

Home Farm Aston Abbots Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Evaluation



Oxford Archaeology

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**HOME FARM, ASTON ABBOTTS,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

NGR SP 848 282

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation between 14th and 16th March 2002 at Home Farm, Aston Abbots, Buckinghamshire on behalf of Sutton Homes. Three trenches were excavated. Two ditches [109, 107] were revealed in Trench 1. The fill of Ditch 109 contained medieval pottery, but Ditch 107 was undated. In Trench 2, two ditches and two pits were revealed. The ditches [212, 214] were sealed by the subsoil but remain undated as the fills were also devoid of finds. The two pits [205, 210] in Trench 2 were cut from just below the topsoil and are probably of late post-medieval or recent date. A third trench was excavated to investigate the extent of the ditches revealed in Trench 1 but a large pit [302], also of recent date, appeared to have removed any evidence of them.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In March 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Home Farm, Aston Abbots, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1) on behalf of Sutton Homes in respect of a planning application for residential development (Planning Application No.01/1458). A brief was set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Sandy Kidd, Senior Archaeological Officer with Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service.
- 1.1.2 The site is located at NGR SP 848 202¹ within a grassed paddock formerly used as a farmyard to the rear of Cublington Road, and about 100 m south of the medieval parish church.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on drift geology of glacial sandy gravel over Upper Greensand and Gault Clay at a height of c 135.50 m above OD. The site is located within the village of Aston Abbots, which is situated on a wide, gently sloping, north south orientated ridge. The general landscape consists of rolling hills with farmland with sparse woodland.

1.3 Archaeological background

- 1.3.1 The main archaeological interest of Aston Abbots lies in the fact that it was held as a single manor by St. Albans Abbey from shortly before the Norman Conquest until the Dissolution. The monastic manor lay on the west side of the village (CAS 1041). Between the manor and the church is an area of well preserved deserted settlement earthworks (CAS 1987). A small green lies to the south of the church and west of the development site and it seems possible that this may be a remnant of a once larger green. The field to the east of the site contains ridge and furrow earthworks indicating that it was once part of the village's open fields.

1.3.2 The site itself has produced no archaeological evidence. There are some known locations with archaeological remains adjacent to the development site. These are summarised in the table below.

OAU No.	SMR No.	Description	NGR
1	4431	Site of Post-medieval Mill in Burston, opposite the house called the Abbey, where or near where the present Windmill Hill Farm stands. The field where it stood, adjacent to Windmill Hill Farm, known as Windmill Field.	SP 845 197 (approx)
2	1670	Post-medieval Ice House, brick built under a grassed over soil mound, in excellent condition. The distance between the ice-house and the building it served (The Abbey) is c. 100 m.	SP 8443 2004
3	1041	Medieval and Post medieval. The 'Abbey' in Aston Abbots. A possible Manor house which was the site of the ancient country seat / residence of the Abbot of St. Alban's. The present mansion, known as the 'Abbey' is now a good commodious house of brick & stuccoed having being practically rebuilt in the late 18 th or 19 th century. Some of the walls, however, are of exceptional thickness & may be part of the original building. There is mention of a moat, though no trace of this or fishponds is present. However, the road past the Abbey is known as Moat Lane. It is possible that the large sheet of water in the grounds could be an enlarged or adapted moat or fishpond.	SP 8454 2000
4	1987	Medieval. A group of 5+ house platforms, also a larger rectangular area to the West, approx 60 x 150 m. enclosed on 3 sides by streets & probably too large to be a house platform, maybe a close. Whole area delimited to west by ridge and furrow. Most of this is contained in 1 field. The field slightly to the north & adjoining the school has less certain earthworks associated with a wet pond and a dry one. The main field is now attached to the 'Abbey'. It is most likely that emparkment by the abbots led to the removal of property offensive to the eye.	SP 8458 2019
5	1049	St. James Church. 14 th century building; rebuilt 1855-6. The west tower is late 15 th century / early 16 th .	SP 8474 2024
6	1988	Site, contained within a wedge shaped field, lies in a small valley. Apparently hollow ways run at right angles to the valley at its NE end, giving the impression of possible house platforms, although the valley has also probably been drained. Higher up the valley at the West end is another probable house platform. This therefore represents medieval house platforms.	SP 8470 2058

1.4 Evaluation Aims

- 1.4.1 To determine the condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present in the site area.
- 1.4.2 Identify any remains of Saxon or medieval settlement and related boundary features and Interpret the evaluation results in relation to the historical topography of Aston Abbots.
- 1.4.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 2.1.1 The evaluation consisted of three trenches (Fig. 2). Trench 1 was located at the western end of the site and was 20 m long. Trench 2 was located at the eastern end of the site and comprised of a east/west orientated trench, 20 m long, with a 10 m long arm extending to the south at the western end, and a 10 m long arm extending to the north from the central point. Trench 3 was 8 m long and excavated 10 m to the east and parallel with Trench 1.
- 2.1.2 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a JCB fitted with a toothless bucket.

2.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 2.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20.
- 2.2.2 All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down 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 generally bagged by context.

2.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 2.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered during the evaluation.

2.5 Presentation of results

- 2.5.1 In the following sections the deposits are described by trench. There is additional comment on the finds and the reliability of the results. A context inventory, including finds lists, is included in Appendix 1. The stratigraphy of each trench is described

individually, from earliest to latest, and a discussion and interpretation of the archaeology then follows.

3 RESULTS: GENERAL

3.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 3.1.1 The site is located in a relatively flat grassy paddock on soils of well draining sandy loam.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1

- 4.1.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3) was oriented north-north-west/south-south-east. It was 20 m long, 1.6 m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.5 m.
- 4.1.2 A compact natural orange sand (111) with gravel and occasional patches of manganese was encountered at a depth of 0.95 m below ground surface (135.02 OD). This became deeper orange in colour approximately 4 m from the northern end of the trench.
- 4.1.3 A subsoil of mid-orange sandy loam (106) directly overlay the natural sand (111). Frequent animal and plough disturbance was apparent within the upper 0.2 m of the deposit. The subsoil (106) was uniformly 0.5 m deep throughout, where not truncated by archaeological features.
- 4.1.4 Two north-south orientated ditches (107 and 109) cut the subsoil (106). Ditch 107 was revealed at the northern end of the trench and extended to the south for 7.3 m. The ditch then curved to the east into the west facing section (Fig.3). The ditch was 0.9 m wide and 0.63 m deep. It contained a single fill of loose mid-grey sandy loam (108) with gravel. Several large sherds from a single pottery vessel were retrieved from the fill (see Appendix 2).
- 4.1.5 The second ditch (109) was also orientated north-south. The ditch extended 10.5 m from the southern end of the trench. It was 1.8 m wide and 0.7 m deep. The ditch (109) curved eastwards c 8 m from the southern end of the trench. It cut the subsoil (106) and was filled with an orange-brown sandy loam with gravel (110), which contained no finds. Both of the ditches (107, 109) were sealed by a very mixed layer of grey-brown sandy loam containing gravel (103). The deposit was uniformly 0.35 m deep.
- 4.1.6 A layer of brick rubble and clinker (102), 0.16 m deep, overlay layer 103 throughout the northern half of Trench 1.
- 4.1.7 A square pit (104) that was 0.75 m wide and 1.05 m deep, cut layer 103 some 7 m from the northern end of Trench 1. The pit (104) was filled with a grey brown sandy loam, which contained several sherds of white china dating to the 19th century.

- 4.1.8 Topsoil (101) was 0.27 m deep and the turf (100) overlay pit 104 and the layer of brick rubble 102.

Trench 2

- 4.1.9 The layout of Trench 2 comprised three elements (Fig. 4). The main trench was orientated east-west and was 20 m long. A southern orientated arm, 10 m long, was located at the west end and a northern orientated arm, also 10 m long, was located 6.5 m from the western end. The trench was 1.6 m wide and a maximum of 1.5 m deep.
- 4.1.10 A compact mid-orange natural sand (203) and gravel was revealed at approximately 0.5 m below the ground surface (at 135.38 OD). Irregular patches of manganese staining was present throughout the deposit. The upper 0.2 m of this deposit (203) appeared to have undergone considerable root disturbance.
- 4.1.11 In the northern arm of the trench the natural sand (203) was truncated by two east-west orientated ditches (212, 214), which were sealed by the subsoil (202). Ditch 212 was located 3.5 m from the northern end of the north arm of the trench and was 1.15 m wide and 0.34 m deep. It contained a single fill (211) of grey brown silty sand and gravel, which contained some animal bone but no pottery.
- 4.1.12 Ditch 214 was located 1.4 m to the south of ditch 212 and was also sealed by the subsoil (202). The ditch (214) was 2 m wide and 0.45 m deep. It contained a single fill of grey brown sand and gravel (213). No finds were recovered from the fill.
- 4.1.13 A subsoil (202) of compacted fine orange sand and gravel, 0.4 m thick, sealed the ditches in the northern arm of Trench 1. The upper 0.2 m of the deposit (202) was disturbed by rooting.
- 4.1.14 A large square pit (210) cut the subsoil (202) at the northern limit of the north arm. It was 1.55 m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.32 m. Pit 210 contained three fills of compacted sand and gravel (206, 207, 209) and one of blue-grey clay (208). No finds were recovered from the fills (206-208).
- 4.1.15 A second square pit (205) was located 0.65 m from the southern end of the south arm of Trench 1. This pit (205) also cut the subsoil (203). The pit was 1.6 m wide, 0.59 m deep and was filled with a loose orange silty sand (204), which was devoid of finds.
- 4.1.16 The square pits (205, 210) were both sealed by a topsoil of sandy loam (201), which was 0.25 m thick throughout the trench.

Trench 3

- 4.1.17 Trench 3 (Fig. 5) was orientated from north-south and measured 7 m long and 1.6 m wide. The trench was positioned in order to define the possible eastward extent of the ditches 207 and 209 in Trench 1.
- 4.1.18 A fine, compacted mid orange natural sand with gravel (304), with lighter bands and irregular patches of dark red manganese staining within it, was encountered at a depth of approximately 1.2 m below ground (134.91 OD).

- 4.1.19 A large pit (302), 1.2 m deep, extended beyond the limits of Trench 3 (7 m by 1.6 m). It was filled with a loose, mid-brown sandy loam that contained white china and glass dating from the late 19th or early 20th centuries.
- 4.1.20 Pit 302 cut a fine, silty sand subsoil with gravel (303), 0.3 m thick, which overlaid the natural sand (304), where not cut by pit 302.
- 4.1.21 The fill (301) of pit 302 was overlain by a topsoil (300), 0.22 m thick, containing pottery and ceramic building material fragments of modern date.

4.2 Finds

Pottery

- 4.2.1 A total of 23 sherds of course tempered pottery were retrieved from the fill 108 of ditch 107 in Trench 1. These were assessed by pottery specialist, Paul Blinkhorn. All of the pottery dated from the early medieval period. Further comments may be found in Appendix 2.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 5.1.1 The two east to west orientated ditches (212, 214) in Trench 2 were sealed by the subsoil (202). No dating evidence was retrieved from the fill of these ditches (211, 213). However, Ditch 107, in Trench 1, clearly cut the subsoil and was therefore later in date.
- 5.1.2 As the fill (108) of Ditch 107 produced pottery of medieval date, the ditches in Trench 2 (212, 214) are likely to date from an earlier period. The ditches (212, 214) in Trench 2 did not appear to continue on the same alignment as far as Trench 1, 20 m to the west but may have curved to the north-east beyond the northern limits of the trench.
- 5.1.3 The relative paucity of archaeological finds from the ditch fills suggests that they were located some distance from the medieval or earlier settlement of Aston Abbots. All four ditches were similar in size and form and all possessed a single fill. Due to the porous nature of the natural deposits into which the base of the ditches were cut, it seems unlikely that they served as drainage ditches.
- 5.1.4 More probable, therefore, is that the ditches represent field or enclosure boundaries demarcating the agricultural land situated on the high flat ground located to the east of the village.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>No./wt</i>	<i>Date</i>
001								
	100	Layer	>1.60	0.20	Turf			
	101	Layer	>1.60	0.28	Topsoil			
	102	Layer	>1.60	0.16	Make-up			20 th c
	103	Layer	>1.60	0.35	Plough soil			
	104	Cut	0.75	1.05	Pit			19 th c
	105	Fill	0.75	1.05	Pit fill			19 th c
	106	Layer	>1.60	0.50	Subsoil			
	107	Cut	1.10	0.63	Ditch			
	108	Fill	1.10	0.63	Ditch fill	Pot		Med
	109	Cut	0.72	0.72	Ditch			
	110	Fill	0.72	0.72	Ditch fill			
	111	Layer	>1.60	-	Natural sand and gravel			
002								
	201	Layer	>1.60	0.25	Topsoil			
	202	Layer	>1.60	0.30	Subsoil			
	203	Layer	0.60	0.20	Natural sand			
	204	Fill	1.60	0.59	Pit fill			
	205	Cut	1.60	0.59	pit			
	206	Fill	1.55	0.90	F.O 205			
	207	Fill	0.82	0.22	F.O 205			
	208	Fill	1.06	0.38	F.O 205			
	209	Fill	1.07	0.15	F.O 205			
	210	Cut	1.55	1.32	Ditch/ Pit			modern
	211	Fill	1.15	0.34	F.O 212			
	212	Cut	1.15	0.34	Ditch			
	213	Fill	2.00	0.42	F.O 214			
	214	Cut	2.00	0.42	Ditch			
003								
	300	Layer	1.60	0.25	Topsoil			
	301	Layer	1.60	1.20	F.O 302	Pot		19th c

Trench	Ctxt No	Type	Width (m)	Thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No./wt	Date
	302	Cut	1.60	1.20	Pit			
	303	Layer	>1.60	0.22	Subsoil			
	304	Layer	>1.60	-	Natural sand			

APPENDIX 2 POTTERY

Pottery from Aston Abbots, Home Farm, Bucks by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 26 sherds with a total weight of 835 g. All the pottery was early medieval, apart from two sherds (4 g) of modern material. It was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994), as follows:

MC1: Shelly Coarseware, AD1100-1400. 1 sherd, 20 g.

MS3: Medieval Grey Sandy Wares. Mid 11th – late 14th century. 23 sherds, 811 g.

The rest of the assemblage comprised miscellaneous 19th – 20th century wares such as late English Stoneware, refined white earthenwares, etc. 2 sherds, 4 g.

The majority of the assemblage comprised large pieces (23 sherds, 811 g) of a single early medieval sandy ware jar from one context (108). The good quality of the preservation of this vessel suggests that there was contemporary occupation in the immediate vicinity of the place of deposition. If further work is carried out on the site, it is recommended that the vessel be reconstructed and illustrated in any future report.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	MC1		MS3		19th/20th		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
108			23	811			M11thC?
303	1	20			2	4	20thC
Total	1	20	23	811	2	4	

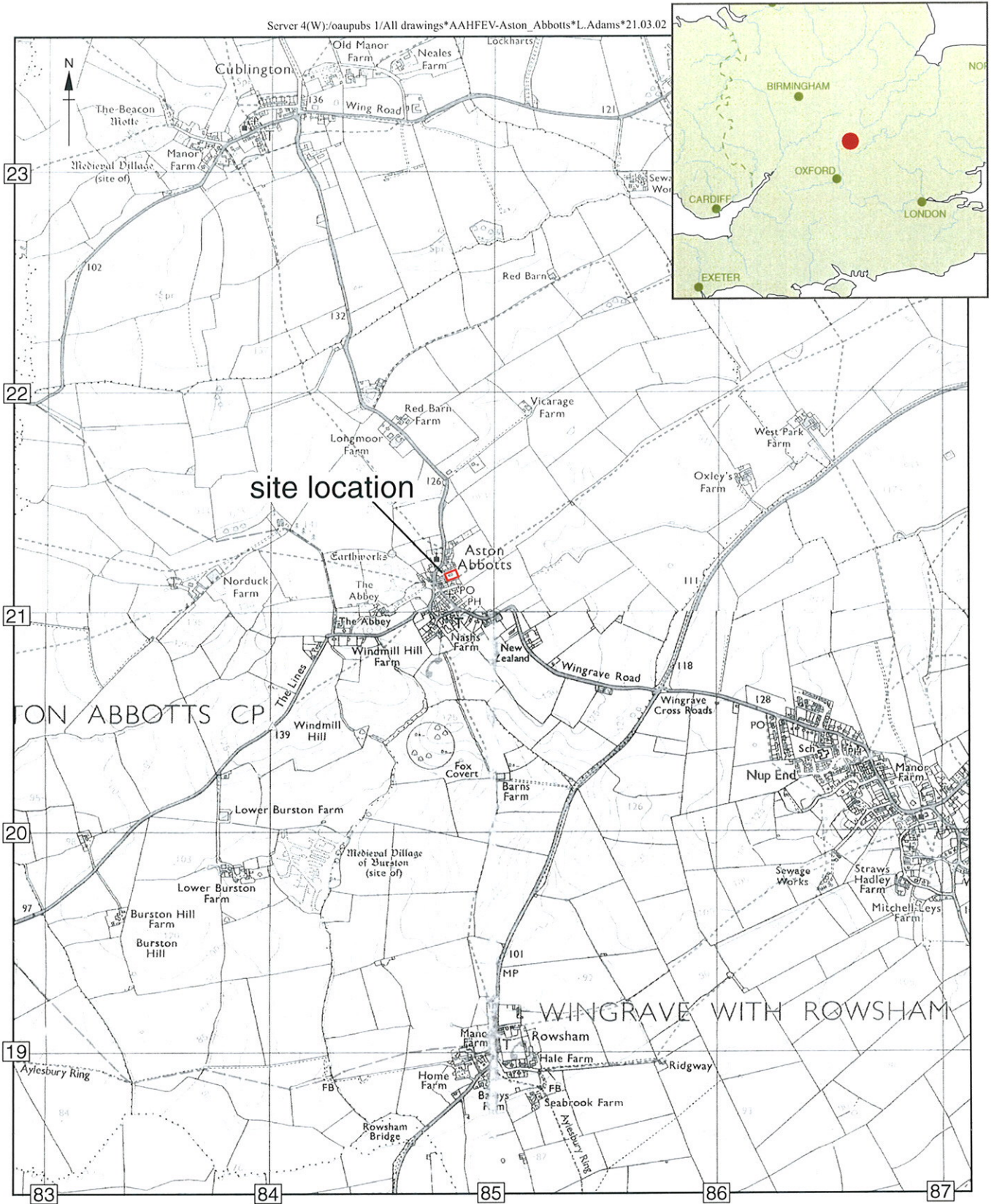
APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Mynard, DC and Zeepvat RJ, 1992 *Great Linford Bucks Archaeol Soc Monog Ser 3*

Wilkinson D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual* (unpub.)

Zeepvat, RJ, Roberts, JS and King, NA, 1994 *Caldecotte, Milton Keynes. Excavation and Fieldwork 1966-91* Bucks Archaeol Soc Monog Ser 9

APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** Home Farm, Aston Abbots, Bucks**Site code:** AAHF02**Grid reference**Type of evaluation: SP 848 282**Date and duration of project:** 14-16/03/02**Summary of results:** The evaluation revealed a small group of ditches marking land divisions, one of which contained medieval pottery; the remainder were undated. Two pits in Trench 2 were probably of post-medieval or recent date. A large pit was revealed in Trench 3.**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with an appropriate museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Trench locations

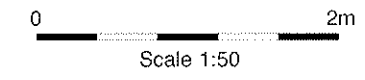
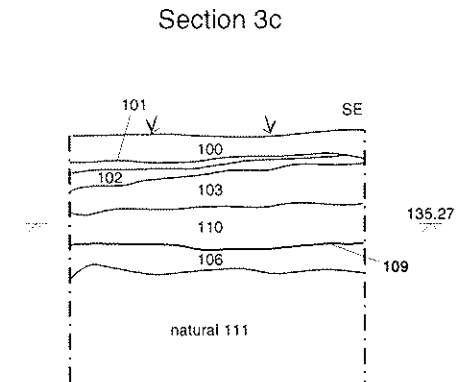
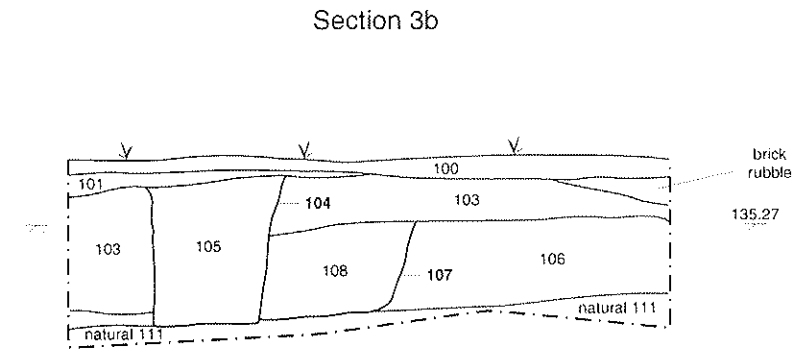
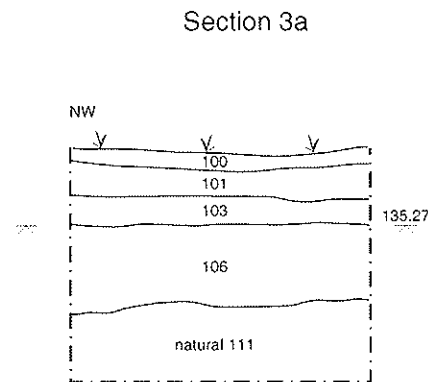
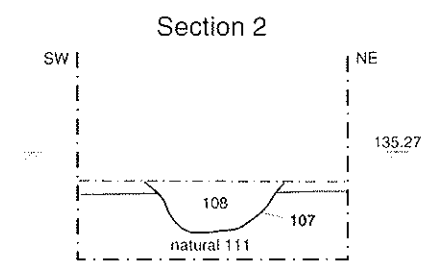
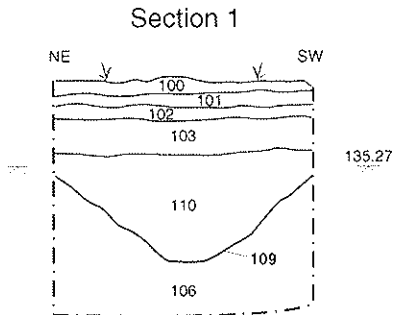
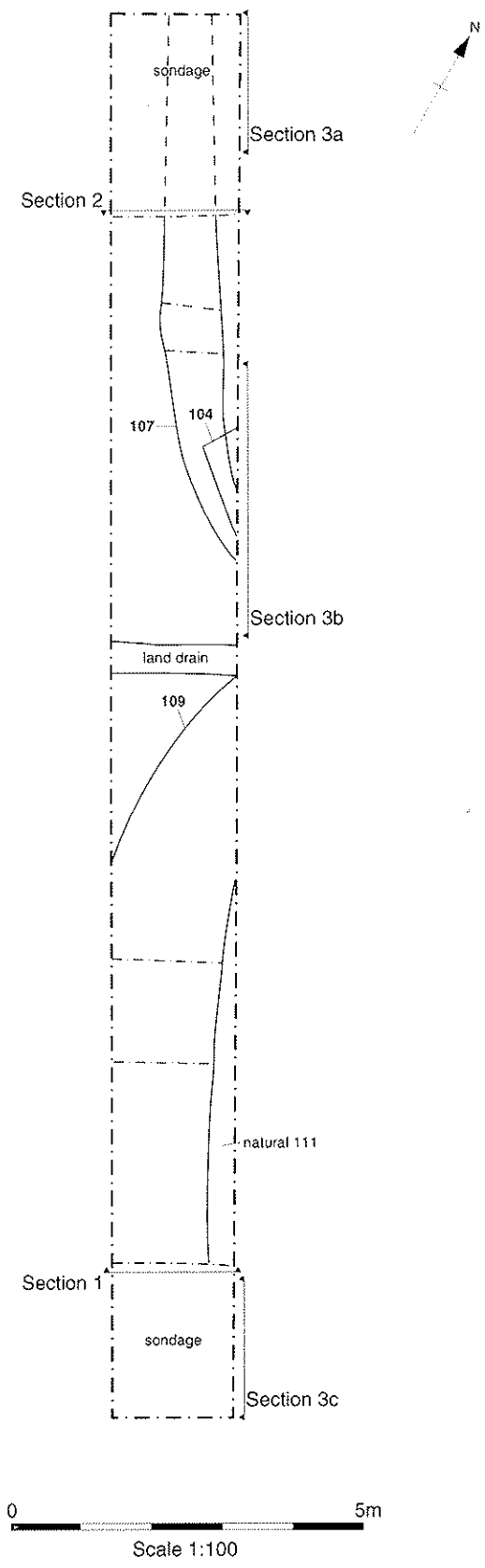


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and sections

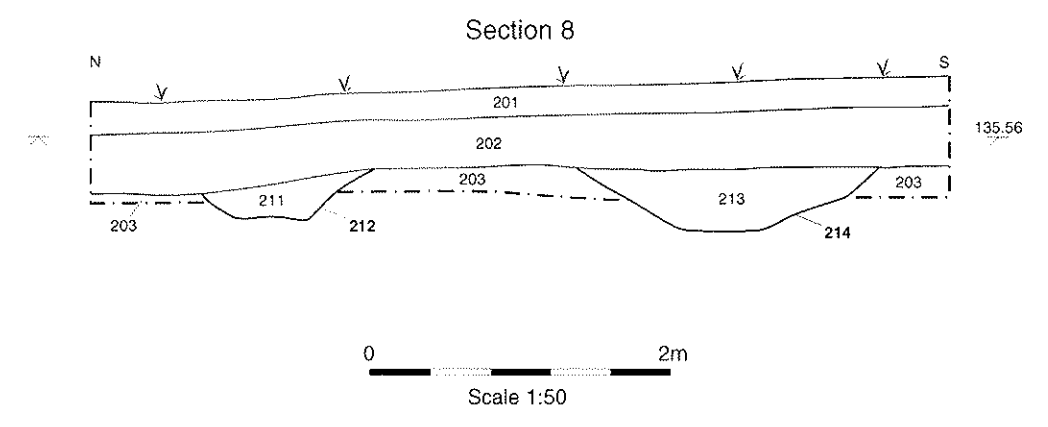
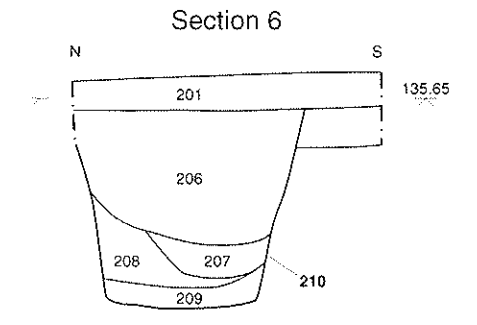
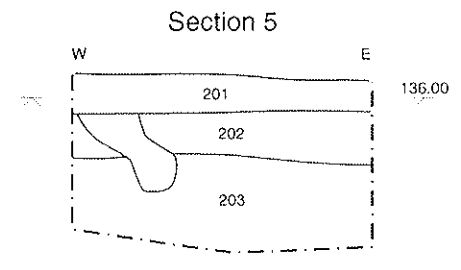
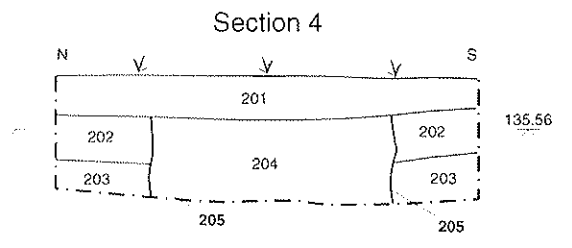
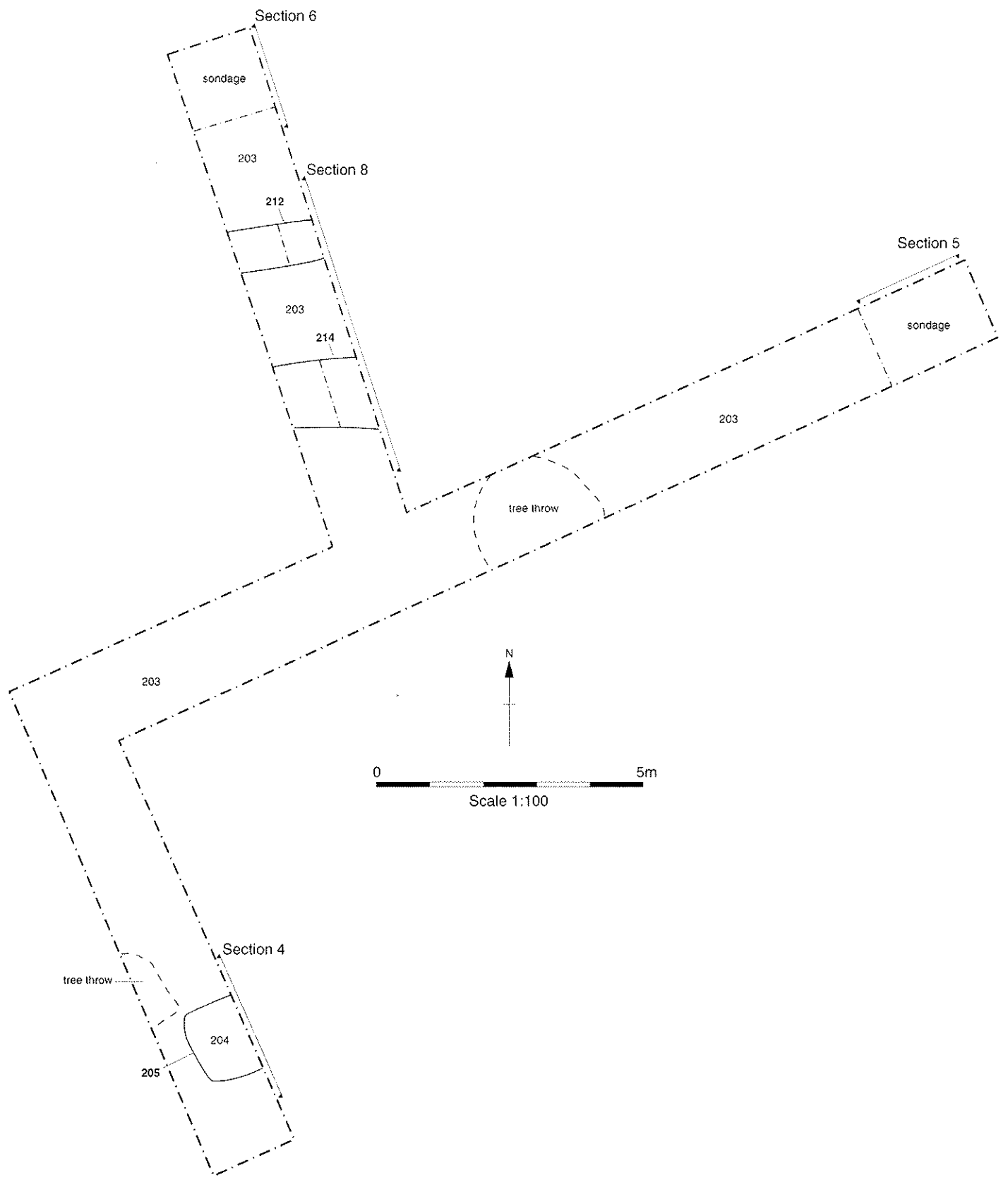
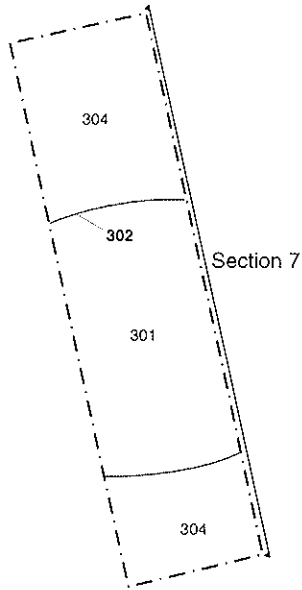


Figure 4: Trench 2, plan and sections



Section 7

0 5m

Scale 1:100

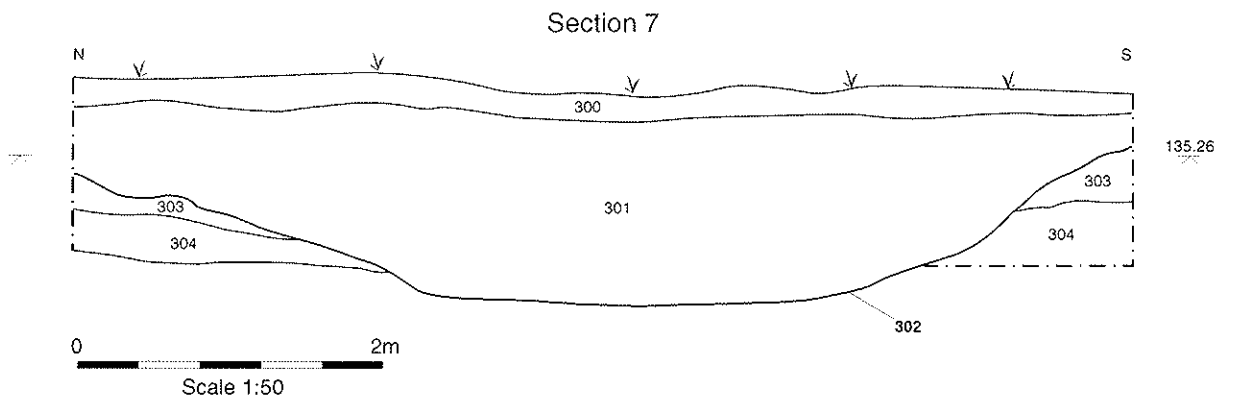


Figure 5: Trench 3, plan and section



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