

## The Colt House, Sweetzer's Piece, Mortimer Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief



**THE COLT HOUSE, SWEETZER'S PIECE, MORTIMER  
BERKSHIRE**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

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## Archaeological Watching Brief

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# **THE COLT HOUSE, SWEETZER'S PIECE, MORTIMER BERKSHIRE**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**

### **Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned via Mark Leedale by Isignia Homes Ltd (the Client) to undertake a targeted archaeological watching brief during construction on land at Colt House, Sweetzer's Piece, Mortimer, Berkshire (hereafter 'the Site') centred on NGR 464385 164690.

The watching brief was undertaken as a condition of planning consent for the redevelopment of the Site to provide two detached residential properties with garages. The West Berkshire Council Archaeological Advisor (WBCAA) had advised that the Site had the potential to contain archaeological remains. A previous evaluation of one of the two proposed house plots on the Site had revealed a part of the buried Grim's Bank where the bank and ditch had suffered considerable truncation from modern building and gardening work (Wessex Archaeology 2004). Consequently the WBCAA requested a better record of the nature of the bank and ditch elsewhere within the development by means of a targeted archaeological watching brief during construction.

One trench was excavated along the projected line of Grim's Bank, which revealed the ditch. The ditch was also observed and recorded in the foundation trenches excavated during construction of the proposed houses.

# **THE COLT HOUSE, SWEETZER'S PIECE, MORTIMER BERKSHIRE**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**

### **Acknowledgements**

Wessex Archaeology in London was commissioned by Isignia Homes Ltd. Wessex Archaeology in London would like to thank the onsite staff of AMC Construction Ltd for their assistance.

John Powell carried out the fieldwork, with assistance from Zsolt Magyar. John Powell compiled the report, with illustrations prepared by Kitty Brandon. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology in London by Lawrence Pontin.

# THE COLT HOUSE, SWEETZER'S PIECE, MORTIMER BERKSHIRE

## Targeted Archaeological Watching Brief

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned via Mark Leedle by Isignia Homes Ltd (the Client) to undertake a targeted archaeological watching brief as a condition of planning consent during construction on land at the Colt House, Sweetzer's Piece, Mortimer, Berkshire.
- 1.1.2 An earlier phase of work was undertaken in 2004 to record one evaluation trench on the proposed house plots (Wessex Archaeology, 2004).
- 1.1.3 This report refers to the watching brief undertaken during the construction on the Site from 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

#### 1.2 Site Description

- 1.2.1 The Site is located on a sub-rectangular parcel of land covering an area of c.0.11ha. It lies on the west side of the town of Mortimer, some 5 miles southwest of Reading, centred on National Grid Reference 464385 164690. The Site is bordered by two roads; to the south by Sweetzer's Piece, and to the west by St Catherine's Hill (see **Figure 1**).
- 1.2.2 The Site is generally flat, and lies at a height of approximately 96m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The Site was previously occupied by the disused Colt House property (demolished prior to the time of work) and gardens.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology of the Site has been identified as Plateau gravels of the Reading beds (British Geological Survey, 1997).

#### 1.3 Archaeological Background

- 1.3.1 The Site is known to straddle the projected line of Grim's Bank. Grim's Bank is presumed to be a Late Iron Age ditch acting as a boundary to an Oppida within which the subsequent Roman town of *Calleva* developed to the south (Wessex Archaeology 2004). Parts of the upstanding remains of the bank and ditch not on the Site are a Scheduled Monument. No upstanding remains of the bank and ditch survive on Site.
- 1.3.2 As discussed above, the previous evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2004) demonstrated that buried remains for the bank and ditch do survive on Site, in a degraded form due to modern truncation. The deposits within the ditch showed some evidence for an upstanding bank which had weathered into the ditch over a period of time. Later filling of the ditch was thought to date to the construction of the Colt House and subsequent planting and re-planting of the gardens.

- 1.3.3 A barrow cemetery also lies some 300m to the North of the Site.

## **2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS**

- 2.1.1 The aims of the targeted archaeological watching brief were to identify, date and characterise any surviving remains of Grim's Bank within the footprint of the south western garage by means of the excavated trench, and to assess the condition and depth of any such remains.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Methodological Standards**

- 3.1.1 All work was undertaken in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (as amended 2001).

### **3.2 Health and Safety**

- 3.2.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations (1992), and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force.
- 3.2.2 A risk assessment was prepared by Wessex Archaeology prior to the commencement of fieldwork (WA 2007).

### **3.3 Fieldwork**

- 3.3.1 The majority of work on Site was concentrated on one machine excavated trench, sited within the footprint of the proposed development (**Figure 1**). The foundation trenches for the westerly house were archaeologically monitored and where the ditch was visible it was recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system.
- 3.3.2 The trench was excavated to archaeological/geological levels using a 360-degree tracked machine, equipped with a toothless grading bucket, under constant archaeological supervision.
- 3.3.3 The revealed section of Grim's Bank was excavated using the tracked machine. Successive layers were removed and visually scanned for archaeological material. The trench was hand cleaned and a written record was created using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system. A photographic archive (including digital images) was maintained.
- 3.3.4 Where the ditch was revealed in the house foundation trenches, it was recorded and the positions of ditch sections were marked on the plan of the Site.
- 3.3.5 Following completion of the targeted watching brief the trench was backfilled following agreement with the WBCAA.



## 4 RESULTS

- 4.1.1 The following section provides a brief summary of the findings for all recorded interventions and each has been allocated a trench number. Detailed descriptions of deposits and depths are provided in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.1.2 The targeted trench revealed one ditch **[204]** cut into the underlying natural gravels. The ditch was located towards the south eastern end of the trench and was aligned with the extrapolated line of Grim's Bank. (**Figure 1**). Two further sections of the ditch were observed to the north east of the targeted trench within the house foundation trench, these sections showed a similar profile and infilling sequence as that described below.
- 4.1.3 Finds from the ditch **(213)** included a modern bottle and modern pottery sherds. These finds probably relate to the latter infilling of the ditch during construction of the Colt House and due to their modern date were not retained. All archaeological layers had suffered from heavy root disturbance, probably related to the humic nature of the ditch fills in comparison to the surrounding natural.
- 4.1.4 The targeted ditch section **[204]** revealed the ditch to have a wide flat bottomed profile (see **Figure 2**). The earliest sequence of infilling comprised primary deposits **(205, 206)** which were derived from erosion and stabilisation of the sides of the features. Above the primary fills was a secondary deposit of very dark grey-brown silty-clay deposit **(208)** with a high humic content, which was also visible in section in the house foundation trenches. This deposit may relate to the collection of organic material within the excavated ditch, during its use as a linear landscape boundary.
- 4.1.5 The latter filling of the ditch was composed of tertiary fills **(209 - 213)** and may indicate a degree of levelling out of the ditch hollow during the construction of the Colt House property. This would suggest that the ditch may still have been a visible feature during the construction of the Colt House.
- 4.1.6 Deposits recorded in section to the north east of the ditch may represent the very base of an up-cast bank or made up ground relating to the construction of the Colt House **(202 and 201)**. These layers were cut by **[214]** a feature probably relating to later garden features associated to the Colt House.
- 4.1.7 The ditch and deposits to the north east were overlain by c0.20m of topsoil.

## 5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1.1 In conclusion, the watching brief has demonstrated the preservation of a section of ditch and possible levelled down bank, which probably represent the remnants of Grim's Bank (**Figure 2**). The location of the ditch in sections of the house foundation trenches supports the extrapolated line of Grim's Bank, running north east to south west across Site.
- 5.1.2 No artefactual material of archaeological interest was recovered during archaeologically monitored works. The only finds recovered were of a modern date and probably relate to the later infilling of the ditch associated with the construction of Colt House.



- 5.1.3 The stratigraphic sequence revealed evidence that the lower fills of the ditch had been formed by slow natural infilling. The upper fills of the ditch consist of episodes of possible deliberate infilling or levelling. This later infilling may relate to levelling activities that occurred during the construction of the Colt House.

## 6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARY SHEETS

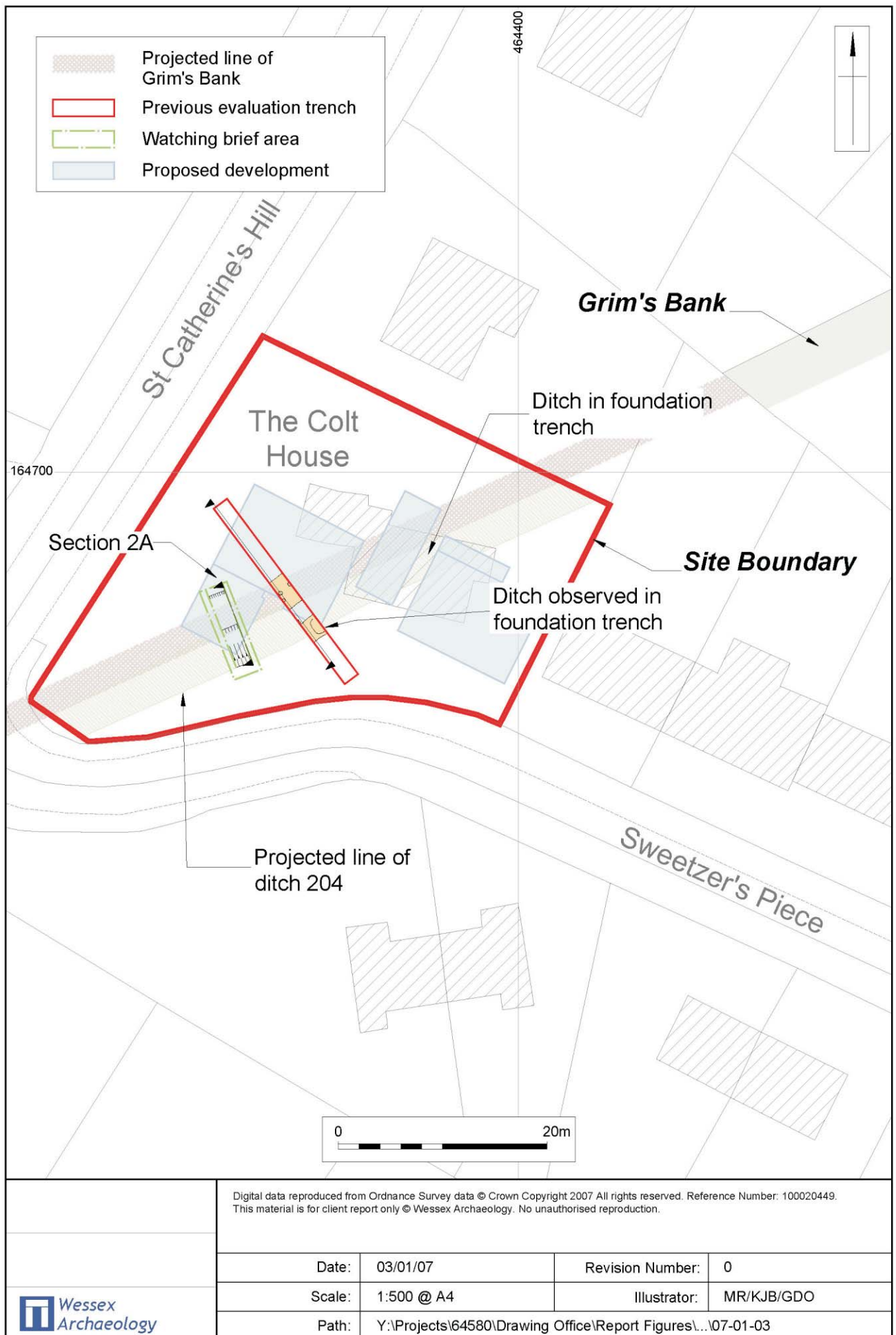
### Trench 2

DIMENSIONS: 9MX2.70M MAX.DEPTH:1.12M		Interpretative & Process of deposition	Depth (m OD)
Context	Description		
<b>200</b>	Dark grey-brown silty clay with frequent root disturbance. Fairly loose and friable with a high humic content. Frequent sub-rounded flint gravel inclusions less than 60mm diam.	Topsoil	0m - 0.20m
<b>201</b>	Light yellowish-brown sandy silt with frequent flint gravels less than 50mm diam. Could possibly relate to re-deposited natural thrown up during construction of bank or possibly due to later construction of Coat House	Subsoil/Up-cast Bank	0. 20m - 0.42m
<b>202</b>	Mid grey-brown sandy clay with frequent sub-angular flints less than 30mm diam. Very common pea grit gravels. Had a clear horizon to natural. May represent a buried soil at base of up-cast bank or buried during construction of the Coat House.	Buried Sub-Soil	0. 42m - 0.55m
<b>203</b>	Light orange-yellow sandy clay with frequent flint gravel inclusions less than 70mm diam. Context was mainly gravel in sandy clay matrix	Natural	0.55m+
<b>204</b>	Ditch cut, Linear ditch with wide flat bottomed profile. Aligned NE-SW, had been allowed to fill up naturally, with later fills possibly indicating deliberate levelling.	Ditch Cut	0.20m – 1.1m
<b>205</b>	Primary fill of ditch. Light yellowish-brown with sandy clay texture. Derived from erosion of cut features edges	Primary Deposit	0.41m – 0.95m
<b>206</b>	Primary fill of ditch. Mid grey-brown sandy silt with frequent pea grits and common flint gravels, less than 50mm diam. Visible across base of ditch. Probably fairly quickly eroded into base of ditch.	Primary Deposit	0.62m – 1.05m
<b>207</b>	Secondary Deposit, Mid grey-brown with orange mottling sandy silt. Naturally derived deposit eroded from contemporary local ground surface.	Secondary Deposit	0.31m – 0.60m
<b>208</b>	Secondary Deposit, dark humic deposit. Very dark grey-brown silty clay with moderate sub-angular and sub-rounded flints. Possibly derived from organic matter which collected in ditch over a long period. No finds were recovered from this deposit so could be at a considerable distance from settlement.	Secondary Deposit	0.47m – 0.88m
<b>209</b>	Secondary Fill, Mid grey-brown sandy silt, with moderate flint less than 50mm diam. Naturally derived deposit of eroded local top and sub soils from the contemporary ground surface.	Secondary Deposit	0.20m – 0.61m
<b>210</b>	Fill of Ditch, Mid reddish-brown sandy silt, with moderate flint gravels less than 50mm diam. Had formed in partially silted up ditch, and may be related to erosion of any upstanding bank.	Ditch Fill	0.42m – 0.62m

<b>211</b>	Tertiary Fill, very dark grey-brown silty clay, with rare sub-angular flint gravels less than 40mm. Similar to fill <b>(208)</b> located towards top of ditch infilling sequence.	Tertiary Deposit	0.20m – 0.41m
<b>212</b>	Tertiary Fill, mid orange-brown sandy silt. Near complete gravel in sandy silt matrix, less than 60mm diam. Lenses of gravels located on SE edge of section may relate to slighting of bank or deliberate infilling of ditch.	Tertiary Deposit	0.20m – 0.35m
<b>213</b>	Tertiary Fill, mid reddish-brown sandy silt, with moderate flint gravels less than 40mm diam.	Tertiary Deposit	0.20m – 0.41m
<b>214</b>	Cut of Pit/Tree Throw, filled by <b>(215)</b> and <b>(216)</b> . Probable later garden feature associated to Coat House.	Cut of Pit/Tree Throw	0.20m – 0.62m
<b>215</b>	Fill of <b>[214]</b> , dark grey-brown sandy silt highly mixed with visible root disturbance.	Fill of Pit/Tree Throw	0.41m – 0.62
<b>216</b>	Fill of <b>[214]</b> , light yellow-grey sandy silt with frequent flint gravels less than 40mm diam.	Fill of Pit/Tree Throw	0.20m – 0.40m

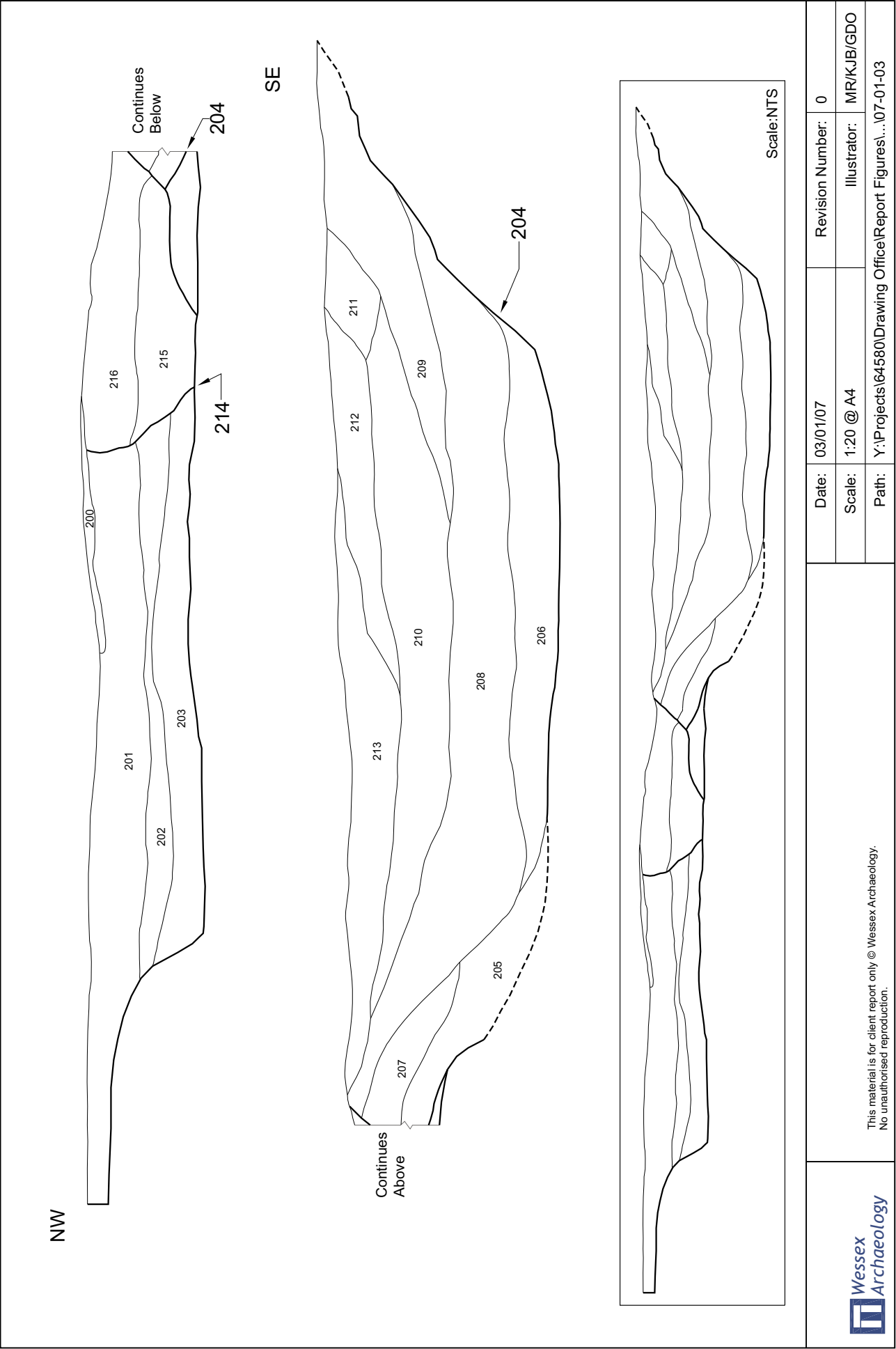
### Trench 3

DIMENSIONS: 8MX0.6M MAX DEPTH 1.8M			
Context	Description	Interpretative & Process of deposition	Depth (m OD)
<b>301</b>	Tertiary Fill, dark grey loam, with frequent gravel inclusions. Top fill of ditch	Tertiary Fill	0.00m – 0.20m
<b>302</b>	Tertiary Fill, light brownish grey sandy silt. Context was near complete gravel in sandy silt matrix.	Tertiary Fill	0.20m – 0.40m
<b>303</b>	Secondary Fill, mid grey sandy loam with frequent gravel inclusions.	Secondary Fill	0.40m – 0.70m
<b>304</b>	Secondary Fill, very dark grey brown silt with common gravel. Similar deposit to that seen in ditch section <b>[204]</b> , <b>(208)</b> .	Secondary Fill	0.70m – 1.0m
<b>305</b>	Cut of ditch, wide flat bottomed ditch on projected line of Grim's bank, same ditch as <b>[204]</b>	Cut of Ditch	0.0m – 1.0m
<b>306</b>	Cut of wall foundation trench, probably relates to construction of Coat House.	Cut of Wall Foundation	0.0m – 0.60m
<b>307</b>	Deliberate backfill, light grey sandy loam with frequent gravel inclusions and building rubble.	Deliberate Backfill	0.0m – 0.60m
<b>308</b>	Natural, light orange-yellow sandy clay with frequent flint gravel inclusions less than 70mm diam. Context was mainly gravel in sandy clay matrix	Natural	1.0m+



Site and proposed area of working

Figure 1



Section Drawing of Ditch 204

Figure 2





Plates 1: SW facing section of ditch [204]



Plates 2: General view of site from SW





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