

Method Statement: Archaeological Evaluation

Definition

Where desk-based and non-intrusive assessment methods indicate the likely presence of subsurface archaeological deposits, a programme of archaeological evaluation, or trial trenching, is implemented in order to evaluate this potential. Should deposits and/or features be located, the aim of the evaluation is to determine the extent, nature, age and state of preservation of the deposits, in order to inform subsequent stages of mitigation.

In the long term, information gathered through archaeological evaluation is typically used to inform subsequent assessment stages or a final mitigation/conservation programme. The research questions, therefore, are fully defined in advance of the initial stage of trench targeting, but the methods employed remain adaptable in order to address unexpected/uncommon archaeological deposits.

The methodology will normally be agreed with the local Archaeological Curator (i.e. the archaeological advisor to the consenting authority) prior to work commencing.



Typical trial trench

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Methodology

The trench location plan will either be based on the evidence from which the archaeological remains are inferred, where trenches are targeted to investigate as many features as possible, or on a prospective sampling strategy (e.g. 2% of total site area).

Trenches will be located through survey and marked with pegs.

A 'before' record photograph will be taken of the area to be trenched.

Area of trench(es) will be CAT scanned for services by trained personnel.

Trenches are normally mechanically excavated using a machine equipped with a smooth (or toothless) ditching blade. The type of machine will vary, and therefore so will the size of the blade used. The machining will be constantly monitored by an archaeologist. Under instruction from the archaeologist, 'spits' will be removed, c.5cm at a time.

Upon reaching the archaeological horizon or the natural horizon, whichever is encountered first, machine excavation will stop. Machine excavation may be stopped prior to this if the trench depth is greater than 1m before either horizon is met.

The surface of the exposed archaeological horizon will be cleaned for the purpose of clarifying the remains. Archaeological features will generally only be sampled sufficiently to characterise and date them. Full excavation of features should not be undertaken at this stage. Care should be taken not to damage archaeological deposits through excessive use of mechanical excavation.

Should no archaeological features be evident at either end of the trench, a machine-dug sondage may be excavated at either end in order to confirm the authenticity of the horizon presumed 'natural'.

A 'pre-excavation' photograph will be taken of the cleaned trench and a sample section will be cleaned, photographed and drawn to scale. A 'post-excavation' plan will be drawn to scale and the trench photographed.

Should it be necessary to leave a trench 'open' over night, it will be fenced on all sides with netlon fencing and iron road pins, and fitted with adequate signage, unless otherwise specified.

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Archaeological Evaluation Fact Sheet

- Archaeological evaluation (also known as trial trenching) is normally conducted by a team of 2 - 4 professional surveyors, per location.
- The surveyors will require access to the site, preferably by car or four wheel drive vehicle. A mechanical excavator will also be required on site, and access will be required for a wheeled or tracked machine, depending on ground conditions and land owner preference.
- This survey technique is intrusive, trenches are typically 20 to 30 meters in length, 1.2 to 1.8 meters in width and 0.2 to 1 metre in depth. This will, however, be specified at each location.
- Should it be necessary to leave a trench 'open' over night, it will be fenced on all sides with netlon fencing and iron road pins, and fitted with adequate signage, unless otherwise specified.
- The trench will be backfilled, replacing the strata in the reverse order to which it was excavated, to the best degree possible, returning the site to the state in which it was found.
- The survey will result in a report that provides survey data supported by figures, specialist reports and photographs.
- Photographs may be taken as part of the survey, but will not be placed into the public domain if the landowner explicitly requests this.
- Finds and soil samples, if present, will be removed from site for further study. Legal requirements will all be met and the landowner will be informed of what finds, if any, are removed. The requirements of the Treasure Act, 1996 and Burial Act, 1857 will be followed, if necessary.

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Finds excavated during the sampling will be removed from site for further analysis, and soil samples may be taken.

The trench will be backfilled, replacing the strata in the reverse order to which it was excavated, to the best degree possible, returning the site to the state in which it was found.

An 'after' photograph will be entered into the photographic record.

Work will be undertaken in accordance with an appropriate health, safety and environment risk assessment.

Output

A report will be produced that will include a methodology, a description of all finds and features recorded and specialist artefact and environmental reports, as appropriate. The report will be accompanied by appropriate figures and photographs.

An archive of the results may be required for future deposition with a relevant repository. Results of archaeological work will, when authorised by the client, end up in the public domain.

Any previously unknown sites identified during the course of the field reconnaissance will be reported to the local Historic Environment Record. This is required under the standards and code of conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists.