



## Pistil Meadow Archaeological Evaluation



July 2017

Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust

Registered address: 22 Wycombe End, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 1NB

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.1. This survey and report have been undertaken in cooperation and with the support of the following organisations:

- The National Trust (NT), for permission to undertake survey of the site, providing help with clearance of site vegetation and providing accommodation in their property at the lighthouse.
- Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST), who were invited by the NT to investigate the site.
- Bournemouth University Department of Archaeology, Anthropology and Forensic Science for the geophysical surveys and assistance with the evaluation excavations.
- The work was done in partnership with Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Maritime Archaeology Society (CISMAS) and Cornwall Council, Historic Environment Projects who conducted the original maritime archaeological survey on the *Royal Anne Galley*.

1.1.2. The site is claimed to be the location of the burial of up to 200 mariners who lost their lives in the catastrophic sinking of the Royal Anne Galley in 1721. Following previous geophysical surveys on the site (Cheetham 2012 and Cheetham 2014), five areas of geophysical anomalies were assessed to be of archaeological potential.

1.1.3. Parts of the five areas of geophysical anomalies were selected for the location for five test trenches in order to assess their archaeological potential (**Figure 1**).

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1.1. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of proposed excavation trenches. The work was to be carried out in a manner which would aim to maintain the integrity of any archaeological features or deposits which warrant preservation in situ, or be better excavated under conditions full excavation. The specific research aims of the project were:
- a) To determine if the geophysical anomalies have archaeological significance.
  - b) To determine if any such archaeological deposits are, or are likely to be, the graves sought. .
- 2.1.2. The aim is to test a up to a total of 40 m<sup>2</sup>, initially based on five 5 x 1 m evaluation trenches (= 25 m<sup>2</sup>), with the flexibility of an additional 15 m<sup>2</sup>, if needed to resolve the extent of any features located or if all the proposed areas are sterile then if time allowed three more 5 x 1 m evaluation trenches in geophysical blank areas (**Figure 2**).

### 3. RESULTS

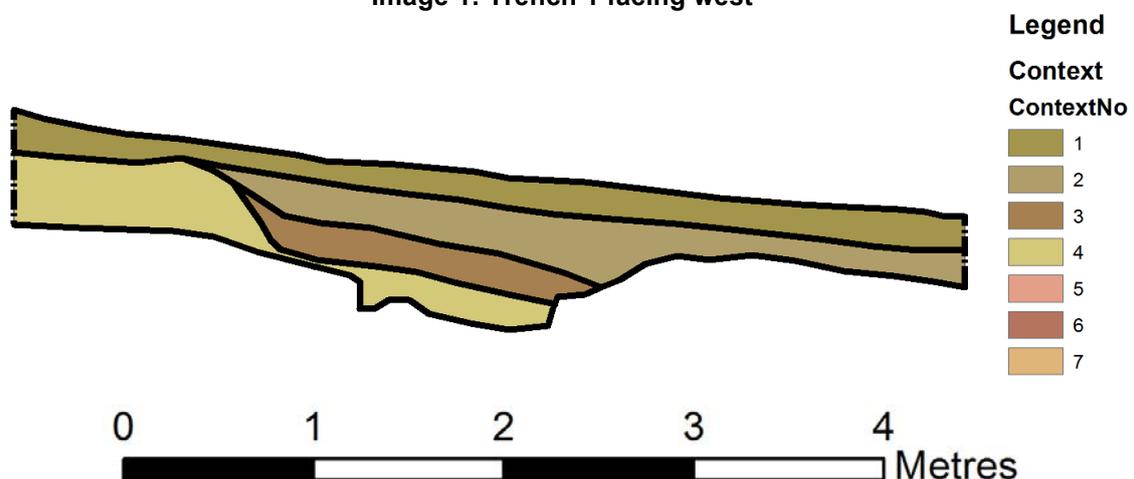
3.1.1. Detailed contextual information is presented in **Appendix 1**. See **Figure 3** for trench profiles.

#### Trench 1

3.1.2. Trench 1 (**Figure 3** and **Image 1**) was excavated remove the current topsoil layer to the original 5 x 1 m dimensions, but then only the southern 5 x 0.5 m section taken down further. A total of four contexts were identified within trench 1, none of these contained archaeological material. Context **104** was the only feature, a possible drainage ditch running roughly north-south and approximately 1 m wide and 0.5 m deep. The location of the trench at the bottom edge of a slope has seen a large amount of run off over time as can be seen by the west to east sloping sediment layers laying above context **104**.



Image 1: Trench 1 facing west



## Trench 2

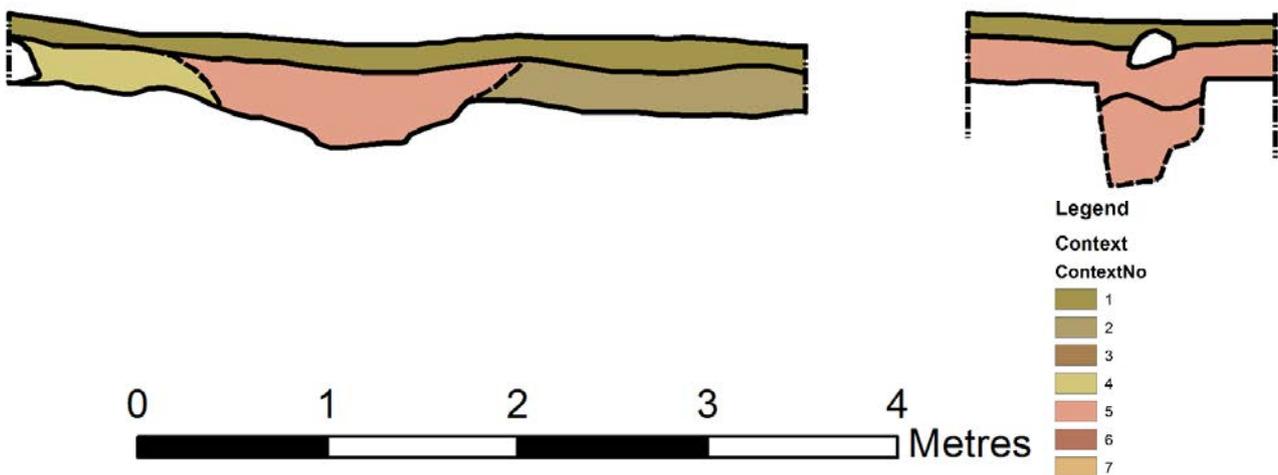
3.1.3. Trench 2 (**Figure 3** and **Image 2 & 3**) was originally excavated to 5 m x 1 m and was extended on the northern edge by 0.5m approximately 1 m from the north western corner and for a total of 1m. A collection of finds were recovered from context **204**. These consisted of fragmented beer bottle from a local brewery and a plastic bag of peanuts dated to the 1970s. There is evidence of a local man living in the field in the 1970s with his structure being located in the north western edge of the field. The location of the trench in the north western edge along with the dated material would suggest context **204** and **205** are features dug during this occupation period.



Image 2: Trench 2 facing west



Image 3: Trench 2 ditch feature facing north

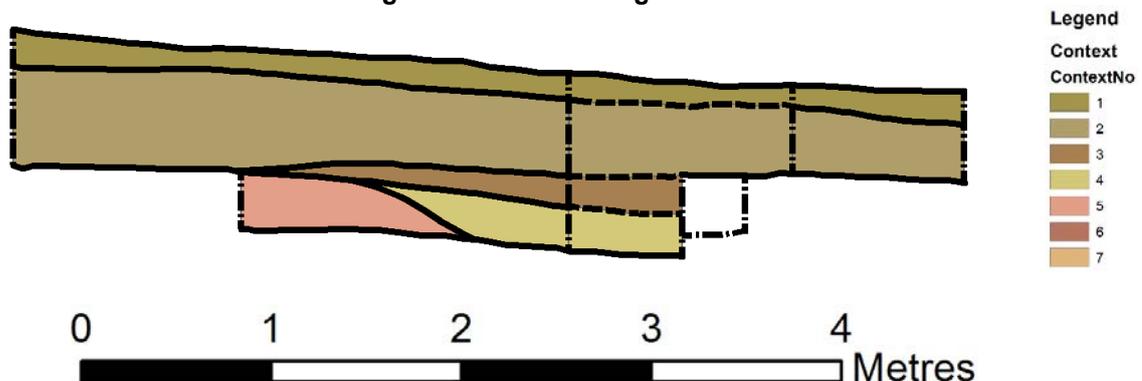


### Trench 3

3.1.4. Trench 3 (**Figure 3** and **Image 4**) was originally excavated to 5 m x 1 m but was extended by 2 m in length and 0.5 m wide on the northern edge, 1 m from the north eastern corner of the trench. The trench yielded a number of corroded iron pieces within the feature context **304**. The feature appears to be a buried drainage ditch, likely naturally formed by water run-off from surrounding high ground. It is also likely that the corroded iron fragments came with the run off from the surrounding fields. The contexts above **304**, suggest a series of different large sediment run off from the high ground to the west of the trench causing the variation in sediment colour and consistency through the contexts.



Image 4: Trench 3 facing west

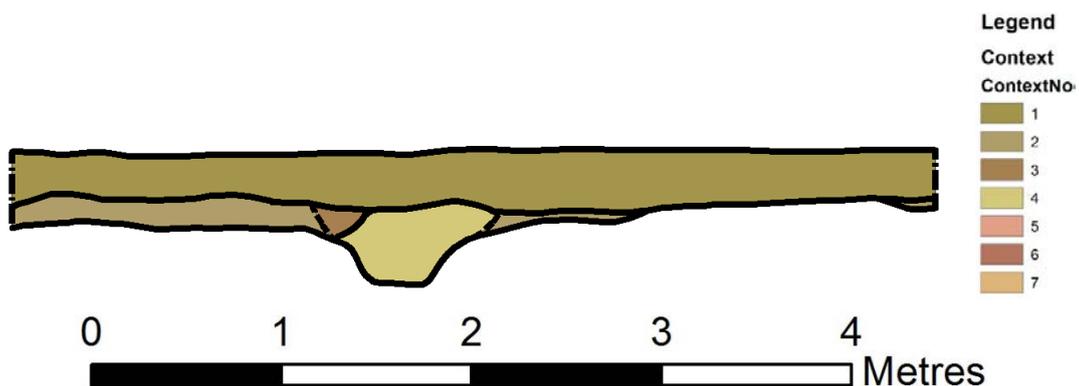


### Trench 4

3.1.5. Trench 4 (**Figure 3** and **Image 5**) was excavated to the original 5 x 1 m dimensions. A total of four contexts were identified within the trench. Context **404** was the only feature, a stone-packed land drain running roughly NNE/SSW across the middle of the field. The ditch is approximately 0.5 m wide at its maximum extent and approximately 0.5 m deep. The context **403** is likely a disturbed horizon between the topsoil **401** and the run off **402** along with the ditch **404**. The disturbance is likely caused by the water levels during high rainfall.



Image 5: Trench 4 facing east

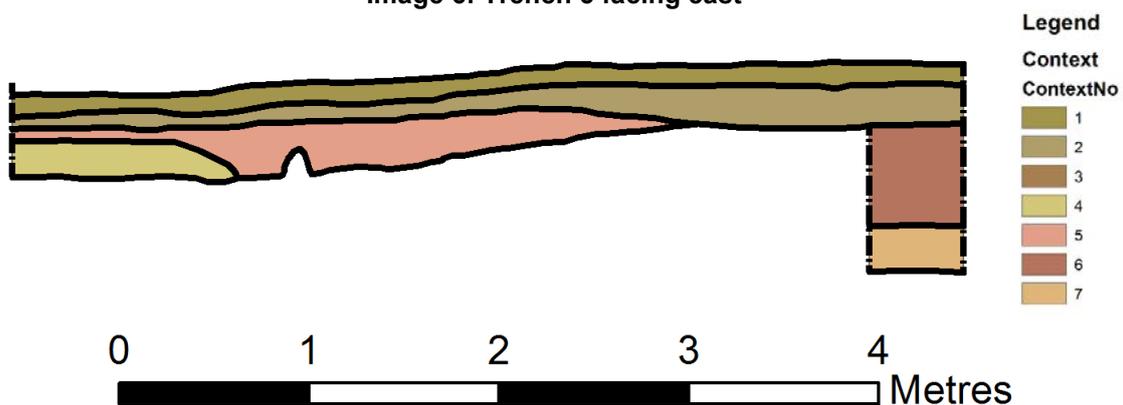


## Trench 5

3.1.6. Trench 5 (**Figure 3** and **Image 6**) was excavated to the original 5 x 1 m dimensions. A total of six contexts were identified within the trench. Context **506** and **507** were the only features identified within the trench, a stone-packed land drain running approximately NNE/SSW across the site and lines up with the feature in trench 4. The above contexts consists of various layers of run off from surround high ground with a topsoil above that.



Image 6: Trench 5 facing east



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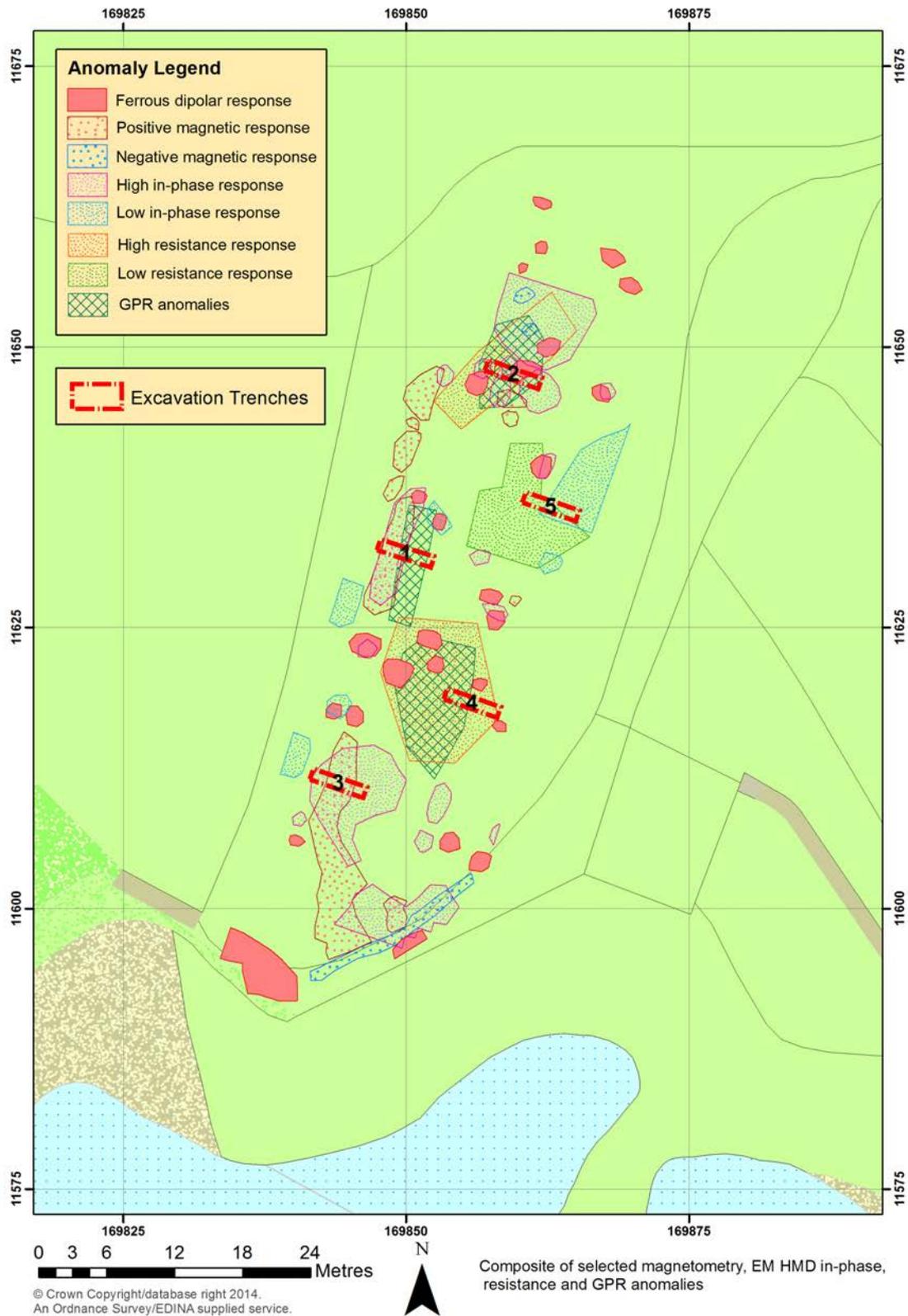
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## 4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1. The excavation was successful in both objectives:
  - a) To determine if the geophysical anomalies have archaeological significance.
  - b) To determine if any such archaeological deposits are, or are likely to be, the graves sought.
- 4.1.2. The anomalies identified in trench 1 and trench 3 both appear to be the remains of a drainage ditch running roughly NNE-SSW along the western edge of the meadow.
- 4.1.3. The anomaly in trench 2 is likely the remains of a possible pit associated with the occupation of the site in the 1970s. The feature was dated from the modern finds located within the disturbed upper context.
- 4.1.4. The anomaly in trench 4 and trench 5 show the remains of a partially stone-packed, land drainage feature that runs approximately NNE-SSW through the middle of the field parallel with the existing ditch on the eastern edge of the meadow. The drainage feature is visible as an open stone-lined drain further south of trench 4 where the meadow meets and crosses the path.
- 4.1.5. It was speculated that there could be a mass burial pit or series of pits within the meadow as reported in various historical sources, none of which were contemporary with the wrecking event. As a result of the geophysical surveys and evaluation excavations, there is no evidence of any burials within the areas examined in Pistil Meadow. The wreck and subsequent mass loss of life did occur and as such a number of bodies would have to have been dealt with by the local population, so the location of the burials is likely elsewhere.
- 4.1.6. To the east of the ditch and directly east of the meadow is a small flat section of land with a dense growth of stunted trees that meant geophysical survey could not be undertaken there. Four auger cores (up to 1 m in depth) were taken to assess the stratigraphy, and similar sediment types and depths to the other side of the meadow were seen. A small potential exists for evidence of the burials to survive within this section, and as such is worth investigating further, with more survey and possibly excavation to completely rule out the accuracy of Pistil Meadow as the location of the mass burials from the wreck.



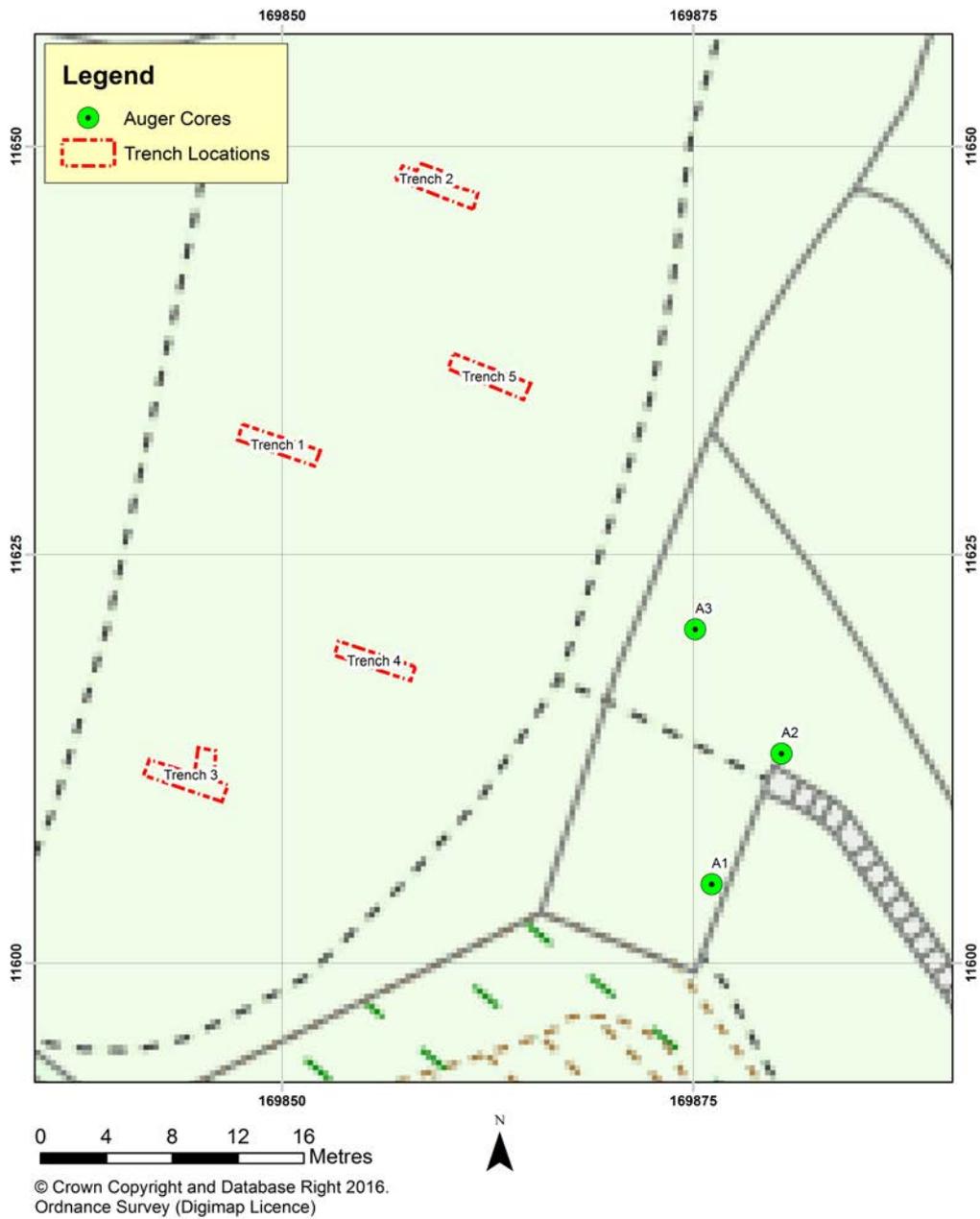
**Figure 1: Proposed trenches over geophysical survey anomalies**

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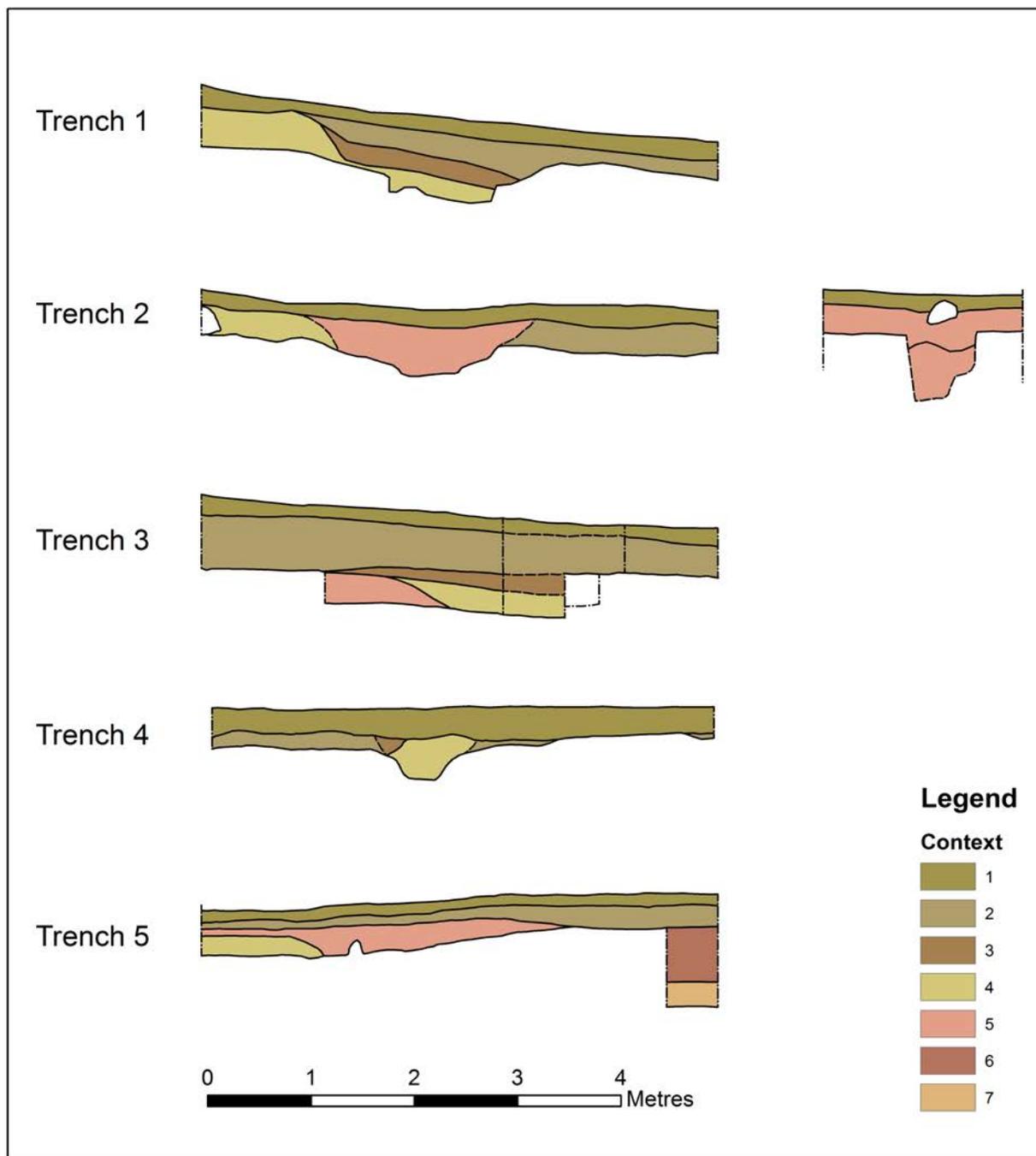
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**Figure 2: Actual trench dimensions and locations**



**Figure 3: Trench profiles and contexts**

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## **5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The evaluation excavations were directed by Paul Cheetham (Bournemouth University) with the assistance of Jim Parry (The National Trust). The other members of the excavation team were Kevin Stratford (MAST), Jessica Berry (MAST) and Tom Harrison, plus Dave Parham and Tom Cousins (Bournemouth University), Kevin Stratford and Paul Cheetham authored the report while Tom Cousins (Bournemouth University) produced the sectional elevations.

## 6. APPENDIX 1 – CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Trench 1		
Context No.	Description	Depth
101	Topsoil. Dark brown silty clay.	
102	Subsoil. Light brown silty clay, occasional rounded flint inclusions. Likely run off from surrounding high ground to the east.	
103	Subsoil. Reddish brown silty clay, occasional to frequent rounded flint inclusions. Likely run off from surrounding high ground to the east.	
104	Natural. Dark brown silty clay.	

Trench 2		
Context No.	Description	Depth
201	Topsoil. Dark brown silty clay.	
202	Subsoil. Yellowish brown silty clay, frequent sub rounded flint inclusions.	
203	Subsoil. Light brown silty clay, frequent sub rounded flint inclusions.	
204	Ditch fill. Reddish brown silty clay, abundant sub rounded flint inclusions. Modern finds likely from occupation period recovered from this context in the extension to the north.	
205	Ditch fill. Dark brown silty clay, abundant flint inclusions.	

Trench 3		
Context No.	Description	Depth
301	Topsoil. Dark brown silty clay.	
302	Subsoil. Yellowish brown silty clay, frequent flint inclusions.	
303	Subsoil. Light grey silty clay	
304	Ditch fill. Dark grey silty clay. Corroded iron fragments recovered from this context.	
305	Natural. Dark brown silty clay. Occasional flint inclusions	

Trench 4		
Context No.	Description	Depth
401	Topsoil. Dark brown silty clay.	
402	Subsoil. Orange silty clay, occasional sub rounded flint inclusions. Likely run off from surrounding high ground.	
403	Eroded horizon between context <b>401</b> , <b>402</b> and <b>404</b> . Dark brown silty sandy clay, frequent sub rounded flint	

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	inclusions. Likely caused by high water levels.	
<b>404</b>	Ditch fill. Dark brown silty clay with flint stone lining and frequent sub rounded flint inclusions.	

<b>Trench 5</b>		
<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>
<b>501</b>	Topsoil. Dark brown silty clay.	
<b>502</b>	Subsoil. Light brown silty clay, occasional sub rounded flint inclusions. Likely run off from surrounding high ground.	
<b>503</b>	Subsoil. Grey brown silty clay, occasional sub rounded flint inclusions. Likely run off from surrounding high ground.	
<b>504</b>	Natural. Mottled clay, occasional flint inclusion.	
<b>505</b>	Ditch fill. Red brownish silty clay, frequent rounded flint inclusions.	
<b>506</b>	Ditch fill. Grey silty clay, Occasional large flint inclusions	

## 7. APPENDIX 2 – COORDINATES

Type	Name	X	Y	Z
Trench 1	T1.1	169852	11630.44	17.044
Trench 1	T1.2	169847.3	11632.02	17.591
Trench 1	T1.3	169847.6	11632.99	17.73
Trench 1	T1.4	169852.3	11631.38	17.138
Trench 2	T2.1	169856.9	11648	18.828
Trench 2	T2.2	169857.3	11648.82	18.83
Trench 2	T2.3	169858.2	11648.54	18.718
Trench 2	T2.4	169858.5	11648.95	18.729
Trench 2	T2.5	169860.2	11648.32	18.727
Trench 2	T2.6	169860	11647.71	18.633
Trench 2	T2.7	169861.9	11647.17	18.611
Trench 2	T2.8	169861.6	11646.17	18.512
Trench 3	T3.1	169846.3	11609.9	15.298
Trench 3	T3.2	169841.6	11611.52	15.546
Trench 3	T3.3	169841.9	11612.47	15.656
Trench 3	T3.4	169844.7	11611.58	15.44
Trench 3	T3.5	169844.9	11613.22	15.526
Trench 3	T3.6	169846	11613.01	15.437
Trench 3	T3.7	169845.9	11611.22	15.391
Trench 3	T3.8	169846.7	11610.92	15.342
Trench 4	T4.1	169853.2	11618.83	15.904
Trench 4	T4.2	169853.4	11619.7	15.967
Trench 4	T4.3	169857.8	11617.31	15.873
Trench 4	T4.4	169858.1	11618.15	15.942
Trench 5	T5.1	169860.1	11636.39	17.298
Trench 5	T5.2	169860.4	11637.32	17.382
Trench 5	T5.3	169865.1	11635.49	17.485
Trench 5	T5.4	169864.7	11634.47	17.385
Auger	A1	169876.1	11604.85	16.448
Auger	A2	169880.4	11612.85	17.939
Auger	A3	169875.1	11620.43	16.804