

Archaeological Evaluation at St. Nicholas's Church, Church Road in Sandhurst



NGR 578961 127295
Site Code: SNS-EV-12
(Planning Application TW/11/00379/FUL)

Report for
St. Nicholas Parish Council

SWAT. ARCHAEOLOGY

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NGR 578961 127295

Site Code: SNS-EV-12

SUMMARY

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on a plot of land immediately west of the churchyard at St. Nicholas, located at the end of Church Road at Sandhurst Cross.. A planning application (TW/11/00379/FUL) for the extension of the church cemetery was submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council whereby the Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council. The evaluation was focused on the impact grave digging may have on any underlying archaeological features.

The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of six trenches which encountered limited archaeological features in Trenches 3 and 6, including a ditch in both trenches and a large possible quarry pit cut by the aforementioned ditch in Trench 6. The Archaeological Evaluation has therefore been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification.

INTRODUCTION

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) was commissioned by St. Nicholas Parish Council to carry out an archaeological evaluation at the above site. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council. The evaluation was carried out from the 5th to 6th March 2012.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is located in the High Weald in the hamlet of Sandhurst Cross, 1.4km south west of Sandhurst and lies roughly 90m west of St. Nicholas church on a promontory with commanding views overlooking the Rother Valley. The plot is relatively rectangular in plan on land set aside as a horse paddock and measures up to 100m long and 50m wide. Sloping to the south and the west, the site sits approximately 69m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) at the north and 65m aOD at the south, and is bounded by the churchyard to the east and gardens and stabling to the north. The topography drops considerably to the south and west where the site is bordered by arable fields to the south and the

extension of the horse paddock to the west. According to the British Geological Survey the site lies on the Tunbridge Wells Sand.

PLANNING BACKGROUND

Planning consent (TW/11/00379/FUL) for the extension of the church cemetery was approved by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC). The Council requested that an archaeological evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of grave digging on any archaeological remains. The Local Planning Authority (TWBC) placed the following condition on the planning consent:

‘No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successor(s) in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with written specification and timetable which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.’

Requirements for the archaeological evaluation comprised trial trenching targeting a representative 4% sample of the impact area with six trenches (Fig. 1) designed to establish whether there were any archaeological deposits at the site that may be affected by the proposed cemetery extension. The results from this evaluation will be used to inform KCC of any further archaeological mitigation measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed site lies within an area of archaeological potential, mainly from the Roman and Medieval periods. 100m west of the site lays a well preserved and still visible Roman road that ran from Rochester to Hastings and possibly led to a small harbour in the Rother Estuary. The 14th century church of St. Nicholas sits 90m east of the site, and there was a possibility that activity related to the church, such as a perimeter boundary, may be located during the evaluation. According to the Historic Environment Record (HER), there are few listed sites in a 500m radius of the proposed new cemetery. This is not unusual in the High Weald, where development, and therefore archaeological mitigation, is rare and few archaeological features are exposed. Listings in the HER in and around the development site consist of listed buildings, including St. Nicholas church, a few find spots of prehistoric tools, and crop marks identified via aerial photography. Included in this report are notable listings within the East Sussex County Council Full Monument Report.

Prehistoric

A circular crop mark feature (TQ 82 NW 10), possibly the remains of a ring ditch was identified by aerial photographs near Cledge Wood, Sandhurst, approximately 1.2km east of the site.

Roman

Approximately 1.2km east of the site a sestertius coin of Septimius Severus (193 AD - 211 AD) found during digging in a garden in Sandhurst (TQ 72 NE 14).

Although the Roman road shown on the Ordnance Survey map running west of the site is not listed in the Kent HER, the East Sussex HER has it listed as the Rochester to Hastings Roman road, SMR Number MES2461, and listed by Margary as RR 13. In 2010 a geophysical survey of the road from Sandhurst Cross to Bodiam by David Staveley challenged Margary's suggested route and the route marked on the Ordnance Survey map.

Medieval

St. Nicholas Church (TQ 72 NE 60) is a Grade II* parish church constructed of local sandstone with a nave and chancel dating from the 13th and 14th century, and aisles and west tower also dating from the 14th century. Extensive restoration work by R. C. Carpenter in 1875 included a largely rebuilt chancel. 15th century stained glass survives in the south aisle, east window and the south window, originally from the Chapel Chantry.

Northwest of the church on Bourne Lane is Ivy Cottages (TQ 72 NE 167), originally a late Medieval timber-framed open hall house with a 16th century chimney stack.

On Bodiam Road, Old Priest's House (TQ 72 NE 152) is a late 15th century four bay late medieval building with the central two bays making up the open hall.

Post medieval

Within St. Nicholas churchyard are a number of Grade II listed memorials including 18th century chest tombs to Howard Ward and Mary Collins (TQ 72 NE 141 and TQ 72 NE 59), and an early 19th century mounting block (TQ 72 NE 88) built into the north wall of the churchyard.

South of the church lies Old Place (TQ 72 NE 116), a Grade II early 19th century brick rebuilt house over 17th century sandstone cellars that were originally the ground floor of the earlier dwelling. Also on the farm is an early 19th century oasthouse (TQ 72 NE 164), 1870s brick hayloft and stables (TQ 72 NE 53), and the site of a former 19th century brick ice well that was destroyed in 1990 (TQ 72 NE 170, but now delisted).

North of the church on Church Road lies The Old Rectory (TQ 72 NE 57), an 18th century or possibly earlier brick dwelling.

Two properties on Bodiam Road have been given Grade II listings. Cherry Tree Cottage (TQ 72 NE 46), is a weatherboarded house dating possibly from the 17th century, and Cross Cottages (TQ 72 NE 122), is an 18th century row of cottages formerly known as Little Haddon.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the evaluation, as set out within the Archaeological Specification (2011) was:

- Assessing the likely cumulative impact of grave digging on the archaeological remains using the results of the fieldwork
- Assessing the impact of past development on the site's archaeological potential, especially from farming
- Assessing the potential of the site to contain nationally important remains

- Establishing the degree of Roman and medieval activity on the site
- Establishing the degree of prehistoric activity on the site
- Contributing to the environmental and landscape history of the area

Methodology

Trial trenching was carried out on 5th March 2012 with the excavation of six trenches. Trench location was agreed prior to the excavation between KCC and SWAT. Excavation was carried out using a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, removing the overburden to the top of the first recognisable archaeological horizon, or natural **(003)**, under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist. All trenches measured about 23m in length and 1.1m wide except for Trench 5A and B which straddled two fields. Trench 5A measured 12m long and Trench 5B measured 10m long. The trenches were subsequently hand-cleaned, and three features were exposed, one in Trenches 3 and three in Trench 6. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the specification. A single context recording system was used to record the deposits, and context recording numbers were assigned to all deposits for recording purposes. These are used in the report and shown in bold. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with KCC and IFA standards and guidance.

MONITORING

Due to the lack of extensive archaeological remains, curatorial monitoring was not carried out during the course of the evaluation, but telephone contact was maintained throughout the fieldwork.

RESULTS

The natural geology of Tunbridge Wells Sand **(003)** was exposed below the subsoil at depths of between 0.25m – 0.40m. Cutting this natural deposit was one linear feature in Trench 3 and possibly a continuation of that ditch cutting a large (quarry?) pit in Trench 6 along with two stake/post holes and also a shallow terminating feature in Trench 6. All trenches were covered with a deposit of subsoil **(002)** up to 0.24m thick under a thin layer of turf or topsoil in the case of Trench 5B **(001)**.

Trench 1

(22m x 1.1m x <0.30m)

Trench 1 was placed along the north-west corner of the site, was positioned north/south and was machined to a depth of 0.30m where the natural geology **(003)** was encountered. No archaeological features were observed (Plate 1).

Trench 2

(22m x 1.1m x <0.32m)

Trench 2 ran east to west and was cut across the north east corner of the site. It was machined to a depth of 0.32m where the natural geology **(003)** was encountered. Plough furrowing was evident

cutting the Tunbridge Wells sand. The natural was sealed by a deposit of subsoil **(002)** up to 0.24m thick which was overlain by turf **(001)** up to 0.08m thick. No archaeological features were observed.

Trench 3

(22m x 1.1m x <0.30m)

Trench 3 was situated in the centre of the site to the west and was aligned east/west. It was machined to a depth of 0.30m where a north/south aligned truncated ditch **[301]** was exposed. The ditch measured up to 0.68m wide and up to 0.18m deep with gently sloping sides and a rounded base and was filled by **(300)**, a mid orange brown sandy silty clay which contained no artefacts. Subsoil **(002)** which sealed the ditch was up to 0.24m thick. Overlying the subsoil was a thin layer of turf **(001)** 0.07m thick (Plate 3).

Trench 4

(22m x 1.1m x <0.35m)

Trench 4 was located at the centre of the site at the eastern edge of the field and was aligned north/south. The trench was machined to a depth of 0.35m exposing the Tunbridge Wells Sand **(003)**, including bands of sandstone, which was sealed by a 0.27m thick deposit of subsoil **(002)** that was covered by a 0.07m thick layer of turf **(001)**. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

Trench 5A

(12m x 1.1m x <0.35m)

Trench 5A was positioned in the south-west corner of the within the horse paddock site and was aligned north/south. The trench was machined to a depth of 0.35m to the top of the natural geology **(003)** which was sealed by a 0.25m thick deposit of subsoil **(002)** that was covered by a 0.08m thick band of turf **(001)**. No archaeological features were observed in this trench.

Trench 5B

(10m x 1.1m x 0.35m)

Trench 5B was the only trench located outside the horse paddock and in the arable field to the south. The trench also ran north/south and was machined to a depth of 0.35m to the top of the natural **(003)** which was covered by subsoil **(002)** up to 0.15m thick. As this was in an arable field, there was no overlying turf. Topsoil **(001)** up to 0.15m thick sealed the subsoil. No archaeology was observed in this trench.

Trench 6

(22m x 1.1m x 0.46m)

Trench 6 was located at the south-east corner of the site and was aligned northwest/southeast. This trench contained five features that cut the Tunbridge Wells Sand **(003)** at a depth of up to 0.44m below the present ground surface. At the eastern end of the site a shallow linear cut **[608]**, possibly with a terminus, was positioned north/south and measured 0.60m wide, 0.22m deep and up to 1m long where it ran into the section. The feature was filled with mid grey brown sandy silty clay **(607)**. No cultural material was found within this feature, and it can not positively be identified as archaeological, as it may be a product of root or animal activity. At the western end of the trench, a

large feature **[605]**, possibly a quarry pit, with edges extending outside the evaluation trench and a flat, undulating base was cut to a depth of 0.40m. It was filled by mid grey brown sandy silty clay (**604**) that contained nine sherds of pottery dating to c.50BC-AD50. Cutting the fill of this pit was a curving ditch **[602]** measuring at least 4m long, 1m wide and up to 0.52m deep. The lower deposit (**601**) was made up of dark brown grey silty clay with frequent carbon, but no dating evidence. The secondary fill of this ditch (**603**) contained four sherds of pottery dating from 100BC-AD70. Above this fill was a deposit of redeposited Tunbridge Wells Sand (**606**) Sealing all the features was a 0.32m thick deposit of subsoil (**002**) that was overlain by a 0.08m thick layer of turf (**001**). Two possible stake or post holes **[609]** and **[610]** were located north of the linear (Plate 2).

FINDS

13 sherds of pottery were recovered from the fill of two features in Trench 6. Nine came from the fill (**604**) of pit **[605]** and was identified as Late Iron Age c.50BC-AD50. Four sherds of pottery retrieved from the secondary fill (**603**) of ditch **[602]** were dated to c.50BC-70AD.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation of land to the west of St. Nicholas church revealed a limited amount of archaeology. In Trenches 3 and 6 features containing pottery dating from the Late Iron Age were found in both pit **[605]** and the curvilinear ditch **[602]** cutting it. The other features on the site, ditch **[301]** in Trench 3, and stake holes **[609]** and **[610]** and the narrow possible ditch or gully **[608]** in Trench 6 did not contain any cultural material, and therefore assigning a date to them is not possible. It may be that ditch **[301]** is a continuation of ditch **[603]**, and if so, this feature could be a western boundary ditch to a sacred area that preceded the churchyard. The outer periphery of churchyards are sometimes requisitioned for other purposes, as seen in an excavation at Hoo St. Werburgh on the Isle of Grain by SWAT in 2007, and in the case of St. Nicholas, land used for crops or grazing livestock may have proved more valuable. The 1st-3rd Edition Ordnance Survey maps (1871-1923) show the western boundary of the churchyard slightly inset from the current location when the need for more burial space shifted the boundary sometime between 1929 and 1952 as seen on the 4th Edition OS map. Yet both these western boundaries appear to push the original extent of the churchyard westwards when viewed either on the ground or on aerial photos and Google Earth.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological evaluation has been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification. A common stratigraphic sequence was recognised across the site of the local geology of Tunbridge Wells Sand (**003**) covered by a layer of subsoil (**002**), most likely a plough soil, which in turn is sealed by a thin layer of turf within the horse paddock or topsoil in the arable field to the south (**001**).

Limited archaeological activity was found during the evaluation comprising a large irregularly shaped pit **[605]**, possibly a quarry pit, and a curving ditch **[602]** which cuts the fill of this pit in Trench 6. Two

possible post or stake holes [609] and [610] were located near the north edge of the curvilinear. A further smaller gully-like feature [608] was found in this trench. Northwest of Trench 6, in Trench 3, a north/south aligned truncated ditch [301] was found which may be a continuation of the ditch in Trench 6, but it was impossible to give a definitive interpretation of the relationship between these two features within the limited confines of the evaluation process. The evaluation has, therefore, assessed the archaeological potential of land intended for development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SWAT Archaeology would like to thank St. Nicholas Parish Council for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Wendy Rogers, Heritage Officer, Kent County Council and Brian Powell for their advice and assistance.

Julie Martin supervised the fieldwork, assisted in the field by Marcus Headifen. Illustrations were produced by James Madden for *Digitise This*. The project was managed by Paul Wilkinson.

Julie Martin

March 2012

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Bibliography

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Institute for Field Archaeologists (IfA), Rev (2008) *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation*.

Kent County Council (KCC), (2011) *Specification for an archaeological evaluation at St. Nicholas's Church, Church Road in Sandhurst*

Kent County Council (KCC) (2012) *Kent County Council Monument Full Report* for site centred at 604661 162712

Margary, I. (1948) *Roman Ways in the Weald*, Phoenix House.

Staveley, D. (2010) *A Geophysical Survey of the Roman Road between Bodiam and Sandhurst Cross, 2010*. Unpublished document.

Maps

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition (1871-1890)

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition (1897-1900)

Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition (1907-1923)

Ordnance Survey 4th Edition (1929-1952)

Websites

Exploring Kent's Past <http://www.extranet7.krnt.gov.uk/ExploringKentsPast/>

Kent Landscape Information System <http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/home.htm>

Old Maps Online <http://www.oldmapsonline.org/>

APPENDIX 1 – Kent County Council HER Summary Form

Site Name: <i>St. Nicholas church</i>	
SWAT Site Code: <i>SNS-EV-12</i>	
Site Address: <i>St. Nicholas Church, Church Rd., Sandhurst Cross, Kent</i>	
<p>Summary: <i>Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land west of St. Nicholas church. A planning application (TW/11/00379/FUL) for the extension of the church graveyard at the above site was submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) whereby Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of grave digging on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council.</i></p> <p><i>The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of six trenches which encountered limited archaeological features in Trenches 3 and 6 only. Trench 3 contained a truncated north/south aligned ditch containing no artefacts. In Trench 6 a large, flat based (quarry?) pit with sides extending outside the confines of the trench was located at the northwest end of the trench. The fill contained sherds of Late Iron Age pottery. The pit was cut by a curving ditch with a secondary fill containing sherds of Late Iron Age pottery. Along the north edge of the curvilinear were two stake/post hole-like features. The trench also contained a terminus-like feature which contained no cultural material.</i></p>	
District/Unitary: <i>Tunbridge Wells</i>	Parish: <i>St. Nicholas</i>
Period(s): Tentative:	
NGR (centre of site : 8 figures): (NB if large or linear site give multiple NGRs): <i>NGR 578961 127295</i>	
Type of archaeological work (delete) <i>Evaluation</i>	
Date of Recording: <i>March 2012</i>	
Unit undertaking recording: <i>Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT)</i>	
Geology: <i>Tunbridge Wells Sand</i>	
Title and author of accompanying report: <i>Martin J. An Archaeological Evaluation at St. Nicholas church, Church Road, Sandhurst, Kent</i>	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate) <i>As above</i> <p style="text-align: right;">(cont. on attached sheet)</p>	
Location of archive/finds: <i>SWAT</i>	
Contact at Unit: <i>Paul Wilkinson</i>	Date: <i>11th March 2012</i>

Appendix 2.

Spot-dating of the pottery from the evaluation at St Nicholas Church, Sandhurst, Kent

Malcolm Lyne

Fabrics

LIA1. Coarse grog-tempered with additional very sparse <0.50 mm. calcined flint

LIA2A. Coarse grog-tempered

LIA2B. Fine grog-tempered

Catalogue

Context	Fabric	Form	Date-range	No of sherds	Wt in gm	Comments
603	LIA1	Jar	c.100BC-	1	4	Abraded
	LIA2A		AD.50	2	7	Abraded
	Fired clay		c.50BC-AD.70	1	6	Abraded
			c.50BC-AD.50 but possibly derived from 604	3	11g	Ditch fill
604	LIA2A		c.50BC-AD.70	5	14	Abraded
	LIA2B		c.50BC-AD.50	1	8	Fresh
			c.50BC-AD.50	6	22g	subsoil



Plate 1. View of site looking southeast with Trench 1 in foreground



Plate 2. Trench 6 – Pit [605]/ditch [602] looking south, 1m scale



Plate 3. Trench 3 looking east, 1m scale

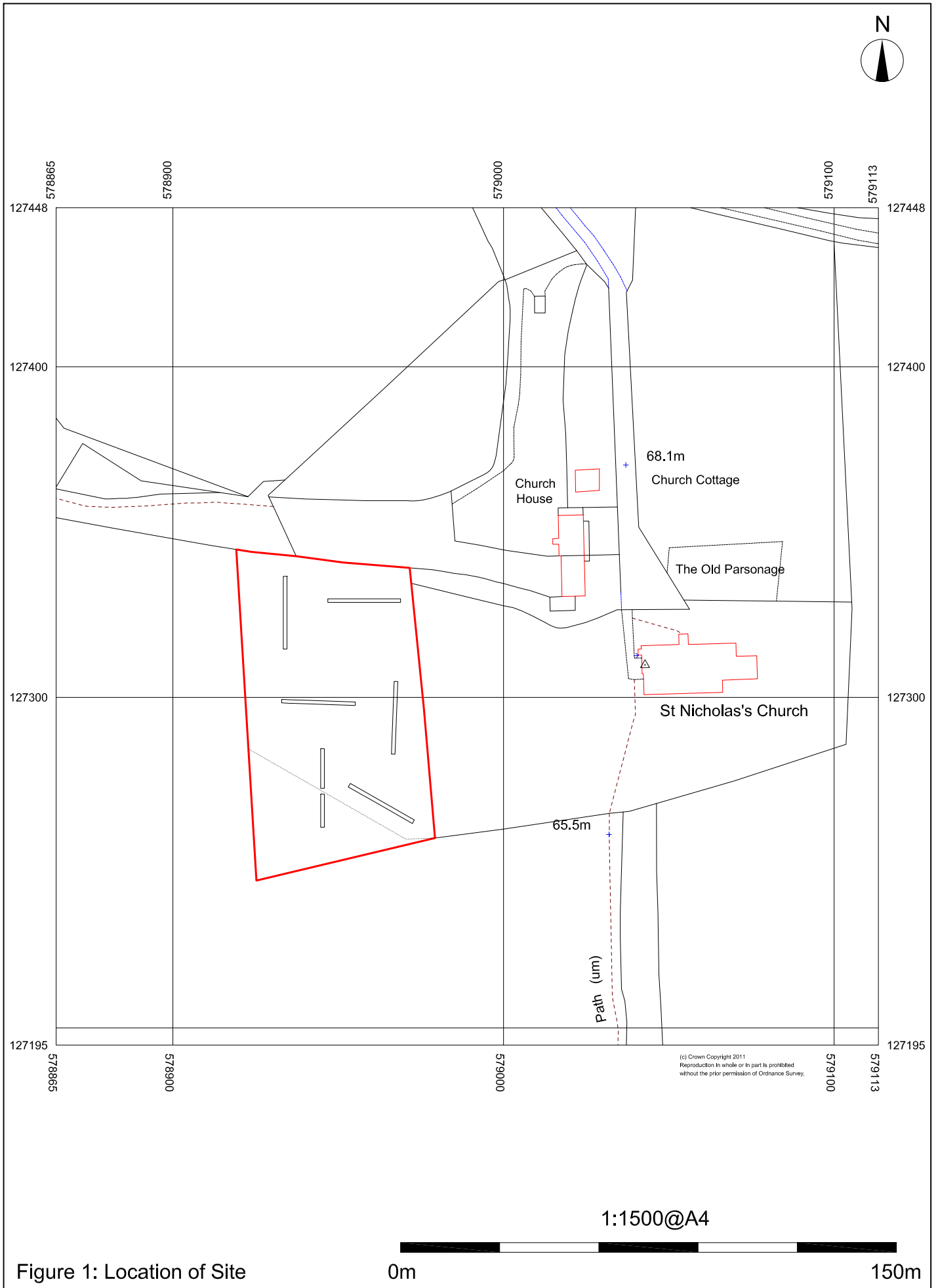


Figure 1: Location of Site

0m

150m

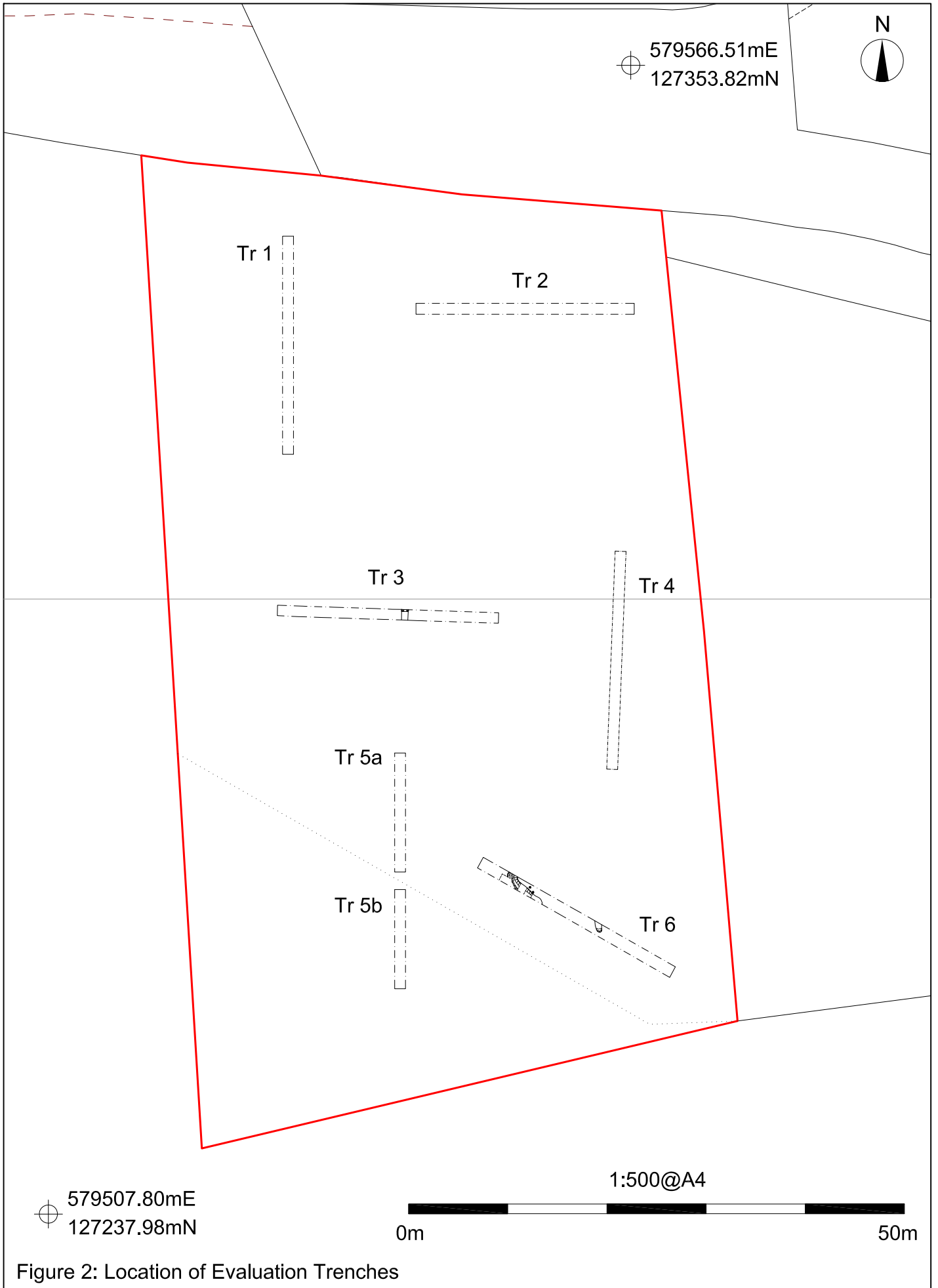


Figure 2: Location of Evaluation Trenches

580013.40mE
127275.90mN

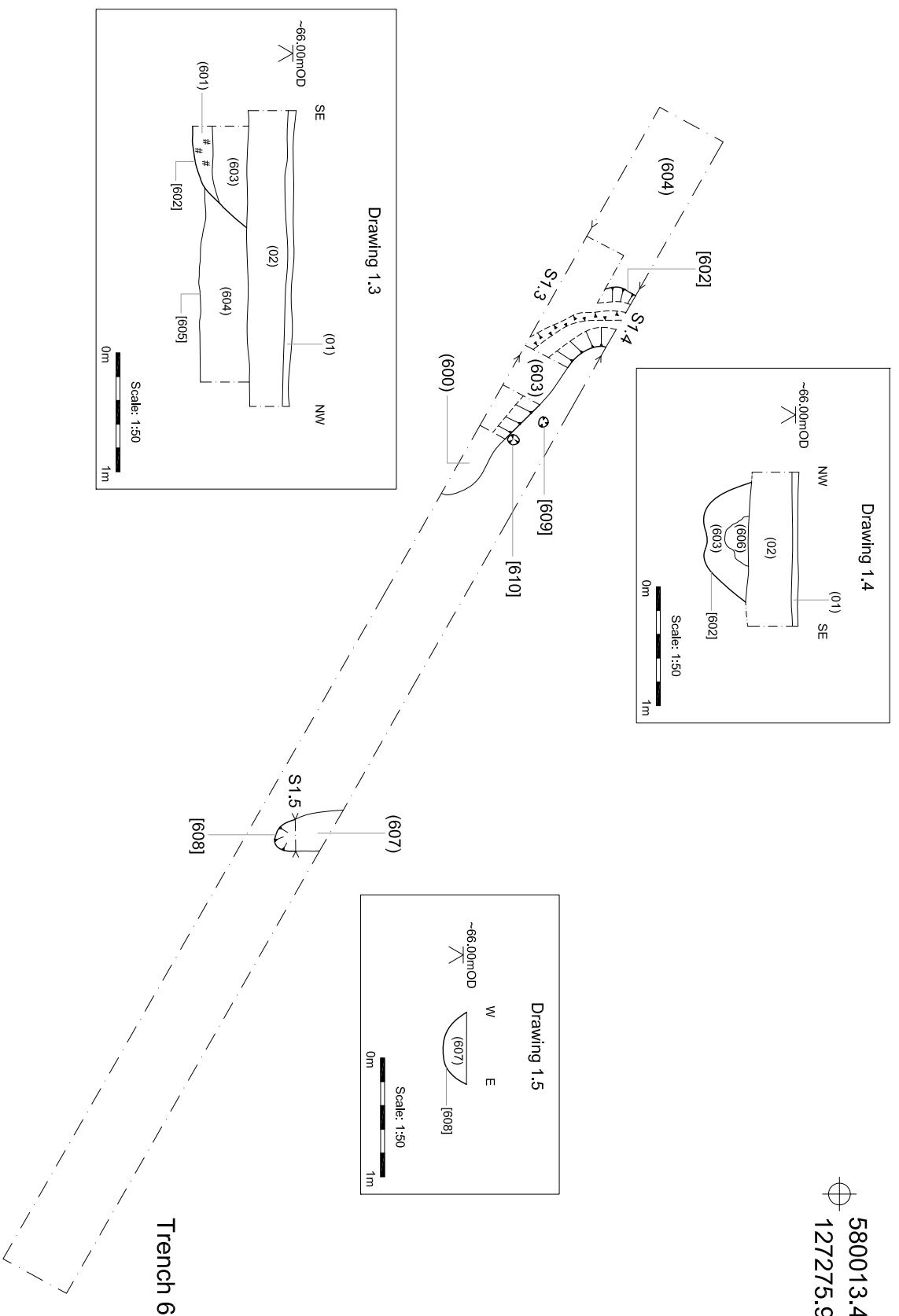
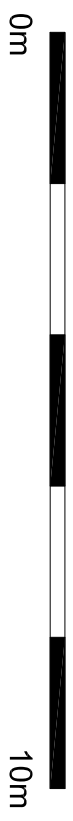
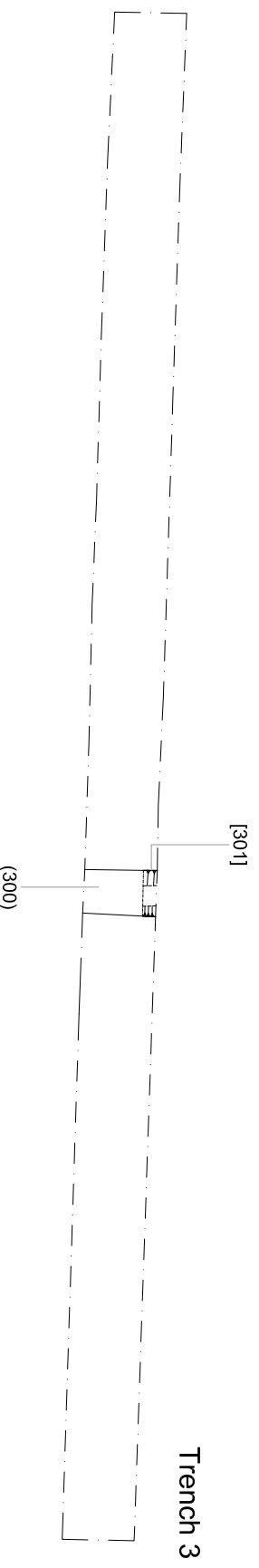



Figure 3: Site Plan; Trench 6 with Associated Section Drawings

1:100@A4



579994.85mE
127306.68mN



579974.54mE
127291.18mN

Figure 4: Site Plan; Trench 3

