


# Churchill Hospital, Oxford, Clinical Biomanufacturing Facility



## Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
1	Paul Booth Senior Project Manager	Edward Biddulph Senior Project Manager	(Edward Biddulph Senior Project Manager	

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263800

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

f: +44 (0) 1865 793496

w: oxfordarchaeology.com

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**Churchill Hospital, Oxford, site of proposed Biomanufacturing Facility,  
Archaeological Evaluation Report**

*Written by Paul Booth*

*and illustrated by Victoria Hosegood*

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## **Summary**

*Two evaluation trenches were excavated in October 2015 at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford on the site of the proposed Clinical Biomanufacturing Facility, immediately west of the location of Roman pottery kilns excavated in the early 1970s. The sequence in both trenches comprised the natural sand subsoil overlain by a brown sand deposit of uncertain date. This was cut in both trenches by a large pit containing modern building material amongst other rubbish. These two intrusions were probably parts of a single feature, the limits of which to north, south and east are unknown but was at least 12m in extent north-south by at least 7m east-west. In Trench 2 the base of this feature was c 1.2m below modern ground level and any earlier deposits in this area would have been completely destroyed. The fill of the feature(s) was sealed by a levelling layer of similar material beneath the current surface material. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were present and only a single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered.*





## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was appointed by CPC Project Services LLP to carry out an archaeological evaluation prior to submission of an application for construction of an extension to the existing Clinical Biomanufacturing Facility at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford (SP 5458 0578). The proposed extension occupies an area of c 470 sq m (Figs 1 and 2).
- 1.1.2 The site lies immediately adjacent to (west of) the location of kilns forming part of the Oxford Roman pottery industry (see below) excavated in the 1970s. Oxford City Council therefore required an archaeological evaluation to be carried out based on the potential for Roman remains, including possible pottery kilns, to be encountered in this location. A brief was set by David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist, detailing the City Council's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process.
- 1.1.3 The primary requirement of the brief was that the evaluation should '*gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important archaeological remains within the area of study*'.

- 
- 1.1.4 Specific requirements included the need to '*Establish the character and extent of Roman remains, including the projected ditch from the 1971 excavation*' (for this see below) and '*Establish the extent of character of any modern truncation*'.
- 1.1.5 OA produced a written scheme of investigation (WSI) detailing the approach and specific methodologies to be employed in carrying out the work to meet the requirements of the City Council brief.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The geology of the area is of the Corallian Group, consisting locally of sand with rafts of calcareous grit, overlying Oxford clay (Young 1972, 10; <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyOfBritain>). The natural subsoil encountered in the evaluation comprised fine yellow-brown sand.
- 1.2.2 The site is located on a slight south-facing slope, on undulating ground at about 92.5m aOD. The land upon which the Churchill Hospital sits falls away to the south-east and south-west to the valleys of the Boundary Brook and a tributary stream. The Boundary Brook is in turn a tributary of the Thames, which it joins c 2.75km south-west of the present site.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 No prehistoric features are known in the vicinity of the site, but a flint scatter including barbed and tanged arrowheads, broadly assigned to the Beaker period, was encountered in the 1971 and 1972 excavations in the immediately adjacent site (Young 1974, 2). The nearest known later prehistoric features and findspots lie more than 1km distant both north and south of the site.

**Roman Period (AD 43–410)**

- 1.3.2 The site lies within one of the focal areas of the nationally important Oxfordshire Roman pottery industry, component elements of which extend across east and south Oxford and beyond. With origins in the late 1st/early 2nd century, by the late Roman period this was amongst the three or four most important pottery industries in the whole of Britain, with a range of specialist products distributed over a very wide area (Young 1977).
- 1.3.3 Surface indications of Roman activity at the Churchill Hospital were noted in the 19th century, while pottery kilns were discovered at three different locations in the 1950s and 1960s (Young 1972, 12). On the basis of this information excavations were undertaken in 1971, 1972 and 1973 in an area immediately east and south of the present proposed development site, in the process re-examining a kiln found in 1955 (Young 1972; 1973; 1974). The plot of Young's excavations (by Oxford City Council; see Fig. 2) suggests that the most northerly examined area, excavated in 1971, actually overlapped in part the eastern end of the proposed development site.
- 1.3.4 Pottery production in this area was mainly carried out from the mid 3rd to 4th centuries AD, the heyday of the industry. Activity was of two main phases, with six kilns identified in each (including a kiln found in 1953 and not re-excavated by Young). A particularly important aspect of Young's excavations was the relatively rare evidence for workshop and other installations in addition to the kilns that are more commonly located. Workshop and related features are still better represented and understood here than at any other Oxford pottery production site. The site produced the full range of characteristic late Roman Oxford products, including the specialist lines of mortaria and colour-coated fine wares.
- 1.3.5 The orientation of the excavated features suggests that they were laid out in relation to a series of ditched boundaries broadly aligned NE-SW and NW-SE. Elements of both these alignments were found in the 1971 excavation immediately adjacent to (and perhaps partly within) the proposed development area. While clearly important, there is no indication that the identified components of this boundary system necessarily defined the whole area of pottery production activity. On present evidence, the limit of the extent of the production area is not necessarily defined in any direction.
- 1.3.6 Other component kiln sites of the Oxford industry have been identified in the Headington area within a radius of less than 1km of the present site, the closest being at Harry Bear's Pit, some 400-500m distant to the north-east (eg Young 1972, 12; 1977, 250). Present evidence suggests that most individual production sites formed relatively discrete foci within the wider semi-industrial landscape. These foci might, however, have varied considerably in size.
- 1.3.7 The line of the principal north-south Roman road in the Oxford area, from Dorchester on Thames to Alchester, lies about 1km east of the present site.

**Early Medieval Period (AD 410–1066)**

- 1.3.8 The site lies within the boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon royal manor of Headington (VCH 1957, 160), but there is no archaeological evidence for activity of the earlier or later Anglo-Saxon period in the vicinity of the Churchill Hospital, current evidence for this period being located north of London Road.

**Later Medieval Period (AD 1066-1550)**

- 1.3.9 The village of Headington is named in the Domesday Book of 1086. The manor was held by King William at the time of the survey. The earliest maps of the area (Davis



1797; Bryant 1823) both show the site as lying within the open agricultural fields to the south and west of the core of the medieval settlement.

- 1.3.10 Sherds of medieval pottery were identified and recovered from the area of the Oxfordshire Ambulance Service, new Management HQ Building at the Churchill Hospital. These probably derived from medieval manuring of the area when it formed part of the South Field of the village of Headington

***Post-Medieval Period (AD 1550-present)***

- 1.3.11 The nature of the area changed significantly in the latter part of the 19th century. The area of New Headington only began to be developed from the 1860s and prior to this date had remained as agricultural land with stone quarries in the eastern part of the parish.
- 1.3.12 The parish was inclosed by an act of parliament in 1802 and the award was made in 1804. After the award the land was held by the Lord of the Manor, Henry Whorwood. The area was leased to a number of different tenants at the time of Inclosure, but by the middle of the 19th century was leased to Southfield Farm. First and second edition OS 1:2500 mapping (1880 and 1899) shows that the area around the present site was still largely undivided at the end of the 19th century. It remained open ground until the establishment of the present hospital from 1940.

**1.4 Acknowledgements**

- 1.4.1 The work was commissioned by Bradley Jowitt of CPC Project Service LLP. Paul Booth was assisted on site by Victoria Hosegood of OA and survey data were collected by Markus Dylewski.



## 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- To determine the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important archaeological remains;
- To relate, where possible, the results to the city, county and regional period based resource assessments and research agendas available on the web:  
[http://thehumanjourney.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=553&Itemid=277](http://thehumanjourney.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=553&Itemid=277)  
<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordArchaeologicalPlan.htm>
- To inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of any proposed development on surviving archaeological remains;
- To disseminate the results through the production of a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and a report to be made available via the Oxford UAD and OA library.

### 2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- To establish the character and extent of Roman remains, including a ditch identified in the 1971 excavation projected to run through the present site.
- To establish the extent and character of modern truncation of archaeological features and deposits.

### 2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The excavation methodology was implemented as set out in Section 4 and Appendix A of the WSI (see section 1.1.5 above). Two trenches, Trench 1 (20m x 1.6m) and Trench 2 (10m x 1.6m), forming a 10% sample of the projected development area, were excavated. The trenches were excavated by machine (JCB) using a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket and under constant archaeological supervision. Excavation was to the first archaeologically significant level, where present, or to the top of the natural subsoil. At the west end of Trench 2 and at one limited point in Trench 1 machine excavation was halted above these levels owing to the presence of modern services and other features.

2.3.2 Limited hand cleaning of exposed features and deposits was undertaken as necessary. Plans and typical sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and general photographs were taken of each trench. Finds other than modern material were collected where present.



### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are summarised briefly below. A description of general soils and ground conditions is followed by trench descriptions and a review of finds evidence. Discussion of the results follows in a separate section (Section 4). Further details of individual contexts in Trenches 1 and 2 are given in Appendix A below.

#### 3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The two trenches were located some 9m apart and there was therefore considerable similarity in the character of the deposits encountered within them. The natural subsoil (104/204) was a fine fairly soft yellow-brown sand. This was located in Trench 1 at a depth of c 0.50-0.72m below ground level (92.04-92.26m aOD), sloping down from the west, and in the western part of Trench 2 at a depth of 0.70m (91.68m aOD) (Fig. 3 sections 101-103, Fig. 4 section 201).

3.2.2 In both trenches the natural subsoil was overlain by a deposit of brown sand (103/203), of similar consistency to the underlying natural subsoil. The interface between the two deposits was not exactly level; slight dips in the upper surface of 104 and 204 were filled with 103 and 203 respectively. Layer 103 ranged from 0.24-0.37m in thickness, while layer 203, truncated for much of the length of Trench 2, was 0.22m thick. Both deposits were generally clean, but contained occasional pieces of sub-rounded limestone, usually <0.05m in size but rarely up to c 0.25m, and flecks of coal and coke. The latter could have been introduced through natural processes, but possibly indicate a post-medieval date for the formation of these deposits.

3.2.3 Layers 103 and 203 were sealed by widespread levelling deposits (102 and 202 respectively) containing very mixed material of recent date in a clayey matrix and ranging from c 0.14-0.33m in thickness. These in turn were overlain by a geotextile upon which was laid the hardcore base for the current surface material (101 and 201) which covered the entire area.

#### 3.3 Trench 1

3.3.1 The sequence in Trench 1 (Fig. 3) consisted principally of the general deposits described above. At the east end of the trench, however, deposits 104 and 103 were truncated by a cut (105) which extended 5.7m from the east end and had a fairly steep-sloping western edge on a slightly curving NNE-SSW alignment (Fig. 3, section 103). The full depth of the cut is not known; at the east end of the trench its fill continued at least 0.9m below modern ground level (c 91.80m aOD), some 0.2-0.25m below the level of the top of the natural subsoil 104. The fill of cut 105 (106) comprised a mixture of redeposited layer 103 with red-brown clay and large quantities of redeposited building rubble and other material of recent date. Layer 102 may have extended across the top of this material, but this is not completely clear. A modern north-south aligned alarm cable trench roughly in the middle of the trench was seen in plan and left as an upstanding feature.

#### 3.4 Trench 2

3.4.1 The overall sequence in Trench 2 (Fig. 4) was similar to that in Trench 1, but the trench was much more heavily impacted by modern features. These included a drain pipe and a concrete foundation (208 and 207 respectively) running obliquely across the west end



of the trench. These were left in position. As in Trench 1, the eastern part of the trench was truncated by a large modern pit. Here the cut of the west edge of the feature (205) was aligned more nearly north-south and cut almost vertically through layer 203 and into the natural subsoil 204 below, while the east of the trench was machined more deeply than in Trench 1, revealing the flat base of cut 205 at c 1.16m below modern ground level (91.12m aOD), some 0.50m below the level of the top of the natural subsoil further west (Fig. 4, sections 201 and 202). At the western edge of cut 205, its fill, 206, of identical character to 106 in Trench 1, was clearly overlain by the levelling deposit 202, which here was up to 0.32m thick. Further east, however, as in Trench 1, the distinction between layer 202 and 206 was much less clear.

### **3.5 Finds summary**

3.5.1 The only artefact recovered, and the only one not of modern date seen, was a single sherd of white ware pottery from the Roman Oxford industry (see below). A wide range of modern finds, but principally building material, was seen in pit fills 106 and 206 but was not retained.

3.5.2 No animal bone was seen and no deposits suitable for environmental sampling were present. Consequently there is no ecofactual or environmental evidence from the site.



## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 Ground conditions at the time of the evaluation were good. Observation of features and deposits was not compromised by adverse weather or other factors. Consequently the results of the evaluation can be considered reliable.

### 4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The evaluation identified no significant archaeological features or deposits of any period. In particular, there was no evidence of Roman features or of deposits that are likely to have been closely contemporary with the kilns known to have existed just to the east. Truncation by substantial modern features in the eastern part of both trenches means that it is not possible to determine if Roman (or other) features had survived prior to the digging of the modern pits, but an absence of obvious redeposited material might suggest that there had been relatively little Roman activity in the area covered by the trenches.
- 4.2.2 On the specific point of the continuation of one of the ditches located by Young in the 1971 excavation (section 2.2.1 above) there can be no certainty. Young's plan shows the feature terminating, coincidentally, in line with the southern side of the proposed new building. If it had extended into the evaluated area (which is not certain) the ditch would have lain in the eastern part of Trench 2 and would almost certainly have been completely removed by the deep pit 205 at this point. There was no trace of any feature in the natural subsoil (204) exposed in the base of cut 205 in the relevant part of the trench.

### 4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The evaluation revealed the apparently undisturbed natural subsoil of the site in a large part of Trench 1 and a more localised area at the west end of Trench 2. The interpretation of the brown sand deposit (103/203) which overlay the natural subsoil is less certain, owing in part to the presence within it of occasional pieces of limestone, but more particularly because it also contained small fragments of coal and coke.
- 4.3.2 Despite an absence of anything resembling ploughmarks in the top of the natural subsoil it may be that layer 103/203 is a surviving ploughsoil from the period when this area was under cultivation, potentially at least as late as the middle of the 19th century, and that this activity introduced intrusive material into the light soil. It might have been expected that such a soil would have contained redeposited Roman pottery and other material from the adjacent production site, but this seems not to have been the case.
- 4.3.3 It is likely that the pit cuts 105 and 205 in the two trenches formed part of the western edge of a single large feature. Differences in the angle of the cut and slight variation in its orientation can be easily explained as the two trenches were some 9m apart; the two cuts line up quite well. The limits of the feature to north, south and east are unknown but it was at least 12m in extent north-south by at least 7m east-west and was probably considerably larger. In Trench 2 the base of this feature was c 1.2m below modern ground level and any earlier deposits here and probably elsewhere across the area occupied by the feature would have been completely destroyed.
- 4.3.4 The general layers 102 and 202 were quite similar in composition to the pit fills 106 and 206, the principal difference being the absence of large lumps of brickwork from the



layers. It is likely that the deposition of the latter formed part of the same general process as the filling of pit 105/205, which is why a distinction between the fills and the layers is clear in some places (eg in Section 201) and not in others. In any case there can have been no significant difference in date between the filling of the pit and the deposition of the levelling layers. The laying of geotextile and the overlying hard core and tarmac surface may also have been part of the same phase of developments. The exact date of these events is of course unknown, but it must have followed the early 1970s excavations in the immediately adjoining and partly overlapping site.

#### **4.4 Significance**

- 4.4.1 The evaluation has demonstrated that no significant archaeological features or deposits survive within the area of the trenched sample and that any potential for the survival of such features and deposits in the eastern part of the proposed development area has been largely removed by the excavation of a very large pit of relatively recent date. To the west a possible ploughsoil does not contain indications of redeposited Roman material, therefore suggesting that activity of this period in the western part of the proposed development area was not particularly intensive. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that features of Roman or other date might survive beneath the possible ploughsoil in other parts of this area.





## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
<b>General description</b>					<b>Orientation</b>	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeological features. Consists of tarmac surface and levelling deposits above subsoil overlying a natural of silty sand. Large modern intrusion at east end.					<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	0.70
					<b>Width (m)</b>	1.60
					<b>Length (m)</b>	20.0
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
101	Layer	-	0.10-0.18	Tarmac, hardcore and terram surface	-	Modern
102	Layer	-	0.14-0.18	Mixed levelling layer	-	Modern
103	Layer	-	0.24-0.37	Brown sand subsoil	-	?
104	Layer		0.12+	Orange-brown sand natural subsoil	-	
105	Cut		0.8+	W edge of large pit aligned NNE-SSW		Modern
106	Fill		0.8+	Mixed fill of 105	Brick, iron etc not retained	Modern

Trench 2						
<b>General description</b>					<b>Orientation</b>	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeological features. Consists of tarmac surface and levelling deposits above subsoil overlying a natural of silty sand. Modern features at west end and very large modern intrusion at east end.					<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	0.80
					<b>Width (m)</b>	1.60
					<b>Length (m)</b>	10.0
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
201	Layer	-	0.18-0.21	Tarmac, hardcore and terram surface	-	Modern
202	Layer	-	0.15-0.33	Mixed levelling layer	-	Modern
203	Layer	-	0.22	Brown sand subsoil	-	?
204	Layer		0.15+	Orange-brown sand natural subsoil	-	
205	Cut		c 0.8	W edge of large pit aligned N-S		Modern
206	Fill		0.8	Mixed fill of 205	Brick, iron,	Modern



					tarmac etc not retained	
207	Structure	0.6	?	Concrete foundation aligned NE-SW		modern
208	Structure	0.22	0.22	Ceramic drain pipe		modern



## APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

### B.1 Pottery

B.1.1 A single abraded sherd (12g) of Oxford white ware mortarium (OA Roman pottery recording system (Booth 2014) fabric M22) was an unstratified find from Trench 1. This is characteristic of the material being manufactured in the adjacent production site. The overall possible date range (AD 100-400) is in very broad, but a date after *c* AD 240 is most likely on the basis of the character of the sherd and, in particular, the evidence from the immediately adjacent production site.

### B.2 Other finds

B.2.1 A range of modern material was observed in layers 102 and 202 and particularly in pit fills 106 and 206. This included brick (including large chunks of mortared brickwork), concrete, tarmac, ceramic drainpipe, iron objects and plastic. None of this material was retained.



## APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Churchill Hospital, Oxford, site of proposed Clinical Biomanufacturing Facility

**Site code:** OXCHBF 15

**Grid reference:** SP 5458 0578

**Type:** Evaluation

**Date and duration:** 8th-9th October 2015

**Area of site:** Two 1.6m wide trenches, 10m and 20m long (48sq m)

**Summary of results:** Two evaluation trenches were excavated immediately west of the location of Roman pottery kilns excavated in the early 1970s. The sequence in both trenches comprised the natural sand subsoil overlain by a brown sand deposit of uncertain date. This was cut in both trenches by a large pit containing modern building material amongst other rubbish. These two intrusions were probably parts of a single feature, the limits of which to north, south and east are unknown but was therefore at least 12m in extent north-south by at least 7m east-west. In Trench 2 the base of this feature was c 1.2m below modern ground level and any earlier deposits in this area would have been completely destroyed. The fill of the feature(s) was sealed by a levelling layer of similar material beneath the current ground surface. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were present and only a single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number, OXCMS: 2015.196.



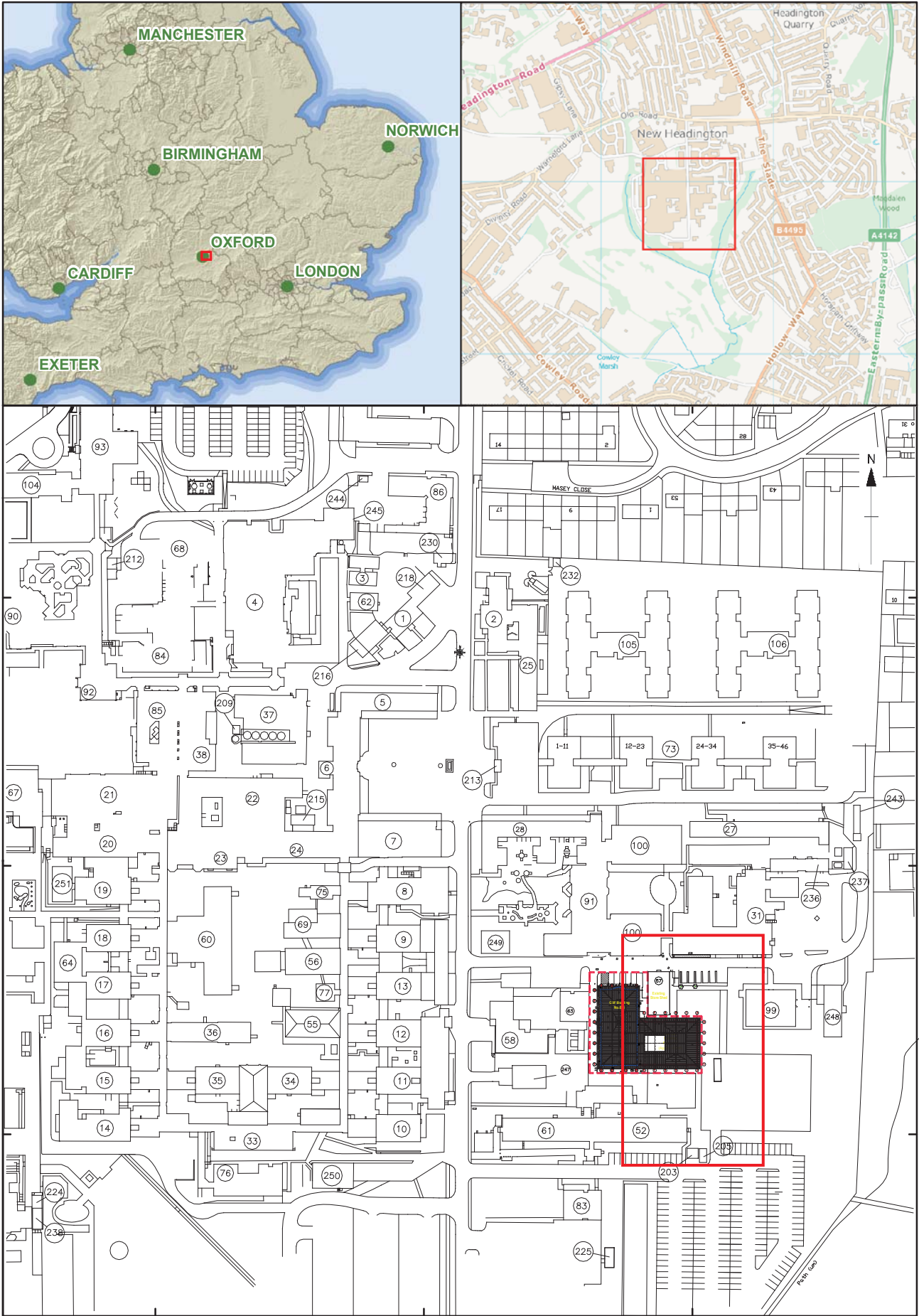


Figure 1: Site location

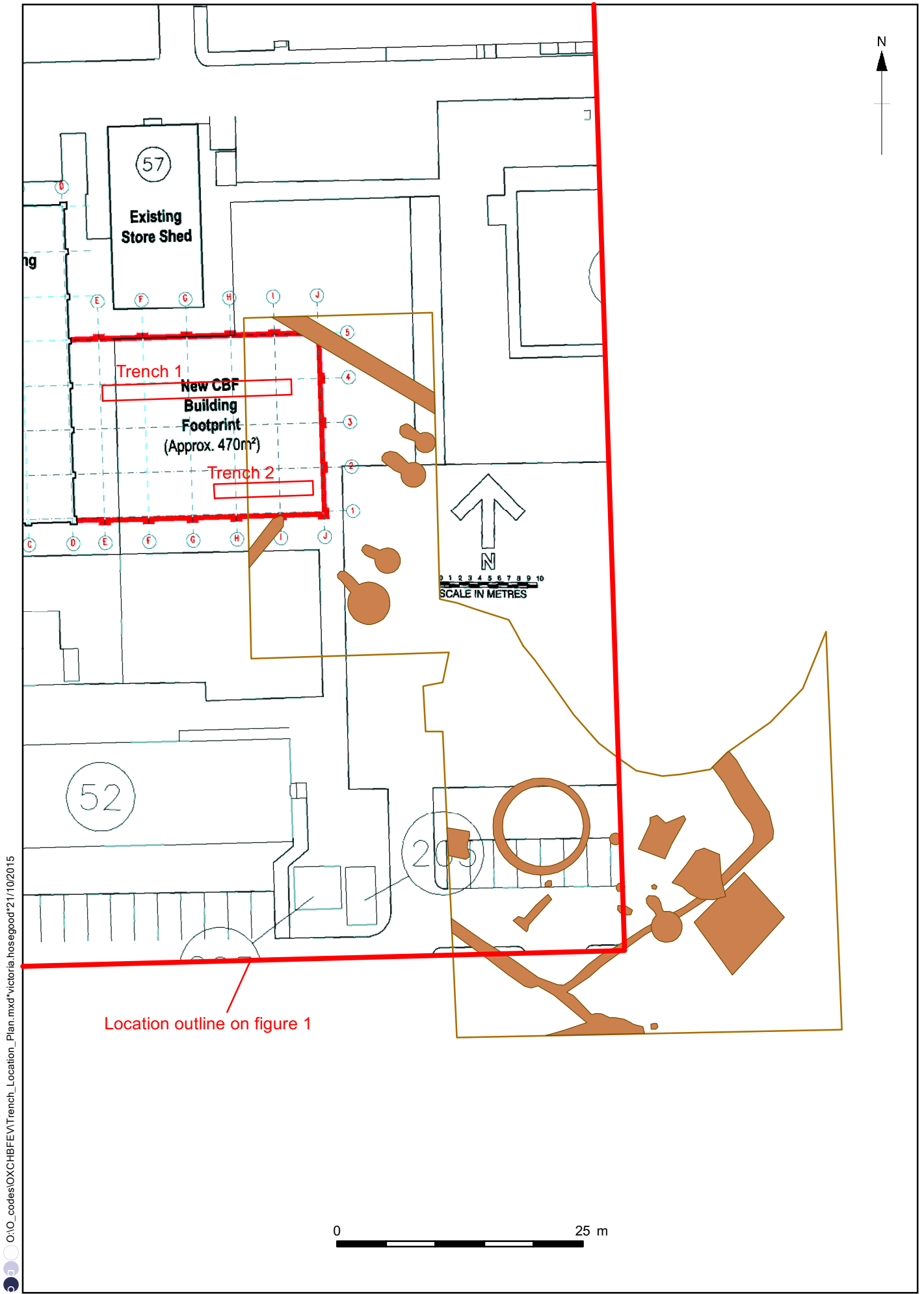


Figure 2: Trench locations and outline of proposed building location with overlay of 1970s excavation features



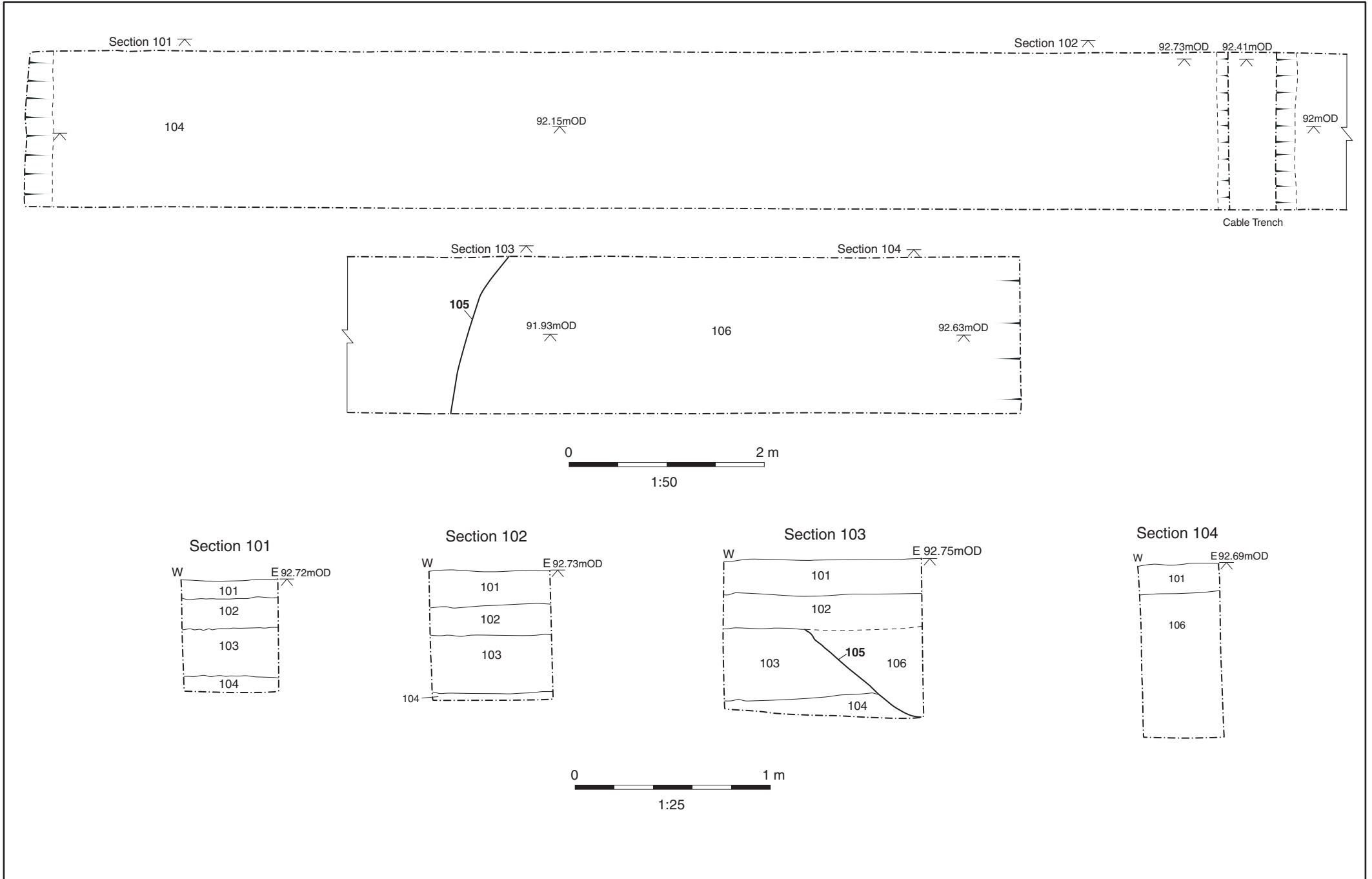


Figure 3: Trench plans and sections for Trench 1

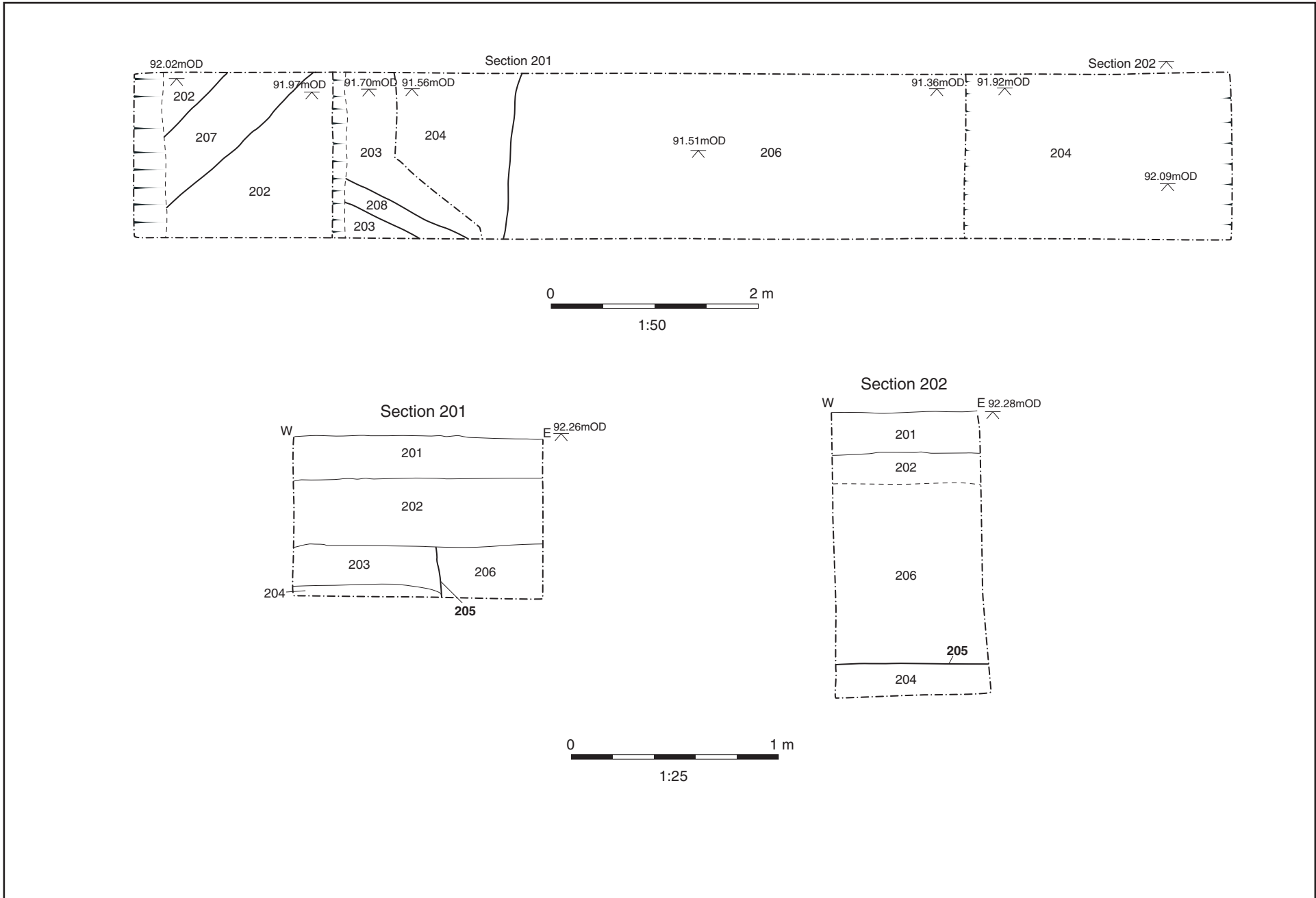


Figure 4: Trench plan and sections from Trench 2





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

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800  
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496  
e: [info@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: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>



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