

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION AT THE
FORMER PRIMARY SCHOOL,
VICTORIA ROAD,
BIDFORD-ON-AVON,
WARWICKSHIRE

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Contents

Part 1 Project summary	1
Part 2 Detailed report	
1. Background	2
1.1 Reasons for the project	2
1.2 Project parameters	2
1.3 Aims	2
2. Methods	2
2.1 Documentary search	2
2.2 Fieldwork	2
2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy	2
2.2.2 Structural analysis	3
2.3 Artefacts	3
2.3.1 Artefact recovery policy	3
2.3.2 Method of analysis	3
2.4 Environment	3
2.4.1 Sampling policy	3
2.5 The methods in retrospect	3
3. Topographical and archaeological context	3
4. Description	5
4.1 Artefactual Analysis	5
4.2 Phase 1 Natural deposits.....	6
4.3 Phase 2 Post-medieval/modern.....	6
5. Discussion	6
6. Significance	6
7. Publication summary	7
8. The archive	7
9. Acknowledgements	7
10. Personnel	8
11. Bibliography	8
12. Abbreviations	8

Archaeological evaluation at the former Primary School, Victoria Road, Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire

Tom Vaughan

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the former Primary School, Victoria Road, Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire (NGR: SP 0945 5182). It was undertaken on behalf of Westbury Homes Ltd, who intends to develop the site for residential use, for which a planning application has been submitted. The project aimed to determine if any significant archaeological site was present and if so to indicate its location, nature and date.

Five trenches were excavated across the site. No archaeological features or horizons were identified. To the north and west modern dump deposits were observed directly over the natural terrace gravel. To the south and east a very thin clayey sand subsoil was noted, over naturally occurring clay and gravels. Toward the middle of the site a deeper sequence of clayey sands with gravel was recorded, overlying natural sandy gravel and bands of clay.

Documentary sources indicate that the site was an undeveloped field prior to the construction of the primary school in the mid 20th century. It is considered likely that the groundworks associated with the school involved landscaping and levelling of the southern side of the site, which truncated the deposit sequence. However the general lack of residual finds predating the post-medieval/modern periods over the entire site indicates that there was probably never any substantial human activity within the development area.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the former Primary School, Victoria Road, Bidford-on-Avon (NGR: SP 0945 5182) on behalf of Westbury Homes Ltd. The client intends to redevelop the site for residential use with associated landscaping and access and has submitted a planning application to Stratford-on-Avon District Council (reference number S/9903592 outline / 04/00579 rem), who consider that a site of archaeological interest may be affected.

1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to model briefs prepared by the Curator and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2004).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to locate archaeological deposits and if present to determine their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation. The purpose of this was to establish their significance, so that it would be possible to recommend an appropriate treatment, which might then be integrated with the proposed development programme.

Significant deposits were defined as likely to be of prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval date.

2. Methods

2.1 Documentary search

A search was made of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). In addition the following sources were also consulted:

Cartographic sources

- 1887, First edition Ordnance Survey, sheet SP36, scale 25": 1 mile
- 1905, Ordnance Survey, sheet SP36, scale 25": 1 mile
- 1923, Ordnance Survey, sheet SP36, scale 25": 1 mile

2.2 Fieldwork

2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2004).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 28th and 29th June 2004.

Five trenches amounting to just over 222m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 1.1ha, representing a sample of 2%. The location of the trenches is indicated in Fig 2. Trenches 1, 4 and 5 were moved from their planned location for logistical reasons.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under archaeological supervision using a 180° wheeled excavator, employing a toothless bucket. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces and sections were inspected to determine their nature. Machine sondages were also excavated in the base of a number of the trenches to clarify the natural matrix. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995).

2.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

2.3 **Artefacts**

2.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended). This in principal determines that all finds, of whatever date, must be collected. However, in this case only a sample of later material was collected from the overburden during machining. These comprised all of the finds recovered from the site.

2.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand retrieved finds were examined. A primary record was made of all finds on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated.

Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

2.4 **Environment**

2.4.1 **Sampling policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4). No deposits were identified which were suitable for environmental analysis.

2.5 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site comprises a sub-rectangular 1.1ha area, 0.5km west of the centre of Bidford-on-Avon. It is at present a vacant plot, the primary school having recently been demolished, comprising overgrown grassland to the south, tarmac and gravel hardcore to the north. It is bounded by Victoria Road to the east and housing to the north, south and west.

Topographically it lies 0.25km to the north-west of the River Avon, on the first gravel terrace, and slopes gradually from 32m AOD to the north, to 30m AOD to the south. The predominant soil type is the Arrow soil association (543) comprising deep permeable coarse loamy soils affected by groundwater, over glaciofluvial drift. Along the banks of the River Avon the soils are of the Fladbury 1 soil association (813b), comprising stoneless clayey soils, in places calcareous, variably affected by groundwater with a risk of flooding, over alluvium (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

A ditch of probable prehistoric origin has been recorded within the village (MWA 6136). A number of finds of prehistoric date have also been made within the village: a Palaeolithic Mousterian flint scraper (MWA 6131), waste flints and a Neolithic scraper (MWA 4035), a large assemblage of Neolithic worked and waste flakes, a sidescraper and a retouched scraper (MWA 6624); an edge blunted Neolithic-Bronze Age flint knife (MWA 6173). A reworked early Neolithic-Bronze Age flint flake has been found south of Marriage Hill (MWA 4810) while a collection of flints of similar date is recorded from the vicinity (MWA 4448).

A number of undated features have also been identified: cropmarks of a sub-circular enclosure 0.4km south of the present site (MWA 6735); a cropmark complex of irregular enclosures and linear trackways 0.5km south-west (MWA 6733), an enclosure earthwork 0.5km south-east (MWA 4567), cropmarks of an enclosure 0.5km west (MWA 0597), a possible ring ditch 1km north (MWA 4912) and a trackway 0.5km west (MWA 4985).

Evidence of Roman occupation has been uncovered in the centre of the present village, comprising a walled enclosure with a cremation (MWA 6177), a ditch with associated pits (MWA 6178), a 2nd century quarry (MWA 0596) and traces of timber structures of 1st-2nd and 4th century date (MWA 7125). Further stray finds have been made in the area of Roman date (MWA 4010, 4036, 4037, 4039, 4840, 6135 and 6623).

Ickniel or *Rykniel* Street Roman road from the Fosse Way north to Yorkshire via Alcester runs though the centre of the present town on a north-south alignment along a route which has been largely maintained down to the present day (MWA 445 and 8674).

Evidence of Saxon occupation has been identified north of the present bridge (MWA 0588 and 6132). A coin of Coenwulf and a small-long brooch have also been found in the area (MWA 6175 and 8269). The settlement is thought to derive its name from *Byda's Ford*, which crossed the River Avon, south of the parish church (MWA 0591). Three burial sites, containing almost 200 individuals have been identified adjacent, dating from this period (MWA 602, 605, 606, 608 and 8129). Further a field an exceptionally fine pair of Saxon saucer brooches (of a type also found at Upton Snodsbury, Worcestershire) were reportedly found in the parish in the 19th century (VCH I, 231).

Spurious documents of 710 purport that one Ceolred of Mercia granted land in Bidford to the monastery at Evesham. It has been suggested however that Abbot Agelwy acquired the land in the 11th century and this manuscript was infact forged to strengthen his claims (VCH II, 113). After the Norman Conquest of 1066 Bishop Odo of Bayeux seized numerous lands from Evesham Abbey, including the manor at Bidford (VCH II, 116).

In the medieval period the village is thought to have been a ribbon development, along road next to the river, with large open fields adjacent (MWA 8323 and 9031). Traces of medieval building debris have been discovered on the High Street (MWA 5607) while many stray finds of medieval date have been made within and around the present village (MWA 0587, 4080, 4981, 5108, 5613, 6137, 7808).

The parish church of St Laurence lies on the south-east side of the village, alongside the river. The chancel, west end of the nave and west tower date from c 1250. The nave was originally long and narrow and may (in part) have been on the line of an earlier nave, although no 12th century details remain. In 1835 it was widened and aisles were added. The chancel was restored in 1886-9 and the roof in 1922 (MWA 586).

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 reveals the site to have comprised an undeveloped field with tree-lined boundaries, as today. Other fields occupy surrounding plots, with the exception of a small school building in the north-east corner. The site remained under agricultural use until the primary school was built in the mid 19th century.

4. Description

A summary of the artefacts recovered can be seen in Table 1. The trench locations are shown in Fig 2.

4.1 Artefactual analysis

Only three sherds of pottery were recovered with the remaining finds consisting of animal bone, an iron cold chisel and fragments of ceramic tile. The pottery was identified and grouped by fabric (see Table 2). The sherds were undiagnostic but could be dated to the 18th century by fabric type.

Trench 1

All finds from trench 1 were recovered from the topsoil 100. Three sherds of pottery were recovered and identified as post medieval red sandy ware (fabric 78) dating to the 18th century. Two fragments of roof tile were also identified but could only be broadly dated to between the 13th and 18th century.

A small iron tool morphologically similar to a cold chisel could not be accurately dated but its condition and hand forged manufacture suggests a late post-medieval date.

Trench 2

A small fragment of tile was recovered from subsoil 201. An exact identification was again difficult although the quality of manufacture and firing is suggestive of a late post-medieval date. No further finds were recovered from Trench 2.

Trench 3

Five fragments of animal bone of unknown species, from relict soil 301, was the only material recovered from Trench 3.

Material	Type	Context	Total	Weight g
Bone	Animal	301	5	40
Ceramic	Tile	201	1	16
Iron	Cold chisel	100	1	39
Iron	Unidentified	100	1	11
Pottery	Post medieval	100	3	149
Ceramic	Roof tile	100	2	42

Table 1: *Quantification of evaluation assemblage.*

Fabric name	Fabric	Trench	Total	Weight g
Red sandy ware	78	1	3	149

Table 2: *Quantification of evaluation assemblage fabrics.*

4.2 **Phase 1 Natural deposits**

The natural matrix was noted to vary across the site. It was at a very shallow depth in Trenches 1, 2 and 5 on the south and east sides of the site, comprising clay with pebble gravel in Trenches 1 and 2, and sand with pebble gravel in Trench 5.

Relict soils were identified below modern overburden to a greater depth in Trenches 3 and 4 to the north and west of the site. Here the natural comprised bands of fine sandy pea gravel and large pebble gravel over clay. The natural was noted to have been frequently disturbed by deep modern activity in Trench 4.

4.3 **Phase 2 Post-medieval/modern**

There were no archaeological features or horizons predating the post-medieval/modern periods.

A thin topsoil overlay minimal subsoil in Trenches 1 and 2. Similar subsoil was noted in Trench 5 on the east side, although the topsoil had recently been stripped off during the development.

Modern overburden was recorded in Trenches 3 and 4.

In Trench 3 this comprised a mixed hardcore of fine pea gravel and a patch of decayed tarmac and brick debris. It overlay the natural gravel at a very shallow depth to the north, but to the south overlay deep residual clayey sand soils with pebble gravel from which only animal bone was retrieved. The deeper subsoil appeared to fill a natural depression, which was not fully excavated. No charcoal was noted.

Trench 4 was heavily disturbed by dump deposits and service pipes. These frequently lay to a great depth, truncating the sand and gravel subsoil, down into the natural gravel. The dumped material was variable, but contained occasional brick rubble, iron waste and residual hydrocarbons.

5. **Discussion**

The soils in Trenches 3 and 4 (301, 303, 304 and 402) were determined to be buried topsoils and subsoils, extant below disturbance related to the demolished primary school. Unfortunately these soils are undated as the only finds recovered were undated animal bone fragments and a single abraded tile.

The very shallow nature of the soils on the south and east side of the site are conjectured to be the result of landscaping, probably during construction of the school.

However the lack of features and horizons, the small quantity and late date of the finds indicate that there is no activity of archaeological significance on site. All finds from the post-medieval/modern period appear to be the result of manuring or the discard of general rubbish, which would accord with the site having been under agricultural use until the mid 20th century when the school was built.

6. **Significance**

In considering significance, the Secretary of State's criteria for the scheduling of ancient monuments (DoE 1990, annex 4), have been used as a guide.

These nationally accepted criteria are used to assess the importance of an ancient monument and considering whether scheduling is appropriate. Though scheduling is not being

considered in this case they form an appropriate and consistent framework for the assessment of any archaeological site. The criteria should not, however, be regarded as definitive; rather they are indicators which contribute to a wider judgement based on the individual circumstances of a case.

The results indicate that there are no significant archaeological remains on this site.

7. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Westbury Homes at the former Primary School, Victoria Road, Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire (NGR ref SP 0945 5182). Five trenches were excavated, revealing shallow soils on the south and east side of the site, and frequent modern disturbance to the north and west where the soils were noted to a greater depth. There were no archaeological features or horizons predating the post-medieval/modern periods. The natural matrix varied over the site, from clay with pebble gravel to the south, to sand and gravel to the east, and fine gravels over clay to the middle and north. The site is conjectured to have substantially landscaped during construction of the primary school in the mid 20th century. Prior to this it was an undeveloped agricultural field.

8. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 2 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 1 Photographic record sheet AS3
- 16 Digital images
- 6 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Warwickshire Museum,
The Butts,
Warwick,
Warwickshire, CV34 4SS
Tel (01926) 412500

9. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Paul O'Kelly (Layout Designer, Westbury Homes Ltd), Duncan Powell (Hunter Page Planning Ltd), Ed Wilson (Planning Archaeologist, Warwickshire County Council).

10. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Tom Vaughan. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Woodiwiss. Fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Brown, finds analysis by Angus Crawford and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

11. **Bibliography**

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12. **Abbreviations**

MWA Numbers prefixed with 'MWA' are the primary reference numbers used by the Warwickshire County Sites and Monuments Record.

NMR National Monuments Record.

SMR Sites and Monuments Record.

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 31m Width: 1.60m Depth:0.41-1.10m

Orientation: ENE/WSW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Mid-light greyish brown sandy silt. Moderate gravel. Turfed with extensive roots. Moderately compact and cohesive. Moderately diffuse boundary with 101 below. As 200.	0.00-0.37m
101	Subsoil	Light orangey red clayey sand. Occasional small sub-rounded stones. Occasional red brick/tile flecks and small fragments. Compact and cohesive. Very diffuse boundary with 102 below. As 201 and 500.	0.25-0.61m
102	Natural	Light orangey fawn clay with dark grey patches. Occasional sub-angular stones and manganese flecks. Compact and cohesive. As 202 and 501.	0.62m+

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30.90m Width: 1.55m Depth: 0.48-0.57m

Orientation: ENE/WSW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Mid-light greyish brown sandy silt. Moderate gravel. Turfed with extensive roots. Moderately compact and cohesive. Moderately diffuse boundary with 101 below. As 100.	0.00-0.20m
201	Subsoil	Light orangey red clayey sand. Occasional small sub-rounded and sub-angular stones. Very compact. Cohesive. Very diffuse boundary with 202 below. As 101 and 500.	0.25-0.61m
202	Natural	Light orangey fawn clay with dark grey patches. Very occasional sub-angular stones and manganese flecks. Compact and cohesive. As 102 and 501.	0.62m+

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 26.30m Width: 1.55-1.65m Depth: 0.61-1.34m

Orientation: NNW/SSE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Hardcore	Mixed hardcore. Fine light fawn pea gravel to north and south ends. Mid bluish grey decayed tarmac with brick rubble to middle. Defined boundary with 301 below to south. Diffuse boundary with 302 to north. Disturbed by dumps of brick rubble. Compact. Non-cohesive.	0.00-0.37m
301	Relict topsoil	Dark greyish brown clayey sand. Occasional pebble gravel. Mid and south end of trench. Very diffuse boundary with 303 below. Compact. Moderately cohesive. Inc. animal bone.	0.33-0.64m
302	Natural	Light fawn grey sandy gravel. North end of trench. Pea gravel - large sub-rounded pebbles. Defined boundary with 305 below. Very diffuse boundary with 300 above. Compact. Non-cohesive.	0.26-0.97m
303	Subsoil	Mid reddish brown clayey sand. Occasional pebble gravel. Mid and south end of trench. Very diffuse boundary with 301 above and 304 below. Compact. Moderately cohesive.	0.61-1.01m
304	Subsoil	Dark brown clayey sand. Occasional pebble gravel. Mid and south end of trench. Very diffuse boundary with 303 above. Defined boundary with 305 below. Compact. Moderately cohesive.	0.95-1.56m
305	Natural	Clay. Dark red over light whitish grey to north. Mid-dark brownish grey to south. Bright North and south end of trench. Defined boundary with 302 and 304 above.	0.97m+

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30.35m Width: 1.60m Depth: 0.84-1.30m

Orientation: ENE/WSW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Topsoil	Tarmac with brick hardcore levelling to north. Light grey gravel and gravel dust with occasional brick rubble to south and east.	0.00-0.33m
401	Dump deposit	Mid brownish green sandy clay. Frequent small sub-rounded stones. In east side of trench. Defined boundary with 400 above and 402 below. Occasional brick rubble and iron debris. Hydrocarbon soaked. Compact and cohesive.	0.33-0.69m
402	Subsoil	Light brown sand and gravel. Occasional brick rubble and iron debris. Not compact or cohesive. Defined boundary with 400 and 401 above, 404 and 407 below. Cut by 405 and modern service trenches.	0.31-1.20m
403	Dump deposit	Dark greenish grey sandy silt. Extensive small sub-rounded gravels. Within 402.	0.59-1.10m
404	Redeposited gravel	Beige sandy gravel with dark grey pea gravel band and hydrocarbon soaked base. Defined boundary with 402 above and 407 below.	0.75-1.06m
405	Cut	Pit. East side: sharp break of slope, steep concave side curving to flattish base. Indeterminate shape and alignment. In west end of trench. Filled by 406. Cuts 407. Sealed by 400.	0.25-1.15m
406	Fill	Mixed dark greenish grey silty sand. Extensive hydrocarbon contamination. Moderate brick rubble. Compact and cohesive. Fill of 405.	0.25-1.15m
407	Natural	Fine pea gravel and sub-rounded pebble gravel. Compact. Non-cohesive. Defined boundary with 402 and 404 above. Cut by 405 and modern activity.	0.84m+

Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 21.85m Width: 1.55m Depth: 0.43-0.66m

Orientation: ENE/WSW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
500	Subsoil	Mid-light yellowish brown silty sand. Occasional small sub-rounded pebbles. Very occasional red brick/tile flecks. Compact. Moderately cohesive. Very diffuse boundary with 501 below. As 201 and 500.	0.00-0.39m
501	Natural	Light yellowish/greyish brown sand. Occasional sub-rounded and sub-angular stones. Patch of light yellow sand to east. Compact and moderately cohesive. As 102 and 201.	0.19m+



Plate 1: Trench 1 – general view west-south-west



Plate 2: Trench 2 – general view east-north-east



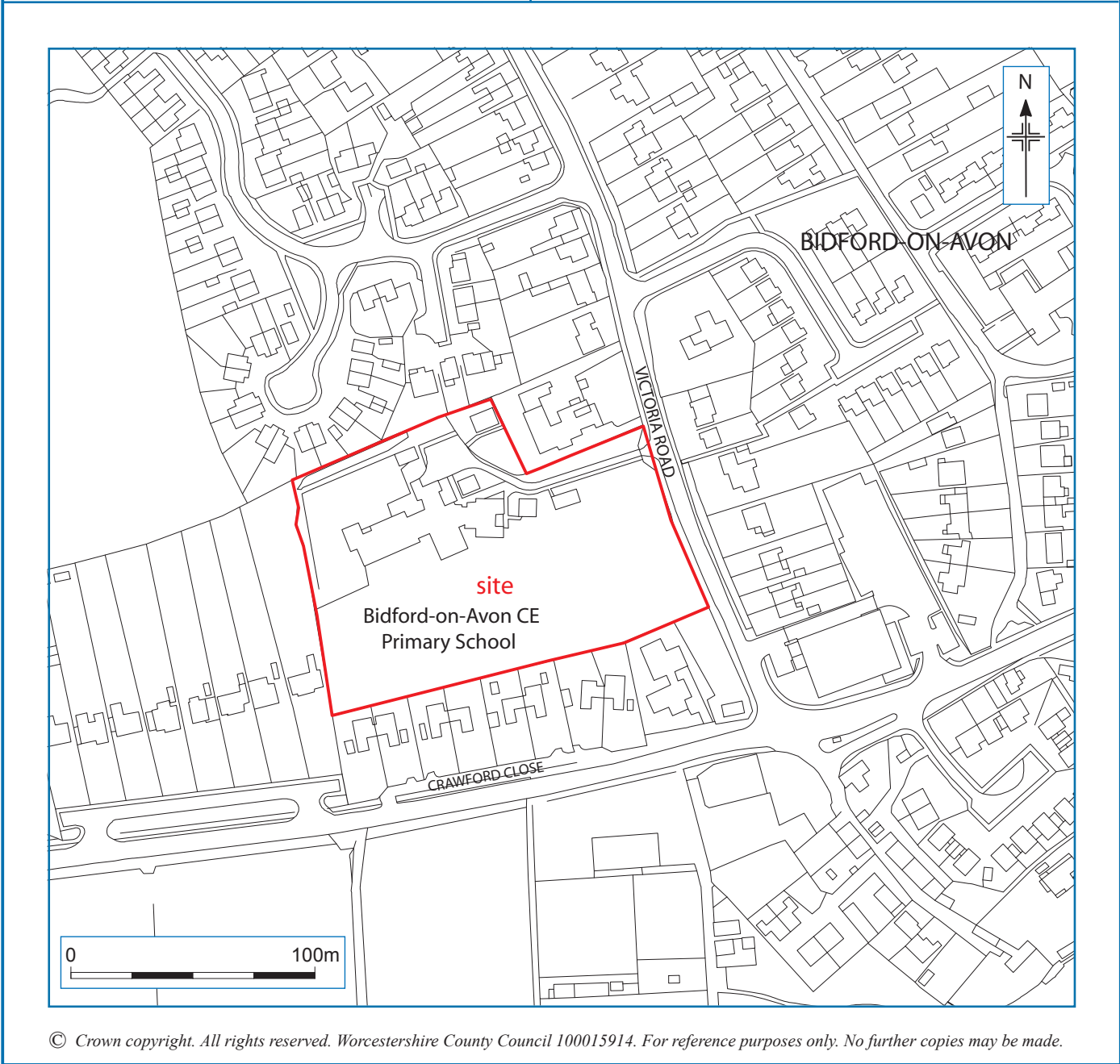
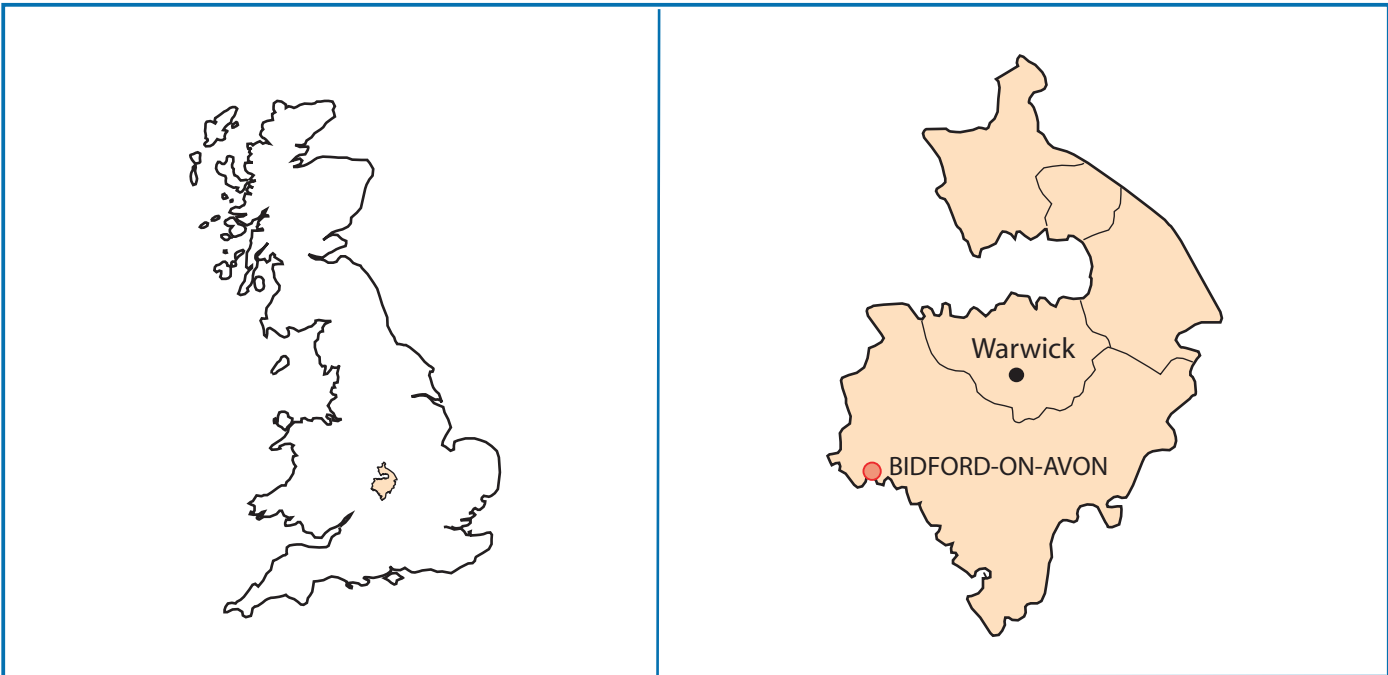
Plate 3: Trench 3 – general view north-north-west



Plate 4: Trench 4 – general view west-south-west



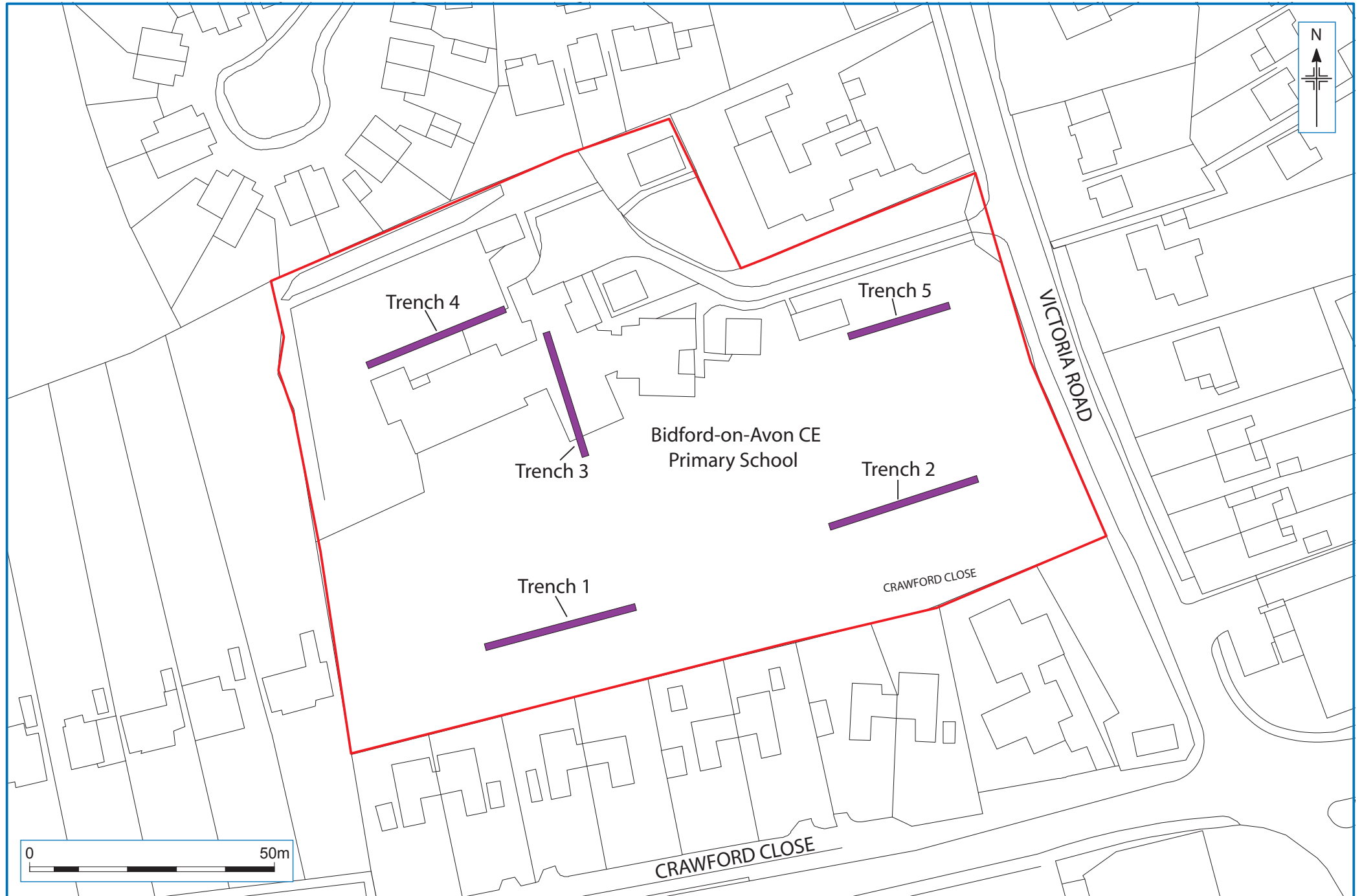
Plate 5: Trench 5 – general view east-north-east



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Location of the site.

Figure 1



Trench location plan.

Figure 2.