Castle Hill, Laughton-en-le-Morthen, Targeted Excavation

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Report produced on behalf of Dr Duncan Wright.

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Non-technical summary

This report presents the results of a scheme of archaeological trial trenching carried out between 1st and 5th of April 2019 as part of the ongoing Landscapes of Lordship project led by Dr Duncan Wright. Sam Bromage, a PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield, was commissioned to work alongside Dr Wright in its design, execution and analysis.

The scheme of work comprised the excavation of two trial trenches, each targeting potential linear features identified as a result of a non-invasive survey carried out by Sam Bromage and Dr Wright in 2018. The primary aim of this work was to ground-proof the results of this non-invasive survey and determine, if possible, their relative relationships and utility. It has succeeded in confirming the location and orientation of each of the features initially targeted, but due to the lack of artefactual evidence and direct stratigraphic relationships specific dating has not been possible.

This report offers a brief summary discussion suggesting the potential origin and utility of the encountered features. A more thorough assessment will follow in due course as part of a publication synthesising the various schemes of work and specialist reports carried out as part of the Landscapes of Lordship project.

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Acknowledgements

The project would like to thank Dr Hugh Willmott and Cait Scott for their help in carrying out the fieldwork. Thanks is also due to Mr Mark Ferris and family for their time and enthusiasm whilst work was being done on the castle site and in their garden. Milica Rajic was also integral in the success of efforts to prevent the project falling foul of unforeseen technical difficulties, her timely assistance was very much appreciated.

1. Introduction

Over five days at the start of April 2019 a targeted archaeological assessment was carried out on land associated with the castle and settlement of Laughton-en-le-Morthen, Rotherham, South Yorkshire (Figure 1). The scheme of works comprised the excavation and recording of two perpendicular evaluation trenches (trench 1 and trench 2), the siting of which was informed by the non-invasive survey carried out on the same site in 2018 (Figure 2) (Bromage 2018). The excavation team comprised Sam Bromage and Dr Duncan Wright, with assistance from Dr Hugh Willmott and Cait Scott. Little material culture was recovered during the course of the excavation but this limited assemblage did include several pottery sherds recovered primarily from various contexts in trench 1. Analysis of the pottery has been completed by C. G. Cumberpatch and the resultant report is included here as Appendix 1.

1.1 Site location and topography

The castle (OS NGR SK 51615 88203) is located at the western limit of the village of Laughton-en-le-Morthen, immediately to the west of the church of All Saints. The area of investigation (hereafter referred to as 'the site') focussed on the land immediately to the south of the castle motte, designated 'Area B' during the non-invasive survey (Bromage 2018).

The site is largely level apart from the obvious extant earthworks to the north, sitting at approximately 133m above ordnance datum (aOD) and rising slightly to the south (134m aOD). A line of substantial trees bisects the site, running north north west by south south east. The location of these trees was a significant limiting factor in the placement of trenches 1 and 2.

1.2 Soils, geology and land-use

The site is situated on a prominent outcrop of sedimentary dolostone bedrock (British Geological Survey 2019). No superficial geology is recorded but the soil type across the site can be described as slowly permeable, seasonally wet, acid loamy clay (Cranfield University 2019).

In terms of land-use the site is maintained as a large recreational garden, incorporating planted beds, trees and areas of open lawn. It lies outside the scheduled area, which is primarily focussed on the castle to the north.

2. Archaeological and Historical Background

This archaeological and historical background is largely taken from the non-invasive survey report compiled following the completion of the initial phase of work at Castle Hill, Laughton en le Morthen; with the addition of a summary of that work and some relevant local references to potential Roman activity.

The village of Laughton-en-le-Morthen predates the Norman conquest and there is reference in Domesday to a hall or manor belonging to Earl Edwin of Mercia (Williams & Martin (eds.), Folio 319 X). The settlement was of regional significance occupying a prominent point in the landscape, overlooking the Rother Valley to the north and commanding a near 360^{o} view over the surrounding area. The church of All Saints, substantially re-developed in the 14th century, is also Saxon in origin and a pre-conquest porticus survives in the form of the present church's north door (Ryder 1982, 71-2).

The proximity of the Saxon church to the Norman castle site makes it likely that this was also the location for the earlier Saxon hall. It is possible that the hall, and perhaps the church, were slighted at some point before 1070 following Edwin's active resistance to the conquest and his role in the northern revolt of 1068 (Holland 1969, 2; Thomas 2008, 148). The castle was likely established in its motte and bailey form soon after this, once it had been granted to Roger de Busli, who developed the holding as part of the Honour of Tickhill (Historic England 2018).

The castle site was first scheduled in 1928 with the most recent amendment to that scheduling taking place in 1991. This was in acknowledgement of the castle at Laughton-en-le-Morthen being one of the best preserved motte and bailey sites in the region, despite the loss of much of the outer bailey, and so being of considerable archaeological potential. Historic England have also noted the specific importance of the site in that, being largely undisturbed, earlier Saxon deposits may also survive in situ (Historic England 2018).

Following the abandonment of the castle, the focus of power in Laughton apparently migrated to the manor house immediately to the south. The developmental history of the manor is not explicitly evident, although there was clearly a substantial post-medieval house situated immediately to the north of the current Old Hall Farm. The platform of this house is still present as a clear earthwork.

In addition to the relatively well attested medieval and post-medieval history of Laughton it is held locally that a Roman settlement of unknown size pre-dated the

Saxon occupation. The accuracy of this supposition is as yet unclear but the site of a 'putative Roman mosaic' is recorded in South Yorkshire SMR and there is extant at least one associated antiquarian reference (South Yorks. SMR No. 00723/01; Tomlinson 1860).

The only direct archaeological investigation of the site previously carried out is that by Dr Duncan Wright and Sam Bromage in April 2018 (see Bromage 2018). This primarily comprised a resistivity survey that covered three distinct areas: the scheduled area of the castle (area A), the site as described above (area B), and a large paddock associated with Old Hall Farm (area C). The results included several distinct low resistance linear features in area B, one of which was reminiscent of a substantial rectilinear enclosure. Associated with this study was an aerial drone survey carried out by Adam Stanford, of Aerial-Cam Ltd and SUMO Aerial Surveys, although this did not identify any additional features in area B.

In 2007 Archaeological Services WYAS carried out an archaeological evaluation at Rectory Farm ahead of the construction of a residential development. This identified a series of Saxon and medieval features and recovered artefacts potentially indicative of nearby high-status occupation (WYAS 2007). Amongst these was a substantial linear feature, not securely associated with any particular phase of occupation. It has been observed that this feature is similar in its dimensions to a substantial linear identified on the 2018 geophysical survey as running south east – north west through the current area of investigation and that both may be constituent parts of a settlement boundary of unknown date (Wright 2018, pers. com.).

3. Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this scheme of targeted excavation was to ground-proof the results of the non-invasive survey carried out in 2018 (described above). In particular the low resistance features identified in area B of that survey were targeted, with priority being given to the recording of the likely rectilinear enclosure. If possible the western most linear features were also to be investigated.

In addition, this excavation serves as a continuation of the 'Lanscapes of Lordship project', a proof of concept exercise for a rapid and targeted method of archaeological prospection. Particular attention is given to the identification of Saxon sites otherwise obscured by subsequent Norman development. The success of this approach to site identification will not be expanded on here but will be discussed in more detail once all associated work has been completed.

This report is not intended as an exhaustive discussion of the identified features and their potential significance but rather as a record of the work done and a presentation of the encountered archaeology. A brief summary will be offered in section 6.

4. Methodology

This excavation was conducted with reference to industry best practice as outlined in The Institute for Archaeology's 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation' (CIFA 2014). Both trenches were initially laid out with a Trimble TSC 3 mobile GPS unit and the topsoil was stripped under archaeological supervision, down to the uppermost archaeological layer, using a tracked mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.0 m toothless bucket.

All identified features were hand excavated and recording was done using Bishop Grosseteste University standardised recording sheets. All sections were drawn at 1:10 saving section 005, which was recorded at 1:20 due to it being over 20 metres in length. All feature-specific plans were recorded at 1:20, whilst whole-trench plans were recorded at 1:50.

No significantly adverse weather conditions were experienced however the national failure of the Trimble network during the period of excavation meant that only the trench-tops could be recorded using the GPS system. As a result, all plans are primarily derived from hand drawn offset recordings.

4.1 Trenches

A total of two trenches were excavated, both targeted at low resistance features identified during the 2018 resistivity survey (Figure 2). Trench 1 was 20 m in length and 2 m in width, orientated east – west. Trench 2 was 8 m in length and 2.5 m wide, orientated north – south.

4.1 Sampling

Due to the scale of the project there was no need to set in place a universal sampling policy and each feature was considered on a case by case basis. When deemed necessary a 10L bag was filled with a single context (the volume may be less where this constituted the entire deposit). This bag was then labelled inside and out, and a contextualising environmental sample sheet completed. As of the submission of this report these samples were still to be processed by Bishop Grosseteste University, the subsequent results will be incorporated into a separate report and submitted with the final archive.

4.3 Digitisation and presentation

All drawings have been scanned and then digitised using ESRI ArcMap v10.4.1 (ESRI Inc. © 1999-2015). This same software was used for the generation of all maps and plans associated with this report. Any records generated during this scheme of work have been digitised and will be submitted as part of the final archive.

5. Results

This section will present the results of the scheme of work already described. Each trench will be described in turn.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was primarily targeted at the north – south arm of the rectilinear enclosure [1003] identified as a result of the 2018 non-invasive survey (figure 2). It also extended far enough to the west that one of the other significant identified linear features [1005] could also be investigated.

The topsoil contained a single residual pottery sherd, the only medieval sherd to be recovered from the excavated area. This was a green glazed body sherd of Hallgate B type ware dated to between the 12th and 13th centuries (Appendix 1).

Following the removal of the topsoil (1000) and very thin subsoil (1008), a clear linear cut feature became evident [1003]. This matched closely the feature noted on the geophysics and so was prioritised. Cut feature [1003] was found to have an unequal v-shaped profile, being at the point of intervention 2.2 m in width and surviving to 0.75 m in depth (figures 3 & 4). This ditch was filled by a uniform clayey sand deposit (1004) and was likely the result of a single backfill event. No finds of any kind were recovered from (1004) (figure 5).

To the east of [1003] an occupation layer (1002) was identified, immediately overlying the natural (1001) (figure 3). This produced two pottery sherds, both Roman greyware. Some charcoal inclusions were evident throughout (1002) but no other evidence of occupation was recorded.

To the west of ditch [1003] was a second cut feature [1005] (figures 3 & 4), initially only evident by the increased concentration of animal bone and other debris in the uppermost fill (1007). The easternmost edge of this feature was defined and excavated to a depth of 0.7 m, however due to time pressures and the adverse weather conditions experienced it was not possible define this feature fully (figure

6). Nevertheless, the presence of the feature was confirmed and enough of its eastern edge exposed to suggest its orientation. The feature was otherwise left undisturbed.

The lowest identified fill (1006) produced a single sherd of Roman greyware (appendix 1). The overlying fill (1007) also produced two sherds of pottery, one Roman mortarium and the other a H1 calcite jar fragment that may date to either the pre-Roman Iron Age or early Roman periods (appendix 1).

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was similarly targeted at an arm of the rectilinear feature identified as a result of the non-invasive survey, the east – west aligned section (figure 2).

The topsoil (2000) produced three pottery sherds, two of Roman greyware and one of late 18th or 19th century brown glazed coarseware (appendix 1). Two struck flint flakes were also identified as well as a single fragment of burnt animal bone.

Following the removal of the topsoil (2000) and subsoil (2002), both of the same respective materials encountered in trench 1, a single clear east – west aligned cut feature [2003] was identified. A substantial tree root ran along its length but was left in situ (figures 7 & 8).

The ditch is consistent with that identified on the geophysics and was similar in both profile and scale to [1003], although the disturbance described at the base of [1003] was more pronounced in [2003] with a more substantial undercut evident in its southern edge (figure 9). They also differed in that, rather than being filled by a single context, [2003] was filled by three distinct contexts. The lowermost (2004) was a mid-brownish-grey clayey sand, this was overlain by a mid-greyish-brown clayey sand deposit (2005). The uppermost identified deposit (2006) was similar in composition to (2005) but incorporated a higher number of stone inclusions as well as sparse flecks of charcoal.

The natural (2001) was higher towards the northern end of trench and as such no occupation layer similar to (1002) was evident.

6. Summary discussion

This work has confirmed the presence of two cut features identified during the 2018 non-invasive survey.

The first of these comprised a substantial linear feature, apparently making up parts of the southern [2003] and western [1003] arms of a likely rectangular enclosure. No specific dating material was recovered but Saxon enclosure ditches of similar, dimensions, though differing in exact profile, have been identified at Raunds, Northamptonshire (Group III, enclosing buildings F, G, H & R) and at Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire (Enclosure 1) (Cadman 1983; Gibson& Murray, 2003).

It is also possible that the feature pre-dates Saxon occupation of the area. A small number of Roman pottery sherds were recovered from the interior of the enclosure, associated with layer (1002), however this material may be residual and no direct relationship could be established between this layer and either [1003] or [2003]. The lack of any recovered in situ artefactual material, and in particular ceramic material, makes it unlikely that the feature is later medieval in origin, but an association with the extant Norman motte and bailey castle cannot be ruled out.

The lack of recovered material culture of any kind could indicate that the feature was rapidly backfilled; this is supported by the large, near homogenous fills identified in both associated interventions. The feature was cut through the natural bedrock but it is probable that the stone produced by its initial excavation was put to some other use, stone extraction being evidenced by a large number of likely medieval quarry pits in the adjacent field to the west. A slot is evident in the base of the southern arm of the feature [2003], possibly representing a footing made to support timbers placed vertically and adjacent to one another in order to form a wooden wall or stockade. If this interpretation is accurate then the evident disturbance in the base and to the lower edges of the feature in both [1003] and [2003] would be consistent with the deliberate leveraging of these timbers to aid in their removal. The feature's function remains ambiguous.

The second identified feature was a substantial linear ditch. It was not excavated in its entirety but those contexts that were identified produced occasional fragments of animal bone and pottery and it is likely that the feature is either Roman or Iron Age in date. However, as no additional datable material has been recovered, it is possible that these sherds were either residual or redeposited and further work is needed to more firmly establish its origin and function.

In summary, the two cut features identified during the course of excavations at Laughton en le Morthen confirm the location and orientation of two corresponding features identified during the 2018 geophysical and aerial surveys. The eastern most feature is likely the limit of a rectangular enclosure and may have been the foundation cut for a timber stockade wall. Although no direct evidence to this effect was recorded, the disturbance to the base and lower edge of the feature seen in

both recorded sections would be consistent with the removal of such timbers. Morphologically this feature may be Saxon but as no additional evidence aside from the lack of ceramic material culture was recorded that might corroborate such a conclusion, this date remains conjecture.

The westernmost feature was only partially excavated but can be said to be of substantial size and depth. It runs approximately parallel to the severe escarpment to the west and may represent an early settlement boundary, possibly dating to the late Iron Age or Roman period. However, similar to the rectangular enclosure, this date is speculative and further investigation is required to confirm both its origin and specific function.

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HER/SMR records:

South Yorkshire SMR no. 00723/01: https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MSY4221&resourceID=1027

Figures:

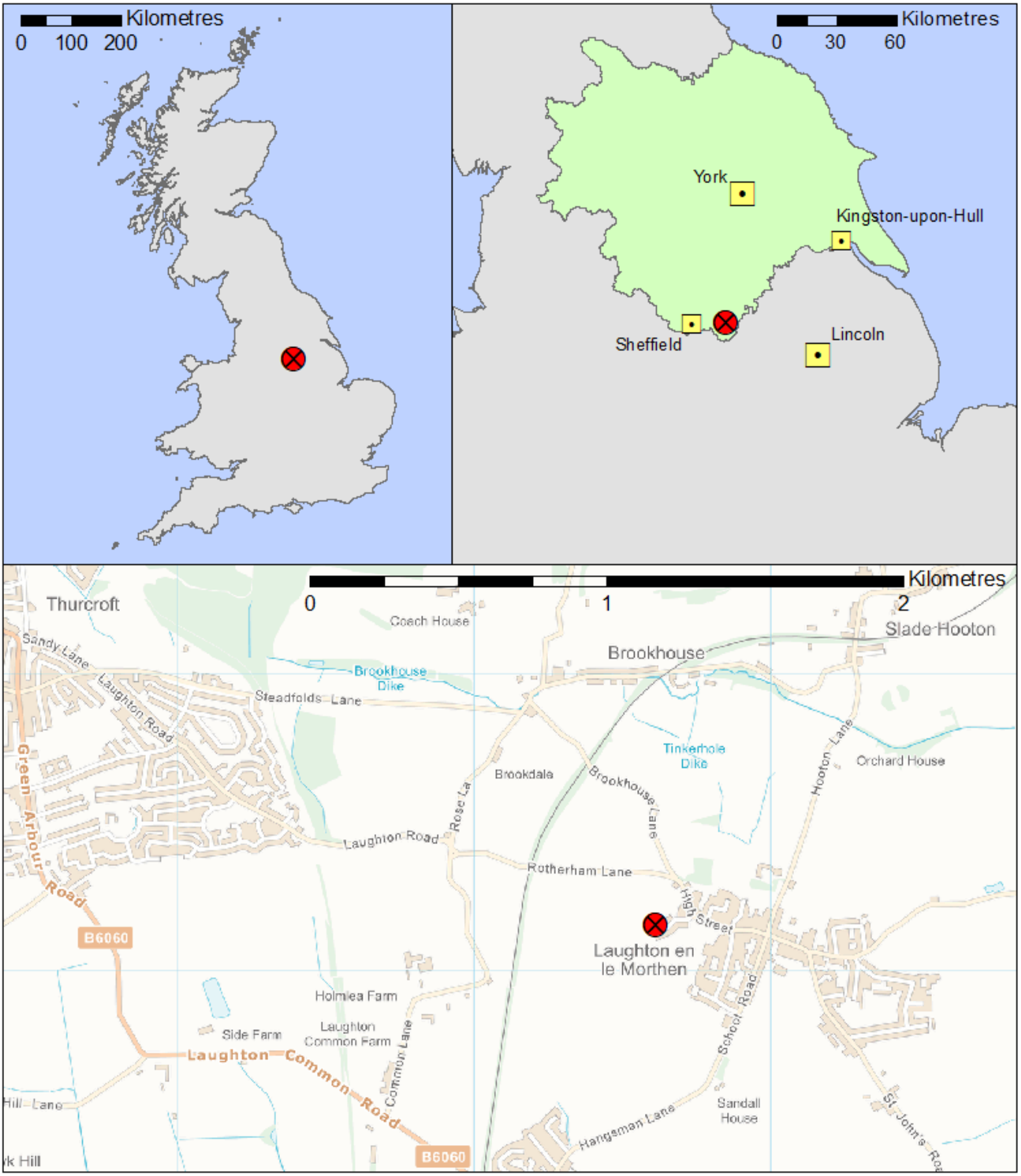

Figure 1: Site location; national (top left), regional (top right), and local (bottom).

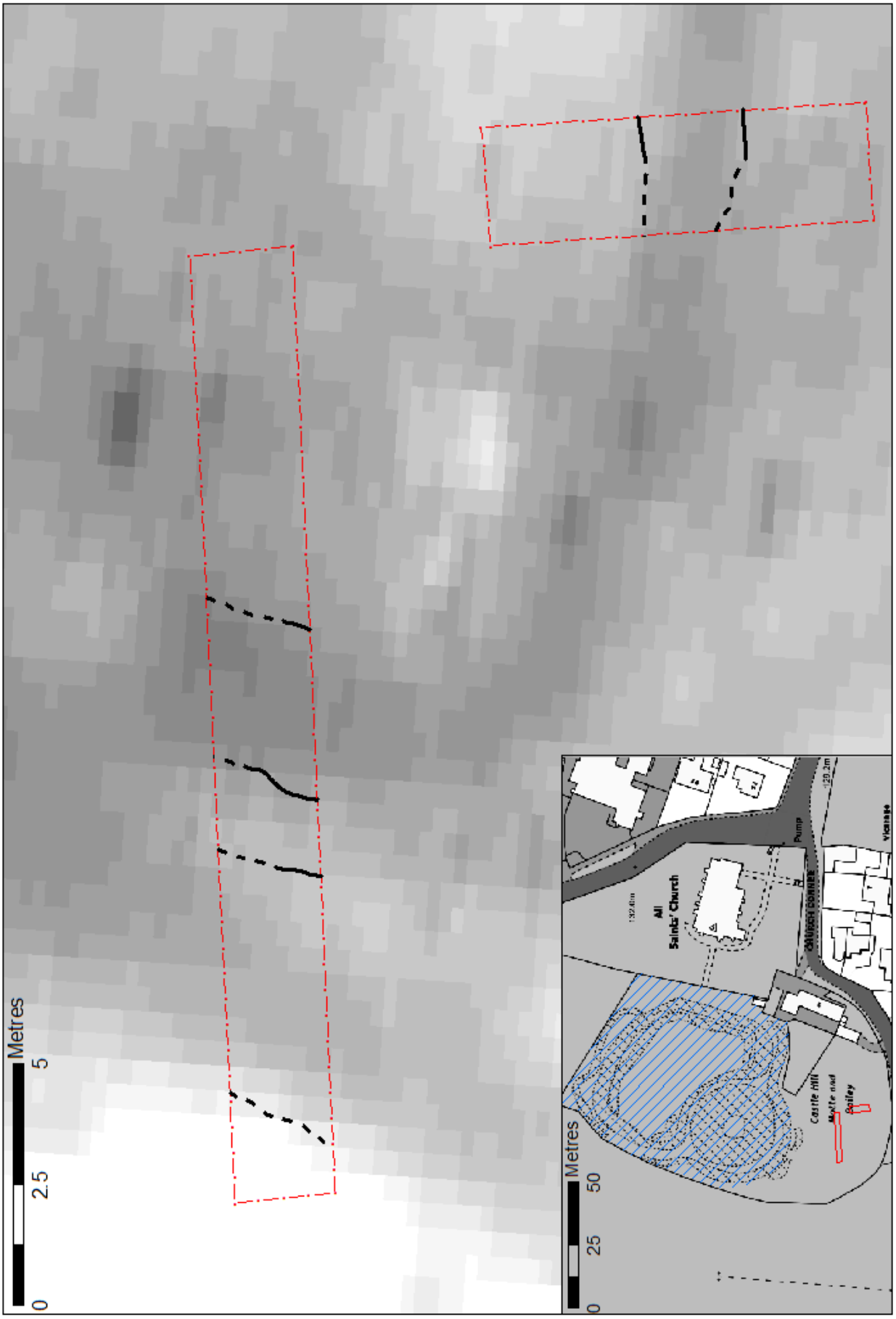

Figure 2: Trench locations overlain onto resistivity survey results, trenches in relation to the scheduled area (inset).

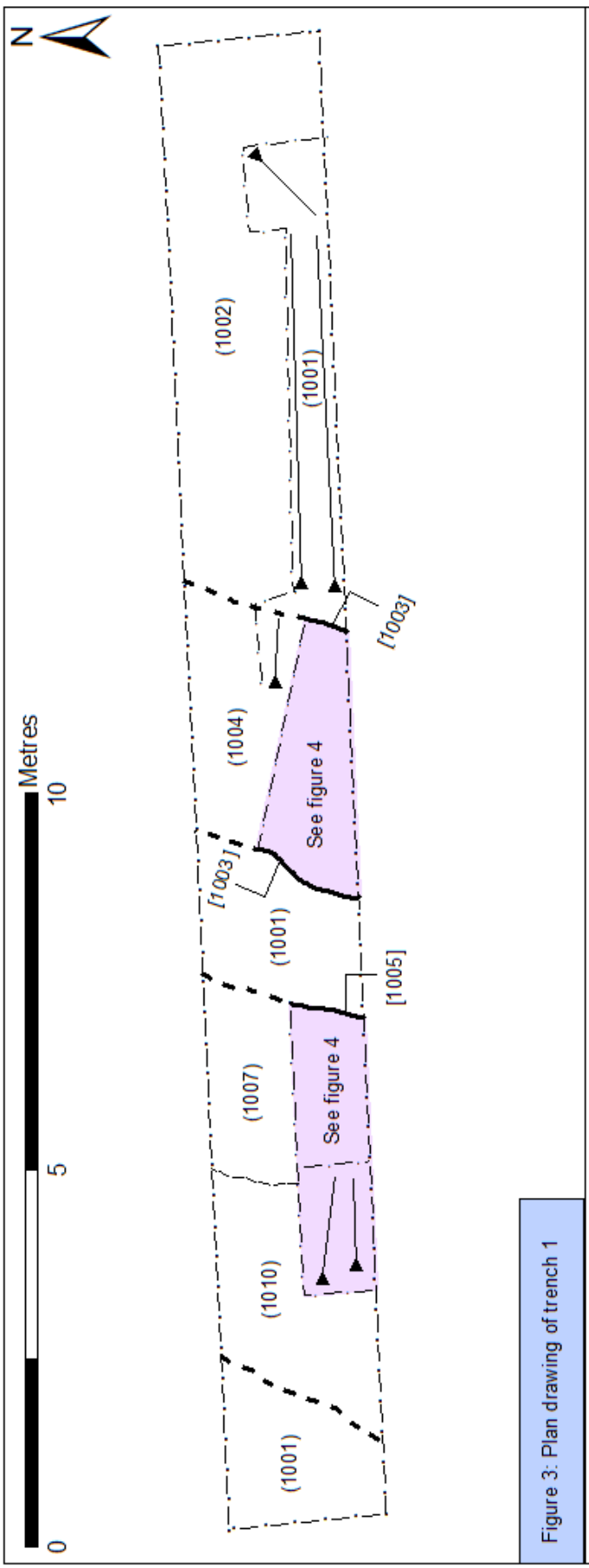

Figure 3: Plan drawing of trench 1

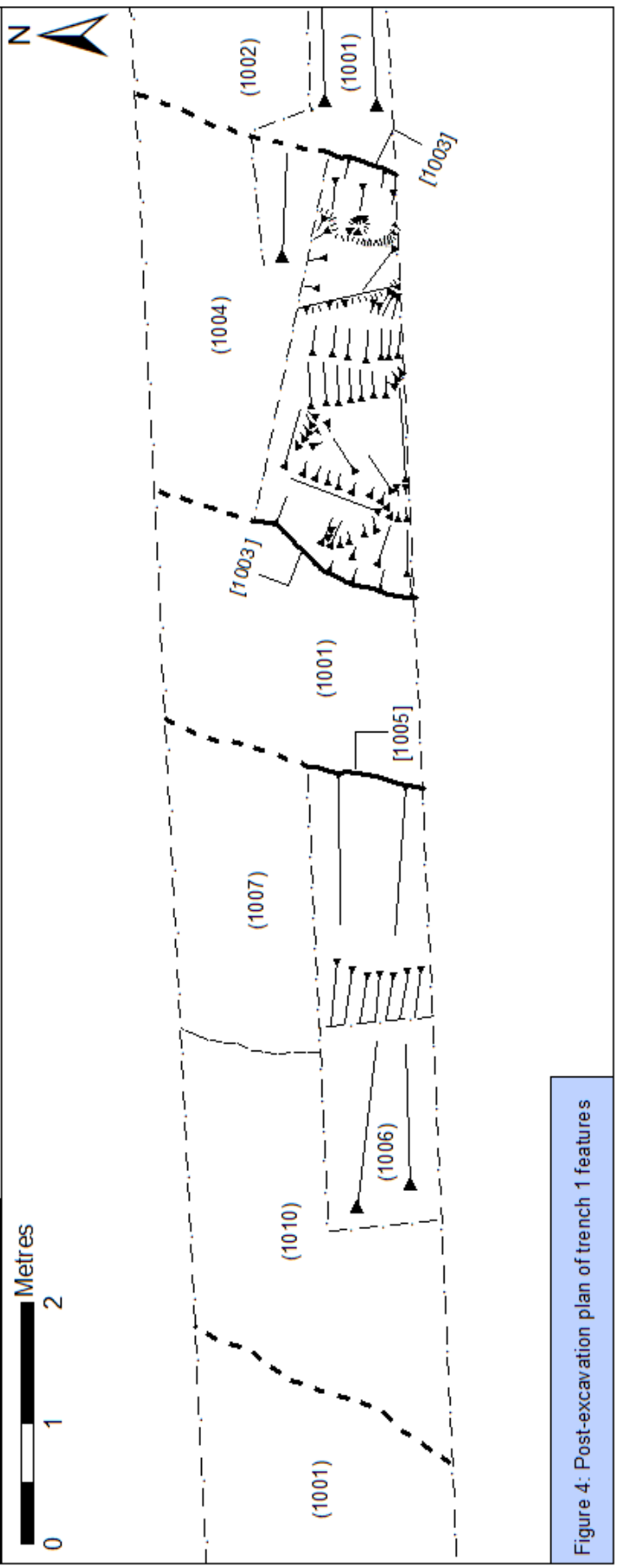

Figure 4: Post-excavation plan of trench 1 features

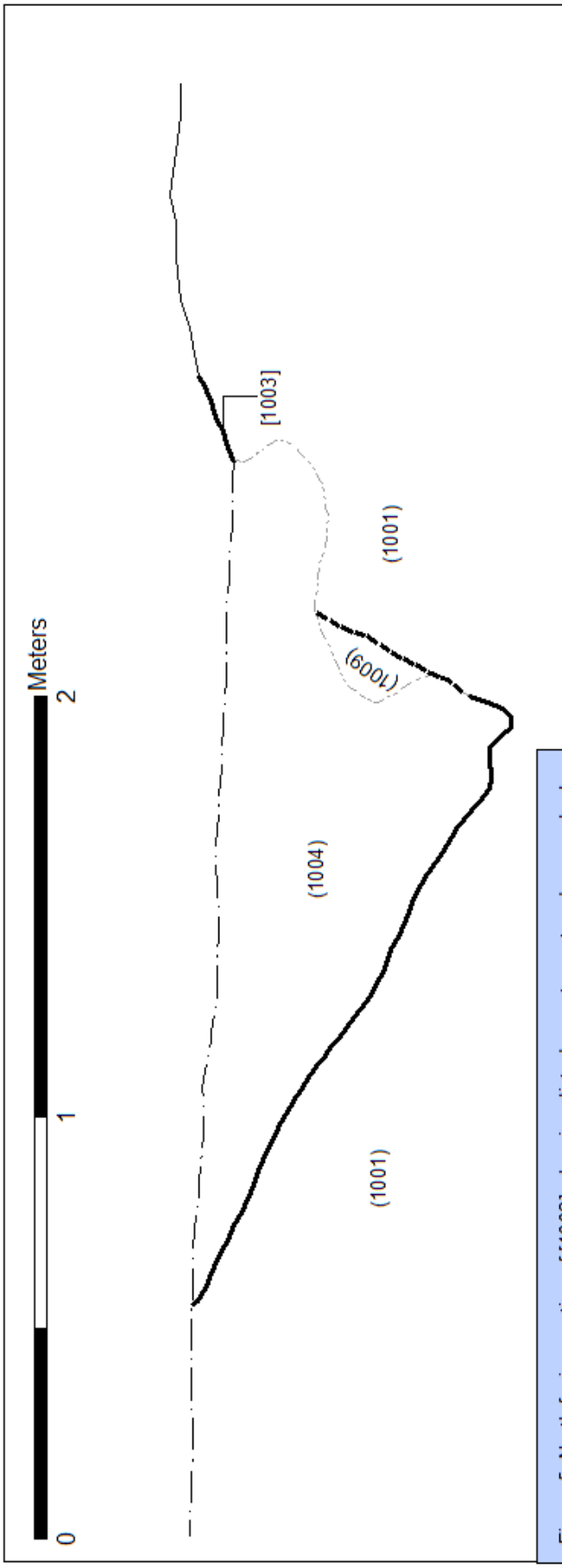

Figure 5: North facing section of [1003], showing disturbance to eastern base and edge

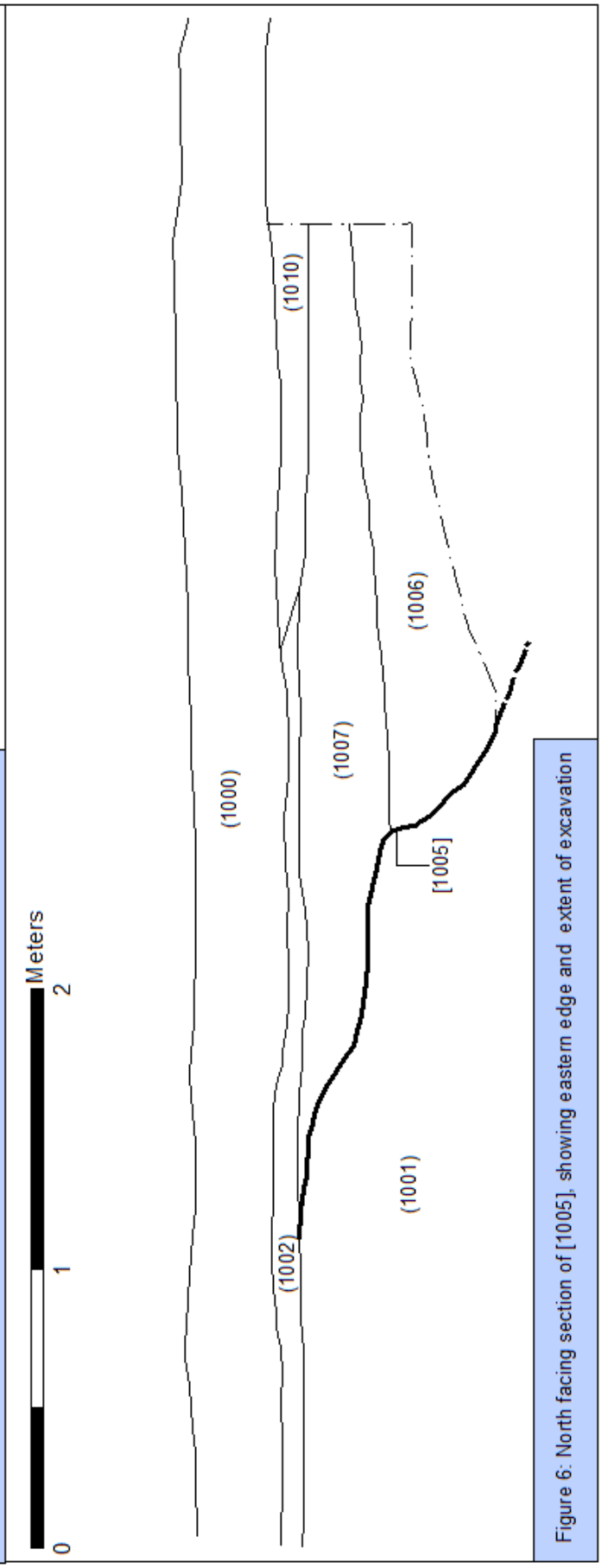

Figure 6: North facing section of [1005], showing eastern edge and extent of excavation

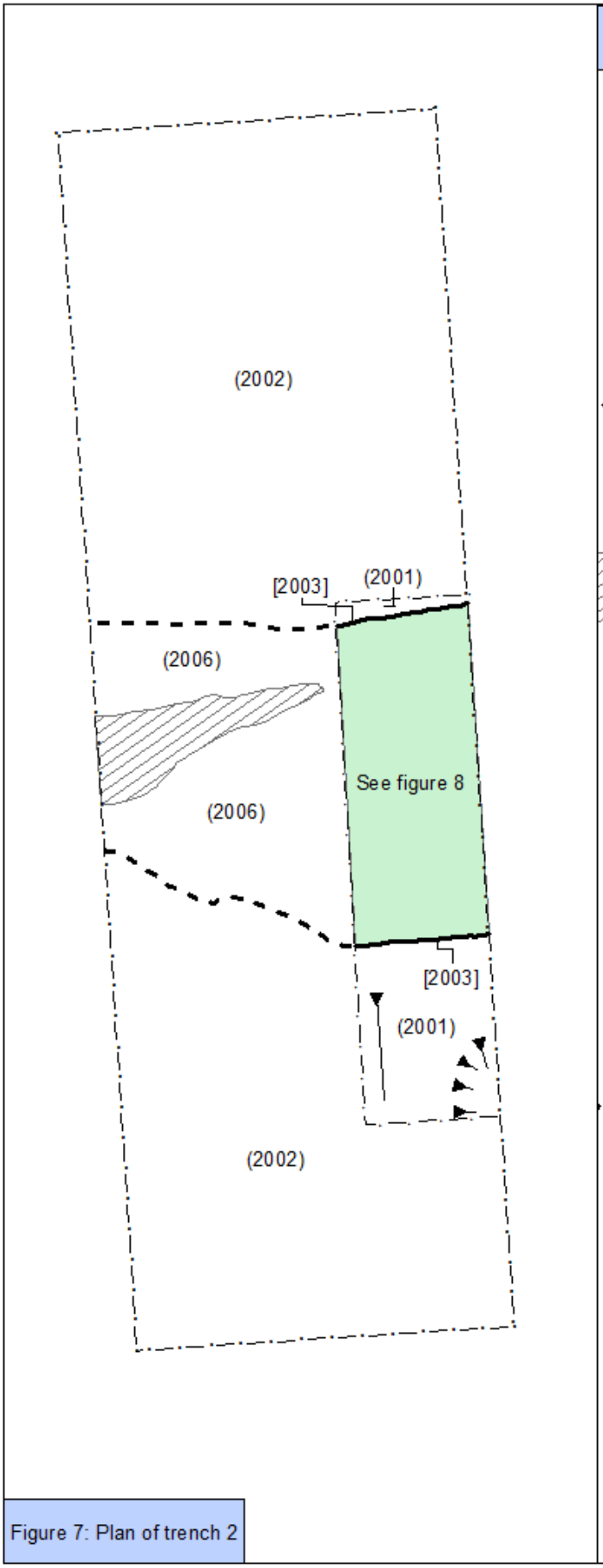

Figure 7: Plan of trench 2

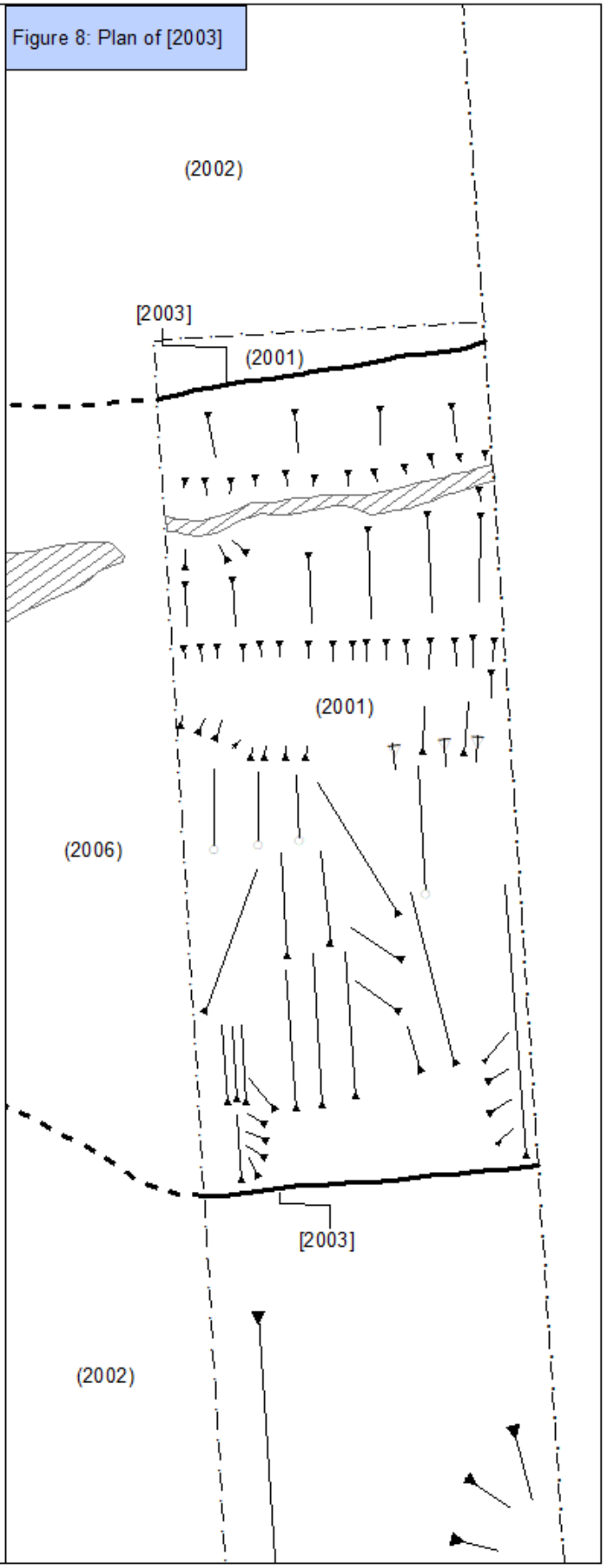

Figure 8: Plan of [2003]

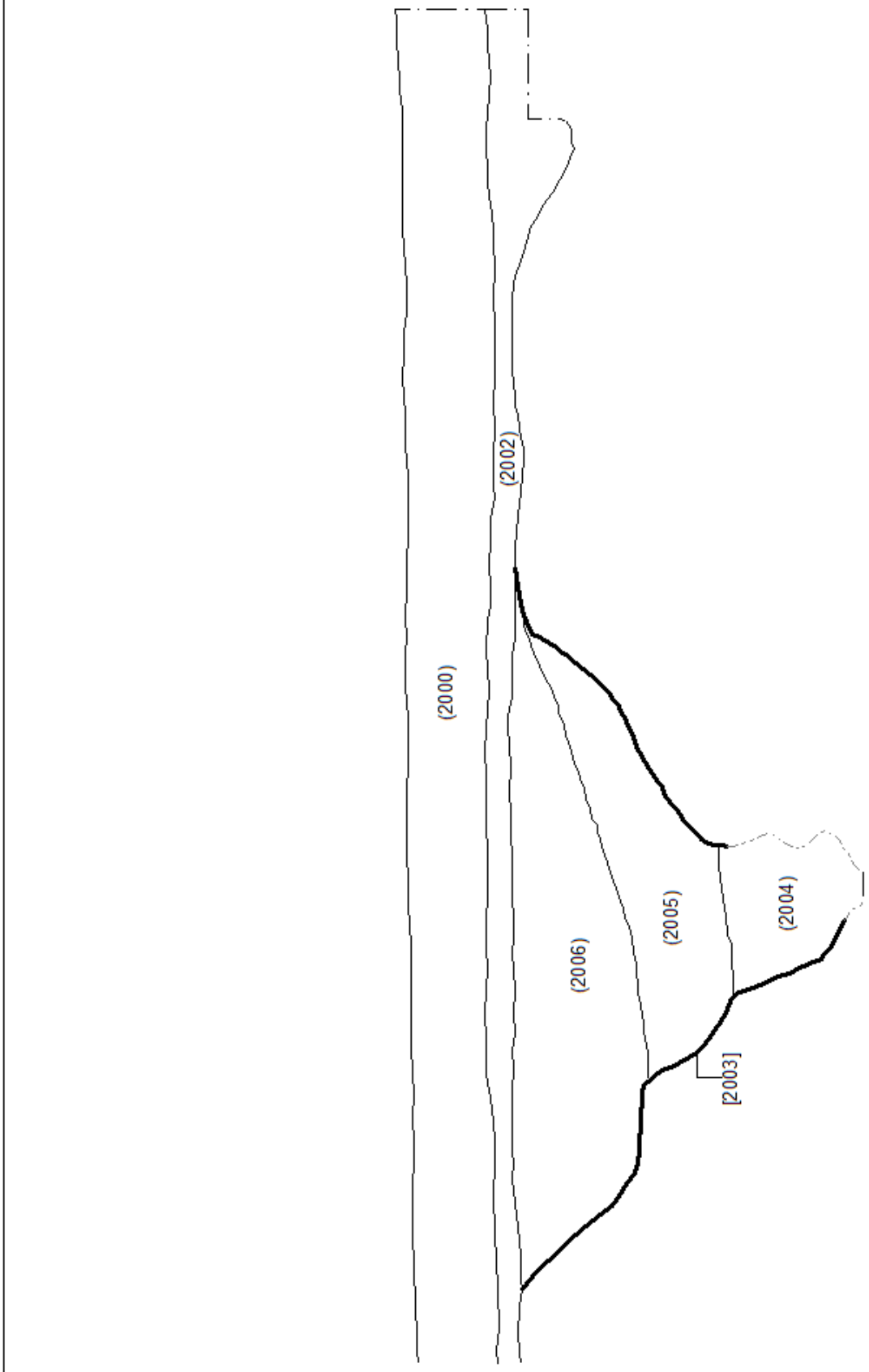

Figure 9: West facing section of [2003] showing disturbance to base and southern edge

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Appendix 1:

Roman and later pottery from excavations at Laughton-en-le-Morthen

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Introduction

The pottery assemblage from Laughton-en-le-Morthen was examined by the author on 11th May 2019. It consisted of eighteen sherds of pottery weighing 425 grams, the majority of which were of Roman date. The data are summarised in Table 1.

The pottery

As noted above, the majority of the pottery was of Roman date and as such lies beyond the competence of the author. It is recommended that a report on the assemblage is commissioned from a suitably experienced practitioner. The exception amongst the pre-medieval material was a small rim sherd from context 1007. Unlike the sandy, quartz-tempered Roman Greywares, this soft black sherd was tempered with angular calcite grains and as such may be an example of the type of hand-made wares which were abundant in eastern and northern Yorkshire throughout the Iron Age and Roman periods. The classification (H1 Calcite) follows the system set out in detail elsewhere (Cumberpatch 2016, 2018, Leary and Cumberpatch 2016). As such it would represent an example of an unusual (although not unparalleled) occurrence of such pottery in South Yorkshire which was largely aceramic throughout the pre-Roman Iron Age. Unfortunately the form, a simple everted rim jar is not a chronologically diagnostic one.

Medieval pottery was represented by a single sherd from context 1000. This bore a degree of similarity to Hallgate B ware manufactured in Doncaster in the earlier medieval period but was somewhat finer in texture and was also a pale grey colour rather than the light buff-grey typical of Hallgate B. Although the Hattgate B ware has traditionally been dated to the 12th century (Buckland *et al* 1979), recent work has suggested that this dating is in need of revisions although there is little prospect of this task being completed in the near future.

Two sherds of Brown Glazed Coarseware were recovered from context 2000 and the topsoil. Brown Glazed Coarseware is ubiquitous on sites of early modern and recent date. Although individual sherds are difficult to date with any accuracy, a later 18th or 19th century date is probable for both of these sherds.

The two fragments of flint from the topsoil both show signs of having been worked, with one being a possible end-scraper of Mesolithic type (Cockrell pers.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Dr. Tim Cockrell for examining and commenting on the flints.

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