

Oxford Community School
Site B, Barracks Rd
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Evaluation Report**

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Oxford Community School, Site B, Barracks Lane, Oxford, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Jodie Ford and illustrated by Amy Hemmingway

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Summary

In November 2008 Oxford Archaeology undertook a four trench archaeological evaluation at Oxford Community School, Barracks Lane, Oxford, on the site of a proposed new science block. The evaluation revealed evidence of late Romano-British activity, possibly indicating the presence of a previously unknown pottery kiln within the vicinity.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between 31st October and 5th November 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological evaluation at Oxford Community School, Oxford on the site of a proposed new science block. OA was commissioned to undertake the work by Mouchel Ltd acting on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by OA in response to a Design Brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Officer (OCAO) Paul Smith and Jeremy Flawn of Mouchel Ltd (August 2008).
- 1.1.2 The evaluation comprised 4 trenches (10 m x 1.5 m) over approximately 0.16 ha (3.75 % of the development area). A geophysical investigation was carried out at the site prior to the evaluation, which revealed little of possible archaeological significance. Trench 3 (fig. 2) was located to investigate an anomaly possibly indicating the presence of ridge and furrow or similar. The remaining trenches were spread evenly across the development area, whilst avoiding known services and land-drains.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located to on the northern side of Barracks Road, Oxford, within the boundary of Oxford Community School, on land currently in use as school playing fields.
- 1.2.2 The site lies on the junction of Lower Oxford Clay with the fine grained sandstones, sand and siltstones of the Temple Cowley member of the Corralian formation. The land slopes gently to the south-east.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background has been outlined in the Design Brief (OCC 2008) and the Written Scheme of Investigation for this site (OA 2008), and is summarised below.
- 1.3.2 Roman occupation and activity is known in the vicinity of Barracks Lane, with burials, pottery and a spiked mace head being recorded from 1898 quarrying at Cowley Barracks Quarry (SMR no. PRN 3818 & 9932). Romano-British kilns and occupation at Temple Cowley (SMR 3817) and a kiln site at the Boys School (SMR 3630) have also been recorded. It is possible that the alignment of Barracks Lane from the Hollow Way may be based on an earlier Roman route. As there is reasonable evidence in the area for pottery and ceramic production, it would seem probable that associated settlement would be close by. However, as burials were encountered during quarrying at the Cowley Barracks Quarry it would seem unlikely that settlement contemporary with these exists on site due to cemeteries normally being located away from inhabitation areas.
- 1.3.3 The place name Cowley is derived from the Anglo-Saxon meaning Cufa's wood or clearing. The main focus of medieval activity in this area was based around Temple Cowley and the associated church. It would seem that during this period much of this area was agricultural land adjacent to wooded and marsh areas to the west. St Bartholemew's Chapel and Hospital were founded in 1126 by Henry I for the physical and spiritual care of lepers. The site of the hospital was located approximately 0.5 km to the west of the Oxford Community School site and it was initially known as the



Bartlemas. In 1329, Edward III transferred ownership to Oriel College, who remain the landlords today. During the Civil War, the hospital was burnt to the ground and was rebuilt by Oriel in 1649. The associated chapel is thought to date from the 14th century.

- 1.3.4 The main route into Oxford has always been the Cowley Road, part of which was known as Berrye Lane in 1605. This crossed the marsh as a causeway, past St Bartholemew's and on to Magdalen Bridge. By 1763, this causeway route had mostly fallen out of use and the course more commonly taken was across Headington Fields and along Mud Lane, now known as Barracks Lane.
- 1.3.5 The settlements of the Cowleys and the other peripheral villages to Oxford such as Littlemore, were agricultural based settlements. The open fields of Cowley were finally enclosed in 1856 with many of the freeholds being shared out between various Oxford colleges. This enclosure award set aside three one acre plots for quarries for the surveyor of highways, and although the quarries within the immediate area are considered to be post-medieval, there is a possibility for these to be of an earlier origin

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to all at Oxford Community School, in particular Sandy Alcock and Andy Loveridge for their assistance in facilitating the works.
- 1.4.2 Thanks are also extended to Paul Smith (Oxfordshire County Council) and Emily Moore (Mouchel Ltd.) for their advice and assistance prior to and during the fieldwork.
- 1.4.3 The fieldwork was carried out over 4 days by Jodie Ford (Supervisor), Pete Gane and Matt Morgan (Assistant Supervisors). The project was managed by Tim Haines.



2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- To determine the general nature of any archaeological deposits present, with reference to the results of geophysical survey of the area.
- To determine the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- To determine the approximate extent, condition and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits present.
- To determine the degree of complexity of any horizontal or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To determine the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present.
- To determine the potential of the site to provide paleo-environmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 A total of 4 trenches were excavated. These measured 10 m long by 1.5 m wide.
- 2.2.2 Trenches were excavated under constant archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. Excavation proceeded to the top of the natural geology or to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first. Care was taken to minimise damage to the trenched area and any features, or deposits.
- 2.2.3 All archaeological features were hand sampled and issued with unique context numbers, context recording was in accordance with established OA practice as detailed in the OA Field Manual (OA 1992).
- 2.2.4 A full photographic record consisting of colour digital photographs and black and white slide photography was made. Images were taken of any archaeological features and deposits, together with record shots of each trench. Trench plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50. Section drawings of features and sample sections of stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

2.3 Finds

- 2.3.1 All small finds and samples from contexts were allocated unique numbers.
- 2.3.2 Bulk finds recovered during the course of the evaluation were bagged by context.

2.4 Paleo-environmental evidence

- 2.4.1 No deposits were encountered during the course of the evaluation which were deemed suitable for environmental sampling.



3 RESULTS

3.1 Presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below on a trench by trench basis. Detailed descriptions of the deposits are not included within the main text, unless directly relevant to the discussion, otherwise they are included in the context inventory (Appendix A).
- 3.1.2 A generalised interpretation of the results can be found in section 4.

3.2 Soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The site was situated on a sand and clay natural which was clearly defined from the topsoil and subsoil. The boundary between the topsoil and subsoil was diffuse, due to the similarity of the deposits, rather than mixing caused by root disturbance.
- 3.2.2 The land on which the evaluation took place had been terraced during the 1940s to create a more level playing area and some distance the north-west is stepped upwards c 1 m and to the south-east it is stepped downwards c 1 m, at either end of the playing field. It was not clear whether the existing overburden was re-deposited during the process of this landscaping, although the presence of a possible subsoil deposit would suggest that this is unlikely.

3.3 Distribution of archaeological deposits

General

- 3.3.1 All of the trenches were machined to the top of natural clay and sand geology (see Table 1 for heights in m O.D) with archaeological deposits being observed in the northern end of trench 4 (Fig. 2).
- 3.3.2 In all trenches approximately 0.35 m of overburden, topsoil and subsoil, overlay the natural with no evidence of disturbance other than field drains.

Table 1

Trench	OD height at top of natural (m)
1	69.85
2	70.10
3	70.46
4	71.52

Trenches 1-3

- 3.3.3 Trenches 1 – 3 were excavated to the top of the natural sand and clay geology. In all three trenches this was overlain by a combined depth of c 0.3-0.35 m of topsoil and subsoil. No archaeological deposits were observed in these trenches and the overburden appeared undisturbed, other than by field drains. Some root disturbance was evident within the natural geology in these trenches.
- 3.3.4 The geophysical anomaly targeted in Trench 2 was not observed.

**Trench 4**

- 3.3.5 Trench 4 was located to the north of the evaluated area. The trench was excavated to the top of natural sand and clay geology (403), which was overlain by 0.35 m of topsoil and subsoil (401 and 402 respectively). Some evidence of root disturbance was observed within the natural geology.
- 3.3.6 A north-south aligned gully (406) (Fig. 3, plan 400, section 402) measured 0.4 m wide and 0.07 m deep, with approximately 0.8 m of its length visible in plan. The gully contained a single bluish-grey clayey-silt fill (407). No finds were recovered from the feature, which was interpreted as a drainage gully, due to the possibly water-lain clay-silt fill. The gully was truncated to the north by feature (404).
- 3.3.7 The possible linear feature (404) (Fig. 3, plan 400, section 401) appeared to be aligned east-west although only 50% of the profile was visible within the trench. As seen the feature measured 1.38 m wide by 1.5 m long and 0.58 m deep. A moderate break of slope approximately halfway down the feature's southern edge could indicate a re-cut, but no evidence of this was observed within the fills.
- 3.3.8 The feature was filled by a single bluish-grey clayey-silt (405), probably deposited by natural processes, and contained a relatively large quantity of 3rd century Roman pottery, within the top 0.15 m of the fill (Appendix A), as well as small amount of well worn fragmentary animal bone (Appendix B).
- 3.3.9 The interpretation of 404 as a linear feature is based on the single visible straight edge and relatively ditch-like profile although it is possible that upon further excavation it could be interpreted as a large pit.



4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 The evaluation produced some evidence for late Romano-British activity at the site in the form of possible ditch 404. Gully 406, which stratigraphically pre-dates 404 could be of a similar date or significantly earlier, but in the absence of any dating evidence it is not possible to determine this.
- 4.1.2 The pottery associated with ditch 404 provides evidence of late Romano-British domestic activity, or might indicate the existence of a Romano-British kiln site in the vicinity (Appendix A). However, obvious wasters are absent. Alternatively the group represents domestic activity of 3rd century date in the immediate vicinity.
- 4.1.3 More extensive evaluation might provide more conclusive evidence about the type of activity, or industry indicated by the results of this evaluation. However, the limited area of the proposed development and the relatively high level of evaluation already undertaken would suggest that further evaluation would be inappropriate.

4.2 Significance

- 4.2.1 As outlined in section 1.3 there is evidence for both Romano-British occupation and pottery production in east Oxford. The information gathered during the evaluation may indicate further evidence of domestic activity or, potentially, a previously unknown kiln site, suggesting the the Oxford pottery industry extended further east than has previously been identified.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying natural sand and clay geology.				Avg. depth (m)		0.32
				Width (m)		1.5
				Length (m)		10
Contexts						
Context no.	Type	Width (m)	Thickness (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.19	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.18	Subsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 2						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying natural sand and clay geology.				Avg. depth (m)		0.32
				Width (m)		1.5
				Length (m)		10
Contexts						
Context no.	Type	Width (m)	Thickness (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.14	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 3						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying natural sand and clay geology.				Avg. depth (m)		0.32
				Width (m)		1.5
				Length (m)		10
Contexts						
Context no.	Type	Width (m)	Thickness (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.16	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.16	Subsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-



Trench 4						
General description				Orientation	NE-SW	
Trench containing a single late Romano-British feature, cutting an undated gully. Overlain by topsoil and subsoil and cut into natural sand and clay geology.				Avg. depth (m)	0.32	
				Width (m)	1.5	
				Length (m)	10	
Contexts						
Context no.	Type	Width (m)	Thickness (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.18	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.16	Subsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
403	VOID	-	-	VOID- number unused	-	-
404	Cut	>1.38	0.6	Possible ditch	-	-
405	Fill	>1.38	0.6	Fill of ditch 404	Pottery, bone	Roman- 3 rd /4 th century
406	Cut	0.4	0.07	Gully	-	-
407	Fill	0.4	0.07	Fill of gully 406	-	-



APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By Paul Booth (OA)

The Roman pottery from context 405

- B.1.1 A group of some 47 Roman pottery sherds weighing 765 g from context 405 was rapidly scanned. The majority are reduced coarse wares, most if not all of which derive from kilns of the Oxford industry. A late 3rd century date is likely for the group.
- B.1.2 The only certainly non-local sherd was a fragment of a dish rim in black-burnished ware from Dorset with a general date range of 3rd-4th century. A single shell-tempered sherd may be of fairly local origin but is not a product of the Oxford kilns. All the other sherds are certain or probable Oxford products. They include a single white ware fragment, four sherds of oxidised coarse wares and three white mortarium rims, the remainder being reduced coarse wares in a variety of fabrics within the fine to medium sand-tempered range (ware groups R10 and R30 in the OA Roman pottery recording system).
- B.1.3 The reduced coarse ware sherds include two everted rims from jars, neither of which is particularly diagnostic in chronological terms, being found on Oxford types such as R24 and R38, both of which have generic 1st-4th century date ranges. The best dating for the group comes from the three mortaria. All fall into the continuum of Young (1977) types M17 and M18, dated AD 240-300. The complete absence of Oxford colour-coated ware sherds would support a date before the 4th century AD.
- B.1.4 The site is located within the area occupied by component complexes of the Oxford Roman pottery industry. It is not possible to determine if the present group represents production waste, but if it did it would indicate the existence of a previously unknown complex in this area of East Oxford. Such an interpretation is possible, but the group is too small to allow certainty. Obvious wasters are absent. Alternatively the group represents domestic activity of 3rd century date in the immediate vicinity.

B.2 Animal bone

By Rebecca Nicholson

- 4.2.2 Six animal bone fragments were recovered by hand from context (405). Bone preservation was poor; all fragments were rounded and most exhibited surface erosion, which is consistent with relatively shallow burial or with material which has weathered above ground before burial. One pig lower incisor and five fragments of large mammal (cattle sized) long bone were recovered.



APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 2008, Oxford Community School, Barracks Lane, Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation.

OA 1992, Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OCC 2008, Oxford Community School, Barracks Road, Oxford, Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation

Young, C J, 1977 The Roman pottery industry of the Oxford region, Brit Archaeol Rep (Brit Ser) 43, Oxford.



APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Oxford Community School, Barracks Lane, Oxford

Site code: OXCOMB08

Grid reference: NGR SP 5390 0530

Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: 31st October 2008 - 5th November 2008

Area of site: 0.16 ha

Summary of results: 4 trenches measuring 10 m x 1.5 m were excavated, revealing some evidence of late Romano British domestic activity or pottery production.

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 Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2008.117



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Figure 1: Site location

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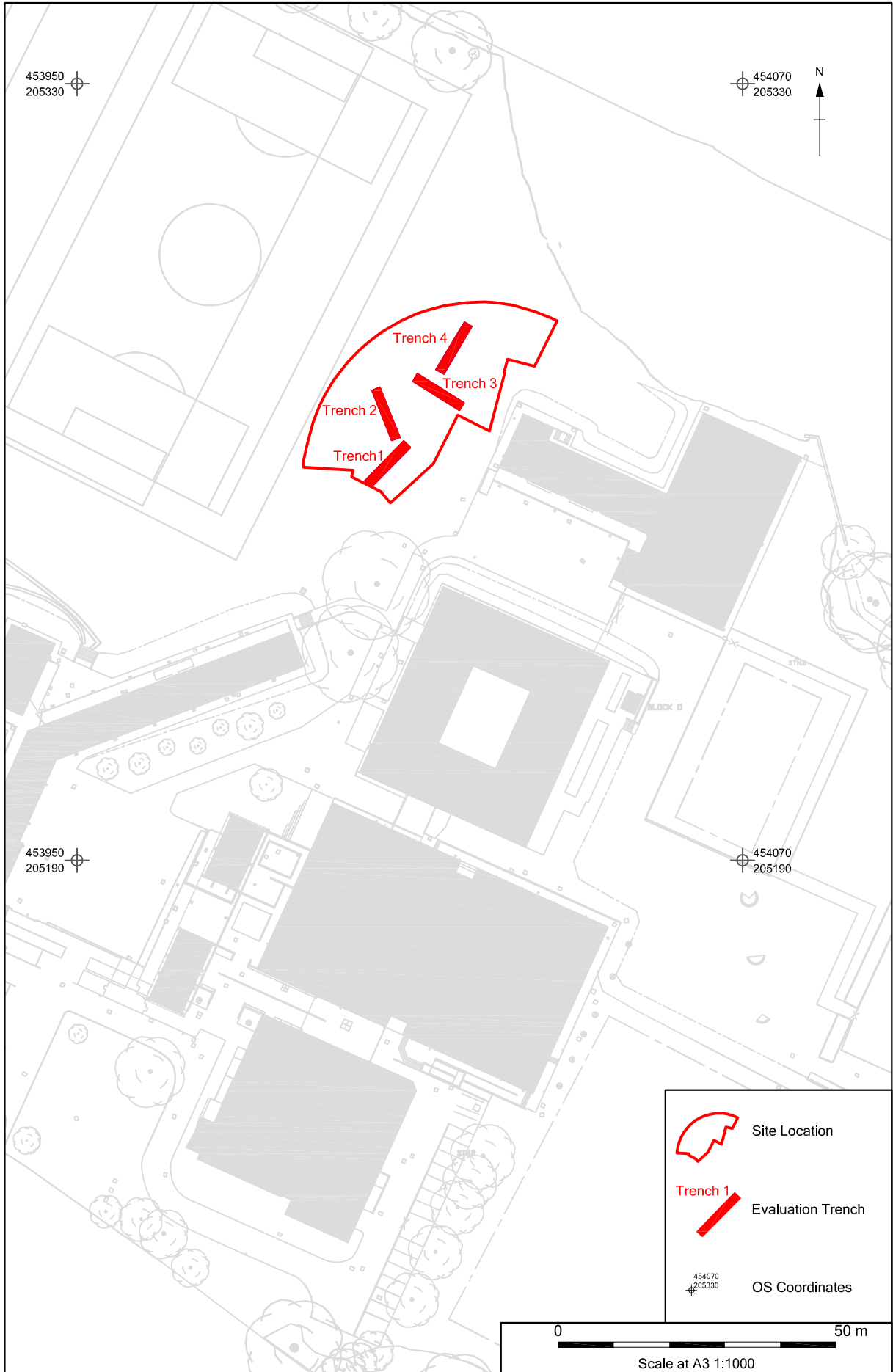
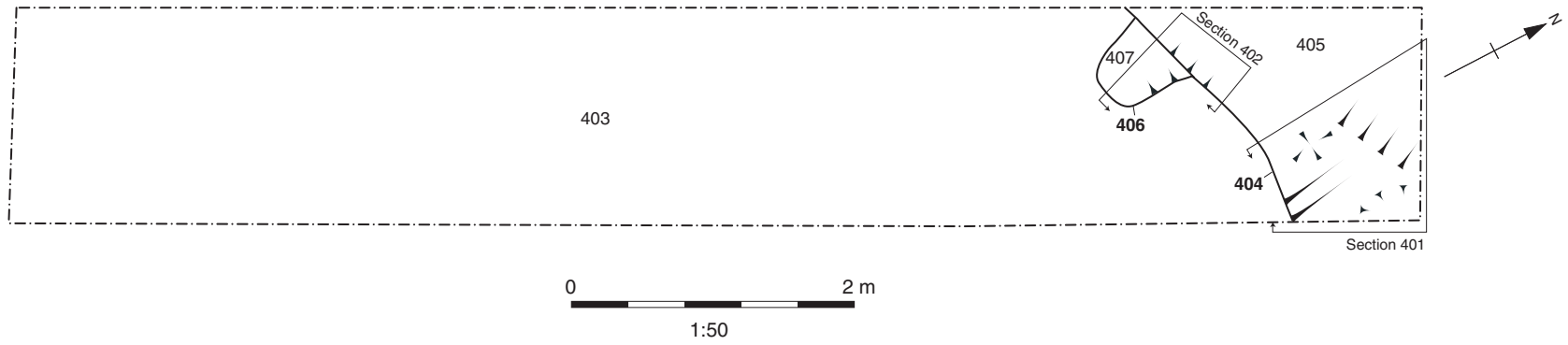
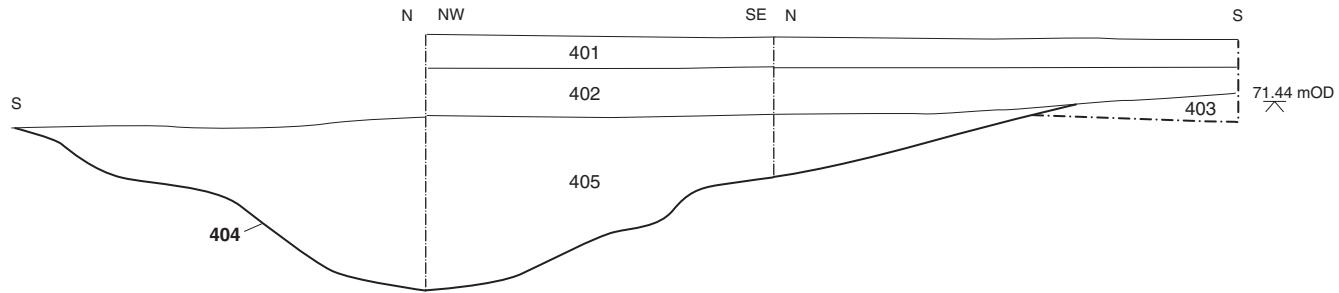


Figure 2: Trench Locations

Trench 4
Plan 400



Trench 4
Section 401



Trench 4
Section 402

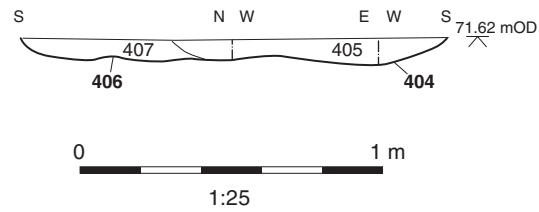


Figure 3 : Trench 4, plan 400 and sections 401-402