

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION
AT
NORTH BROMSGROVE HIGH
SCHOOL, BROMSGROVE,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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With a contribution by Alan Jacobs

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
Project 2780
Report 1364
WSM 34489

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Archaeological Evaluation at North Bromsgrove High School, School Drive, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire

Tom Vaughan

With contributions by Alan Jacobs

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at North Bromsgrove High School, School Drive, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9656 7990). It was undertaken on behalf of HBG Construction Ltd, who intends to construct a new school, which may affect archaeological sites registered on the County Historic Environment and Archaeology Record (WSM 12156). The project aimed to determine if any significant archaeological remains were present and, if so, to indicate its nature, date and location.

Three trenches were excavated on the playing field to the north of the existing school buildings. No significant archaeological features, structures or horizons were identified. Toward the south a very shallow soil profile was observed; whereas to the north dump deposits were noted. Stray finds within the spoil comprised a small quantity of pottery, brick, tile and other debris, representing minor residual material of medieval and later date.

It is considered that the site has been the subject of terracing to create the modern playing field. This would have involved the removal of soils on the south side down into the natural matrix, and to the north the dumping of material to raise the level. This would have disturbed or entirely removed all archaeological remains to the south but allowed the preservation of deposits to the north. However the total lack of features to the north and the small quantity of residual finds generally indicates that the site has probably never been the subject of much activity beyond simple cultivation from the medieval period down to conversion into a football ground in the early 20th century and the construction of the present school buildings in the mid 20th century.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at North Bromsgrove High School, School Drive, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9656 7990; Fig 1), on behalf of HBG Construction Ltd. They intend to construct a new school, which may affect archaeological sites registered on the County Historic Environment and Archaeology Record (WSM 12156).

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

The project also conforms to a brief prepared by HEAS (HEAS 2005a) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2005b).

1.2 Aims

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

2. Methods

2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER). In addition the following sources were also consulted:

Cartographic sources

- 1840 Tithe Map
- 1886 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map, 25":1 mile

Documentary sources

- Site archives (from earlier excavations, evaluations etc).

The following sources were not considered relevant to this project: aerial photographs.

2.2 Fieldwork methodology

2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2005b). As a result of site inspection and discussion with the client, it was agreed with the curator that the initial area of investigation (stage 1) would be reduced by half and that trenches would only be excavated to the east and west sides of the playing field, thereby avoiding disturbance to the main pitch area. Trenches on the main playing pitch (stage 2) were only to take place if stage 1 produced

positive evidence of archaeological remains. Special care was taken to reduce disturbance to the surface of the playing field including the use of terram sheeting for storage of the spoil.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 22nd and 24th August 2005. The site reference number and site code is WSM 34489.

Three trenches, amounting to approximately 136m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 7,500m², representing a sample of 1.81%. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

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 were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material and returned.

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 **Artefact methodology, by Alan Jacobs**

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 spoil during machining. These comprised all of the finds recovered from the site as no artefacts were retrieved from stratified deposits.

2.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context.

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

2.4 **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 lies to the north-east side of the historic core of Bromsgrove, within the grounds of North Bromsgrove High School. It occupies a playing field bounded by School Drive to the north and east, school buildings, tarmac car parking and playing areas to the south and west. The site is turfed and largely level, although generally within the school grounds there is a

gradual slope from the south-east down to a tributary of the Spadesbourne Brook to the north (Fig 1).

The soils of the area comprise well-drained reddish coarse loamy soils of the Bromsgrove Association (Ragg *et al* 1984) over solid geology of Bromsgrove Sandstone with localised areas of drift (British Geological Survey 1989).

The site itself has not been the subject of archaeological investigation previously. However North East Worcestershire College adjacent to the north and east has (Jackson and Buteux 1998; WSM30450). This evaluation identified a ditch and post-medieval dump deposits, which probably relate to a field boundary and mill ponds recorded on the 1840 tithe map and early Ordnance Survey maps; residual late medieval and post-medieval pottery interpreted to have been scattered during manuring of the fields; a Mesolithic microlith (10000-4000 BC), and a probable Neolithic flint blade (4000-2350 BC). Although residual, the microlith is of considerable interest given the proximity of the brook, as such locations were favoured by Mesolithic hunters.

Further evidence of prehistoric activity lies to the east. Two cropmark sites have been identified comprising a square enclosure (WSM 12156) and a large ring-ditch (WSM 12151). In addition a Bronze Age (2350-800 BC) flat axe (WSM 11364) has been recovered from a field to the south-east of these cropmarks, while local metal detectorists suggest that other Bronze Age material has been recovered in the vicinity, although these reports remain unconfirmed. A prehistoric focus of activity is therefore conjectured, although its character and extent are unknown (Jackson and Buteux 1998, 4).

The present High Street follows the line of a Roman road (WSM 01095), which continues northwards below the former A38, The Strand and Birmingham Road. At present however, no associated occupation activity has been identified within the vicinity.

Bromsgrove has been surveyed as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Buteux 1996). The site lies *c* 0.35km to the north-east of the medieval settlement (WSM 19703) and the post-medieval urban area (WSM 19704). Limited archaeological investigations within the town centre have revealed evidence of this settlement, but most evidence comes from documentary material.

The 1840 tithe map and the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 depict Blackmore Mill with an associated mill pond and leats to the north of the site (WSM 01375, 19670, 19681 and 25971). The building - a water and steam powered mill - was erected in 1880 on the site of a former mill, known in 1870 as the 'Old Water Mill', which is conjectured to have dated from the medieval period (Richards 1981, 80; Buteux 1996, 9). The cartographic sources also record the area of the site as an undeveloped field, although later maps reveal that by the beginning of the 20th century it has been converted into a football ground. The present school was built in the 1950s/1960s.

4. Results

4.1 Structural analysis

The trench locations are shown in Fig 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

4.1.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits

The natural matrix varied across the site. To the south-east it comprised a pink clay with light fawn streaks, while to the north a streaked pinkish and greyish orange sand with occasional pebbles predominated. In addition a wide band of decayed off-white sandstone was noted to the west.

4.1.2 Phase 2 Modern deposits

No significant archaeological features, structures or horizons were identified. Across the south and middle of the site only a very shallow soil profile was observed [1001, 2001 and 3001]; whereas to the north, dump deposits [3002] were noted, overlying a relict subsoil [3003]. No finds were recovered in association with the latter horizon, although modern tile fragments were noted within [3002] but not retained.

4.2 Artefact analysis, by Alan Jacobs

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of seven sherds of pottery weighing 140g, and in addition fragments of tile, brick, tobacco pipe and grid-iron were recovered. The material was unstratified and could be dated from the medieval period onwards (see Table 1). The state of preservation was generally fair with the majority of sherds displaying only moderate levels of abrasion.

Material	Total	Weight (g)
Modern pottery (fabric 81.4)	1	8
Post-medieval pottery (fabric 78)	4	112
Medieval pottery (fabric 69)	2	20
Tile	8	288
Brick	4	40
Tobacco pipe	6	6
Bone	3	8
Grid iron	1	70
Total	29	452

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

4.2.1 Pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 1). A single diagnostic form sherd was present, and the other sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span. The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, *terminus post quem* dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

A total of two abraded body sherds of Malvernian glazed ware (fabric 69) of late 12th-16th century date were recovered from [1000]. Four sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered, all were post-medieval red sandy ware (fabric 78) of 17th-18th century date from [1000] and [2000]. The only identifiable form was a pancheon rim from [2000]. This was a strongly everted rim form, with irregular white inclusions within the fabric indicating a 18th century date. The only modern pottery recovered consisted of a small fragment of miscellaneous modern stoneware (fabric 81.4) possibly a small bowl from [3000].

4.2.2 Ceramic building material

A number of fragments of medieval/post-medieval tile (fabric 2a & 2b; cf Hurst 1992) dating to the 13th-18th centuries were recovered from [1000] and [2000], and a single fragment of tile (fabric 2c cf Hurst 1992) was recovered from [3000]. A quantity of 20th century tile fragments were noted within [3002] but not retained. In addition a total of four fragments of brick (fabric 2a; cf Hurst 1992) of 17th-20th century date came from [2000]. Other finds included four small fragments of bone from [1000], and a number of tobacco pipe stems of 17th-19th century date from [1000] and [2000]. Finally there was a single fragment of iron that appears to be a broken piece of grid-iron from [2000].

Context no.	Date range
1000	17 th -18 th century
2000	17 th -18 th century
3000	19 th -20 th century

Table 2: Context terminus post quem dates

5. **Synthesis and significance**

It is considered that the site has been the subject of terracing to create the modern playing field, which involved the removal of soils on the south side down into the natural matrix, and to the north the dumping of material to raise the level. This would have disturbed and potentially entirely removed all archaeological remains to the south, but allowed the preservation of deposits to the north, where a buried soil was observed. Modern 20th century tile fragments were noted within the dump deposits overlying this soil, confirming the date of this activity.

The total lack of features to the north and the overall small quantity of residual finds generally across the site indicates that there has probably never been intensive activity beyond agricultural cultivation from the medieval period down to conversion into a football ground in the early 20th century and subsequently the construction of the present school in the mid 20th century.

The small quantity of finds and lack of distinct archaeological features makes the finds assemblage of very limited archaeological interest. The material represents very residual waste disposal in medieval, post-medieval and modern contexts.

6. **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 HBG Construction Ltd at Bromsgrove North High School, School Drive, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9656 7090; HER: WSM 34489). Three trenches were excavated on the playing field to the north of the existing school buildings. No significant archaeological features, structures or horizons were identified. Toward the south a very shallow soil profile was observed, whereas to the north deeper dump deposits were noted. Stray finds within the spoil comprised a small quantity of pottery, brick, tile and other debris, of a medieval and later date.

It is considered that the site has been the subject of terracing to create the modern playing field. This would have involved the removal of soils on the south side down into the natural matrix, with the dumping of material to the north to raise the level. This would have disturbed or entirely removed all archaeological remains to the south but allowed the preservation of deposits to the north. However the total lack of features below the intact early 20th century soil to the north and the small quantity of residual finds generally indicates that the site has probably never been the subject of intensive activity beyond agricultural cultivation from the medieval period down to conversion as a football ground in the early 20th century and subsequently the construction of the present school buildings in the mid 20th century.

7. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 3 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 2 Photographic record sheets
- 38 Digital photographs
- 3 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Levels record sheets AS19
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel. Hartlebury (01299) 250416

8. **Acknowledgements**

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9. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was undertaken and led by Tom Vaughan. Finds analysis was undertaken by Alan Jacobs. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Derek Hurst.

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11. **Abbreviations**

HER Historic Environment Record.

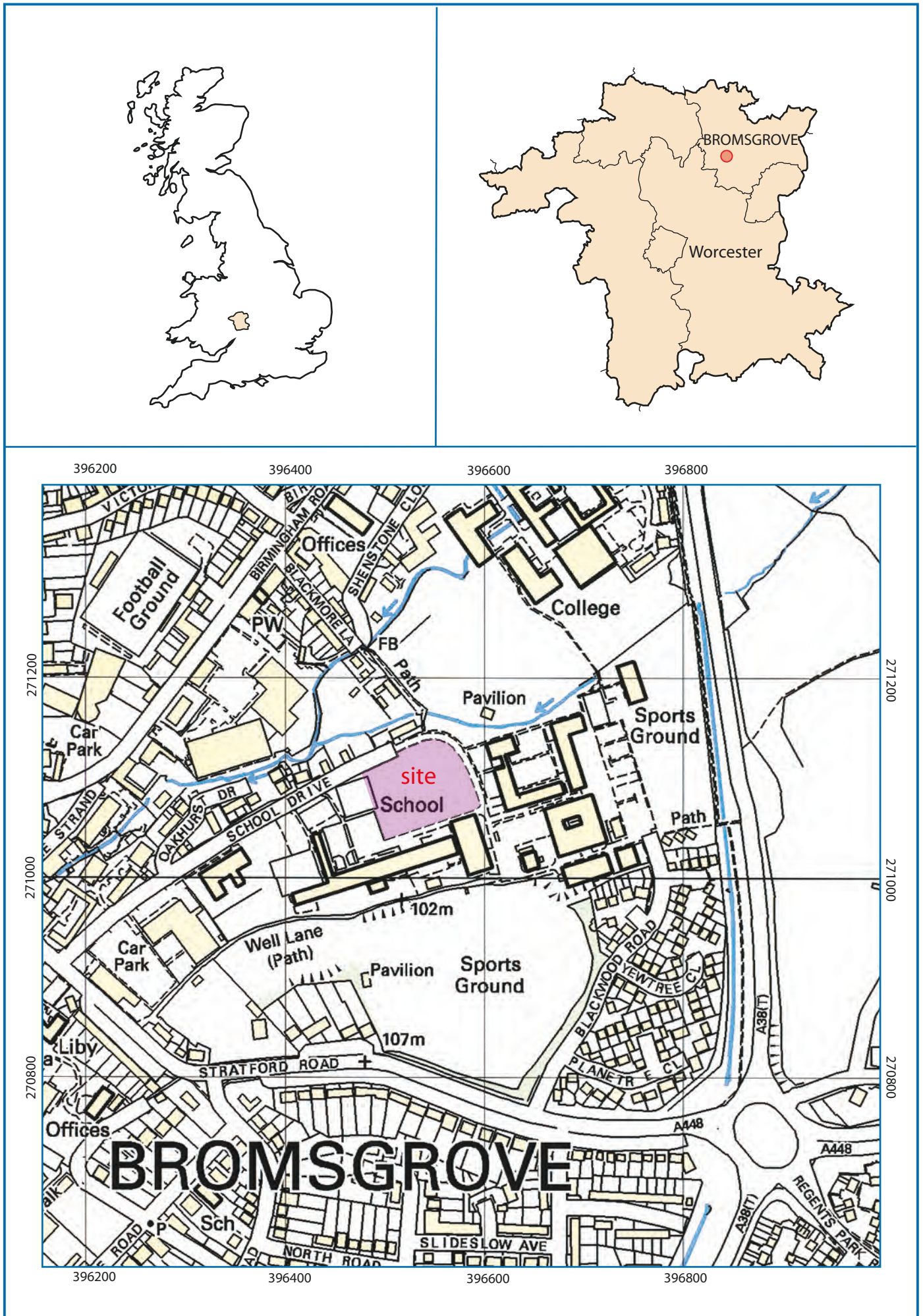
NMR National Monuments Record.

WCRO Worcestershire County Records Office.

WSM Numbers prefixed with 'WSM' are the primary reference numbers used by the Worcestershire County Historic Environment Record.

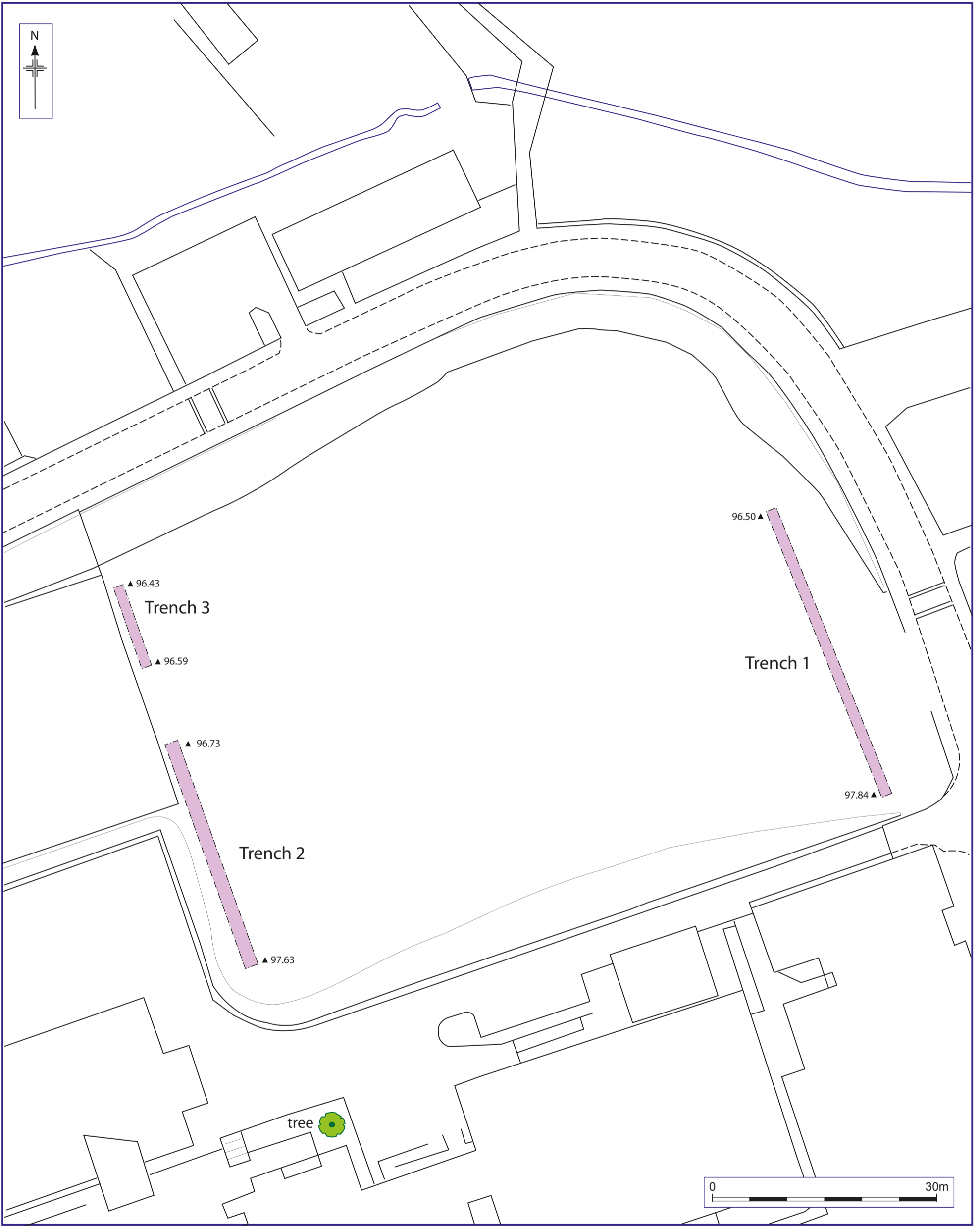
Appendix 1 Context descriptions

Context no	Context type	Feature type	Colour	Texture	Consistency	Notes
1000	N/a	N/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	tr1 unstrat machine cut finds only
1001	Layer	Topsoil	Light grey/brown	Sandy loam	Compact	tr1 turfed topsoil, gen defined boundary with 1002, 0.00-0.36m bgs, occ pmed & mod debris & charcoal flecks
1002	Layer	Natural	mixed	Clay & sand	Compact-firm	tr1 nat matrix, pink clay w/ light fawn streaks in south third, pinkish orange sand w/ light streaks to north, defined boundary w/ 1001, occ pebbles & roots, 0.33m+ bgs
1003	Layer	Subsoil	Brownish pink	sily sand	Firm	tr1 subsoil, in south half of tr, 0.38-0.72m bgs, occ mod debris, pebbles & charcoal flecks, defuse boundaries
2000	N/a	N/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	tr2 unstrat machine cut finds only
2001	Layer	Topsoil	light brown/Grey	Sandy loam	Compact	tr2 turfed topsoil, inc occ small pebbles, brick frags, defined boundary w/ 2002, 0.00-0.31m bgs
2002	Layer	Natural	Grey & orange	sand	Compact	tr2 nat matrix, gen solid decayed off white sandstone, bands of orange sand to either end with occ manganese, defined boundary w/ 2001 & 2003 above, occ decayed roots & iron pan, 0.21m+ bgs
2003	Layer	Modern dump	orange	Sand	Firm	tr2 only in northern 4.80m of tr, 0.23-0.38m bgs, defined boundaries w/ 2001 above & 2002 below
3000	N/a	N/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	tr 3 unstrat machine cut finds only
3001	Layer	Topsoil	Light Brown	Sandy loam	Compact	tr 3 topsoil, turfed, defined boundary, 0-0.51m bgs, inc occ roots, charcoal, small pebbles
3002	Layer	Modern dump	mixed	sand & clay	Compact	tr 3 redep bands of sandy loam, sand & clay, occ mod tile frags to base, 0.48-1.41m bgs
3003	Layer	relict soil	Mid-Brown	Sandy loam	Compact	tr 3 relict soil as elsewhere, 0.93-1.52m bgs, defined boundary with 3002, diffuse w/ 3004
3004	Layer	Natural	greyish orange	Sand	Compact	tr3 nat matrix, greyish orange sand to south, greyish fawn sandy clay to north



Location of the site.

Figure 1



Trench location plan (levels in metres AOD)

Figure 2

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Appendix 2 Plates



Plate 1: Trench 1, general shot, view west-north-west



Plate 2: Trench 1, east-north-east section to south end



Plate 3: Trench 2, machine excavation in progress, view north-west



Plate 4: Trench 2, general shot, view south-south-east



Plate 5: Trench 2, west-south-west section to south end



Plate 6: Trench 3, general shot, view north-north-west



Plate 7: Trench 3, west-south-west section to north end, with relict soil [3003]



Plate 8: Location of Trenches 2 and 3 after reinstatement, view west-north-west