

Former Sandwell College  
Woden Road  
Wednesbury  
West Midlands



**Archaeological Evaluation Report**



**Oxford Archaeology**

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**Client: John Samuels  
Archaeological Consultants**

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## Former Sandwell College, Woden Road South, Wednesbury, West Midlands

NGR SO 3990 2940

### *ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*In September 2004, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological field evaluation at the former Sandwell College, Woden Road South, Wednesbury near Birmingham (NGR SO 3990 2940). The work was undertaken for John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of Bellway Homes. The evaluation was carried out with a view to target a known Roman Road and a river crossing, which was predicted to pass close to the site of the college. The results of the evaluation, however, revealed that modern industrial and mining activity had largely re-modelled the landscape here, including the hillside to the south of the site. The north end of the site had been truncated and subsequently used for landfill, prior to construction of the College in the early 1970s.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 From 20th September to 1st October 2004, Oxford Archaeology carried out a field evaluation at the former Sandwell College, Woden Road South, Wednesbury, near Birmingham (Fig. 1) on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants. This was in respect of a planning application for residential development of the site (Planning Application No. DC/04/42731).

1.1.2 The development site is situated at NGR SO 3990 2940 and lies at a height of about 120 m OD. It is bisected by the River Thame. The proposed development area covers a total area of about 5.5 ha.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 To the north of the River Thame the land is generally flat at an average of 115 m OD. However, it rises steeply to 123.64 m OD from the south bank of the river towards the south end of site.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The background was prepared for the brief for the project (JSAC 2004) and is summarised here. The proposed development area lies on either side of the River Thame and its location was thought to be a likely setting for prehistoric activity.

1.3.2 Within a short distance to the north of the River Thame is the historic core of the medieval town of Wednesbury, and a possible Iron Age hill fort

1.3.3 The known Roman Road running from *Pennocrucium* (Stretton, on the A5, west of Gailey) to Metchley (Edgbaston, Birmingham) would pass north-west to south-east through Wednesbury (over Church Hill) and across West Bromwich Heath. This postulated alignment would set the Roman Road and its river crossing close near or on the site of the college. A hoard of Roman coins was found in Wednesbury during the 19th century although their exact location is not known.

1.3.4 Historic maps depict the site of the college as being used for coal mining and later sand pits in the Victorian period and early part of the 20th century. In 1890 the site lay due east of the Globe Tube Works and was the site of a large clay pit. Sand pits are depicted south of the site on Balls Hill, where there was also a colliery. By 1903 coal shafts are shown on the site and by the time of maps dated 1919 and 1938 (Fig. 2) there were further clay pits and coal shafts. By 1965 the site appears as an array of steeply sloping earthworks, which appear to have been levelled by the early 1970s, when the college is mapped for the first time (AIG Consultants Ltd, 2003).

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

The aims of the evaluation were to determine or confirm the following:

- 2.1.1 The general nature of any remains present and to assess the possible scale of development impact on any remains and provide information that might influence development design so that impact on any remains could be avoided or minimised.
- 2.1.2 To provide information that would allow the local planning authority to reconcile development proposals with their policy for preserving archaeological remains and make an informed and reasoned decision on the planning application.
- 2.1.3 Provide site specific archaeological information, which if necessary, would allow for design and integration of timing and funding of any further archaeological work (or mitigation strategy) that may be required in advance of or during any subsequent development programme.
- 2.1.4 To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum, provide information for accession to the Sandwell Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and in general to add to the corpus of known information for this area.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The agreed brief for the evaluation specified that a total of 1,629 m<sup>2</sup> (3% of the area to be developed) was to be evaluated. This equated to twenty-seven trenches each measuring 30 m by 2 m (Fig. 3).
- 3.1.2 Due to the presence of unforeseen services, two test pits replaced Trench 21 and Trench 23 was not excavated at all. Trenches 19 and 24 were also deemed too difficult to excavate owing to the presence of drains and were replaced with test pits.
- 3.1.3 Trench 13 was relocated to avoid an existing car-park, and Trench 27 was enlarged to further assess the potential for archaeological survival in that area.
- 3.1.4 Trenches 4, 5 and 6 were not excavated as it was agreed with the Borough Archaeologist, Mr Graham Eyre-Morgan, that previous trenches in this area rendered further investigation unnecessary.

3.1.5 For the same reasons Trenches 1 and 2 were reduced in scale to test pits.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 Topsoil and overburden were removed by mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket while under archaeological supervision. The spoil generated during the evaluation was mounded away from each trench. Mechanical excavation ceased at either undisturbed natural deposits, or when archaeological features were encountered. The nature of those deposits was assessed by hand. Excavation of archaeological features was undertaken to determine their date, sequence, density and nature.

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. All archaeological features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers.

3.2.3 Trenches were planned at a scale of 1:100 if no features were present, and at 1:50 if there were deposits to be examined. Section drawings of features and sample sections were drawn at scales of 1:20. All trenches, sample sections and features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.2.4 The photographic record also included shots of the site prior to commencement of fieldwork and during the evaluation, showing specific stages of fieldwork.

### 3.3 Finds

3.3.1 No finds were recovered from the evaluation.

## 4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1.1 The Test Pits have been grouped together geographically while trenches containing no archaeology have only a basic description. Trenches containing features are described in more detail. As only one of the trenches contained possible archaeological features, the rest of the trenches have been grouped together by either geographical position, or their potential for archaeological survival.

4.1.2 A context inventory is included in Appendix 1. The stratigraphy and archaeology of each trench is described from earliest to the latest. A discussion, interpretation and conclusion of the evaluation follow this.

4.1.3 A selection of trench sections has been illustrated in this report: the remainder can be found in the site archive.

## 5 RESULTS: GENERAL

5.1.1 The site incorporated a basic flat landscape on the north side of the river Thame and rose relatively steeply to the south on its southern side. Only in the far south-west corner of the site and along parts of the east side were there any remnants of the

original land-surface. Probable quarrying, landfill and re-landscaping had heavily truncated the remainder of the site.

- 5.1.2 Where there was survival of the original land-surface, it generally comprised brick-earth overlain by natural subsoil.
- 5.1.3 Only one trench (Trench 17) contained archaeological features or deposits. This was located towards the centre of the site. However, the feature identified within this trench contained no finds and is thought to be post-medieval in date.

## 6 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 6.1 Test Pit Descriptions.

#### *Test pits 1a, 1b and 2.*

- 6.1.1 These test pits were located on the north-west side of the river. They did not contain any features or deposits of archaeological significance. All three were machined to a depth below 2 m and revealed only landfill deposits.

#### *Test pits 19a, 19b and 19c.*

- 6.1.2 These test pits were located along the south-east edge of the site and were positioned to avoid existing services. They did not contain any features or deposits of archaeological significance and were machined down to an average depth of 2 m, to reveal only made ground/landfill deposits.

#### *Test pits 21a and 21b*

- 6.1.3 These test pits were located to the west of test pits 19a, 19b and 19c, and were cut into a steep bank. They were machined down to an average depth of 1.5 m but revealed only made ground/landfill deposits.

#### *Test pit 24.*

- 6.1.4 This test pit was located at the far south-east corner of site. It was machined down to a depth of 1.2 m, and revealed natural brick-earth at a depth of 0.65 m. It did not reveal any features of archaeological significance.

### 6.2 Trench descriptions.

#### *Trenches 3, 7, and 8 (Fig. 4).*

- 6.2.1 These trenches were located on the north-east side of the River Thame and were all aligned roughly east-west. They were machined to a depth of 1.2 m with test pits excavated at either end of the trenches to an average depth of 2.5 m. All three trenches revealed natural alluvium at an average depth of 2.7 m. In Trench 7 this was overlain by a possible natural sub-soil (7008) at a depth of 2.55 m. This was, in turn, overlain by made ground to the surface of each trench.

***Trenches 9, 10 (Fig. 5), 11, and 15.***

- 6.2.2 These trenches were located along the south-west side of the river, and were aligned approximately east-west. They were machined to a depth of 1.2 m, with test pits excavated at either end to an average depth of 2.5 m. All four trenches all revealed a grey silty clay, thought to be either colluvium or re-deposited natural, at an average depth of 116.7 m OD. In all trenches this was overlain by made ground, which was overlain by topsoil to an average depth of 0.2 m. The trenches did not contain any features of archaeological significance.

***Trenches 12, 14 (Fig. 6), and 18.***

- 6.2.3 These trenches were located towards the centre of the site, and were aligned east-west. They were excavated to a depth of 1.2 m and test pits were opened at each end to an average depth of 2.5 m. Trenches 12 and 14 encountered the water table at 116.2 m OD and 116.3 m OD respectively. Here natural gravel was revealed and in both cases this was overlain by made ground, in turn was overlain by topsoil to an average depth of 0.25 m. Trench 18 was excavated to a depth of 2.4 m and revealed only made ground/landfill deposits.

***Trenches 16, 20, 22, and 26.***

- 6.2.4 Trenches 16 and 20 are located in the south-west part of site and Trenches 22 and 26 were opened to the south of site. All four of these trenches were aligned east-west. All were machined to an average depth of 2.5 m and contained no features; natural deposits were not revealed.

***Trench 17 (Fig. 7)***

- 6.2.5 Trench 17 lay to the centre of site, and was aligned east-west. It was machined to a depth of 1.2 m with a test pit excavated at the east end to a depth of 2.5 m. A small feature, possibly a gully (1704) was revealed at the west end of the trench cut into what was thought to be natural clay at a depth of 121.54 m OD. However, due to similar deposits appearing elsewhere on site, it was thought that this is a post-medieval feature cut into re-deposited natural. At the west end Trench 17 was excavated to a depth of 120.7 m OD without revealing natural deposits.

***Trenches 13, 25, 27, 27a (Fig. 8, Fig. 9), and 27b.***

- 6.2.6 These trenches have been grouped together due to the fact that they all revealed natural brick-earth at a relatively shallow depth, thus displaying some potential for the survival of archaeological remains. Trench 27 was located at the far south-west end of site and was aligned north-east/south-west. Further trenches (27a and 27b) were excavated at right angles to its south-west end and centre respectively. Within Trench 27 natural brick-earth was revealed at the north at 120.31 m OD, rising to a depth of 121.75 m OD at the SW end. Trench 27a revealed natural brick-earth at its north-west end at depth of 122.2 m OD, rising to 121.13 m OD at the south-east end. Trench 27b measured 10 m in length and revealed natural brick-earth at a depth of



121.1 m OD. In all these trenches the natural brick-earth was overlain by made ground/landfill and then topsoil to an average depth of 0.2 m.

- 6.2.7 Trench 13 was aligned north-west/south-east and was excavated to a depth of 1.2 m with test pits at either end. Natural brick-earth was revealed at a depth of 1.2 m at the north-west end of the trench and at 2.2 m below ground level at its south-east end.
- 6.2.8 Trench 25 was aligned east-west and revealed natural brick-earth at a depth of 2.5 m at its west end and only made ground to the same depth at its east end. None of the trenches in this group revealed any features of archaeological significance.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 7.1.1 The archaeological and historical background of the area suggested potential for prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains to be present on this site. The location of the site, adjacent to the River Thame, would provide an ideal setting for prehistoric activity, while the relatively close proximity of an Iron Age hill fort and the high probability that the Roman Road from Stretton to Metchley ran through the site indicated a high potential for archaeological remains.
- 7.1.2 The evaluation only revealed potential for archaeological remains in isolated parts of the site, for example in the south-east corner and a small area south-east of the river. However, both of these areas failed to reveal any archaeological features.
- 7.1.3 Elsewhere, these investigations seem to indicate that modern land-filling/dumping and almost certainly the scarring effects of quarrying have truncated the original land surface and thus the potential for the survival of any archaeological deposits is negligible. That the site was utilised for mining resources, coal and sand, as depicted on historic maps has thus been confirmed.

## APPENDICES

## 8 APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench or test pit number</i>	<i>Ctx No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1a/1b	101	Layer		0.4	topsoil
	102-106	Layer		2.2	Made ground
2	201	Layer		0.4	topsoil
	202	Layer		<2.50	Made ground
3	301	Layer		0.4	Topsoil
	302	Layer		1.84	Made ground
	303	Layer		2.14	Made ground
	304	Layer		2.36	Made ground
	305	Layer		2.42	Blue grey alluvium
	306	Layer		2.85	Yellow blue alluvium
	307	Layer		2.6	Grey clay
7	701	Layer		0.16	hardcore
	702-707	Layer		2.55	Made ground
	708	Layer		2.65	subsoil
	709	Layer			Grey alluvium
8	801	Layer		0.1	hardcore
	802-805	Layer		2.25	Made ground
	806	Layer		2.85	Dark grey, silty clay
9	901	Layer		0.26	topsoil
	902-908	Layer		1.68	Made ground
	909	Layer		2.22	Re-deposited natural
10	1001	Layer		0.15	topsoil
	1003	Layer		0.45	Made ground
	1004	Layer		0.75	Made ground
	1005	Layer		1.6	Redeposit natural

11	1101	Layer		0.15	Topsoil
	1102	Layer		2.0	Made ground
	1103	Layer		<2.8	Re-deposited natural
12	1201	Layer		0.12	Topsoil
	1202	Layer		2.85	Made ground
	1203	Layer			Natural gravel
13	1301	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	1302	Layer		1.2	Made ground
	1303	Layer		<2.4	Natural brick-earth
14	1401	Layer		0.3	Topsoil
	1402	Layer		1.8	Made ground
	1403	Layer		1.9	Made ground
	1404	Layer		<2.6	Natural grey clay
15	1501	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	1502	Layer		1.2	Made ground
	1503	Layer		>2.8	Re-deposited natural
16	1601	Layer		0.12	Topsoil
	1602-1604	Layer		1.2	Made ground
	1604	Layer		1.2	Made ground
16	1605	Layer		<2.3	Yellow, orange, silty clay natural.
17	1700	Layer		0.1	Modern tarmac
	1701-1702	Layer		1.48	Made ground
	1703	Fill		1.55	Fill of 1704
	1704	Cut		1.48	Gully (post med)
	1705	Layer		1.58	Re-deposited natural
	1706	Layer		<1.98	Made ground
18	1801	Layer		0.05	Tarmac
	1802-1804	Layer		<2.40	Made ground
19a	1901	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	1902	Layer		<1.85	Made ground
19b	1901	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	1903	Layer		2.5	Made ground

	1904	Layer			Grey clay natural
19c	1901	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	1903	Layer		<2.3	Made ground
20	2001	Layer		0.1	Topsoil
	2002	Layer		<2.15	Made ground
21a/21b	2101	Layer		0.4	Topsoil
	2102-2103	Layer		1.6	Made ground
22	2201	Layer		0.18	Tarmac
	2202-2203	Layer		<2.65	Made ground
24	2401	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	2402	Layer		0.65	Made ground
	2403	Layer		<1.2	Natural brickearth
25	2501	Layer		0.2	Hardcore
	2502	Layer		2.5	Made ground
	2503	Layer		0.2	Topsoil
	2505	Layer		<2.3	Natural brickearth
26	2601	layer		0.1	Topsoil
	2602-2612	layer		2.7	Made ground
27	2701	layer		0.25	Topsoil
	2702	layer		1.71	Made ground
	2703	layer		1.08-2.0	Sub soil
	2704	layer		<2.66	Natural brickearth
27a	2301	Layer		0.1	Topsoil
	2302	Layer		1.95	Made ground
	2303	Layer		1.35-2.05	Subsoil
	2304	Layer		<2.4	Natural brickearth
27b	2309	Layer		0.1	Topsoil
	2310	Layer		1.7	Made ground
	2311	Layer		1.85	Subsoil
	2312	Layer		<2.0	Natural brickearth

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**9 APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

AIG Consultants Ltd 2003 *Geoenvironmental Assessment, Sandwell College, Wednesbury.*

JSAC 2004 *A specification for an Archaeological Evaluation at the former Sandwell College, Woden Road South, Wednesbury.*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (Ed. D Wilkinson, 1st Edition, August 1992)

OA 2004 *Former Sandwell College, Woden Road South, Wednesbury. Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation.*

**10 APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Former Sandwell College, Wednesbury, Birmingham, Warwickshire

**Site code:** SAND 04

**Grid reference:** NGR SO 3990 2940

**Type of evaluation:** Test pits and trenches

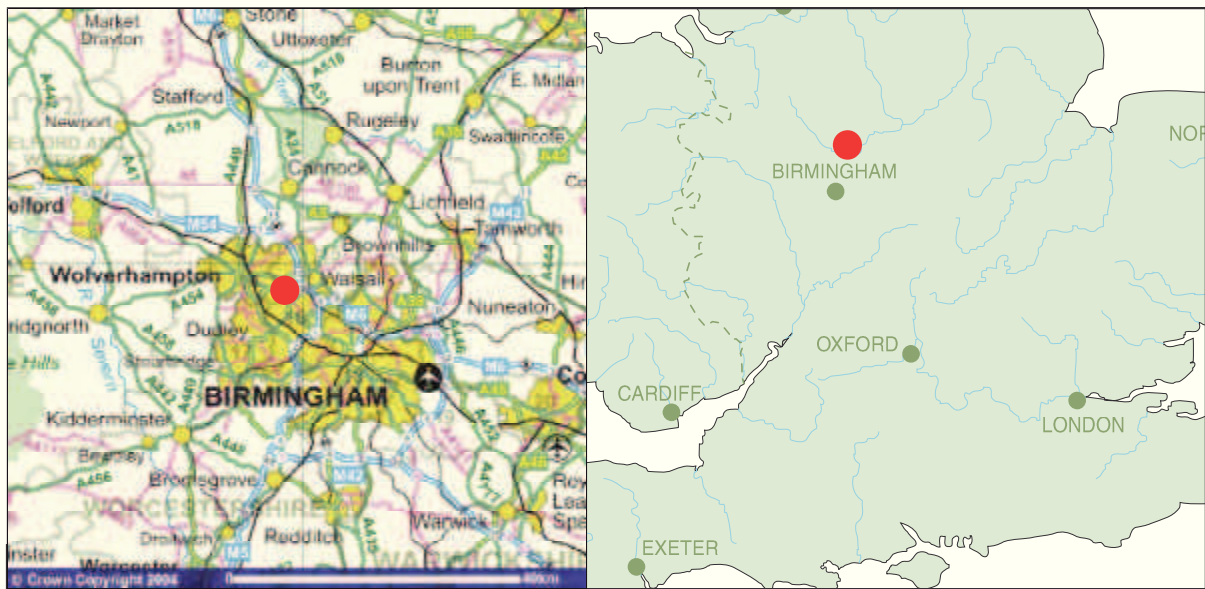
**Date and duration of project:** September 2004 for a duration of 2 weeks.

**Area of site:** 5.5 ha

**Summary of results:** The results of the evaluation show that modern activity has largely remodelled the landscape including the hillside to the south of the site. The north end of the site has been truncated and subsequently used for landfill.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Wednesbury Art Gallery and Museum in due course, under the following accession number: 0330.

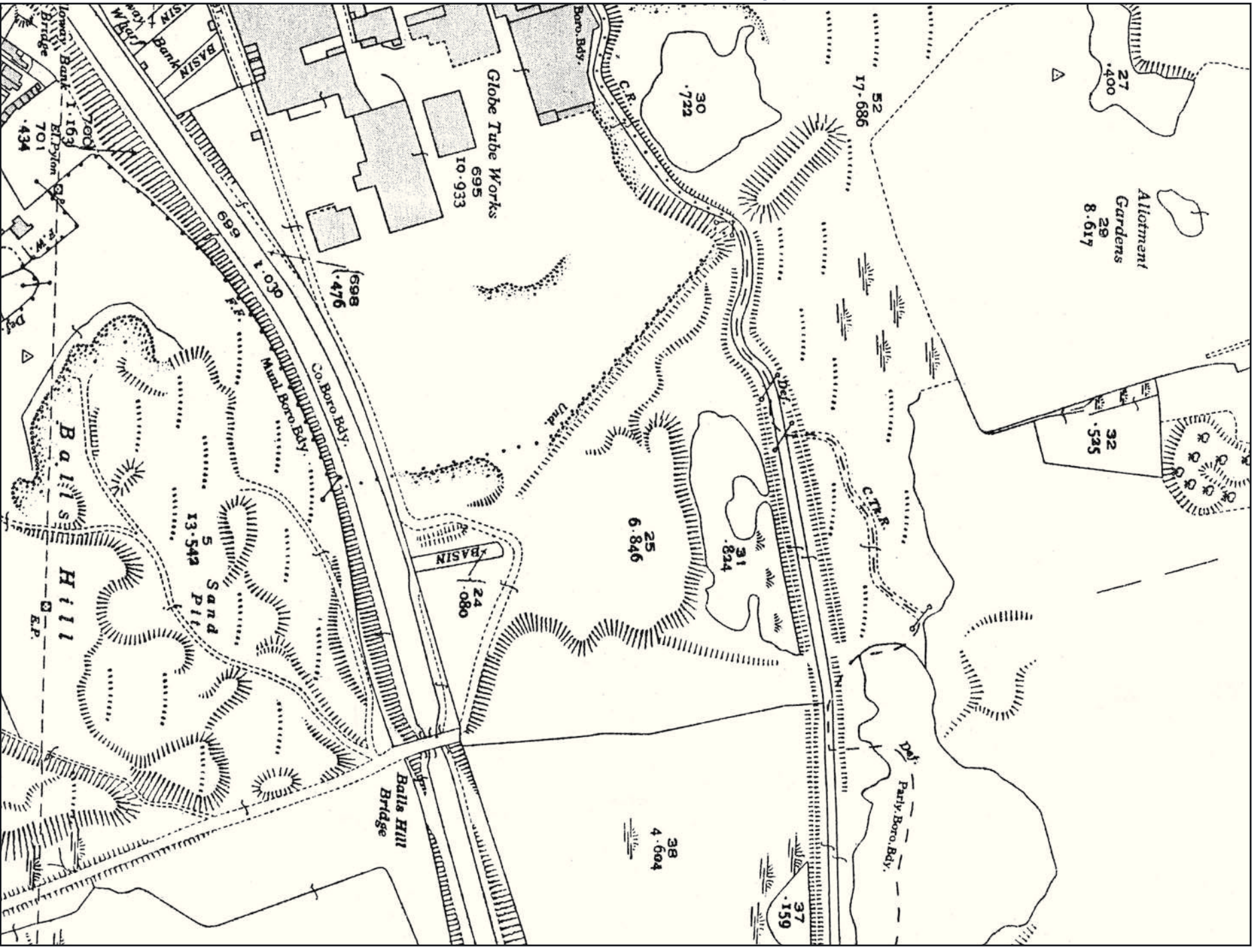




Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location



Not to scale

Figure 2: OS map of 1938



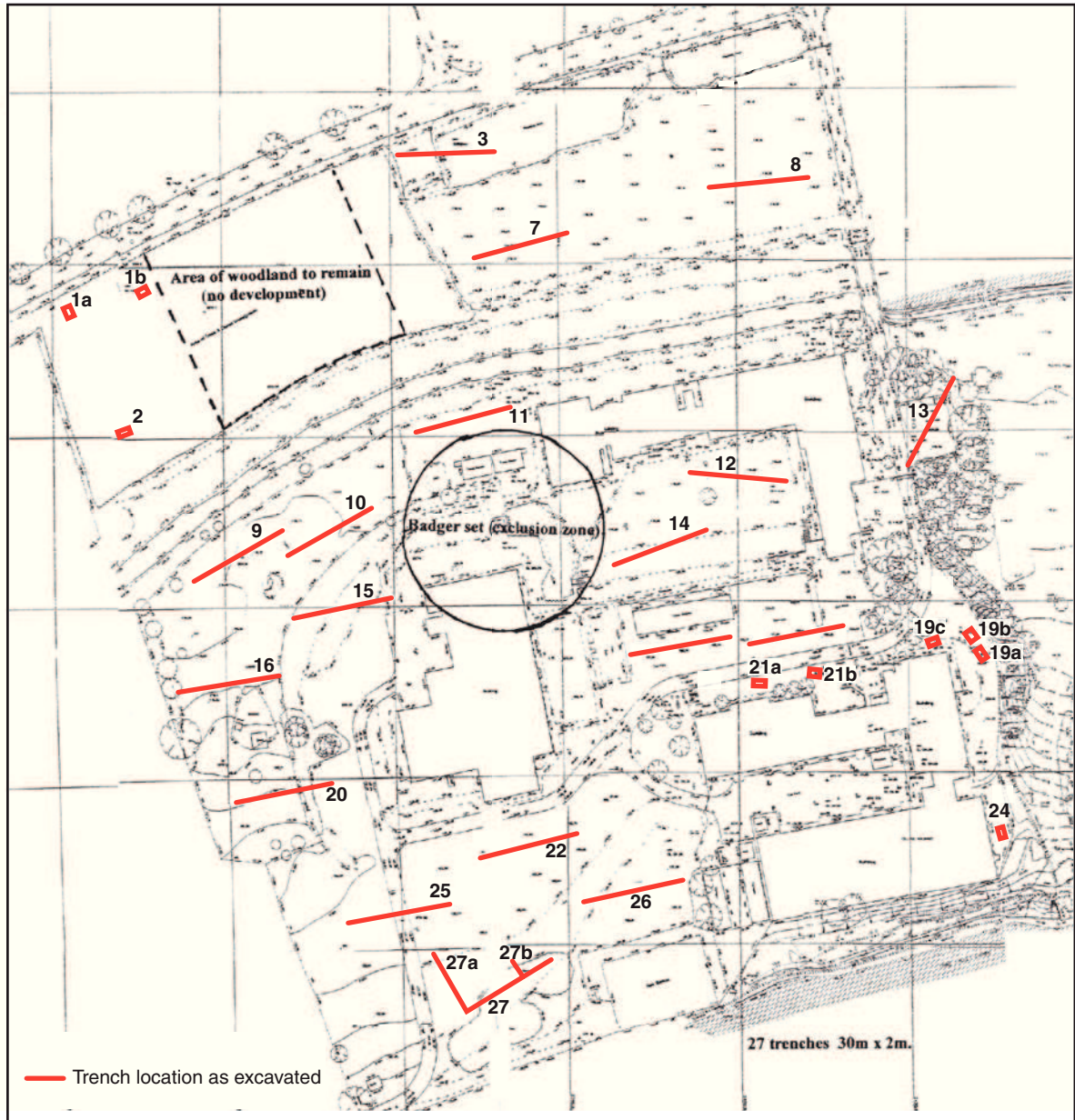


Figure 3: Trench and test pit location plan

Section 8001

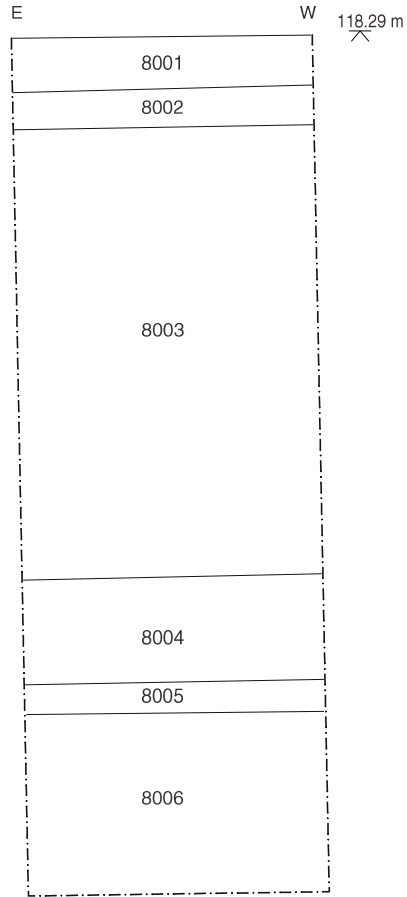


Figure 4: North facing section through trench 8

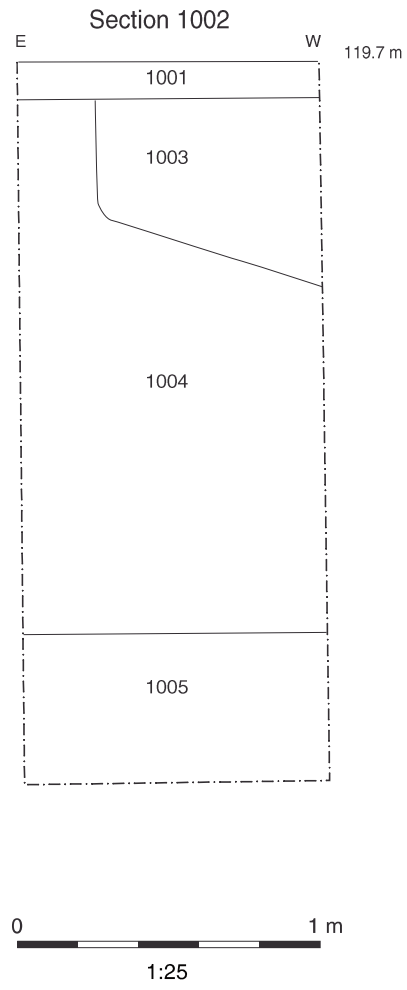


Figure 5: South facing section at east end of Trench 10



### Section 1401

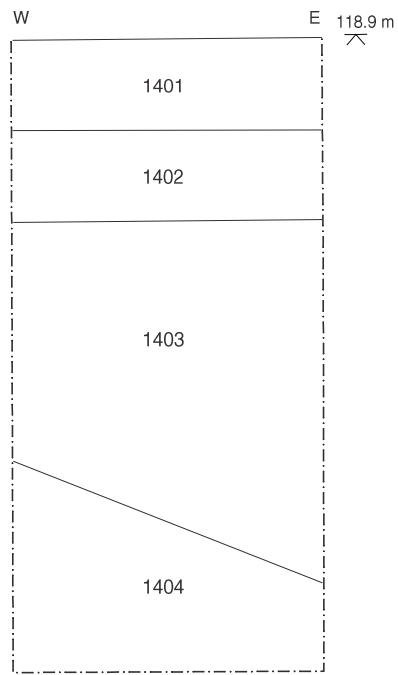


Figure 6: South facing section at west end of Trench 14

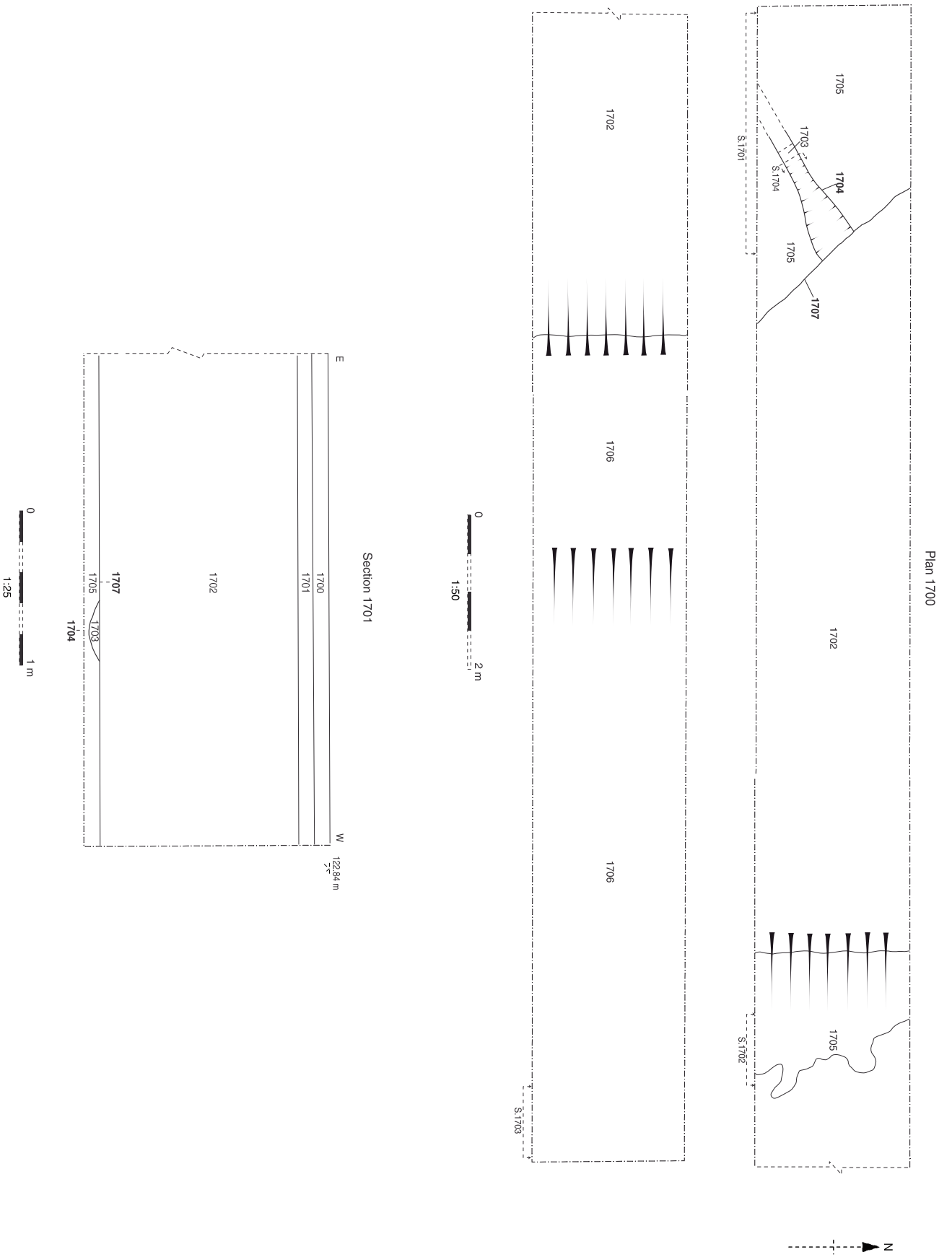


Figure 7: Plan of Trench 17; north facing section west end of Trench 17



### Section 2701

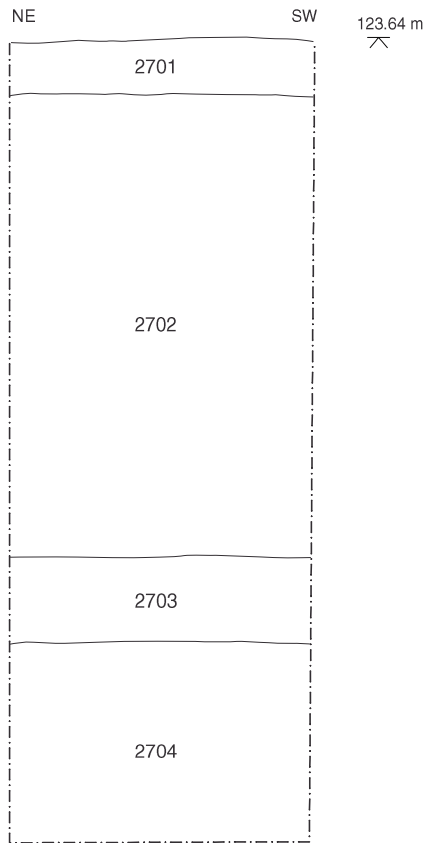


Figure 8: South facing section through north-east end of Trench 27



### Section 2702

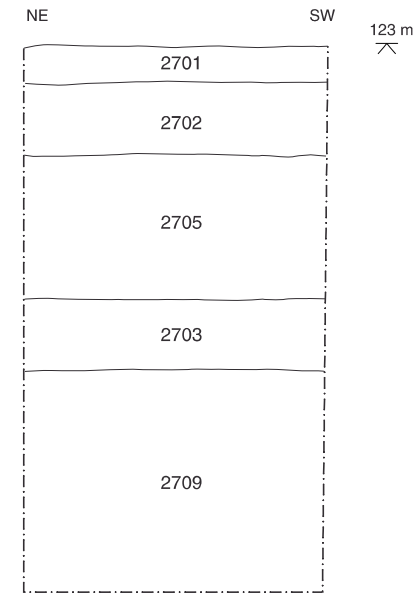


Figure 9: South facing section at south-west end of Trench 27