MARCHAM (OX)

MHC88

HITCH COPSE, MARCHAM, OXON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

SEPTEMBER 1988

Hitch Copse, Marcham

Archaeological Assessment

Summary

An archaeological assessment was carried out in August 1988 by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of ARC Ltd. on the proposed sand extraction site at Hitch Copse. The purpose was to assess the archaeological potential of the site and the effects of any extraction for sand.

A spread of neolithic flint tools was found across the south-east portion of the field and a small scatter of Roman pottery on the north and on the very south-east edge of the field. A scatter of medieval and 18th and 19th century pottery is probably the residue of manuring.

Only the flint scatters suggest settlement.

Before sand extraction a programme of field-walking after ploughing would be required to define more clearly the extent of the flint debris and to locate any more flint scatters. Some further trenches may be required in Hitch Copse wood itself with a small mechanical excavator as this was impenetrable to the JCB.

Location

Hitch Copse lies between the A420 Oxford to Kingston Bagpuize road and the A338 Wantage road at their junction at Besselsleigh and some 500m from either road.

The field is an oblong shape wider at the north-west end and running NW-SE. There is a stream on the north-east side, which is the parish boundary at this point, and there is a slope running into this from the rather higher field. Hitch Copse wood forms the south-western edge of the field. It was not possible to evaluate this area of the site owing to the density of trees and undergrowth.

Assessment Strategy

The field was approximately 9 hectares, of which 7ha was included in the proposed extraction area. Thirty-one trenches 1.5m wide and approximately 30m long were dug in a grid pattern. The total length of the sampled area was 880m wide. In seven trenches the subsoil was removed down to Corallian sand to ensure that no stratification survived masked by the sandy subsoil.

Hitch Copse itself was not investigated as the trees were large and the JCB was unable to operate.

Topsoil

This was a darkish brown very sandy loam which made up the ploughsoil across all the field at a fairly uniform depth of 0.25-0.30m. Its marked textural similarity to the subsoil suggests it is identical material merely made darker by the action of worms and ploughing which introduced more humic material.

Subsoil

This was red-brown very sandy loam extending all over the site at a fairly uniform depth of 0.60-0.75m. The colour changes from dark red-brown to a lighter colour in the south and east of the field.

It contained no original ground surface or indeed any finds except in the interface with the topsoil.

Some charcoal was present in the interface in Trench 19 but it did not contain any finds or extend for any great distance.

The finds horizon suggests that the field has been fallow or heathland for some time fairly recently, as the juxtaposition of flints and 19th century pottery not in features is accountable for by worm sorting.

There were no features cut into the subsoil except modern plough furrows and rabbit-burrows.

Flint

There was a general scatter of flints across the south and east part of the site in a band running east-west from one-third of the distance of the south-west edge. This was the only point where the flint band touched this edge as it ran due east from this point. The north edge of this band ran due west from the north-east field boundary 250m from north-west to a point north of the south-western corner of the band.

In this area were one cluster of 19 flints (in Trench 9) with several blades and the rest flakes. Two much smaller clusters were located to the east and to the south these consisted of flakes.

From walking around the field a selection of flints were found. These were mainly from an area in the centre of the band of flint but this may be a biased result because of the ploughing around an area of stubble burning.

The early blade element in some of these flints and a somewhat crude flaking technique in others suggest that there is an early and later element in the flint technology. Although these are not highly diagnostic types they suggest that the area was utilised from early Neolithic (c. 3000 BC) to later Bronze Age (c. 1200 BC).

Pottery

There was a general scatter of Roman pottery across the area except in the west, which suggests manuring for cultivation. Two Saxon sherds were recovered. Some medieval pottery as well as the 17th, 18th and 19th century pottery was present which would indicate cultivation at these times.

Bones

The soil type being acidic did not lend itself to bone preservation; none were found.

Conclusion

An area of the field contains a long-term flint scatter but no features were located to suggest intensive occupation. It has also been in long-term cultivation. At some time recently it has lain fallow.

A systematic field-walking of transects would define the flint scatters and identify any further clusters after ploughing and harrowing. Also a watching brief of controlled stripping. This would give more information of the nature of the prehistoric settlement and its duration. Field-walking would also indicate if excavation in Hitch Copse was necessary. On the basis of this evidence archaeology does not present a major constraint on the utilisation of the area for sand extraction.

M Roberts BA
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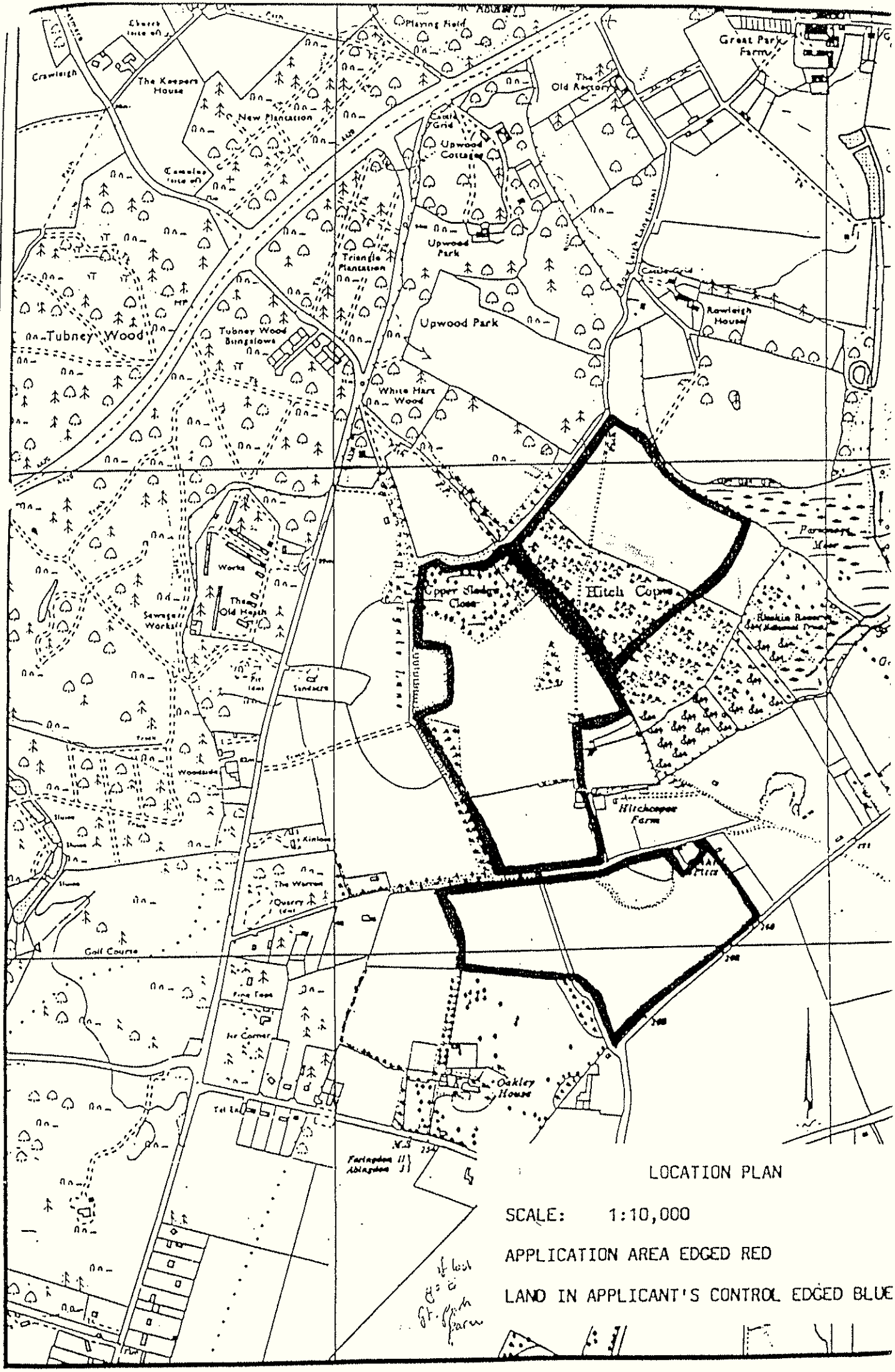
Oxford Archaeological Unit
9th September 1988

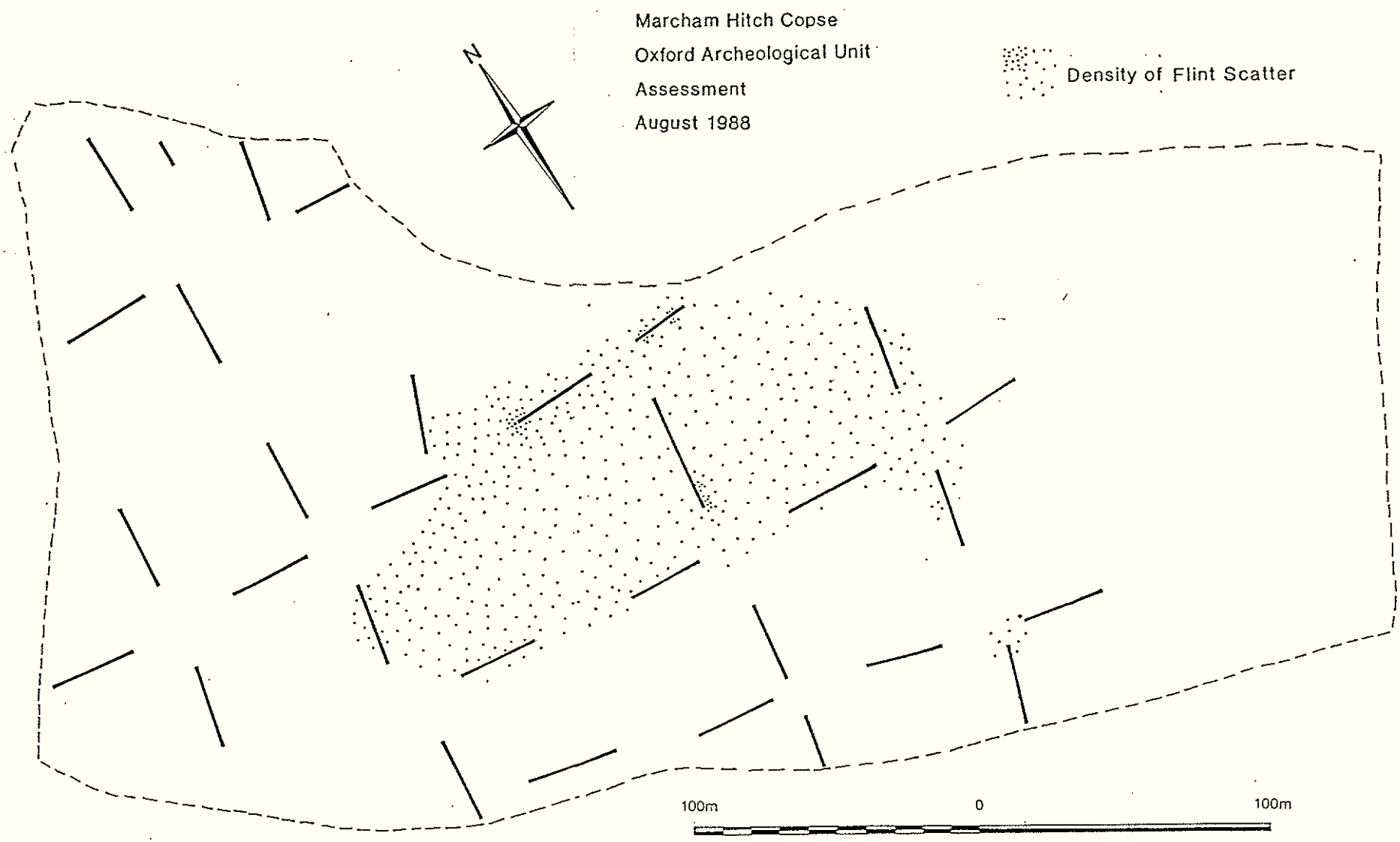


LOCATION PLAN

SCALE: 1:10,000

APPLICATION AREA EDGED RED

LAND IN APPLICANT'S CONTROL EDGED BLUE


Marcham Hitch Copse
Oxford Archeological Unit
Assessment
August 1988
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Density of Flint Scatter
100m
0
100m