

Archaeological evaluation (Stage 1) at Fradley Park, Fradley, Staffordshire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for Lanpro Services Ltd

February 2019



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FRADLEY PARK FRADLEY STAFFORDSHIRE

Archaeological evaluation report (Stage 1)



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name: Fradley Park, Fradley
Site code: -
Local planning authority: Lichfield District Council
Planning reference: 10/01498/OUTMEI
Central NGR: SK 1486 1321
Commissioning client: Lanpro Services Ltd
Client project reference: BEL001/0930H/01
WA project number: P5503
WA report number: 2666
HER reference: TBA
Oasis reference: fieldsec1-340130
Museum accession number: TBA

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Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	08/02/2019	Richard Bradley	Draft for comment	Tom Vaughan

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Archaeological evaluation (Stage 1) at Fradley Park, Fradley, Staffordshire

By Richard Bradley

With contributions by Rob Hedge

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology in January 2019 at Fradley Park, Fradley, Staffordshire (NGR SK 1486 1321). This involved excavation of three trial trenches comprising the first stage (Stage 1) of a larger scheme of evaluation and historic building recording. It was commissioned by Lanpro Services Ltd on behalf of Bellway Homes, in advance of a proposed residential development. A planning application has been submitted and outline permission has been granted subject to a number of conditions that include a programme of archaeological works.

A large proportion of the development area has been subject to extensive disturbance associated with spoil movement and the presence of various buildings and hardstanding of a former airfield (RAF Lichfield). The trenches were therefore targeted on areas known to have been subject to less disturbance from this activity. Only a limited number of archaeological features were identified within the trenches, however, mainly related to drainage and other modern intrusions. Two features, a shallow linear ditch and an adjacent pit, appeared to be of relatively modern date and reflect a former field system visible on early 20th century mapping, prior to construction of the airfield. There were no buried features associated with RAF Lichfield, and there was no indication of earlier occupation or other activity on the site.

Further site investigations (Stage 2) are anticipated to be completed later this year.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in January 2019 at Fradley Park, Fradley, Staffordshire (NGR SK 1486 1321; Figure 1). This involved excavation of three trial trenches comprising the first stage (Stage 1) of a larger scheme of evaluation and historic building recording. It was commissioned by Lanpro Services Ltd on behalf of Bellway Homes, in advance of proposed residential development. A planning application has been submitted and outline permission has been granted subject to a number of conditions that include a programme of archaeological works (ref. 10/01498/OUTMEI).

A large proportion of the development area has been subject to extensive disturbance associated with spoil movement and the presence of various buildings and hardstanding of a former airfield. The trenches were, however, targeted on areas known to have suffered less disturbance from this activity, where the archaeological advisor to the local planning authority considered that the proposed development has the potential to impact upon possible heritage assets.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Lanpro Services Ltd (Gajos 2018) and to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in *Standard and guidance: for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site is around 900m south-west of Fradley village and 4.5km north-west of Lichfield. It is approximately 13.5ha in size, located within the northern corner of the former RAF Lichfield, now largely redeveloped. The ground is broadly level at c 65m AOD, and occupied by the remains of the runway, access tracks, hangars and other buildings on the airfield. There are also areas of scrubland, small areas of woodland and large spoil heaps on the site. The Coventry Canal bounds the site to the north. There is residential development to the east, industrial development to the south and further areas of the former airfield to the west.

The underlying geology comprises mudstone of the Gunthorpe Member formation overlain by superficial glaciofluvial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2019).

2 Archaeological and historical background

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) of the site was originally undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology (2010). The archaeological and historical background provided in that document was summarised in the Lanpro Services WSI (Gajos 2018) as follows:

There are few prehistoric or Roman sites recorded in the vicinity. Cropmarks some 900m to the north of the site are thought to represent the remains of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure (HER1337). This oval enclosure consists of three concentric circuits of segmented ditches set about 10m apart and measures up to 205m by 250m, although the northern and south-eastern sectors of the ditch circuit are not visible on aerial photographs. A Roman coin and brooch may have been found anywhere within the 1km grid co-ordinates listed and therefore may not have been found within the site. However, the finds do suggest Roman activity in the vicinity, probably connected to Ryknild Street (HER5155) nearly 700m to the east.

There is no evidence for Saxon or medieval remains. Map and historical evidence suggests that the area was heath since at least the medieval period, the closest settlement being located at Fradley to the north-east of the site. There is evidence of a moated site (HER940) on the western outskirts of the village.

Linear cropmarks identified to the north of the site appear to relate to former post-medieval field boundaries that were extant until at least the 1920s (HER1339, HER1340, HER1341 and HER3573). Some cropmarks may relate to a former leat adjacent to a moated site at Old Hall Farm (HER3574).

During the late 18th century, the landscape was fundamentally altered by the construction of two canals. While the Trent and Mersey Canal has been protected by the creation of a Conservation Area along its route and listing many of the associated structures, the stretch of the Coventry Canal has not. Adjacent to the western boundary of the site is New Bridge, an accommodation bridge probably built when the canal was constructed in the late 18th century (HER3048). The route of Common Lane (extant until the construction of the airfield) appears to have been diverted when the canal was constructed to cross at Fradley Bridge to east of the site (HER3047).

Further HER records are connected with the former airfield and include air raid shelters, pillboxes and hangars. The structures were all surveyed during the Defence of Britain project. A rare Pickett Hamilton Fort is recorded within the overall airfield, although it has not been possible to identify its exact location, and so it is not known whether it falls within the site area. An aerial photograph of the airfield from 1948 shows a circular mark approximately 350m to the south-west of the site, which may be the fort.

2.1 Previous archaeological work on the site

There are no known previous archaeological investigations on the site or in the wider development area.

3 Project aims

The overall aim of the programme of archaeological evaluation was to obtain sufficient information as to the archaeological significance and potential of the site, in order to allow reasoned and informed recommendations to be made on the application for development.

More specifically, the project had the following objectives (Gajos 2018):

- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition and significance of any archaeological remains within the development site;
- To excavate and record identified archaeological features and deposits to a level appropriate to their extent and significance;
- To assess vulnerability/sensitivity of any exposed remains;
- To assess the impact of previous land use on the site;
- To assess the potential for survival of environmental evidence;
- To inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of the proposed development on surviving archaeological remains;
- To undertake sufficient post-excavation assessment to confidently interpret identified archaeological features;
- To report the results of the evaluation and place them in their local and regional context;
- To compile and deposit a site archive for deposition.

4 Project methodology

As noted above, a project Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Lanpro Services Ltds (Gajos 2018) and this stage of fieldwork was undertaken between 21st and 22nd of January 2019.

The overall archaeological evaluation involves the excavation of eight trenches on the site, but at this stage of work (Stage 1) only three of these were undertaken (Trenches 6, 7 and 8). The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. These were all intended to be 50m in length, on a non-gridded array, targeted on areas considered to be relatively undisturbed. In the event, however, considerable localised ground constraints prevented the full 50m length of two of the trenches being achieved: Trenches 7 and 8 were both positioned to avoid dense wood/scrubland, an in-use access road, and a footpath in regular use (desired route), whilst still remaining close to the intended target areas.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). Trench and feature locations were surveyed using a differential GPS with an accuracy limit set at <0.04m. On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

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

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Introduction

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2-3 and Plates 1-5. The trench and context inventory is presented in Appendix 1.

5.2 Phasing/Trench descriptions

5.2.1 Natural deposits

The natural substrate was encountered in all of the trenches excavated. This varied between trenches, comprising either light orange-brown sandy gravel or light whiteish-yellow and greyish-orange sandy gravel.

5.2.2 Phase 1: post-medieval/modern

Trench 7 contained a shallow ditch aligned west-north-west to east-south-east, directly below the topsoil [706]. This was 1.15m wide and 0.26m in depth, filled with soft blackish-brown silt similar to the topsoil (Fig 3; Plate 3). There were no finds, but this clearly aligns with a field boundary present on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map (published in 1902). Around 1.20m to the north-east was a shallow depression, possibly a pit, 0.90m long, 0.62m wide but only 0.12m in depth [708] (Fig 3; Plate 4). The soft blackish-brown silty fill was comparable to the ditch fill and the topsoil, and included post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM) and a piece of an iron bar, suggesting a relatively modern date.

5.2.3 Phase 2: Modern

Towards the north-east end of Trench 6 was a modern plastic drain pipe [602], as well as a linear spread of re-deposited natural. This was likely to reflect the recent insertion of a large sewer and drainage system on the site, as it appeared to align with the route between two nearby concrete access chambers.

Trench 7 also contained a series of modern services, including two parallel ceramic land drains, [702] and [704], and a further large drain with a concrete cap. This aligned with a similar feature running

north-east to south-west at the eastern end of Trench 8 [806]. Another service was present in the centre of Trench 8 [808], overlain by made ground (802) and a former tarmac surface for an access road (801), now overgrown.

The topsoil in Trench 7 and 8 was dark grey-brown sandy silt with abundant modern detritus, 0.05-0.32m thick (Plate 2 and Plate 5). No topsoil was present in Trench 6, as this had been already scalped away by groundworks, but redeposited and disturbed natural was present, clearly derived from a combination of machines tracking over the exposed natural and recent scrub growth (Plate 1).

6 Artefactual evidence, by Rob Hedge

6.1 Artefact methodology

The finds work reported here conforms with the following guidance: for findwork by ClfA (2014b), for pottery analysis by PCR/SGRP/MPRG (2016), for archive creation by AAF (2011), and for museum deposition by SMA (1993).

6.1.1 Recovery policy

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

6.1.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site.

6.1.3 Discard policy

Artefacts from topsoil and subsoil and unstratified contexts are normally noted but not retained, unless they are of intrinsic interest (e.g. worked flint or flint debitage, featured pottery sherds, and other potential 'registered artefacts'). All artefacts are collected from stratified excavated contexts, except for large assemblages of post-medieval or modern material, unless there is some special reason to retain such as local production. Discard of finds from post-medieval and earlier deposits will only be instituted with reference to museum collection policy and/or with agreement of the local museum.

6.2 Artefactual analysis

Only three artefacts were retained from the site:

- a very small (2g) fragment of 17th to 19th century ceramic building material, and a fragment of an iron bar (59g) from fill (709) of pit [708];
- a fragment (25g) of late 18th to 19th century drainage tile from the topsoil (800) of Trench 8.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Further analysis and reporting

The artefacts are of negligible significance and no further work on these is required.

6.3.2 Discard and retention

The assemblage is not considered worthy of retention, although the final decision rests with the collecting museum.

7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion and conclusions

There were a limited number of archaeological features identified within the trenches opened as Stage 1 of this project (Trenches 6, 7 and 8), with mainly drainage and modern intrusions identified. Two other features in Trench 7, a shallow linear ditch and an adjacent pit, appeared to be of relatively modern date and reflect a former field system visible on early 20th century maps, prior to construction of the airfield. These features are of negligible archaeological significance.

There were no buried features associated with RAF Lichfield located in the trenches, and there was no indication of earlier occupation or other activity on the site. As such, it is considered that there is very limited potential for such features to occur in the trenches proposed across the rest of the site areas. The surrounding landscape appears to have been subject to agricultural and then industrial (airfield) use for a substantial period, with the small quantity of post-medieval and modern artefacts recovered reflecting this land use.

Further site investigations will be completed in due course, but at this stage, the methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project will be achieved. Conditions were suitable in all of the trenches to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features; although it is apparent that extensive disturbance from modern construction works has affected large parts of the site. It is considered that the nature, density and distribution of archaeological features so far has provided an accurate characterisation of the development site.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Richard Bradley, assisted by Hazel Whitefoot.

The project was managed by Tom Vaughan. The report was produced and collated by Richard Bradley. Specialist contributions and individual sections of the report are attributed to the relevant authors throughout the text.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following:

- Paul Gajos (Lanpro Services Ltd);
- Shane Kelleher (Staffordshire County Archaeologist);
- Terry Beaumont (site maintenance, Evans Group).

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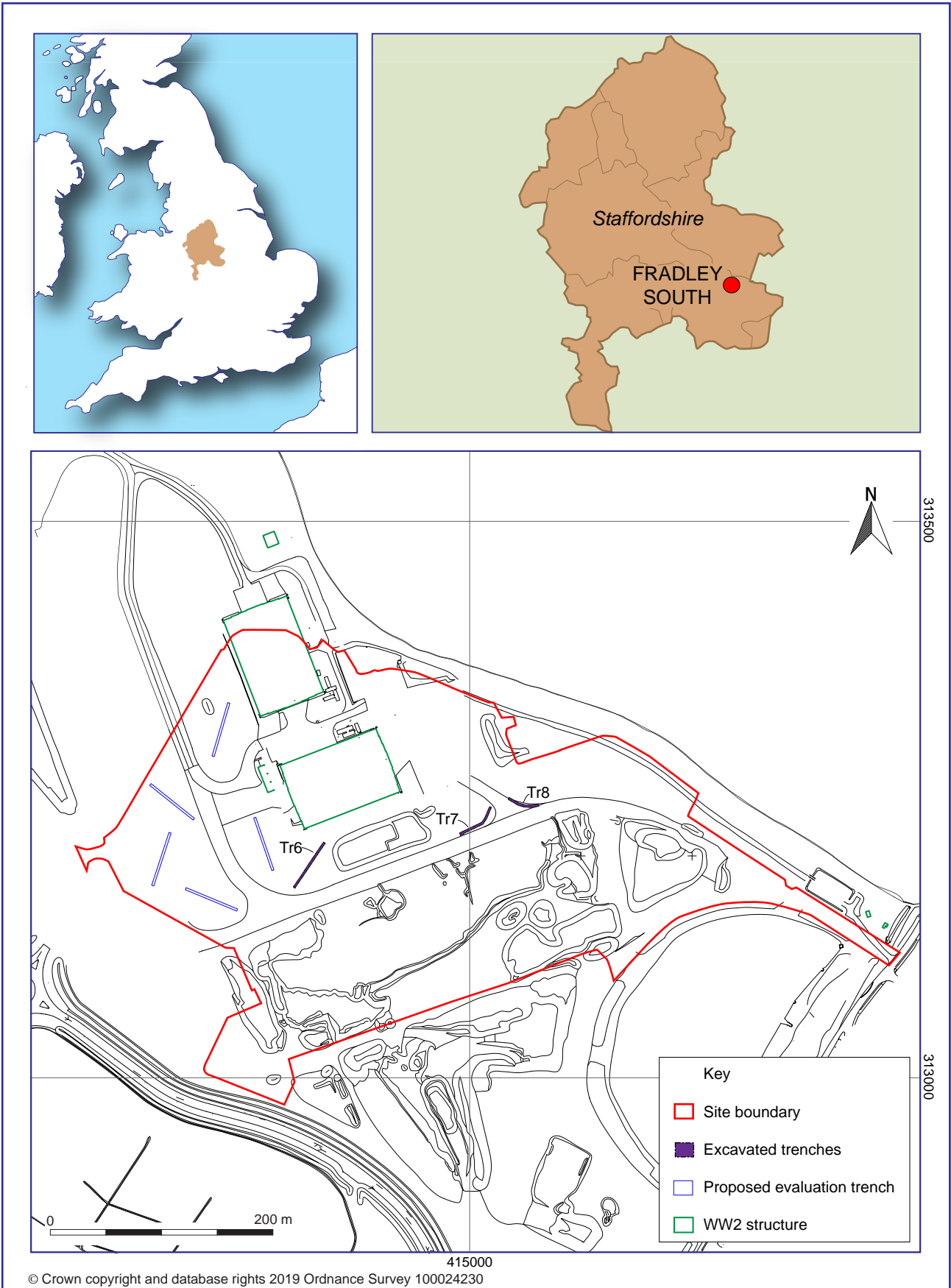
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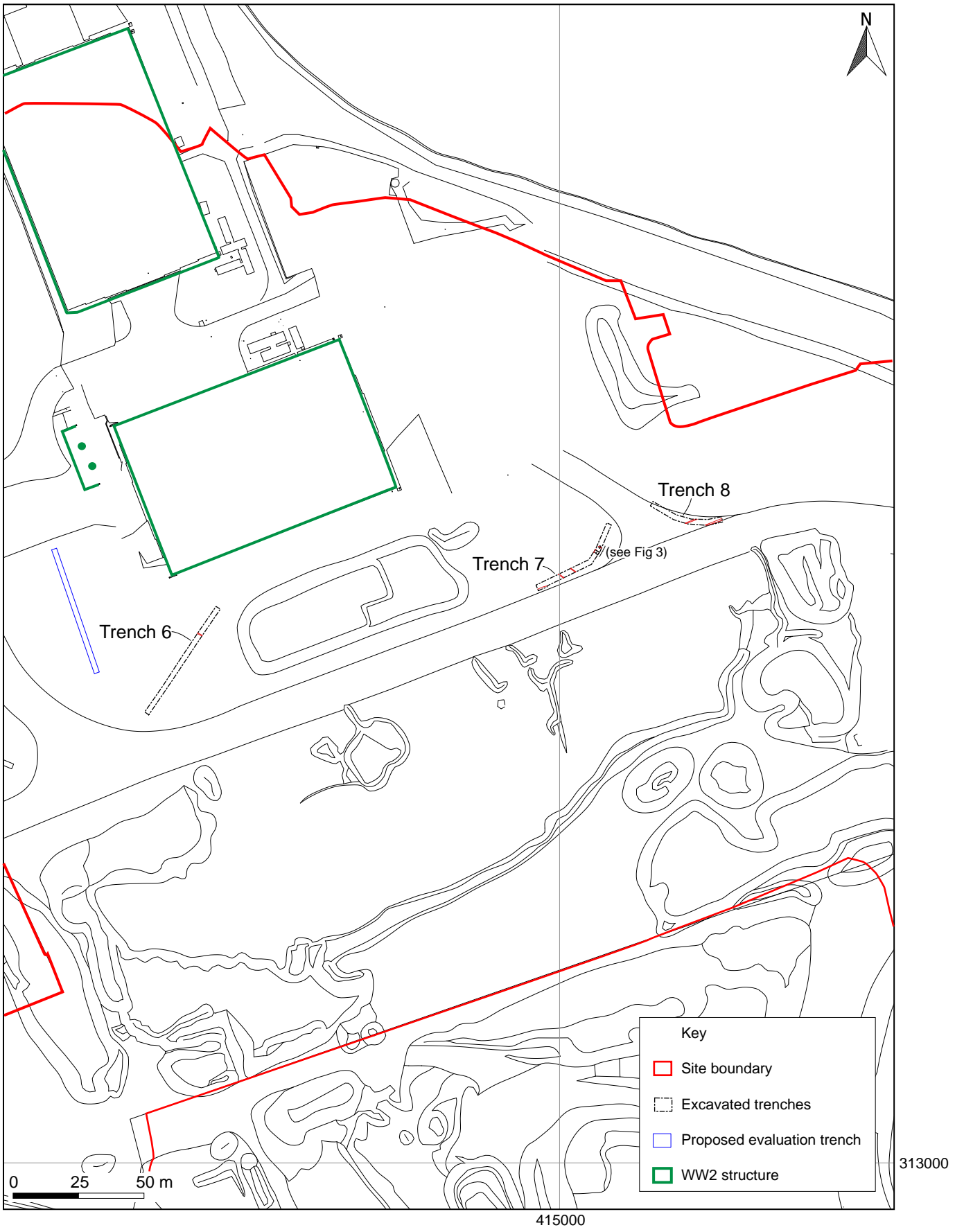
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Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1

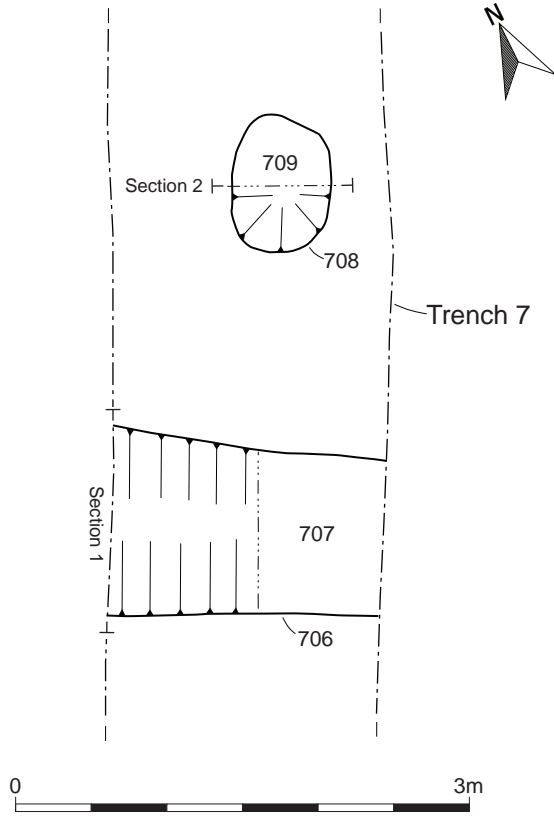


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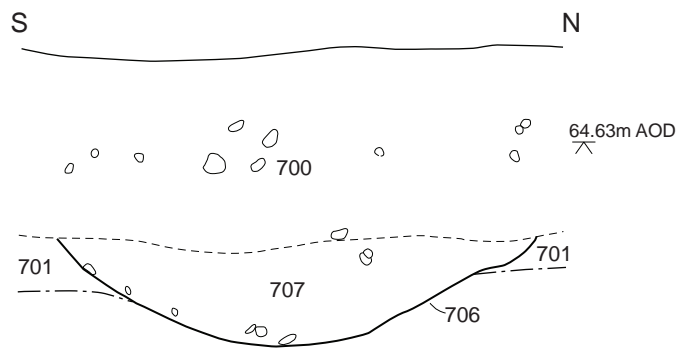
Location of Trenches 6, 7 and 8

Figure 2

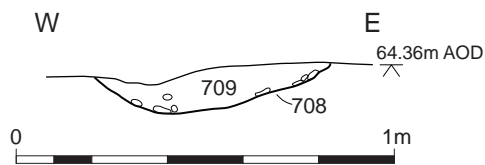
TRENCH 7: PLAN



SECTION 1: DITCH 706



SECTION 2: PIT 708



Features in Trench 7

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1: Trench 6 general view, facing south-west, 2x 1m scales



Plate 2: General working shot of Trench 7 during excavation, facing north-east, no scales



Plate 3: Ditch 706, facing west-north-west, 1m and 0.5m scales



Plate 4: Pit 708, facing north-north-east, 0.4m scale



Plate 5: Trench 8 general view, facing south-east, 2x 1m scales

Appendix 1: Trench descriptions

Trench 6

Length: 50m

Width: 1.80m

Orientation: NE-SW

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
600	Natural	Layer	Redeposited natural	0.09m	Friable orangey brown sandy silt with gravels
601	Natural	Layer	Natural	0.16m+	Friable orangey brown sand with sub-rounded gravel and pebbles
602	Modern service	Cut	Cut for service pipe running E-W across trench.		
603	Modern service	Fill	Modern plastic pipe		Friable orangey brown sandy silt with sub-round stones

Trench 7

Length: 37.9m

Width: 1.80m

Orientation: SW-NE and N-S

Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
700	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil-	0.32m	Friable greyish brown sandy silt with pebbles and occasional sub- rounded cobbles
701	Natural	Layer	Natural	0.15m+	Moderately compact whiteish yellow sand
702	Field drain	Cut	Cut for land drain		
703	Field drain	Fill	Ceramic land drain in sandy soil matrix. Fill of [702]		
704	Field drain	Cut	Cut for land drain		
705	Field drain	Fill	Fill of land drain [704]		
706	Ditch	Cut	Shallow ditch feature, no finds	0.26m	Dark fill similar to pit [708] and topsoil. Possible post-med/modern boundary ditch. Seems to correlate with OS mapping
707	Ditch	Fill	Single fill in ditch [706]. No finds, sterile but similar to topsoil	0.26m	Soft blackish brown sandy silt
708	Pit	Cut	Oval shallow depression, possible pit or base of posthole. Finds suggest post-medieval/modern date	0.12m	
709	Pit	Fill	Single topsoil-like fill in pit/posthole/depression [708]. CBM and metal inclusions suggests modern or post-med	0.12m	Friable blackish brown silty sand

Trench 8

Length: 29m

Width: 1.90m

Orientation: NW-SE and E-W

Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
800	Topsoil	Layer	Current topsoil/scrub	0.05m	Soft greyish brown sandy silt Frequent rooting and modern detritus
801	Layer	Layer	Tarmacadam surface with Type 1 hardcore.	0.12m	Indurated tarmac and hardcore bedding layer
802	Layer	Layer	Made ground - demolition bedding layer for surface	0.10m	Brick rubble and reddish orange gravel
803	Layer	Layer	Former topsoil	0.30m	Blackish brown sandy silt
804	Natural	Layer	Clay sand and gravel natural	0.05m+	Firm whiteish grey clayey sand
805	Drain	Fill	Concrete pipe in [806]		
806	Drain	Cut	Service trench for drainage		
807	Drain	Fill	Salt-glazed pipes in [808]		
808	Drain	Cut	Service trench for drain		

Appendix 2: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	Ceramics, Metal
Paper	Context sheet, Diary (Field progress form), Drawing, Plan, Report, Section
Digital	Database, GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Survey, Text

*OASIS terminology