CHCMFAOL

Cox's Meadow Cheltenham Flood Alleviation Scheme

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Oxford Archaeology

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Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

In January 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the site known as Cox's Meadow in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire on behalf of Brian Evans and Associates. The evaluation revealed evidence of extensive ridge and furrow cultivation over the development area, the foundation remains of post-medieval agricultural building and a paleo-channel of the former River Chelt to the north of the site. No further evidence of archaeological remains or activity was encountered during the evaluation.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between the 20th and 23rd of January 2004 OA carried out a field evaluation at Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire on behalf of Brian Evans and Associates representing the Environmental Agency (EA) in respect of a planning condition set by the Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) for flood alleviation work on this site. A brief was set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2004) agreed with Charles Parry, the Senior Archaeological Officer for GCC.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 Cox's Meadow is situated to the south east of the centre of Cheltenham, immediately north west of the confluence of the River Chelt and Lilley Brook (Fig.1). The site is bounded to the north east by Sandford Mill Road and the present channel of the River Chelt, to the south-west by a sports ground and residential areas, to the north-west by the A 40 and to the east by residential gardens (NGR: SO 956 212). The site lies on alluvium overlying sands and gravel at approximately 66 m OD. The site is presently used for recreational purposes and occupies an area of 5.3 Hectares.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 In October 2003 OA carried out a geophysical survey of the meadow, which detected multiple anomalies with archaeological potential including several linear features, a rectangular enclosure and a possible palaeochannel representing an earlier course of the River Chelt (OA 2003).

1.3.2 The meadow is known to have been used for grazing animals until recently. The concrete bases observed on the eastern side of the meadow attest to the location of former agricultural buildings on the eastern side of the meadow which formed part of a pastoral farm.

1.3.3 An earlier agricultural regime is indicated by the presence of ridge and furrow, which appear to respect the old river channel and are potentially medieval in date.

1.3.4 To the north of the meadow is the site of Sandford mill. The canalised nature of the current river course may be linked to this creating a more efficient use of water power.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area and in particular to target areas known to contain anomalies detected during the geophysical survey.

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 twelve trenches each measuring 30 m long by 2 m wide representing a 2% sample of the development area (Fig 2).These trenches were sited to intercept the anomalies produced by the geophysical survey as well as providing coverage of non-anomalous areas of the development site. Subsequently Trench 12 was deemed to be outside the development area and was not excavated.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 2 m wide toothless grading bucket. Excavation proceeded to the top of the natural geology or to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

3.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and where possible to retrieve dating evidence. All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers. The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:100 where sterile, and at 1:50 if containing archaeological features. Section drawings of features and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All features, sections and trenches were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (OAU, 1992).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. The majority of the finds were of modern origin and were evaluated on site but not retained. Only the finds recovered from the paleo-channel were kept.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

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

3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below trench by trench followed by an overall discussion.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The site was located on a gentle slope running from the south west boundary down towards the north east extent of the site. All the trenches came down onto natural drift geology represented by a sandy clay alluvium. Sondages were dug in Trenches 7, 8, 9 and 13 in order to identify the depth of alluvium and to determine whether the alluvium sealed earlier archaeology. All the soil divisions were sharply defined with little or no mixing between the contexts. Groundwater was not encountered in any of the trenches.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 All the significant archaeological deposits were confined to trenches located to the north-west and centre of the site.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 All the trenches displayed a similar stratigraphy with the base of the trench being machined down onto the surface of an orange brown alluvium at a depth of between 0.18 m and 0.5 m below ground level. Of the four sondages dug only that in Trench 13 penetrated through this deposit onto the clay sand natural (1303) underneath giving a thickness of 0.8 m, whilst the remainder showed the alluvium to be in excess of 1.0 m deep.

5.1.2 Within Trenches 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11 and 13 the alluvium was overlaid by a dark yellow silty clay of between 0.18 m and 0.25 m representing an earlier ploughsoil associated with ridge and furrow cultivation. All the trenches were sealed by a layer of modern topsoil of between 0.18 m and 0.3 m.

5.1.3 Only Trenches 4, 6 and 8 produced significant archaeology and only these will be considered in detail. Full details of the stratigraphy and the contexts of the other trenches can be found in the context inventory.

Trench 4

5.1.4 This trench was excavated to a depth of 0.5 m below ground level (Fig.4, Section 401) onto an orange brown sandy clay alluvium (405). This was overlaid by a 0.32 m thick layer of dark yellow brown silty clay (404), an earlier plough soil. Cutting

through these layers was an 11 m wide feature (403) the palaeo-channel shown on the geophysical survey. This was filled with a blue grey stiff clay (402) containing many modern brick ends. A modern land drain backfilled with iron clinker cut across the trench at this level producing the linear anomaly which appeared on the geophysical survey. These contexts were then sealed by an overall layer of modern topsoil (401), 0.2 m deep.

Trench 6

5.1.5 This trench was positioned to cut across a possible paleo-channel indicated by the geophysical survey (Fig.3). The majority of the trench was machined down to a depth of 0.5 m below ground level down onto the surface of an orange brown sandy clay alluvium (603). Overlying this was a 0.22 m deep layer of a dark yellow brown silt clay (602), representing an earlier plough soil. At this level a 10 m wide feature was visible which was machine excavated 1.7 m deep (607) (Fig.3, Section 602). This paleo-channel had shallow sloping sides and a flat base and represented a former meander of the River Chelt indicated on the geophysical survey. The primary fill was a 0.25 m thick layer of sandy silts (606) containing fragments of 19th century pottery. This was overlaid by a 0.15 m layer of black organic silts (605). The remainder of the feature was backfilled to a depth of 1.3 m with a stiff blue grey clay (604) which contained many 20th century brick ends. The length of the trench was then sealed by a 0.22 m deep layer of modern topsoil (601).

Trench 8

5.1.6 A 1.5 m deep sondage was dug at the north eastern end of this trench cutting into an orange brown sandy clay alluvium (802) down to a depth of 1.2 m but did not reach the base of this layer. The remainder of the trench was excavated for a depth of 0.15 m below the surface of (802). This alluvium was overlaid by a layer of worked topsoil (801) 0.3 m in depth. A rectangular structure shown on the geophysical survey proved to be bricks and clinker contained wholly within the topsoil (Fig.4 Section 803) and represents the base of a modern of agricultural outbuilding associated with the former farm. The linear anomaly also shown on the geophysical survey was not defined.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 All the finds observed were of 19th and 20th century in origin. The bricks recorded within the clay backfill of the river meander were of a modern deep frogged type and were noted but not retained. Fragments of shallow frogged bricks of 19th and early 20th century origin were noted within the modern worked topsoil together with fragments of transfer printed and late glazed earthenware domestic pottery indicative of 19th century manuring practise. Fragments of 19th and 20th century transfer print and glazed stoneware were recovered from the primary fill of the river meander.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 The conditions in the field were wet with heavy showers. There was relatively little intrusion by modern features such as services and land drains. The percentage sample, distribution, positioning of the trenches over anomalies produced by the geophysical survey and blank areas of the site is believed to have given a good reflection of the overall archaeological potential of the site.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 The results of the evaluation shows very little archaeological remains exist on the site confirming the information provided within the archaeological and historical background section. The presence of a buried ploughsoil within Trenches 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11 and 13 is characteristic of soil structures produced by ridge and furrow ploughing. The absence of dating evidence from these layers suggests a medieval date rather than later practise.

6.2.2 The presence of the river meander within Trenches 2, 4 and 6 confirms both the geophysical survey and visible undulations in the present day ground surface. The organic silting layer (604) found near the base of the channel is indicative of stagnant or low water flow conditions, suggesting isolation and may have formed as the result of the construction of a leat feeding Sandford Mill. The backfilling and levelling of this feature with clay and modern brick appears to have been undertaken with the last 30 years possibly to facilitate recreational use of the site.

6.2.3 Investigation of the other anomalies shown on the geophysical survey proved disappointing. The rectangular feature cut by Trench 2 proved to be a modern brick and cinder foundation within the worked topsoil suggesting a late agricultural origin, whilst the linear anomalies cut by Trenches 2 and 4 proved to be modern land drains, which had been backfilled with iron clinker and hence had produced strong traces. Other slight linear anomalies cut by Trenches 3, 8, 9 and 10 failed to produce any discernible cause and may indicate mole drains.

6.2.4 The information gathered during this evaluation all relates to medieval and post-medieval farming practise with no indication or earlier archaeology or other landuse.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Depth (m)*	*Comment*	*Finds*	*Date*
1						
	101	Layer	0.0 m - 0.18 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	102	Layer	0.18 m - 0.4 m	Earlier ploughsoil / subsoil	-	-
	103	Layer	0.4 m - >0.5m	Alluvium	-	-
	104	Fill	0.18 m - >0.5 m	Backfill of service trench		
	105	Cut	0.18 m - >0.5m	Modern service trench	Tarmac	C20th
2						
	201	Layer	0.0 m - 0.18 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	202	Layer	0.18 m - 0.44 m	Earlier ploughsoil / subsoil	-	-
	203	Fill	0.44 m - 0.54 m	Spread of backfill from old river meander	Brick	C20th
	204	Layer	>0.54 m	Alluvium	-	-
	205	Cut	>0.54 m	Old river meander	-	-
3						
	301	Layer	0.0 m - 0.22 m	Modern topsoil	--	-
	302	Layer	> 0.22 m	Alluvium	-	-
4						
	401	Layer	0.0 m - 0.14 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	402	Fill	0.14 m - >0.5 m	Backfill of old river meander	Brick	C20th
	403	Cut	>0.14 m	Old river meander	-	-
	404	Layer	0.14 m - 0.44 m	Earlier ploughsoil / subsoil	-	-
	405	Layer	>0.44 m	Alluvium	-	-
5						
	501	Layer	0.0 m - 0.20 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	502	Layer	> 0.2 m	Alluvium	-	-
6						
	601	Layer	0.0 m - 0.22 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	602	Layer	0.22 m - 0.42 m	Earlier ploughsoil / subsoil	-	-
	603	Layer	0.42 m - >1.7 m	Alluvium	-	-
	604	Fill	0.22 m - 1.35 m	Backfill of old river meander	Brick, wood	C20th
	605	Fill	1.35 m - 1.52 m	Organic silting	-	-

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Depth (m)*	*Comment*	*Finds*	*Date*
	606	Fill	1.52 m - 1.7 m	Primary silting	Pottery, Glass	19th cent
	607	Cut	0.2 m - 1.7 m	Line of old river meander	-	-
7						
	701	Layer	0.0 m - 0.15 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	702	Layer	0.15 m - 0.45 m	Earlier ploughsoil/subsoil	-	-
	703	Layer	0.45 m - >1.6 m	Alluvium	-	-
8						
	801	Layer	0.0 m - 0.3 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	802	Layer	0.3 m - >0.64 m	Alluvium	-	-
9						
	901	Layer	0.0 m - 0.22 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	902	Layer	0.22 m - >0.5 m	Alluvium	-	-
10						
	1001	Layer	0.0 m - 0.22 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	1002	Layer	0.22 m - >0.5 m	Alluvium	-	-
11						
	1101	Layer	0.0 m - 0.25 m	Imported topsoil/landscaping	-	-
	1102	Layer	0.25 m - 0.4 m	Earlier ploughsoil/subsoil	-	-
	1103	Layer	0.4 m - >0.5 m	Alluvium	-	-
	1104	Layer	0.0 m - 0.25 m	Original modern topsoil	-	-
13						
	1301	Layer	0.0 m - 0.24 m	Modern topsoil	-	-
	1302	Layer	0.24 m - 0.44 m	Earlier ploughsoil/subsoil	-	-
	1303	Layer	0.44 m - 1.24 m	Alluvium	-	-
	1304	Layer	1.24 m - >1.3 m	Natural sand	-	-

APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

OA, 2003 *Geophysical Survey of Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham. Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA, 2004 *Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham Flood Alleviation Scheme, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
Site code: CMCHFA 04
Grid reference: SO 956 212
Type of evaluation: Twelve 30 m x 2 m trenches
Date and duration of project: 4 days, 20th to 23rd January 2004
Area of site: Approximately 5.3 hectares
Summary of results: Evidence of extensive ridge and furrow of possible medieval date, a paleao-channel of the River Chelt and modern agricultural outbuildings. No earlier archaeology was encountered.
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Cheltenham Museum in due course

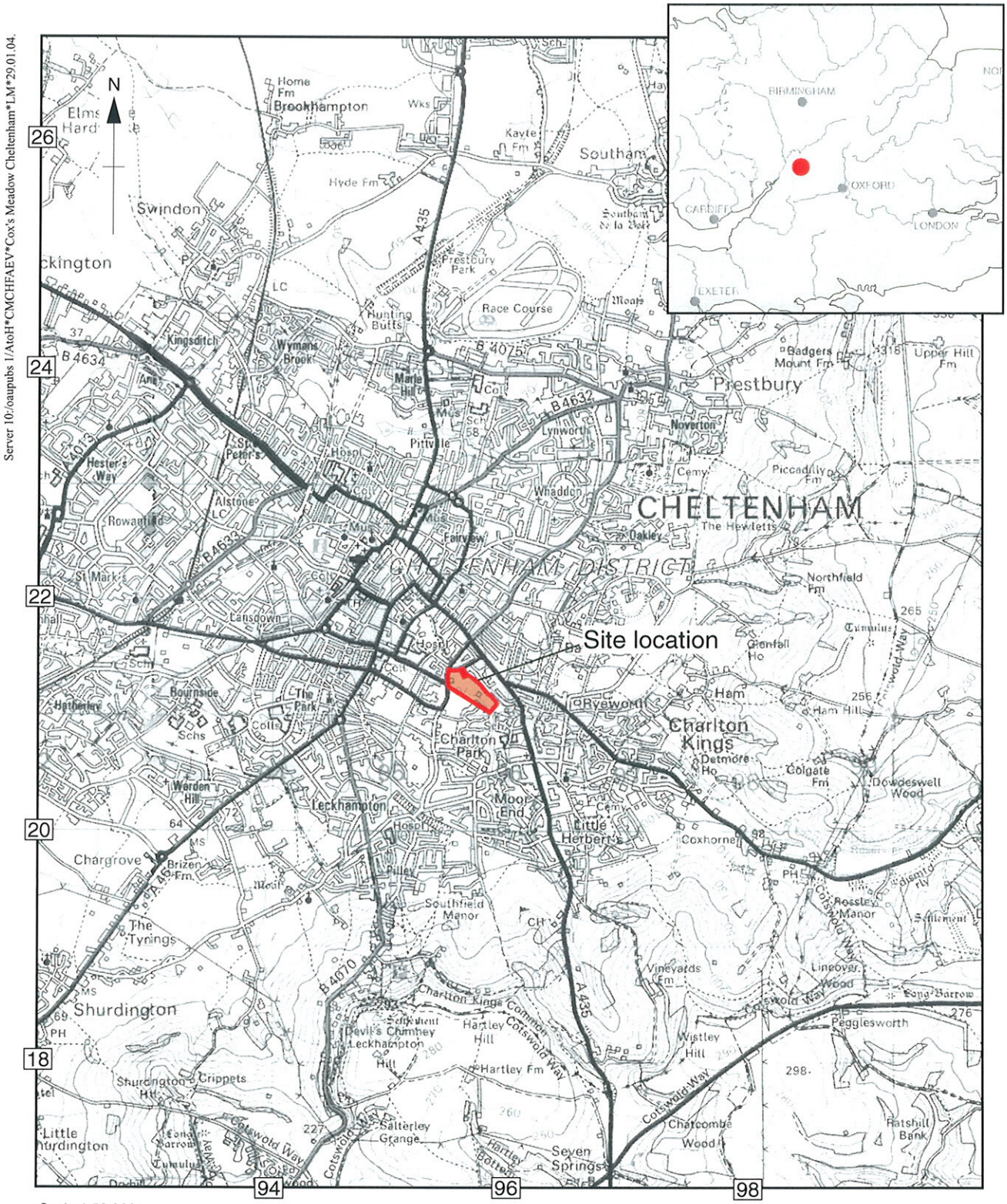


Figure 1: Site location

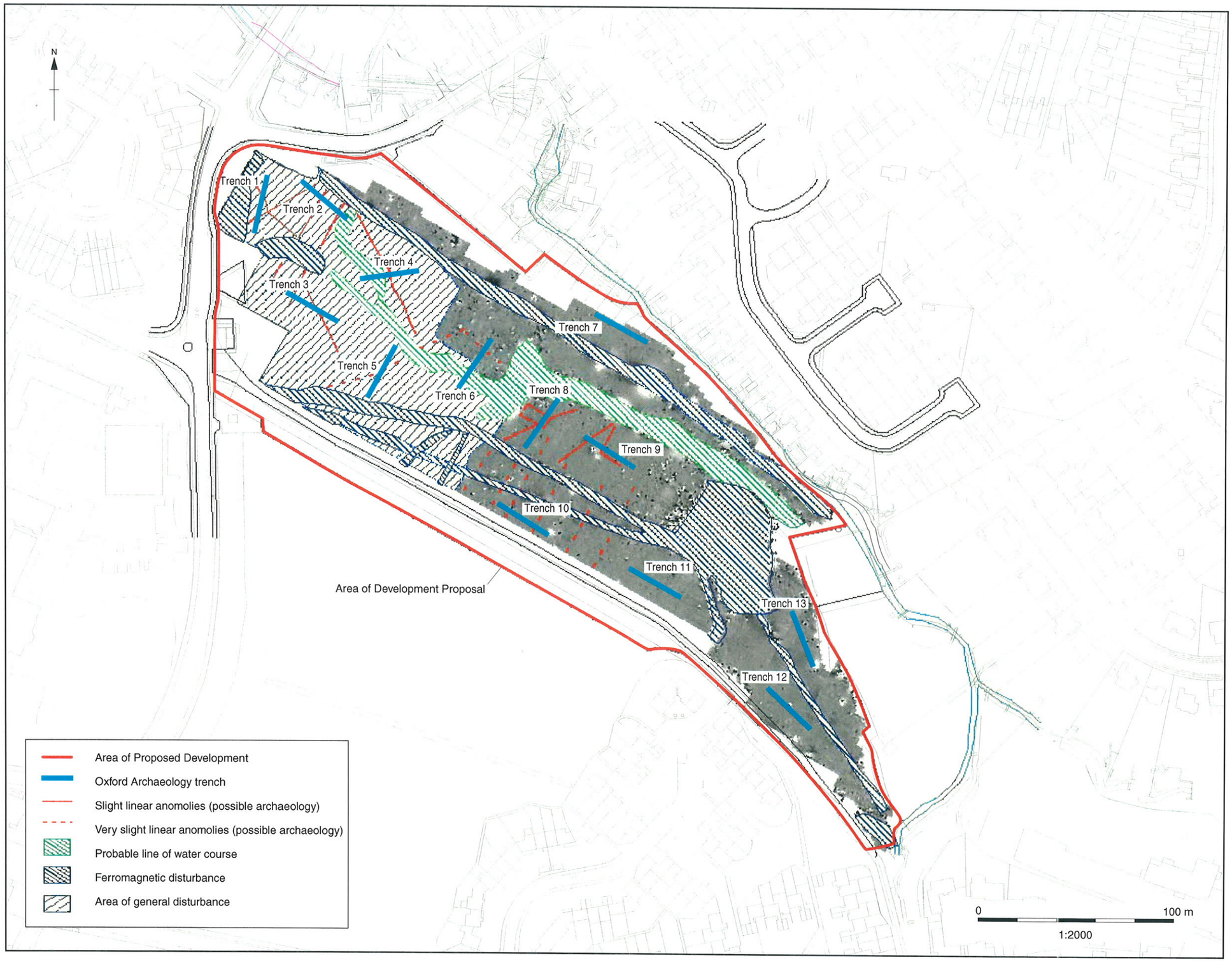
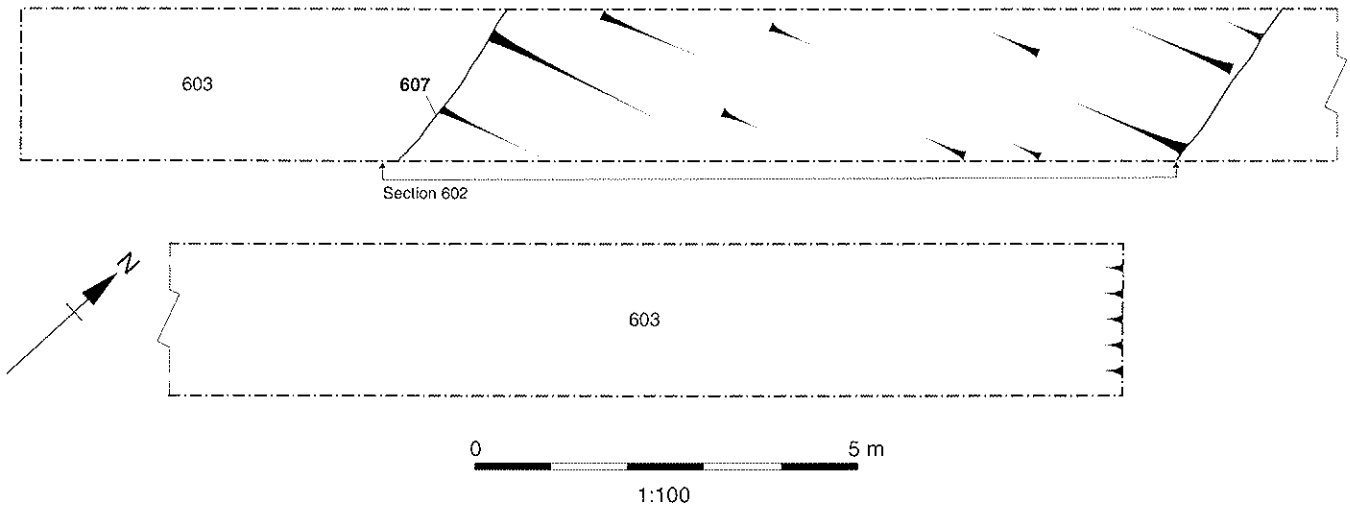


Figure 2: Trench location plan and geophysical survey



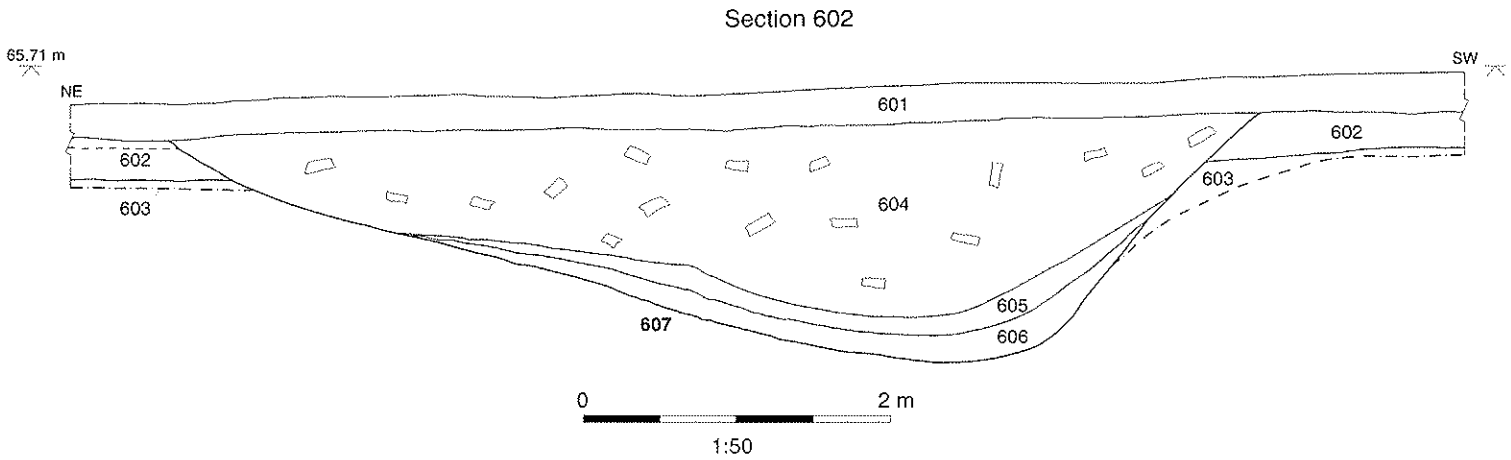


Figure 3: Plan of Trench 6 and section 602

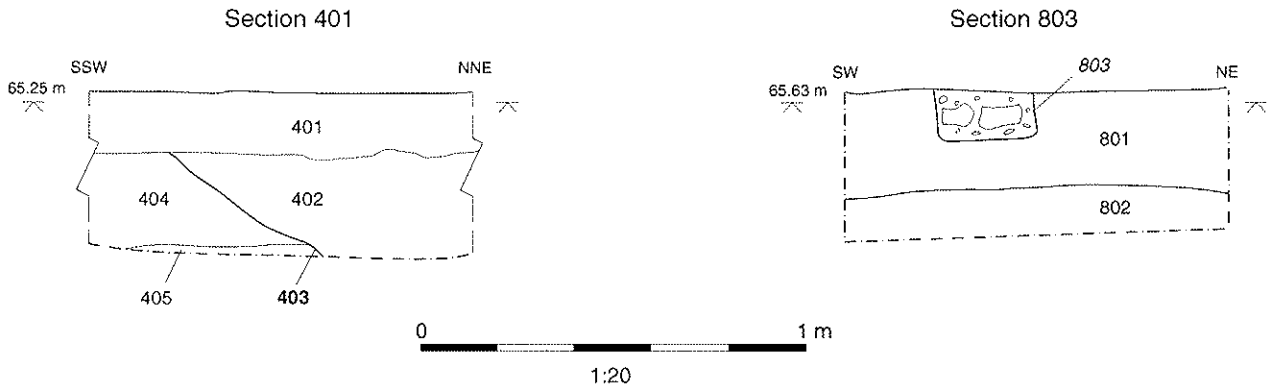


Figure 4: Sections 401 and 803

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