

# Park Rise and Laburnum Close Ambrosden Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

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**Client: BDG Design**

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**Park Rise and Laburnum Close  
Ambrosden  
Oxfordshire**

NGR: SP 6020 1946

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*In June 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at land adjacent to Park Rise and Laburnum Close, Ambrosden, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 6020 1946) on behalf of BDG Design. The evaluation revealed a section of a brick built tunnel well preserved beneath a thick layer of modern made ground. The tunnel was 3.5 m wide and thought to be 2.5 m high and was probably constructed in or shortly after 1740. It is thought that the tunnel linked the basements and offices of Ambrosden Hall to the church of St Mary the Virgin. No other features or deposits of archaeological significance were discovered.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In June 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at land adjacent to Park Rise and Laburnum Close, Ambrosden, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 6020 1946) on behalf of BDG Design in respect of a planning application for the construction of 14 new houses, 6 new flats and 2 new flats with associated parking (Planning Application No. 03/00407/OUT).
- 1.1.2 A brief was set by Hannah Fluck of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS 2003) and a Written Scheme of Investigation was agreed.
- 1.1.3 The development site is situated in a residential setting built on former Ministry of Defence land and is 0.52 hectares in area and is approximately 68 m above OD.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on residential land at approximately 68 m above OD. The underlying geology is mixed, being a boundary of Oxford Clay and Kelloway Beds with some Cornbrash.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The development site lies within an area of archaeological potential. The site lies within the historic core of Ambrosden as shown on the Davis map of 1797.
- 1.3.2 The south west corner of the site was occupied by Ambrosden Hall one of the major houses owned by the Glynne and Page-Turner families, built in the 18th century. The house was built in 1740 and demolished in 1768. It had extensive cellars and underground offices that were entered from a covered passage that opened some distance to the east of the house. In 1972 a 17-metre stretch of the passage was examined but a much greater length running between the site of the house and the church could not be examined because it had collapsed and was blocked with rubble.

## 1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA thanks Hannah Fluck of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services for her advice during the fieldwork.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of five proposed trenches as shown in Fig. 2. Trench 1 was aborted owing to the presence of unmarked services. Trench 2 measured 13 m in length while Trenches 4 and 5 were 30 m long. All trenches were 1.8 m wide. Trenches 4 and 5 were located specifically to evaluate the condition of the remains of Ambrosden Hall (Trench 4) and the covered passage (Trench 5). The positions of the archaeologically sterile trenches are shown on the location plan (Fig. 2) but the individual plans have not been reproduced in this document except for the detailed plan of Trench 5 which did contain archaeology (Fig. 3).

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The overburden in the trenches was removed, under strict archaeological supervision, with a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a standard toothless ditching bucket.
- 3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and, where appropriate, any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features, where located are planned, and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features are photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3.3 Finds

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

### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No deposits of Palaeo-environmental significance were encountered during the fieldwork.

### 3.5 Presentation of results

- 3.5.1 The results of the fieldwork will be discussed trench by trench. A summary of the overall results will follow.

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The site is located on a residential estate on former Ministry of Defence land. Trenches 4 and 5 were excavated to maximum safe working depth (1.2 m) through late 20th century made ground without encountering the natural geology or significant archaeological deposits. Trenches 2 and 3 also had a major element of made overburden though the natural geology was encountered in these trenches. The excavation of Trench 1 was abandoned because of the proliferation of live services.

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### *Trench 1*

- 5.1.1 Trench 1 was located towards the northern edge of the development site (Fig 2). The trench was orientated NW-SE. The trench was originally designed to be 20 m in length though excavation was aborted almost immediately owing to the very large number of services on this part of the site.

### *Trench 2*

- 5.1.2 Trench 2 was located in the north west corner of the development site (Fig 2) and oriented NW-SE. The trench was 13 m in length and measured 1.8 m wide. Trench 2 was originally designed to be 20 m long but as with Trench 1, the proliferation of unmarked services required the trench to be reduced to 13 m in length. The natural geology (202) was encountered 0.8 m below ground surface and consisted of a mixture of Oxford Clay and the yellow Kelloway Beds gravel. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were seen to be cut into the natural geology.
- 5.1.3 A layer of modern made ground (201) lay directly over the natural geology. This deposit was composed of a mixed clay matrix that contained stone, brick/tile, glass, plastic and metal. The deposit was up to 0.5 m thick and extended across the whole trench. The many services encountered during the excavation of this trench were all contained within this deposit.
- 5.1.4 The latest deposit in Trench 2 was the modern topsoil (200). This deposit was a fairly compact, dark brown loam 0.3 m thick.

### ***Trench 3***

- 5.1.5 Trench 3 was located at the east side of the development area (Fig 2) and orientated SW-NE. The trench was 20 m long and 1.8 m wide with a maximum depth of 0.9 m. The natural geology (303) was encountered 0.9 m below ground surface and was composed of Oxford Clay.
- 5.1.6 Horizon (303) was overlain by a light greyish brown loamy soil (302) that was up to 0.3 m thick. A number of modern finds (including a shovel) were observed in this deposit. This deposit was a former topsoil context buried beneath the overlying made ground. Context (303) was cut by a narrow and very straight edged linear feature (304). This feature was not completely exposed within the trench and as a result the width was not ascertained. The edges of the feature were vertical and the base was flat. Feature 304 was filled by a single homogenous dark greyish brown sticky clay, 0.25 m thick (305). No finds were recovered and it would appear likely that feature (304) was part of a modern service trench.
- 5.1.7 A layer of made ground (301) sealed the underlying buried topsoil. The made ground was the same as that observed in the other trenches and measured up to 0.5 m thick.
- 5.1.8 The sequence of deposits in Trench 3 was capped by a layer of modern topsoil (300). This was a dark brown loam up to 0.1 m thick.

### ***Trench 4***

- 5.1.9 Trench 4 was located in the south-west part of the development site (Fig 2). The trench was 30 m in length and 1.8 m wide and was located in order to evaluate the preservation and condition of the remains of Ambrosden House. Excavation was carried out to the maximum safe working depth of 1.2 m. The depth of excavation did not reveal either the underlying geology or any significant archaeology. The bulk deposit of made ground (401) was very mixed and contained metal, glass, wood, plastic etc. The made ground was sealed beneath a layer of modern dark brown topsoil up to 0.2 m thick (400).

### ***Trench 5***

- 5.1.10 Trench 5 was located in the south-west part of the development site (Fig. 2). Orientated NE-SW, the trench was 30 m long and 1.8 m wide. The trench was excavated to safe maximum working depth of 1.2m. Most of the trench revealed only a thick layer of modern made ground, however the north-east end demonstrated a buried topsoil and the brick built cover passage (Fig. 2). The passage (503) was built of red brick, some of which had the remains of a bluish glaze adhering (perhaps indicating a degree of re-use), in a header-stretcher pattern. The bricks were bonded with lime mortar. The passage was 3.5 m wide and investigations in 1972 suggested that it was 2.5 m high. The top of the passage was arched and a hole in the structure revealed the build to be three courses deep. The passage was orientated east to west.

5.1.11 The passage was sealed beneath a layer of firm, dark grey silty loam 0.6 m thick (502). This layer produced an array of modern finds including plastic string and has been interpreted as a buried top soil.

5.1.12 Layer (502) was sealed beneath up to 1.2 m of modern made ground as noted across the rest of the development area. The made ground was in turn sealed beneath 0.28 m of modern topsoil (500).

## 5.2 Finds

5.2.1 No finds were recovered from the evaluation.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 The field investigation was hampered by the sheer depth of made ground, particularly in the south-west part of the site. Deeper excavation was impossible owing to the residential setting of the site. At the northern end of the site excavation was impeded by the quantity of unmarked services. As a result only 4 trenches were excavated and of these only two revealed natural deposits (though no archaeology).

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

#### *Summary of results*

6.2.1 Despite the presence of unknown services across the northern and eastern part of the site, no archaeological features or deposits were present within the trenches that contained exposed natural geology. Apart from the obvious post-medieval remains detected in Trench 5 and the postulated presence of Ambrosden House, the site appears to be clear of any earlier features or deposits.

6.2.2 The depth of made ground in Trenches 4 and 5 may suggest that there had been some earlier landscaping associated with the construction of Ambrosden House and its environs. There may also have been a need in the 20th century for severe levelling action prior to the construction of the present day dwellings, or more likely, the previous use of the site by the Ministry of Defence.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	Context No.	Type	Width	Thickness	Description
2	200	Dep	1.8	0.3	Topsoil
2	201	Dep	1.8	0.5	Made Ground
2	202	Dep	N/A	N/A	Natural
3	300	Dep	1.8	0.1	Topsoil
3	301	Dep	1.8	0.5	Made Ground
3	302	Dep	1.8	0.5	Buried Topsoil
3	303	Dep	N/A	N/A	Natural
3	304	Cut	N/A	0.25	Service Trench
3	305	Fill	N/A	0.25	Fill
4	400	Dep	1.8	0.4	Topsoil
4	401	Dep	1.8	1.2	Made Ground
5	500	Dep	1.8	0.28	Topsoil
5	501	Dep	1.8	1.2	Made Ground
5	502	Dep	1.8	0.6	Buried Topsoil
5	503	Struct.	3.5	2.5	Cover Passage

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 2003 *Land adjacent to Park Rise and Laburnum Close, Ambrosden, Oxfordshire*  
*Written Scheme of Investigation*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, 1st edition, 1992)

OCAS 2003 *Land Adjacent to Park Rise and Laburnum Close, Ambrosden Design Brief for*  
*Archaeological Field Evaluation*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Park Rise and Laburnum Close, Ambrosden, Oxon

**Site code:** AMPLB 03

**Grid reference:** SP 6020 1946

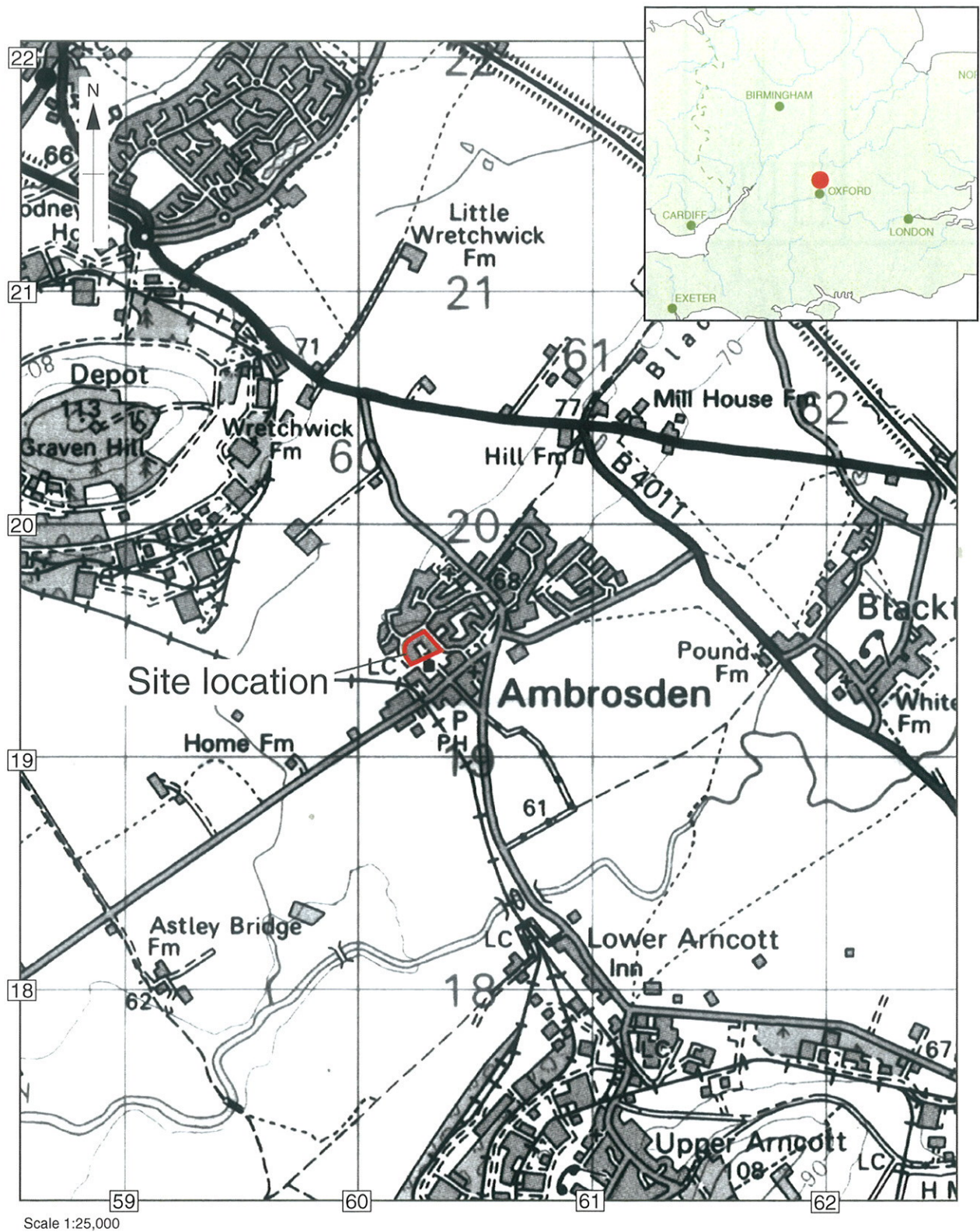
**Type of evaluation:** Trial trenching

**Date and duration of project:** 18th-20th June 2003

**Area of site:** 0.52 Hectares

**Summary of results:** Located the line of the covered passage identified in 1972. Evidence for large scale landscaping across the site was present but no further archaeological features or deposits were identified.

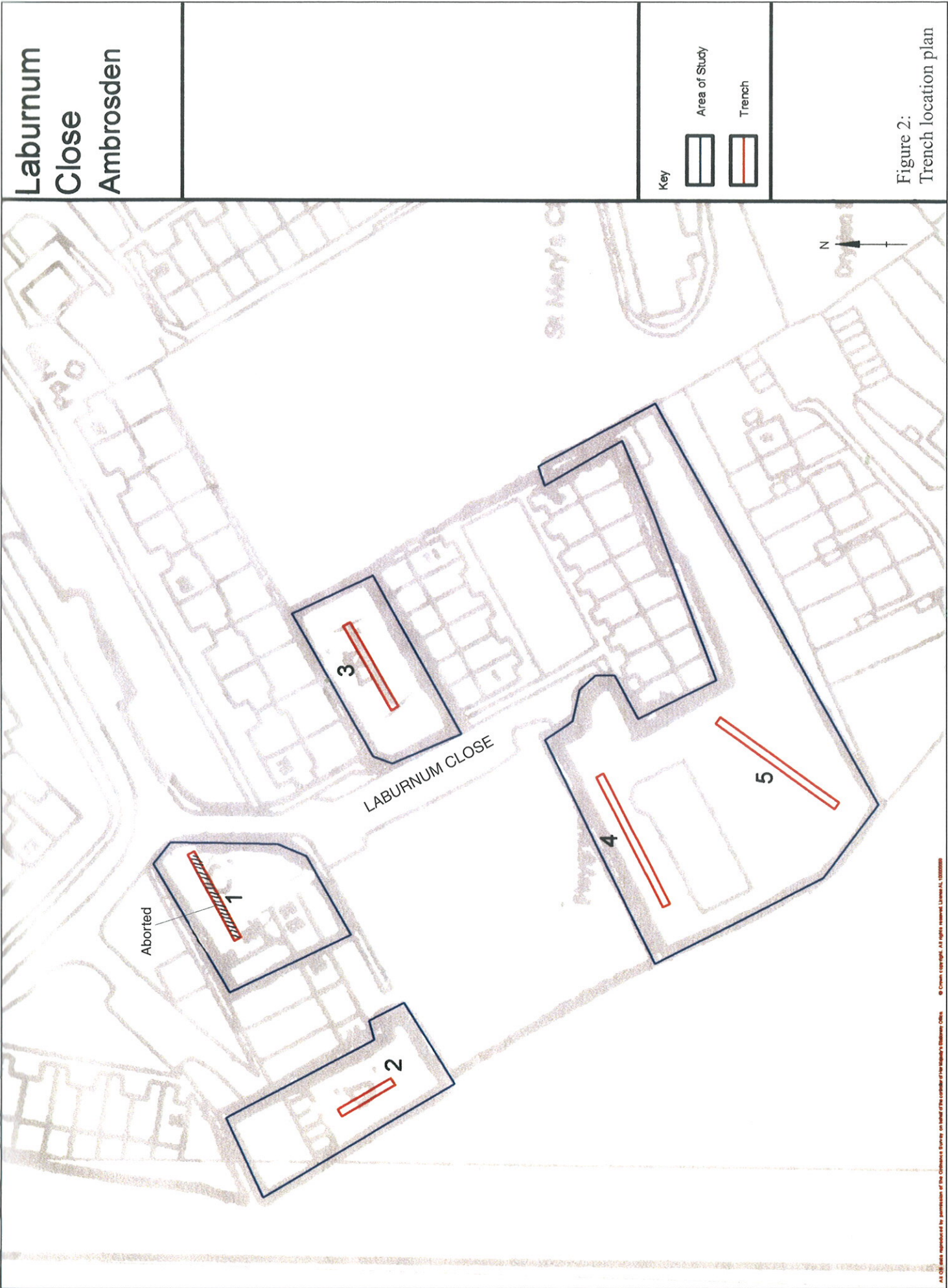
**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OCMS 2003.68



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Figure 1: Site location





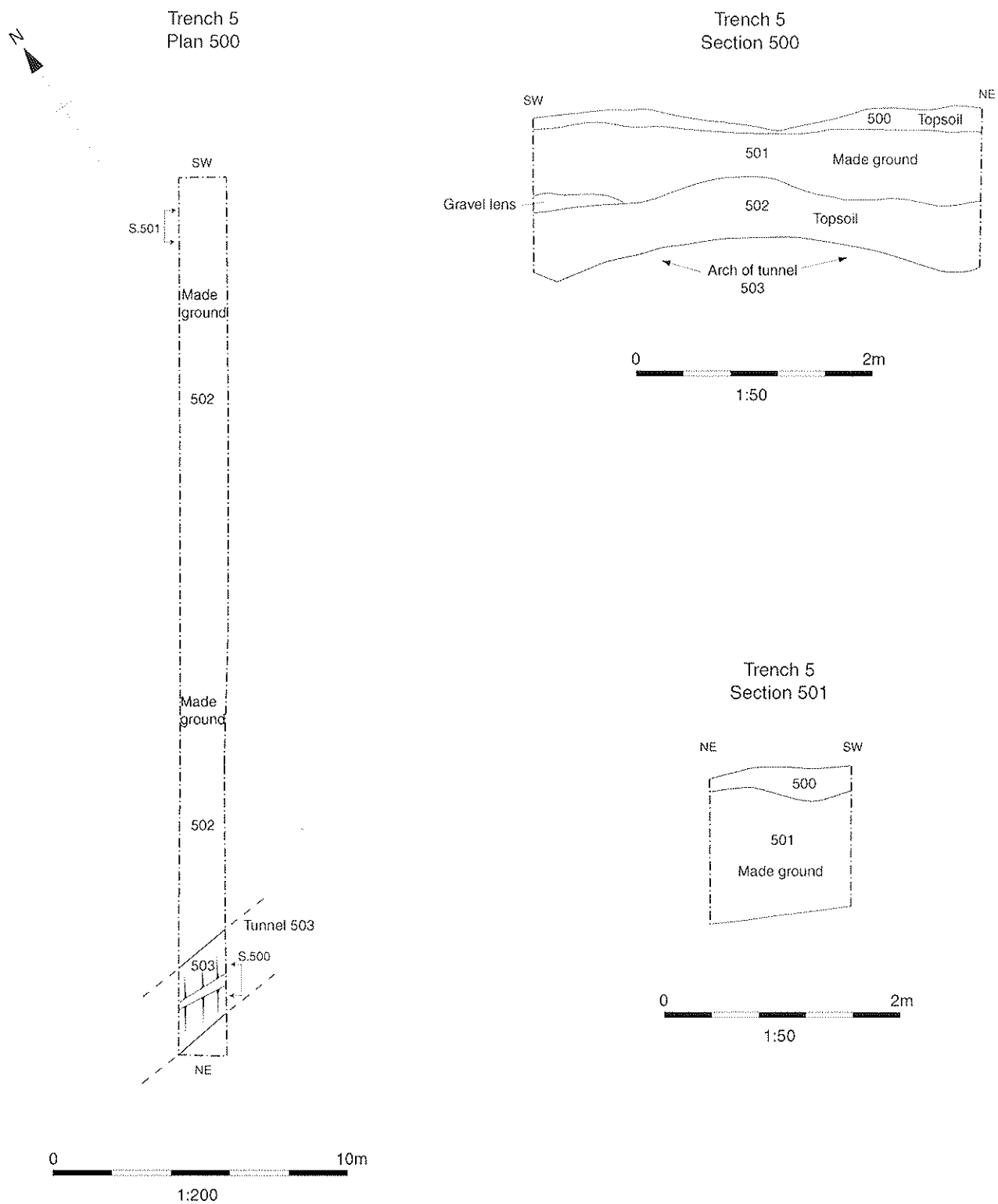
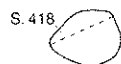


Figure 3: Plan 500 and sections 500 and 501



Section line and number



Interior section line and number



Limit of excavation



Sondage / Interior limit of excavation



Fill line and number



Cut line and number



Structure number



Unclear boundary



Stones



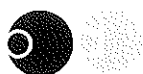
Hachures indicate inclination of slope  
inside excavated feature

14.80 m

Levels

670325E  
689525N

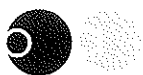
Grid point



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