

AKED

Landscape Evolution Centre  
Hill Farm  
Little Wittenham  
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological Impact Assessment**



**Oxford Archaeology**

April 2004

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Northmoor Trust

## **Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire**

NGR: SU 5635 9255

### **Archaeological Impact Assessment**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Northmoor Trust is seeking planning permission for the refurbishment and redevelopment of the redundant farm buildings at Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, (NGR: SU 5635 9255) from South Oxfordshire District Council. The site will be used both as the offices of the Trust, and to provide a new educational focus, the Landscape Evolution Centre. An initial planning application has been revised, and is now being re-submitted (Ref: P02/W0538). The redevelopment comprises conversion of some of the existing buildings for educational purposes and minor extensions to others with associated car parking, landscaping and other facilities (see Figure 1).
- 1.2. The site lies in an area of known archaeological potential and therefore, on the recommendation of the County Archaeological Services, the planning authority has stated that 'no development shall be undertaken until a scheme of archaeological works has been agreed with the planning authority'. This is in line with PPG16 and local plan policies.
- 1.3. The Oxfordshire County Archaeologist Paul Smith has stated that the first step in implementing this scheme will be an Archaeological Impact Assessment, following which he will determine the appropriate mitigation before and during construction and advise the district planning authority accordingly.
- 1.4. The Archaeological Impact Assessment that is presented in this document draws upon a variety of sources of information. These comprise: Desktop Assessment, fieldwalking, cropmarks, geophysical survey, excavation, trial pit excavation and building recording.
- 1.5. A desk-based assessment of the known archaeological potential was produced by Oxford Archaeology for Castle Hill and its surroundings in advance of the current project (OA 2002). The results of that assessment, which include cropmarks plotted by the National Monuments Record and the results of

excavations carried out in 1947 and 1970 north-east of Hill Farm, are summarised in section 3.1 below, and are illustrated on Figure 2.

- 1.6. Fieldwalking was carried out by a team of volunteers under the supervision of professionals from Oxford Archaeology in the winters of 2002 and 2003. This covered the field immediately south-west of Hill Farm, and the western half of the large field south of the farm up to a line some 100 m east of the farm. This complements an earlier fieldwalking exercise carried out for the Northmoor Trust in the late 1990s, which covered most of the eastern half of the same field. The areas walked, and the results of the survey, are shown on Figures 3-7, and are summarised in section 3.4 below.
- 1.7. A geophysical magnetometer survey of the interior of the Castle Hill hillfort was carried out by English Heritage in 2002. This was followed in 2003 by an 8-hectare magnetometer survey of the fields to the south and west of the hillfort that lie north of Hill Farm. This has been supplemented during 2004 by further magnetometer survey carried out by a volunteer team supervised by Alister Bartlett and Oxford Archaeology, which has covered some 12 hectares around Hill Farm to the east, south and south-west. In addition, small areas have also been subject to resistivity survey. This has revealed a very large concentration of buried archaeology of a variety of dates, which is illustrated in Figure 8 and is interpreted and summarised in sections 3.5-3.10 below.
- 1.8. Excavations in summer 2003 by Oxford Archaeology on Castle Hill, and by Time Team in the field west of the car park below Round Hill, have added further information on the character and date of archaeological activity close to Hill Farm. The results are summarised in section 3.2 below.
- 1.9. Further cropmark information has come to light as a result of a helicopter flight in July 2003 by Time Team, which revealed dense cropmarks in the wheat field south and east of Hill Farm (see Figures 9 and 10). These complement the results of the geophysical surveys in the same area (see section 3.11 below).

1.10. In addition, vertical RAF photographs of the area around Hill Farm taken in 1946 have shown that the area south of the road was covered by ridge-and-furrow (see also section 3.12). The clearest photograph (106G/UK 1396 10 Apr 46 F20///541 SQDN) is illustrated as Figure 11.

1.11. In the light of the relatively modest scope of the redevelopment the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist agreed that a full archaeological evaluation by trenching would not be needed. Instead, the character of the stratigraphy and an indication of the likely survival of any archaeological deposits was obtained from a series of test-pits. The results (OA 2004) are summarised in section 3.13 below and illustrated in Figure 12.

## **2. SITE LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

2.1. Hill Farm lies at the south-west end of the village of Little Wittenham on a minor road that connects Long Wittenham via Little Wittenham with Brightwell. The area of the farm buildings and proposed car park is irregular in shape and occupies an area of *c.* 7500 m<sup>2</sup>.

2.2. The site sits on Upper Greensand, and lies at the west end of a plateau of high ground below the Glauconitic Marl and Lower Chalk outcrops of Round Hill and Castle Hill (Figure 1). From Hill Farm the ground drops to the north-west onto the Gault Clay some 350 m distant, beyond which are the flat gravel terraces of the Thames. To the south and east the land drops more gradually, and the greensand continues for nearly 1 km. Further south the land was formerly poorly-drained marshland overlying an ancient channel of the Thames.

## **3. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE**

3.1. Hill Farm lies in an area of known archaeological potential (Figure 2). Some 500 m to the east Castle Hill is an Iron Age hillfort designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Oxfordshire SAM 208). Iron Age, Roman and Saxon pottery has been recovered from the interior, and burials (both cremations and inhumations) of Roman date from around the defences. Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age pits and drainage gullies were discovered by Rutland when

the car park was constructed south of Castle Hill (Hingley 1980). Only 250 m east of the farm excavations carried out in the mid-20th century revealed the remains of a Roman building, an Early Iron Age chalk and pebble platform and a Beaker land surface (Rhodes 1948). Cropmarks have been recorded within 100 m of Hill Farm on the south and south-west, and both Roman and Saxon finds are recorded in the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record in the field to the west (OA 2002). The gazetteer of OA findspots will be found in Appendix 1.

3.2. Excavations on the hillfort by Oxford Archaeology in 2003 revealed a Late Bronze Age phase on Castle Hill, both Early and Middle Iron Age pits and prehistoric burials, plus evidence of Late Roman and medieval 12th-13th century occupation (OA website 2003). Geophysical survey and limited trenching by Time Team on Round Hill and the fields to the south of this revealed an extensive Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlement stretching from below the hillfort almost as far west as Hill Farm north of the road (Wessex Archaeology 2004). They also recovered a Roman enclosure surrounding the building found by Rhodes, and revealed further walls and surfaces associated with it.

3.3. A map regression has been carried out for the parish of Little Wittenham, and the historic maps show that Hill Farm was not constructed until the later 19th century. Hill Farm is not shown on the 1844 Tithe Apportionment map, but does appear on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1877. Further documentary research on the village of Little Wittenham and Hill Farm is currently in progress. A detailed record of the barns and other buildings at Hill Farm has been carried out by the Oxfordshire Buildings Record.

3.4. Fieldwalking over the field that surrounds Hill Farm to the east and south, and of the field immediately south-west of Hill Farm, has revealed a spread of concentration of Roman pottery (Figure 4) and building material (Figure 5) in this area. The building material has not yet all been recorded onto database, but the partial plot is included as even this shows the concentration close to the farm. The greatest concentration (not yet plotted) corresponds to the probable building identified by resistivity survey (see section 3.7 below).

Surface collection immediately south of the farm has revealed a further concentration of Iron Age pottery (not indicated on Figure 3) that corresponds closely to one of the sub-circular enclosures revealed by geophysical survey. Medieval pottery was less common, but even this is concentrated around Hill Farm (Figure 6).

- 3.5. Earlier fieldwalking carried out in advance of a gas pipeline constructed in the late 1990s showed a concentration of prehistoric pottery in the eastern part of the field directly below the hillfort, and a shift to more Roman material to the west closer to Hill Farm (Figure 7).
- 3.6. Geophysical survey south of the road around Hill Farm has confirmed the fieldwalking evidence for continuing settlement activity throughout the northern part of the field from the car park up to and around Hill Farm (OA website 2004). This area comprises a fairly level plateau below Round Hill and Castle Hill, before the land drops again to the south. The concentrated pit scatters found north of the road thin out south of the road, but another concentration of pits, interspersed with small circular or polygonal enclosures, runs from south of Hill Farm south-eastwards for c. 250 m. The enclosures suggest a Middle Iron Age date, possibly indicating a shift of settlement focus from the largely Early Iron Age settlement north of the road and closer to the hillfort. Closer to the car park small square enclosures, together with a larger square enclosure south of the road, indicate further Iron Age activity, from their morphology possibly burial enclosures of Late Iron Age date.
- 3.7. Cutting across the Middle Iron Age settlement are parallel ditches running from the south-west, probably representing a Roman trackway approaching the enclosure excavated by Time Team north of the road. A third parallel ditch north of the trackway probably indicates a second Roman enclosure that extends beneath the south part of Hill Farm. A third rectangular enclosure has been identified within the field south-west of Hill Farm, with faint indications of a track running south-east from it down to the main trackway. This may have been another element of the Roman settlement. West of Hill Farm a faint north-south boundary may be attached to this. A limited resistivity



survey immediately south and south-east of Hill Farm (Figure 8 inset) has revealed a probable building to the south-east within one of the Roman ditched enclosures.

- 3.8. North of the road the Time Team geophysical survey revealed part of the east and north sides of another enclosure. This is at present undated, but is clearly not of the same date as the ridge-and-furrow cultivation running roughly north-south in this area. The enclosure is not shown on any historic maps, and is therefore most likely to predate the medieval period. This could therefore be another Roman enclosure. The ridge-and-furrow cultivation was not evident on the 1946 aerial photograph (see section 3.12 below), and shows that there was arable cultivation in the medieval period north of Hill Farm as well as on the south, east and west.
- 3.9. Curving north-south and then south-east around the west side of Round Hill, and picked up both by the Time Team survey north of Hill Farm and by the more recent geophysical survey east and south-east of Hill Farm, is a very long linear feature whose date and function is uncertain. It is clearly not contemporary either with the ridge-and-furrow north of Hill Farm, nor with the trackway south-east of the farm, and is therefore likely to be either prehistoric or Saxon in date.
- 3.10. Geophysical survey west of the farm, where the plateau dips away to the west, has revealed only one linear boundary and a scatter of possible pits. This appears to indicate that the archaeology is dying out at the edge of the plateau just west of Hill Farm. It must however be remembered that small features such as postholes, and indeed graves, are not usually detected through geophysical survey. Saxon activity, which is known from findspots in this field, and which is normally only evident in geophysical plots by pits or sunken-featured buildings, may still be represented by the results.
- 3.11. Cropmarks taken from a helicopter by Time Team during July 2003 show many of the features revealed by geophysical survey south and east of Hill Farm, and also additional details of pits and other small features, revealing that the density of archaeological features is very high indeed (Figures 9 and 10).

3.12. Evidence from an RAF aerial photograph taken in 1946 shows that the areas on the west, south and east of Hill Farm were covered by ridge-and-furrow during the medieval and early post-medieval periods (Figure 11). Together with the geophysical survey evidence for similar cultivation north of the farm, this makes it almost certain that the area of the later farm was also cultivated in the medieval period. The area south of Round Hill gives the impression of having been one of the major fields of the medieval three-field system for Little Wittenham.

3.13. A limited below-ground investigation comprising eleven 1 m square test-pits was carried out to establish the depth of the foundations of the existing buildings and the character and depth of the underlying geology. Oxford Archaeology carried out the work, in order to record the stratigraphy and any archaeological deposits within the test-pits. Two of the eleven 1 m square test-pits revealed archaeological features, and possibly archaeological features were uncovered in two more (Figure 12). Both of the definite features were probably Saxon in date, and were truncated by ploughing, probably the ridge-and-furrow cultivation evident on the 1946 aerial photograph. The investigation was particularly significant in confirming that Saxon archaeology, which was previously only known from findspots west of the farm, continued underneath it.

#### 4. CHARACTER OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1. The development involves the construction of extensions to the existing farm buildings on the south, limited strengthening of existing foundations, the insertion of panels to enclose existing open-fronted structures, removal of existing floors and replacement with new floors and sub-floors, new services (including drainage and a sewerage treatment unit) for the whole complex, and removal of the existing concrete hard-standing surrounding the buildings and replacing it with new surfacing. These alterations are illustrated in the main planning application (Figure ).

## 5. IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1. The various archaeological investigations have demonstrated that there is dense archaeology of several periods including the Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Roman periods surrounding Hill Farm, particularly on the east, south and north. There is no reason to believe that the archaeology does not continue beneath the farm, and the limited test-pitting, which located three archaeological features earlier than the existing farm within an investigation covering only c. 10 sq m, confirms this. It is therefore likely that any new excavations will uncover further archaeological features.
- 5.2. The archaeology is not covered by any statutory designations, nor does the Oxfordshire SMR provide any county designations to otherwise undesignated sites. In any case, much of the archaeology described in section 3 above has been discovered only very recently, particularly that closest to Hill Farm, and has therefore not yet entered the OCSMR or NMR datasets. It is clear that the archaeology overall represents a significant multi-period settlement within Oxfordshire.
- 5.3. It is however also clear from the cropmarks, geophysical survey and test-pitting that the site was cultivated in the medieval and early post-medieval period, and that earlier archaeology has been truncated to some extent. Even from the small-scale excavations carried out to date, it is clear that preservation varies from well-preserved in the area of Rhodes' excavations to relatively poor where Rutland excavated in the car park.
- 5.4. The scale of the development relative to the archaeological site is small, and its character is such that within the development area the impact will be limited. Excavations connected with the development that do not penetrate beneath the ploughsoil, that is beyond a depth of c. 0.5 m, are unlikely to have an impact upon buried archaeology. *The archaeology is however likely to be less in the south part of the development, where the undisturbed geology was found at a considerably shallower depth* *to be more visible* *? (low)*
- 5.5. In the area of the farm buildings the impact of the development upon Saxon or earlier archaeology is likely to be limited to areas where excavation into

the underlying greensand is required, in other words, foundation trenches for new building, services and outfall ponds.

- 5.6. Removal of existing floors within the buildings may however reveal earlier surfaces associated with the 19th century farm, as may removal of the concrete surrounding the farm buildings.
- 5.7. The depth of soils over the natural greensand was shallowest away from the farm buildings in the garden to the south. The area of open ground west of the farm buildings, where a car park is to be constructed, has not revealed a high concentration of archaeological features from geophysical survey, but the possibility of Saxon remains cannot be dismissed. This area was not investigated by test-pitting, and it is possible that the soil is similarly shallow in this area. If so, excavation and levelling for the car park may expose or even truncate buried archaeological features.

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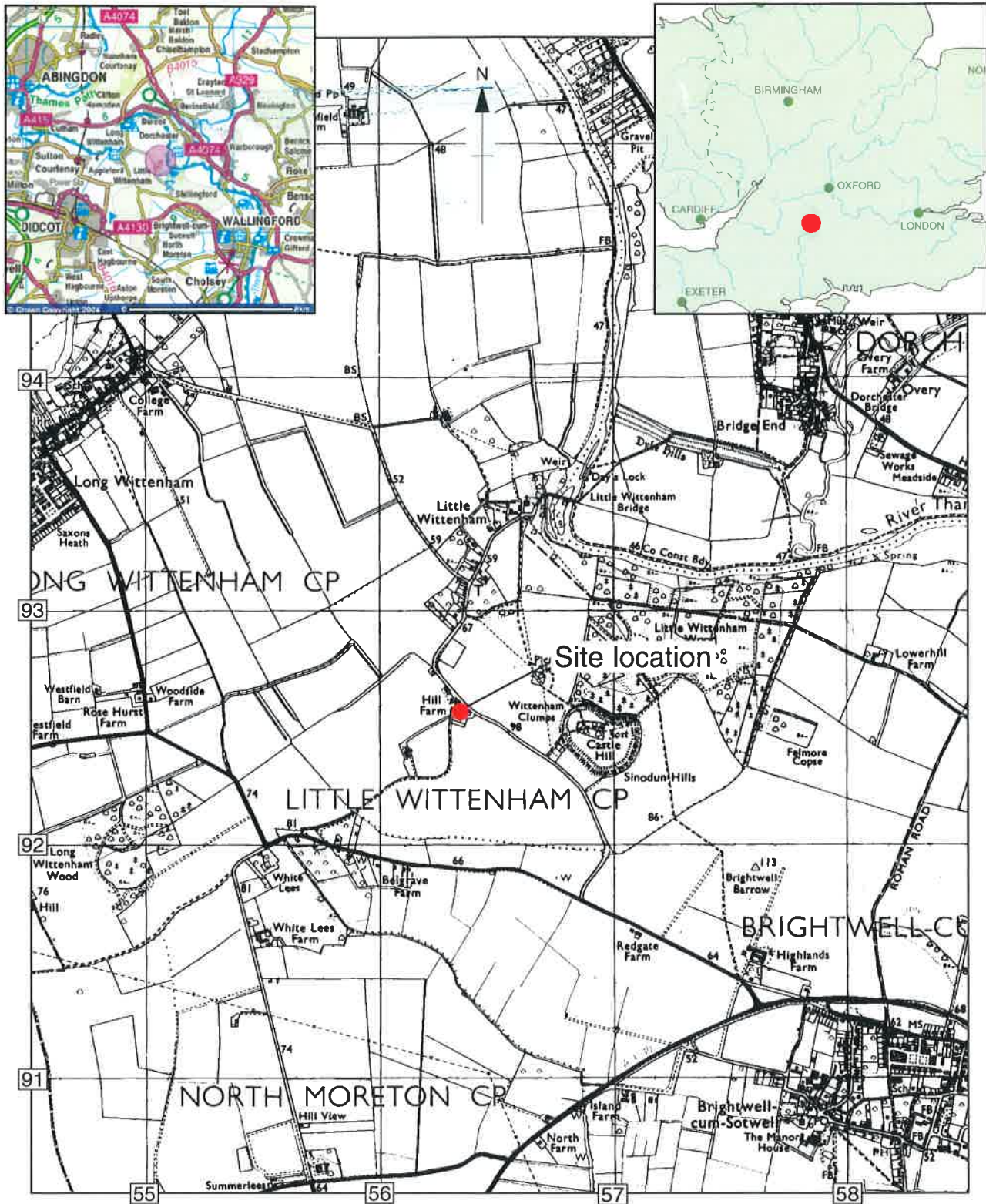
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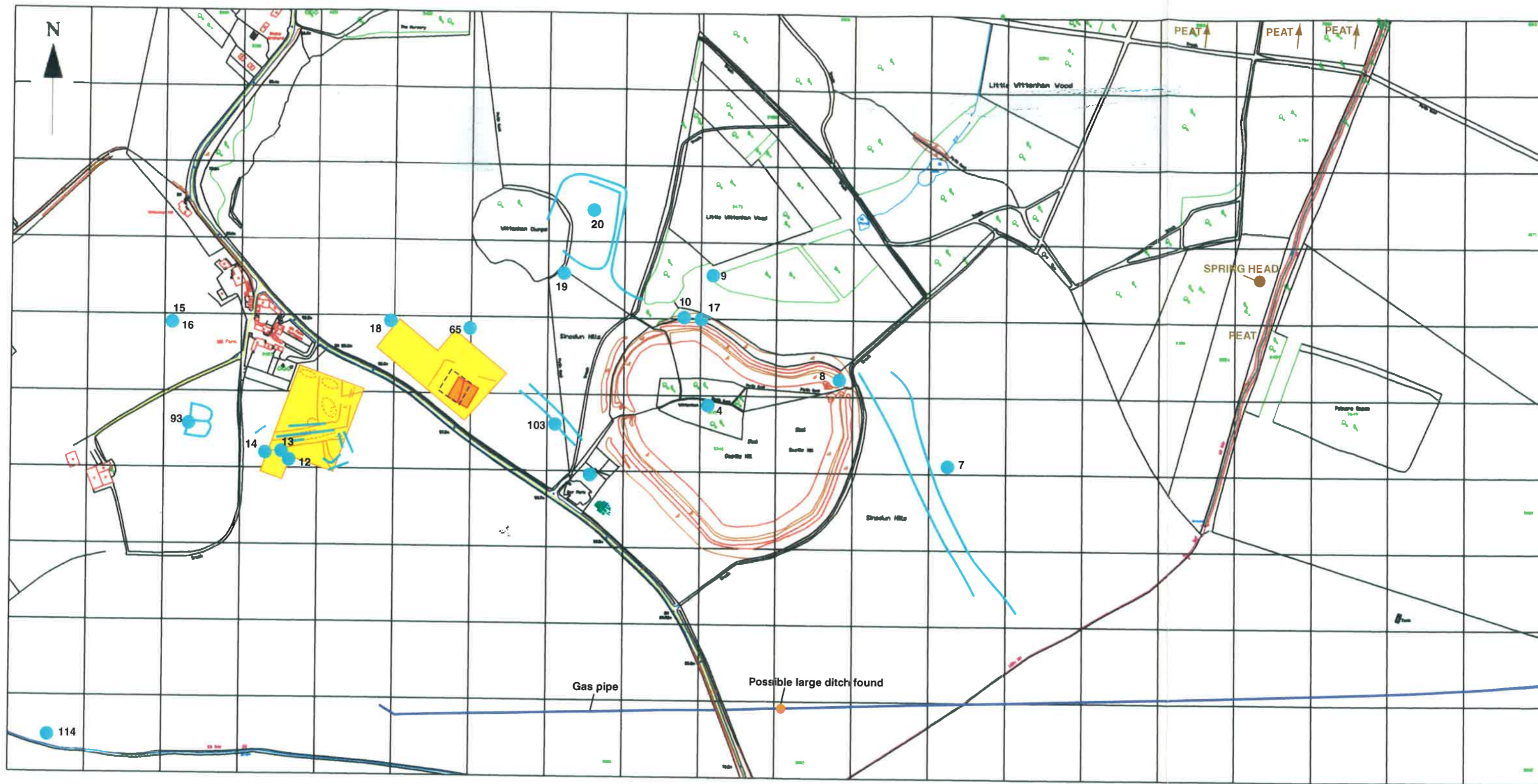
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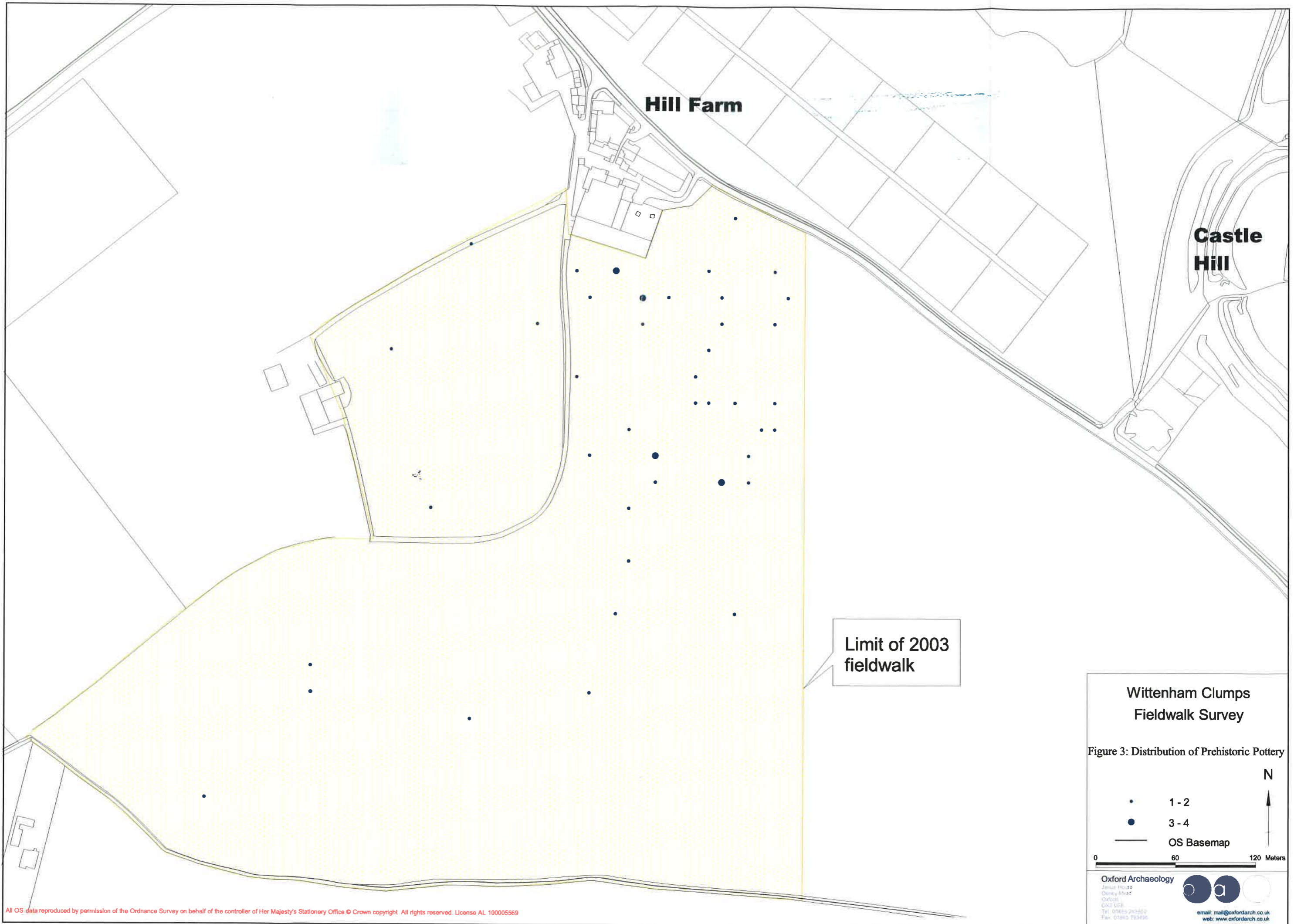
Figure 1: Site location

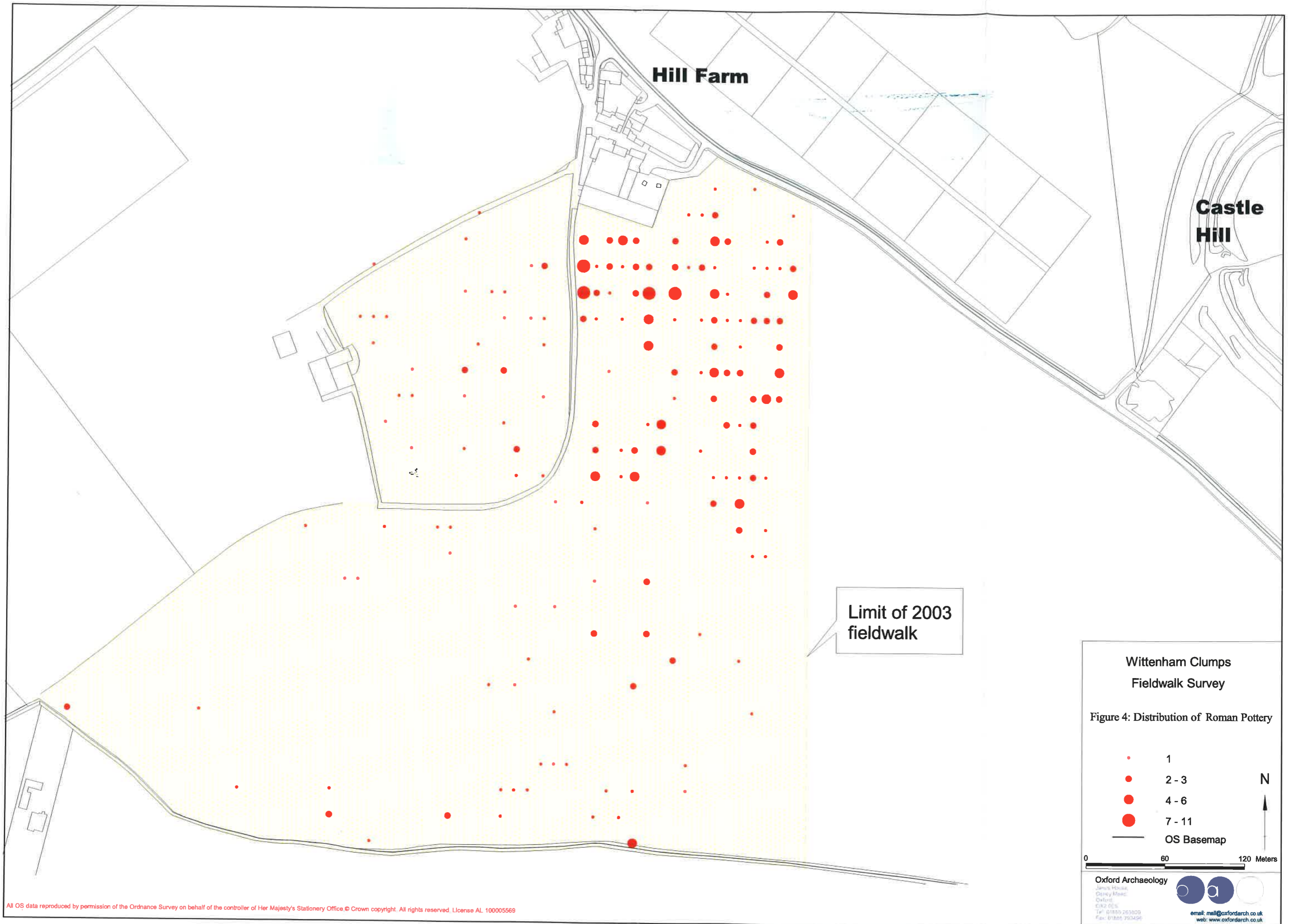


- Cropmarks
- 12 Previous archaeological findspots/ investigations (numbers in OA gazetteer)
- ◆ First geophysical survey
- Area of Rhodes' excavation
- PEAT Known areas of waterlogged environmental potential
- 1970 excavated area with features
- 1995 geophysical surveys



Figure 2: Previous archaeological investigations around Castle Hill





Hill Farm

Castle Hill

Limit of 2003 fieldwalk

**Wittenham Clumps  
Fieldwalk Survey**

Figure 4: Distribution of Roman Pottery

- 1
- 2 - 3
- 4 - 6
- 7 - 11
- OS Basemap

0 60 120 Meters

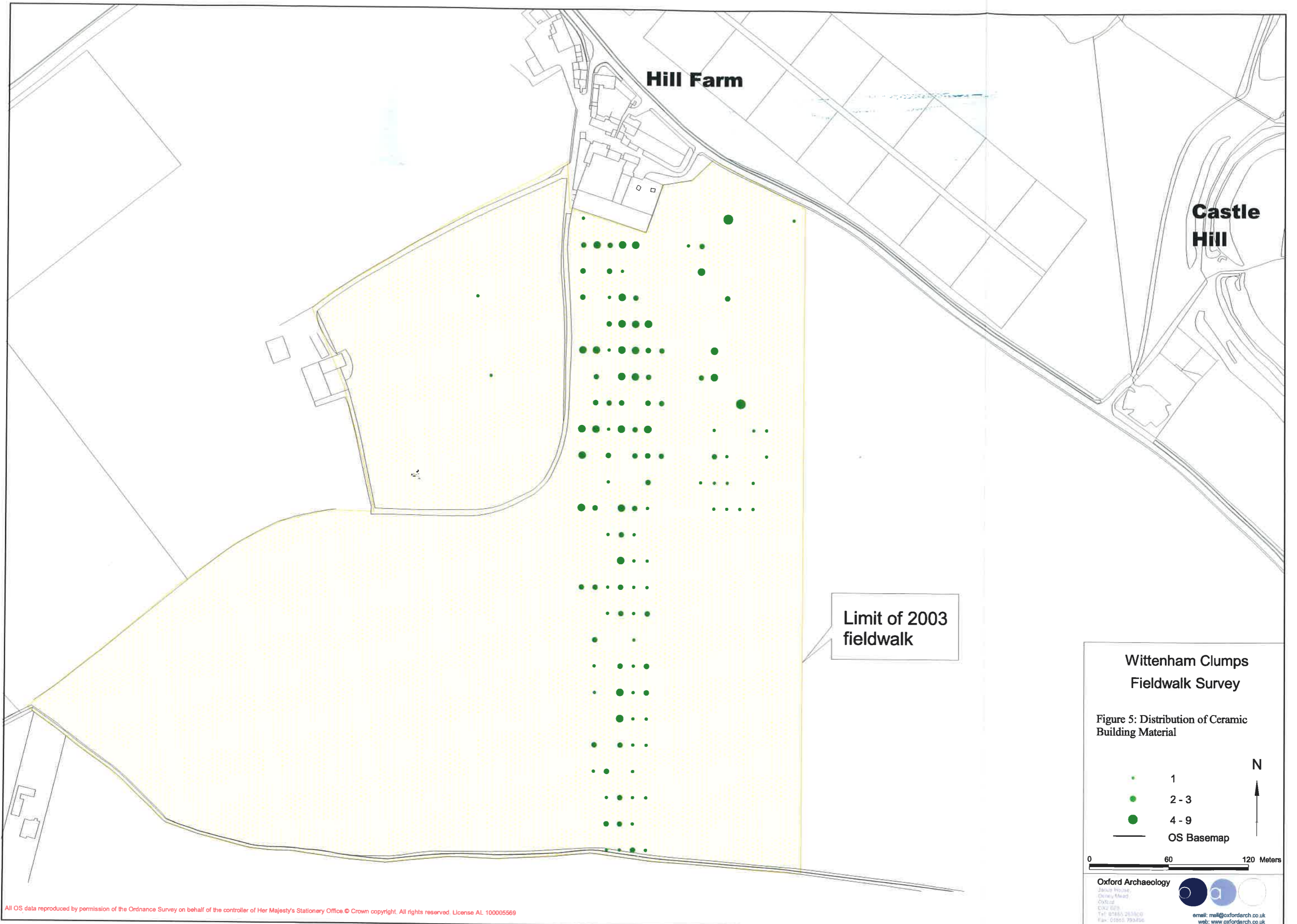
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Hill Farm

Castle Hill

Limit of 2003 fieldwalk

**Wittenham Clumps  
Fieldwalk Survey**

Figure 5: Distribution of Ceramic Building Material

- 1
- 2 - 3
- 4 - 9
- OS Basemap

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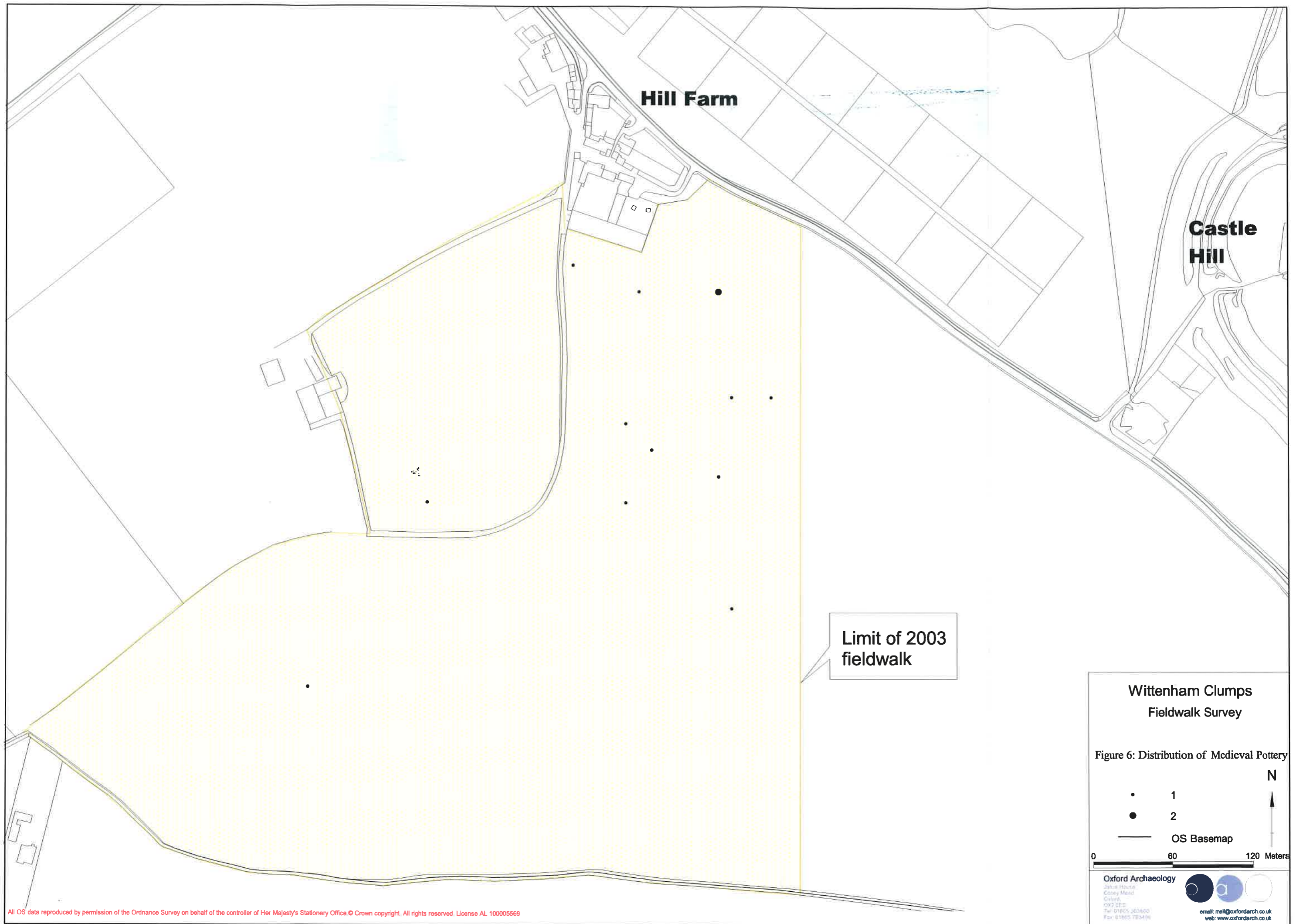
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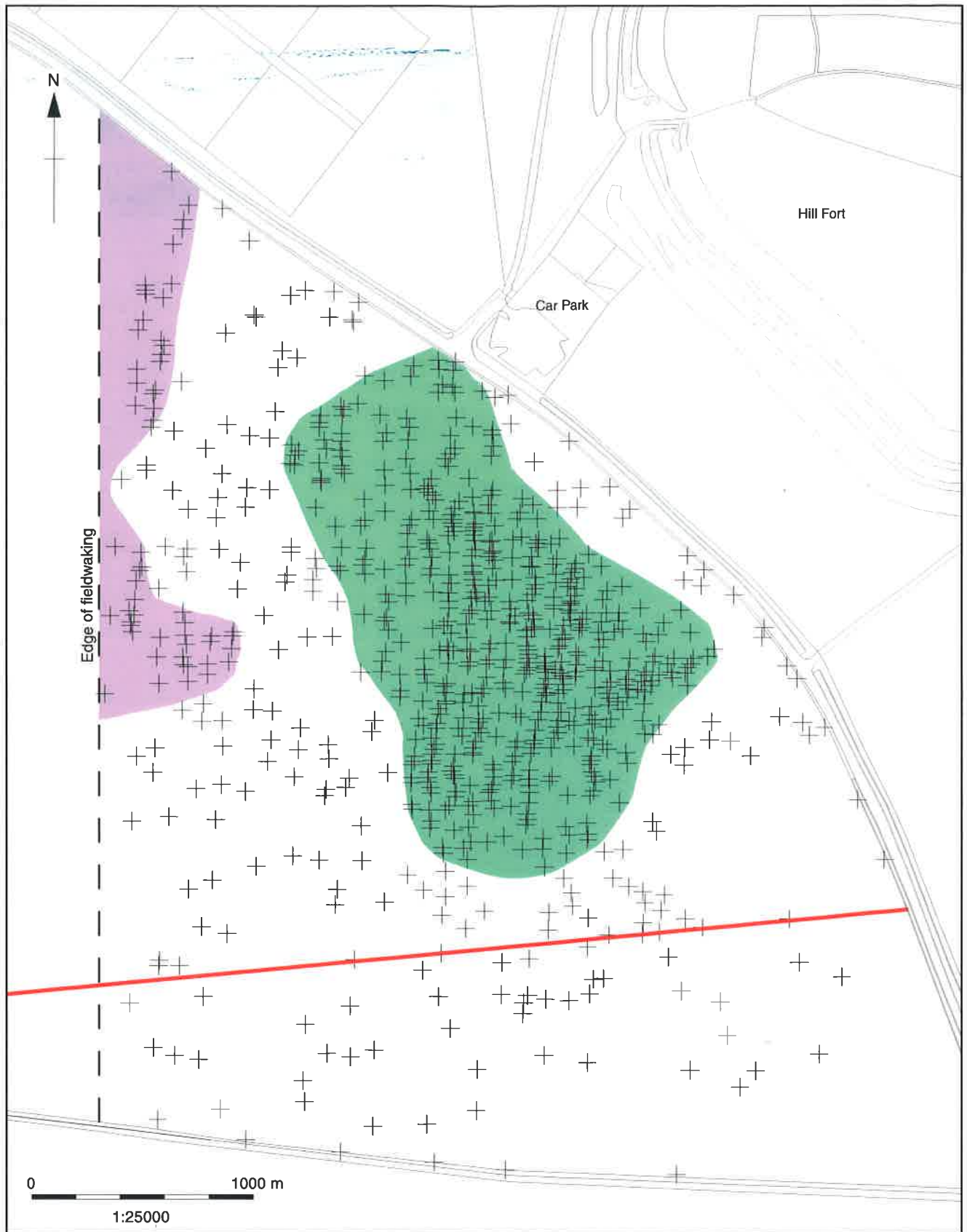
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-  Gas pipe route
-  Pottery findspot
-  Romano-British concentration
-  Prehistoric concentration

Figure 7: Results of fieldwalking carried out in 1998-9

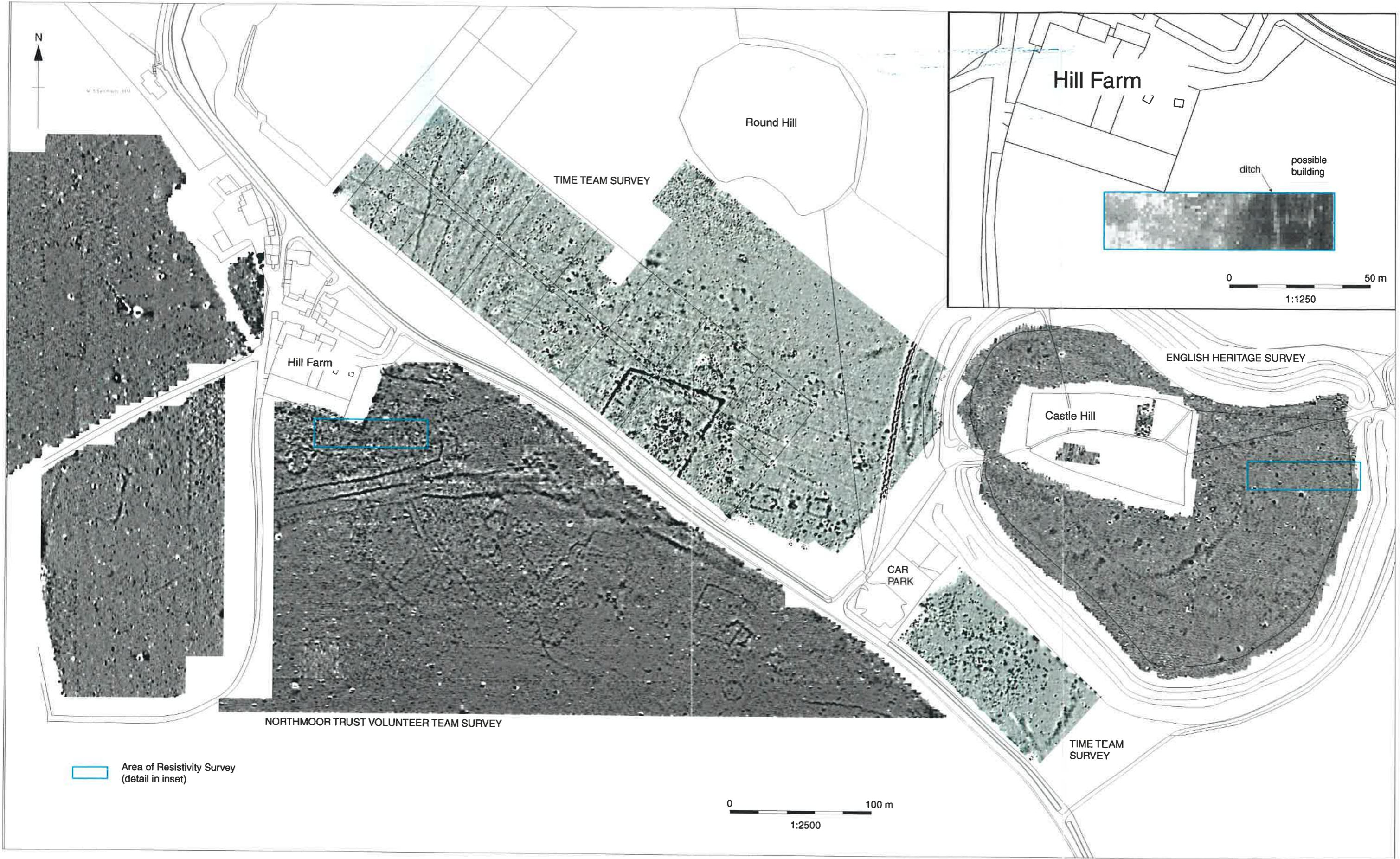


Figure 8: Geophysical Survey Information of Hill Farm Environs



Figure 9: Cropmarks south and east of Hill Farm seen from the air in July 2003, viewed from the south



Figure 10: Cropmarks south and east of Hill Farm seen from the air in July 2003, viewed from the north



Figure 11: 1946 RAF vertical photograph showing extent of ridge-and-furrow cultivation around Hill Farm

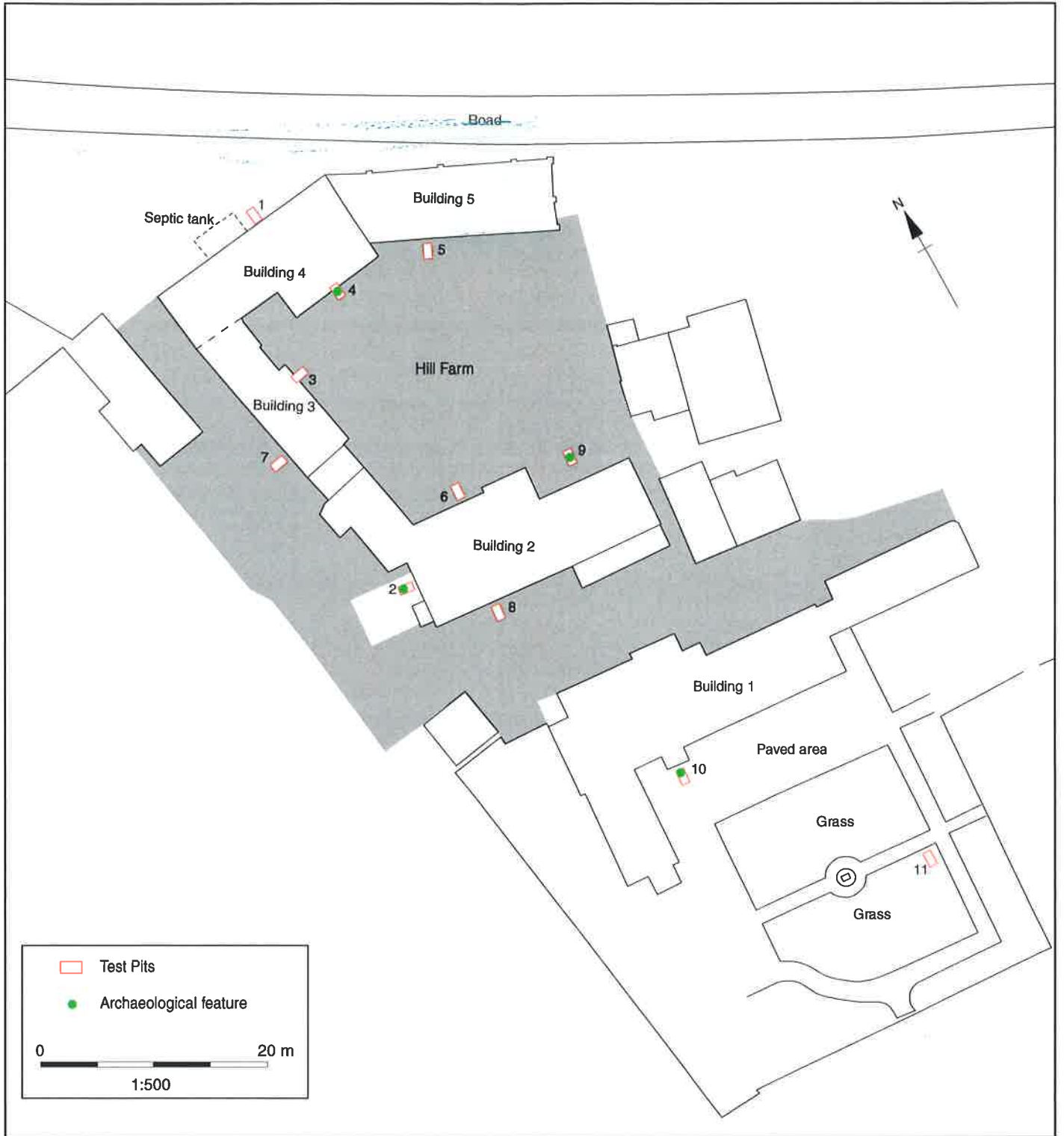


Figure 12: Trial trench locations and archaeological features





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