

R.S.P.B. Rainham  
Wennington and  
Aveley Marshes  
Reserve  
Essex



**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**



**Oxford Archaeology**

August 2004

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**Royal Society for the Protection of Birds**

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**Prepared by:** James Mumford  
**Position:** Supervisor  
**Date:** 3rd August 2004

**Checked by:** Paul Booth  
**Position:** Senior Project Manager  
**Date:** 3rd August 2004

**Approved by:** Nick Shepherd  
**Position:** Head of Fieldwork  
**Date:** 3rd August 2004

Signed..... *NRH* PP. N. SHEPHERD

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**Illustrated by** Julia Moxham

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**Oxford Archaeology**

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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## RSPB Rainham, Wennington and Aveley Reserve, Wennington Marshes, Essex

### *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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Cover Plate: Working shot clearing the central ditch looking from the east.

## SUMMARY

*From May to June 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief within Wennington Marsh and the disused MOD rifle range at Aveley Marsh (NGR TQ 540 800). The work was commissioned by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds during the ongoing development of the marsh as a nature reserve. The watching brief revealed no significant archaeological remains during this final phase of the ditching works.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 From May to June 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief within Wennington Marsh and the disused MOD rifle range at Aveley Marsh. The work was commissioned by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds during the ongoing development of the marsh as a nature reserve.
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Richard Havis, Senior Archaeological Development Control Officer, Essex County Council.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies at approximately 1 m above OD. It is situated on a low-lying alluvial floodplain in a meander of the River Thames. Immediately to the north-east of the reserve lies the higher ground of the gravel terrace at 5 to 10 m OD.
- 1.2.2 Modern landuse is characterised by the disused rifle ranges, a total of three shooting structures, comprising butts and mantlets, and low intensity cattle grazing. The marsh is covered by rough grass, reed beds and shallow areas of open water. It is criss-crossed by a series of drainage ditches and low earthworks associated with medieval and later land reclamation.
- 1.2.3 The drift geology of the site consists of Holocene alluvial clay-silts and peat, overlying Pleistocene fluvial deposits at depth. The solid geology consists of Cretaceous Upper Chalk in the eastern part of the site, Palaeocene Thanet Beds and Woolwich/Reading Beds in the centre, and London Clay to the west. (British Geological Survey sheets 257 and 271)

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief has been detailed in *Rainham, Wennington and Aveley Marshes, Desk-based Assessment*. (OAU 2001 Client Report) as well as the previous interim report (OA 2002) and will not therefore be repeated here.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence, 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 The works included re-cutting and de-silting of existing ditches between Wennington Marsh and the disused Purfleet Rifle Ranges along the south-west and north-west boundaries and in the central area of the reserve (Fig. 2). This involved clearing the vegetation and excavating the accumulated silt in the base of these ditches. The spoil was then being used to form a 1.10 m deep, 2.1 m wide bank at the side of the ditch. Excavation was carried out using a 20 ton tracked 360 degree excavator fitted with a 1 m wide toothed bucket. No de-watering was carried out during excavation. None of the excavations impinged on the existing medieval and post-medieval Wennington Creek earthworks. The work was carried out with weekly visits by an archaeologist to monitor the progress.
- 2.2.2 All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The de-silting and re-cutting of the ditches consisted of battering back the sides and clearing the base of the ditches. This work exposed the natural clay with occasional bands of peat. These were mainly located where smaller ditches joined the main ditches that were being cleared out. The clay had been sealed below a 0.20 m thick layer of very dark grey brown silty sand topsoil. All the material exposed during the de-silting operation including the organic deposits was very clean with only organic deposits. The only finds were from areas alongside the landfill site and in the centre of the site. These finds consisted of bottles, plastic bags and in the centre two, 1 foot square metal plates, painted red, which were used as markers for the bombing range.

### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were retained during the watching brief.

### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The monitoring during the watching brief revealed the later Holocene minerogenic silt-clay estuarine alluvium. Thin bands of peat and organic deposits were located where silted up earlier channels were cut by the ditches.
- 4.1.2 The north-west and south-west boundary ditches were very modern ditches, dating from the later half of the 20th century. The northern end of the central ditch had been recut in the latter half of the 20th century. The remaining length of ditch in the centre of the site, had also been recut. It was very broad and deeper here than the ditches in the centre of the marsh. It would appear that the earlier profile of the ditch had been removed during the late 20th century as part of boundary ditching work maintenance. No archaeological remains were identified during the excavations.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.20 m			Topsoil	
2	Natural				Natural clay	

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA (1992) *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

OA (2001) *Rainham, Wennington and Aveley Marshes. Desk-based Assessment*. (Client report)

OA (2002) *RSPB Reserve, Aveley Marshes, Essex. Archaeological Watching Brief and Recordings Actions 2001-2002*. (Phase 1. Client report)

OA (2003) *RSPB Reserve, Aveley Marsh, Essex, Archaeological Watching Brief and Recording Actions 2002* (Client report)

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:**

**Site code:** RWMA 04

**Grid reference:** NGR TQ 540 800

**Type of watching brief:** Monitoring of excavation and desilting of drainage ditches.

**Date and duration of project:** A total of six visits from 26th May 2004 to 28th June 2004.

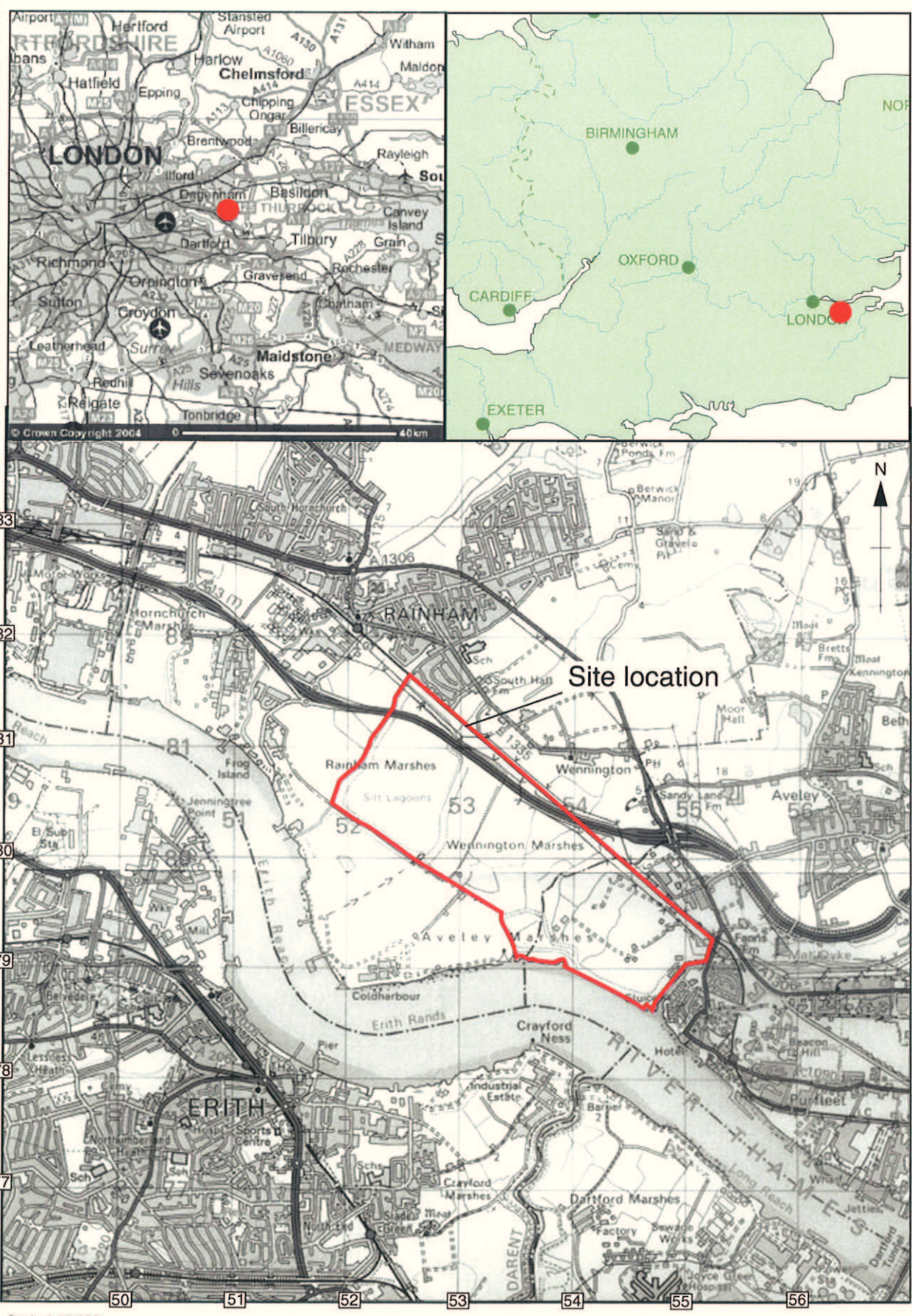
**Area of site:** 2,060 m of ditching

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed no significant archaeological remains during this final phase of the ditching works.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Thurrock Museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location



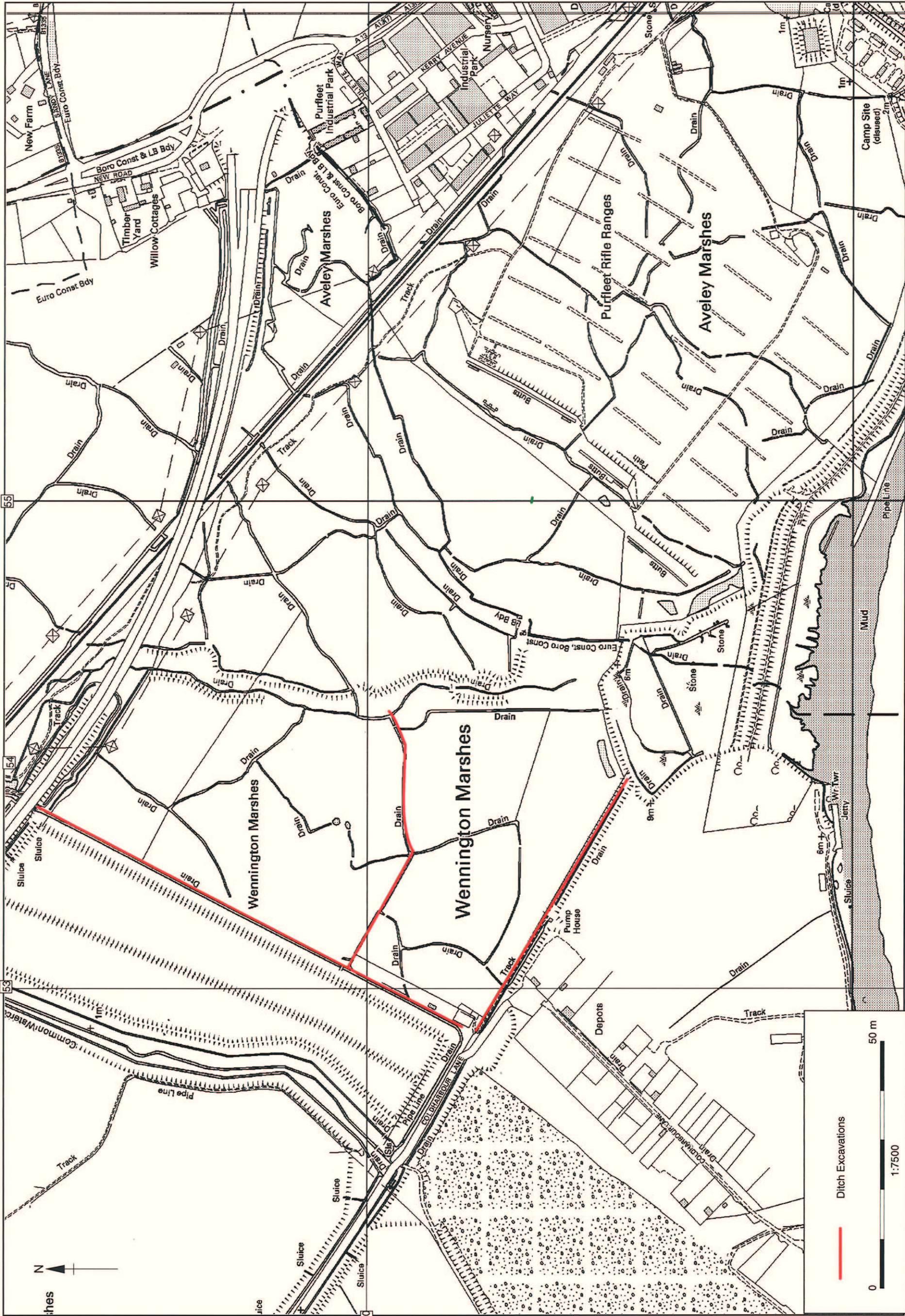
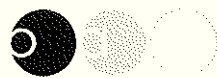


Figure 2: Site plan showing extent of ditch monitoring

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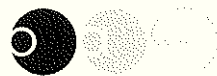




### **Oxford Archaeology**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800  
f: (0044) 01865 793496  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



### **Oxford Archaeology North**

Storey Institute  
Meeting House Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 541000  
f: (0044) 01524 848606  
e: [lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



**Director:** David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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Oxford Archaeological Unit  
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES