

# Land at the Grange Rothley Leicestershire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



February 2006

**Client: John Samuels  
Archaeological Consultants**

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# The Grange, Rothley, Leicestershire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*Between 5th and 7th September 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the Grange Rothley, Leicestershire (NGR: SK 5867 1273) on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC). The evaluation revealed evidence for a Christian cemetery, possibly Romano-British in date, within the south-western corner of the development area. There was also evidence for the use of some of the land as permanent pasture or flood meadows. No evidence was encountered for the extent of the medieval village of Rothley .*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between 5th and 7th September 2005, OA carried out a field evaluation at the Grange, Rothley, Leicestershire (NGR: SK 5867 1273) on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC), in respect of a planning application for the construction of apartments and the conversion of the Grange to residential use (Planning Application No. P/05/1550/2).
- 1.1.2 The work was carried out in accordance with “A specification for an Archaeological Evaluation of land at the Grange, Rothley, Leicestershire” issued by the client (JSAC 1228/05/01a).

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is situated to the east of Fowke Street, Rothley, 6.4 km north of Leicester (Fig. 1) and occupies an area of approximately 1.8 hectares.
- 1.2.2 The site lies at an average height of 48 m above OD and slopes gently down to the north and east towards Rothley Brook, which forms the eastern boundary of the site. The underlying soils are loams over clay soils of the Dunnington Heath association, overlying clay subsoils and Permo-Triassic mudstones (SSEW 1983).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of the site had been undertaken (JSAC/1228/04/02) prior to the evaluation, the results of which are presented below.
- 1.3.2 There is evidence of activity from the prehistoric period from a light scatter of Neolithic flint noted from approximately 400 m east of the site, and a large Bronze Age ring ditch and a rectilinear enclosure that may date from the Iron Age has been identified from cropmarks approximately 400 m to the south of the site. The findspot of a Roman coin is recorded approximately 50 m west of the site and the site of a Roman villa is known about 2 km to the west, at a location that has also produced evidence of an Anglo-Saxon burial.

- 1.3.3 Rothley is recorded as a substantial settlement by 1086, when it had a population of 29 villagers, 18 smallholders and a priest. This may suggest that the village possessed a church, and a late Saxon cross stands in the churchyard. The Knights Templar possessed land at Rothley by 1203, and it is likely that their preceptory and chapel were built, to the west of the village, soon after Henry III granted them the manor in 1231. They remained in possession until 1308, after which the Crown granted Rothley to the Knights Hospitallers, who retained it for the remainder of the medieval period. The extent of the medieval village has been deduced, and it is considered that it encompassed approximately half of the proposed development site.
- 1.3.4 A 1782 plan of Rothley shows the Grange with a range of outbuildings to the north, and extensive grounds to the east, stretching down to Rothley brook, which formed a large meander. The First Edition 1" Ordnance Survey map of 1835 shows that by that date, a channel had been made through the Rothley Brook meander. Further extensions and outbuildings had been built since and the Grange has been used as office accommodation since 1950.
- 1.3.5 In summary, the assessment identified that the south-western half of the site lies within the deduced extent of the medieval village, and may contain late Saxon and/or medieval remains.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 The aims of the investigation were:
- 2.1.2 To locate, identify and assess the state of preservation of any potential archaeological remains.
- 2.1.3 To provide further information on the development of Rothley and the historic character of the development site.
- 2.1.4 To assess the artefactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits encountered.
- 2.1.5 To place these remains within their local, regional and national context.
- 2.1.6 To provide a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the local SMR.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation was to have consisted of 7 trenches measuring between 10 m and 30 m in length by 1.5 m in width (Fig. 2), forming a 5 % sample of the part of the site considered to have a potential for late Saxon and/or medieval remains.

3.1.2 However the presence of Pink Waxcap Fungi (a protected species) on the site meant that only trenches 1, 2, 5 and 7 were opened, an area of 105 m<sup>2</sup>, forming an approximate 2.5 % sample.

### 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 toothless bucket. Excavation proceeded to the top of the natural geology or to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and any revealed features (where possible) were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers. The trenches and archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 and sections of excavated features and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All features, sections and trenches were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and generally bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

### 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 trench by trench followed by an overall discussion.

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 All the trenches came down onto natural deposits, with all these being alluvial in origin. Ground water was not encountered in any of the trenches.

### 4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 All the significant archaeological deposits were confined to trenches located to the south of the development site, with only minor archaeology encountered within the northern trenches.

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 Description of deposits

#### *Trench 1*

5.1.1 This trench measured 10 m long by 1.63 m wide (Fig. 3, plan 1). The underlying natural, a dark reddish orange silty sand with blue-grey mottling (104) was encountered at a depth of 1.14 m below ground level. At the south-eastern end of the trench this layer was cut by a 0.7 m wide by 0.14 m deep linear feature running north-south diagonally across the trench (107). This feature had steeply sloping sides with a flat base and probably represents a boundary ditch (Fig. 4, section 101). This was filled by a dark grey-brown sandy silt (108), a probable silting deposit.

5.1.2 This feature was sealed by a 0.5 m thick layer of light orange sandy clay (103), a probable layer of alluvium. Cut into the top of this layer was the north-eastern edge of a (probably) circular feature measuring 1.7 m diameter by 0.4 m deep (105) (Fig. 4, section 102). This was filled by a very dark brown sandy silt (106) that contained burnt material and produced post-medieval transfer printed pottery, suggesting that this feature may have been a rubbish pit. Overlying this feature and layer 103 was a 0.5 m thick layer of dark orange sandy clay (102), a probable layer of alluvium. This was overlaid with a 0.6 m deep layer of hardcore (101) topped with the current tarmac car park surface.

#### *Trench 2*

5.1.3 This trench measured 10 m long by 1.6 m wide (Fig. 3, plan 2). The natural, an orange gravel within a clay matrix (204) was encountered at a depth of 1.3 m below the current ground level (Fig. 4, section 2). This was overlaid by a 0.2 m deep layer of mid brown clay (203), a layer of alluvium. Overlying this was a 0.7 m thick layer of dark brown silty clay (202), a later alluvial deposit. This was sealed by a 0.6 m deep layer of modern hardcore (201), which supported a modern tarmac surface.

#### *Trench 5*

5.1.4 This trench was originally intended to be 30 m in length by 1.6 m wide, however the presence of a substantial concrete block and the stoppage of the site by the presence of the Pink Waxcap Fungi meant that this trench was reduced to 6 m in length (Fig. 3, plan 5).

5.1.5 The underlying natural, a dark orange clay sand (502) was encountered at a depth of 0.7 m below ground level. Running in from the northern end of the trench was the corner of a straight edged rectangular feature (507). This was filled by a mid brown silty sand (508). Also cut into the natural was a circular feature (505), approximately 0.4 m in diameter. This was filled by a mid brown sandy silt (506), which contained a small fragment of brick and a fragment of slag. Towards the southern end of the trench a rectangular feature (503), measuring 1.35 m by 0.46 m could be seen cut into the surface of 502. This was filled by a dark brown silty clay (504), which produced a fragment of brick with attached lime mortar.

- 5.1.6 Due to the stoppage of the site these features remained unexcavated. They were sealed by a 0.7 m thick layer of mid brown clay loam (501), the present day topsoil.

### ***Trench 7***

- 5.1.7 This trench measured 30 m long by 1.6 m wide (Fig. 3, plan 7).
- 5.1.8 The underlying natural, a reddish brown clay, mottled with blue grey clay (703) was encountered at a depth of 0.65 m below the current ground level. At the western end of the trench a 1.1 m wide linear feature (722) could be observed running north-south across the trench. This was filled by a mid brown silty sand (723) which produced a large fragment of possible Romano-British brick. This feature may represent a Romano-British boundary ditch. Running in from the southern baulk of the trench was a circular feature 0.6 m in diameter (720). This was filled by a dark brown silty sand (721) and possibly represents a small pit. To the east of this feature was a circular feature (718), 0.5 m diameter and filled by a mid brown sandy silt (719). This feature is a probable posthole.
- 5.1.9 Towards the centre of the trench, a rectangular feature (716) measuring 0.9 m by 0.5 m could be seen cut into the surface of the natural (703). This was filled with a mid brown silty sand (717). Long bones and the back of a skull could be seen on the surface of this deposit suggesting that the feature was a human inhumation, while its east-west alignment suggests a probable Christian burial.
- 5.1.10 In the centre of the trench a rectangular feature measuring 1.5 m by 0.65 m (714) could be observed lying on the same east-west alignment. Filling this cut was a mid brown silty sand (715). The presence of long bones visible on the surface of this deposit suggests that it also is a human burial.
- 5.1.11 Cutting the south-east corner of this inhumation, was a 2m long by 0.6 m wide feature (712), running along the southern baulk of the trench. This was filled by a mid brown silty sand (713) which also displayed long bones.
- 5.1.12 To the east of this grave was an elliptical cut (710) measuring 0.5 m long by 0.35 m wide. This was filled by a reddish brown sandy silt (711). This feature may represent a small pit or posthole. East of the centre of the trench, a rectangular feature (708) measuring 0.9 m by 0.45 m and aligned south-west to north-east, could be seen cut into the surface of the natural clay. This was filled with a mid brown sandy silt (709). Although no bones were visible and the alignment is slightly awry, this may represent a juvenile inhumation.
- 5.1.13 At the eastern end of the trench a corner of a rectangular feature (706) was observed running in from the northern baulk of the trench. Filling this was a mid brown sandy silt (707). Its alignment and shape suggests that this also is a grave cut. At the eastern extent of the trench a rectangular cut (704) measuring 2.15 m long and 0.52 m could be observed cut into the surface of the natural. This east-west aligned feature was filled with a mid brown silty sand (705). The shape and alignment of this feature suggested a probable inhumation.



- 5.1.14 Sealing all these features was an overall layer of reddish brown silty clay (702), 0.25 m thick, a probable layer of earlier worked soil. This was overlaid by a 0.4 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (701), the present day topsoil and turf.
- 5.1.15 None of these features were excavated due to the site being stopped, however, a fragment of cranium was recovered from the spoil and was retained for analysis (See human bone report within section 5, finds).

## 5.2 Finds

### *General*

- 5.2.1 Fragments of brick and tile were recovered from 6 contexts, however they were insufficient for any meaningful analysis., as was the small fragment of slag recovered from 1 context. The only pottery recovered was from a post-medieval context.

### *Human Bone from the Grange, Rothley*

*by Ceridwen Boston (OA)*

- 5.2.2 A single fragment of human skull (724) was recovered from an unstratified context within Trench 7. In view its close vicinity to the graves revealed within the trench, it is probable that this bone originated from one such feature. The fresh breaks on the bone suggest that this disturbance was of recent date, possibly during mechanical excavation of the trench.
- 5.2.3 The fragment (measuring 80.1 mm x 49.2 mm) was the posterior and central portion of a right parietal bone of the cranial vault, which included the sagittal and lamdoid sutures. Bone preservation was fair, with relatively little demineralisation of the bone matrix, but with some flaking of the outer table on the ectocranial surface. The skull fragment was part of an adult. The cranial sutures were unfused on the ectocranial surface, indicating an age less than 40 years (Meindl and Lovejoy 1985). However, the endocranial sutures appeared to be in the process of fusion, suggesting an adult, aged 30+ years (Krogman and Iscan 1986). Hence, the individual was aged 30 - 40 years. The bone was not sexually diagnostic.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The conditions in the field were fine and dry. There was relatively little intrusion by modern features such as services and land drains. The percentage sample, distribution and positioning of the trenches was believed to have given a good reflection of the overall archaeological potential of the site. The stoppage of the work caused by the Pink Waxcap Fungi has, however, meant that the central area of the site has been left unexplored. However the distribution of the archaeological deposits, being mainly concentrated in the south of the site probably means that the results of the evaluation still give an indication of the archaeological potential of the site.

## 6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 There is evidence for the substantial deposition of alluvial material throughout the site, particularly towards the northern, lower, extent of the development area. This evidence of flooding would suggest that any occupation would have been concentrated in the marginally higher ground towards the south-west corner of the site.
- 6.2.2 The north-south aligned boundary ditch observed within Trench 1 suggests that the area has been divided up in the past, however the lack of dating evidence makes it impossible to assign a period to this feature. The lack of significant archaeological deposits within Trench 2 and any deposits predating the post-medieval deposits within Trench 5 suggests that the central area of the site was utilised as permanent pasture or water meadows in the past with no evidence for occupation.
- 6.2.3 The number of inhumations encountered in Trench 7 suggest the presence of a substantial cemetery within this area. The east-west alignment of the grave cuts would also suggest that they were Christian in origin, although the only dating evidence available is a possible fragment of Romano-British brick recovered from the fill of ditch (722). This ditch also appears to demarcate the western extent of the inhumations. The present churchyard within Rothley is located 300m south-west of the site possibly suggesting that this was an early Christian cemetery whose location was forgotten, although this may also indicate a later relocation of the church. Another possibility is that there may have been a private chapel attached to the Grange and that it may be a family cemetery. Further research will be needed in order to fully determine its origins.
- 6.2.4 No evidence for the extent of the medieval village of Rothley was encountered during the course of the evaluation or for previous structures relating to the Grange.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1							
	101	Layer	-	0.6 m	Modern hardcore base	Brick	C20th
	102	Layer	-	0.5 m	Alluvial deposit	-	-
	103	Layer	-	0.5 m	Alluvial deposit	-	-
	104	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Natural clay	-	-
	105	Cut	2.9 m	0.38 m	Probable rubbish pit	-	C19th
	106	Fill	2.9 m	0.38 m	Backfill of 105	Pottery	C19th
	107	Cut	0.66 m	0.14 m	Boundary ditch	-	-
	108	Fill	0.66 m	0.14 m	Fill of 107	-	-
2							
	201	Layer	-	0.6 m	Made ground	Brick	C20th
	202	Layer	-	0.7 m	Alluvial deposit	-	-
	203	Layer	-	0.2 m	Natural clay	-	-
	204	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Natural gravel	-	-
5							
	501	layer	-	0.77 m	Topsoil and turf	-	-
	502	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Natural clay sand	-	-
	503	Cut	0.46 m	-	Modern feature	-	C19th ?
	504	Fill	0.46 m	-	Backfill of 503	Tile	C19th ?
	505	Cut	0.4 m	-	Small pit / posthole	-	C20th
	506	Fill	0.4 m	-	Fill of 505	Tile, tarmac	C20th
	507	Cut	> 0.7 m	-	Probable rectangular pit	-	-
	508	Fill	> 0.7 m	-	Backfill of 507	-	-
7							
	701	Layer	-	0.4 m	Topsoil and turf	-	C20th
	702	Layer	-	0.22 m	Alluvial deposit	-	-
	703	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Natural clay	-	-
	704	Cut	0.52 m	-	Grave cut	-	-
	705	Fill	0.52 m	-	Fill of 704	Human bone	-

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
7							
	706	Cut	> 0.3 m	-	Grave cut	-	-
	707	Fill	> 0.3 m	-	Fill of 706	Human bone	-
	708	Cut	0.4 m	-	Grave cut	-	-
	709	Fill	0.4 m	-	Fill of 708	Human bone	-
	710	Cut	0.5 m	-	Small pit	-	-
	711	Fill	0.5 m	-	Fill of 710	-	-
	712	Cut	0.6 m	-	Grave cut	-	-
	713	Fill	0.6 m	-	Fill of 712	Human bone	-
	714	Cut	0.65 m	-	Grave cut	-	-
	715	Fill	0.65 m	-	Fill of 714	Human bone	-
	716	Cut	0.5 m	-	Grave cut	-	-
	717	Fill	0.5 m	-	Fill of 716	Human bone	-
	718	Cut	0.45 m	-	Small pit/ post hole	-	-
	719	Fill	0.45 m	-	Fill of 718	-	-
	720	Cut	0.6 m	-	Small pit	-	-
	721	Fill	0.6 m	-	Fill of 720	Animal bone	-
	722	Cut	1.5 m	-	Possible boundary ditch	-	-
	723	Fill	1.5 m	-	Fill of 722	Tile, human bone	-

**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

JSAC 1228/04/02, 2004 *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of land at the Grange, Rothley, Leicestershire*

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Krogman, W M and Iscan, M Y 1986 *The human skeleton in forensic medicine*, 2nd edition, Charles C Thomas, Springfield, Illinois

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### **APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** The Grange, Rothley, Leicestershire

**Site code:** X.A174.2005

**Grid reference:** SK 5867 1273

**Type of evaluation:** Machine excavation of 7 trenches (Reduced to 4 due to the presence of a protected fungi)

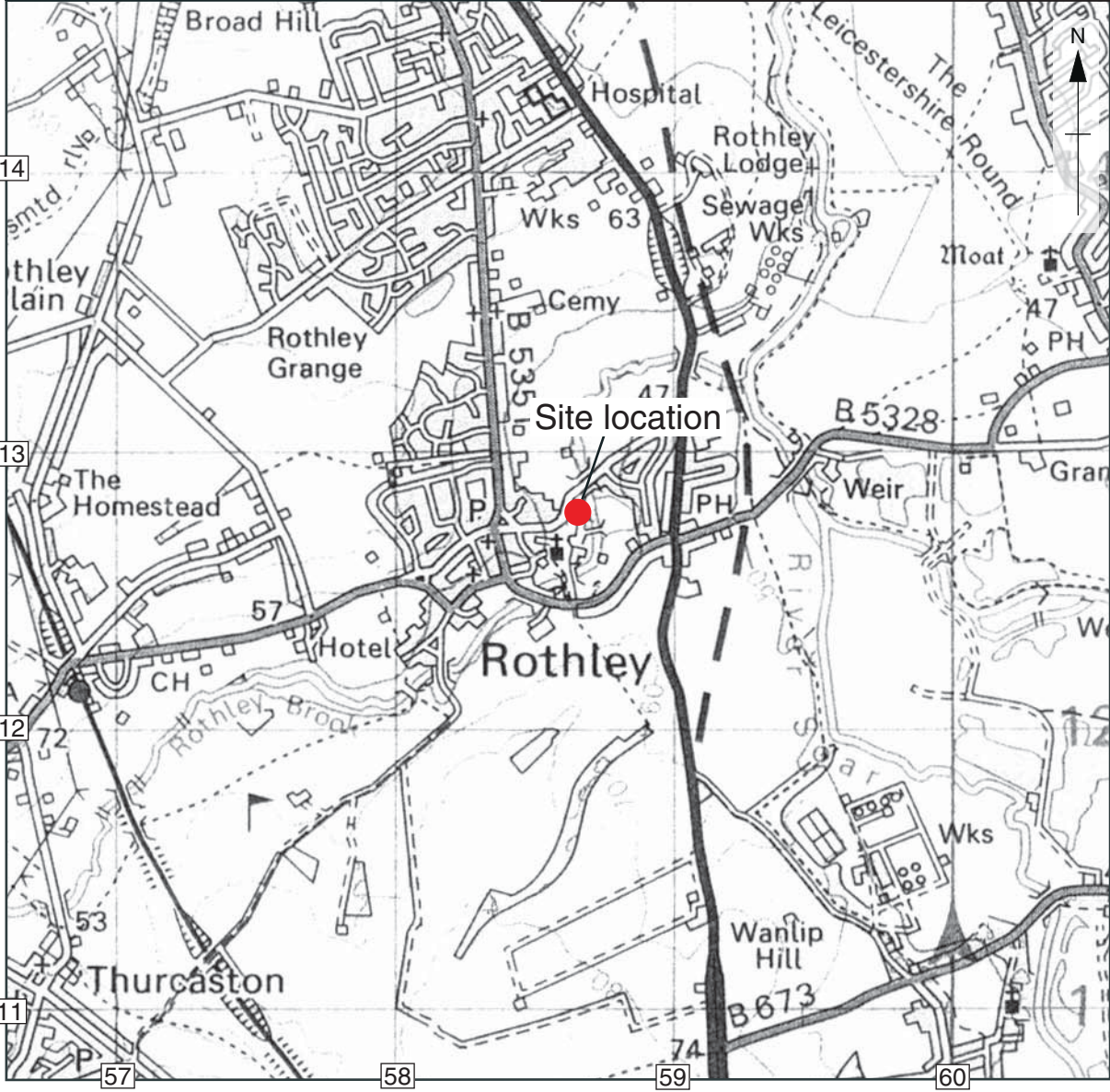
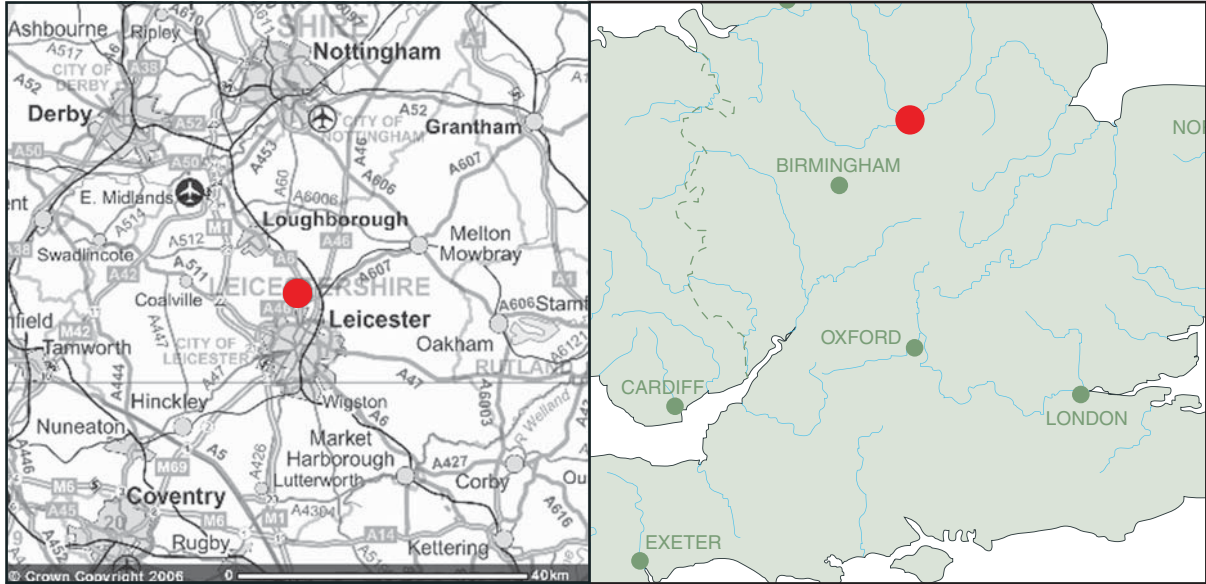
**Date and duration of project:** 5th to 7th September 2005

**Area of site:** 1.8 hectares

**Summary of results:** Two boundary ditches were observed together with evidence of a probable Christian cemetery of unknown date.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Leicestershire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: XA.174.2005

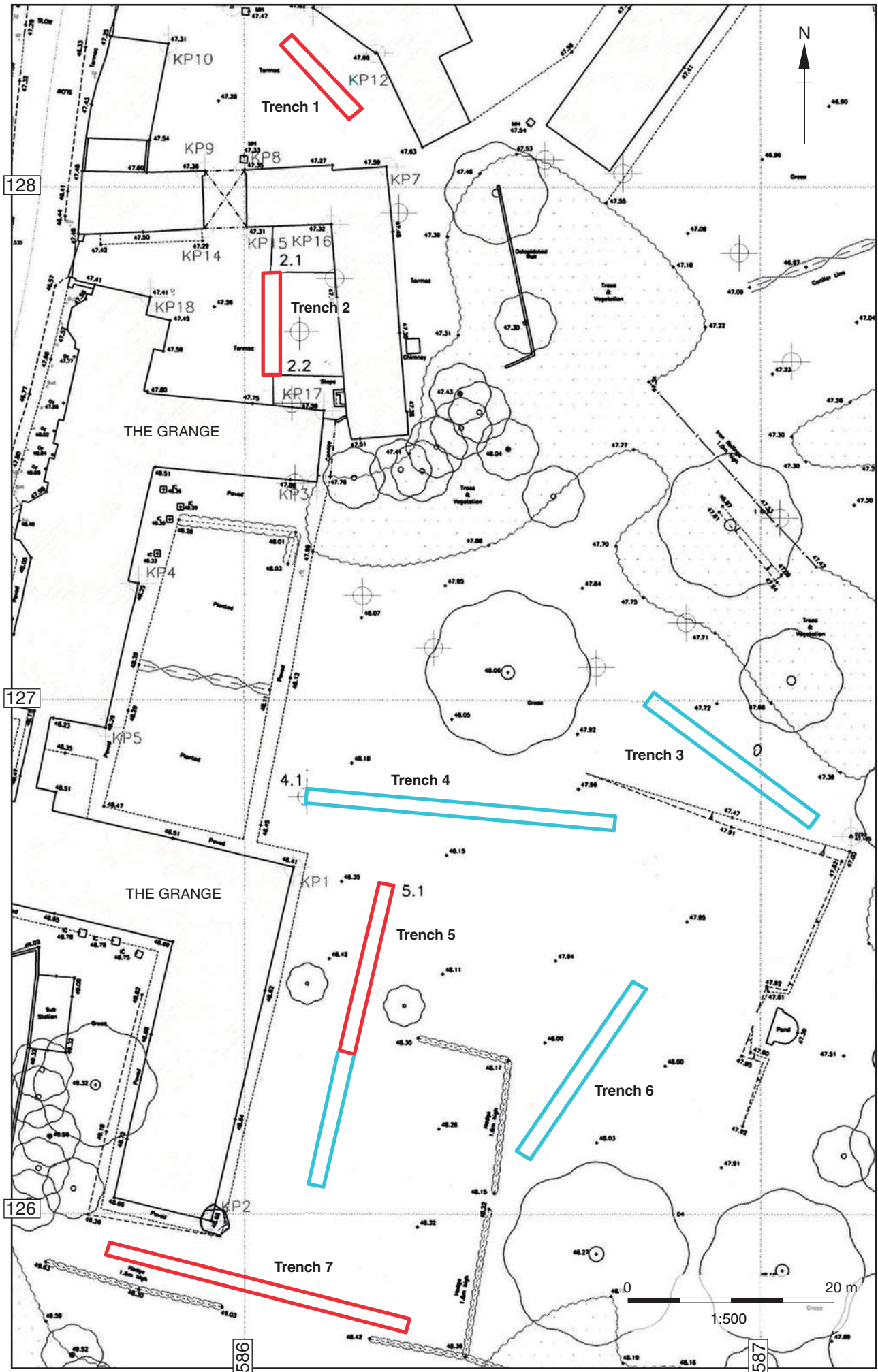




Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



- Opened trench
- Unopened trench

Figure 2 : Site plan showing trench locations



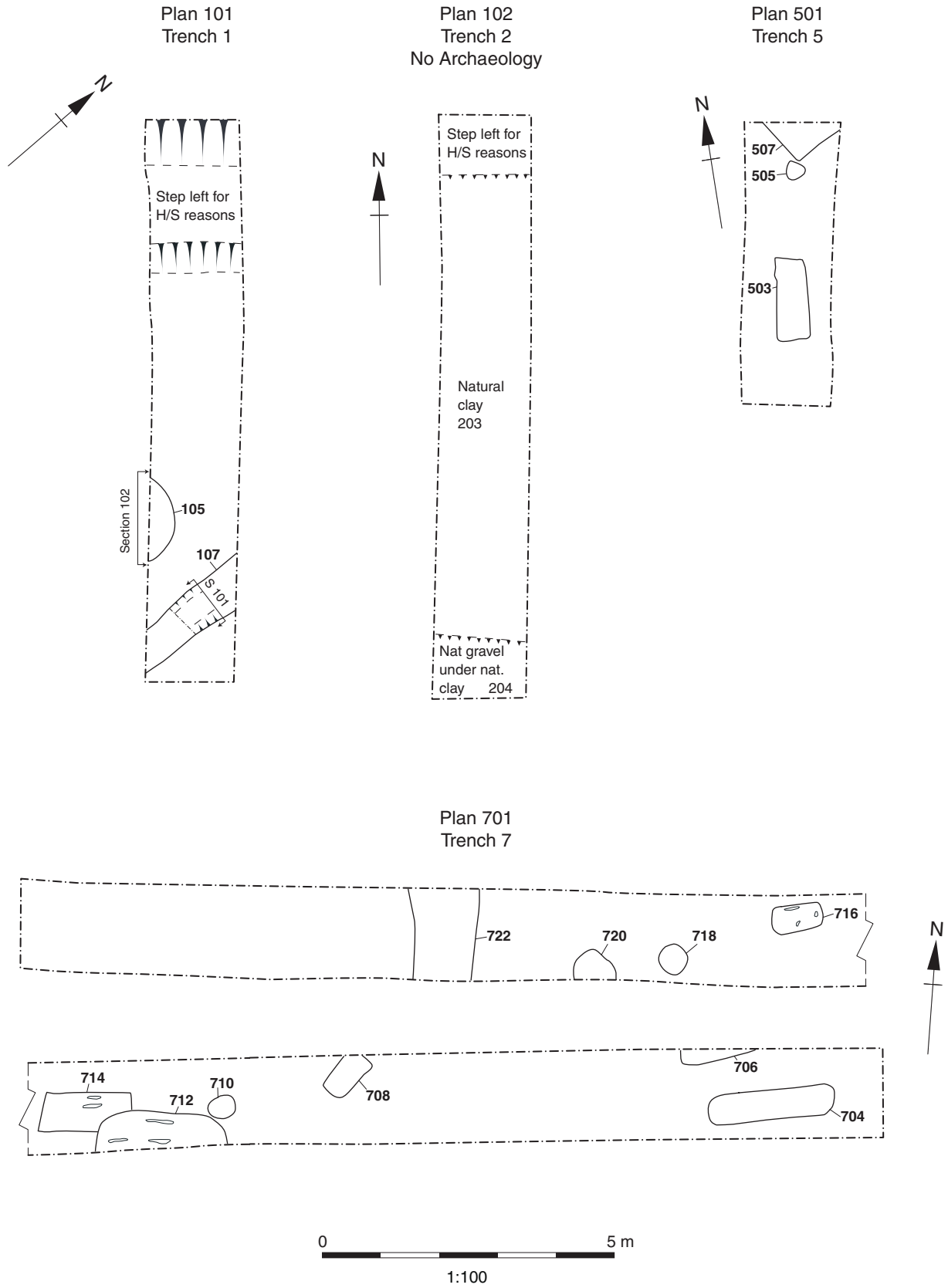


Figure 3 : Trench plans

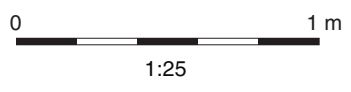
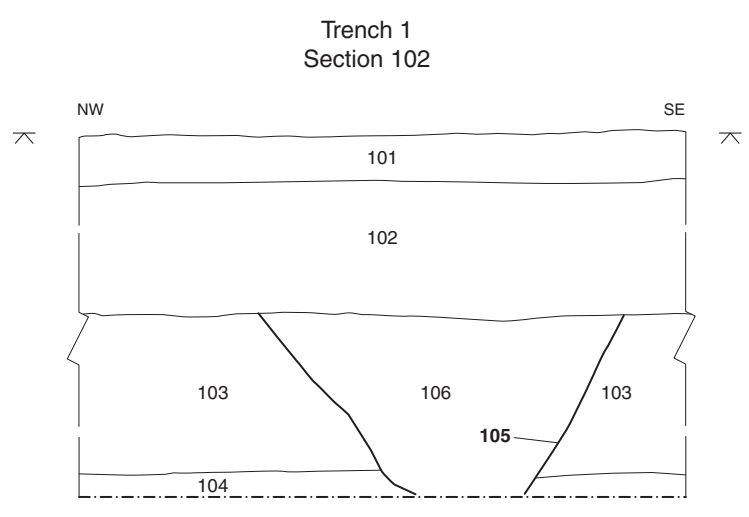
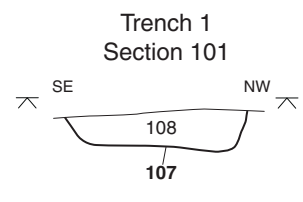


Figure 4: Sections