-	-	Cut of unknown modern feature only partially exposed.	-	20th C.
103	Fill	-	-	Modern backfill, orange-brown clay containing metal, brick, plastic etc.	-	20th C.
104	Layer	-	0.1	A greyish brown silt, containing many bricks, pieces of metal.	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench machined to the top of made ground (201). A sondage was excavated to a depth of 0.75, through the made ground, revealing modern backfill beneath.					Length (m)	5
					Width (m)	1.3
					Avg. depth (m)	0.2
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil, woodland soils.	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.25	Made ground. Firm, brownish orange clay with lenses of grey clay. Contained slag, brick modern pottery and concrete.	-	20th C.
202	Layer	-	-	Backfill. Dark brown silty clay with a large quantity of bricks and concrete within.	-	20th C.

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NNE-SSW
Trench contained made ground similar to that in trench 2.					Length (m)	3.9
					Width (m)	1.3
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.18	Topsoil, woodland soils	-	-

301	Layer	-	0.32	Made ground. Firm, brownish orange clay with lenses of grey clay. Contained slag, brick modern pottery, concrete and metal.	-	20th C.
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Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench contained a concrete footing or surface, flush with the top of the clay built ground also seen in trenches 2 and 3.					Length (m)	5.5
					Width (m)	1.3
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.25	A greyish brown silt, containing many bricks, pieces of metal.	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Made ground. Firm, brownish orange clay with lenses of grey clay. Contained slag, brick modern pottery, concrete and metal.	-	20th C.
403	Structure	1.3	-	Concrete slab.	-	20th C.

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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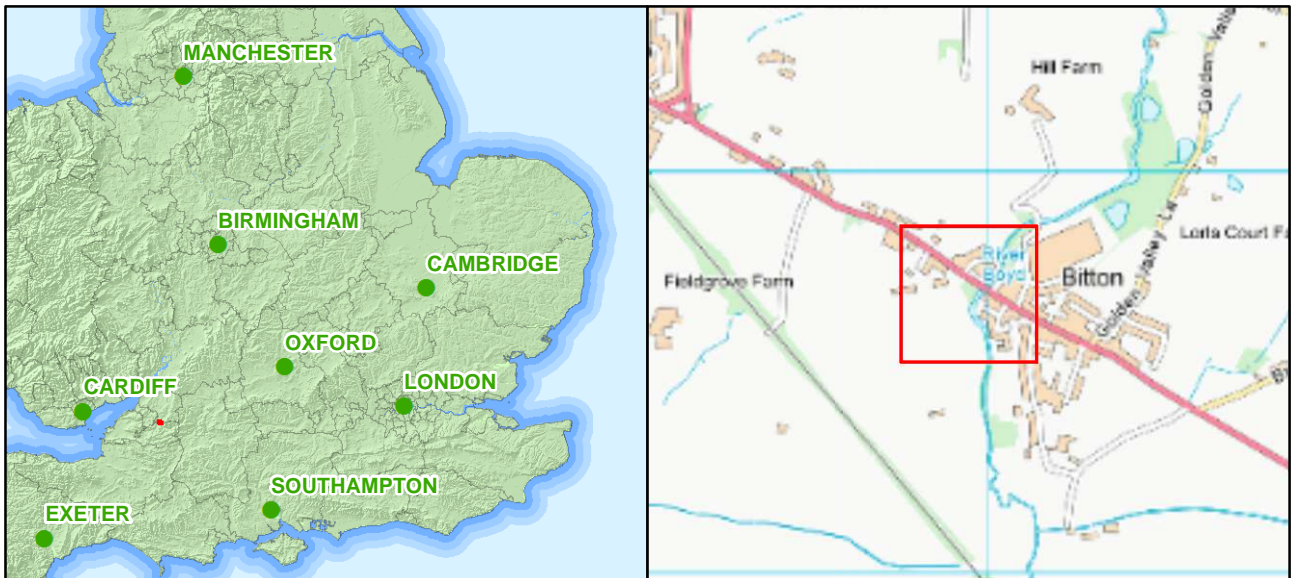
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APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Kings Square, Bitton, South Gloucestershire
Site code:	BRSMG:2018/35
Grid Reference	ST 6795 6970
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	21st-22nd May 2018
Area of Site	0.19ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with City of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery in due course under the accession number BRSMG:2018/35.
Summary of Results:	<p>In May 2018 Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation on the site of a proposed residential development at Kings Square, Bitton, South Gloucestershire. The site is centred on ST 6795 6970.</p> <p>At the time of the investigation the site enclosed an area of regenerated tree cover with some older former riverside willow trees. All of the trees had preservation orders on them limiting the amount of trench excavation possible.</p> <p>Four trenches were excavated, each consistently revealing modern truncated or made ground. Aerial photographs chart the modern activity with a 1969 image showing the original line of the River Boyd along with a range of factory structures within the site boundary. An image from 1980 shows the diverted route of the River Boyd and the former infilled channel along with a cleared area of ground.</p> <p>No archaeological deposits were encountered and the results of the evaluation indicate that the site has a very low potential for any archaeological deposits to be present or to survive.</p>



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0 100m

Figure 1: Site location

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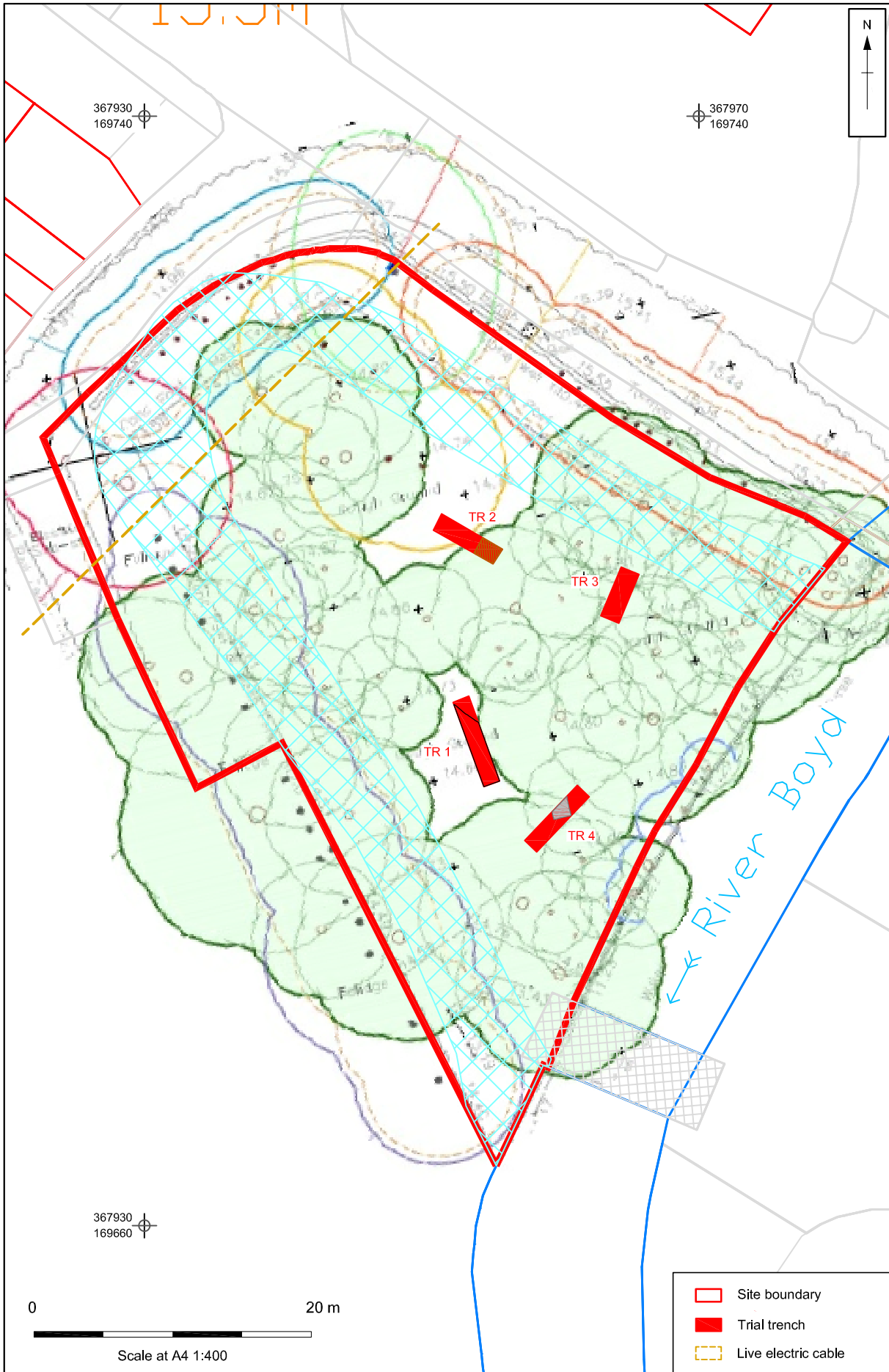


Figure 2: Trench and tree locations

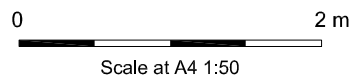
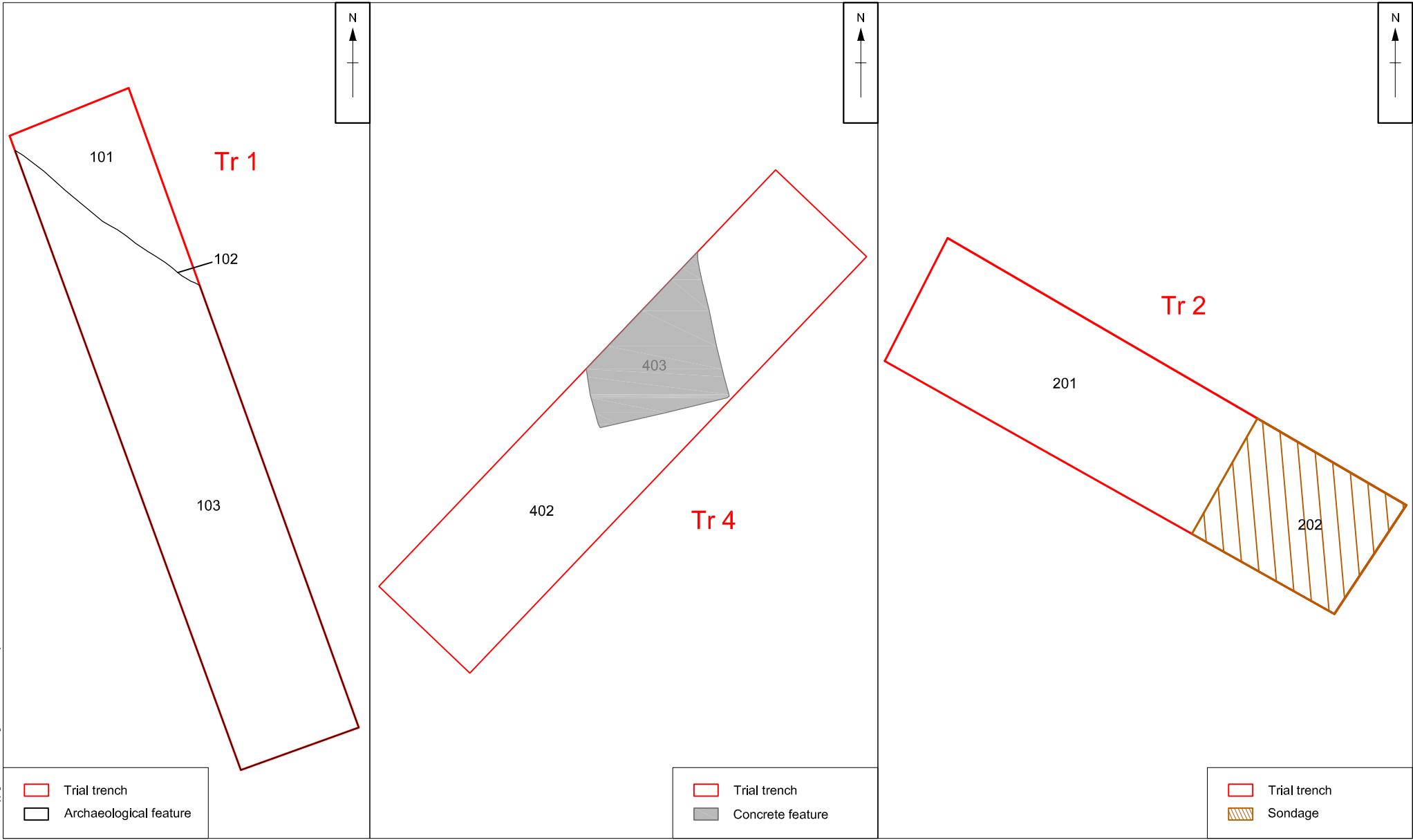


Figure 3: Trenches 1, 2 and 4



Plate 1: Trench 1 looking North



Plate 2: Trench 2 looking North-West



Plate 3: Trench 2 sondage looking South-West



Plate 4: Trench 3 looking South-West



Plate 5: Trench 4 looking South-West



Plate 6: Factory activity 1969



Plate 7: After construction works of the River Boyd 1980



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX20ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCifA
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