

# Site 2

## RAF High Wycombe Buckinghamshire



### Archaeological Evaluation Report



October 2009

**Client: Debut Services Ltd**

Issue No: 1  
OA Job No: 4126  
NGR: SU 834 979



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## Site 2, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

### *ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*Between the 21st and 23rd of July 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Site 2, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 834 979) on behalf of Debut Services Ltd. The evaluation revealed extensive truncation within the northern extent of the site exposing colluvial deposits directly below layers of modern made ground and landscaping deposits. Intact stratigraphy was observed within the south-west extent of the development area with evidence of activity including pottery and a probable post-medieval field boundary ditch observed. The exact location of Grim's Ditch was established, outside the footprint of the proposed development, although no dating evidence was recovered from its fills.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between the 21st and 23rd of July 2008, OA carried out a field evaluation at Site 2, Raf High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 834 979) on behalf of Debut Services Ltd. This was in respect of a planning application for the construction of two three storey buildings (Planning Application No. 07/07219/FUL).
- 1.1.2 Scott Wilson Ltd, on behalf of Debut Services Ltd, produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (SW 2008) for this project which meet the requirements of the Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation, produced by David Radford of Buckinghamshire County Council (BCAS 2008).
- 1.1.3 OA produced a WSI showing how it meet these requirements (OA 2008a)

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 RAF High Wycombe is located approximately 6 km north-west of the town of High Wycombe (Fig. 1). Site 2 is located on the southern edge of the village of Walter's Ash. The site is currently an open area of terraced ground, partially occupied by three tennis courts and areas of hardstanding measuring approximately 0.7 hectares, and is bounded on all sides by MOD property.
- 1.2.2 The site lies at a height of between 186 m and 189 m above OD and the underlying geology is clay with flints overlying soft chalk and flints (British Geological Survey, sheet no. 255).

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 A full discussion of the archaeological background is available in the Desk-Based Assessment produced by Scott Wilson Ltd (Scott Wilson 2008). A brief summary is presented below.

- 1.3.2 The proposed development is located to the north-east of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Grim's Ditch (SAM 35331). The monument runs north from the site through Buckinghamshire then turns east into Hertfordshire covering a distance of 18 km. Where the monument lies within the site it comprises a bank topped with a hedge. A flanking ditch to the east has been filled in.
- 1.3.3 Excavations on other sections of the monument carried out in 1973 and in 1991 have indicated that a level area or berm would have separated the bank and ditch. Evidence for a palisade trench to support a wooden fence was also found along the outer edge of the ditch. A watching brief carried out to the north west earlier this year did not find any evidence of the palisade or other features associated with the monument (OA, 2008b).
- 1.3.4 Excavations have found no conclusive evidence to date the monument. Dates ranging from the Iron Age to the Saxon period have been postulated.
- 1.3.5 Lynchets of possible Roman date have been recorded 300 m north west of the site. Other Roman remains found in the area include an extensive area of iron smelting slag and pottery associated with well-developed lynchets found in Park Wood *c* 200 m west of the site and a bank and ditch in The Coppice *c* 300 m south of the site. Both would suggest industrial activity of Roman date.
- 1.3.6 No evidence for early medieval activity on the site has been recorded, beyond the use of the term Grim's Ditch which appears to be of Anglo-Saxon origin. Medieval activity is represented by a scheduled farmstead some 80 m west of the site.
- 1.3.7 The main post-medieval feature of note is the bank and ditch in Park Wood. This boundary ditch has a north-south alignment from immediately north of the site and may pass through the development site. A survey of the feature, carried out by the National Trust, found that the bank was up to 2 m wide and 0.5 m high. The ditch was up to 2 m wide and 0.3 m deep.
- 1.3.8 The Buckinghamshire SMR states that the park is not earlier than the earliest reference of 1574, and is therefore firmly post-medieval in origin.
- 1.3.9 The development site lies in an area of land that has been cleared since at least the 16th century, when a route was created through the wood to allow Elizabeth I to access Bradenham Manor from Hampden Manor safely during a royal Progress in 1566 (Parks and Gardens entry). This clearance is shown on the 1796 county map and is known as the 'Queen's Gap' (Gilchrist 2000, 8). Langley, writing in 1797 states that 'the greater part of the parish was formerly emparked but at present is divided into farms' (ibid, 166).

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present. In particular to identify any features associated with the ditch and bank known as Grim's Ditch that could shed further light on the Iron Age construction, use and abandonment of the monument.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To provide information allowing a mitigation strategy to be formulated preserving significant archaeological deposits, (if found) *in situ*.
- 2.1.5 To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of five trenches in total, 2 trenches of 20 m length and 2 of 30 m length located within the footprints of the proposed buildings and a fifth trench of 15 m length located over a proposed service trench crossing Grim's Ditch (Fig. 2). All the trenches measured 1.6 m wide.
- 3.1.2 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation by machine proceeded by spits down to either undisturbed natural deposits or to the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and, where possible, to retrieve finds and environmental samples. The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50 and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trenches and sections were photographed using digital photography and also 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 collected by context.



### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were identified during 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 was located on a south-east facing slope, with 2 distinct terraces visible. Soil conditions were moist with no waterlogging.

### 4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 No significant archaeological deposits were encountered in Trenches 1, 2 and 4. Undisturbed features were only encountered within Trenches 3 and 5.

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 Description of deposits

#### *Trench 1*

5.1.1 This measured 20 m in length and was located north of the first tennis court on a terrace approximately 1.2 m below the level of the lawn fronting the Officer's Mess. The stratigraphy was similar throughout its length. Because of the proximity of a power cable at the eastern end of the trench the width was reduced to 0.8 m at this point, however it was felt that this would not effect the results observed.

5.1.2 An orange-brown clay (102) containing many small to medium sub-angular flints was encountered at a depth of between 0.2 m and 0.25 m below ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 100 and 102). This was a very clean deposit and represents a naturally formed colluvium. This was overlain by a 0.15 m deep layer of yellow-brown silt clay (101), a probable landscaping deposit. This was sealed by a 0.1 m thick layer of a grey-brown silt clay (100), the present day topsoil and turf.

#### *Trench 2*

5.1.3 This measured 30 m in length and was located within the first tennis court and aligned south-east to north-west. Prior to excavation the presence of two water mains was detected. To avoid excavating within the region of the pipes the trench was

moved 2 m southwards along its axis to avoid one and an unexcavated baulk was left over the other splitting the trench into 2 parts.

- 5.1.4 The undisturbed natural, an orange-brown sandy clay (206) was encountered at a depth of 0.35 m below the level of the tennis court at the northern end of the trench sloping down to 0.95 m below the tennis court at the southern end (Fig. 3, Sections 200 and 201). Overlying this layer within the southern half of the trench was a lens of light grey-brown clay silt (207). This represents a pocket of colluvial silts within the natural clay. At the northern end of the trench layer 206 was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of yellow-brown clay silt (205), a layer of subsoil similar to layer 101. This deposit tapered off towards the middle of the trench, probably truncated during the initial construction phase of the tennis court.
- 5.1.5 At the southern end of the trench layers 206 and 207 were overlaid by a succession of layers of made ground, a 0.25 m deep layer of green-grey silt clay (212), a 0.2 m deep layer of dark grey silt clay (211), a 0.16 m deep layer of a light yellow-orange clay (210), a 0.18 m deep layer of light grey clay with chalk flecking (209) and a 0.06 m deep layer of fine crushed limestone (208). These layers combine to raise the ground level by 0.8 m at the southern end of the trench.
- 5.1.6 Layer 205 was cut by a 0.7 m wide by 0.35 m deep trench (202) containing a machine extruded clay land drain and backfilled with a clay infill (204) and an upper gravel fill (203).
- 5.1.7 Overlying the subsoil 205, the land drain and the made ground was a 0.12 m deep layer of fine dark grey stone chippings (201), the base for the 0.2 m deep tarmac tennis court surface (200)

### *Trench 3*

- 5.1.8 This measured 20 m long and was located at the base of the slope, south of the route of Grim's Ditch. The western end of the trench was excavated through topsoil and turf east of the second tennis court and ran south-west to north-east into an area of hardstanding.
- 5.1.9 The underlying natural, an orange-brown sandy clay (305) was encountered at a depth of 1.0 m below the level of the tarmac at the eastern end of the trench (Fig. 3, Section 300). This was overlaid by a 0.4 m deep layer of orange-brown silt clay containing numerous small to medium sub-angular flints (304) (Fig. 3, Sections 300 and 301), a colluvial deposit. This was overlaid by 0.15 m deep lenses of a dark yellow-brown silt clay (303), also a probable colluvial deposit.
- 5.1.10 At the western end of the trench layer 304 was cut by 2 features. Running north-west to south-east across the trench was a 1 m wide ditch (309) (Fig. 3, Section 301 and Fig 4, Trench 3 plan). It was filled with a light yellow-brown silt clay (308), a

probable silting deposit. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature, although its profile suggests a probable field boundary ditch.

- 5.1.11 Also cutting layer 304 was an irregular ovoid feature measuring 0.85 m by 0.6 m (310) (Fig. 3, Section 302 and Fig. 4, Trench 4 plan). Upon excavation it was found to have steeply sloping sides to the south and east, while the northern end was undercut with a circular void sloping downwards to the north suggesting that the feature may be a tree-throw-pit, possibly later disturbed by animal activity. The bottom 0.04 m depth of the feature was filled by a light grey-brown silt clay (311). The remainder was filled with a grey-brown silt clay (312) which produced 2 fragments of pottery, one an abraded fragment of black-burnished ware and the second a shard of quartz sand tempered ware, possibly produced within the region at the Fulmer/Hedgerley kilns east of High Wycombe. Both fragments date to the 2nd or 3rd century.
- 5.1.12 Overlying these 2 features and layers 303 and 304 elsewhere in the trench was a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (307). This deposit probably represents a layer of worked soil, possibly ploughsoil, predating the acquisition of the site by the MOD. This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt loam (306), the present day topsoil and turf.
- 5.1.13 Within the area of the hardstanding layer 306 had been truncated prior to its construction (Cut 302, not shown in section). A layer of dark red-brown crushed ironstone (301), 0.2 m in depth had been laid directly over layer 307, forming a hardcore base for the hardstanding's tarmac surface (300).

#### *Trench 4*

- 5.1.14 This measured 30 m long and was located within the second tennis court on the bottom terrace.
- 5.1.15 The underlying natural, an orange-brown clay with numerous sub-angular flints (402) was encountered at a depth of 0.25 m below the tennis court at the northern end of the trench sloping down to 0.6 m below the court at the southern end (Fig. 3, Sections 400 and 401). This slope reflects the original lie of the land prior to construction of the terraces. Overlying this deposit at the southern end of the trench was a layer of light grey brown clay (403) (Section 401), measuring 0.5 m deep at the southern end of the trench and reducing in thickness towards the north. This represents a layer of modern made ground laid to level the area of the tennis court.
- 5.1.16 This made ground and the natural within the remainder of the trench was sealed by a 0.14 m deep layer of crushed limestone (401), the hardcore base for the 0.08 m deep tarmac tennis court playing surface (400).

*Trench 5*

- 5.1.17 This measured 15 m in length and was located over the proposed route for a service trench to cross the Monument known as Grim's Ditch. The south-western end of the trench was reduced by a length of 1 m due to the presence of a live service.
- 5.1.18 The underlying natural, an orange-brown sandy clay (505) was encountered at a depth of 0.75 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 500 and 501). This was overlaid by a 0.35 m deep layer of red-brown silt clay (504), a layer of colluvium containing small to medium sub-angular flints.
- 5.1.19 At the south-western end of the trench this was cut by a shallow sloping feature (511) (Fig. 3, Section 500 and Fig. 4, Trench 5 plan) aligned south-east to north-west. Just over half the feature was exposed in section, giving a depth of 0.8 m and a width to the deepest point of 3.4 m, giving a probable total width of 6.8 m.
- 5.1.20 The primary fill of the feature was a 0.18 m deep layer of dark brown silt clay (510), a probable silting deposit. This was overlaid by a 0.12 m deep layer of yellow-brown silt clay (509), also a probable silting deposit. Sealing this was a 0.12 m deep layer of very dark grey/black silt clay (508). This had a high organic content suggesting that it may be a layer of leaf mould collecting in the base of the ditch while it was open for a long period. Filling the remainder of the feature was a 0.3 m deep layer of brown silt loam (507). This deposit filled the feature to the level of the surrounding area and probably represents a modern landscaping deposit, possibly topsoil stripped during the construction of the two terraces to the north.
- 5.1.21 At the north-eastern end of the trench Layer 504 was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of very dark grey clay silt (503) containing fragments of brick and probably represents the original topsoil. Cutting this layer was a vertically edged cut with a flat base (502) (Fig. 3, Section 501 and Fig. 4, Trench 5 plan). This was aligned south-west to north-east and ran parallel to the southern edge of the lower tennis court, and is the probable original edge of the terrace excavated for the lower tennis court. It was backfilled by grey-brown silt clay (501) containing fragments of frogged bricks, creamware pottery and bottle glass. This represent a landscaping layer deposited between the cut 502 for the lower terrace and the French drain surrounding the tennis court.
- 5.1.22 Overlying the southern extent of 503 and the levelling layer 507 was a layer of red-brown silt clay (506) up to 0.15 m in depth. This is a probable layer of redeposited natural clay used as a levelling layer. Overlying this and running the full length of the trench was a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay loam (500), a modern landscaping layer of topsoil and turf.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 The area of the trenching equates to approximately 11.6% of the proposed buildings footprint. The similarity of stratigraphy within Trenches 1, 2 and 4 suggest that the results can be applied throughout the north and centre of the site, while within the southern extent of the site the low density of features observed also gives confidence that the interpretation can be applied in that area.

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 Trenches 1, 2 and 4 have shown that a large degree of truncation has taken place within these areas, with the original topsoil, subsoil and in places, the top of the underlying natural clay having been removed as part of the construction process for the two terraces. This activity has severely reduced the archaeological potential within these areas leaving only the possibility of observing truncated deeper features cut into the natural. The removal of both the topsoil and topsoil from site has also left no evidence for activity to be deduced from residual finds.

6.2.2 Trench 3 was located at the base of the slope leaving the majority of its archaeological stratigraphy intact. While no dating evidence was recovered from the probable field boundary ditch 309, its alignment roughly parallel to Bradenham Wood Lane to the east suggests that it may be medieval or post-medieval in date and related to the division of the former parkland into farms mentioned by Langley in 1797 (*ibid*, 166).

6.2.3 The presence of recorded Romano-British activity to the north-west, west and south of the site would account for pottery recovered within the tree-throw-hole (310) and may suggest woodland clearance during this period, possibly associated with the iron smelting activity found in Park Wood, c 200m west of the development area. The lack of features would suggest that this area was outside the main centre of Romano-British activity.

6.2.4 The exact location of Grim's Ditch was established in Trench 5. The outside edge of the ditch was located 15m south-east of the existing scheduled monument boundary, further to the south than previously thought. The bank which can be observed south of the trench overlies the southern edge of the ditch and is presumably part of the modern landscaping of the area and is probably associated with the access road immediately to the south rather than being the bank associated with Grim's Ditch.

6.2.5 No evidence for features associated with Grim's Ditch or for the post-medieval bank and ditch observed in Park Wood continuing into the site was observed during this phase of evaluation.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1						
	100	Layer	0.08 m	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
	101	Layer	0.17 m	Made ground, levelling layer	-	C20th
	102	Layer	> 0.2 m	Natural clay	-	-
2						
	200	Layer	0.2 m	Tarmac playing surface	-	C20th
	201	Layer	0.12 m	Hardcore base for tarmac	-	C20th
	202	Cut	0.3 m	Trench for clay land drain	-	C19th/ C20th
	203	Fill	0.13 m	Upper fill of land drain trench	-	C19th/ C20th
	204	Fill	0.3 m	Lower fill of land drain trench	-	C19th/ C20th
	205	Layer	0.13 m	Subsoil, earlier worked soil	-	C19th/ C20th
	206	Layer	>0.4 m	Natural clay	-	-
	207	Layer	> 0.2 m	Lens of colluvium	-	-
	208	Layer	0.06 m	Levelling layer	-	C20th
	209	Layer	0.18 m	Made ground	-	C20th
	210	Layer	0.16 m	Made ground	-	C20th
	211	Layer	0.2 m	Made ground	-	C20th
	212	Layer	0.27 m	Made ground	-	C20th
3						
	300	Layer	0.08 m	Tarmac hardstanding	-	C20th
	301	Layer	0.2 m	Hardcore base for tarmac	-	C20th
	302	Cut	0.3 m	Construction cut for hardstanding	-	C20th
	303	Layer	0.15 m	Lens of colluvium	-	-
	304	Layer	0.4 m	Natural clay	-	-

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
3						
	305	Layer	> 0.25 m	Natural clay	-	-
	306	Layer	0.3 m	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
	307	Layer	0.25 m	Earlier worked soil	-	C19th/ C20th
	308	Fill	0.2 m	Fill of ditch	-	C18th?
	309	Cut	0.2 m	Field boundary ditch	-	C18th ?
	310	Cut	0.38 m	Tree-throw-hole	-	C2nd- C3rd
	311	Fill	0.04 m	Primary fill of 310	-	C2nd- C3rd
	312	Fill	0.34 m	Upper fill of 310	Pottery	C2nd- C3rd
4						
	400	Layer	0.08 m	Tarmac playing surface	-	C20th
	401	Layer	0.14 m	Hardcore base for tarmac	-	C20th
	402	Layer	> 0.2 m	Natural clay	-	-
	403	Layer	0.5 m	Made ground	-	C20th
5						
	500	Layer	0.15 m	Modern landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
	501	Fill	0.6 m	Modern backfill	Brick, glass, pottery	C20th
	502	Cut	0.6 m	Terrace for lower tennis court	-	C20th
	503	Layer	0.15 m	Original topsoil layer	-	C18th/ C19th
	504	Layer	0.35 m	Colluvium	-	-
	505	Layer	> 0.2 m	Natural clay	-	-
	506	Layer	0.15 m	Made ground, redeposited natural clay	-	C20th
	507	Fill	0.3 m	Modern levelling layer in top of Grim's Ditch	-	C20th

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
5						
	508	Fill	0.12 m	Silting deposit	-	-
	509	Fill	0.18 m	Silting deposit	-	-
	510	Fill	0.18 m	Silting deposit	-	-
	511	Cut	0.8m	Grim's Ditch	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

BCAS 2008 *Site 2, RAF High Wycombe :Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation (Trial Trenching)*

IFA 2001 *Standard Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition. ed. D. Wilkinson)

OA, 2004 *Oxford Archaeology Environmental Sampling Guidelines*

OA, 2008a *Site 2, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire - Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation*

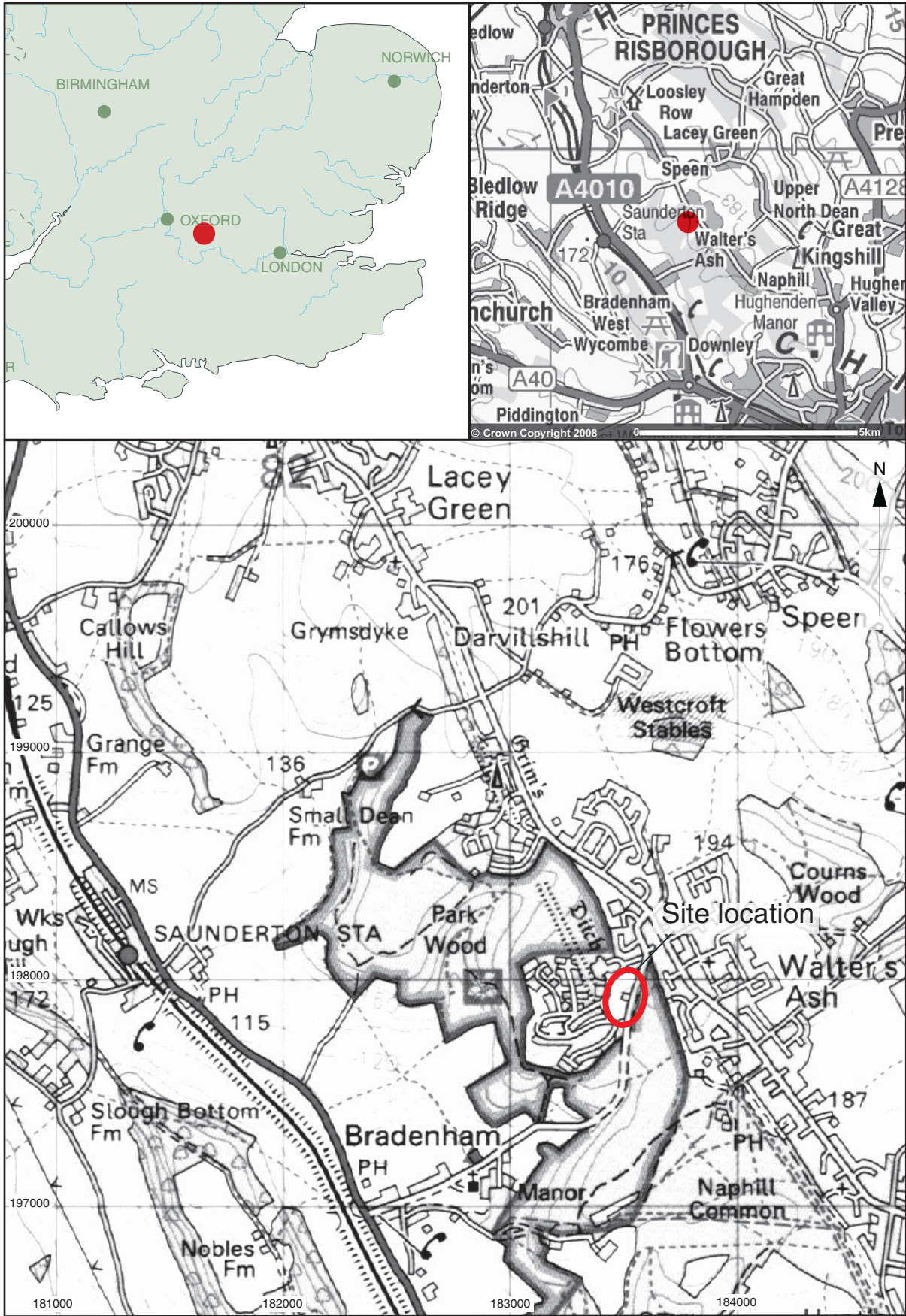
OA, 2008b *Grim's Ditch, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire - Archaeological Watching Brief Report (Forthcoming)*

SW 2008 *RAF High Wycombe: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation*



**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS****Site name:** Site 2, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire**Site code:** BRAHWY 08**Grid reference:** Centred at SU 834 979**Type of evaluation:** 4 machine excavated trenches**Date and duration of project:** 21st to 23rd of July 2008, 3 days**Area of site:** 0.7 hectare**Summary of results:** The evaluation revealed extensive truncation within the northern extent of the site exposing colluvial deposits directly below layers of modern made ground and landscaping deposits. Undisturbed ground was observed within the south-west extent of the site with evidence of activity including pottery and a probable post-medieval field boundary ditch observed. The outside edge of Grim's Ditch was encountered located further to the south than previously thought.**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service under the following Accession Number: AYBCM:2008.122

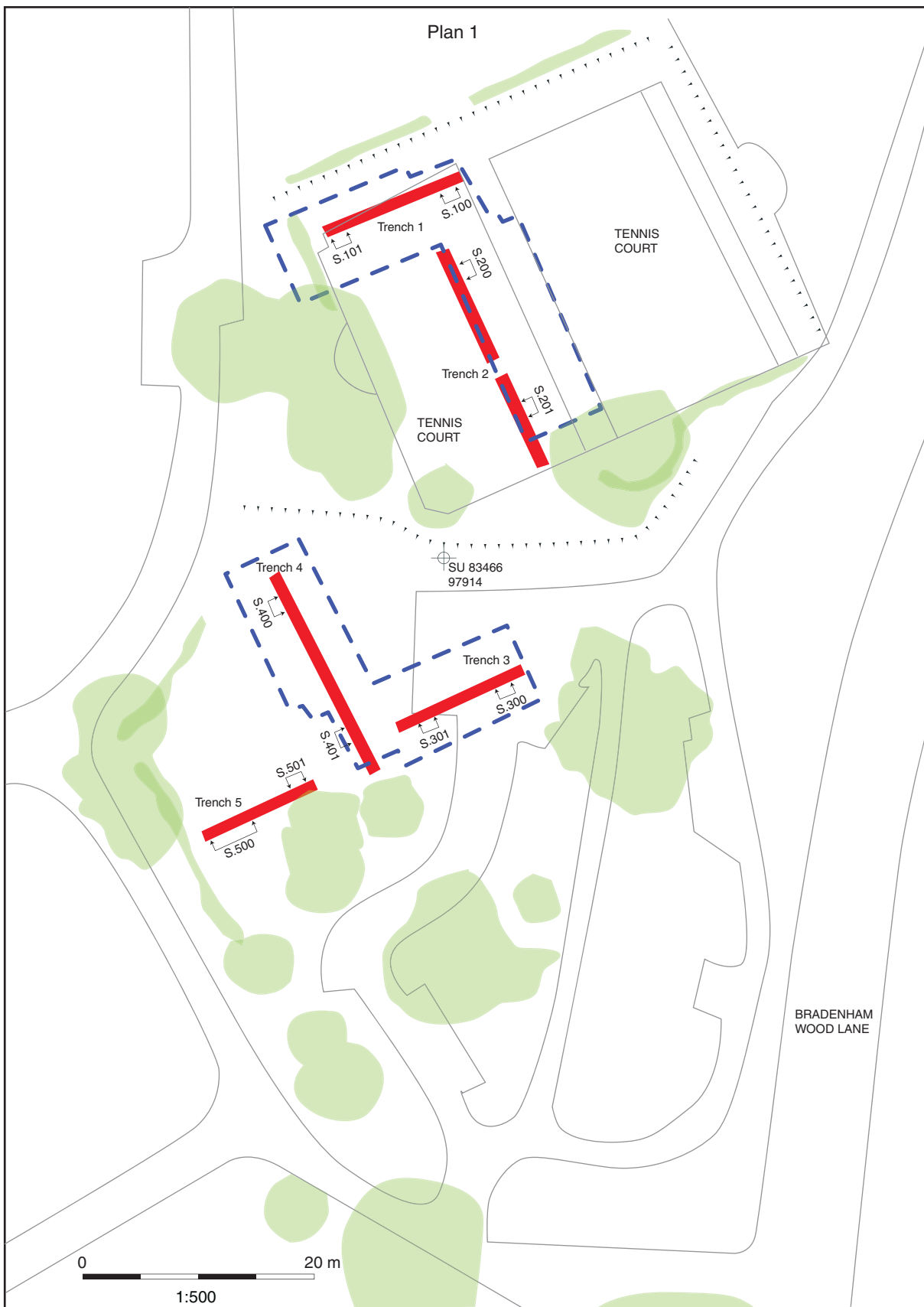




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Figure 1: Site location





- Building footprint
- Trench

Figure 2 : Trench locations



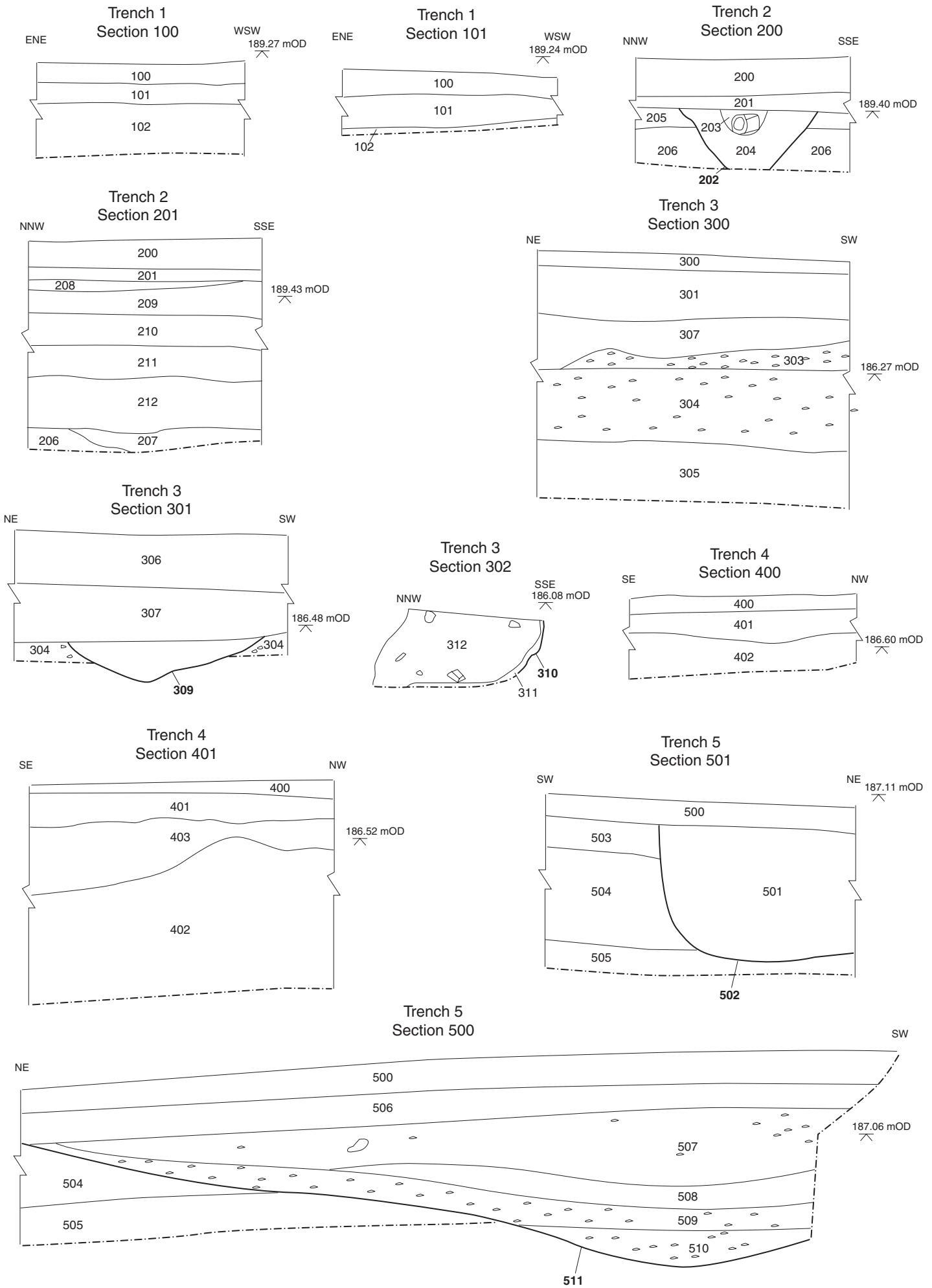


Figure 3 : Sections





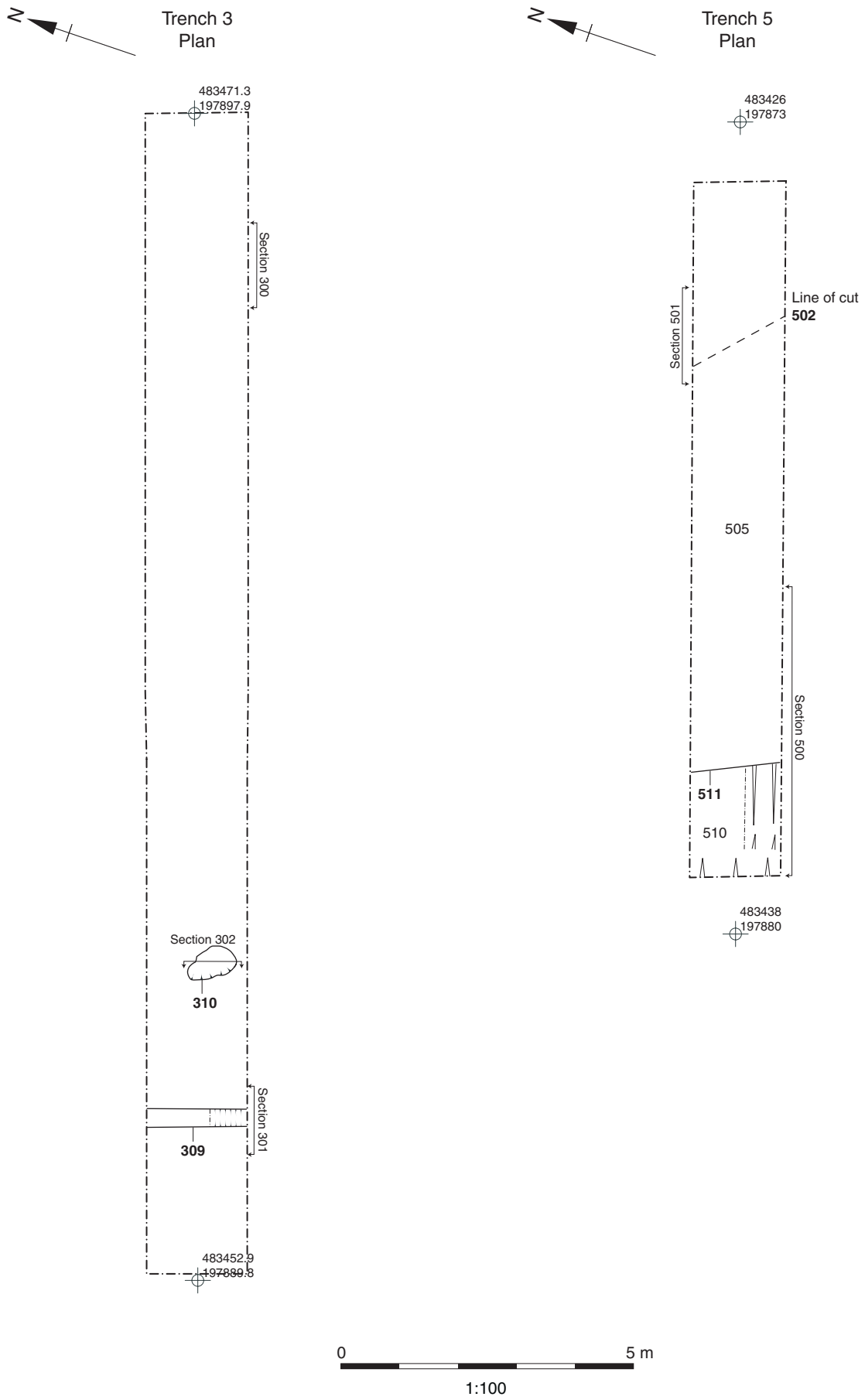


Figure 4 : Plans of trenches 3 and 5







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