

**LAND AT COFFIN CLOSE, WESTROP,
HIGHWORTH
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

SU 2000 9270

Report No. 501
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SUMMARY

This document details the results of an archaeological evaluation relating to land at Coffin Close, Westrop, Highworth in the Borough of Swindon (SU 2000 9270). The evaluation was undertaken in order to ascertain the likely potential of the site for the presence and survival of archaeological deposits.

Highworth is a settlement of Saxon and Medieval origin, but there have also been indications of extensive Romano-British settlement on the high ground now occupied by the town.

The results of the evaluation have demonstrated that the site contains archaeologically significant features.

Roman activity was identified in the form of a single 'V' shaped ditch [103] in the southwest corner of Trench 1. An articulated cow skeleton was present in the top of the fill and had clearly been buried while the ditch was still a visible feature. A sherd of residual roman pottery was also recovered from feature [303] in Trench 3.

Medieval activity was identified in Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4. Two features were present in Trench 1 in the form of a ditch and terminus [105] and a second ditch terminus or pit [107]. It is likely that these represent part of the same feature, which appears to be a small length of curving ditch. A further ditch was identified in Trench 2, which did not reappear in Trench 4 and must, therefore, either turn or terminate between them. A substantial feature [303] was present in the central part of Trench 3. It is likely that this feature represents medieval stone extraction, probably for hardcore rather than building stone, as the feature was not excavated deeply enough to reach suitable stone. Other interpretations (such as a hollow way) are also possible. A substantial pit [403] was also present in Trench 4.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A proposal has been submitted for the redevelopment of land at Coffin Close, Westrop, Highworth in the Borough of Swindon centred at NGR: SU 2000 9270. In accordance with the principals of Planning Policy Guidance note, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16) a programme of archaeological works has been requested, of which archaeological evaluation comprised the second stage in ascertaining the archaeological potential of the area. The works were commissioned by DPDS Consulting on behalf of the Trustees of S R Wise.
- 1.2 The evaluation works were undertaken in accordance with a project design (Foundations Archaeology 2006) agreed with the County Archaeological Service, acting as archaeological advisors to the Borough of Swindon. The project design was prepared in accordance with a brief and in accordance with the general requirements set out by the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (1994, revised 2001) and *Standards for Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation in Wiltshire* (County Archaeological Service 1995).

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The site is located to the north of the historic core of Highworth in the area known as Westrop (figures 1 and 2). It consists of an area bounded on all sides by gardens and built environment, to the east a narrow drive leads to Westrop road. At the time of the evaluation the study area comprised the existing house, gardens, comprising lawn and scrub areas, and a tennis court.
- 2.2 The geology of the study area consists of an outlier of Portland and Purbeck beds with occasional sand and clay deposits.

3 PROJECT AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Highworth is a settlement of Saxon and Medieval origin, but there have also been indications of extensive Romano-British settlement on the high ground now occupied by the town.
- 3.2 It is currently proposed to construct a new residential development at the site.

4 AIMS

- 4.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential

of any surviving archaeological remains; as well as to make recommendations for management of the resource, including further archaeological works if necessary. In turn this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed development.

- 4.2 In particular the project sought to identify evidence for Roman activity and to test the extent of the medieval settlement.
- 4.3 This in no way prejudiced the monitoring works against artefacts and features from other periods.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The method statement specified the excavation of five 30m by 1.6m trenches within the study area. Due to on-site constraints no trenches were excavated in the area of the tennis court, which could not be accessed by a mechanical excavator, or in the lawned areas adjacent to the existing house, where they would have impacted on live services. The final trench locations were approved by Roy Canham acting as the archaeological advisor to Swindon Borough Council and Liz Smith of Swindon Borough Council. The trench locations are illustrated on Figure 2.
- 5.2 Topsoil and non-significant overburden was removed through use of a mechanical excavator with a toothless grading bucket to the top of archaeological deposits or natural, whichever was encountered first. All site recording was undertaken in accordance with Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3 (Excavation Manual).
- 5.3 Upon completion of the works, the trenches were subsequently backfilled.

6 RESULTS

- 6.1 **Trench 1** measured 30m long by 1.60m wide and was aligned northeast-southwest. The trench was excavated onto natural deposits which consisted of strong orange clays at an average depth of 0.45m (119.96m OD) from the modern ground surface. The natural was sealed beneath a thin orange grey clay subsoil layer (102) up to 0.15m thick. This layer was sealed in turn beneath a grey brown humic clay topsoil (101) up to 0.4m thick. All the archaeological features were cut into the natural substrates and sealed by layer (102).
- 6.2 Feature [103] was located at the western end of the trench and consisted of a 'V' shaped ditch with steep sloping sides and a narrow base. It was aligned northeast-southwest and measured 0.75m wide by 0.40m deep. A possible

posthole, with vertical sides and a flat base was present at the southeastern end of the section and measured 0.22m across by 0.10m deep. Both the ditch and the posthole contained an identical fill of compact mid grey brown clay (104), from which a single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered. An articulated cow skeleton was also present in the top of the fill.

- 6.3 Feature [105] was located in the central part of the trench. The eastern continuation of this feature could not be traced due to the presence of an electrical cable. It comprised a section of curving ditch, which terminated within the trench area. It was aligned approximately east-west and curved to northwest to its terminus. It measured 1.0m wide by 0.10m deep with shallow sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a compact mid grey brown sandy clay (106), from which a single sherd of mid 12th-14th century *Minety ware* pottery was recovered.
- 6.4 Feature [107] was located to the east of ditch [105], on the far side of the baulk left for the electricity cable. It is possible that this feature might represent the eastern terminus of ditch [105]. It consisted either of a ditch terminus, or part of a pit. It measured 0.90m wide by 0.23m deep with sloping sides and a slightly rounded base. It contained a mid grey brown sandy clay (108) from which no finds were recovered.
- 6.5 **Trench 2** measured 30m long by 1.60m wide and was aligned north northeast-south southwest following the natural slope. The trench was excavated onto natural deposits which consisted of strong orange clays with outcrops of brash at an average depth of 0.43m (11.96m OD at the northern end, rising to 120.08m OD at the southern end) from the modern ground surface. The natural was sealed beneath a thin orange clay interface layer (203) up to 0.10m thick, beneath a thin orange grey clay subsoil layer (202) up to 0.20m thick. This layer was sealed in turn beneath a grey brown humic clay topsoil (201) up to 0.25m thick. A substantial hollow was visible as a surface feature between 12.3m and 18.6m from the southern end of the trench. Excavation identified that this feature was cut from the level of the topsoil and contained modern refuse. It is likely that it represents an infilled pond. A single archaeological feature, cut into the interface/natural substrates and sealed by layer (202), was present within this trench.
- 6.6 Feature [203] was present in the southern part of the trench and comprised an east-west aligned ditch. It measured 1.05m wide by 0.13m deep with shallow sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a compact mid grey brown silty clay (204), from which a single sherd of mid 12th-14th century *Minety ware* pottery was recovered..

- 6.7 **Trench 3** measured 30m long by 1.60m wide and was aligned east-west. The trench was excavated onto natural deposits which consisted of limestone brash with orange clay banding at an average depth of 0.37m (119.72m OD) from the modern ground surface. The natural was sealed beneath a thin orange grey clay subsoil layer (302) up to 0.18m thick. This layer was sealed in turn beneath a grey brown humic clay topsoil (301) up to 0.25m thick. A single archaeological feature was present in this trench, cut into the natural substrates and sealed by layer (302).
- 6.8 Feature [303] was present in the central part of the trench and consisted of a substantial cut into the top of the brash. It measured 4.9m wide by 0.30m deep with shallow sloping sides a flat base. It contained a mixed orange/grey/brown sandy clay with frequent redeposited stone fragments (304) from which an assemblage of medieval pottery was recovered.
- 6.9 **Trench 4** measured 30m long by 1.60m wide and was aligned northeast-southwest. The trench was excavated onto natural deposits which consisted of limestone brash in the northern half and strong orange clay in the southern half at an average depth of 0.40m (118.98m OD) from the modern ground surface. The natural was sealed beneath a thin mid grey brown sandy clay subsoil layer (402) up to 0.15m thick. This layer was sealed in turn beneath a dark grey brown humic clay topsoil (401) up to 0.30m thick. A single archaeological feature was present in this trench, cut into the natural substrates and sealed by layer (402).
- 6.10 Feature [403] was present in the northeaster end of the trench and consisted of a substantial cut into the top of the brash. It measured 2m wide by 0.35m deep with irregular sloping sides a flat base. It contained a mid grey brown sandy clay with occasional stone fragments (404) from which a small assemblage of medieval pottery was recovered.
- 6.11 **Trench 5** measured 30m long by 1.60m wide and was aligned west northwest-east southeast. The trench was excavated onto natural deposits which consisted of degraded limestone brash with bands and patches of strong orange clay at an average depth of 0.40m (118.26m OD) from the modern ground surface. The natural was sealed beneath a thin mid grey brown sandy clay and degraded brash layer (502) up to 0.13m thick. This layer was sealed in turn beneath a dark grey brown humic clay topsoil (501) up to 0.32m thick. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

7 DISCUSSION

- 7.1 The results of the evaluation have demonstrated that the site contains archaeologically significant features.
- 7.2 Roman activity was identified in the form of a single 'V' shaped ditch [103] in the southwest corner of Trench 1. An articulated cow skeleton was present in the top of the fill and had clearly been buried while the ditch was still a visible feature. A sherd of residual Roman pottery was also recovered from feature [303] in Trench 3.
- 7.3 Medieval activity was identified in Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4. Two features were present in Trench 1 in the form of a ditch and terminus [105] and a second ditch terminus or pit [107]. It is likely that these represent part of the same feature, which appears to be a small length of curving ditch. A further ditch was identified in Trench 2, which did not reappear in Trench 4 and must, therefore, either turn or terminate between them. A substantial feature [303] was present in the central part of Trench 3. It is likely that this feature represents medieval stone extraction, probably for hardcore rather than building stone, as the feature was not excavated deeply enough to reach suitable stone. Other interpretations (such as a hollow way) are also possible. A substantial pit [403] was also present in Trench 4.
- 7.4 A small finds assemblage was recovered during the course of this evaluation. This included two sherds of Romano-British pottery and a small assemblage of medieval pottery, predominantly products of local industries. No Post-medieval material was recovered from any feature, with the exception of the probable infilled pond, which yielded modern refuse including Coca-Cola bottles, modern china and tin cans. These were not retained.
- 7.5 The results of the archaeological evaluation indicate that there are no features which will require preservation *in situ*. Further mitigation works will, however, be required. Discussions should therefore be held with Roy Canham, acting as the archaeological advisor to Swindon Borough Council, in order to define the required level of these works.
- 7.6 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology and will be deposited with Swindon Museum in due course. An OASIS form will be completed and submitted and a short note will be submitted for publication in the Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine.

8 REFERENCES

Foundations Archaeology 2006 *Land to the Rear of Coffin Close, Highworth Archaeological Evaluation: Specification* Unpublished report

Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, revised 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation*

Wiltshire County Council 1995 *Standards for Archaeological Assessment and Field Evaluation in Wiltshire*

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank the following:

Mr And Mrs G N Wise
Graham Smith of DPDS
Roy Canham of Wiltshire County Council
Liz Smith of Swindon Borough Council

APPENDIX 1 FINDS REPORT

The Pottery by Roy King

An assemblage of Roman and medieval pottery was recovered during the course of the evaluation works. The assemblage comprised two Roman sherds, of which one was residual, and 69 sherds of medieval pottery, of which the greater part was from the local Minety kilns. The levels of abrasion suggest that the pottery recovered from features [103] and [303] might represent a primary deposit, while the remaining material may have been introduced to the features via backfilling using material which had already been subject to some disturbance. The complete absence of post-medieval/modern ceramics, however, indicates that even this latter pottery is likely to provide moderately secure dating of features. The medieval pottery predominantly comprised coarsewares, but sherds from two fineware jugs were recovered from feature [303], suggesting that there was some relatively high status activity in the close vicinity.

Catalogue

Context (104)

1 rim sherd of unabraded locally produced Roman greyware weighing 24g. Dates c. 2nd-3rd century.

Context (106)

3 abraded body sherds of Minety ware weighing 8g. Dates 12th-14th century.
1 abraded body sherd of Bath A ware weighing 4g. Dates 12th-13th century.

Context (204)

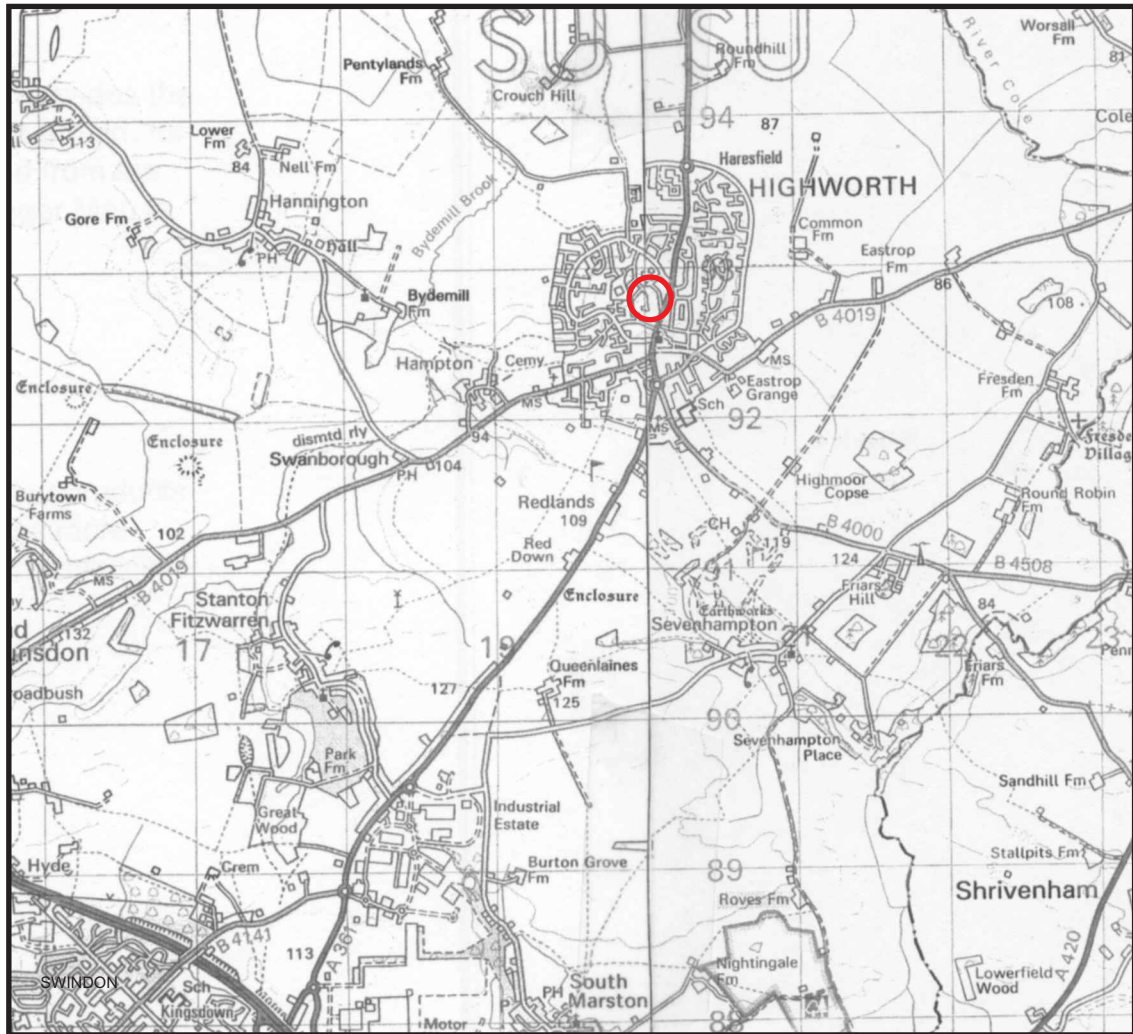
2 body sherds of moderately abraded Minety ware weighing 18g. Dates 12th-14th century.

Context (304)

46 relatively unabraded rim and body sherds from Minety ware vessels weighing 556g. Dates 12th-14th century.
1 unabraded base sherd Brill Boastall fineware weighing 28g. Dates 13th-14th century.
1 body sherd of unknown medieval pottery weighing 4g
5 relatively unabraded body sherds of surrey whiteware vessel (probably Kingston ware) weighing 18g. Dates 13th-14th century.
1 residual abraded body sherd of Roman mortaria weighing 6g.

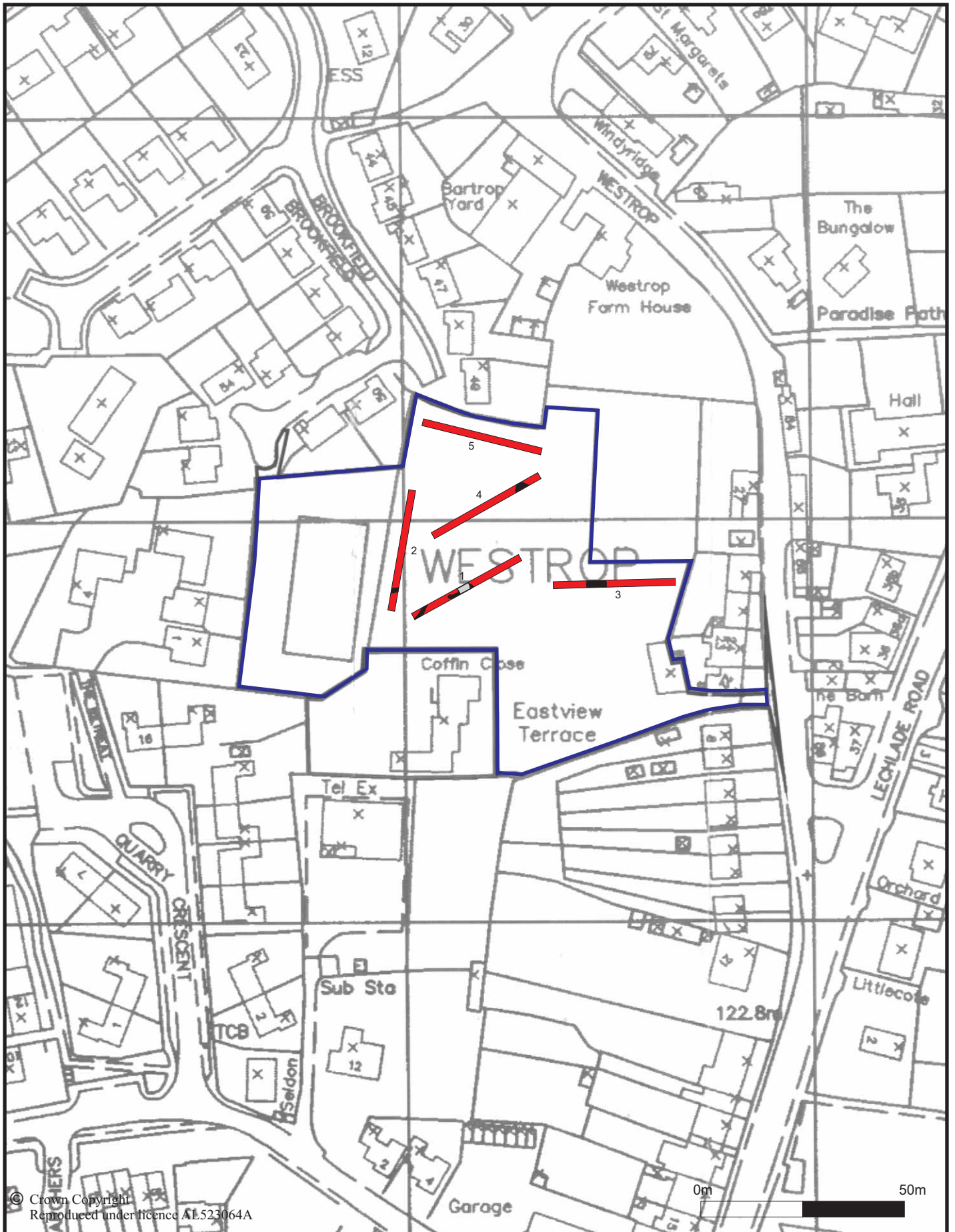
Context (404)

1 abraded body sherd of Newbury A ware weighing 8g. Dates 11th-mid 12th century.
2 abraded body sherds of Newbury B ware weighing 16g. Dates mid 12th-14th century.
7 abraded body sherds of Minety ware weighing 38g. Dates 12th-14th century.



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FIGURE 1: Site Location



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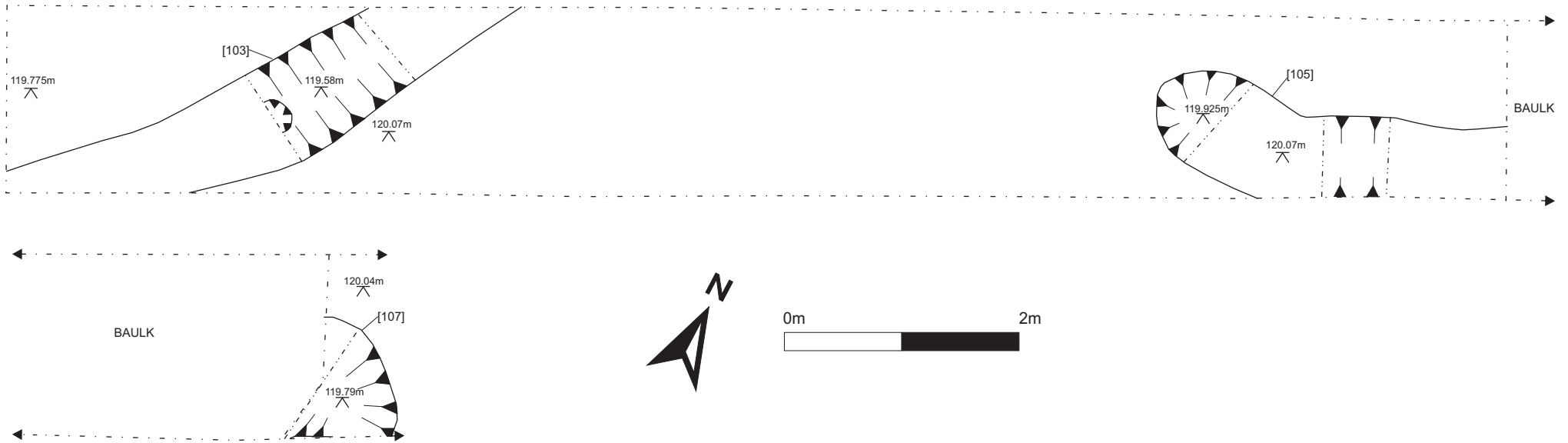
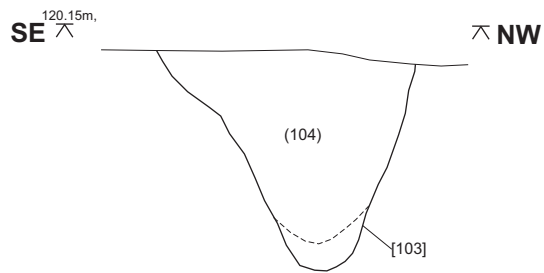
KEY	
	SITE BOUNDARY
	TRENCH LOCATIONS
	TRENCHES WITH ARCHAEOLOGY
	BAULK

FIGURE 2:: Trench Locations

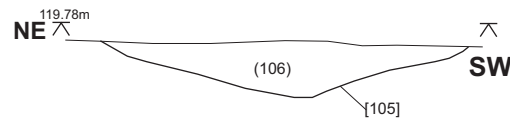
PLAN OF TRENCH 1



NORTH EAST FACING SECTION [103]



NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [105] (TERMINUS)



SOUTH EAST FACING SECTION [107]

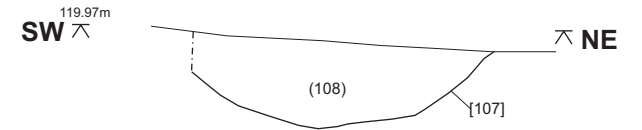
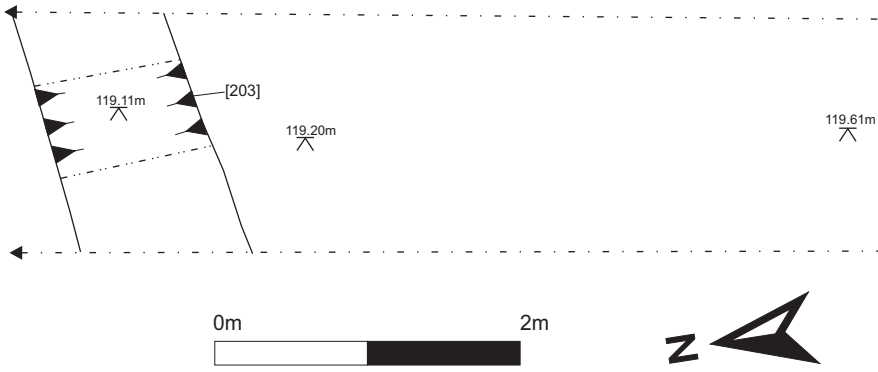
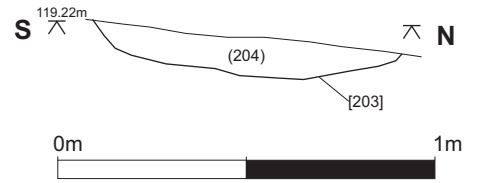


FIGURE 3: Trench 1, Plan and Sections

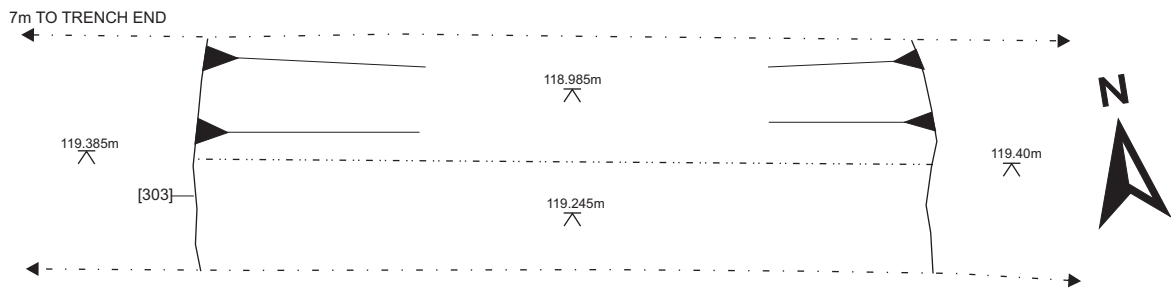
PLAN OF TRENCH 2



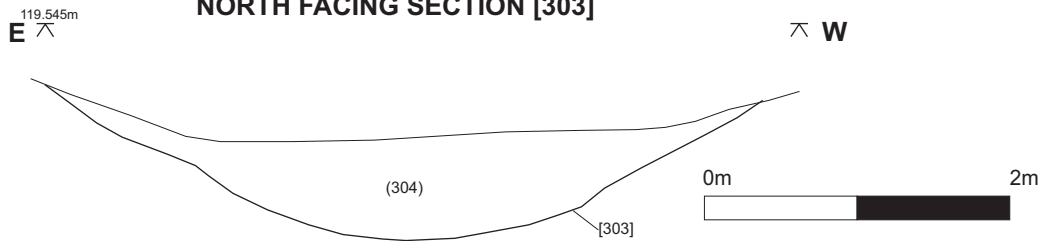
EAST FACING SECTION [203]



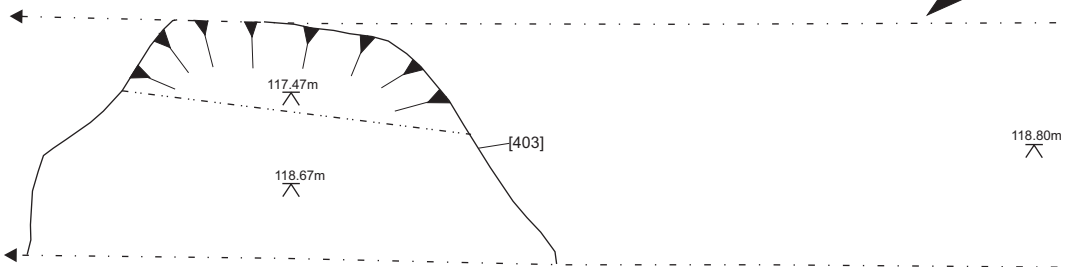
PLAN OF TRENCH 3



NORTH FACING SECTION [303]



PLAN OF TRENCH 4



WEST FACING SECTION [403]

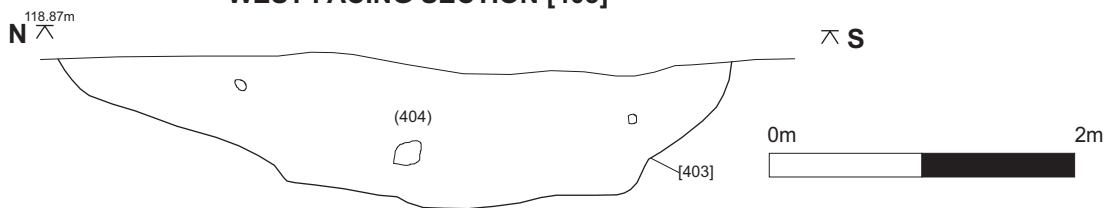


FIGURE 4: Trenches 2, 3 & 4, Plans and Sections