

West Herts College
Hempstead Road
Watford
Hertfordshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

In December 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an eight trench evaluation at West Herts College, Hempstead Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, on behalf of West Herts College and CgMs Consulting. The evaluation revealed between 0.1m and 0.7 m of modern backfill/levelling layers, overlying natural terrace gravels and brickearth. Twentieth century wall footings and natural features, such as tree holes, were also revealed. No significant archaeology was observed during the course of the evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In December 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an eight trench field evaluation at West Herts College, Hempstead Road, Watford, Herts (NGR TQ 1030 9693) on behalf of West Herts College and CgMs consulting. The work was in respect of a planning application for two new college buildings, with associated public open space and vehicular and pedestrian access (Planning Ref. 07/00757/FULM). Following consultation between Andy Instone, the Archaeological Advisor at Hertfordshire County Council, and CgMs Consulting, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI - CgMS 2007b) was prepared outlining the archaeological requirements of the work. In response to the WSI OA prepared a Project Design detailing how it would meet those requirements (OA, 2007).

1.1.2 The site lies within the urban area of Watford, some 800 m north-west of the historic town centre (Fig. 1). It is bounded to the south-west by the rear of properties fronting Cassiobury Drive, to the west and north-west by the sides of properties fronting Woodland Drive and Hempstead Road, and to the south-west by Watford Central Baths and Prospect House. The existing college was built in the 1940s and a new wing constructed in the 1960s.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site occupies a spur of land forming the watershed between the River Colne to the east, and the River Gade to the west. The site is situated on an area of the Westmill Gravel Terrace, which in turn overlies Upper Chalk, and slopes moderately down from *c* 77 m OD along Hempsted Road, to *c* 74 m OD, to the rear of the properties fronting Cassiobury Drive. The site occupies an area of *c* 3 ha.

1.3 Archaeological background

1.3.1 The site was subject to a desk-based assessment (CgMS 2007a), which is summarised below. No previous archaeological work has taken place on the proposed development site, although there are known areas of interest with 1 km of the site.

Prehistoric and Roman

- 1.3.2 Three Acheulian handaxes and a flint tool were recovered from sites within 1 km of the proposed site.
- 1.3.3 The Hempstead Road is thought to follow the alignment of a Roman road, although there are no other sites and/or finds within a 1 km radius of the proposed site. It is likely that the site lay in agricultural land during the Roman period.

Anglo-Saxon and medieval

- 1.3.4 According to placename evidence the name Watford comes from the Old English 'Waedford' meaning 'place for wading' (Hunns 2000, p 3).
- 1.3.5 The site lies within the estate of *Cassio*, which was gifted to St Albans Abbey in the 10th century. The Domesday Survey of 1086 assessed the manor of Cassiobury at 20 hides, and woodland to feed a thousand swine. Watford was not mentioned within the survey, suggesting that Cassiobury included the whole manor of Watford.
- 1.3.6 Watford developed linearly as a market town, during the 12th century, with the focus of activity *c* 800 m south-east of the proposed site. Cassio Hamlet developed along the Hempstead Road, immediately south of the proposed site. Much of the site probably lay within agricultural land at this time.

Post-medieval

- 1.3.7 Little Cassiobury house and grounds were constructed in the 18th century by the Earl of Essex, and the house is Grade II listed. The 1871/1873 Ordnance Survey plan shows the site occupied by the grounds of Little Cassiobury, part of Cassiobury Park, and The Dog public house fronting Hempstead Road.
- 1.3.8 In summary the proposed site mostly lay within agricultural land or within the grounds of Cassiobury Park until the college was constructed in the 1940s.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 General aims were to establish the presence/absence, location, extent, date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the site, and to make available the results of the investigation.
- 2.1.2 The evaluation aimed to test the model of archaeological potential constructed in the desk-based assessment (CgMs 2007a). Particularly, it sought to clarify the presence and character of a possible Roman road alignment running through the site, and the possible medieval remains associated with Cassiobury Manor. The evaluation also sought to clarify the impact of 19th-century development.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of eight trenches (Fig. 2). Trenches 1 and 3 were located to the north-west of the site, and measured 24.1 m by 1.8 m and 16.5 by 1.8 m respectively. Trenches 4, 5 and 6 were located to the north-east of the college and measured 25 m by 1.8 m, 25 m by 1.8 m and 9.3 m by 1.8 m respectively. Trench 7 was located inside a courtyard in the south-west of the site and measured 15 m by 1.8 m. Trenches 8 and 9 were located at the south-east edge of the site and measured 17.2 m by 1.8 m and 19.7 m by 1.8 m respectively.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator (JCB), fitted with a 1.8 m wide toothless grading bucket. Excavation by machine proceeded in spits down to either undisturbed natural deposits or to the highest significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:100 with sections drawn at a scale of 1:20. 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).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. No finds of special interest were recovered during the evaluation.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the evaluation.

3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, with the stratigraphic accounts of each trench described individually, followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The site is located on terrace gravels, which was revealed in all of the trenches, and the fills of the natural features encountered were derived from disturbed natural gravel.

4.1.2 Logistical problems meant that some trench locations were slightly altered from that proposed in the Project Design; Trench 3 was moved and shortened due to the presence of trees; Trenches 6, 7 and 8 were shortened due to the presence of services, Trench 7 was also moved. Following the excavation of Trenches 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9 it was agreed with Andy Instone, the Archaeological Advisor at Hertfordshire County Council, and CgMS that it was not necessary to excavate Trench 2, due to its location within a truncated part of the site. The weather conditions were fair.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 No significant archaeological deposits were encountered in any of the trenches.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3)

5.1.1 The natural geology, a reddish brown sandy gravel with patches of reddish brown, clayey sand brickearth (103), was reached at 0.38 m below ground level (75.3 m OD - Plate 1). Two areas of bioturbation and modern disturbance were uncovered within the trench. Overlying the bioturbation was a 0.2 m thick layer of modern building debris (102), which in turn was overlain by a 0.08 m thick levelling layer of loose tarmac and gravel (101). A 0.1 m thick layer of tarmac (100) overlaid this.

Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 3)

5.1.2 Natural reddish brown sandy gravel (301) was reached at 0.1 m below the ground surface (76.35). A large amount of bioturbation was visible throughout the trench. This was overlain by a 0.1 m thick layer of topsoil (300).

Trench 4 (Figs 2 and 3)

5.1.3 The natural geology, a light reddish brown, clayey sand brickearth (407) was reached at an average of 0.74 m below the ground surface (76 m OD - Plate 2). Overlaying this was a 0.24 m thick layer black sandy clay (406), a modern make-up layer. This was overlain by a 0.12 m thick layer of grey silt and gravel (405), which in turn was overlain by 0.04 m thick layer of tarmac (404), a modern surface layer. A 0.04 m thick layer of light brown gravel (403) overlaid 404, and was overlain by a 0.04 m thick layer of gravelly silt (402). Overlying 402 was a 0.2 m thick levelling layer of light brown silty gravel (401), which in turn was overlain by a 0.06 m thick layer of

tarmac (400). A modern brick and concrete wall (408) was uncovered running north-west to south-east in the north-east of the trench.

Trench 5 (Figs 2 and 3)

- 5.1.4 Natural light reddish brown sandy gravel, and light reddish brown clayey sand, brickearth (504) towards the north-eastern end of the trench, were reached at an average of 0.5 m below the ground surface (76 m OD - Plate 3). Bioturbation was revealed throughout the trench. Overlaying this was a 0.26 m thick layer black sandy clay (503), a modern make-up layer. A 0.04 m thick layer of light brown gravel (502) overlaid 503, and was overlain itself by a 0.12 m thick levelling layer of light brown silty gravel (501). This was overlain by a 0.04 m thick layer of tarmac (500).

Trench 6 (Figs 2 and 3)

- 5.1.5 Natural greyish brown sandy gravel (603) was reached at 0.5 m below the ground surface (75.6 m OD). Two possible irregular features (604 and 605) were revealed, although upon excavation proved to be a result of bioturbation. A 0.38 m thick landscaping layer of black clayey silt (601) overlaid the deposits and was in turn overlain by a 0.12 m thick layer of topsoil (600).

Trench 7

- 5.1.6 The natural geology, a reddish brown sandy gravel (705) was reached at 0.4 m below ground level (74.4 m OD at the northern end). Irregular features were observed cutting into the natural gravel, but on excavation these proved to be root disturbance (703, fill 704). These deposits were overlain by a 0.24 m thick layer of modern building debris (702), which was overlain by a 0.08 m thick levelling layer of reddish brown sandy silt (701). A 0.08 m thick layer of tarmac (700) overlaid this.

Trench 8

- 5.1.7 Natural greyish brown sandy gravel (803) was reached at an average of 0.2 m below the ground surface (74.6 m OD). The natural gravel was disturbed by a large amount of bioturbation. A 0.12 m thick layer of blackish grey silty clay (802), which represents a modern levelling layer, overlaid the natural gravel. This was overlain by a 0.02 m thick levelling layer of dark brown silty gravel (801), which was in turn overlain by a 0.06 m thick layer of tarmac (800).

Trench 9

- 5.1.8 The stratigraphy within this trench was similar to Trench 8. The natural geology, a greyish brown sandy gravel (907) was reached at 0.46 m below the ground surface in the south eastern part of the trench (74.3 m OD), but was not reached at the north-western end. Three walls (904, 905 and 906) were uncovered at north-western end of the trench. Wall 904 was a red brick wall, aligned north-west to south-east. Wall 905 consisted of concrete and red brick and was also aligned north-west to south-east. Wall 906 was a single red brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. The walls were surrounded by and overlain by a 0.6 m thick layer of modern building debris.

The deposits were overlain by a 0.32 m thick layer of blackish grey silty clay (902), a modern levelling layer. This was overlain by a 0.08 m thick levelling layer of dark brown silty gravel (901), which was in turn overlain by a 0.06 m thick layer of tarmac (900).

5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. One post-medieval nail and one piece of post-medieval plant pot (19th / 20th century) identified by John Cotter (OA), were retained.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 Parts of the site were truncated by modern landscaping, and it is possible that archaeological features were removed during this process. However, there were no features within the less truncated trenches, or any residual finds within the overburden, and it is unlikely that any evidence of archaeological activity has been lost through landscaping.

6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 The walls in Trench 9 relate to the tennis court and building shown on the 1970 OS map and are not archaeologically significant; the wall in Trench 4 probably relates to an earlier boundary to the car park. A large amount of bioturbation was uncovered within trenches 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 which ties in with the DBA conclusion that the site was previously woodland and farmland.
- 6.2.2 The natural geology changes from terrace gravels to brickearth towards the north-eastern part of the site. No significant archaeological deposits were observed during the course of the evaluation. The results of the evaluation support the theory that the site has always agricultural land or park land since Roman times.

APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Trench	Ctxt No	Type	Thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
001						
	100	Layer	0.1	Tarmac		
	101	Layer	0.08	Gravel levelling layer		
	102	Layer	0.2	Modern building debris		
	103	Natural		Natural sandy gravel		
003						
	300	Layer	0.1	Topsoil		
	301	Natural		Natural sandy gravel		
004						
	400	Layer	0.06	Tarmac		
	401	Layer	0.2	Gravel levelling layer		
	402	Layer	0.04	Gravelly silt		
	403	Layer	0.04	Gravel		
	404	Layer	0.04	Tarmac		
	405	Layer	0.12	Gravelly silt		
	406	Layer	0.24	Black sandy clay		
	407			Natural sandy gravel		
	408	Wall		NW-SE concrete and brick wall		
005						
	500	Layer	0.04	Tarmac		
	501	Layer	0.12	Gravel levelling layer		
	502	Layer	0.04	Gravelly silt		
	503	Layer	0.3	Black sandy clay		
	504			Natural sandy gravel		
006						
	600	Layer		Topsoil		
	601	Layer		Black clayey silt landscaping layer		
	602			Natural sandy gravel		
	603	Void		Void		
	604	Cut		Bioturbation		

Trench	Ctxt No	Type	Thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
	605	Cut		Bioturbation		
	606	Fill		Bioturbation		
	607	Fill		Bioturbation	Fe nail, 1968 Sixpence, Post-med pot	mod
007						
	700	Layer	0.08	Tarmac		
	701	Layer	0.08	Sandy silt levelling layer		
	702	Layer	0.24	Building debris		
	703	Cut		Bioturbation		
	704	Fill		Bioturbation		
	705	Natural		Natural sandy gravel		
008						
	800	Layer	0.06	Tarmac		
	801	Layer	0.02	Gravel levelling layer		
	802	Layer	0.12	Blackish grey silty clay levelling layer		
	803	Natural		Natural sandy gravel		
009						
	900	Layer	0.06	Tarmac		
	901	Layer	0.08	Gravel levelling layer		
	902	Layer	0.32	Blackish grey silty clay levelling layer		
	903	Layer	>0.6	Building debris		
	904	Wall		NW-SE brick wall		
	905	Wall		NW-SE concrete and brick wall		
	906	Wall		NE-SW single brick wall		
	907	Natural		Natural sandy gravel		

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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OAU, 1992 Field Manual (ed. D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Client name: CgMs Consulting

Site name: West Herts College, Hempstead Road, Watford, Hertfordshire

Site code: WAHE07

Grid reference: TQ 1030 9693

Type of evaluation: 8 machine excavated trenches

Date and duration of project: 10th - 19th December 2007, five days

Summary of results: Large amount of bioturbation overlain by modern levelling layers and building debris

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



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Figure 1: Site location

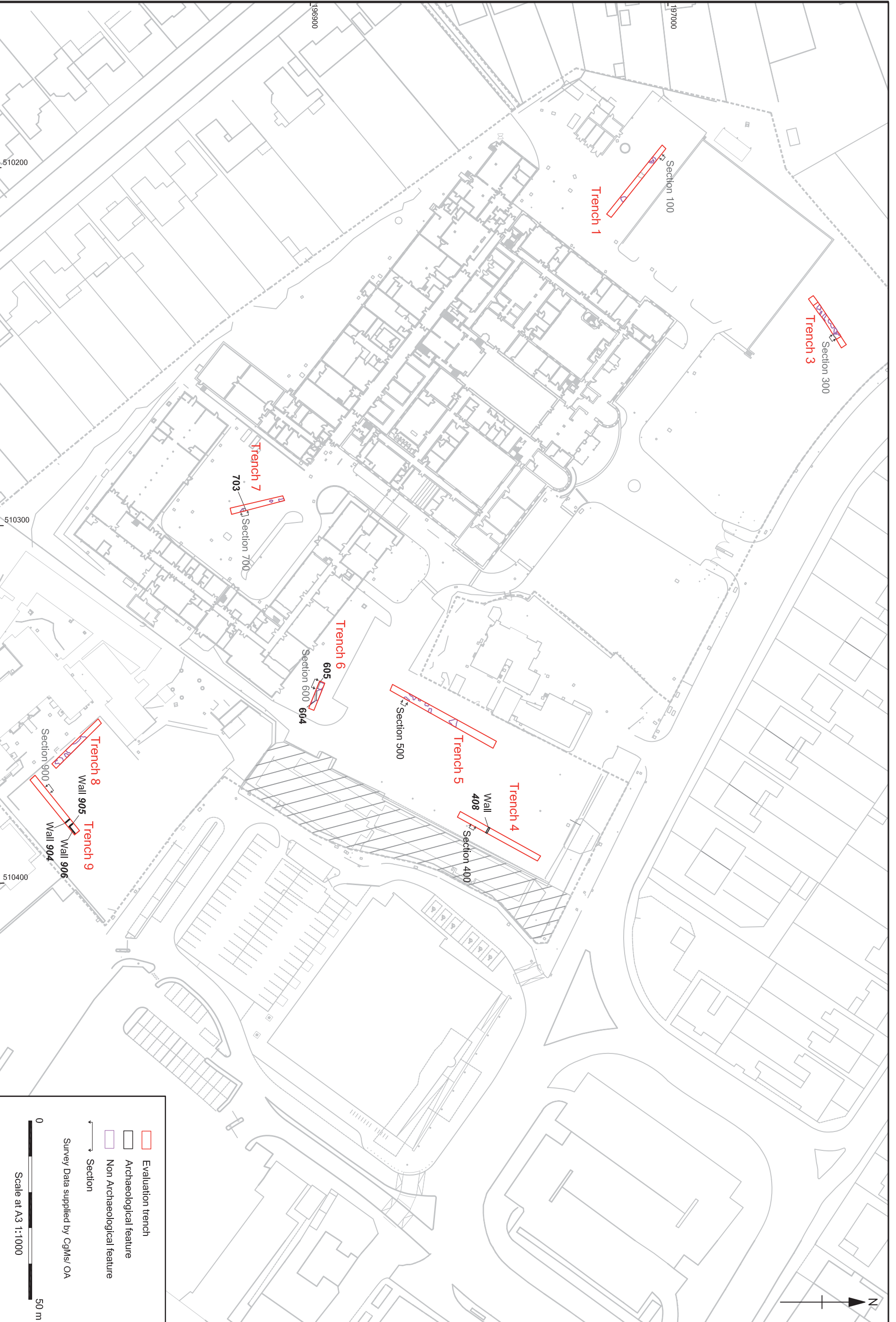


Figure 2: Trench location

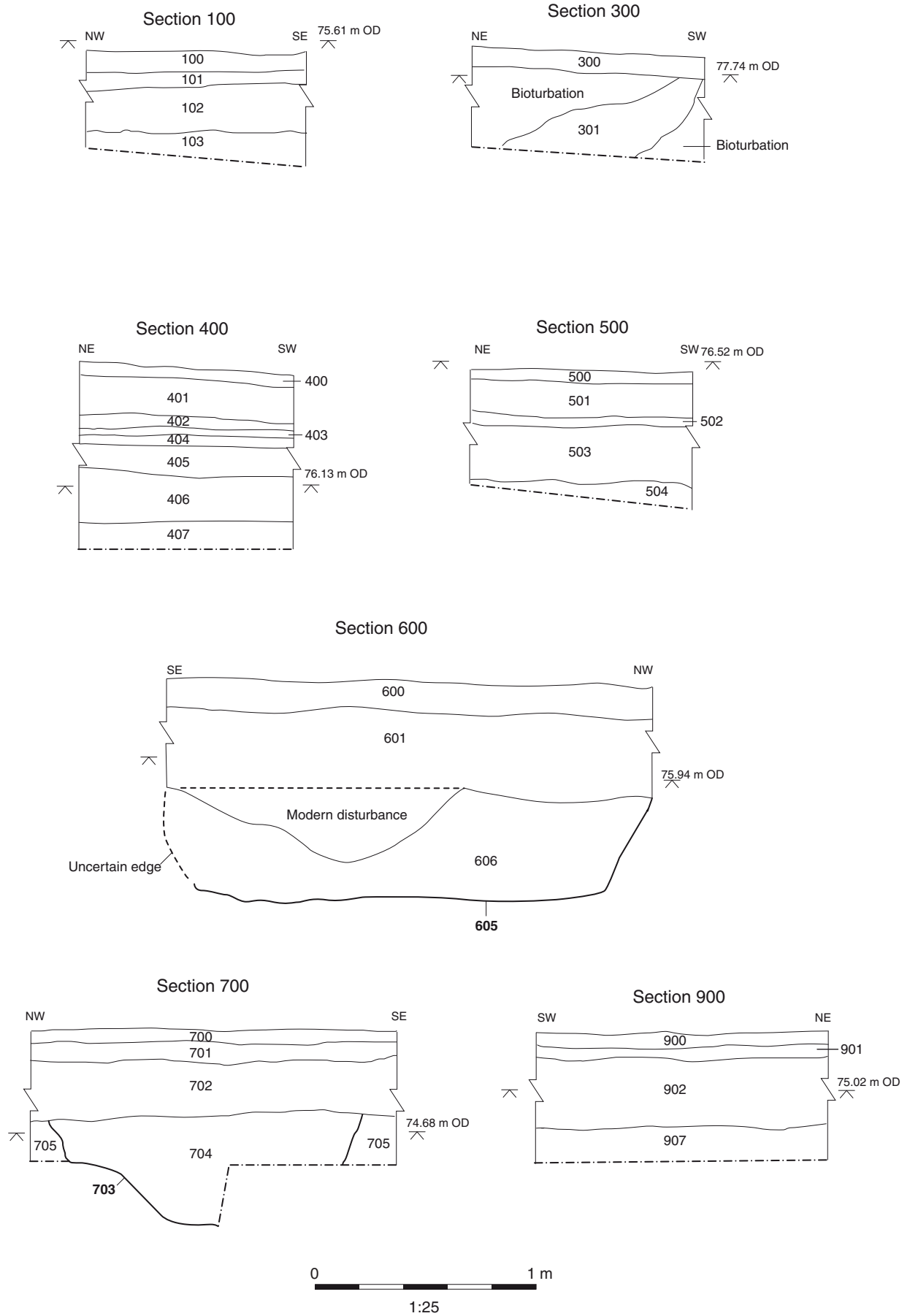


Figure 3: Sections



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking south



Plate 2: Trench 4, looking south-west



Plate 3: Trench 5, looking south-west



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