

Network Rail

Trent Valley

West Coast Mainline Upgrade

Staffordshire: Lichfield to Tamworth

Site 4, Netherstowe Lane



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



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**Network Rail, Trent Valley  
West Coast Mainline Upgrade  
Staffordshire: Lichfield to Tamworth  
Site 4 Netherstowe Lane**

NGR : SK 126 108

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*During November 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Site 4 Netherstowe Lane near Lichfield, Staffordshire (NGR SK 126 108) on behalf of Network Rail. The evaluation consisted of a single trench, which revealed a post-medieval metalled track pre-dating the construction of the railway.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In November 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Site 4, Netherstowe Lane Bridge, near Lichfield, Staffordshire, as part of the rail improvements scheme on behalf of Network Rail. The development site is situated at NGR SK 126 108 and is approximately 890 m<sup>2</sup> in area.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies at c 84 m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and overlies Keuper Sandstones (BGS Sheet 154). The evaluated area is north of the old bridge where Netherstowe Lane crosses the West Coast Mainline railway. The site itself is a flat area of landscaped grass with a scattered trees. The site had been partly truncated for the construction of the new bridge, prior to the evaluation (Fig. 1).

#### 1.3 Previous work and project background

1.3.1 In 2002, when Network Rail Order 2 went to Public Inquiry, Staffordshire County Council requested that further and more detailed archaeological work should be undertaken on known crop-marks along the route and within fields with ancient field names depicted on Parish Tithe maps.

1.3.2 The Council also requested that an all-encompassing archaeological project design be produced to cover the construction works proposed under Order 2. This work (*West Coast Mainline Upgrade - Trent Valley. Outline Proposal for Phase 1 Works, OA 2004*) was undertaken by OA and included provision for both evaluation trenches and watching briefs.

#### 1.4 Archaeological and historical background

1.4.1 The following background information is reproduced from the Heritage Impact Assessment produced by OA for Railtrack but never issued due to the collapse of the latter. The "study corridor" refers to a corridor 500m either side of the railway line which was the subject of the Impact Assessment

#### 1.4.2 General

1.4.3 Between 1960 and 1976 J. K. St Joseph and later J. Pickering carried out regular aerial reconnaissance of the central section of the study corridor, following the discovery of a large number of crop-marks on the Gravel Terrace within the Tame Valley. As a result of this research a number of archaeological 'rescue' excavations were carried out in the early 1970s in the Fisherwick area in response to gravel extraction, which threatened to destroy a number of crop-mark sites within this area of seemingly high archaeological potential. The majority of these excavations were located c. 2 km to the north-east of the study corridor. One excavation was undertaken within the study corridor c 300 m north-east of the line of the railway. The results of these excavations were published in a British Archaeological Reports volume in 1979 entitled '*Fisherwick: The Reconstruction of an Iron Age Landscape*' (Smith *et al.*, 1979).

1.4.4 In 1980, Christopher Smith published a summary of his doctoral thesis for the University of Nottingham on the historical development of the parishes of Alrewas, Fisherwick and Whittington, in *Transactions of the Southern Staffordshire Archaeological Society* Vol XIX. Smith's study area forms a broad north-south strip which encompasses the central section of the WCML study corridor between eastings SK 16 (Whittington) and SK 19 (River Tame). The study involved detailed examination of documentary and cartographic sources, air photographs, and also involved several fieldwalking surveys. The survey revealed concentrations of material from the prehistoric to post-medieval period at various locations within his study area. Smith attempted to reconstruct the landscape of his study area at four periods in time: the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, AD200, c. AD1300 and the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Prehistoric*

1.4.5 Excavations on the Gravel Terrace at Fisherwick, c. 2 km to the north-east of the study corridor, prior to gravel extraction in 1968 and 1973-4, have revealed further evidence of prehistoric activity in the form of a possible Neolithic settlement and extensive Iron Age activity. The latter includes Iron Age settlements believed to have been agricultural in nature - small farmsteads surrounded by extensive field systems. It has been suggested (Smith 1977 quoted in Hodder 1982, 19) that the Tame Gravel Terrace was divided by a series of permanent ditched boundaries during the first millennium BC, as the result of population increase. Excavations at Fisherwick revealed that pre-medieval population levels within the Valley are likely to have been considerably greater than was previously supposed (Smith 1979, 103).

#### *Roman*

1.4.6 Excavations in 1968 prior to gravel extraction at Fisherwick, c. 2 km to the north-east of the study corridor, revealed a Romano-British farmstead consisting of four circular huts, pens and palisaded enclosures, adjacent to a drove-way. The farm, dated to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, was believed to have specialised in stock-rearing. In addition, traces of Roman activity have been found within the

historic core of Tamworth and it is possible that there may have been an earlier settlement here prior to the early medieval *burh* (Staffs SMR).

### *Medieval*

- 1.4.7 There were a number of known medieval settlements within the study area, some of which later became deserted and which have left no trace. The settlements include Lichfield, Streethay, Whittington (all extant) and *Fisherwick* (deserted), located just outside the study corridor, and *Tamhorn*, *Horton*, *Fulfen* and *Morughale* (all deserted), located within the study corridor. These settlements would have provided a focus for the community within the parish. In addition, there were probably a number of smaller secondary settlements in the form of isolated farmsteads located away from the villages. The identification of these is less straightforward and is primarily based on buildings shown on the earliest maps consulted and place-name evidence.
- 1.4.8 Fisherwick, although not mentioned in the Domesday Book, is recorded as a manor in 1167 (VCH xiv, 239). The settlement no longer exists but is believed to lie outside the study corridor, c. 1.5 km to the north-east of the railway (Hurst 1967, 45 and VCH Staffs xiv, 239).
- 1.4.9 Tamhorn and Horton are both mentioned in Domesday and formed a township by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, with Horton apparently more important (VCH Staffs xiv, 239). The township of Tamhorn and Horton is listed in a Subsidy Roll of 1327 when 12 people were assessed for subsidy. Smith (1980, 7) identified the possible location of the DMVs of Tamhorn and Horton through concentrations of medieval pottery and building material found during field-walking in the early 1970s. The spread of artefacts was too dense to be simply residual material within a manure scatter used to assist cultivation. It should however be noted that the VCH (XIV 1990, 240) suggests that the site of Horton village may also lie close to, or on, the present site of the small cluster of houses at Hademore, immediately to the south of the railway.

### *Fisherwick Park*

- 1.4.10 The Railway line between Fisherwick Brook and Hademore cuts the southern edge of a formal post-medieval park called Fisherwick Park. The park is not listed in English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens. The park was created to provide a setting around a 'very proper brick house' (possibly located on or near the site of the medieval manor) built by John Skeffington in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (VCH Staffs xiv, 243-4).
- 1.4.11 The park was enclosed by a park pale (boundary) intended to keep deer and rabbits out of the park grounds. The park was planted with a large number of trees and by the 1680s the trees had 'grown to a magnitude (in number) almost beyond belief' (*ibid.*, 244). Two avenues led through the park to Fisherwick Hall (c. 1.5 km to the north-east of the railway) aligned on the Whittington and Tamhorn churches. The park increased in size in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, evidently to the north-east (VCH

Staffs xiv, 244), absorbing enclosed farmland adjacent (Smith 1980, 5). In 1747 the park covered an area of 450 acres; in 1760 this had grown to 571 acres. A map of the park dated 1760 shows a fence around the perimeter of the park and the broad avenue leading to Fisherwick Park from an entrance by Hademore Lodge. The map shows little detail, other than a depiction of land within the park boundary and the enclosed fields to the east.

- 1.4.12 Between c. 1766-79 Fisherwick Hall was demolished and rebuilt for Lord Donegall. This involved landscaping of the park by Lancelot (Capability) Brown, following an Act of 1766 stopping up all public roads through the park. The two avenues were removed and replaced with two new drives, which led to south to the lodge at Hademore, and east to Stubby Leas (outside the study area). Brown planted 10,000 trees and created a boundary plantation enclosing a ride along the south and east sides of the park (VCH Staffs xiv, 244). A plan of the Estate of Lord Spencer Chichester dated to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century shows boundary plantations along the southern edge of the park at Hademore as well as a building marked 'Hedimore Lodge' at the southern entrance to the park. Also shown is the developing estate hamlet of 'Hedimore' immediately to the south, consisting of Hademore Farm, Holly Cottage and another cottage (now demolished). It had been intended to build a brick wall around the whole park, but only about a mile of it was completed, on the south-east side. This wall was evidently still standing in 1990 (*ibid.*, 244). Shortly after 1808 Fisherwick Hall was demolished. A large number of trees were felled and the park divided into fields. The OS 1<sup>st</sup> map (1834) shows the former park, with a clear boundary in the form of a line of screening trees along the southern edge. This is the earliest map which enables the southern line of the park to be placed in relation to the modern OS mapping with any accuracy. A Plan of the Township of Fisherwick (1842) and the OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" map (1883-8) both show Hademore Lodge as still extant, the latter showing the lodge to have lain some 50m north-east of the railway.
- 1.4.13 When the Trent Valley Railway was built in 1846-7, it cut across the extreme southern corner of the former Fisherwick Park, just to the south of the gate lodge. It is unclear whether the southern edge of the park as shown in 1834 represented the extent of the original 16<sup>th</sup> century park however. It is therefore possible that remains of the original park pale, in the form of a bank, ditch or fence (the latter is suggested by a map of 1760) may survive in the form of an earthwork, or that remains of a ditch may be preserved as a buried feature beneath and close to the railway. Whilst the site of the Fisherwick Hall is now occupied by a container company, and its grounds now lie under a former explosives depot and a field of crops, a pair of Grade II Listed gate piers dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century still survive at a point some 50 m north of the railway, flanking the former formal drive, which remains in use from this point northward. The course of the driveway southward from the gates has been abandoned following the construction of a later connecting road, although its alignment is still traceable as a double hedge line. This crosses the railway at a disused level-crossing to the west of Fogg Cottages, before passing behind Holly Cottage to emerge onto the public road behind a cast-iron telephone kiosk.



## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.
- 2.1.5 To define any relevant research priorities if additional archaeological investigation proves necessary.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of a single trench measuring c 12.8 m by 1.6 m (Fig. 2).

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The overburden was removed under archaeological supervision by a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket.
- 3.2.2 Where appropriate the trench was hand cleaned for recording purposes and planned at a scale of 1:50. Sample sections were drawn at 1:20. The trench and sections 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 No finds were recovered.

### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified and no samples were taken.

### 3.5 Presentation of results

- 3.5.1 The soils and ground conditions are described. This is followed by a description of the stratigraphic sequence within the trench and by a brief summary.
- 3.5.2 A Table of Contexts is given in Appendix 1.

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The underlying natural was a silty sand. The overlying soil layers consisted of sandy silts or silty loam. It was dry during the period of the evaluation and ground conditions were good.

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 Description of deposits

#### *Trench 1 (Fig. 3)*

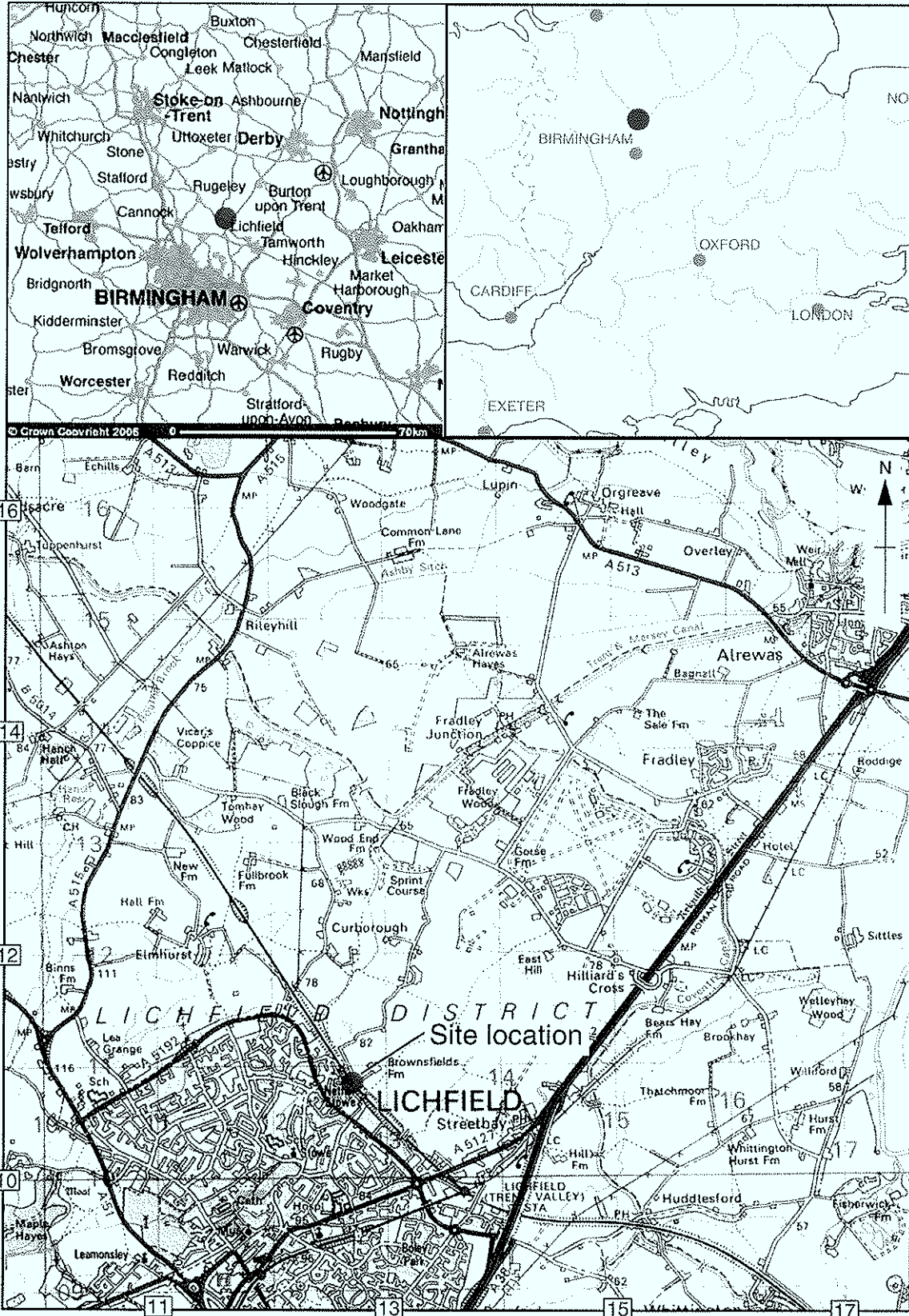
- 5.1.1 The underlying orange silty sand natural (2), with patches of reddish brown silt, was observed at *c* 83.84 m aOD, or between 0.52 - 1.02 m below the present ground level and had a natural slope towards the north of the site.
- 5.1.2 The natural was overlain by compacted CBM fragments and a metallised road surface of small cobbles (4). This was 0.15 m thick. The track surface and natural were cut by a north-west to south-east aligned trackside ditch (3). It's southern edge was cut into the slope with a rounded sloping side, which became a flat base. It measured 4.30 m long x 2.40 m wide x 0.20 m depth and was filled by a 0.10 - 0.14 m thick layer of hill-wash topsoil, of very dark grey brown silty sand, (5).
- 5.1.3 This was sealed by a 0.24 m thick layer of patchy dark brown and orange silty sand made ground (6), which was sealed by a 0.10 m thick old topsoil horizon of dark brown silty sand (7). This was sealed by a 0.20 m thick layer of recent topsoil of very dark grey brown silty sand loam (1). In the southern half of the trench these layers had been cut by a large irregular feature (8), which sloped sharply to the east across the site and was 0.30 m wide on the west side of the trench and over 1 m in depth in the east of the trench. It was filled by a series of layers of compacted crushed stone, hardcore and tarmac (9) and was from the works for the construction of the new bridge and hard-standing for the crane on site.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 6.1.1 The trench revealed the line of a post-medieval trackway that pre-dated the construction of the railway, which had been filled and then overlain by mixed soil layers. It is possible that these are up-cast material from the construction of the railway line, with the trackway being re-aligned to cross the Netherstowe railway bridge. No other archaeological features were observed in the trench and the area to the east of the trench up to the railway line had been truncated during the construction of the new replacement bridge.



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Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location



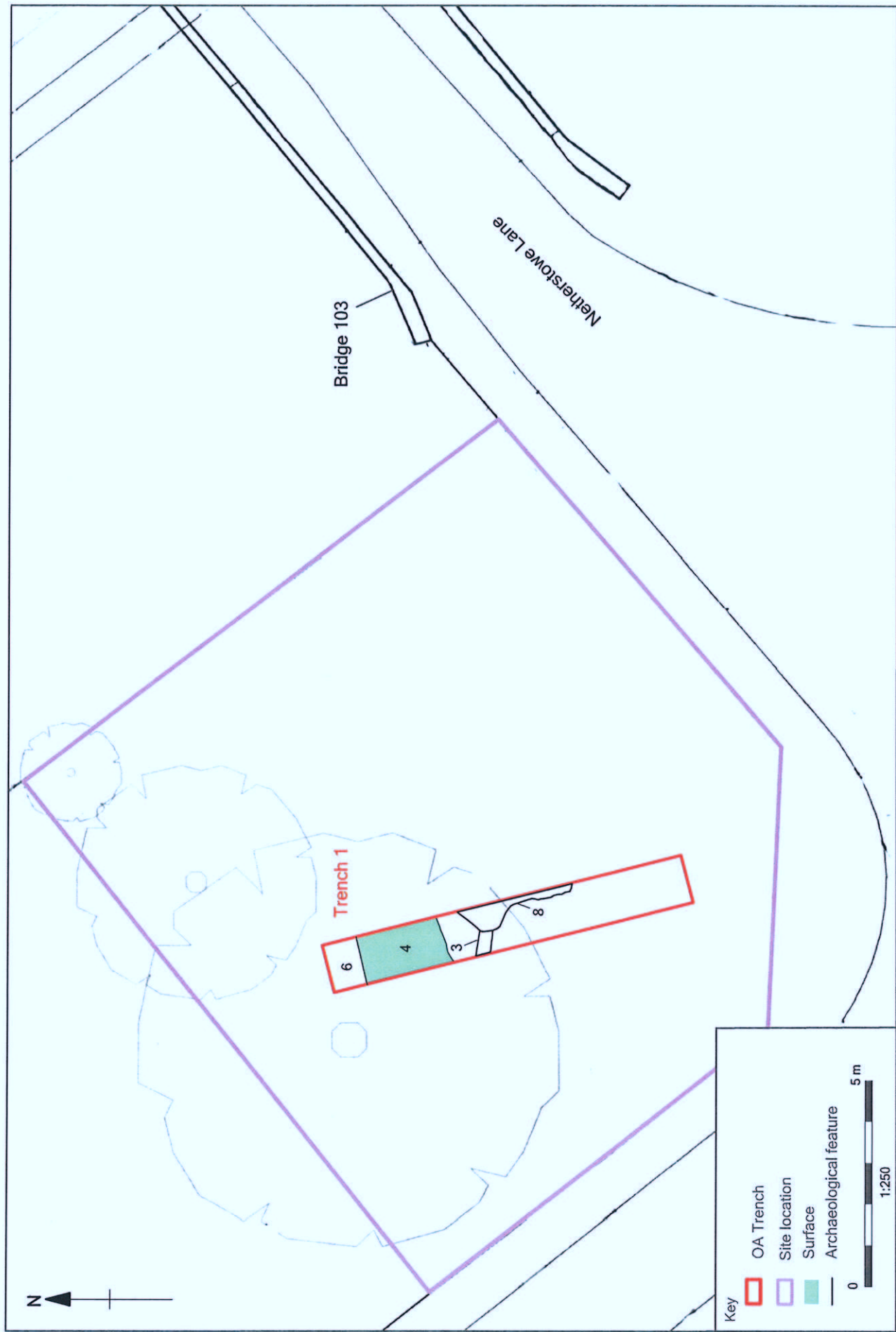


Figure 2: Trench location



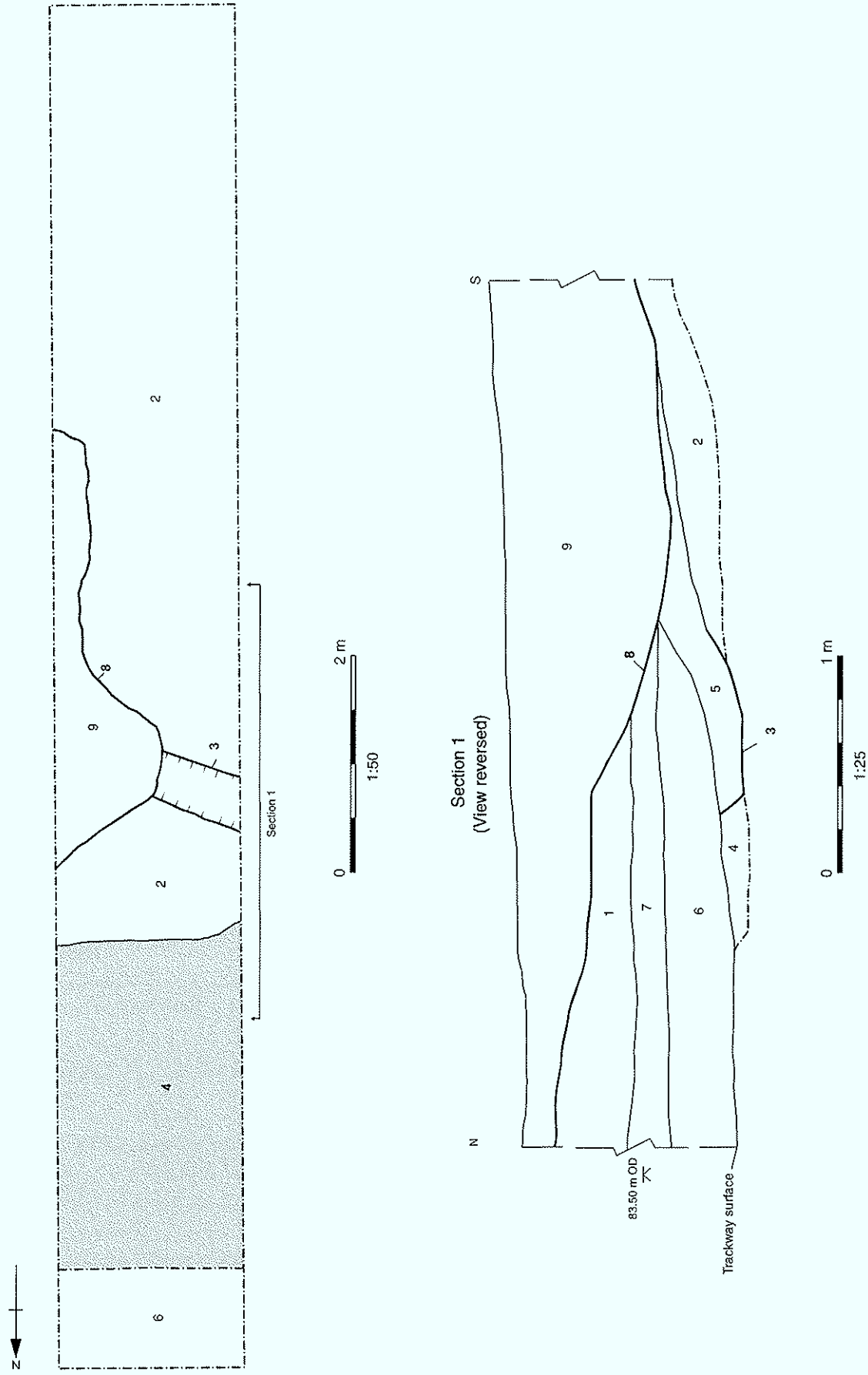


Figure 3: Trench plan and section







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