

Maidenhead Common Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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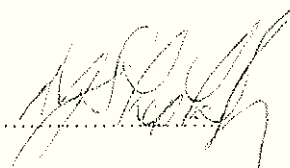
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Maidenhead Common, Berkshire

NGR SU 8600 8240

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SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Maidenhead Common, Berkshire, NGR SU 8600 8240 during May, June and July 2002. The work was commissioned by The National Trust in advance of the construction of a series of ditches aimed at preventing unauthorised occupation of the area. The watching brief revealed two possible chalk trackways and a possible ditch. No associated dating evidence was retrieved from these features, but Neolithic or Bronze Age flint flakes were recovered from the general area and post-medieval tile and pottery were also recovered. Sites of potential earthworks were also noted during the programme of observations.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 From May to July 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Maidenhead Common, Berkshire (NGR SU 8600 8240). The work was commissioned by The National Trust in advance of the construction of a series of ditches aimed at preventing unauthorised occupation of the area. The ditches were cut alongside existing roads and trackways.

1.1.2 No formal brief was issued by the National Trust for the work, though discussions took place as to the level of recording required. The lengths of the trenches were visually inspected.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on the chalk at c 60 m above OD and is about 100 hectares in area.

1.2.2 The site is situated on common land at Maidenhead Thicket extending north to Cookhamdean Common (Fig. 1) and includes a cricket field at Pinkneys Green.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief has been summarised from the information provided by the National Trust from the Sites and Monuments Record and is presented in summary form below.

Prehistoric

1.3.2 At Maidenhead Thicket there are a number of earthworks dating from the Bronze or Iron Age and an undated possible barrow. Robin Hood's Arbour is a late Iron Age/Belgic enclosure, possibly a paved stockyard, found toward the centre of the Thicket. There are also a number of undated marl or chalk pits and cropmarks. At nearby Cockmarsh, four Bronze Age barrows are evident.

Roman

1.3.3 Roman coins have been discovered within Maidenhead Thicket.

Post medieval

- 1.3.4 On Winter Hill Road is the site of a 19th-century brickwork's and brickyard. At Pinkney's Green and Maidenhead Thicket are a number of recent earthworks, which may be the result of military training during WWI, and quarrying.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Site visits were timed to coincide with the excavation of the ditches as far as was reasonable practicable. A full-time watching brief was not maintained.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features and find spots were planned on a base plan at a scale of 1:10,000 and where archaeological strata was exposed, sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. A general photographic record of the work was made including specific record shots of archaeological features where observed. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The new ditches were usually around 0.35 m wide at the base and dug to variable depths between 0.3-0.5 m. Observations were made of strata in the sides of the new ditches. In the main, this comprised topsoil deposits mixed with vegetation and tree roots etc.

Ditches south of Pinkney's Drive (Figs 2 and 4 - sections 1 and 2)

- 3.1.2 In the side of the new ditch flanking Pinkney's Drive a possible chalk surface was observed (Fig. 4, section 1). In section the sequence of deposits consisted of the natural orange silty clay (4) that lay c 0.3 m below ground level. Above the natural was an extensive spread of chalk (3) that was 5.4 m wide and 0.1 m thick). The chalk layer had defined edges and appeared to extend on a north-west/south-east alignment. It is possible that this represents the remains of a purpose-built trackway. No dating evidence was found in association with it. The possible trackway was overlain by thin layer of clay loam with sand (2), in turn sealed beneath the topsoil (1).
- 3.1.3 To the south-west of the possible trackway (3) and some 50 m distant was another layer of disturbed chalk fragments beneath the topsoil (9, position located on Fig. 2, Plan 1). This layer was over 4 m wide and may have represented another trackway, or part of the same feature seen to the north-east (Fig. 2 and Fig. 4, section 2).

- 3.1.4 To the south-west of layer 9 towards the junction of Pinkney's Drive and Henley Road an area of dark yellow-brown disturbed subsoil (6) was observed in the side of the ditch. This may represent the upper fill of a large cut feature (Fig. 2, for location). This feature was large enough to represent an infilled ditch of uncertain date. The ditch appeared to cut the orange silty clay subsoil (2 and 5), all of which were sealed by the topsoil (1).

Ditch sections on south and east sides of Pinkney's Green (Fig. 2)

- 3.1.5 Observations along the south-west edge of Pinkney's Green revealed three pieces of struck flint, four pieces of burnt, un-worked flint and a sherd of post-medieval pottery (collective context 8, located on Fig. 2, Plan 1). These finds were recovered from the spoil heaps from the ditching excavations. The flints may date to the Bronze Age or Neolithic period (see finds report below).
- 3.1.6 Along the south-east edge of Pinkney's Green a fragment of post-medieval tile was recovered (context 7, located on Fig. 2, Plan 1). A ditch of uncertain date with associated bank was noted at the east corner of the Green, and just south-west was a shallow, banked enclosure, again undated (located on Fig. 2). A further area of banked material was noted across the road junction at the east side of the Green.

Ditch sections from Pinkney's Green (north) to Butler's Gate

- 3.1.7 On the north-edge of Pinkney's Green, an area of banked material was noted along the west side of Winter Hill Road, and a further area of banking was seen opposite Herons Court (Fig. 3). No further archaeology or finds were discovered during observations along these routes.

3.2 Finds

Worked Flint by Kate Cramp

- 3.2.1 The assemblage comprised three pieces of struck flint and four pieces (39 g) of burnt unworked flint (8). The struck component consists of two flakes and a heavily calcined piece of irregular waste. The material probably dates broadly to the Neolithic or Bronze Age; the limited size of the assemblage and the absence of diagnostic traits preclude a more precise date.

Post-medieval finds

- 3.2.2 One fragment of post-medieval roof tile (7) was retrieved and one sherd of pottery (8) is dated to the 17th century or later.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The works revealed little of archaeological significance. The only definite feature was a chalk feature/surface to the south of Pinkney's Drive, with possible continuation to the south-west. The feature presumably represents part of the network of paths in the area of Maidenhead thicket, in this case perhaps one mapped leading to a circular earthwork north of Pinkney's Drive (Fig. 2). It was not dated but may be relatively recent and could represent a feature relating to the documented

WWI military manoeuvres in the area. The area of disturbed subsoil between the chalk features may represent the fill of a ditch or a pit.

- 4.1.2 The nature of the works meant that archaeological features might have gone unseen. The ditches were only c 0.35 m wide at the base, which is a relatively narrow area in which to recognise and interpret archaeological features. Where the subsoil was deeper, the natural was not observed, so it remains possible that any archaeology was obscured within long stretches of the new ditches.
- 4.1.3 The few artefacts recovered from the spoil heaps along side the ditches would suggest that any archaeology is fairly limited in the areas of recent ditching. The flints found to south west of Pinkney's Green could be associated with an area of prehistoric activity. The limited evidence thus recovered corresponds, however, with the known archaeology of the general area.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	Topsoil		
2	Layer	Subsoil		
3	Surface	Chalk surface		
4	Layer	Natural		
5	Layer	Subsoil		
6	Layer	Possible ditch fill		
7	Layer	Subsoil	1 CBM	Post-medieval
8	Layer	Subsoil	4 Burnt flint/3 Flints/1 Pottery	BA/Neo/Post Med
9	Layer	Possible chalk surface		

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Wilkinson, D, 1992 Field Manual (Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd, First Edition, August 2002)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Maidenhead Common, Berkshire

Site code: MACOM02

Grid reference: SU 8600 8240

Type of watching brief: Monitoring of ditches dug over an area of c 100 ha.

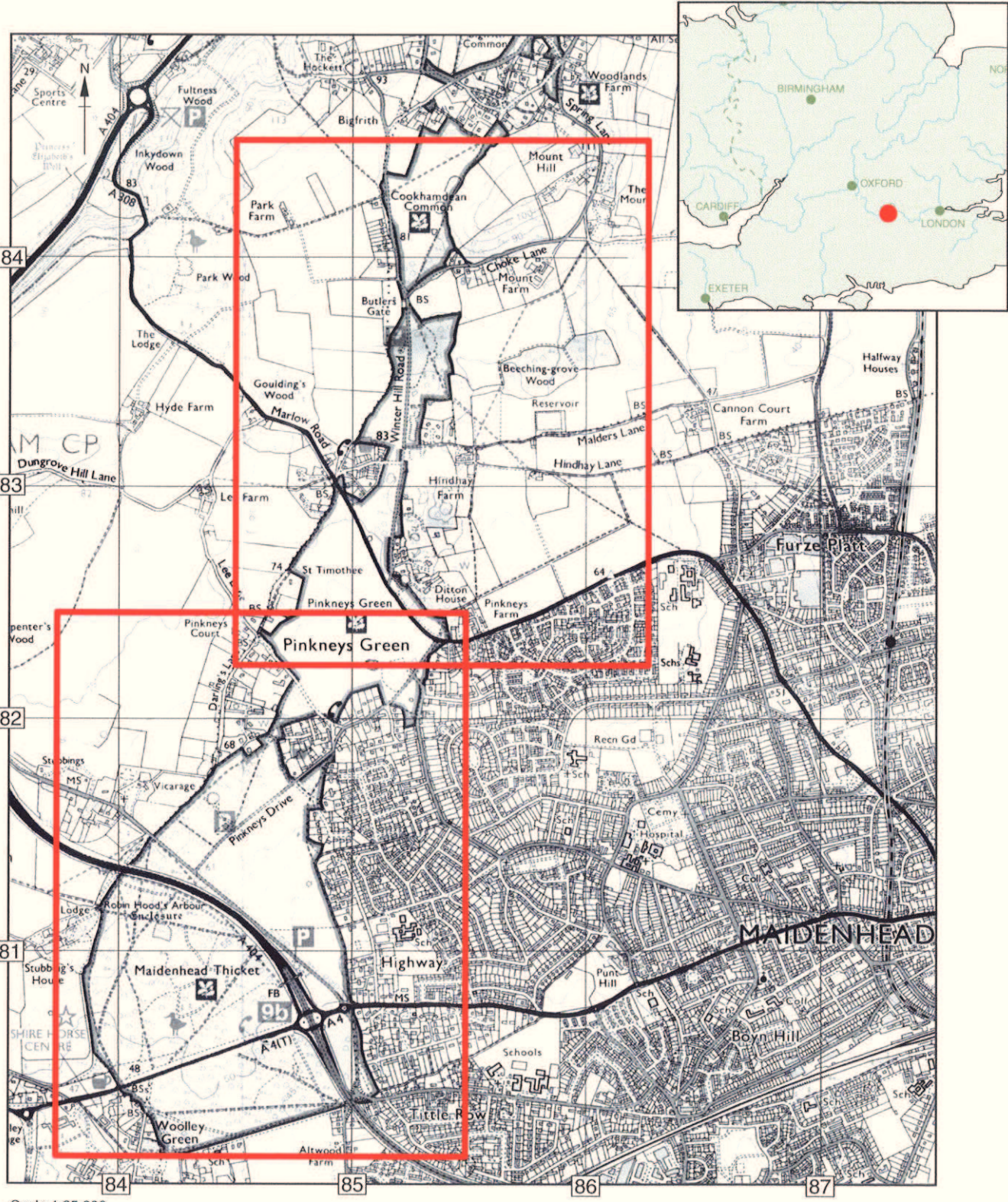
Date and duration of project: May, June and July 2002

Area of site: 100 ha

Summary of results: Two possible chalk trackways and Bronze Age or Neolithic flints were identified, together with undated earthworks.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with The National Trust Archaeological Archive at Stowe Gardens, Buckinghamshire in due course.

Server 4(W): oaupubs 1/A to H* Invoice Code* Site Name* Initials* 20.11.02.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

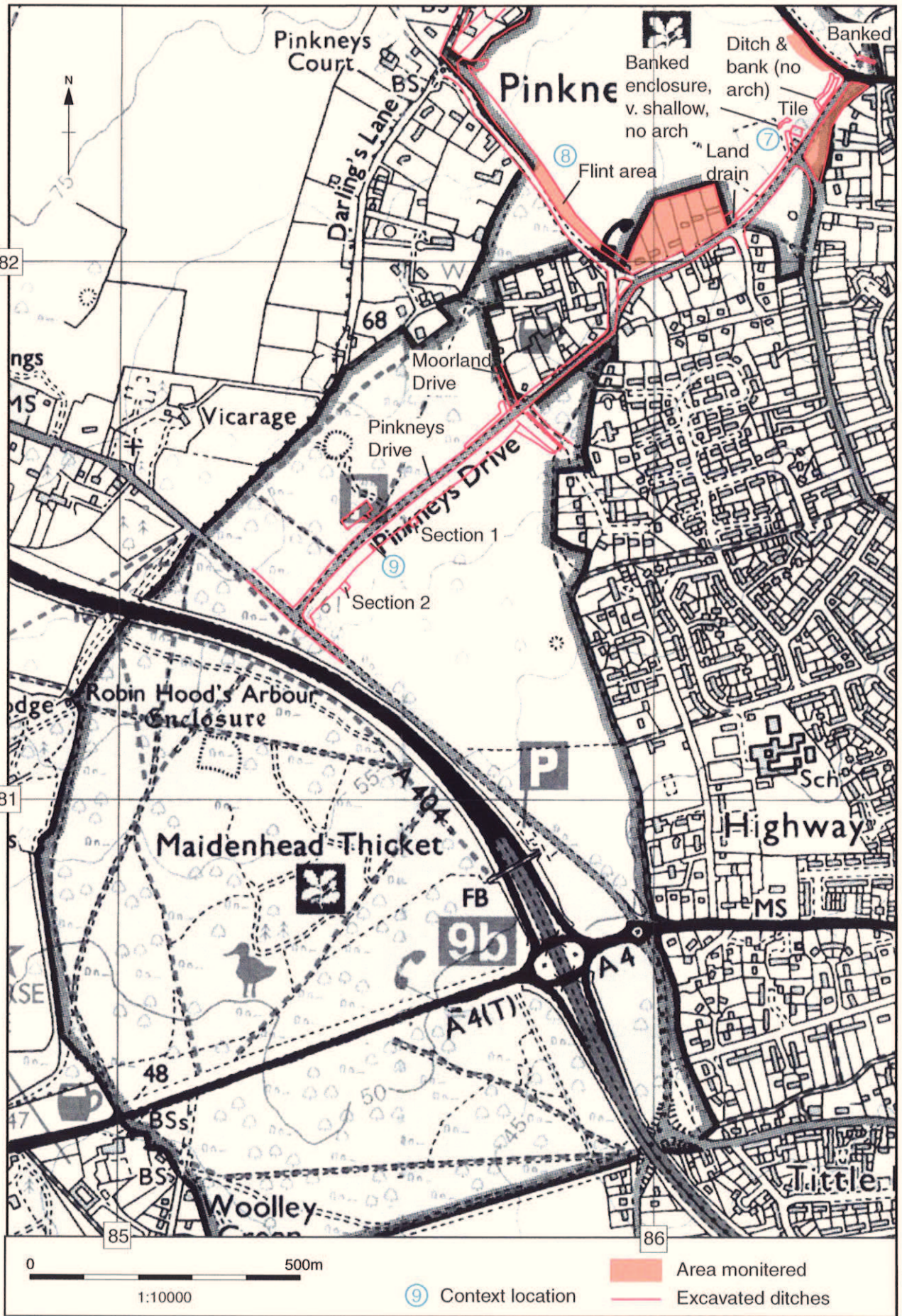


Figure 2: Site Plan 1.

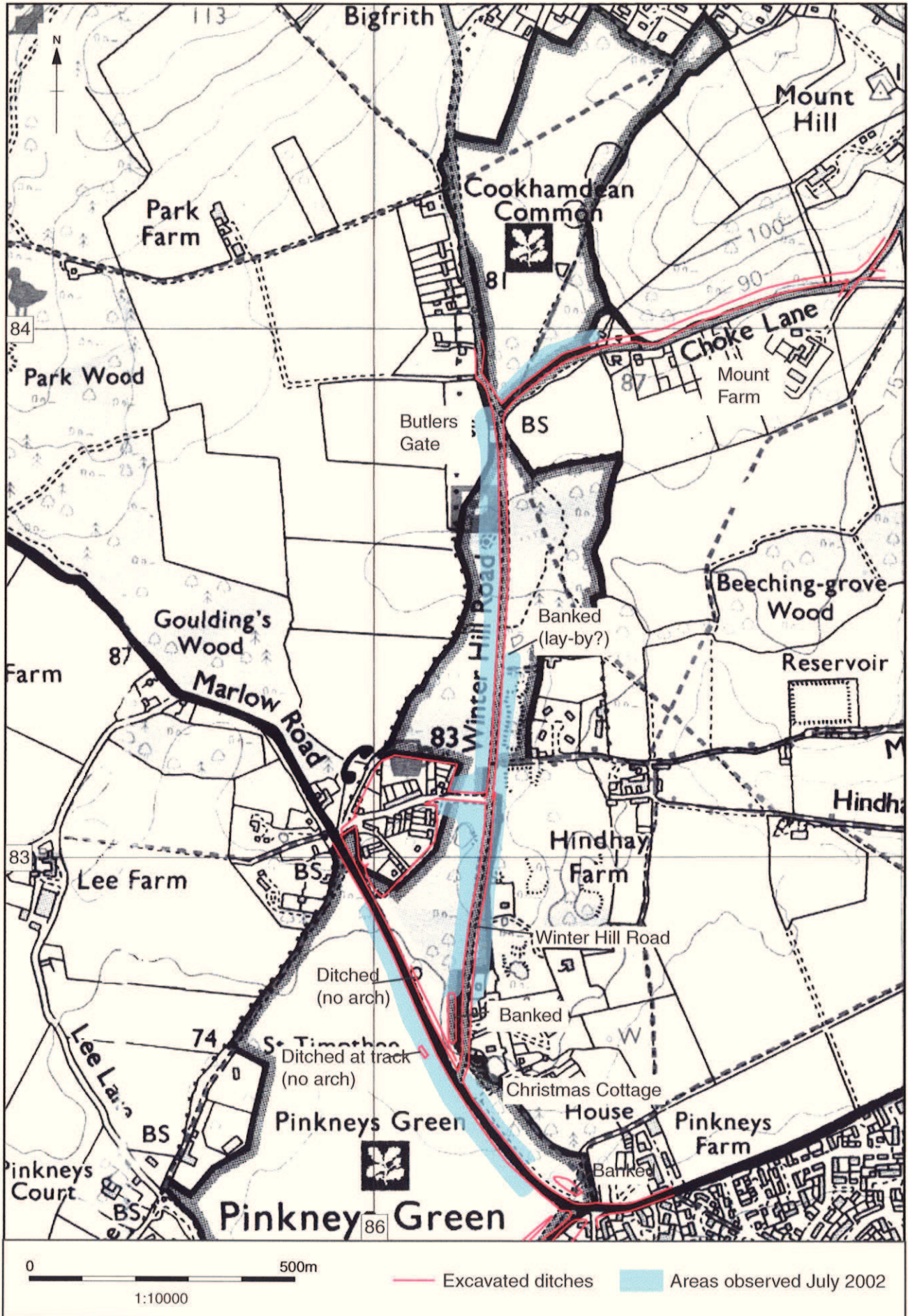


Figure 3: Site Plan 2

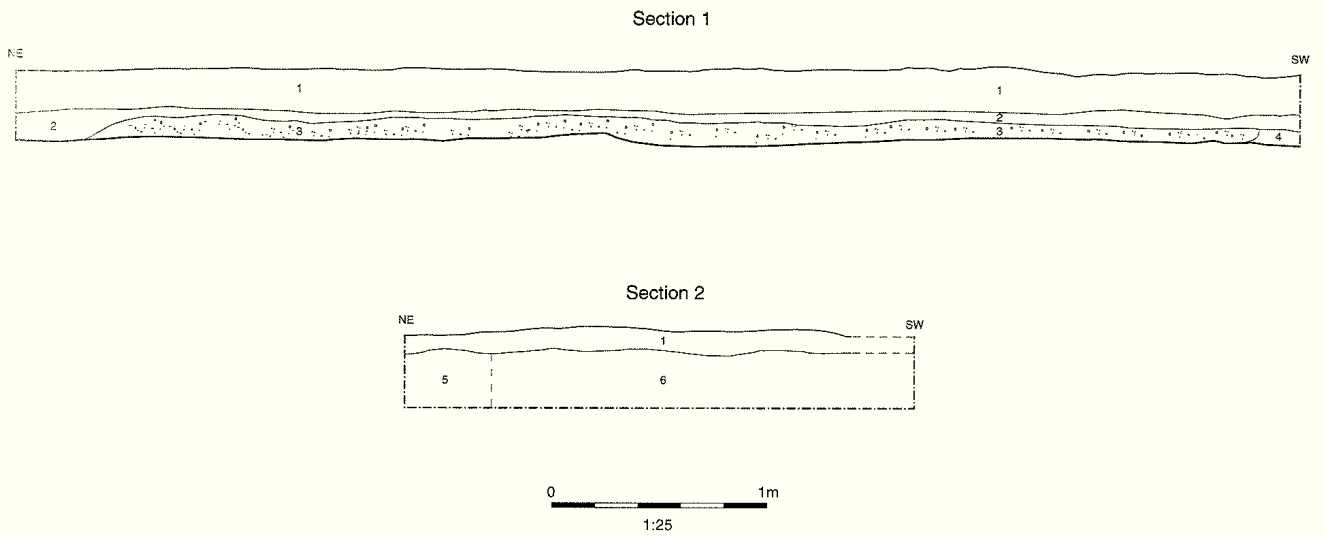


Figure 4: Sections 1 and 2



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