

Archaeological Watching Brief at Quaker Farm Tilney Cum, Islington



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



March 2013

Client: H. E. Kitchen and Sons

OA East Report No: 1458

OASIS No: oxfordar3-139058

NGR: TF 5718 1332

Archaeological Watching Brief at Quaker Farm, Tilney Cum Islington.

Site Code: XNFQFT12

NHER No. ENF:130396

Date of Works: 11/12/12- 6/3/13

Report No: 1458

Excavator: John Diffey

Client: H. E. Kitchen and Sons

Report Date: March 2013

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Summary

Between the 11th of December 2012 and , OA East carried out an archaeological watching brief at Quaker Farm, High Road, Tilney cum Islington, Norfolk (TF 5718 1332). The monitoring was carried out during the excavation of foundations for a large grain store and associated hard-standings.

The Works revealed a medieval furrow, a post medieval ditch and identified potential archaeological horizons within the superficial geological deposits recorded on site.

1 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1 The British Geological Survey data describes the bedrock geology as a formation of Kimmeridge clay mudstone formed when the local environment was dominated by shallow seas this is overlain by superficial deposits of Tidal Flat deposits of clay and silt formed when the local environment was dominated by shorelines.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1 A search of the HER was carried out on the 7th December, incorporating a search area of 500m around the watching brief site. The Site lies in the parish of Tilney St Lawrence near the border with the parish of Wiggenshall St Mary the Virgin. It is located approximately 1km to the west of the village of Wiggenshall St Mary the Virgin, more than 2km to the east of the village of Tilney St Lawrence and is situated within the marshland region of West Norfolk, an area of silt fen.
- 2 During the prehistoric period the landscape in this area underwent several fluctuations. Much of the land was only fully drained in the last two hundred years and it is thought unlikely that occupation would have been possible. As a result the only recorded prehistoric monuments in the search area are some possible natural iron-age gullies (NHER 21397) (Fillery-Travis, 2007).
- 3 The Site lies on or just to the north of the Aylmer Canal (NHER 25333) – a Roman canal (now silted up) used for transport and communication through the area. It can be traced on aerial photographs as a crop-mark and earthwork for 5.6km, running on a south-east to north-west alignment from the original course of the Great Ouse River to Aylmer hall farm in Tilney St Lawrence with the watching Brief site located approximately half way along its course The environment around the canal during the Roman period is uncertain - it may have been waterlogged peats or silt lands. It is thought that the canal was partly washed away by a sea inundation during the 2nd or 3rd century. As part of the Fenland Management Project a section was cut through the canal in 1992. A possible cut for the canal was recorded which was 12m wide and was not definitely bottomed at 1.7m depth. The surrounding natural sediments consisted of laminated silts whilst the base and sides of the fill of the canal cut were a much darker, stickier clay. The proposed new buildings may impinge on the canal.
- 4 The only Anglo-Saxon evidence within the search area comes from the top of the Aylmer Canal where a total of 40 sherds of Early Anglo-Saxon period pottery were found (Silvester 1988, 60 and 61 and fig 43.). Approximately 800m north east of the site, further along the course of the canal a possible Saxon settlement site has been recorded NHER 21397 although no features were found with preliminary investigations field walking recorded a concentration of early and late Saxon pottery in this area.
- 5 In the Medieval period a series of droveways were developed in the local area and many of these are still in existence. The Site lies on the western side of Islington Drove which was a focus of scattered settlement from the 13th century at least (Silvester 1988, 60). This is backed up by field-walking carried out on the fields surrounding the Site as part of the Fenland Survey between 1984 and 1986. The survey resulted in scatters of Medieval pottery being recorded to the north, east, south and west of the Site (NHER 21395, 20285, 20294, 22489, 21936, 20886, 21402-4). Some concentrations were recorded, especially alongside the Medieval droveways.

- 6 An aerial photographic survey recorded an undated rectangular enclosure showing as an earthwork immediately to the west of Lords Bridge Farm, approximately 200-300m south of the Site (NHER 22489).
- 7 Three Post-Medieval wind pumps are known of within the search area, located from late 18th and 19th century maps (NHER 16347, 13398 and 16346).

3 METHODOLOGY

- 1 The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.
- 2 The Brief required constant archaeological monitoring of all areas of below-ground disturbance
- 3 The area of investigation was located immediately east of Quaker Farm, High Road, Tilney cum Islington, at grid reference TF 5716 133.
- 4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 5 Site conditions were difficult with mix of heavy rain a high water table and sub zero temperatures.

4 RESULTS

- 1 The development works on site were split into two phases and as such the results are similarly subdivided below.
- 2 The first phase of works saw the excavation of a large foundation pad 25m x 35m immediately beneath the proposed new development. This was initially dug to a depth of 0.6m to 0.8m OD across the whole area, with a further 0.15m of depth excavated (to 0.65mOD) for a 4m wide trench running north-south down the centre of the foundation pad and for 1.2m wide trenches around the periphery (See Plan 1 and Plate 1). Further excavations took place surrounding this foundation pad to form hard standings. These extended 8m south 6m east and 4m west of the foundation pad but were only excavated to a depth of 0.2m (to 1.2mOD). A large area 20m x 50m was excavated north of the foundation pad to extend existing hard standings in the farmyard westwards towards the new development. This area was excavated to a depth of 0.2m (to 1.2m OD).
- 3 The second phase of work saw the excavation of 28 small stanchion foundation pads around the edge of the main foundation pad, mostly measuring 1.5m x 1m and excavated to a depth of 0.65m below the base of the foundation pad, finishing at around 0.2m OD.

4.2 Phase 1

- 1 Initial excavation of the foundation pad commenced 11th Dec 2012 and in the south western half of the excavation this revealed the top of the natural geology (003), encountered at c.0.85m OD, which comprised a firm mid-reddish yellow silt containing occasional marine shell. The top surface of this natural geology was repeatedly marked by deep 'pan-busting' plough scars running north-south across the site. It is thought that

this layer slopes downwards to the northeast as at this initial level it was not encountered over the north eastern half of the area. The natural geology was overlain by a layer of mixed mid orangey brown clayey silt sub-soil (002), containing occasional small rounded flint stones and post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM) and pottery. This layer was encountered over almost the whole the area excavated, but as a result of the natural slope downwards to the northeast only the extent of its survival at lower levels is shown on Figure 2. In turn this sub-soil was overlain by a layer of plough soil (001) comprising a dark brownish-grey clayey silt containing occasional small rounded flint stones and occasional post-medieval CBM. Again this layer was encountered over the whole of the excavation area.

- 2 The initial excavation revealed a single archaeological feature **004** cut into the natural geology (003) in the southwest quarter of the excavation area. This consisted of a linear cut 1.64m wide x 0.15m deep aligned east-west and running for 10.5m from the western side of the foundation excavation until it disappeared beneath the subsoil layer found at this level over the north eastern half of the site (See Plate 2). This cut was filled with a soft mid-yellowish grey clayey silt containing occasional small rounded flint stones (005). This fill may represent a continuation of the subsoil layer (002) downwards into this feature. This fill also contained two small sherds of pottery thought to be a local ware dated to the medieval period (C Fletcher, pers. comm.). It is likely that this shallow feature represents a medieval furrow and suggests an agricultural use for this land during this period.
- 3 This first phase of excavation also revealed a series of post-medieval ceramic field drains cut into the natural geology aligned north-west to south-east and spaced c.8m apart across the whole of the excavated area.
- 4 The shallower excavations for hard standings to the south, east and west of the foundation pad remained firmly in the ploughsoil layer and therefore encountered no archaeological contexts or horizons.

4.3 Phase 2

- 1 Excavation of the Stanchion foundation pads (SP 1-27) was carried out on the 5th and 6th of March 2013 following the laying of a hardcore base across the previously excavated area. The extra depth of these excavations revealed more of the layers that make up the natural superficial geology on site. Sections were recorded in each of the separate pits and these were used with data from Phase 1 records to produce composite sections through the site (Fig. 3, SP sections and composite sections A-A and B-B). The earliest stratigraphic unit encountered was a layer of firm, mid-light bluish grey clay with orangey Iron Staining (009). This was encountered in SP 5, 9 and 13 at 0.07, 0.00, and 0.33mOD respectively and appeared to slope gently in a north easterly direction. This layer appears to be a marine clay laid down when the site was covered by sea. Overlying this marine clay was a thin layer (c.0.1m thick) of peat (008) this layer was encountered over a large area of the site (SP 2,3,4,5,8,9,10,11,13,15,16,17,18 and 19) and represents a change in site environment from marine to terrestrial (most probably formed in a brackish or freshwater marsh). Overlying this peat layer was another thin layer (0.1-0.34m thick) of marine clay (007) identical in composition to (009). Layer (007) was encountered in all stanchion pits other than SP13, where there was a rise in layer (009), and SP 20 and 21 (along the eastern edge of development) where it is thought it dropped below the depth of excavation. This layer represents an inundation of the sea and a return to a marine environment. In two of the stanchion pits (SP 25 and 26) sand was found at the upper

horizon of this layer suggesting another change from Marine to a higher energy or terrestrial (beach) environment. Overlying (007), and found across all of the stanchion pits, was 0.2-0.4m thick layer of firm mid orangey grey clay. Differing in colour from the marine clay below it is possible that this layer was formed from a mix of alluvial and tidal flooding over a coastline environment. This layer of clay was in turn overlain by the 0.1-0.3m thick layer of natural silt (003) which was encountered in the Phase 1 work and is described above. Although no archaeological finds or features were found within these natural layers some of them have the potential to archaeological horizons and may be worth investigating in any future work in this area.

- 2 The natural geological layers described above were found fairly consistently along the western, southern and northern lines of stanchion pits however along the eastern edge they are all but absent. This is in part due to the natural slope of these layers from west to east but also due in part to their cutting by a possible ditch-line (cut **010**). This cut was first encountered during the excavation of SP20, where it is most prevalent. Cut from above the natural silt layer (003) the ditch runs north-south from the southeast corner of the excavation area, traversing gradually further east as it runs north along this eastern edge of excavation. Within SP20, where the widest (although incomplete) profile, of the feature was found it measured 2.5m wide and 0.7m deep with straight medium sloping sides and it contained two fills (011) and (012). The lower fill (011) comprised a soft mid-grey silty clay with a maximum recorded thickness of 0.7m. This fill contained modern c.19th building materials including brick and tile. This fill was seen in the eastern-facing sections of all of the eastern line of stanchion posts, although its decreasing thickness towards the northern excavations suggests the line of the ditch moves gradually east of the excavation area. Fill (011) also appears to form a thin layer above the natural silt (003) to the west of the ditch cut which was thought in the first phase of work to be an area of thicker subsoil in the northeast corner of the site. Overlying (011) but only found in section in SP20 was a second fill (012). This comprised a very mixed fill of reddish yellow and greyish brown clay extending 0.9m x 1m across the visible section, with a maximum recorded depth of 0.6m. This fill again contained modern building materials and also broken pieces of field drain showing that the feature post-dates the system of field drains found in Phase 1. This modern dating evidence suggests that **010** represents a modern ditch most likely acting as field boundary and drainage system and probably filled in prior to the construction of the farm buildings immediately east of the site.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 1 The little archaeology found during the development work suggests that the site has been used agriculturally since at least the medieval period. This is supported by the presence of medieval pottery recorded in surrounding fields and the identification of a possible medieval droveway in previous investigations carried out in the local area. The lower stratigraphic layers found on site show that until only relatively recently the environment of the site's location was dominated by a shifting coastline with a number of episodes of marine inundation. As it is thought that a marine inundation was responsible for the disuse of the Aylmer canal and presumably the cessation of the Roman activity surrounding it, it is possible that some of these lower stratigraphic layers have the potential to be archaeological horizons and may produce archaeological material in future investigations within the area.
- 2 It is apparent from the investigations of this site that the route of the Aylmer canal does not pass through the excavation area. However, aerial photographs of the area show a possible turn from its typical north-west south-east alignment to a north-east south-west

alignment only 150m north-west of the excavation area. After following what appears to be a natural watercourses route for 125m the canal then appears to make a gentle turn forming a junction with the natural water course at this point until again heading north-west south-east across the field immediately south of the site towards Lords Bridge barn. Immediately north of Lords Bridge barn the canal appears to turn again to head north-east south-west until turning one final time to rejoin its original alignment close to where it intersects high road approximately 200m southeast of the site. This loop around an area immediately south of the site appears to be unique in the course of the canal's route and interestingly lies almost exactly halfway along the canal's known extent. It also appears that the route encircles an undated rectangular enclosure also identified from aerial photographs NHER 22489 that lies immediately south of the site. Although speculative it is possible that the route of the canal encircles some form of Roman settlement immediately south of the current site. With its location on the canal at a junction with a natural watercourse this possible settlement could have performed one or more of many functions including port, military, trading, industrial, financial (collecting trading taxes or tolls) or religious. The possibility of this area having archaeological potential was enhanced during discussions with farm workers whilst on site when they described large flint cobbles (not seen naturally at this location) turned up by ploughing in this area. The same farm workers also described instances when their ploughs have made contact with solid subterranean features in the same area thus breaking the plough or causing it to bounce up as they have ploughed the field. It should probably be noted for future reference that this area south of the excavation area may have a high potential for archaeological remains.

3

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 1 The author would like to thank H E Kitchen and Sons who commissioned and funded the archaeological work and A. C. Bacon Engineering Ltd, J. K. Construction Ltd and K & S Allbones Civil Engineers Ltd for their assistance and cooperation on site. The project was managed by Paul Spoerry.
- 2 The brief for archaeological works was written by James Albone, who was updated of progress during the various phases of works.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fillery-Travis, R 2007 *Parish Summary of Tilney St Lawrence* (NCC's Norfolk Heritage Explorer <http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk>)

Silvester RJ, 1988 *The Fenland Project Number 3: Marshland and the Nar Valley, Norfolk*. EAA
45

APPENDIX A. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	<input type="text" value="oxfordar3-139058"/>		
Project Name	<input type="text" value="Watching brief at Quaker Farm, Tilney cum Islington, Norfolk"/>		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	<input type="text" value="11-12-2012"/>	Finish	<input type="text" value="11-12-2012"/>
Previous Work (by OA East)	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>	Future Work	<input type="text" value="Unknown"/>

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	<input type="text" value="ENF130396"/>	Planning App. No.	<input type="text"/>
HER No.	<input type="text" value="ENF130396"/>	Related HER/OASIS No.	<input type="text"/>

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Field Observation (periodic visits)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Excavation (100%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Field Walking
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Recorded Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Metal Detector Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pit Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Area Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Excavation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
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Project Location

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Tilney St Lawrence"/>
Parish	<input type="text" value="Tilney St Lawrence"/>	
HER	<input type="text" value="Norfolk"/>	
Study Area	<input type="text" value="0.5 km"/>	National Grid Reference <input type="text" value="TF 5781 1332"/>

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	James Albone
Project Design Originator	Paul Spoerry
Project Manager	Paul Spoerry
Supervisor	John Diffey

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
none	OA East	NMAS
none	XNFQFT12	ENF130396

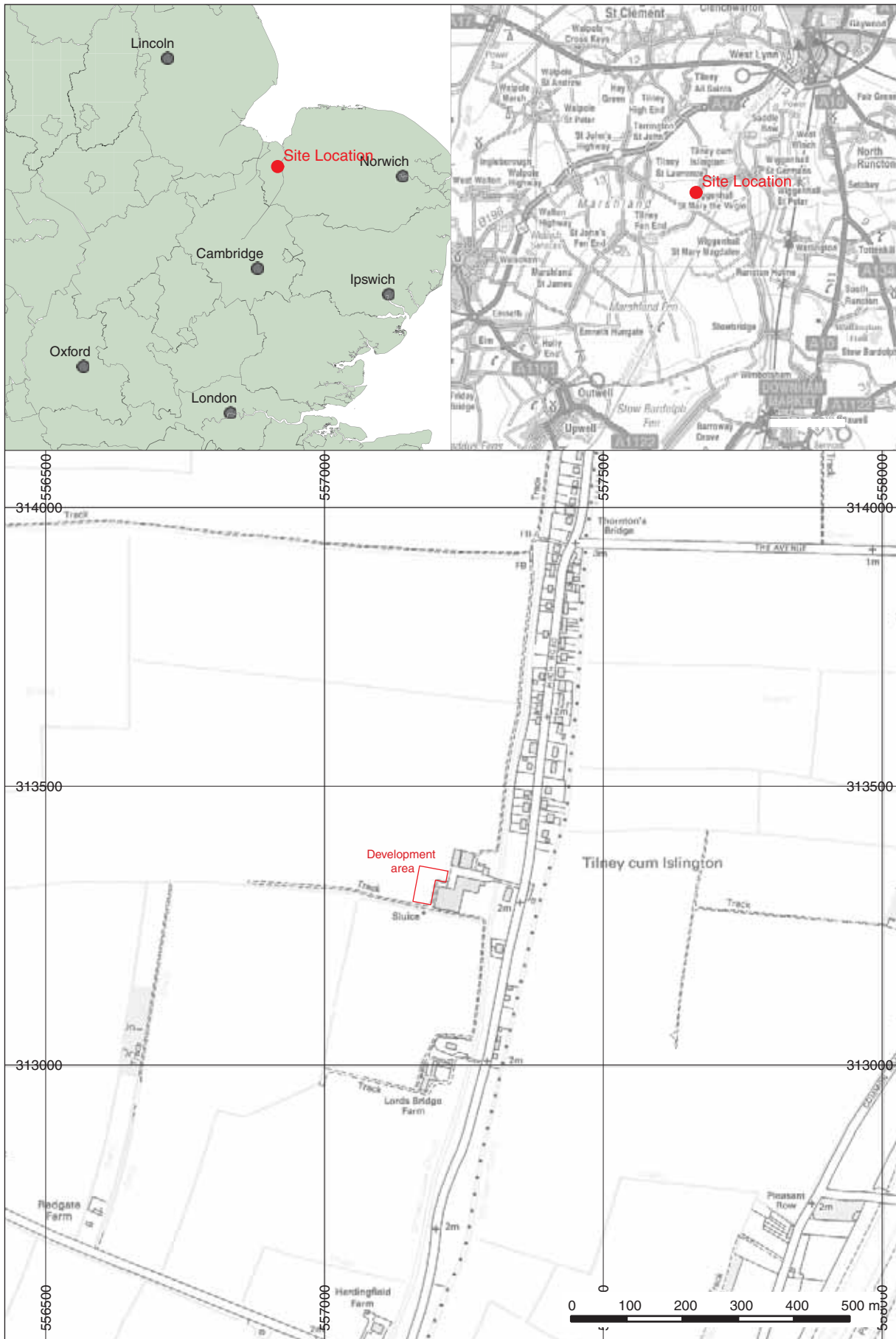
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Digital Media	Paper Media
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:

No physical archive - no finds were kept from this watching brief



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Figure 1: Site location

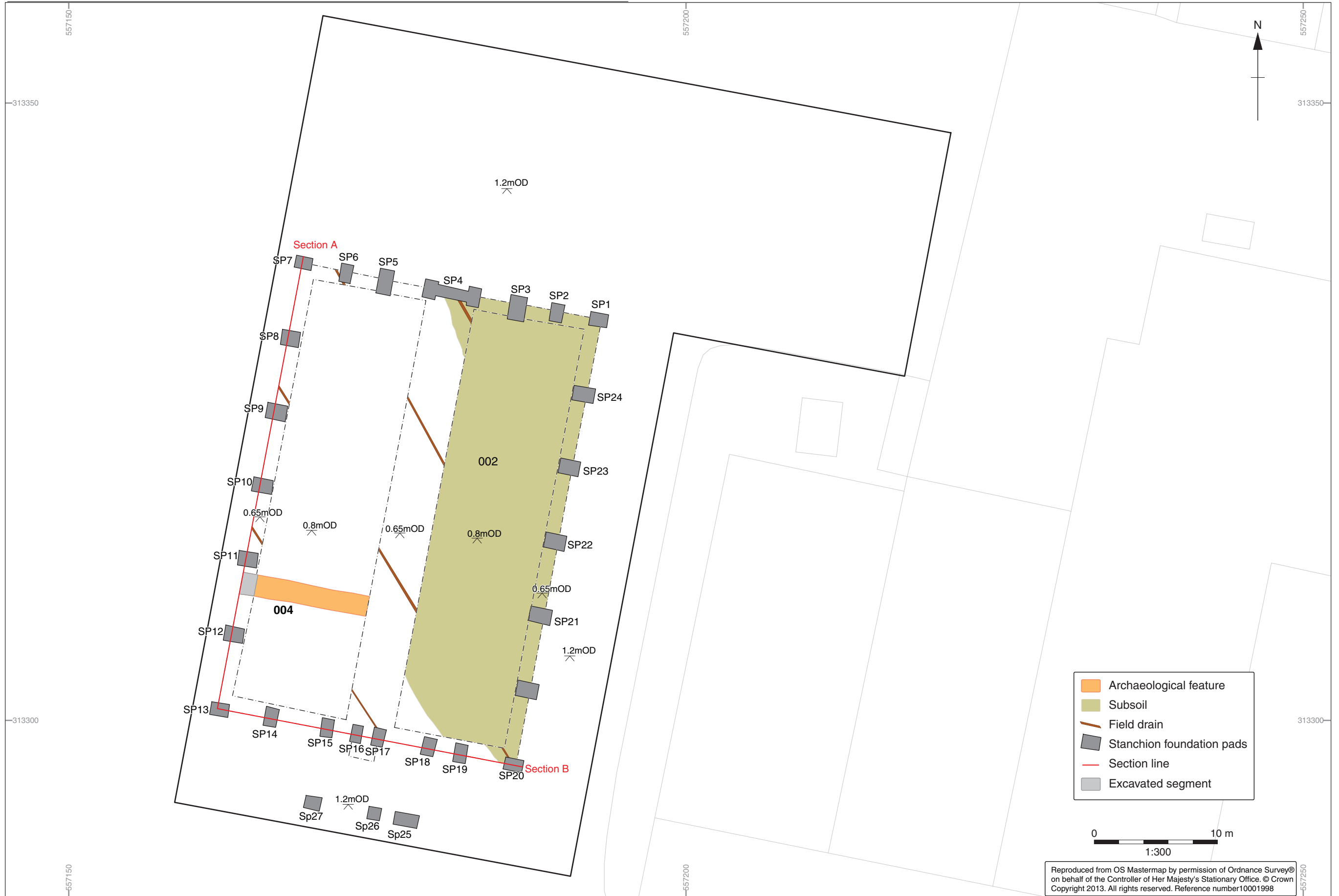


Figure 2. Site plan

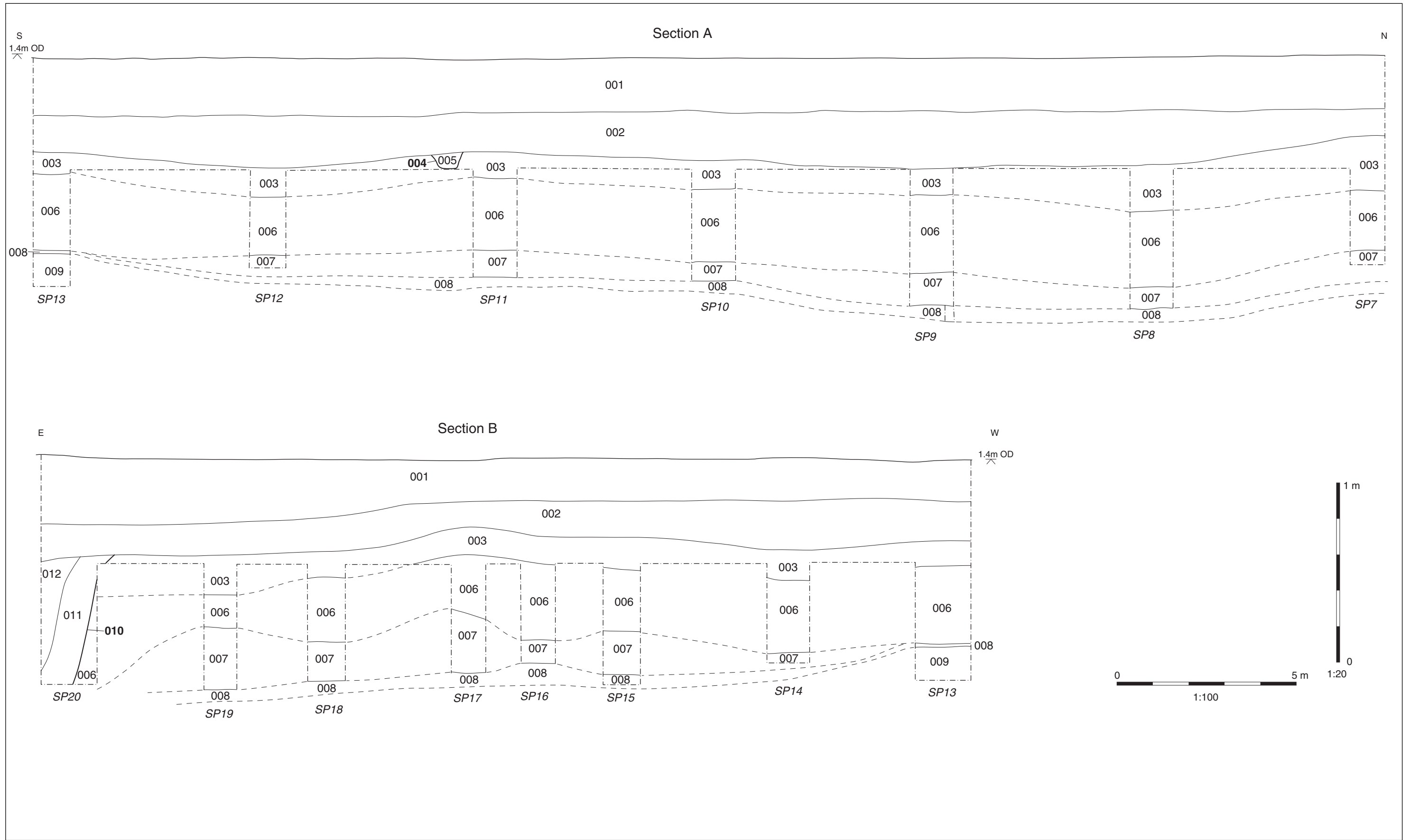


Figure 3: Composite Sections



Plate 1: Phase 1 excavations



Plate 2: Medieval furrow 004