

LAND TO THE SOUTH OF AND ADJACENT TO SOUTH
SIDE
STEEPLE ASTON
OXFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCHING

Albion
archaeology



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Compiled by	Edited by	Approved by
Lewis Busby	Iain Leslie	Drew Shotliff

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Preface

All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and was prepared solely for the benefit of the client. This document should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and the prior written authority of Albion Archaeology (a trading unit of Central Bedfordshire Council).

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Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Rectory Homes and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Richard Oram of the Oxfordshire County Council Planning Team. The fieldwork was undertaken by Lewis Busby (Project Supervisor) and Jonathan Nilsson (Assistant Archaeological Supervisor).

This report has been prepared by Lewis Busby and Iain Leslie (Project Manager) with figures produced by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician).

The project was managed by Iain Leslie. All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

Albion Archaeology
 St Mary's Church
 St Mary's Street
 Bedford, MK42 0AS
 ☎: 0300 300 8141
 Fax: 0300 300 8209
 e-mail: office@albion-arch.com
 Website: www.albionarchaeology.co.uk

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Key Terms

The following terms and abbreviations are used throughout this report:

CI/A	Chartered Institute <i>for</i> Archaeologists
HER	Historic Environment Record (Oxfordshire County Council)
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
PA	Oxfordshire County Council Planning Archaeologist
PDA	Proposed development area



Non-Technical Summary

Rectory Homes are preparing to submit a planning application to Cherwell District Council for a residential development on land to the south of South Side, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire. The proposed development comprises the erection of ten dwellings along with the provision of parking/garages and soft landscaping to the rear and eastern boundaries.

The proposed development area (PDA) is situated at the south-west corner of the village, c.600m south-west of the parish church. It comprises a c.0.94ha plot of pasture, centred on SP 4697 2584, with further arable fields to the south.

A number of archaeological investigations have taken place within Steeple Aston, revealing some significant Iron Age and, in particular, Romano-British remains. Accordingly, the Oxfordshire County Council Planning Archaeologist (OCC PA) advised that field evaluation was necessary to provide additional information on potential heritage assets that might be affected by the proposals. Rectory Homes commissioned Albion Archaeology to undertake the required archaeological trial trenching.

The archaeological trial-trench evaluation of the PDA identified no dateable archaeological remains or unstratified artefacts. A single undated small pit or posthole was present within Trench 2. Elsewhere only tree bowls or modern features were identified.

The absence of archaeological remains and artefacts suggests that the known Roman remains to the east do not continue into the PDA. The trial trenching has shown there is negligible potential for surviving archaeological remains within the PDA and, therefore, the impact of the proposed development is also likely to be negligible.

The project archive will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre (accession no.: OXCMS: 2019.125). Details of the project and its findings will be submitted to the OASIS database (reference no.: albionar1-369649) in accordance with the guidelines issued by Historic England and the Archaeology Data Service.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

Rectory Homes are preparing to submit a planning application to Cherwell District Council for a residential development on land to the south of South Side, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire. The proposed development comprises the erection of ten dwellings along with the provision of parking/garages and soft landscaping to the rear and eastern boundaries.

Given the site's archaeological potential, the Oxfordshire County Council Planning Archaeologist (PA) advised that archaeological evaluation was necessary to provide the information required to assess the potential impact of the development on archaeological heritage assets that might survive within the site. The PA issued a design brief, outlining the required work (OCC 2019).

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Rectory Homes to prepare a written scheme of investigation (WSI) in response to the design brief (Albion Archaeology 2019) and to undertake the required archaeological trial trenching. This report presents the results of the trial trenching.

1.2 *Site Location and Geology*

Steeple Aston is a village and civil parish on the west side of the Cherwell Valley in north Oxfordshire. It lies *c.*11km west of Bicester and *c.*16km south of Banbury. The proposed development area (PDA) is situated at the south-west corner of the village, *c.*600m south-west of the parish church (Figure 1). It comprises a *c.*0.94ha plot of pasture to the south of South Side, centred on SP 4697 2584, with further arable fields to the south.

The PDA is generally flat at *c.*121m OD. The underlying solid geology varies with Horsehay Sand Formation – Sandstone to the east and Chipping Norton Limestone Formation – Limestone to the west; both formed approximately 166–170 million years ago in the Jurassic Period¹. No superficial deposits are recorded.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

A number of archaeological investigations have taken place within Steeple Aston, revealing some significant Iron Age and, in particular, Romano-British remains.

The PDA lies *c.*90m west of Burlands, a house on the north side of South Side, where a possible Romano-British burial was revealed during construction of a patio (HER 26108). It was possibly associated with further Romano-British burials recorded to the east.

An archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation was undertaken ahead of a housing development on Heyford Road (HER 16024), *c.*700m east-

¹ <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>



south-east of the PDA (OA 1998). The work revealed Neolithic, Iron Age and Romano-British remains. The latter included a trackway and a number of burials, possibly related to the burial found at Burlands. The full extent of this settlement and its associated burials is unknown, but it was considered possible that it might extend into the PDA.

An evaluation at the hotel in the hamlet of Hopcroft's Holt, c.800m to the south-west of the PDA, revealed the remains of a low-status, early Romano-British farmstead (HER 16311) (OAU 1996). A Roman villa, possible prehistoric burials, pottery and animal bones had been recorded in the area in antiquity.

An archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a service trench on land adjacent to the village hall did not reveal any significant archaeological remains (OA 2007). A Romano-British inhumation burial had been recorded close to the site in the late 19th century (HER 1708).

1.4 Project Objectives

The specific research objectives of the evaluation were:

- To determine if evidence for Iron Age/Roman activity or settlement was present within the PDA.
- To determine if further Roman burials were present within the PDA.
- To assess if any heritage assets relating to other periods were present within the PDA.

The general purpose of the evaluation was to recover information on the:

- location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that were present within the PDA;
- integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that were present within the PDA;
- nature of palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.



2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to the project is summarised below; a full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2019).

2.1 Standards

The standards and requirements set out in the following documents were adhered to throughout the project:

• Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (3rd ed., 2017).
• CfA	<i>Charter and by-law; Code of conduct</i> (2014)
	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological evaluation</i> (2014)
	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> (2014)
• EAA	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment PPN3: Archaeological Excavation</i> (2015)
• Historic England	Archaeology Guidelines and Standards ² ;
	<i>The MoRPHE Project Managers Guide</i> (2015)
	<i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation</i> , (2nd edn, 2011)
• Oxfordshire Museums Service	<i>Oxfordshire Museums Documentation Manual</i> (Everitt 2002)
	<i>Requirements for Transferring Archaeological Archives</i> (2014)

The trial trenching took place between 25th and 27th November 2019. Seven 30m-long trenches were excavated, all measuring 1.8m wide (Figure 1).

The trenches were opened by a mechanical excavator fitted with a flat-edged bucket, operated by an experienced driver under close archaeological supervision. Overburden was removed down to the top of the archaeological deposits or undisturbed geological deposits, whichever were encountered first.

All excavation and recording was carried out by experienced Albion staff. The bases and sides of the trenches were cleaned by hand. Any potential archaeological features were cleaned, excavated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. All features and deposits were assigned a unique context number commencing at 100 for Trench 1, 200 for Trench 2. Each trench was subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate.

² Historic England guidelines on a number of specialist fields and materials, including environmental archaeology, are available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/advice-and-guidance/>.



2.2 Monitoring

Monitoring of the fieldwork was conducted by the PA on 26th November 2019.

2.3 Archiving

The project archive will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre (accession no.: OXCMS: 2019.125). Details of the project and its findings will be submitted to the OASIS database (reference no.: albionar1-369649) in accordance with the guidelines issued by Historic England and the Archaeology Data Service.



3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

All archaeological deposits and features found within the trial trenches are summarised in this section. Where site recording numbers have been used they are distinguished by different bracket styles to indicate whether they are a feature number = [***] or fill/ layer numbers = (***). Context numbers reflect the trench number, e.g. [303] is a feature within Trench 3.

Detailed descriptions of every individual context are provided in Appendix 1; this should be consulted for information such as alignment, nature of fills, dimensions *etc.* The trench locations are shown on Figure 1, an all-features plan and section on Figure 2 and selected photographs on Figures 4–6. The results are discussed by trench below.

3.2 Trench 1

Overburden in Trench 1 was *c.*0.4–0.45m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, friable dark grey silt. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, firm mid-red-brown sandy clay. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of light brown-yellow sandy clay.

No archaeological features or deposits were present within the trench.

3.3 Trench 2

Overburden in Trench 2 was *c.*0.45–0.5m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, friable dark grey silt. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.25m-thick, firm mid-orange-brown clayey sand. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of firm, light brown-yellow clayey sand.

A single undated feature [203] represents a small pit or posthole. It was 0.3m in diameter and 0.1m deep. It was filled with firm mid-brown sandy clay with occasional small stones.

3.4 Trench 3

Overburden in Trench 3 was 0.4m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, friable dark grey silt. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, firm mid-red-brown clayey sand. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of firm light yellow clayey sand.

A modern ditch [303] on a NE-SW alignment was 1m wide and was filled with compact light grey clay containing modern material (such as plastic). The ditch was not excavated.

Three irregular features with steep sides and uneven bases [305]/[307]/[309] (Figure 5) are thought to represent tree bowls, given their irregular shape and profile. They varied in size — 0.2–2m long, 0.5–1.4m wide and 0.15–0.45m deep. Their fills comprised firm dark brown clayey sand.



3.5 Trench 4

Overburden in Trench 4 was 0.4m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, friable dark grey silt with occasional small to large stones. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, firm mid-brown sandy clay. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of compact mid-red sandy clay.

No archaeological features or deposits were present within the trench.

3.6 Trench 5

Overburden in Trench 5 was 0.3–0.45m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, friable mid-grey silt with occasional small to large stones. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.1m-thick, firm mid-red-brown sandy clay. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of compact red-brown sandy clay with frequent fragments of limestone.

Hollow [503] probably represents a natural tree bowl or geological variation in the limestone geology. It had an uneven base and was 0.75m long, 1.1m wide and 0.1m deep. It contained a fill of loose light brown clayey sand with occasional small to large stones.

3.7 Trench 6

Overburden in Trench 6 was *c.*0.4m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, friable dark grey silt with occasional small to large stones. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.2m-thick, firm mid-brown-red clayey sand. A 0.09m-thick layer of loose limestone rubble (605) was present at the western edge of the trench, overlying the topsoil. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of compact mid-red sand with frequent small to large limestone fragments.

An oval pit [603] with vertical sides and a flat base was the sole feature within the trench (Figure 5). It was 2.7m long, 0.8m wide and 0.3m deep. It was filled with loose light blue-yellow clay with frequent small to large stones. The pit could be seen to cut the subsoil and, given its vertical sides and loose fill, is thought to be modern (possibly a geotechnical trial pit).

3.8 Trench 7

Overburden in Trench 7 was 0.4–0.45m thick. Topsoil comprised *c.*0.25m-thick, friable dark grey silt with occasional small to large stones. Subsoil comprised *c.*0.15m-thick, firm mid-brown-red clayey sand. The undisturbed geological strata consisted of compact mid-red sand with frequent small to large limestone fragments.

An oval pit, similar to that identified in Trench 6, was the only feature present within the trench. It was 1.55m long, 0.75m wide and 0.6m deep. The pit was filled with loose mid-green-yellow clay with moderate small to large stones. Like pit [603], this feature was observed to cut the subsoil and is thought to be modern (possibly a geotechnical trial pit).



4. CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological trial-trench evaluation of the PDA identified no dateable archaeological remains or unstratified artefacts. A single undated small pit or posthole was present within Trench 2. Elsewhere only tree bowls or modern features were identified.

The absence of archaeological remains suggests that the known Roman remains to the east do not continue into the PDA. The trial trenching has shown there is negligible potential for surviving archaeological remains within the PDA and, therefore, the impact of the proposed development is also likely to be negligible.



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6. APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARIES



Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.4 m. Max: 0.45 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 46934/25855

OS Grid Ref.: SP 46918/25829

Reason: Assessment of archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silt occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Subsoil	Firm mid red brown sandy clay 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Natural	Firm light brown yellow sandy clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.45 m. Max: 0.5 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 46958/25851

OS Grid Ref.: SP 46980/25830

Reason: Assessment of archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silt occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
201	Subsoil	Firm mid orange brown clay sand 0.22m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
202	Natural	Firm light brown yellow clay sand occasional small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
203	Pit	Circular sides: 45 degrees base: concave dimensions: max depth 0.08m, max diameter 0.32m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
204	Fill	Firm mid brown sandy clay occasional small stones 0.08m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 3

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.4 m. Max: 0.4 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 46934/25817

OS Grid Ref.: SP 46964/25814

Reason: Assessment of archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
300	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silt occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
301	Subsoil	Firm mid red brown clay sand 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
302	Natural	Firm light yellow clay sand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
303	Ditch	Linear NE-SW dimensions: max breadth 1.m, min length 2.5m Modern ditch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
304	Backfill	Compact light grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
305	Treethrow	Oval N-S sides: steep base: concave dimensions: max breadth 0.5m, max depth 0.17m, max length 0.17m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
306	Fill	Firm dark brown clay sand 0.17m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
307	Treethrow	Sub-circular sides: 45 degrees base: uneven dimensions: max breadth 1.4m, max depth 0.2m, min length 1.8m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
308	Fill	Firm dark brown clay sand 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
309	Treethrow	Circular sides: U-shaped base: uneven dimensions: min breadth 0.5m, max depth 0.45m, max length 2.m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
310	Fill	Firm dark brown clay sand 0.45m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 4

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.4 m. Max: 0.4 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 46975/25862

OS Grid Ref.: SP 47005/25862

Reason: Assessment of archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
400	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silt occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
401	Subsoil	Firm mid brown sandy clay 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
402	Natural	Compact mid red sandy clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 5

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.4 m. Max: 0.45 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 47001/25812

OS Grid Ref.: SP 47001/25842

Reason: Assessment of Archaeological Potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
500	Topsoil	Friable mid grey silt occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
501	Subsoil	Firm mid red brown sandy clay 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
502	Natural	Compact mid red brown sandy clay frequent large stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
503	Treethrow	Sub-oval E-W sides: irregular base: uneven dimensions: max breadth 1.11m, max depth 0.12m, max length 0.75m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
504	Fill	Loose light brown clay sand occasional small-large stones 0.12m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 6

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.37 m. Max: 0.4 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 47012/25854

OS Grid Ref.: SP 47039/25841

Reason: Assessment of archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
600	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silt occasional small-large stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
601	Subsoil	Firm mid brown red clay sand 0.17m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
602	Natural	Compact mid red sand frequent small-large stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
603	Modern intrusion	Oval NW-SE sides: vertical dimensions: max breadth 0.8m, min depth 0.3m, max length 2.7m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
604	Backfill	Loose light blue yellow clay frequent small-large stones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
605	Dump material	Loose mid yellow orange sand frequent medium-large stones 0.09m thick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 7

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.4 m. Max: 0.45 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP 47039/25832

OS Grid Ref.: SP 47018/25811

Reason: Assessment of archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
700	Topsoil	Friable dark grey silt 0.25m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
701	Subsoil	Firm light red brown clay sand 0.15m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
702	Natural	Compact light red yellow sand frequent small-large stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
703	Modern intrusion	Oval NE-SW sides: steep dimensions: min breadth 0.76m, min depth 0.59m, max length 1.56m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
704	Fill	Loose mid green yellow clay moderate small-large stones 0.59m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

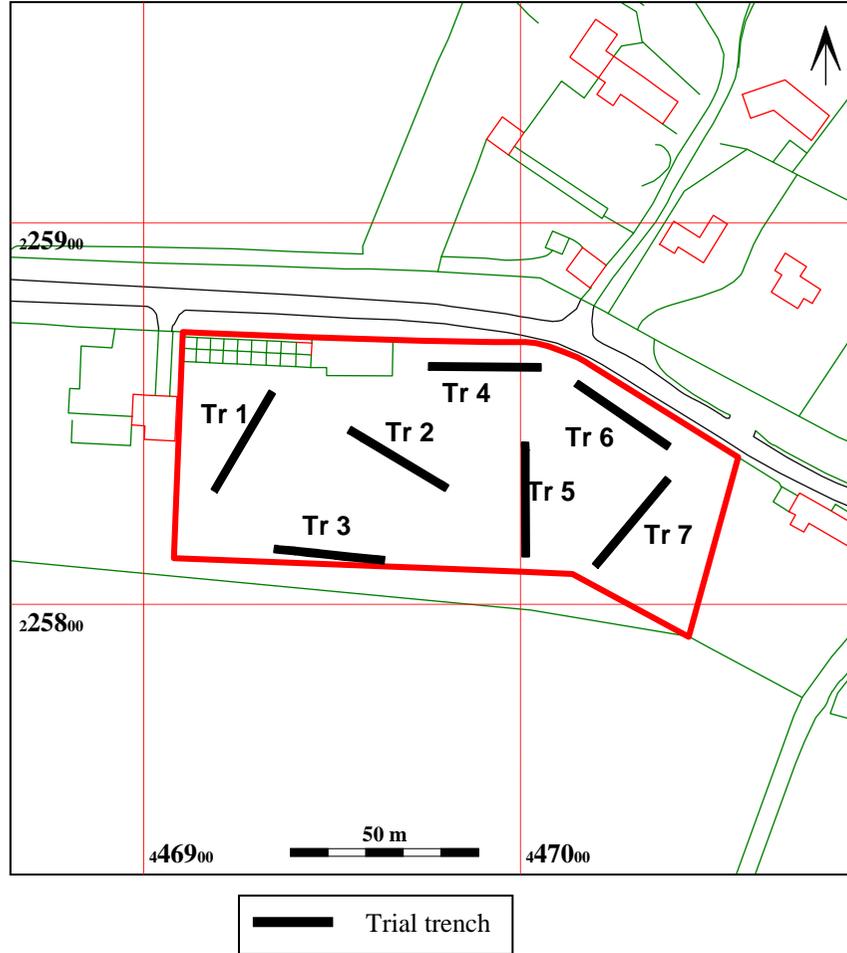
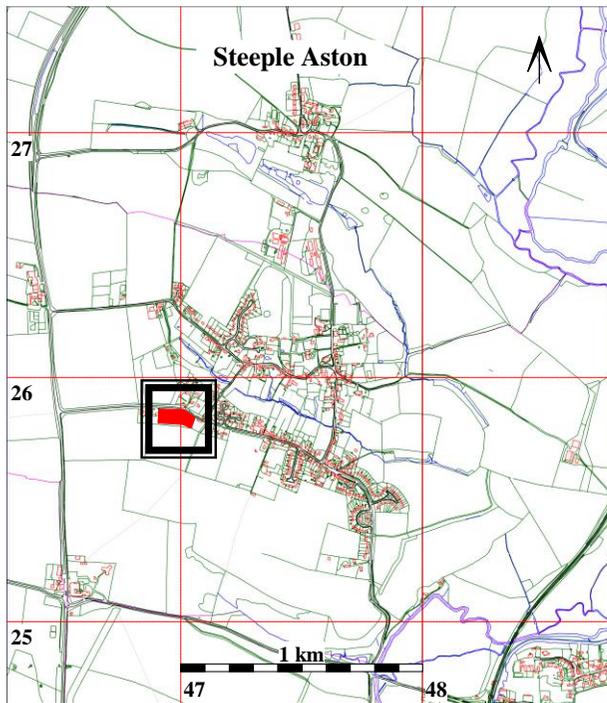
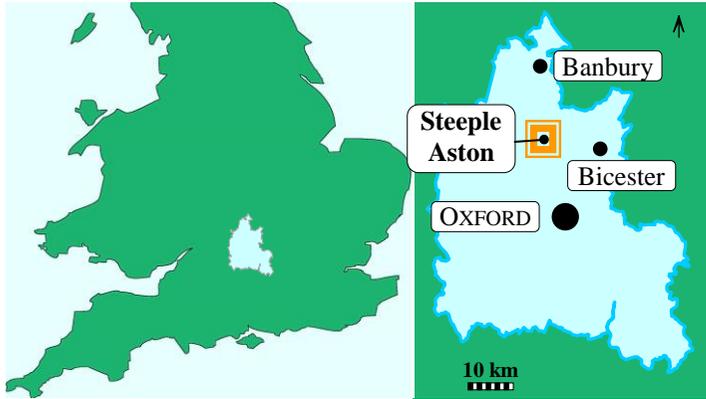
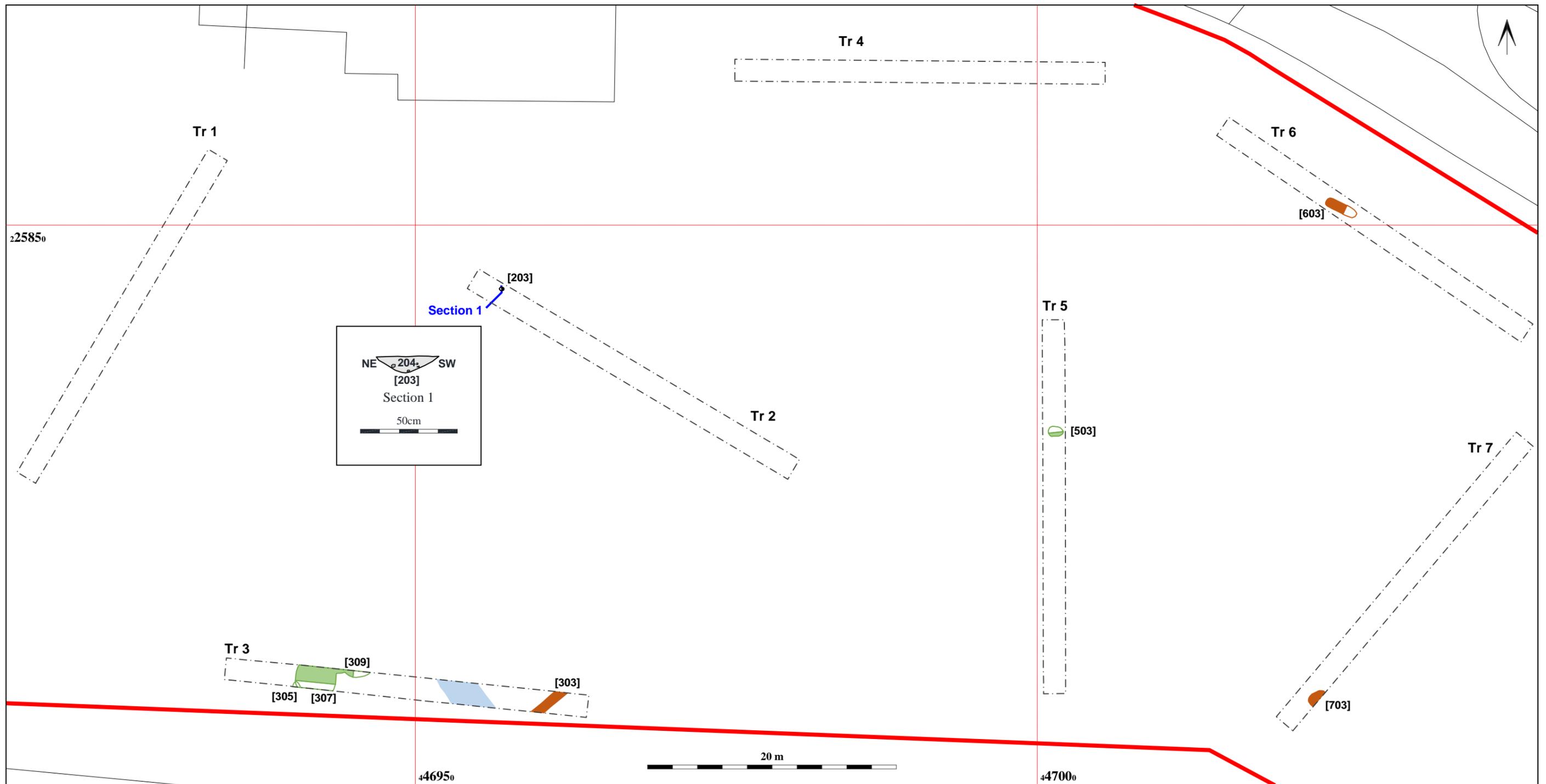


Figure 1: Site location plan

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- | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Trial trench | Archaeological feature | Tree bowl | Modern feature | Geological feature |
| Excavated segment | Excavated segment | Excavated segment | Excavated segment | |

Figure 2: All-features plan and section

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Trench 1, looking NE



Trench 2, looking W



Trench 3, looking E

Figure 3: Site photographs (Trenches 1–3)



Trench 4, looking E



Trench 5, looking S



Trench 6, looking SE

Figure 4: Site photographs (Trenches 4–6)



Trench 7, looking N



NE-facing section of modern pit [603]



N-facing section of tree bowls [305] and [307]

Figure 5: Site photographs (Trench 7 and selected features)



Albion
archaeology



Albion Archaeology
St Mary's Church
St Mary's Street
Bedford
MK42 0AS

Telephone 01234 294000
Email office@albion-arch.com
www.albion-arch.com

