Station Quarry Steeple Morden Cambridgeshire

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Station Quarry, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION REPORT

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF TABLES

SUMMARY

From September to November 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field investigation at Station Quarry, Steeple Morden NGR TL 307 393 on behalf of OMYA UK Ltd. The work was in advance of extending an existing chalk quarry. The investigation revealed a large probable late Saxon or medieval ditch, and the foundations of two similarly dated buildings. Two post-medieval ditches and a modern posthole were also revealed. In addition two undated pits, one undated linear ditch and more than 200 tree holes were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 From September to November 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field investigation (field walking and a strip map and sample exercise) at Station Quarry, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire on behalf of OMYA UK Ltd (Planning Ref. S/0366/00/CM). The investigation was in respect of a planning application for an extension to the existing chalk quarry. A brief (CCC 2007) was set by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA), which outlined the archaeological requirements of the work. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by OA (OA 2007), describing how those archaeological requirements would be met, which was agreed with Andy Thomas of Cambridgeshire County Council. The development site lies to the east of Ashwell and Morden Station and is bounded by an existing chalk quarry to the west, the railway to the south and fields to the north and east (NGR TL 307 393 - Fig 1). The site is 4.1 hectares in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on a north-west facing slope with a distinct knoll at the south-eastern end. The land slopes from *c* 80 m OD to the south to *c* 71 m OD to the north.

1.2.2 The underlying geology is recorded as Cretaceous Middle Chalk (White chalk without flints -OSGB 1974, sheet 204). The weathered chalk surface is overlain with topsoil and subsoil deposits with a combined depth of 0.3 m to 0.5 m.

1.3 Archaeological background

1.4 General

1.4.1 The site was subject to an aerial photographic assessment (CgMs 2002) and an Environmental Impact Assessment (OA 2005). The results of the work are summarised below and illustrated in Figure 2.

Prehistoric

1.4.2 The site lies close to the Icknield Way, identified elsewhere as a focus of Neolithic activity. A probable Neolithic or Bronze Age flint blade was located immediately to the west of the site.

1.4.3 A total of 33 possible Bronze Age barrows have been identified within 1 km of the site, in the form of existing earthwork mounds or as ring ditches recorded by aerial photography. These include three ring ditches on a ridge *c* 400 m east of the site, and a bell barrow (SAM 24419) *c* 50 m to the south of the site.

1.4.4 The site lies in an area that was densely populated in the Iron Age, with large complexes of ditches forming extensive field systems, among which were scattered

many small farming settlements (Taylor 1997, 2). An Iron Age enclosure was excavated *c* 300 m south of the site, near Lower Coombe Farm.

Romano-British

1.4.5 The site lies close to the Icknield Way, which is believed to have been straightened and provided with a metalled surface during the Roman period. A Roman burial mound lies *c* 650 m east of the site, and crop marks are thought to represent Roman enclosures.

1.4.6 The aerial photographic assessment identified a boundary feature crossing the site. (Fig 2). This was excavated within two evaluation trenches in an area of a previous extension to the quarry, immediately to the west of the current site, but no secure dating evidence was retrieved (OA 2002).

Anglo-Saxon and medieval

1.4.7 A possible Anglo-Saxon burial site is recorded near Ashwell and Morden Station, *c* 900 m south-west of the site. A surface find of possible Saxon pottery was recovered during the 2002 OA evaluation to the west of the site, and interpreted as resulting from a manuring spread. The site is likely to have been heathland from the Saxon period onwards until enclosure in the early 19th century.

Post-medieval

1.4.8 The site of a former barn complex and cropmarks indicating a former shelter-belt and trackway, first depicted on the 1834 and 1839 OS maps, lie within the site. Post-medieval ditches and features associated with a 1940s air strip were revealed during work in the fields to the west (OA 2002).

1.5 Acknowledgements

1.5.1 The authors would like to thank Rob Nicholson, of OMYA UK Ltd for his co-operation throughout the work. Andy Thomas and Kasia Gdaniec who monitored the work on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council. The drawings were produced by Julia Moxham. Thanks to Elizabeth Stafford for helping Marta Perez with the identification of the snails and explanation about their habitats, and for the use of her snail reference collection.

2 INVESTIGATION AIMS

2.1.1 The aims and objectives of the investigation, as set out in the Brief, were:

- To preserve the archaeological evidence contained within the site by record and to attempt a reconstruction of the history and use of the site;
- In particular, to identify the character and extent of prehistoric activity within the area and to contribute to an understanding of the development of prehistoric landscapes in southern Cambridgeshire.

- To attempt to model the landscape and its transformation brought about by its inhabitants and by natural events using the spectrum of environmental techniques appropriate for this aspect of investigation.

3 INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The objectives of the investigation were met through a three stage process:

- Archaeological fieldwalking so that any archaeological remains that only survive in the ploughsoil could be recorded;
- Clearance of topsoil and other overburden under archaeological supervision to allow the creation of a baseplan of all archaeological features thus exposed;
- Following consultation with CAPCA, excavation of all significant archaeological features was undertaken.

3.1.2 All excavation was conducted in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (as amended 2001), and *Standards For Field Archaeology in the East of Englan*d (East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 14) excepting where they are superseded by statements made below.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

Stage 1

3.2.1 The site was ploughed and harrowed prior to the surface artefact collection survey (Fig. 3).

3.2.2 Transects were laid out parallel to the western edge of the site and placed 20 m apart, on a 20 m grid. These transects were laid out by means of a base line at the southern edge of the site. Each transect was up to 2 m wide - the area that can be observed readily by an individual walking along a single line, and was walked by an archaeologist equipped with a sub -10 m accuracy GPS system. All collection units were given a unique identifier indicating site and OS co-ordinate within each 20 m run.

3.2.3 All material considered to be man-made or not local to the area was collected and recorded by the individual collection unit.

3.2.4 The name of the walker, presence/absence of finds, soil/crop conditions, slope/topography and lighting/weather conditions were recorded for each hectare on standard Field Record Sheets.

3.2.5 Finds were sorted and bagged according to artefact class and the collection unit.

Stage 2

3.2.6 Topsoil and other overburden were removed under archaeological supervision to expose the upper surface of the chalk. Stripping was closely monitored and carried out with regards to the possibility of surviving ancient ground surfaces. The machine employed was a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a 1.8 m toothless ditching bucket.

3.2.7 The archaeological survey produced a digital pre-excavation plan of all the visible archaeological features together with any modern intrusions (Fig. 4). The pre-excavation plan formed the basis for establishing the strategy for Stage 3 of the investigation in consultation with CAPCA.

Stage 3

3.2.8 The significant archaeological remains identified in Stage 2 were investigated through hand excavation and in accordance with the minimum sampling levels outlined in the brief.

Recording

3.2.9 A comprehensive written, drawn and photographic record was made of the archaeology in accordance with the requirements of OA's Field Manual (OA 1992), and the Institute of Field Archaeologist's Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations, 1999.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The site is located on chalk and the archaeological deposits were generally derived from sandy silt deposits with chalk inclusions.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 The site could be broadly phased by the finds and the stratigraphic record. These were:

- Phase 1: Roman (AD 43-410)
- Phase 2: Late Saxon/early medieval (AD 900-1200)
- Phase 3:Modern (19th century onwards)

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Fieldwalking

5.1.1 A total of eight transects were walked within the investigation area. Each transect was set out at 20 m intervals, parallel to the area's western boundary. The ploughsoil within the area was comprised of fairly loose sandy silt which contained around 10% chalk inclusions. A high quantity of highly patinated flint was also noted, some of which was plough-struck but none worked. Few finds were recovered from the area. Surface finds included pottery, burnt stone, glass, ceramic building material and fired clay, all of which were post-medieval in date. A limited sample was retained. The location of the principle finds is presented in Figure 3.

5.2 Stratigraphic summary

Phase 1: Roman (AD 43-410)

5.2.1 No clearly Roman features were observed cut into the natural chalk, however, a total of 20 residual sherds of Roman pottery were identified during the course of the excavation. Five sherds, including one sherd of samian ware, were recovered from the fill of ditch 179, four sherds were recovered from structure 124, eight from structure 155 and two from foundation 194 (see below).

Phase 2: Late Saxon/early medieval (AD 900-1200)

5.2.2 Towards the eastern end of the site a NE-SW aligned ditch (179 - Figs 4-6) was revealed. The ditch had been previously identified using aerial photography (CgMs 2002). The ditch was 65 m long, up to 7.4 m wide and 0.9 m deep. The ditch extended beyond the north-east boundary of the site, and terminated 10 m from the western boundary. It had a wide flat base and straight, shallow sloping sides, the terminus displayed a shallow sloping profile. The basal fills (106, 107 and 183) comprised redeposited natural chalk lenses and a loose greyish-brown sandy silt, which contained five sherds of Roman pottery (contexts 103, 128 and 140, which are equivalent to context 183) and two sherd of medieval pottery (again from context 103). The fills appeared to be the result of natural silting. Above this was a sandy silt, chalk rich layer (184), which probably represented the levelling of the associated banks (identified in the aerial photographic survey). One medieval pottery sherd (141, which is equivalent to 184), a medieval iron knife blade (164, which is equivalent to 184) and a small piece of unidentified ironwork (141 again equivalent to 184) were recovered from this layer. The upper fill of the ditch (185) comprised a loose greyish brown sandy silt ploughsoil that had slumped into the top of the feature. A large number of modern finds had been ploughed into this upper fill, none were retained.

5.2.3 The terminal of a NE-SW aligned linear feature (192), was observed opposite ditch 179. The feature was 8.8 m long, 3.9 m wide and up to 0.05 m deep. It was filled with greyish brown sandy, chalky silt, and was cut by a modern hedgeline (187). No

dating evidence was recovered, but its location and width indicate that it was a shallow continuation of ditch 179.

5.2.4 Parallel and to the south-east of ditch 179 were two large beam slots (group 124 - Figs 4-7). The foundations comprised two parallel straight sided, flat bottomed trenches approximately 3.7 m apart. The south-eastern trench (119) measured 4.8 m long, up to 0.78 m wide and 0.46 m deep. The north-western trench was of the same dimensions but had been extended to the north-east (group 125). The extended trench was 4.5 m long, up to 0.64 m wide and sloped from 0.17 m deep at its south west extent to 0.34 m at its the north-east extent. Both trenches and the extension were filled with a mid orange-brown sandy silt with up to 40% chalk inclusions (132). A single piece of tile was recovered from the north-western trench and four sherds of Roman and two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the centre of the south-eastern trench. The size and depth of the trenches indicate a small yet solidly-built building; the extended beam slot may have served to support the base of an extension or lean-to.

5.2.5 A smaller set of beam slots (group 155) were identified approximately 120 m from, and at a 90 degree angle to, group 124 (Figs 4, 5 and 7). These comprised two parallel trenches orientated NW-SE and set 3 m apart. The south-west trench (143) measured 3.3 m long, 0.4 m wide and up to 0.18 m deep. The north east trench had been more heavily truncated by ploughing and measured 2.9 m long, 0.38 m wide and 0.09 m deep. Both trenches contained a loose mid reddish brown sandy silt (144). Although eight sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from this structure, its form was similar to structure 124 and the pottery was probably residual. However, it is also possible that both structures were Roman in date and the medieval pottery from structure 124 was intrusive.

Phase 3: Modern (19th century onwards)

5.2.6 A narrow NE- SW aligned ditch (group 193) was revealed in the western central part of the site, measuring 21 m long and continuing beyond the south-western site boundary. The eastern end of the ditch terminated within the investigation area. It was 0.9 m wide, up to 0.1 m deep and contained a single fill of loose reddish-brown sandy silt. Although no dating was recovered the ditch was on a similar alignment and of a similar profile to a post-medieval ditch (1705) identified in the 2002 evaluation of the area to the south-west of the current investigation (OA 2002). The ditch was cut by the bedding trench for a hedge line.

5.2.7 Foundation 194 comprised a shallow rectangular feature; *c* 8 m long, 1.7 m wide and up to 0.22 m deep. It was filled by a chalky mid greyish brown sandy silt (196), which produced two sherds of Roman, two sherds of medieval and 65 sherds of post-medieval pottery, animal bone, glass and metal. The feature was also cut by the hedge line to the south-west, and by eight wooden stakes (group 180 - not illustrated). The stakes were well preserved, indicative of a 20th-century date, but did not define an obvious structure.

5.2.8 A single posthole (197 - not illustrated) was located near the centre of the investigation area. The feature was filled with a compacted chalky fill and the remains of the wooden post. The well preserved wood was also indicative of a probable 20th-century date.

5.2.9 The modern hedge line (187), was observed along the length of the western boundary of the site. It was 410 m long, 0.58 m wide and up to 0.1 m deep.

Undated Features

5.2.10 Two undated pits were identified within the investigation area. The first (108 - Fig. 6) was a sub oval pit situated between ditch 179 and building 124. Measuring 3.26 m by 2.7 m, and up to 0.54 m deep, it was backfilled with brown silt (109). The second pit (137 - Fig. 4) measured 0.75 m wide and 0.35 m deep. It was filled with a loose, dark reddish-brown clay-silt (138), not dissimilar to the topsoil, indicative of a modern date.

5.2.11 More than 200 tree holes were identified within the investigation area, of which six were excavated in order to characterise them. Although the tree holes varied greatly in size they displayed similar irregular profiles and fills. For example tree hole 133 (Fig. 6) was between 3 m and 3.4 m in diameter, and up to 0.6 m deep. It contained a single fill of loose reddish brown clayey silt (134), whereas tree hole 166 (Fig. 4) was between 1.15 m and 0.65 m in diameter up to 0.17 m deep. It was filled by a greyish brown sandy silt (167). Some of the features were crescent shaped, and were probably tree throw holes, possibly left after a tree had blown over. Others were more circular suggesting the trees may have been felled. There was no evidence of in situ burning, and no datable finds were recovered.

6 RESULTS: FINDS

6.1 Roman pottery by Edward Biddulph

6.1.1 A total of 16 Roman-period sherds (excluding unidentifiable (Z) fragments), weighing 85 g, was recovered from the site. The material was sorted into fabrics within context groups and recorded by sherd count, fabric group weight, and estimated vessel equivalents (EVE) where possible. Fabrics were assigned codes from Oxford Archaeology's standard recording system for Roman pottery (Booth nd). The assemblage was in poor condition; pieces were small – the average sherd weight was 6 g – and just two rims were found among the more usual body sherds. However, fabrics were sufficiently well preserved to allow the assemblage to be broadly characterised and context groups dated.

6.1.2 The assemblage spanned the Roman period, but was biased towards the middle Roman period, specifically AD 170/80 to 250. This is suggested by Hadham grey ware (R10) and Nene Valley white ware (W14), which arrived after the late 2nd century, and supported by probable Colchester-sourced black-burnished ware (B20) dishes. Locally-produced sandy grey wares (R30) and black-surfaced wares (R50) are

consistent with this dating. A South Gaulish samian ware (S20) fragment from context 128 is exceptional, belonging to the early Roman period. A colour-coated ware sherd (F60), reminiscent of Oxford or Hadham colour-coated wares but not identical to either, may be late Roman, though this is uncertain. A possible incised graffito was recorded on a black-surfaced ware base; the piece was too fragmentary to allow the graffito to be identified, but two parallel lines extending from the edge of the base were visible.

Table 1: The Roman pottery

Context	Fabric	Count	Weight (g)	Form	MV	Comments/record date	Context date
103	Z	1	1	Unidentified			43-410
103	F60	1	1	Body sherd		Unsourced, but not Hadham or Oxford. Late Roman?	43-410
103	R30	1	19	Body sherd			43-410
121	R30	1	3	Body sherd		AD43-410	Medieval
121	B20	3	21	Bead-rimmed dish	1	AD125-250	Medieval
128	S20	1	3	Body sherd		?Dish/platter	43-110
140	Z	1	1	Unidentified			Undated
140	R30	1	3	Body sherd			43-410
144	R10	2	10	Body sherds		Hadham grey ware; AD170-410	170-410
144	B20	1	5	Plain-rimmed dish	1	AD125-410	170-410
146	R50	1	1	Body sherd		AD43-410	43-410
148	Z	1	1	Unidentified			Undated
150	Z	1	1	Unidentified			180-410
150	R30	1	5	Body sherd		AD43-410	180-410
150	W14	1	4	Body sherd		AD180-410	180-410
172	R50	2	10	Base sherds		Calcareous inclusions; two post-firing incisions on base externally - ?graffito	43-410
TOTAL	-	20	89	-	2	-	-

6.2 Post-Roman pottery by John Cotter

6.2.1 A total of 74 post Roman-period sherds, weighing 334 g, were recovered from the site, the majority being post-medieval/modern in date. There are, however, 5 sherds with a total weight of 34g that have been identified as late Saxon/medieval pottery. The sherds are in poor condition; small and abraded. The fabric is shell tempered, probably a St Neots ware derivative dating from the 10th -13th centuries.

Table 2: The post-Roman pottery

Context	Count	Weight (g)	Form	Comments/record date	Date
1	1	14			post medieval
103	2	6	Unidentified (abraded body sherds)	Shell tempered - St Neots ware derivative	10C-13C
110	2	16	Flower pot		post medieval
121	2	22	Unidentified (abraded rim and body sherd)	Shell tempered - St Neots ware derivative	10C-13C
141	1	6	Unidentified (abraded base	Shell tempered - St	10C-13C

			sherd ?)	Neots ware derivative	
172	33	126			post medieval
174	32	134			post medieval
199	1	10			post medieval
TOTAL	74	334	-		

6.3 Metalwork by Ian Scott

6.3.1 The only finds which can be dated are a whittle tang knife from slippage within a large ditch (context 164 SF 2), which is probably early medieval in date; a post-medieval horseshoe nail from the topsoil (110) and the modern offcut of copper alloy sheet from the upper fill of the large ditch (130).

6.3.2 The full assemblage is catalogued below:

Iron

- Context 105 - small fragment of much eroded strip or possibly plate.
- Context 110 - horseshoe nail with expanded rectangular section head, post medieval.
- Context 141 sf 1 - strip or plate fragment, irregular
- Context 165, sf 2 - whittle tang knife blade. The tang is centrally placed, with a sloping slightly curved shoulder. The blade has a slightly curved back. No indication of any decoration on the blade, but it is somewhat encrusted and corroded. Probably early medieval in date.
- Context 172 - nail with small head.

Copper alloy

- Context 130 - triangular offcut of copper alloy sheet, modern
- Context 174 - nine tiny irregular and very thin fragments of copper alloy sheet. The largest is 12 mm long.

6.4 Glass by Ian Scott

6.4.1 The glass asssemblage comprises 30 fragments weighing 79g, and is predominantly modern window glass, colourless vessel glass and wine bottle sherds. None of the glass is likely to be earlier than the late 19th-century.

6.4.2 A total of 28 sherds of modern glass were recovered from the fills of a modern trench (172 and 174), including 13 sherds of colourless float glass, two sherds of reeded glass, four sherds of wine bottle, two small colourless vessel sherds and a third sherd of slightly blue green colourless glass with mould line, a single rim sherd and two small body sherds from colourless glass, and one thick sliver of colourless glass with a hint of curvature, possibly a vessel sherd. A small thin body sherd of olive green glass and a weathered blue green? body sherd, were also recovered and were both undiagnostic.

6.4.3 **A** single light blue body sherd, was recovered from the fieldwalking (12), it was undiagnostic and probably modern.

6.5 Other Finds

Table 3: Shell

Context	Frag. count	Weight(g)	Identification
172	1	46	Oyster
174	1	1	Mussel

Table 4: Ceramic building material

Context	Frag.count	Weight(g)	Identification
9	1	6	Unidentified
103	1	13	Unidentified
110	2	11	Unidentified
128	1	3	Unidentified
172	2	36	Unidentified
172	1	70	Pan tile fragment 18thC-19thC
174	1	28	Pan tile fragment 18thC-19thC
174	1	16	Plain tile (roof)
TOTAL	10	183g	

Table 5: Slag

Context	Frag.count	Weight (g)	Identification
105	2	30	slag
172	5	48	slag
174	2	77	slag
144	>50	1	Magnetic material recovered from soil sample
121	>50	1	
128	>50	1	

Table 6: Burnt Flint

Context	Frag.count	Weight (g)	Identification
144	5	194	Burnt flint
128	3	16	Burnt flint

7 PALAEO-ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

7.1 Animal bone by Rachel Scales

7.1.1 Three animal bone fragments were recovered and identified with the aid of the Oxford Archaeology bone reference collection and published texts. One rib (140) from a medium sized mammal and two maxillary cattle molars (105) were recovered from medieval ditch fills.

7.1.2 Bone condition was very poor. The rib was fragile and had no bone surface remaining. The teeth were also crumbling and fragmentary with no tooth enamel preserved. It was not possible to identify butchery marks or evidence for gnawing due the condition of the assemblage. This poor preservation could be due to the chemical make up of the deposits excavated, or the use of the land for arable farming prior to excavation.

7.2 Snails by Marta Perez

Methodology

7.2.1 Three 40 litre bulk samples were taken and sub-sampled for molluscs. Each sub-sample comprised 1.5 litres of soil. These sub-samples, however, contained insufficient snails for full analysis and consequently snails from the flots and residues from the remaining 38.5 litres were also included in this analysis. The samples derived from a large medieval ditch and beam slots for a building. Each sample was processed by water flotation with the flots and residues collected on a 500µm mesh. After air-drying the flots and the residues were scanned under a binocular microscope at x10 and x20 magnification.

7.2.2 The Mollusca recovered from the three sub-samples are listed in Table 7 below, giving the minimum number of individuals represented by the remains from each sample. Habitat information follows Evans (1972) and Kerney (1999). No charred plant remains were evident.

Results - sample 1, context 128: medieval ditch

7.2.3 This sample contains the greatest quantity of identified snails. All are terrestrial species, with *Pupilla muscorum* (adults and juveniles) particularly common. This species is typically found in open environments. Other species common in this sample and also associated with dry and open grassland include *Vallonia excentrica* and *Cochlicopa lubricella*.

Results - sample 2, context 121 and sample 3, context 144: medieval building foundations.

7.2.4 Once again *Pupilla muscorum* is the dominant species in these two samples, especially in sample 3. Similarities between these and the previous sample are apparent, but *Pomatia elegans* was also represented in samples 2 and 3

Discussion

7.2.5 The dominant species in all three samples is *Pupilla muscorum,* a snail typically found in areas of earth bare of vegetation; it is often found in patches of broken ground induced by sheep or around rabbit burrows (Evans 1972, 146). Similarly, Pomatias *elegans* is also a species that favours shaded and moist habitats with broken ground and loose soil into which it can burrow (Evans 1972, 134-135).

7.2.6 These snails were only found in the medieval beam slots, where areas of localised shade and disturbance were likely.

7.2.7 Grazing activity is represented by *Vallonia excentrica*, found usually in short grass (Kerney and Cameron 1979, 97) and common in pasture (Evans 1972, 161-162). *Helicella itala* can also be found where the sward is kept short by grazing; it avoids lowland pasture and arable habitats (Evans 1972, 180-182). *Vallonia costata* is a snail of open habitats, unlike *Vallonia excentrica* it seems to be absent where there is considerable disturbance by cattle. When woodland is cleared and open country created *Vallonia costata* is generally the first of the open-country species to invade the habitat. These two species dominated many of the open country faunas of Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain, in an environment of short-turfed grassland, probably grazed by sheep (Evans, 1972, 153-161). The presence of *Pupilla muscorum* and *Vallonia excentrica* probably represents an open dry grazed downland with short, well-cropped grass (Allen 1992, 146).

7.2.8 Grassland is also represented by *Cochlicopa lubricella* (more abundant in sample 1, from the medieval ditch), this snail tends to occur in dry and exposed habitats but it is not restricted to them, in fact it is a catholic species, able to live in a wide range of habitats (Evans 1972). *Trichia hispida* is another species which can be found in a great variety of habitats, shaded and open, moist and dry. It is found in grassland and/or waste ground environment, is absent from very dry sites but very common elsewhere (Kerney and Cameron 1979; Kerney 1999).

7.2.9 Overall the snail assemblages are of very low diversity representing a long established dry and very open environment (Elizabeth Stafford, pers. comm.). Snails from the Saxon or medieval ditch (sample 1) in particular, are typical of a short grass environment with grazing taking place around the feature. The species indicative of a more shaded environment are represented in smaller numbers, and are likely to reflect very localised shade within building foundations.

Table 7: The Snail Data

Sample number	1	2	3	Habitat
Context number	128	121	144	
Period	Medieval	Medieval	Medieval	
Context type	Ditch	Building	Building	
Litres processed	40	40	40	
COCHLICOPIDAE				
Cochlicopa lubricella (Porro)	26	5	1	C
PUPILLIDAE				
Pupilla muscorum (Linnaeus)	376	78	295	O
Pupilla muscorum (juvenile)	163	36	161	O
VALLONIIDAE				
Vallonia costata (Müller)	52	11	11	O
Vallonia excentrica (Sterki)	40	9	9	O
PUNCTIDAE				
Punctum pygmaeum (Drapernaud)	4			C
VERTIGINIDAE				
Vertigo pygmaea (Drapernaud)	1			O
HELICIDAE				
Helicella itala (Linnaeus)	43	39	26	O
Trichia hispida (Linnaeus)	20	5	6	C
POMATIASIDAE				
Pomatia elegans (Müller)		14	6	C B
Total	725	197	515	

Habitat information: C-catholic, O-open habitat B - burrowing species

8 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

8.1 Reliability of field investigation

8.1.1 The investigation area had undergone heavy ploughing in recent years causing plough damage to the top 0.2 m of archaeological deposits. Below this the deposits remained undisturbed and there was little cross contamination of features.

8.2 Overall interpretation

8.2.1 No distinct concentrations of finds were revealed during the fieldwalking, and the finds collected were all post-medieval in date and most likely a product of manuring.

8.2.2 The excavation demonstrated that despite the proximity of a number of Bronze Age barrows there was no evidence for prehistoric activity on the site. The large number of tree holes suggest that the site was heavily wooded in the prehistoric period. No tree holes were seen to cut the fills of the medieval ditch that traversed the site, and the environmental samples from the ditch indicated that the site was open grassland during the medieval period. The site may have been cleared during the earlier Bronze Age; a period when the chalk downlands and river valleys were being colonized and cleared and long, linear boundaries were established to demarcate complex and fixed allotments of land (Parker Pearson 1999, 91).

8.2.3 The ditch is likely to have undergone its initial silting in the late Saxon/early medieval period, although it could have been maintained as a functioning land boundary over many centuries. Early maps show that some prehistoric field boundaries which underlie Roman roads remained in use throughout the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and even early modern periods (Williamson 1993, fig. 2.1) and the site itself is located close to the Iron Age tribal boundaries of the *Iceni*, *Trinovantes* and *Catuvellauni* (OS Map of Roman Britain 2001). The aerial photography evidence (CgMS, 2002) shows that the ditch is known to continue for at least 1.1 km on a north-east alignment beyond the sites north-eastern boundary, roughly parallel with the Icknield Way.

8.2.4 It is possible that the 'medieval' ditch originated in the Bronze Age, but the absence of any evidence of scouring or re-cutting make a prehistoric or Roman date less likely. The low quantity of late Saxon/medieval pottery (in relation to the residual Roman finds) throws some doubt on the date of the ditch, but it is unlikely that the medieval pottery was intrusive. It is more likely that abraded Roman pottery was residual and originated during the manuring of the site in the Roman period.

8.2.5 The size of the ditch and its proximity to the existing county boundary suggests that it is likely to have formed an early land division boundary. However its shallow sided, flat bottomed profile means the possibility that it is a hollow way or sunken trackway cannot be ruled out; despite the lack of wheel ruts and the limited finds assemblage.

8.2.6 Feature 192 was on the same alignment as ditch 179 but it was insubstantial in comparison. It is possible that the feature was evidence of de-turfing prior to the excavation of an extension to 179; a development never completed. No evidence for 192 was identified in the evaluation of the adjacent area (OA 2002), and it was not visible in the adjacent quarry section; it is therefore unlikely that the ditch continued to the west.

8.2.7 Building foundations were identified on the site in the form of two sets of parallel trenches. These trenches are likely to have contained wooden beams, which would have been utilised for the foundations of the structures. No evidence for the function of these buildings was identified, but their isolation, lack of associated features and material remains precludes a domestic role.

8.2.8 Roman and early medieval pottery was recovered from the fills associated with the larger of the two buildings (124). Only Roman sherds were associated with the smaller building (155), however the similarity in construction techniques indicates that the buildings are likely to be contemporary and of late Saxon or early medieval date.

8.2.9 Beyond these features there is no further evidence for human activity until the post-medieval period. This is congruent with the evidence provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment for the area to the east of the investigation area (OA 2005), which

shows that the area was kept as heathland throughout the medieval period at least until 1816.

8.2.10 The linear ditch 193 has no obvious function, but may have formed a post-medieval field boundary.

8.2.11 The modern foundation trench (194) and posthole 197 were of uncertain function but may have been associated with World War II activity in the area.

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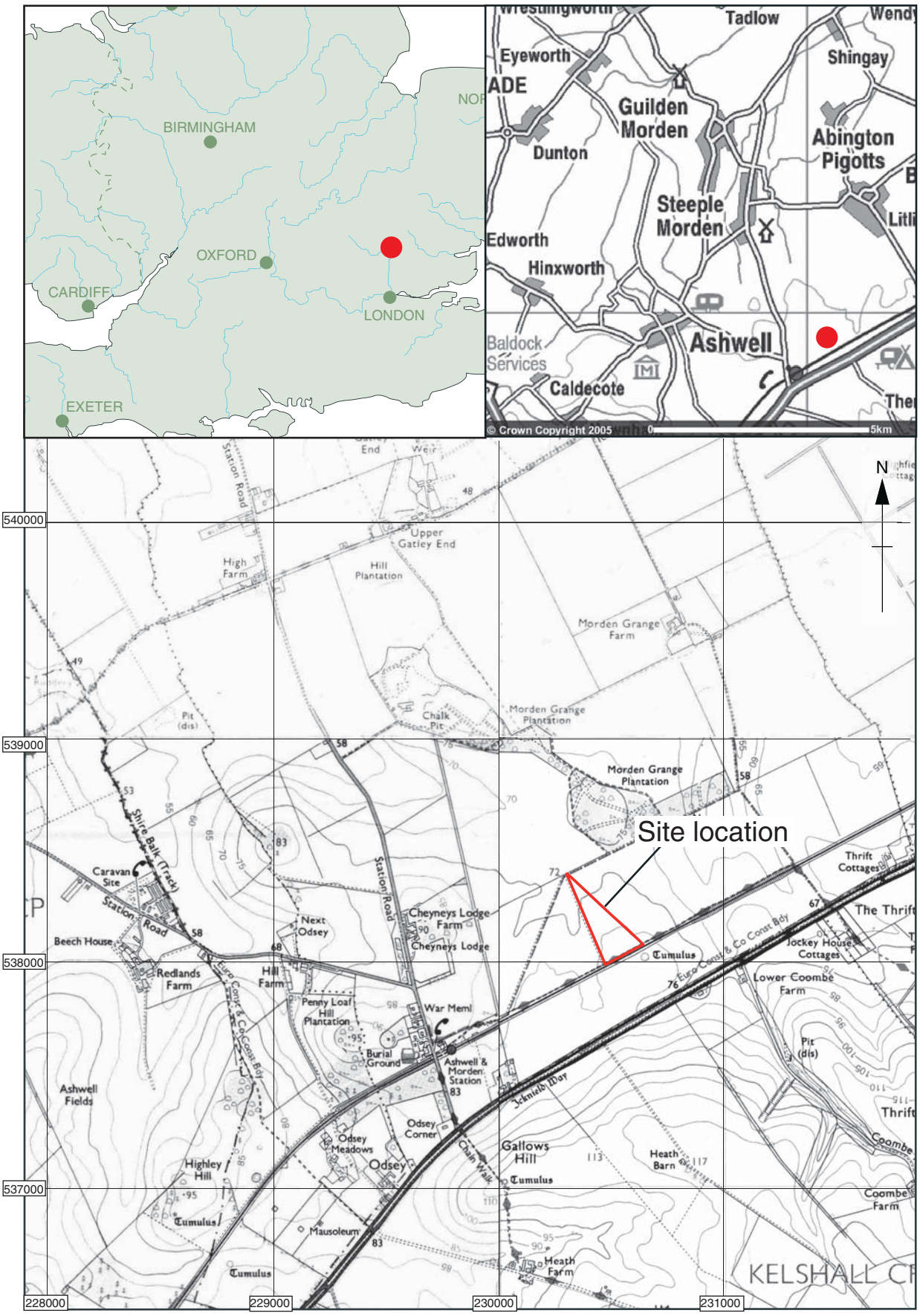


Figure 1: Site location

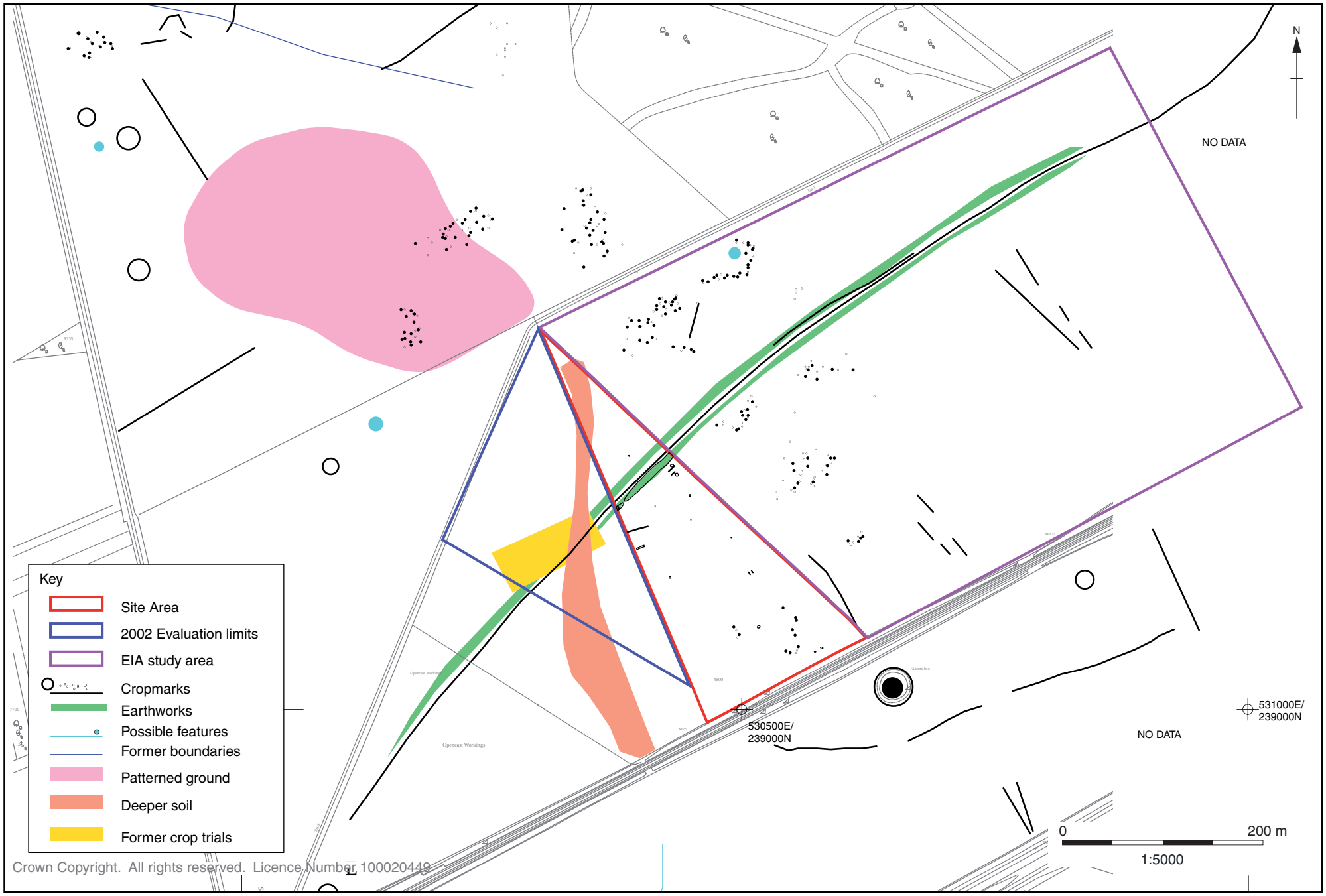


Figure 2: Archaeological features within the study area

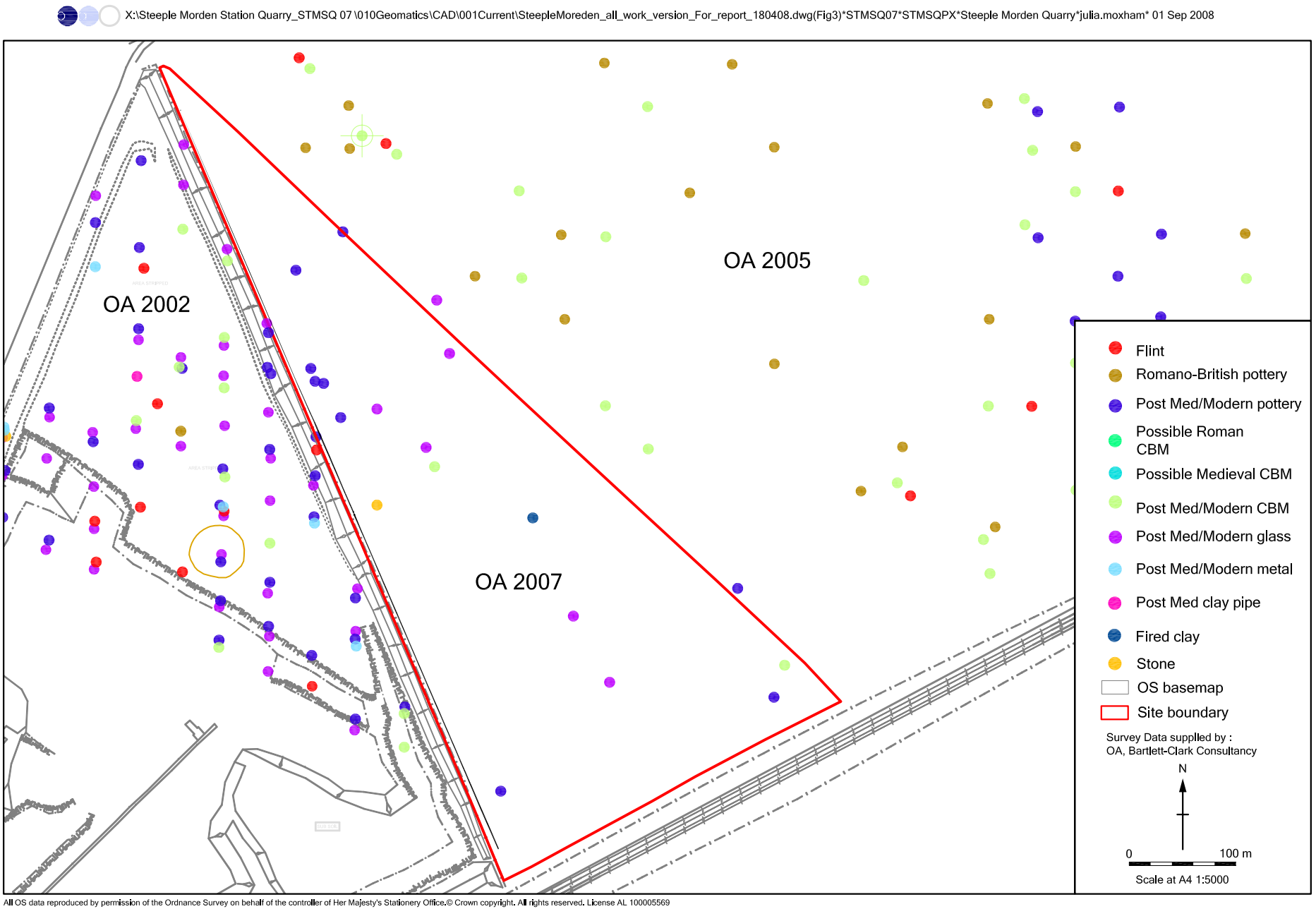


Figure 3: Principle fieldwalking finds

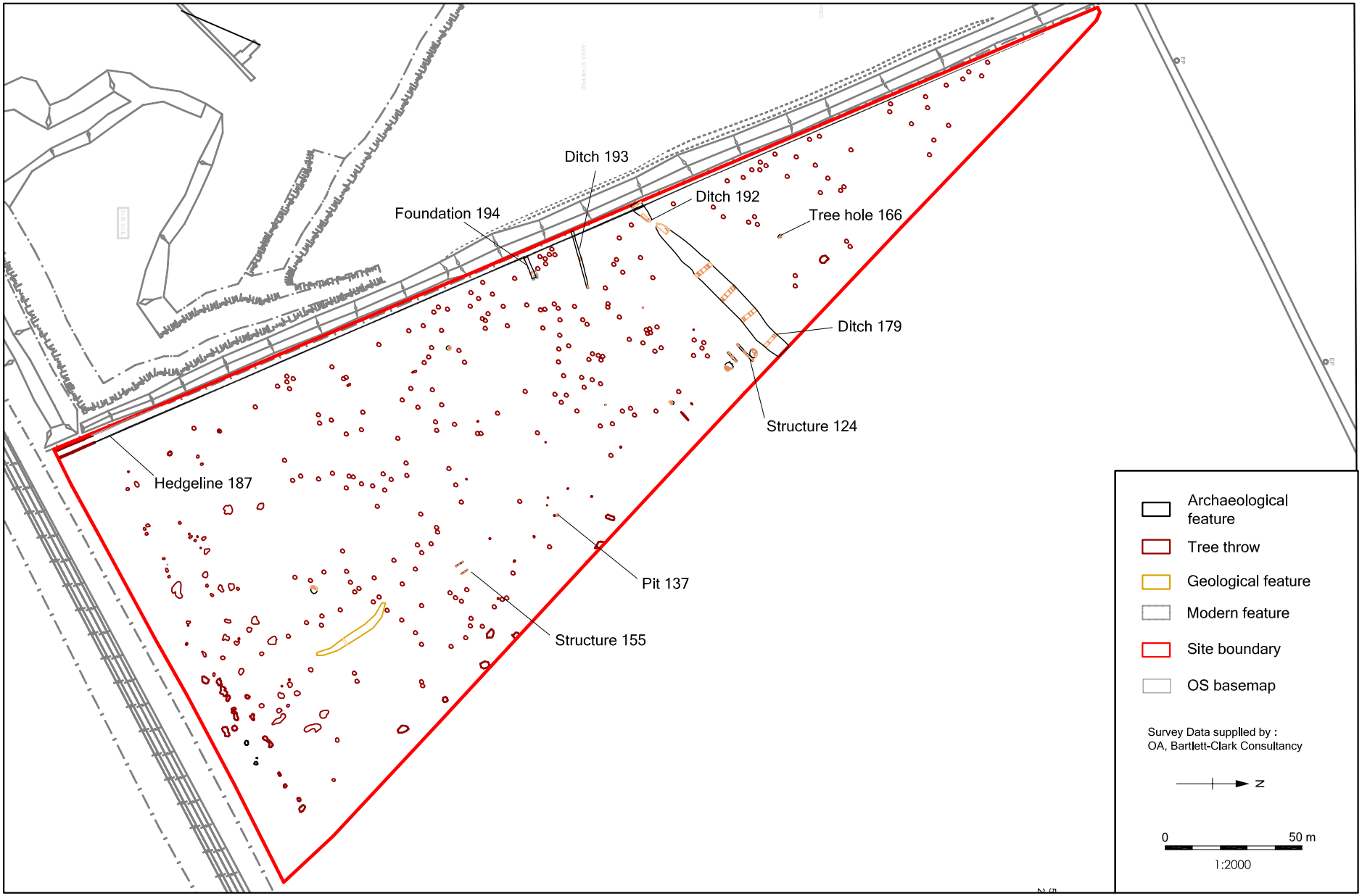
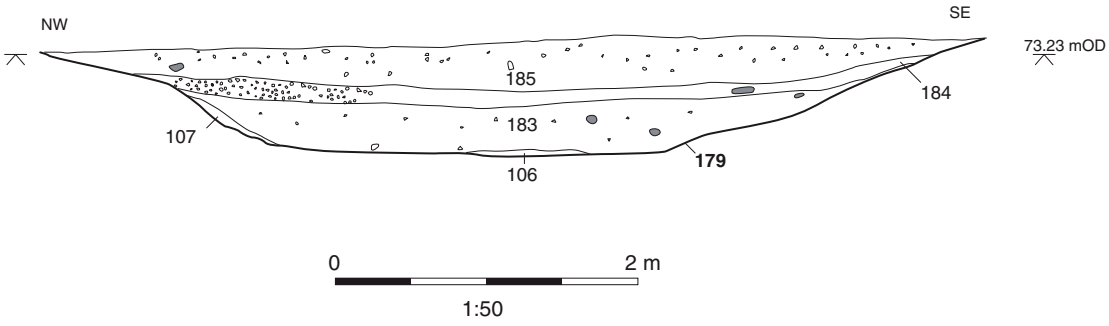
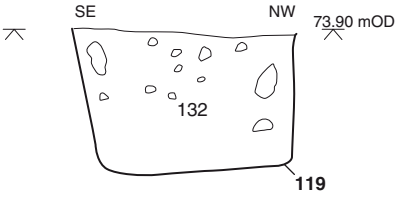


Figure 4: Site plan

Example of section through ditch group 179
Section 2



Example of sections through structures 124 and 155
Section 8



Section 16

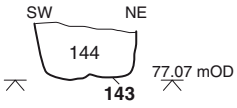


Figure 5: Sections

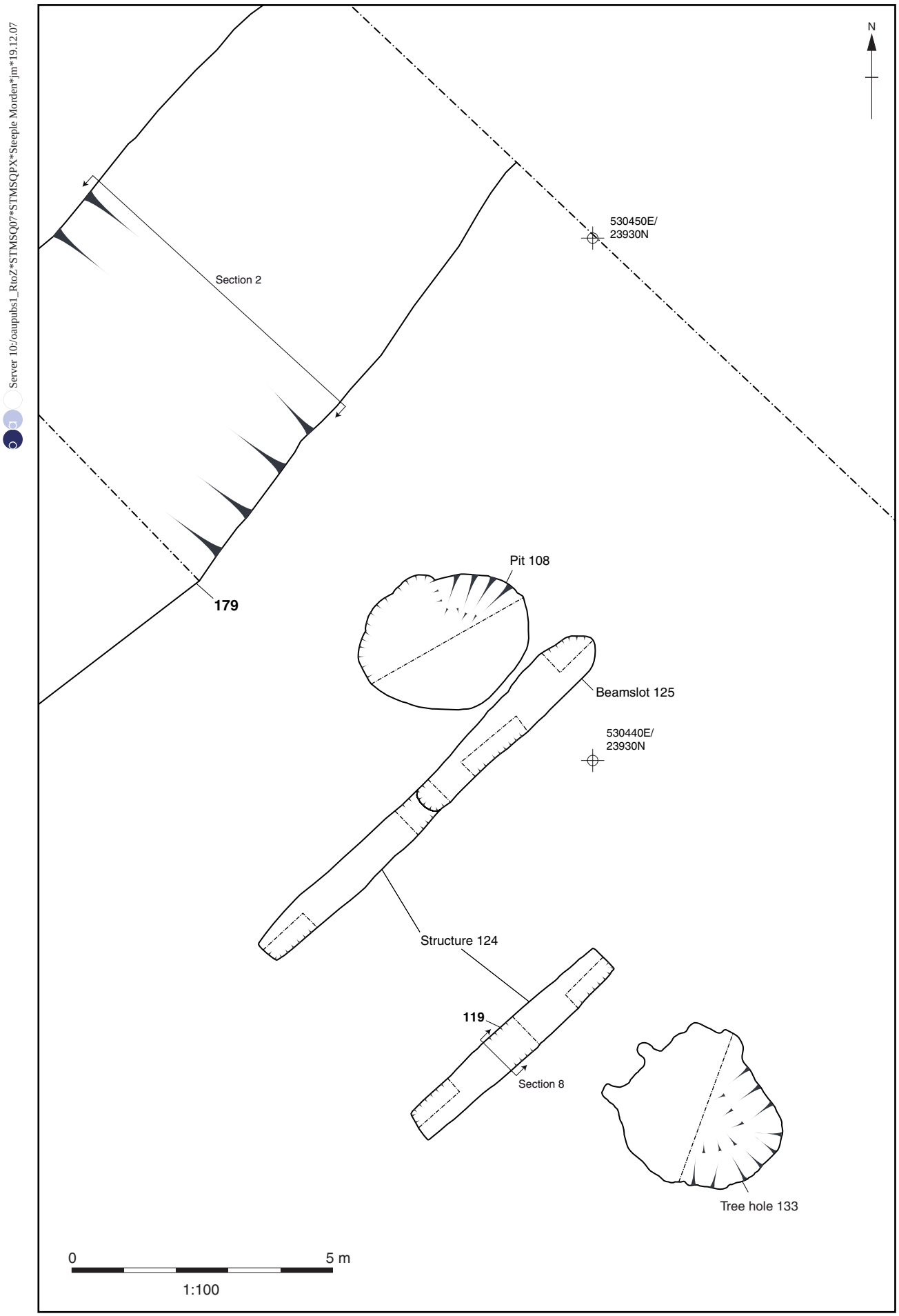


Figure 6: Plan of building 124 and ditch 179

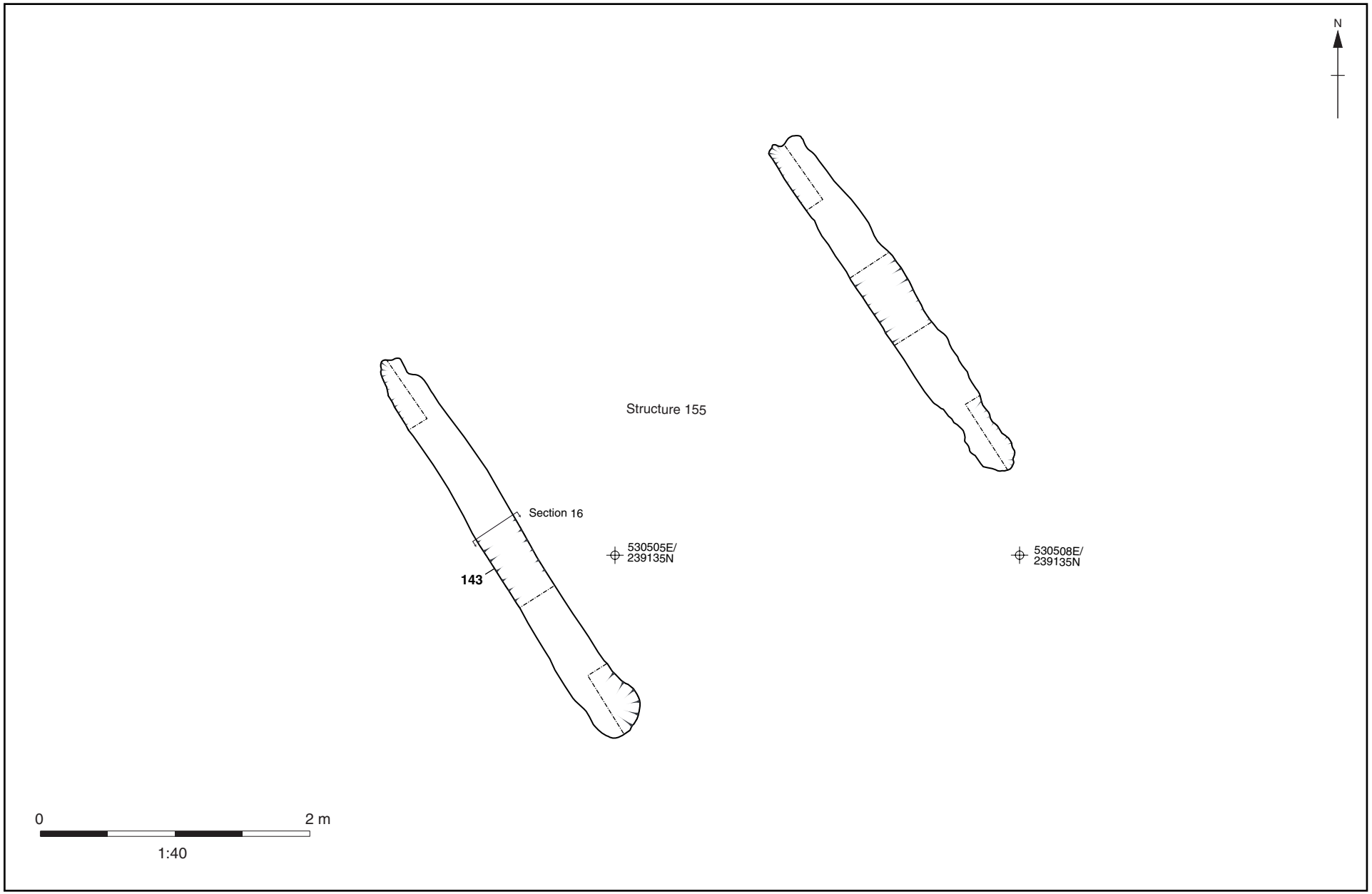


Figure 7: Plan of building 155

Plate 1: Whittle Tang Knife, context 164 SF 2