

National Museum of Science and Industry Wroughton Swindon Phase 2

Archaeological Evaluation Report



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National Museum of Science and Industry Wroughton, near Swindon, Wiltshire

PHASE 2

NGR: SU 143 795

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

In September 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation of a proposed development site on land north of the airfield at Wroughton, Swindon, Wiltshire (NGR SU 143 795) on behalf of the National Museum of Science and Industry. The evaluation revealed a limited quantity of modern archaeological remains that included undated ditches, a probable hollow-way or former track-way, a quarry pit and a the remains of a structure, possibly a gun emplacement, most likely dated to the Second World War.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Location and scope of work**

- 1.1.1 From the 12th to 16th September 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the National Museum of Science and Industry, Wroughton, Swindon, Wiltshire (Fig. 1) on behalf of National Museum of Science and Industry.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken in respect of a planning application for a tree-planting scheme and in accordance with a brief set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI OA 2005b) agreed with Helena Cave-Penney of Wiltshire County Council (WCC 2005).
- 1.1.3 The proposed development concerns a tree-planting scheme at the north end of Wroughton Airfield, covering some 10.7 ha. in area. This report details a second stage of the evaluation process for the site. Test pits were excavated by OA previously (OA 2005a see below).

1.2 **Geology and topography**

- 1.2.1 The area of the proposed scheme is at the north end of Wroughton Airfield (SU 143 795) and the airfield lies to the south of Wroughton, in the Borough of Swindon.
- 1.2.2 The north of the airfield is bounded by Clouts Wood and the lower scarp of the Marlborough Downs. The south-east corner of the airfield lies adjacent to Hackpen Farm and the south-west corner adjacent to Uffcott. The airfield stands on a relatively flat plateau that falls away steeply just beyond the northern perimeter into the Vale of White Horse.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology comprises lower chalk, which in turn overlies Upper Greensand and Gault Clay in the scarp immediately north of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The following archaeological background is a brief summary of information contained within a Desk-based Assessment (DBA) carried out by OA and in the Brief provided by WCC. The background also incorporates the results from a first phase of test pitting across this area carried out by OA (OA 2005a).

- 1.3.2 The desk-based assessment identified a moderate potential for the survival of significant archaeological remains on the site pre-dating the construction of the airfield.
- 1.3.3 The wider study area comprises a rich relict landscape dating to the later Prehistoric and Roman periods. The area came under cultivation and settlement with Neolithic woodland clearances, intensifying into the Bronze Age. By the Bronze Age the area was intensively settled with territorial divisions marked out and the land further subdivided into a patchwork of scattered farmsteads.
- 1.3.4 During the Iron Age, land use continued with a shift in settlement *foci* towards the clay vales, but with the upland areas remaining in use with enclosed grassland for pasture. This continued into the Roman period, when it seems that the original Bronze Age field systems were brought back into use with an intensification of arable farming. A single Roman coin has been found on the site, on the northern edge of the proposed plantations.
- 1.3.5 The DBA concluded that the presence of archaeological evidence from the Neolithic period onwards cannot be discounted, but the construction work for the airfield may have had an adverse effect on the survival of ephemeral features and soil scatters. Larger features may have survived but will in all probability have been damaged or buried by earthmoving associated with the construction of the airfield in the 1940s. It would appear from analysis of cartographic evidence that the site had been subject to very little later disturbance until the creation of the airfield.
- 1.3.6 The excavation of ten 2 m x 1.5m test pits across the area (OA 2005) suggested that this area of the site had not necessarily been subject to extensive removal of earth during the construction of the airfield. One undated ditch was present in two pits.
- 1.3.7 A further brief was issued that required a 2% sample of the area, excluding those areas designated as rides and open spaces and incorporating the original test pits (WCC 2005).

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Matt Moore the Environmental Co-ordinator of the National Museum of Science and Industry for his help and for the site visit by Helena Cave-Penney of Wiltshire Council (WCC).

1.5 Evaluation Aims

- 1.5.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, and state of preservation of any archaeological remains surviving on the site.
- 1.5.2 To determine the level, if any, of truncation or burying of archaeological deposits during the earthworks associated with the construction of the airfield.

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- 1.5.3 To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present.
- 1.5.4 To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may be present.
- 1.5.5 To make available the results of the investigation.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 **Scope of fieldwork**

- 2.1.1 The evaluation consisted of seventeen 30 m long by 2 m wide machine excavated trenches, which equated to a 2% sample of the development area. The trenches were randomly spaced across the area of the proposed tree planting scheme (Fig. 2).
- 2.1.2 Only 10.7 hectares out of the original proposed 12 hectares was evaluated as the remainder of the development site was not to be planted with trees.

2.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 2.2.1 The evaluation trenches were excavated by a 360° tracked machine equipped with a toothless ditching bucket down to the natural geology or to the top of the first archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first. This was supervised by an experienced archaeologist who also visually scanned the spoil for any artefacts.
- 2.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

2.3 Finds

2.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

2.4 **Palaeo-environmental evidence**

- 2.4.1 Only one deposit from a hollow-way or track-way in Trench 16 was environmentally sampled for charred and artefactual remains.
- 2.4.2 No other suitable deposits for environmental sampling were identified during the evaluation.

2.5 **Presentation of results**

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2.5.1 This report outlines the findings from the field evaluation. It does not form a comprehensive trench-by-trench account, as many trenches were devoid of archaeological remains. An inventory of all finds and contexts (which includes measurements not presented within the text) is provided in Appendix 1. All OD levels to the top of the chalk geology are included on Fig. 2.

3 **RESULTS: GENERAL**

3.1 Soils and ground conditions

3.1.1 The general soil type was a mid-brown grey silty loam topsoil overlying a light brown grey silty clay with chalk flecks that generally sealed the underlying chalk geology.

3.2 **Distribution of archaeological deposits**

3.2.1 Archaeological features and deposits were revealed within Trenches 2, 4, 5, 7, 10 and 16 to the west, east and in the middle of the development site. In Trenches 1 and 11, tree-throw holes were located and in Trenches 1, 4, 6, 9, 15 and 17, a patchy post-glacial layer was recorded.

4 **RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS**

4.1 **Description of deposits**

Trench 4

- 4.1.1 Trench 4 (Fig. 3, Sections 1, 2 and 3) was located close to the north-east boundary of the development site and was aligned east-west. The trench was extended to the east and expanded to the south and north so as to investigate further a feature at the eastern limit of the trench.
- 4.1.2 The underlying geology was a white chalk (403), located at a depth of 0.25 m to the west below the present surface (184.85 m OD) and at a depth of 0.22 m to the east below the present surface (184.49 m OD). This was overlain by a layer of patchy light grey brown silt clay chalk (402) post-glacial and this in turn was overlain by a layer of light grey brown silt chalk (401) subsoil. No finds were retrieved from any of these contexts in this trench.
- 4.1.3 A `crucifix' shaped feature (404) to the east end of the trench cut this subsoil. Within this feature was a structure of evenly laid and spaced, criss-crossing railway sleepers. These were 3 courses deep with the timbers regularly bolted together (405). This structure rested upon a layer of sand (408) and had a series of fills (406, 407, 409 and 410), composed of a mix of compact light to mid grey brown silty clay, sand, chalk and including brick and tile. On top of the wooden structure (405) a 1.8 m square iron plate was attached and a layer of concrete that had bolts set in to it was sealed by a layer of mid brown grey silt loam (400) the topsoil. The structure was interpreted as the site of an anti-aircraft gun battery, or similar, and most likely dates to W.W.II.

Trench 2

4.1.4 Trench 2 (Fig. 4, Sections 4 and 5) was located to the north-west edge of the site and aligned east-west. The underlying geology, a white chalk (204), was reached at a depth of 0.32 m to the west below the present surface (182.05 m OD) and at a depth of 0.3 m to the east below the present surface (181. 75 m OD). The natural was overlain by a layer of light grey brown silt chalk (201), a subsoil, which was truncated by a north-east/south-west aligned ditch (203). It had near vertical sides and a flat base and was located towards the west end of the trench (Fig. 4, Section 4). This ditch contained a primary deposit of a compact light grey brown silt clay (205) that yielded a fragment of mortar/plaster. Sealing this latter deposit was a layer of compact dark brown grey silt loam (206) topsoil.

Trench 5

4.1.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 4, Sections 6 and 7) was located to the west of the development site and aligned north-south. The underlying geology, a white chalk (502), was located at a depth of 0.35 m to the south below the present surface (186.20 m OD) and at a depth of 0.45 m to the north below the present surface (184.41 m OD). The natural geology was overlain by a layer of light grey brown silt clay with chalk flecking (501 - subsoil) and this was cut by a linear ditch (503) that in turn truncated a posthole (505). The shallow and circular posthole contained a fill of firm dark grey brown clay silt (506) and was truncated by a ditch aligned north-east/south-west with rounded sides and base. The ditch contained a single infilling of firm light grey brown clay silt (504), which was sealed by a layer of compact dark brown grey silt loam (500) topsoil. No finds were retrieved from any of these deposits in this evaluation trench.

Trench 7

4.1.6 Trench 7 (Fig. 4, Sections 8 and 9) was situated to the middle of the development site and aligned north-south. The underlying geology, a white chalk (705), was reached at a depth of 0.3 m to the north below the present surface (184.28 m OD) and at a depth of 0.21 m to the south below the present surface (186.02 m OD). At the north end of the trench a north-west/south-east aligned, gently sloping and rounded based linear ditch (703) truncated the natural. The ditch contained a single primary infilling of firm grey brown silt flecked with chalk (704) and this and the natural were overlain by a layer of light grey brown silt clay (701 - subsoil). Capping this layer was a layer of compact dark brown grey silt loam (702) topsoil. From the top fill of the ditch (703) a piece of metal was noted but not kept. No other finds were noted.

Trench 10

4.1.7 Trench 10 (Fig. 5, Sections 10 and 11) was located close to the eastern boundary of the development site and aligned north-south. The natural geology, a white chalk (1002), was located at a depth of 0.32 m to the north below the present surface (186.82 m OD) and at a depth of 0.26 m to the south and below the present surface (188. 2 m OD). Overlying the natural chalk was a layer of light grey brown silt clay

© Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd. October 2005 5 X:\Wroughton National Museum of Science and Industry\WRMUSEV_wroughton science museum evaluation\Phase 2\PH II REP\FINAL.doc (1001 - the subsoil). Truncating this layer to the north end of the trench was an irregularly shaped feature (1003), a quarry pit that contained a compact, mid brown orange clay silt with inclusions of chalk (1004). Sealing this and the subsoil was a layer of compact dark brown grey silt loam (1000), the topsoil. A single sherd of 19th century flowerpot pottery was recovered from the quarry backfill. Other finds of glass and pottery were retrieved from the topsoil.

Trench 16

- 4.1.8 Trench 16 (Fig. 5, Sections 12, 13 and 14) was located towards the south-east of the development site and aligned north-south. The chalk natural (1601) was reached at a depth of 0.16 m to the north below the present surface (186.86 m OD) and at a depth of 0.31 m to the south below the present surface (186.76 m OD). Towards the north end of the trench, the natural was truncated by a north-east/south-west linear feature (1605), a possible hollow way or relict track-way. At the base of this feature, two linear grooves could be observed about 2 m apart. This feature was filled by a series of deposits starting with a primary fill of firm brown grey silt (1606) on the northern edge. This was overlain by a dense layer of grey brown silt with 80% small to medium chalk pieces (1608). A similar deposit (1607) was recorded on the southern edge of the feature (Section 12).
- 4.1.9 The latter two deposits were sealed by a firm brown grey silt with the occasional chalk flecking (1609). On the southern edge, a layer of firm brown grey silt with frequent chalk pieces (1602) spread out and beyond the feature (see trench plan for extent). This was possibly banking material and partially overlay 1609. Sealing this layer and the chalk was a layer of light grey brown silt clay (1603), the subsoil and capping this was a layer of compact dark brown grey silt loam (1604) topsoil.
- 4.1.10 An environmental sample <sample 4> was taken for charred and artefactual remains from the lower fill (1606) of the hollow way (1605) see section 4.3.

4.2 **Finds**

- 4.2.1 The full data for pottery, bone and other finds is included in Appendix 1. A small quantity of pottery was retrieved, mostly of 19th to 20th century date and a couple of earlier sherds. The 19th-20th century material ranged from Staffordshire type white earthenware to industrial transfer print and flowerpot. A sherd of Surrey Hampshire border ware (17th century) and a jug sherd of medieval Laverstock ware of 13th-14th century date were also identified. The 19th/20th-century pottery was retrieved from Trenches 6, 10 and 12. Trench 12 contained pottery of 13th-14th century date.
- 4.2.2 Two small fragments of unidentified bone, a small quantity of sandstone/quartzite and 19th century glass was also collected.

4.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

By Seren Griffiths, OA

- 4.3.1 One sample of 40 litres was taken from context 1606, the heavily truncated fill of a track-way. The samples were processed by floatation using a modified Siraf-type machine, the flot being collected onto a 250 micron mesh. The samples were air-dried and the flots scanned under a binocular microscope at Oxford Archaeology. Initially assessment was undertaken at Oxford Archaeology by Seren Griffiths. Samples were taken to assess the preservation of charred plant remains and for the recovery of small bones and artefacts
- 4.3.2 Very limited charred remains were recovered from the sample. The flot was poor with very few items of charcoal (<5), and one charred cereal grain (*?Triticum aestivum*, bread wheat). 90% of the flot by volume was made up of modern root material, worm eggs and the burrowing snail species *Cecilioides acicula* were also present in the flot together with modern weeds seeds. Archaeological snails were frequent in the sample.
- 4.3.3 This material recovered from this sample is of limited value in reconstructing environment and economic practises from this site. It is not always possible in the field to assess the suitability of material for charred plant assessment and it was therefore important to process this sample. The presence of charred material, though by no means abundant, demonstrates the importance of sampling for this ecofact type if further work is undertaken at the site. The interpretation of the deposit as the fill of a track-way is interesting. It seems likely that if the sample originates from the fill of wheel ruts or a similar deposit the material might well be re-deposited. More taphonomically secure samples would be preferable for further work. Preservation of snails at the site appears to be good, and it is recommended that a co-ordinated sampling strategy is undertaken in line with current best methods and practise to recover this and other appropriate material in future investigations.

5 **DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

5.1 **Reliability of field investigation**

5.1.1 The trenches were positioned to investigate a good overall coverage of the proposed development area. Within the area examined, the results from the seventeen trenches clearly demonstrated the presence of archaeological features and deposits in six trenches and the absence of features in eleven trenches.

5.2 **Overall interpretation**

Summary of results

- 5.2.1 Undated tree-throw holes were located in Trenches 1 and 11. A post-glacial deposit was identified in Trenches 1, 4, 6, 9, 15 and 17. Archaeological remains were located in Trenches 2, 4, 5, 7, 10 and 16.
- 5.2.2 In Trenches 2, 5 and 7, one undated and two 19th century ditches and a posthole were recorded. In Trench 16 an undated hollow way or track-way was identified and in Trench 10 a quarry pit was recorded. In Trench 4 a wooden, metal and concrete structure was uncovered, probably the foundations of a gun battery of ?W.W.II date.

Significance

- 5.2.3 The most significant feature in Trench 4 may be associated with activity at the airfield during W.W.II. Aerial photographs shows or suggest activity strongly related to the feature a likely gun emplacement (photographic section RAF Museum Hendon, London. Sorting No 106G/UK/1416, Reference No 3116).
- 5.2.4 The ditches located in Trenches 2, 5 and 7 may be of 19th century origin and possibly represent field drainage ditches/boundary ditches pre-dating the airfield.
- 5.2.4.1 In Trench 7, ditch 703 contained a piece of 19th century metal was sealed by a ?ploughsoil (701), which suggests that this layer has been recently disturbed. This implies that in this area, soils have been stripped and disturbed over the natural, probably during the construction of the airfield.
- 5.2.5 In Trench 10 an irregular feature that was investigated may suggest that road-side quarrying for chalk took place during in the 19th century.
- 5.2.6 A hollow way or track-way identified in Trench 16, if projected on the northeast/south-west alignment, would have been truncated in Trench 10 by quarrying and would have emerged at the north-east corner of the field.
- 5.2.7 On the other side of the road, and opposite to the corner of the field another track is visible, though it curves, this could possibly correspond with the hollow way / track-way of unknown date. The environmental sample taken from the lower deposit of the hollow way / track-way was very limited in results, however.

Trench	Ctx	Type	Width (m)	Thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No./ wt	Date
001								
	101	Layer		0.3	Post-glacial	-		
	102	Layer		0.25	subsoil	-		
	103	Layer		0.12	topsoil	-		
	104	Cut	1m x 0.6	0.32	Tree-throw hole	-		
	105	Fill		0.32	Fill of 104	-		
	106	Cut	1m x 2 m	-	Tree-throw	-		
	107	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
002		·						
	201	Layer		0.13	Subsoil	-		
	202	Fill		0.13	Primary fill of ditch 203	-		
	203	Cut	0.95 m	0.20	Ditch	-		
	204	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	205	Fill		0.20	Upper fill of ditch 203	Mortar	1	19th C
	206	Layer		0.22	topsoil	-		
003								
	301	Layer		0.20	Topsoil	-		
	302	Layer		0.10	Subsoil	-		
	303	Layer		-	Natural chalk	-		
004								
	400	Layer		0.10	Topsoil	-		
	401	Layer		0.14	Subsoil	-		
	402	Layer		0.08	Post-glacial	-		
	403	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	404	Cut	5 m x 2 m	0.60	Cut for structure 405	-		
	405	Structure	5 m x 2 m	0.60	Of wood and metal	-		
	406	Fill		0.4	Fill around structure 405	-		
	407	Fill		0.15	Fill around structure 405	-		
	408	Fill		0.12	Fill around structure 405	-		
	409	Fill		0.04	Fill of 404	-		
	410	Fill		0.10	Fill of 404	-		
005								
	500	Layer		0.15	Topsoil	-		

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

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	501	Layer		0.30	Subsoil	-		
	502	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	503	Cut	0.73	0.18	Ditch	-		
	504	Fill		0.18	Fill of ditch 503	-		
	505	Cut	0.10 m Dia	0.04	Posthole	-		
	506	Fill		0.04	Fill of posthole 505	-		
006								
	600	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	601	Layer		0.35	Post-glacial	-		
	602	Layer		0.38	Subsoil	-		
	603	Layer		0.12	Topsoil	Pottery	3	19th C
007								
	701	Layer		0.22	Subsoil	-		
	702	Layer		0.07	Topsoil	-		
	703	Cut	1.5 m	0.44	Ditch	-		
	704	Fill		0.44		-		
	705	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
008								
	801	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	802	Layer		0.24	Subsoil	-		
	803	Layer		0.05	Topsoil	-		
009								
	900	Layer		0.12	Topsoil	-		
	901	Layer		0.10	Subsoil	-		
	902	Layer		0.10	Post-glacial	-		
	903	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
0010								
	1000	Layer		0.20	Topsoil	Pottery Glass	4 1	19th C
	1001	Layer		0.10	Subsoil	-		
	1002	Deposit			Natural chalk	-		
	1003	Cut	8 m x 2 m	1m	Quarry pit	Yes		
	1004	Fill		1m	Fill of quarry pit 1003	Pottery	1	19th C
0011								
	1100	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	1101	Layer		0.22	Subsoil	-		
	1102	Layer		0.07	Topsoil	-	1	

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	1103	Cut	0.8 x 0.5	0.32	Tree-throw hole	-		
	1104	Fill		0.32	Fill of tree-hole 1103	-		
0012								
	1200	Layer		0.13	Topsoil	Pottery Glass	10 3	C13-14, 17/19th
	1201	Layer		0.08	Subsoil	-		
	1202	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
0013								
	1300	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	1301	Layer		0.22	Topsoil	-		
0014								
	1400	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	1401	Layer		0.20	Subsoil	-		
	1402	Layer		0.10	Topsoil	-		
0015								
	1500	Deposit		-	Natural chalk			
	1501	Layer		0.15	Post-glacial	-		
	1502	Layer		0.20	Subsoil	-		
	1503	Layer		0.08	Topsoil	-		
0016								
	1601	Deposit		-	Natural chalk	-		
	1602	Layer	7.5 m	0.12	Banking material	-		
	1603	Layer		0.28	Subsoil	-		
	1604	Layer		0.05	Topsoil	-		
	1605	Cut	4.4 m	0.40	Hollow / trackway	Yes		
	1606	Fill		0.18	Primary fill of 1605	/bone	2	
	1607	Fill		0.10	Fill of 1605	-		
	1608	Fill		0.28	Fill of 1605	-		
	1609	Fill		0.32	Upper fill of 1605	-		
0017								
	1700	Layer		0.08	Topsoil	-		
	1701	Layer		0.14	Subsoil	-		
	1702	Layer		0.12	Post-glacial	-		
	1703	Deposit		_	Natural chalk	_		

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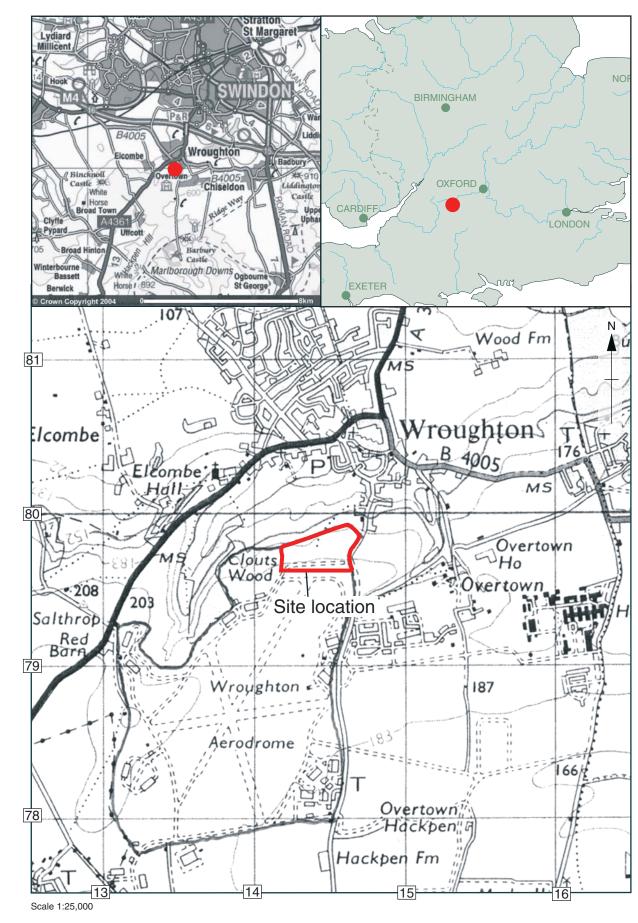
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APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: National Museum of Science and Industry, Wroughton, Wiltshire Site code: B2005/7 Grid reference: NGR SU 143 795 Type of evaluation: 17-trench evaluation Date and duration of project: 12th-16th September 2005 Area of site: 10.7 hectares Summary of results: The evaluation revealed a small quantity of 19th-20th century remains, two/three undated or 19th century ditches, several undated tree-holes, a quarry pit and in

Trench 4 a gun emplacement structure associated with the airfield, possibly during W.W.II. **Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Swindon Museum in due course, under the following accession number: B2005/7



Server 10:/oaupubs1_RtoZ*B2005/7*WRMUSEV2*Wroughton, Wiltshire*jm*04.10.05

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Figure 1: Site location

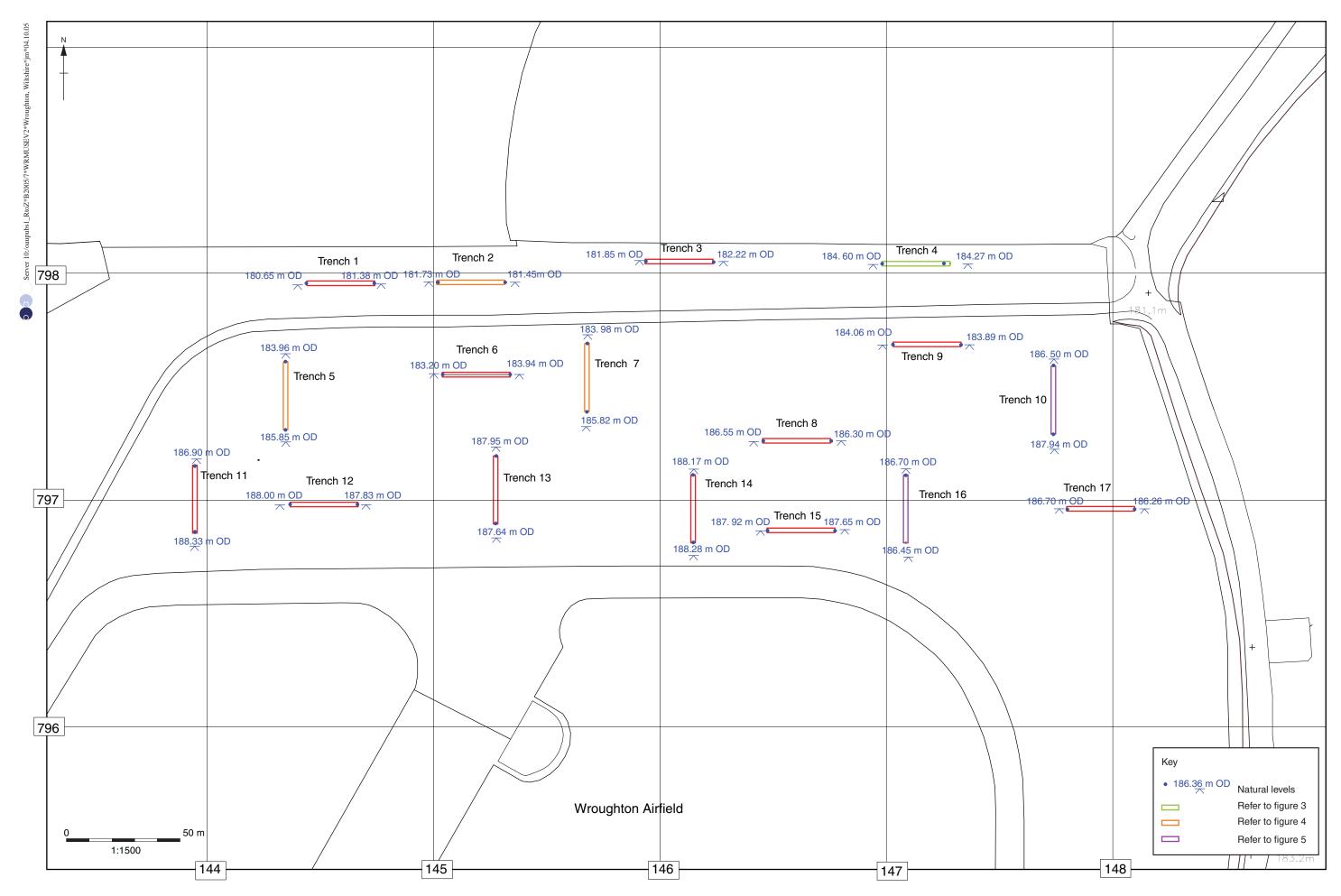
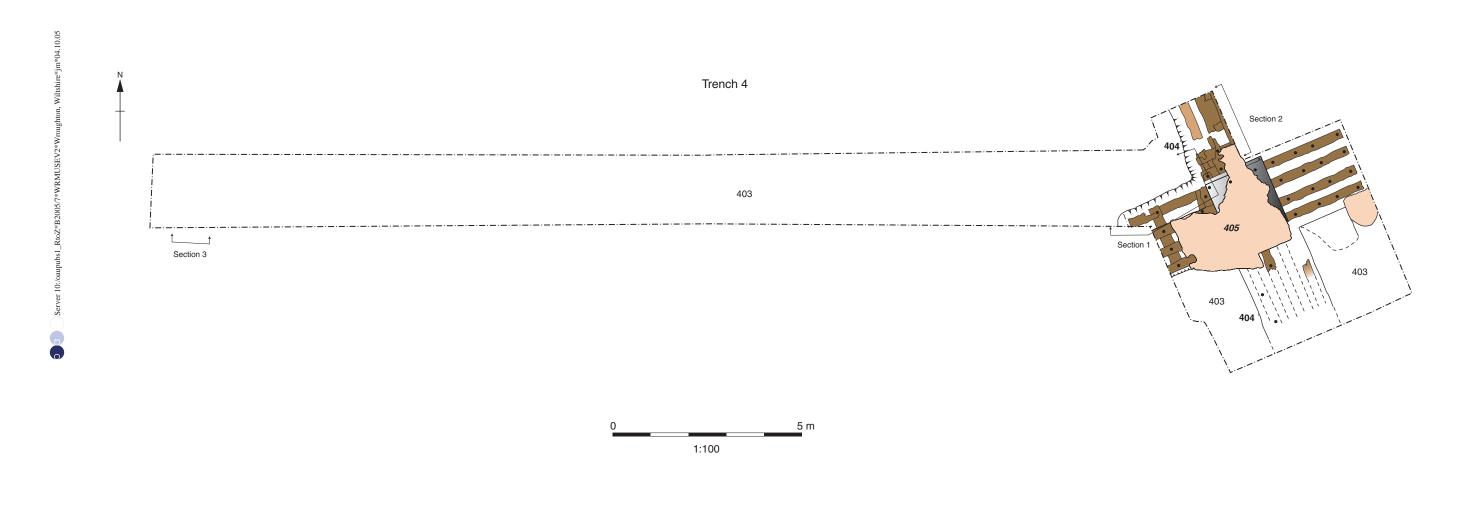
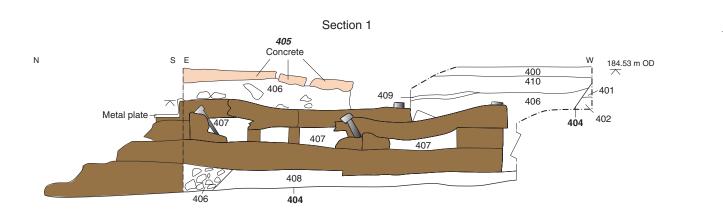
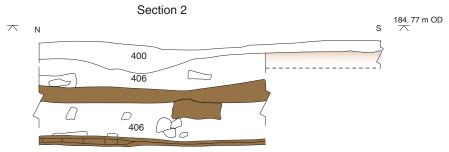


Figure 2: Trench location









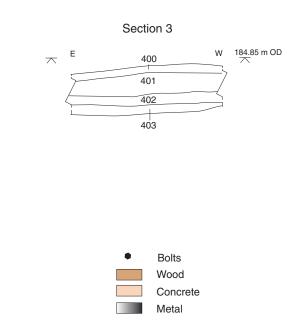
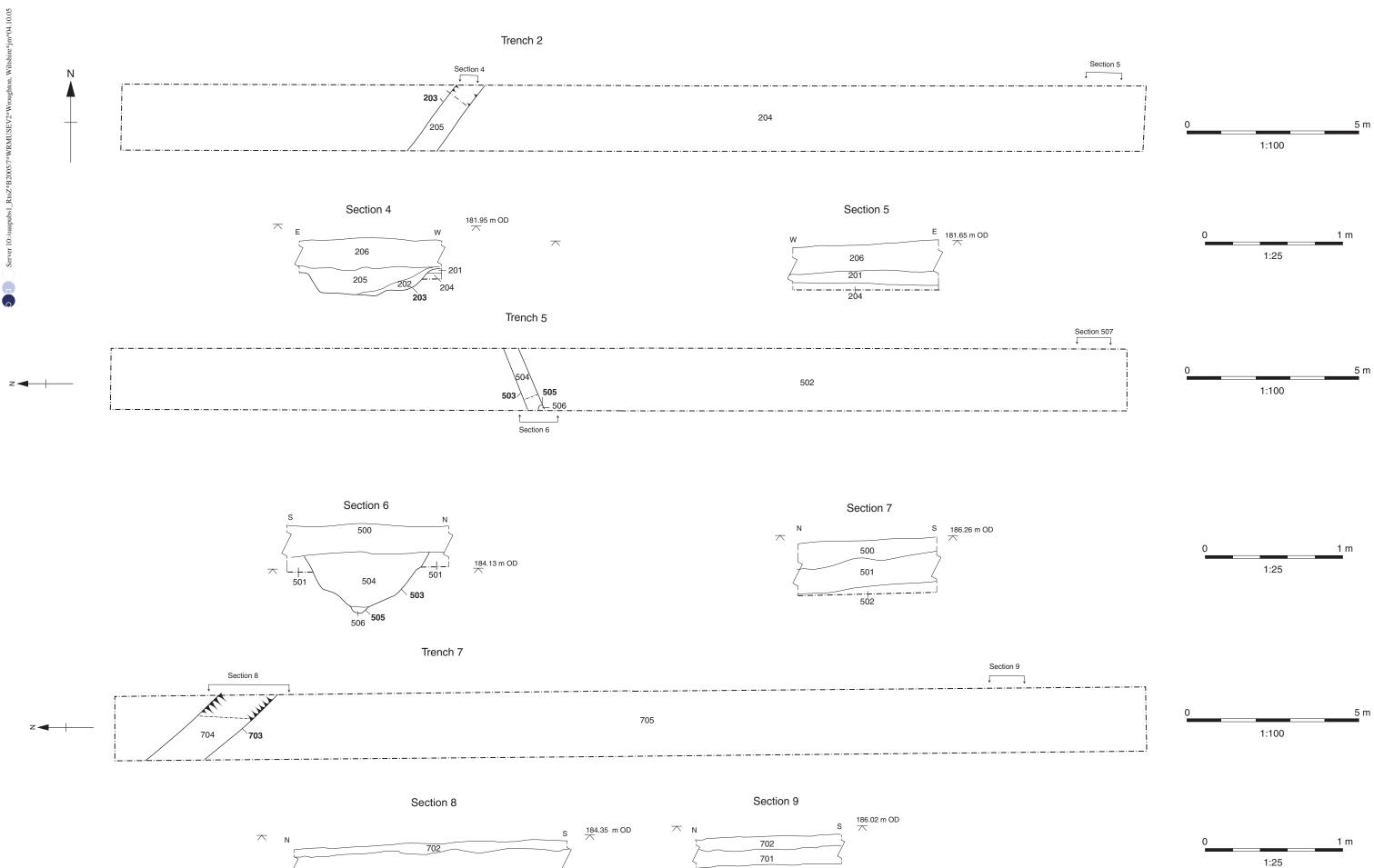
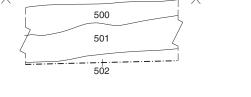


Figure 3: Trench 4, plan and sections







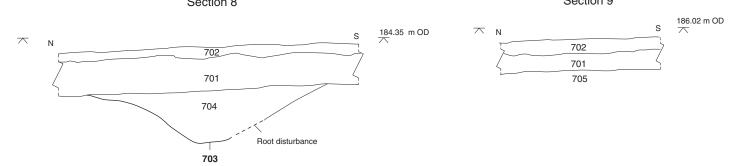


Figure 4: Trenches 2, 5, 7, plans and sections

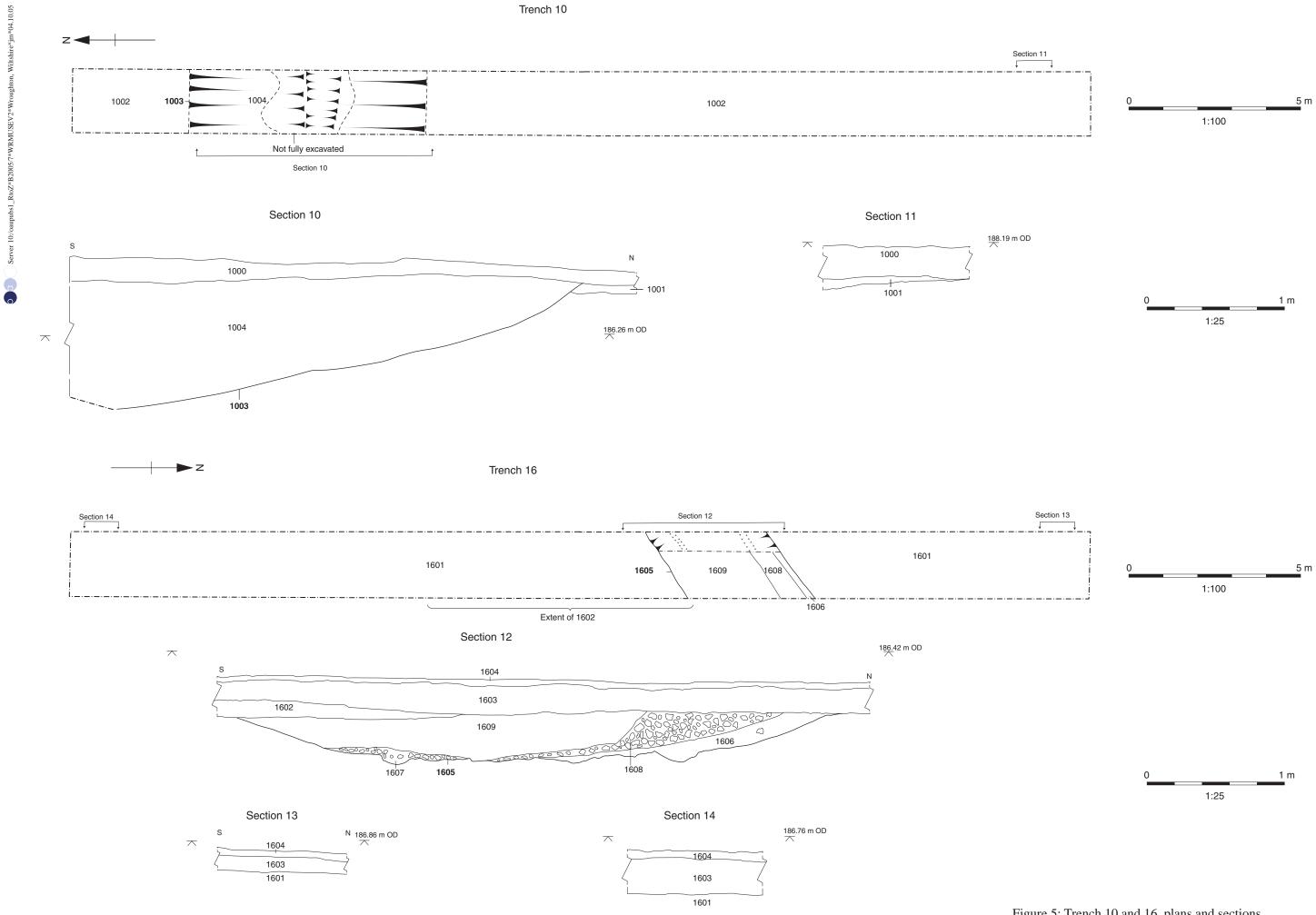


Figure 5: Trench 10 and 16, plans and sections



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