



University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

## Archaeological Evaluation

G Park Stoke,  
Whittle Road,  
Meir,  
Stoke-on-Trent

**Client:**  
CgMs Consulting Ltd

**Planning Ref:**  
48907

**Technical Report:**  
Steve Tamburello

**Report No:**  
SA/2018/20





**Site Location:** The proposed development area is located off Whittle Road, Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, on the site of the former Johnson Matthey Colours and Coatings Works.

**NGR:** Centred at SJ 933 422

**Project:** G Park Stoke, Whittle Road, Meir, Stoke-on-Trent

**Planning Ref:** 48907

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# *Contents*

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|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Summary .....                  | 2  |
| 1. Introduction.....           | 3  |
| 2. Historical Background ..... | 5  |
| 3. Methodology .....           | 8  |
| 4. Excavation Results.....     | 9  |
| 5. Discussion.....             | 15 |
| 6. Impact .....                | 16 |
| Acknowledgments.....           | 17 |
| Sources.....                   | 18 |
| Appendix 1: Figures.....       | 19 |

## Summary

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In April 2018, Salford Archaeology was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd on behalf of G Park (Stoke) Limited, 99 Bishopsgate, London, EC2M 3XD to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site of the former Johnson Matthey Works off Whittle Road in Meir, Stoke-on-Trent (centred on NGR SJ 933 422). The evaluation was required to determine the presence, extent, depth, state of preservation and significance of the archaeological resource of the site as part of the planning process in advance of its proposed redevelopment as a storage and distribution warehouse facility (Use Class B8), with ancillary offices, parking and landscaping (Application No 48907). The archaeological work was intended to enable informed recommendations to be made regarding the future treatment of any surviving remains, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, Paragraph 128.

The potential for archaeological remains was highlighted in an updated written scheme of investigation that was prepared to support the development proposals. This concluded that the site had some potential for below-ground archaeological remains deriving from its proximity to the course of the Roman Rykeneld Street, and to Normacot Grange, a medieval grange of the Cistercian monastery of Hulton Abbey. There was also considered to be some potential for archaeological remains relating to the Meir Aerodrome, which occupied the site from the 1930s until the construction of the Johnson Matthey Works in the 1970s.

The archaeological evaluation comprised the excavation of three trenches, providing a total sample area of 280m<sup>2</sup>. The results obtained from all three trenches demonstrated clearly that the site had been subject to considerable earth-moving works in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with no indication for any surviving archaeological remains. This is likely due to extensive landscaping that was carried out firstly in 1930s during its use as an aerodrome, and subsequently during the construction of the Johnson Matthey Works in the 1970s, when the southern end of the site appears to have been reduced to natural bedrock with the stockpiled earth still present in the south-west corner.

Based on the negative results obtained from the evaluation, it is concluded that there is no merit in undertaking any further archaeological investigation in advance of, or during, the construction work for the proposed development.

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

Planning permission was previously granted in November 2011 for the redevelopment of the former Johnson Matthey Works, off Whittle Road in Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, as a storage and distribution warehouse facility (Use Class B8), with ancillary offices, parking and landscaping (Application No 48907). A series of conditions were attached to planning consent, of which Conditions 26 and 27 required a programme of archaeological works to be secured. The development was not progressed at that time, and a revised application has been prepared. Following discussions with Jonathon Goodwin, Senior Planning Officer for Stoke-on-Trent, during consultation on this revised application, it was agreed that similar conditions would be attached to a new application, as the delivery of the development proposals will necessitate considerable earth-moving works, which will impact on any below-ground archaeological remains that survive *in-situ*.

The potential for archaeological remains was highlighted in an updated Written Scheme of Investigation that was prepared to support the present development proposals. This concluded that the site had some potential for below-ground archaeological remains deriving from the proximity of the Site to the course of the Roman Rykeneld Street and to the site of Normacot Grange, a medieval grange of the Cistercian monastery of Hulton Abbey. There was also considered to be some potential for archaeological remains relating to the Meir Aerodrome, which occupied the Site from the 1930s until the construction of the Johnson Matthey Ceramic Works in the 1970s.

In the first instance, the required programme of archaeological was intended to determine the presence, extent, depth, state of preservation and significance of the archaeological resource via trial trenching. It was anticipated that the results obtained from the trenches would enable informed recommendations to be made for the future treatment of any surviving remains, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, Paragraph 128.

In April 2018, Salford Archaeology, within the Centre for Applied Archaeology at the University of Salford, was commissioned by CgMs Consulting to carry out the recommended scheme of archaeological evaluation. The evaluation was undertaken in April 2018.

## 1.2 Aims and Objectives

The general aims of the evaluation, as stated in the approved Written Scheme of Investigation, were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the development site to provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable the archaeological implications of the proposed development to be assessed. The specific aims of the evaluation were to establish the presence or absence of activity associated with the Roman road and the medieval grange in the vicinity of the Site, and to establish whether there was any evidence of significance associated with the military use of the Site during its time as an aerodrome.

## 1.3 Location and Geology

The Site is located off Whittle Road, Meir, Stoke-on-Trent and was previously occupied by the Johnson Matthey Colours and Coatings works. The site is bounded by Whittle Road and the G Park Distribution centre to the east, Uttoxeter Road (A50) to the north and housing estates to the south and west (Plate 1). The Johnson Matthey site was demolished following the closure of the plant in 2002, leaving open tarmac and concrete surfaces across the north of the Site and a grassed area at the southern end of the Site. The grassed area at the southern end of the Site, where the evaluation trenches were targeted, lies at around 190m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) with an earth mound in the south-west corner lying at around 196m aOD. The solid geology comprises siltstone, mudstone, and sandstone of the Tarporly Siltstone Formation. This is overlain by clay, silt, sand and gravel deposits of alluvium (British Geological Survey 2011)



*Plate 1: Recent satellite imagery with the Site boundary indicated*



## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1 Development of the Site

The Site is located to the south of Uttoxeter Road (A50), which follows the line of Rykeneld Street, one of the principal Roman roads across the English Midlands that linked the military installations at *Deva* (Chester) to *Derwentio* (Derby). Locally, the road was said to proceed from Blyth Marsh, to the south-east of the Site, on a direct course towards Lane End and Chesterton to the north-west.

Throughout the medieval period the area of the Site lay within the estate of Normacot. Normacot is first referred to in the Domesday Book of 1087 as *Normanescote*, which belonged to a freeman named Wulfric. Following the Conquest of 1066, the land was given by King William to Richard Forester, and was later granted to the Cistercian abbots and monks of Hulton Abbey, upon its foundation in 1223 (Plate 2). The Normacot Estate was bounded by the old course of the River Blythe and ran up Rykeneld Street.

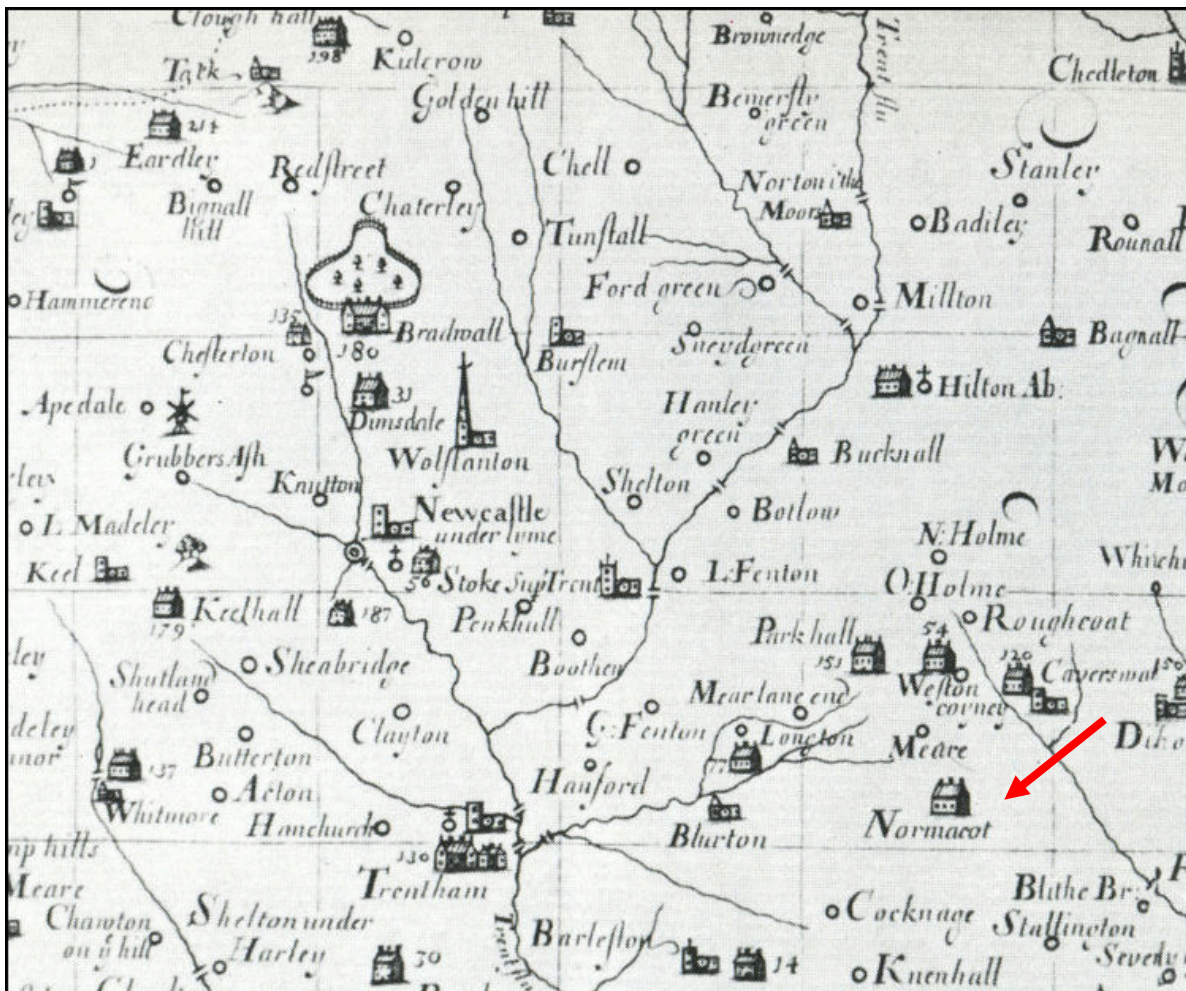


Plate 2: An extract from Plot's map of North Staffordshire c 1670 with the approximate location of the Site indicated

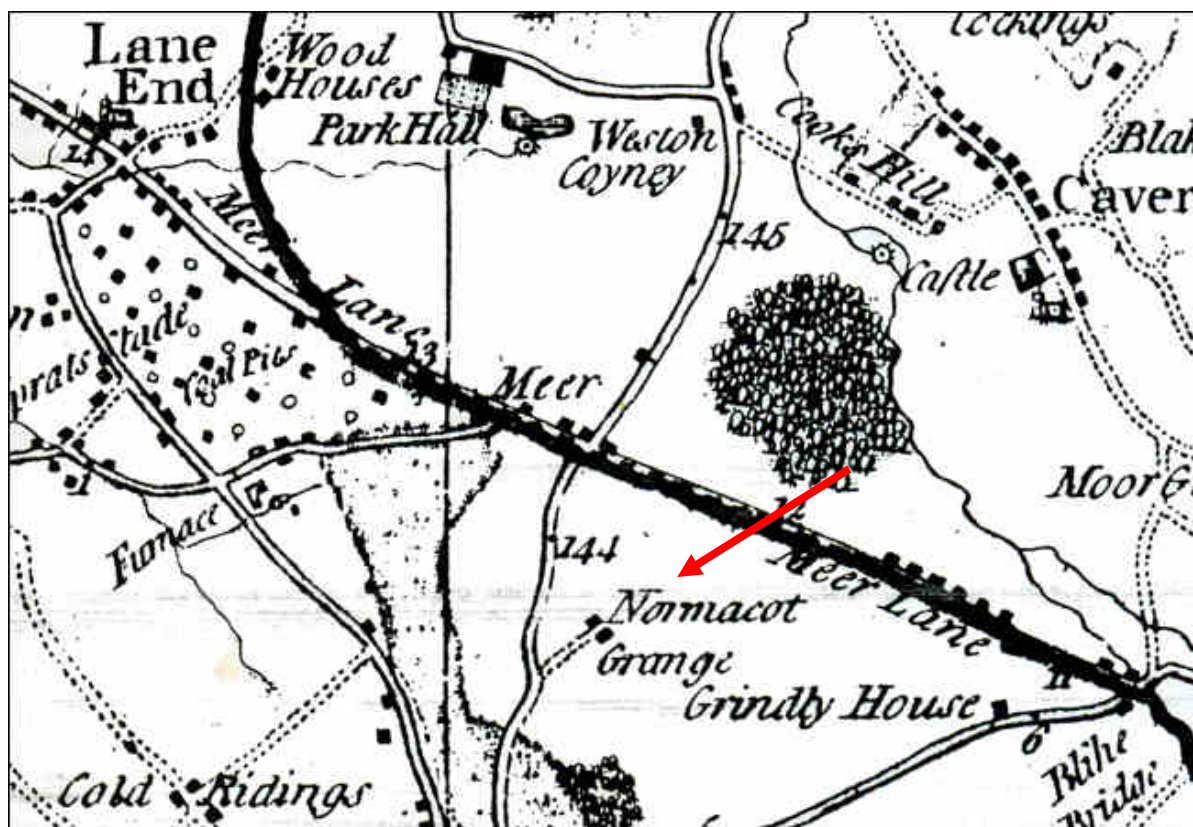


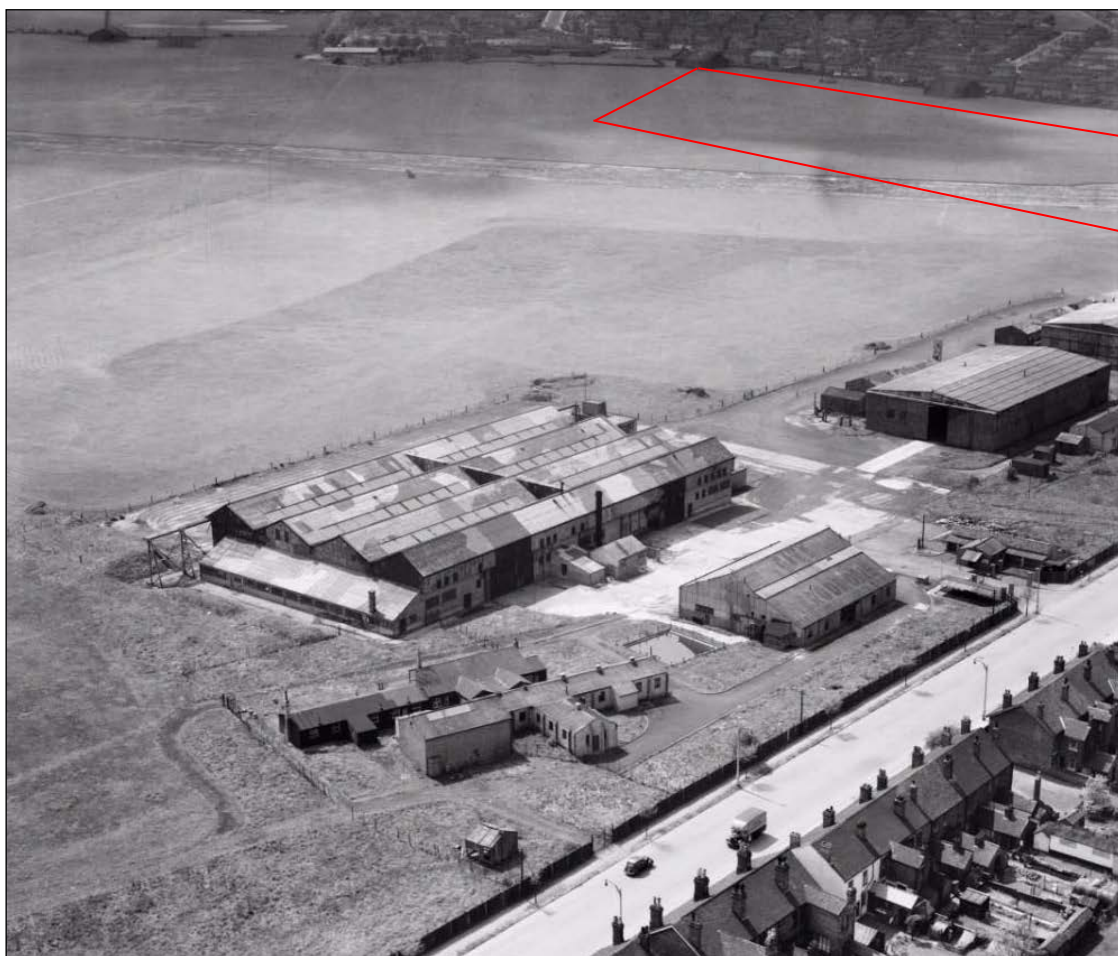
Plate 3: An extract from Yates' map of 1775, with the approximate location of the Site indicated

Normacot Grange, the abbey farm, had been established a short distance to the south-west of the Site by 1242. This included a grange farmhouse, fields and a sheepfold which supplied food and income for the monks at Hulton Abbey. The land and buildings were leased out from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and sold subsequently to Sir John Gifford of Chillingham, following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540. The area around Normacot Grange, including the Site, continued to be used for mainly agricultural purposes throughout the post-medieval period and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Plate 3 and Fig 3), until the establishment of Meir Aerodrome in the 1930s.

The aerodrome was operated initially by the National Flying Services and The North Staffordshire Aero-club on behalf of the Stoke-on-Trent Corporation, but was used as an RAF station in the Second World War. The aerodrome runway extended north/south across the Site, with a long taxiway extending to the east, linking it to the Rootes Factory at Blyth Bridge which manufactured Bristol Blenheims and Beaufighters (Plate 4 and Fig 4).

The Site was developed in the 1970s by Johnson Matthey, a precious metals and chemicals company, whose colours and coatings works at Meir produced gold trim, glazes and other decorations for ceramics in the tableware market. The works buildings were concentrated at the northern end of Site, whilst a playing field occupied the raised terrace area in the south-west corner, presumed to be constructed from earth cleared during extensive landscaping of the Site (Fig 5). The Johnson Matthey site closed in 2002, and the buildings were cleared subsequently.





*Plate 4: An aerial photograph taken in 1950, with the approximate area of the Site indicated, crossing the Meir Aerodrome runway.*

## 3. Methodology

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### 3.1 Excavation Methodology

Prior to excavation, the client provided Salford Archaeology with service plans for the area. The positions of the evaluation trenches and surrounding areas were scanned with a cable avoidance tool to ensure that no live cables would be disturbed during the programme of works. Three trenches were excavated using a JCB 3CX excavator with a 1.80m wide toothless ditching bucket down to the level of surviving archaeological features or natural geology. The machine excavation was supervised by a professional archaeologist at all times. The locations of the trenches are shown in Figure 2. A further two trenches, located on the upper terraced area in the south-west corner of the Site, could not be excavated due to accessibility issues.

### 3.2 Recording Methodology

Separate contexts were recorded individually on Salford Archaeology *pro-forma* trench sheets. The trenches were located and planned using GPS technology provided by Salford Archaeology.

Photography of all relevant phases and features were undertaken in digital format using a digital SLR camera. General working photographs were taken during the archaeological works, to provide illustrative material covering the wider aspects of the archaeological work undertaken.

All archaeological works carried out by Salford Archaeology are carried out to the standards set out in the Code of Conduct of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.



## 4. Excavation Results

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### 4.1 Introduction

In total, three trenches were excavated across the proposed development as shown in Figure 2. These were located at the southern extent of the Site, to the rear of the former Johnson Matthey Works, as the area had seen the least development and therefore retained the greatest archaeological potential (Plate 5). Two further trenches, located on the raised earth mound in the south-west corner of the Site, could not be excavated due to accessibility issues.



*Plate 5: General shot of excavated trenches at the southern extent of the Site, looking north-east*

## 4.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 50 x 1.8m, and was orientated north-east/south-west along the centre of the southern end of the Site, parallel with the south-eastern edge of the earth mound. Following the removal of the mossy grass turf and a thin (0.10m) band of sandy silt topsoil (**102**), a weathered reddish-brown natural siltstone layer (**101**) was encountered. The degraded natural varied in depth from 0.20m to 0.50m before a reddish-brown, solid, siltstone bedrock with bands of yellowish-brown sand (**100**) was reached (Plates 6 and 7). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m. No archaeological finds or features were present in the trench.



*Plate 6: Trench 1 fully excavated, showing natural bedrock, looking south-west*





Plate 7: South-east-facing section of Trench 1, showing the raised mound in the southern part of the Site to the rear

### 4.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 40 x 1.8m, and was orientated north-west/south-east across the south-east part of the Site, between Trenches 1 and 3. As in Trench 1, a weathered reddish-brown natural siltstone layer (**101**) was encountered immediately beneath the mossy grass ground cover, and thin (0.10m) band of sandy silt topsoil (**102**). The degraded natural varied in depth from 0.20m to 0.60m at the south-east end of the trench, before a reddish-brown solid siltstone bedrock (**100**) was encountered.

The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.70m. A concrete block (**103**), measuring 1.25 x 1.15 x 0.38m deep was encountered towards the south-east end of the trench, set into the weathered natural geology, although it did not appear to be *in-situ* (Plate 8). No other archaeological finds or features were present in the trench.





*Plate 8: Trench 2 fully excavated, looking north-west and showing the concrete block at the south-east end*



#### 4.4 Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 50 x 1.8m, and was orientated north-east/south-west, parallel to a tarmac strip along the south-east edge of the Site. Following the removal of the mossy grass turf and a thin band of sandy silt topsoil (**102**), a weathered reddish-brown natural siltstone/ sandstone layer (**101**) was encountered. The degraded natural varied in depth from 0.20m to 0.50m before a reddish-brown solid siltstone bedrock with bands of yellowish-brown sandstone (**100**) was reached (Plate 9). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m. No archaeological finds or features were present in the trench.



*Plate 9: Trench 3 fully excavated, looking south-west*

#### 4.5 Trenches 4 and 5

Trenches 4 and 5, located on the upper terrace on the south-west side of the Site, were not excavated due to issues of accessibility associated with the steepness of the slopes. The earth mound was considered to be of a fairly modern construction, to a depth of at least 3m (Plate 10).



*Plate 10: General shot of the earth mound in the south-west corner of the Site, looking south-west*

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## 5. *Discussion*

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The evaluation trenches excavated at the southern end of the Site did not identify any archaeological activity, with weathered natural siltstone and bedrock encountered immediately below the thin band of topsoil.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1883 (Fig 3) depicts a number of field boundaries crossing the locations of Trenches 2 and 3 on the south-east side of the Site. These were not visible within the trenches, suggesting that the original ground surface had been landscaped extensively in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Ordnance Survey map of 1955 (Fig 4) shows that the field boundaries had been removed prior to the construction of the Meir Aerodrome runway, suggesting some alteration of the ground level in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of the large earth mound in the south-west corner of the Site on the Ordnance Survey of 1978 (Fig 5), suggests that the Site underwent further extensive landscaping during the construction of the Johnson Matthey Works in the 1970s. The results obtained from the evaluation trenches suggest that the ground level may have been reduced to the natural bedrock at this time, and stockpiled in the south-west corner of the Site, with the present thin band of topsoil having accumulated since.



## *6. Impact*

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The archaeological evaluation has concluded that there is no indication of any surviving below-ground archaeological remains, likely due to extensive landscaping of the Site in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The impact on the sub-surface archaeological resource of the Site is therefore considered to be negligible.

Based on the negative results obtained from the evaluation, it is concluded that there is no merit in undertaking any further archaeological investigation in advance of, or during, the construction work for the proposed development.

## *Acknowledgments*

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Salford Archaeology would like to thank Chris Harrison of CgMs Consulting Ltd for commissioning and supporting the archaeological works. Salford Archaeology would also like to thank Jon Goodwin for providing monitoring support and advice as Senior Planning Officer (Archaeology/HER) for Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

The on-site excavations were conducted by Steve Tamburello, assisted by Andy Coutts. This report was compiled and illustrated by Steve Tamburello. The report was edited by Ian Miller, who was also responsible for project management.

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## *Appendix 1: Figures*

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- Figure 1: Site location
- Figure 2: Site boundary and archaeological trenches superimposed on the modern Ordnance Survey map
- Figure 3: Archaeological trenches superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1883
- Figure 4: Archaeological trenches superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1955
- Figure 5: Archaeological trenches superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1978

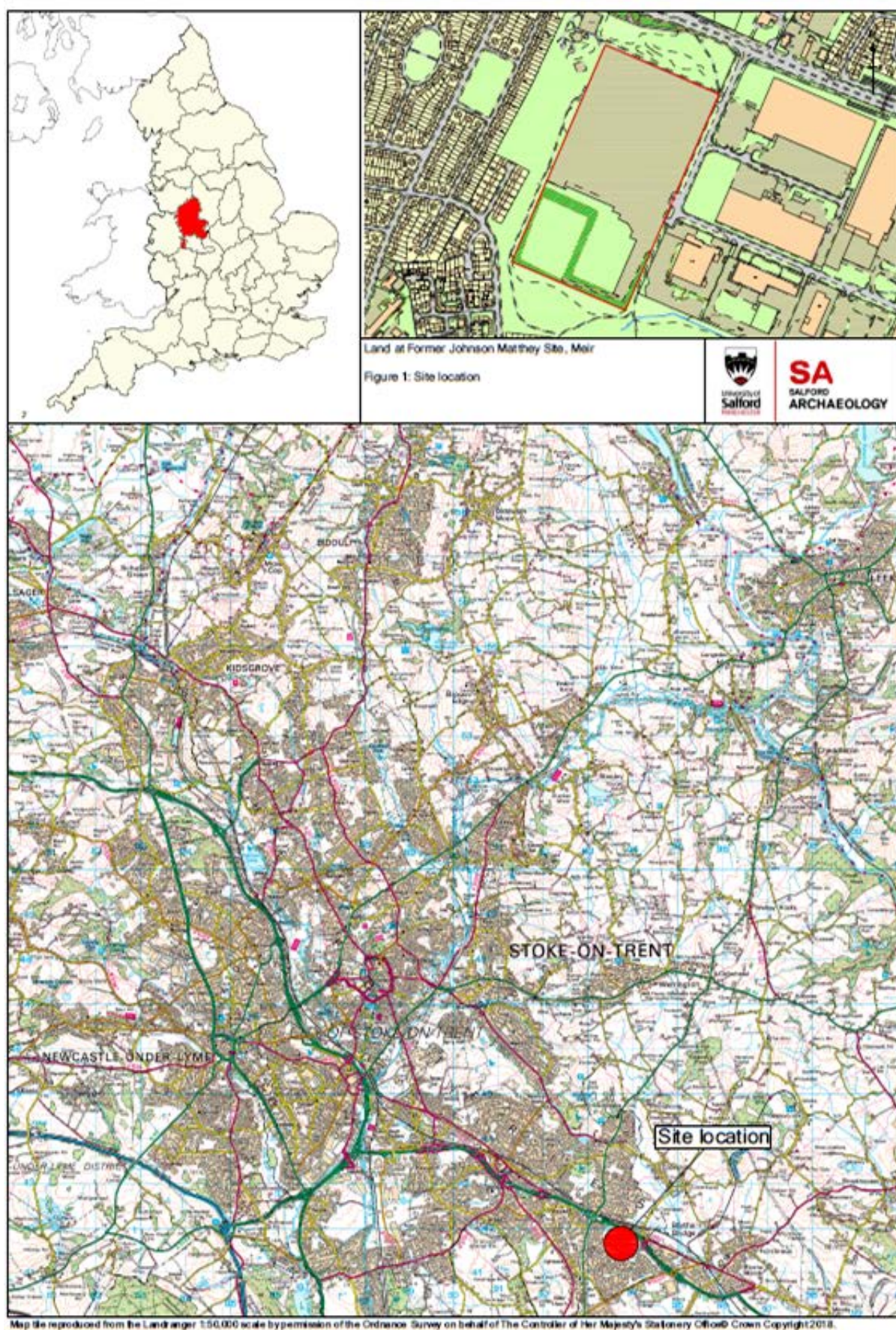


Figure 1: Site location



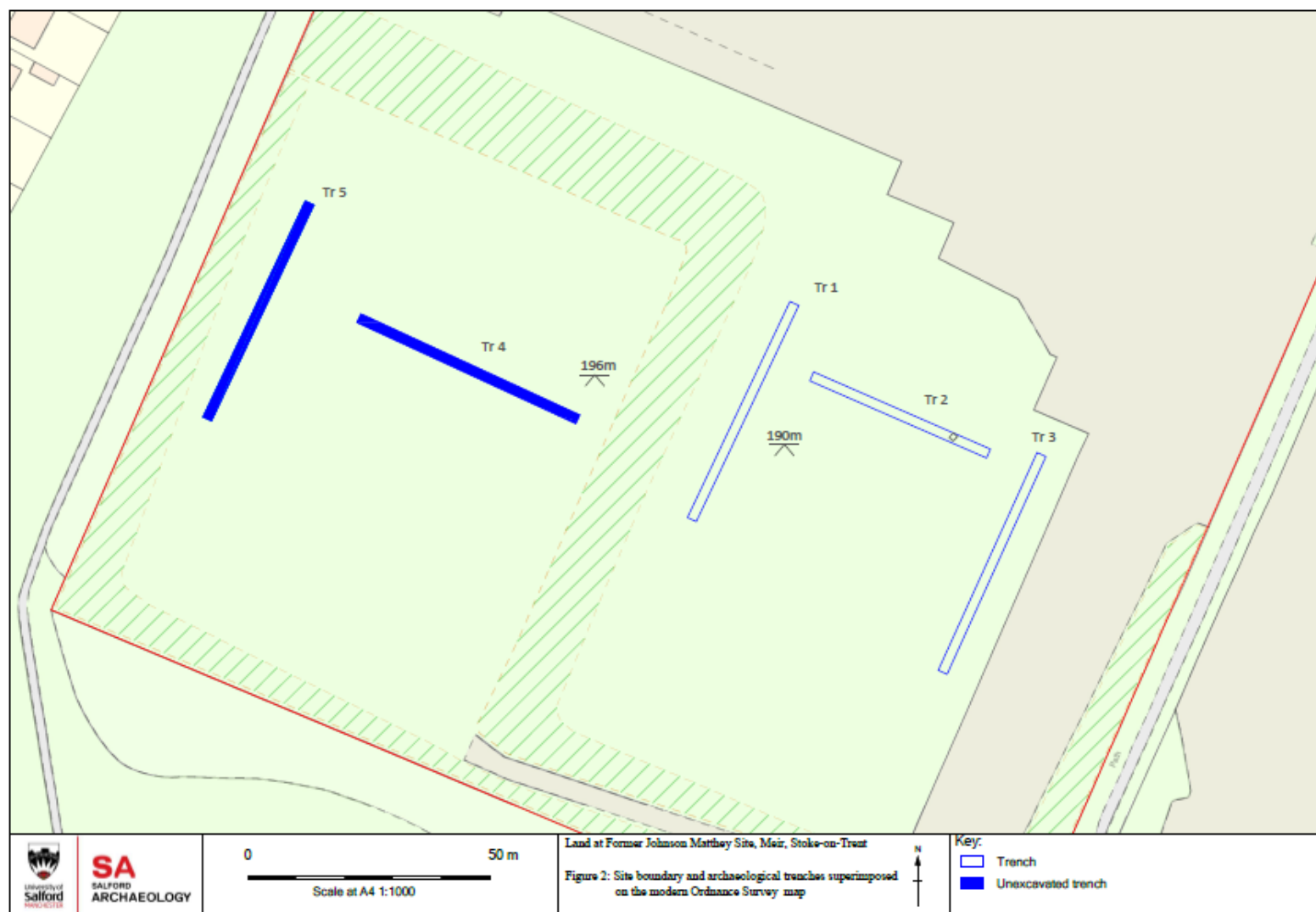


Figure 2: Site boundary and archaeological trenches superimposed on the modern Ordnance Survey map

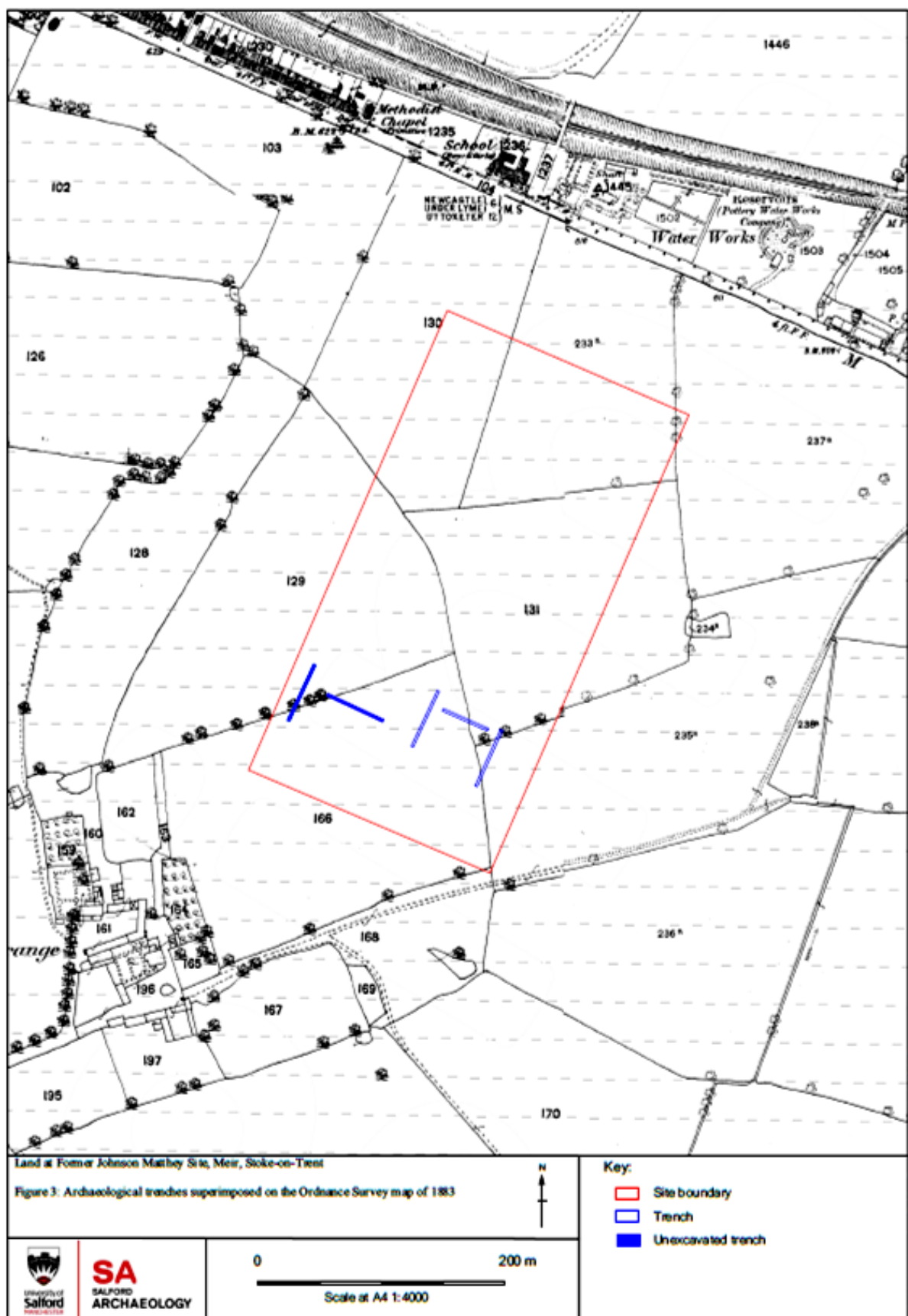


Figure 3: Archaeological trenches superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1883



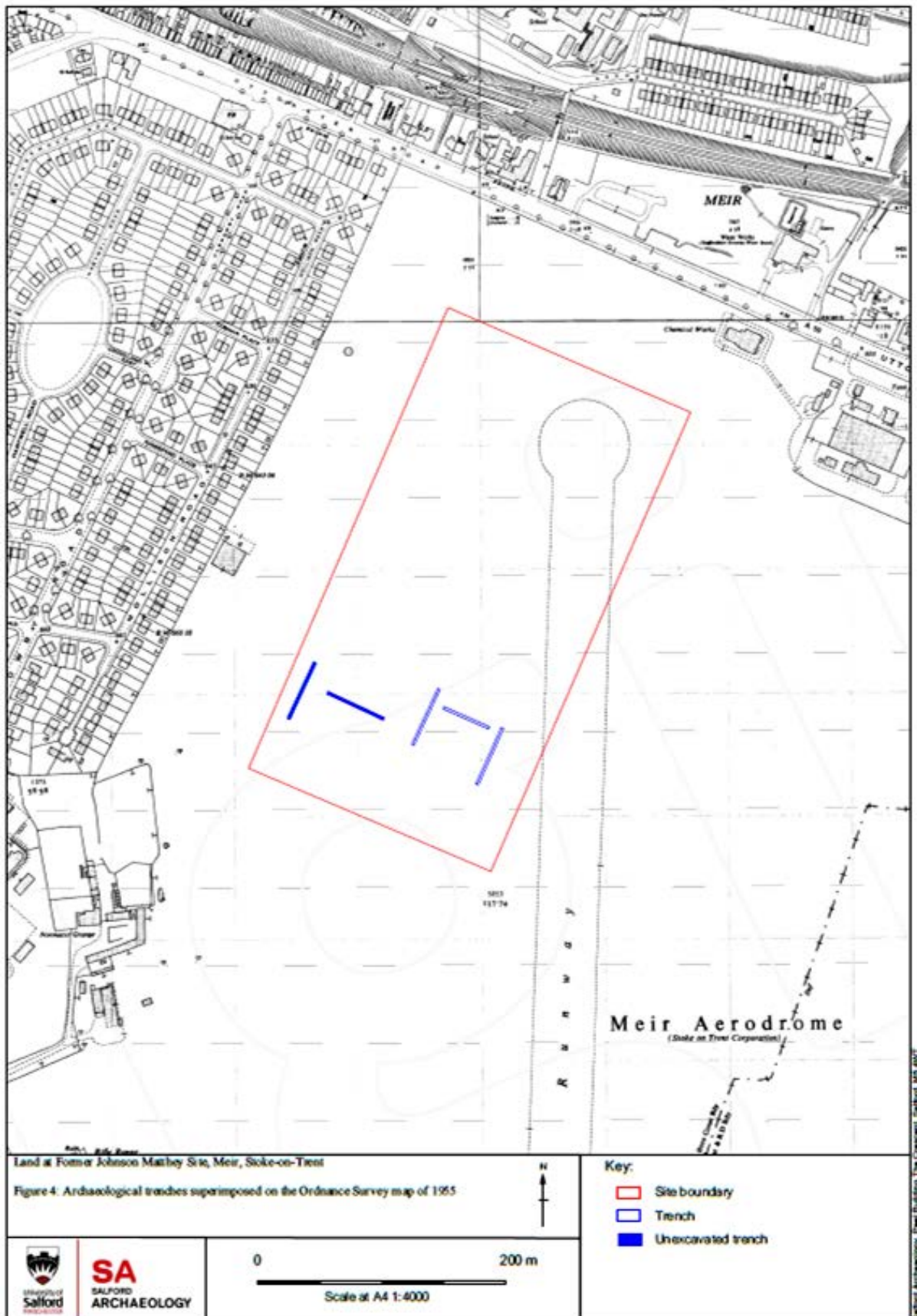


Figure 4: Archaeological trenches superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1955

