



Land North of Summertown East Hanney, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

February 2017

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Land North of Summertown, East Hanney

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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*With contributions from Geraldine Crann and Ian Scott, and
illustrations by Matt Bradley, Gary Jones and Charles
Rousseaux*

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Summary

Between the 16th and 19th January 2017 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a trial trench evaluation on the site of a proposed housing development. The development area is approximately 2.56ha in extent and is located to the north of Summertown Road in East Hanney, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 41600 92600).

The evaluation was carried out in wet conditions and the trial trenches flooded soon after excavation. Fortunately, all features were recorded and planned before flooding became a problem.

Eleven trial trenches were excavated in total across the development area. Only one trench contained remains of archaeological interest. Trench 9, located in the south-western corner of the site, contained a single ditch section. A worked, prehistoric flint was recovered from the main fill of the ditch. The find appears to be Bronze Age in date, though no other finds were found to confirm the date of the feature. In other trenches, only modern intrusions were encountered.

The Oxfordshire County Archaeological Officer, Hugh Coddington, confirmed during a site inspection meeting that no further work would be required.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned and monitored by Simon Mortimer MClfA of CgMs Consulting. The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Stuart Foreman and the fieldwork was directed by Chris Pickard and supported by Ashley Strutt. The finds were examined by Geraldine Crann and Ian Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Bovis Homes to undertake a trial trench evaluation at Land North of Summertown, East Hanney, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken in response to a planning condition attached to permission for residential development (ref. P15/V0343/O). Specifications of the work were set out in a written scheme of investigation produced by CgMs Consulting with the agreement of the Local Planning Archaeologist, Hugh Coddington, of Vale of White Horse District Council (Robertson 2016).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The modern village of East Hanney, Oxfordshire, lies to the eastern end of the Vale of White Horse. The Vale is a valley of the River Ock, a tributary of the River Thames, and is situated between the Berkshire Downs and the Thames valley. The valley bottom is relatively flat with some woodland coverage, while the hills to the south comprise mostly open farmland.
- 1.2.2 East Hanney stands on a low rise between two streams, one of which, Letcombe Brook, lies immediately to the west of the village. Both watercourses flow into the Ock which is located approximately 3.4km north of the study site.
- 1.2.3 The village is predominantly surrounded by agricultural land. Wantage is the nearest substantial settlement, c. 4.8km to the south, while the village of West Hanney is located c. 1km to the west.
- 1.2.4 The study site lies on the south-eastern fringe of East Hanney to the west of the A338 and north of Summertown Road.
- 1.2.5 The area of proposed development is contained within a field measuring 2.56ha. The land is mostly flat but slopes gently from east to west and lies approximately 63m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).
- 1.2.6 The underlying bedrock geology of the site is Jurassic Mudstone, a member of the Ampthill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation. Overlying this are superficial deposits of Northmoor Sand and Gravel (British Geological Survey).
- 1.2.7 The overlying soil on the site is described as free-draining, lime-rich loam (Soilscapes online database). A geotechnical report compiled by RSK Environment Ltd describes thin layers of topsoil and subsoil comprising sandy clay and measuring no more than 1.0m in depth in most areas (Moody 2015). There is no evidence of industrial or agricultural pollution at the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been detailed in a desk-based assessment completed by CgMs Consulting, the results of which are summarised here (see Bethell 2014 for the HER references).

- 1.3.2 No designated heritage assets (scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens and registered battlefields) were identified within the study site.
- 1.3.3 No previous excavation has been undertaken on the site.
- 1.3.4 Previous archaeological investigations recorded on the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record have revealed limited evidence for settlement and land-use within 2km of the site.
- 1.3.5 Two prehistoric lithic scatters have been recorded in the vicinity, one 1.3km to the south-east and the other 800m to the west.
- 1.3.6 A series of rectilinear middle Bronze Age ditches have been identified c. 1.2km to the north-east of the site, which are interpreted as field boundaries.
- 1.3.7 Middle Iron Age enclosures with limited evidence of early Iron Age activity, were identified in trial trenches c. 1km to the north-east.
- 1.3.8 Evidence of Roman activity might be expected to occur in the vicinity considering that the modern A338 follows the alignment of a Roman road running between Oxford and Wantage. This road forms the eastern boundary of the study site.
- 1.3.9 Recent evaluation trenching in the field to the south-west of Dews Meadow, on the opposite side of the Roman Road, has revealed an extensive spread of Roman occupation and landscape deposits (TVAS 2016). The excavators considered that the features represent several clusters of inhabited areas, surrounded by paddocks and enclosures, not obviously in a regular layout. The majority of these features belong to the Roman period. Despite the number of features recorded, the settlement appears to be of relatively modest status with no evidence of elaborate stone-built structures and very little tile. The pottery assemblage is reportedly that of a moderately well off rural settlement rather than a high status site. Four poorly preserved inhumation burials were found, including one adult and one perinate, as well as disarticulated baby bone and unexamined human remains in a pit. These were scattered around the site, not obviously forming an organised cemetery. No trace of the Roman road was found.
- 1.3.10 A site located 1.1km to the south-east revealed evidence of a late Iron Age–early Roman rectilinear enclosure with internal sub-divisions and external field boundaries, presumably relating to a small farmstead. On the same site, more extensive late Roman activity appeared to the south, centring on north-south trackway. The volume of finds indicated the presence of a settlement which was occupied into the 4th century A.D.
- 1.3.11 Roman ditches were found close to the middle Bronze Age ditches located to the east.
- 1.3.12 The villages of East and West Hanney appear to have originated in the early medieval period, since 10th century documents provide references to the place name of ‘Hanney’. No archaeological evidence for pre-Norman activity has yet been discovered.
- 1.3.13 The Domesday Book records several mills in East Hanney, two of which were located on an estate which later became Philbert’s Manor, c. 600m to the north of the study site. Several manors are known to have existed in East Hanney, one of which was held

by Abingdon Abbey. Medieval fishponds and associated earthworks lie 250m west of the study site.

- 1.3.14 St James' Church in West Hanney originated in the 12th century and is known to have expanded in the 13th century with further additions being later added. Several currently standing houses in both villages are known to have been constructed in the medieval period.
- 1.3.15 There is no evidence for medieval settlement on the study site, which instead appears to have been open-field farmland. Areas of medieval ridge and furrow earthworks can be observed at the site, while a 1950 aerial photograph shows that these covered the whole study area, on an east-west alignment.
- 1.3.16 The modern field containing the study site can be seen in John Rocque's map of Berkshire (prior to East Hanney becoming part of Oxfordshire), which shows that the form and extent of the modern settlement has little changed over the past 250 years.
- 1.3.17 A geophysical (gradiometry) survey of the site was undertaken by Stratascan as part of the current planning requirements. This investigation revealed no evidence of sub-surface archaeological features (Davies 2015).

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of this project follow those set out in the written scheme of investigation and are as follows:

- i. To investigate potential geophysical anomalies on the site and determine their character, state of preservation and date to enable an assessment of significance
- ii. To establish the presence/absence, extent and character of any archaeological features on the site, and to consider the archaeological interest of these in the wider context
- iii. To examine any available evidence for economic activity, environmental conditions and industrial or craft activity
- iv. To generate an accessible and useable archive which will allow future research of the evidence to be undertaken if appropriate
- v. To disseminate the results of the work in a format and manner proportionate to the significance of the findings

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The fieldwork, post-excavation analysis and reporting undertaken for this project follows the standard guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

2.2.2 Health and safety considerations, identification of services, and site access agreements were specified in the written scheme of investigation (Robertson 2016).

2.2.3 Initially it was proposed that ten trial trenches measuring 50m x 1.8m be excavated to investigate 3.5% of the total site area (c. 2.56ha). However, the position of an overhead cable in the northern part of the site meant that Trench 10 had to be divided into two 25m x 1.8m trenches, becoming Trenches 10 and 11.

2.2.4 Since the geophysical survey of the site did not produce any anomalies of archaeological interest, the trial trenches were positioned to provide a representative sample across the site.

2.2.5 All trenches were excavated using a toothless ditching bucket (c. 1.8m wide) under the continuous supervision of a qualified field archaeologist. Mechanical excavation ceased when the digging reached undisturbed natural deposits or the top of archaeological deposits.

2.2.6 Soon after initial stripping the trenches flooded with groundwater making further excavation difficult, though all features identified were investigated immediately. Once open, each trench was trowel-cleaned by hand and exposed linear features were then excavated in a 1.0m wide section (no pits were identified).

2.2.7 All trenches were digitally photographed and archaeological features were recorded by plan and section at an appropriate scale (e.g. 1:20, 1:50). The make-up of each trench was recorded using standard OA record forms, while archaeological features and deposits were recorded using standard OA context sheets.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 Archaeological remains were encountered in Trenches 1, 2, 9 and 11, and summaries of the contents of these are presented below. Trenches, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 were completely devoid of archaeology and are not discussed further in this report. The location of each trench is shown in Figure 2. Detailed descriptions of each trench, including dimensions and depths of deposits, are given in Appendix A.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were wet. The trenches often flooded soon after excavation due to the level of the water table. However, archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.2.2 The soil layer sequence was fairly uniform in each trench. The natural geology consisted of a yellowish-brown clay with c. 2-5% chert gravel. This was overlain by a brownish-grey, silty clay, subsoil with c. 2-5% chert gravel. Trenches on the southern side of the site tended to include a yellow, silty clay, alluvial layer with c. 3-5% chert gravel and grit underlying the subsoil. The subsoil was overlain by a dark brown-grey, silty clay topsoil which also included a small amount of gravel.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 As noted above, archaeological features were present in a small number of trenches and most were of modern origin.

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 Trench 1 contained modern building materials, mostly bricks, which were encountered across the eastern end of the trench and as a concentration located in the central area.

3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 Trench 2 contained modern construction features which appear to be related to the carpark and/or the house adjacent to the A338 main road. The material discovered in Trench 1 just to the north may also originate from this activity.

3.6 Trench 9

3.6.1 Trench 9 contained a ditch section aligned NW-SE (Fig. 3). Ditch 904 was located roughly halfway along Trench 9 and measured 1.52m in width and 0.44m in depth. It cut through the natural geology, but was immediately overlain by an alluvial layer underneath the subsoil and topsoil. It contained a single fill (905) which consisted of a mid-bluish brown-grey, silty clay with c 2% sub-angular/angular gravel (Fig. 4). The fill contained a single worked flint piercer, which is likely to be of Bronze Age date.

3.7 Trench 11

3.7.1 Trench 11 was found to have a modern ditch in its western end which contained several broken modern bricks.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The excavation was undertaken in mid-January in cold and wet conditions. Due to the high level of the water table at the site, the trenches flooded soon after the top layers were machined away. The plough furrows form prominent earthworks which contained standing water throughout the fieldwork. However, the features were initially easy to see and as few in number were recorded before the flooding became a problem.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The geophysical survey was unable to locate any evidence for sub-surface archaeology and it was not possible to target specific areas for excavation. Only Trench 9 in the south-west corner of the site produced evidence for pre-modern activity. Archaeological remains were absent from all other trenches.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The section of ditch found in Trench 9 was not substantial in size. It was covered by an alluvial layer underneath the subsoil, but the feature is difficult to date. The identification of a single worked flint, potentially dating to the Bronze Age, suggests that the feature may be later prehistoric (see Appendix B: Finds Reports).

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 The paucity of archaeology at the site is perhaps surprising given its location close to the Oxford to Wantage Roman road and the recently discovered Roman settlement on the opposite side of the road (TVAS 2016). The proximity of the site to East Hanney village, which may have had early medieval origins (see above), also suggested that it had significant potential for archaeological discoveries. The study area produced no evidence of settlement and it appears to have been used for agricultural purposes, as indicated by the medieval ridge and furrow which is preserved as earthworks. The single, possibly prehistoric ditch is of little interpretive value. As the site is poorly drained, it is possible that it has long been prone to winter flooding and thus not suitable for habitation.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	E–W
Trench devoid of archaeology, though modern building material was encountered. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.46
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.12	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.34	Subsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NNW–SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology, though modern features were encountered. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial deposit which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.80
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.51	Alluvial or overburden	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.15	Alluvial deposit	-	-
203	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NW–SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial deposit which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.53
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.17	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.27	Subsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	0.09	Alluvial deposit	-	-
303	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial deposit which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.52
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.19	Subsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	0.18	Alluvial deposit	-	-
403	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.39
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.17	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	SW-NE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial deposit which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.47
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.14	Topsoil	-	-
601	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	0.11	Alluvial deposit	-	-
603	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	E–W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial layer which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.53
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.11	Topsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
702	Layer	-	0.21	Alluvial deposit	-	-
703	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 8						
General description					Orientation	NNW–SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
800	Layer	-	0.12	Topsoil	-	-
801	Layer	-	0.23	Subsoil	Horseshoe	-
802	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Trench 9						
General description					Orientation	NEE–SWW
Trench contains a ditch at its northern end. Trench consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial layer which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.51
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
900	Layer	-	0.16	Topsoil	-	-
901	Layer	-	0.19	Subsoil	-	-
902	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
903	Layer	-	0.17	Alluvial deposit	-	-
904	Cut	1.52	0.44	Ditch	-	-
905	Fill	1.52	0.44	Ditch Fill	Flints	-

Trench 10						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying an alluvial layer which overlies natural clay geology.					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.51
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.18	Topsoil	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil	-	-
1002	Layer	-	0.15	Alluvial deposit	-	-
1003	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 11						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural clay geology.					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.47
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1100	Layer	-	0.17	Topsoil	-	-
1101	Layer	-	0.30	Subsoil	-	-
1102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Iron

Identified by Ian Scott

A.1.1 Discussion and recommendations

One post-medieval (18th–19th century) iron horseshoe was recovered from topsoil context 801. It measures 15cm wide by 14cm long. No further work is recommended.

B.2 Flint

By Geraldine Crann

B.2.1 Discussion and recommendations

One worked flint piercer was recovered from ditch fill (905). Although piercers were manufactured throughout prehistory, the use of an irregular flake with pre-existing natural removal scars suggests that this example may be later prehistoric in date. Piercers are very common in later Bronze Age assemblages and this find may well be related to contemporary features previously identified in the vicinity.

Context	Description	Date
905	Piercer on an irregular flake with a dorsal pot-lid fracture; hard hammer struck; 50% dorsal cortex; distal end of right lateral, ventral margin retouched to form point and backing.	?Bronze Age

APPENDIX C BIBLIOGRAPHY

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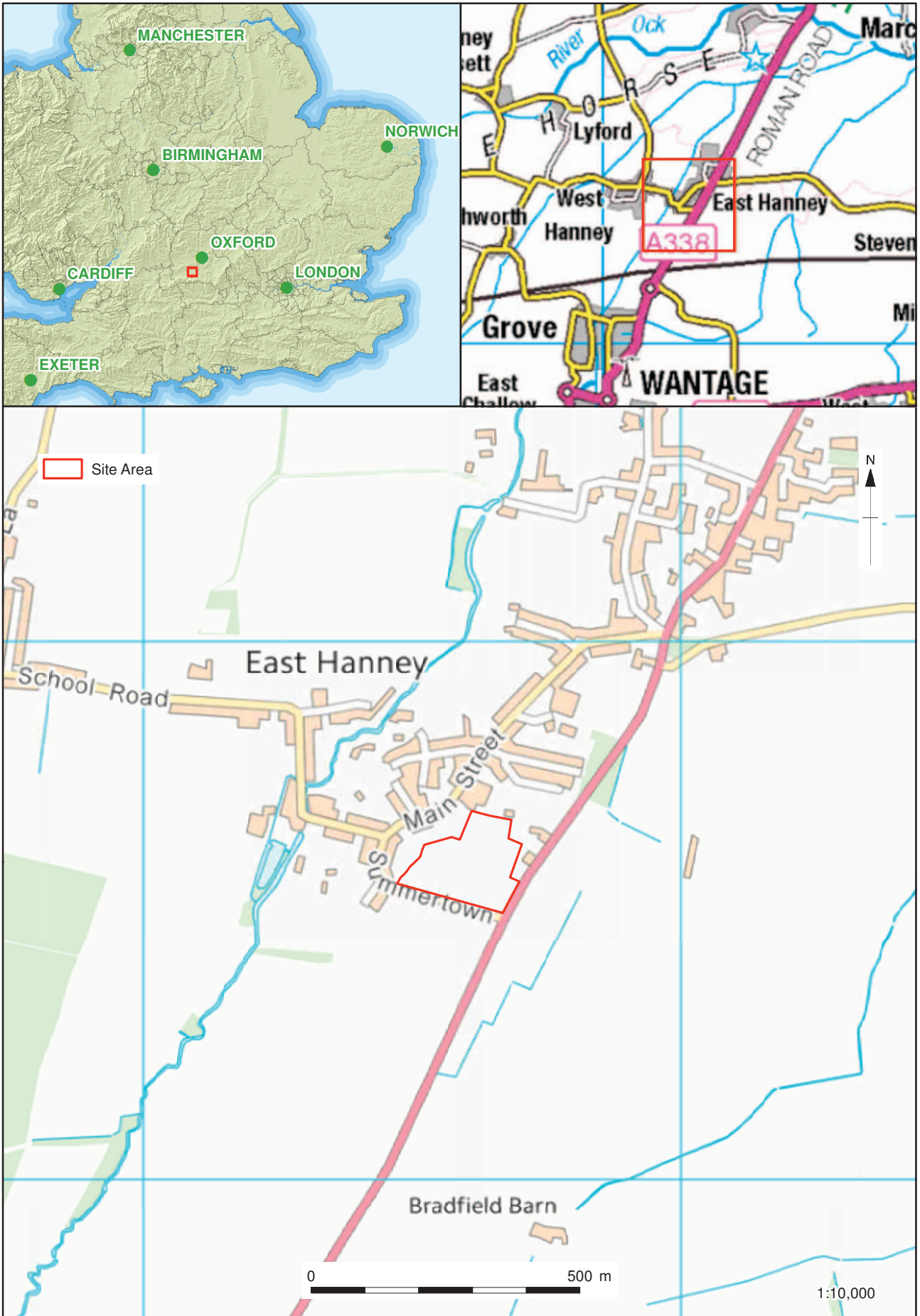
Online sources

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APPENDIX D**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	Land North of Summertown, East Hanney
Site code:	EAHAS17
Grid Reference	SU 41600 92600
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	16 th –19 th January 2017
Summary of Results:	A trial trench evaluation was undertaken in advance of housing development at land north of Summertown Road at East Hanney in Oxfordshire. The results show that very little significant archaeology was encountered, other than a single ditch of possible prehistoric date in the south-western part of the site. Ridge and furrow earthworks in the field indicate that the area was used as arable land in the medieval period.
Area of Site	2.56ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course under accession number OXCMS : 2017.17.



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Figure 1: Site location



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Figure 2: Trench locations

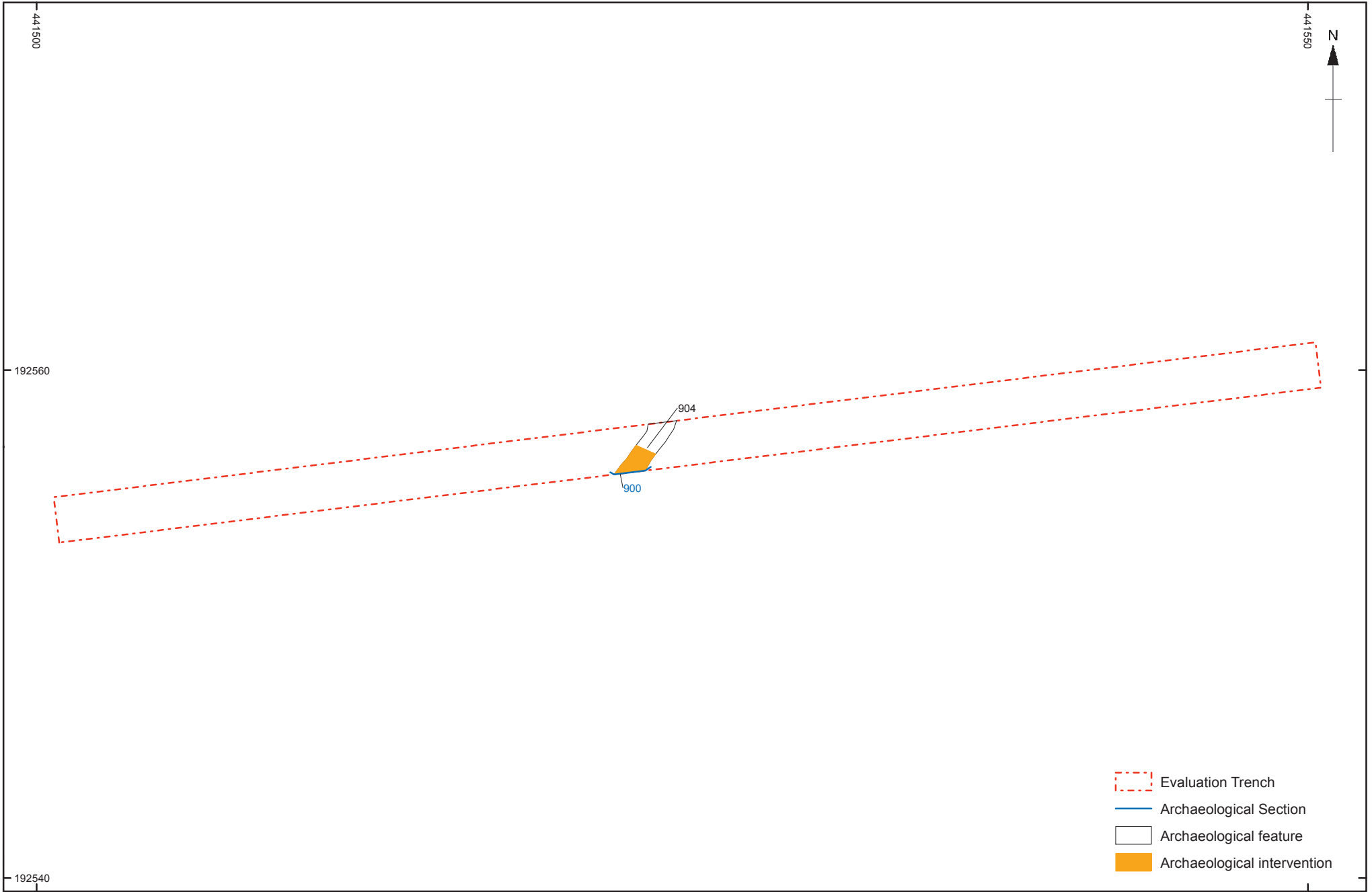


Figure 3: Plan of trench 9 showing ditch [904]

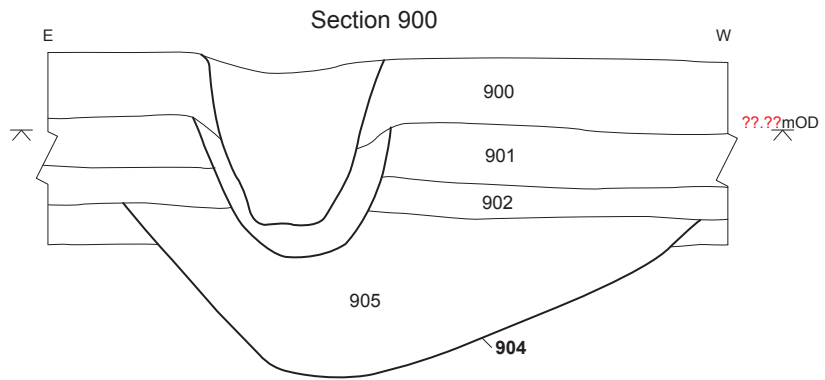


Figure 4: Section of trench 9, ditch 904



Plate 1 : Ditch 904



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