

New Car Park Greys Court Henley-on-Thames Oxfordshire



Archaeological Topographical Survey and Watching Brief Report

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New Car Park. Greys Court, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Topographical Survey and Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In February 2012 Oxford Archaeology undertook a topographic survey of extant earthworks believed to be related to a known post-medieval hollow way at Greys Court, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. In October 2012 Oxford Archaeology carried out a watching brief on the construction of a new visitor car park over the area of the earthworks and observed and recorded the remains of ditches along the north side of the hollow way. No other archaeological features were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake a two stage programme of work, consisting of a topographical survey and archaeological watching brief, at Greys Court, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire in advance of works to improve the existing visitor car park (National Trust Event No. ENA6977).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken in accordance with a brief provided by Gary Marshall, National Trust Archaeologist for London and the South East Region.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Greys Court is a National Trust property located at NGR SU 725 834 near Greys Green, to the north of Rotherford Greys, west of Henley-on-Thames (Fig. 1). It is accessed via an unnamed road from Rocky Lane off the B481.
- 1.2.2 The current site lies within the historic park of Greys Court, which is a Grade II English Heritage Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest (Ref. 2098). The site consists of an existing grass car park, which is situated away from the historic house of Greys Court, beyond the curtain wall and immediately east of the enclosed gardens (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.3 It stands on a high point of the Chiltern chalk and gravel plateau, at approximately 106m OD, and sits within a heavily wooded landscape. Immediately east of the site is the steep valley of Lodge Field.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Although outside the main complex, the site lies close to the medieval buildings which formed the residence of the de Greys, Knollys and Stapleton families before the property was purchased by Felix Brunner in 1937. The area has small potential for the presence of early buildings and for planting pits or other boundary features.
- 1.3.2 A National Trust survey of the park in 1990 (Matthews and Wainwright 1990) identified several earthwork features in the valley of Lodge Field to the east of the development site, which were further assessed by English Heritage in 2002 (Bowden 2002). These features are believed to have formed the course of a road shown on 18th century maps of Henley-on-Thames and which was diverted between 1768 and 1792.
- 1.3.3 Greys Court was donated to the National Trust in 1969, although the Brunner family continued to live there until 2003. The area of the site has been in use as a grass car park for National Trust visitors immediately prior to commencement of the current works.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objectives of the archaeological works were to create a basic topographical record of the extant earthworks, to observe and record any underlying archaeological features discovered during topsoil removal, and to provide a grey literature client report on the works.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The topographical survey across the extant earthworks (Fig. 2, Plate 1) observed by the National Trust in 1990 and by English Heritage in 2002 was undertaken in February 2012 using a Leica RX1250 GPS. This included an outline of the presumed hollow way within the area of the existing car park and within Lodge Field to the east, and three surveyed profiles (Fig. 2 and 3) across the feature where not impeded by tree coverage.
- 2.2.2 The watching brief was undertaken in October 2012 to observe works by MJ Abbott Ltd to transform the grass car park into a more accessible, eco-friendly car park in order to accommodate increasing visitor numbers. The majority of the development work involved raising the ground surface in order to minimise impact upon potential archaeological features. A large central area containing established trees was not impacted upon (Fig. 2) and care was taken wherever possible to limit damage to the roots of trees that are to be retained.
- 2.2.3 In the north and west of the site, the topsoil was removed to a depth not exceeding 0.1m, after rotovation of the grass. No archaeology was revealed (Plate 7).
- 2.2.4 Along the eastern part of the site, the topsoil was removed and found to have a depth not exceeding 0.3m.
- 2.2.5 All features were assigned unique context numbers and recorded in line with established OA practices. Finds were recovered and photographic records made of the observed works and all excavated archaeological features.
- 2.2.6 Features that were not to be impacted by ground works were recorded but only limited intrusive excavation was undertaken. However, finds were also recovered from the surface deposits of these features.
- 2.2.7 A site plan of the archaeological features was made using a Leica RX1250 GPS.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of earthworks

- 3.1.1 The extent of the earthworks as surveyed is illustrated on Figure 2. They comprise a bank approximately 3m wide and 0.4m high, with a further ephemeral bank approximately 4m to the south. The two banks run parallel on a north-east to south-west alignment through Lodge Field (Plate 1), where they run perpendicular across the valley profile, and into the car park (Plate 2). The presence of large established trees and damage effected by visitor vehicles may have distorted the profile of both features, which are barely visible within the car park area. Three north-south transects were surveyed across the earthworks where tree cover allowed and the profiles recorded are illustrated on Figure 3. The overall observed length of the earthworks is approximately

133m, with a further 22m at the eastern end where the features were too ephemeral to satisfactorily confirm the extent.

3.2 Description of deposits

- 3.2.1 The natural (6) comprised a dark yellowish brown sandy gravel, extensive root disturbance was noted.
- 3.2.2 The main area of observation on the eastern edge of the site where the earthwork could be seen was significantly affected by the presence of several large trees, two of which had been removed sometime previously in order to accommodate the present ground works. The evidence left by these could be seen clearly in plan (Fig 2, Plate 3).
- 3.2.3 In this area two approximately parallel linear features were observed cutting the natural over a distance of 20m, separated by a distance of 4m and aligned approximately north-east to south-west.
- 3.2.4 Ditch 1 (Fig. 2, Plates 5) was 4.6m wide and 1.1m deep, with a single fill (2), which was a light greyish brown sandy silt containing around 20% gravel less than 50mm in size. An intervention was excavated 1.6 x 1m, with a depth of 1.1m (Fig. 4, Plate 6).
- 3.2.5 Ditch 3 (Fig 2, Plate 4) ranged in width between 1.7m and 3m. It was partially truncated by a large tree bole and broad, radiating spread of bioturbation. The fill (4) was a light brownish grey sandy silt containing around 20% gravel less than 50mm in size.
- 3.2.6 A possible third linear feature was observed possibly orientated east west to the north of Ditch 1, but proved too ephemeral to sufficiently assess its nature. No other features were observed.
- 3.2.7 The topsoil (5) comprised a dark greyish brown silty loam consistent with wooded, parkland soils and increased in thickness from 0.15m in the north west to 0.3m in the south east.

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds recovered from the excavated intervention within Ditch 1 and the surface of un-excavated Ditch 3, are summarised below. For a full description see Appendix B.
- 3.3.2 A single sherd of pottery was recovered from the excavated fill 2 and broadly dates between c.1225-1625. Its size and condition suggest that it is likely to be residual.
- 3.3.3 Ceramic building material (CBM) fragments from the same feature were equally worn. The assemblage is largely comprised of peg tile fragments broadly dated between the 16th and 18th centuries.
- 3.3.4 CBM from un-excavated Ditch 3 dates to no later than c.1650. However, a partial clay pipe from the same context has been dated c.1700-1770.

3.4 Environmental remains

- 3.4.1 No environmental sampling was undertaken.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 It is likely that both Ditch 1 and Ditch 3 represent part of the hollow way anticipated from the earthworks that may still be seen in Lodge Field to the east. This was identified by the National Trust survey in 1990 (Matthews and Wainwright 1990) as



feature 150428, which was later known as Feature 40, or as English Heritage's Feature 1 (Bowden 2002).

- 4.1.2 The excavated intervention suggests significant depth of features may survive below the earthworks visible on the surface to the east of the site. What was initially presumed to form a bank to the north-west of the hollow way, was found to be a ditch (1) running along a high area of natural gravel in keeping with the general topography of the site. The feature is likely to be substantially damaged to the west of the stripped area, by root structures of the cluster of large trees remaining in situ. The depth and steep profile of Ditch 1 suggest that, in spite of its sufficient width, it is unlikely to be the hollow way itself but rather a flanking ditch with a hollow way area to the south. This area of the hollow way was likewise disturbed by the roots of trees that had been removed.
- 4.1.3 The finds recovered during excavation suggest a broad date range c.16th - 18th century, with cessation of use sometime after c.1750. This is entirely consistent with the diversion of the hollow way to the south some time between 1768 and 1792. It is possible that Ditch 1 may represent an earlier boundary to the hollow way, but the dating evidence is insufficient to confirm this.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Cut	1.1 m	4.6 m	20 m +	Excavated ditch	-	
2	Fill	1.1 m	4.6 m	20 m +	Fill of ditch 1	Pot, CBM	C 16 th - 18 th
3	Cut		1.7 – 3.8 m	20 m +	Unexcavated ditch south of 1	-	
4	Fill		1.7 – 3.8 m	20 m +	Fill of ditch 3	CBM, Clay pipe	C 18 th
5	Layer	<0.3 m			Topsoil		
6	Layer				Natural		



APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery by John Cotter

B.1.1 A single very small sherd of pottery weighing 1g. was recovered from context 2. This has not been separately catalogued but is described here. The piece is a worn body sherd with a fine sandy cream fabric and an external green copper-stained glaze. Firm identification of a piece this small and worn cannot be provided in this case but the sherd is certainly medieval and most probably a pale variant of Brill/Boarstall ware (Fabric OXAM) dating to c 1225-1625, or a product of the lesser-known, but contemporary, Nettlebed pottery industry near Henley. No further work is recommended.

B.2 Clay pipe by John Cotter

B.2.1 Three joining pieces from a single clay pipe weighing 13g. were recovered from context 4. This has not been separately catalogued but is described here. Most of the pipe bowl is present - but not the rim - and a 45mm. length of surviving stem. The bowl is plain with a prominent circular heel. It matches well with London clay pipe bowls of c 1700-1770 (Oswald and Atkinson 1969, fig. 2.25) and the prominent heel suggests it might date early in this range, perhaps c 1700-1750? Some wear is evident on the heel and the whole pipe is discoloured light brown. No further work is recommended.

B.3 Ceramic building material (CBM) by John Cotter

B.3.1 A total of 26 pieces of CBM weighing 1373g. were recovered. These came from the same two contexts as the pottery and pipes above. These have not been separately catalogued but are described below. The condition of the material is very poor and abraded - similar to that from field scatters or trackway metalling/rubble. No further work is recommended.

Context 2. Date 16-18th century? (24 pieces, 639g.).

B.3.2 This comprises two smallish very worn pieces of orange-red brick and twenty two very worn pieces of light orange to brown fine sandy peg tile. A few pieces have traces of ? circular nail holes and one piece has small spots of clear glaze. Thickness varies from 14-17mm. with several pieces around 15mm. suggesting a late medieval or early post-medieval date for the thickest pieces at least. The latest pieces - including the brick - could be of 17th or 18th-century date but there is very little diagnostic material here.

Context 4. Date 16-17th century (2 pieces, 734g.).

B.3.3 One larger very worn end fragment and one much smaller worn scrap from two soft dark orange-red bricks. The end fragment is clearly from an early handmade brick with its original width of 110mm. and thickness of 52mm. still measurable. These characteristics suggest a 16th- or 17th-century date and perhaps no later than c 1650?



APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Atkinson, D and Oswald, A 1969, 'London clay tobacco pipes', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* **32**, 171-227.

Bowden, M 2002, 'Greys Court: Level 1 Archaeological Survey', English Heritage (National Trust Event Number 2M10168)

Matthews, W L and Wainwright, A 1990, 'Archaeological Survey of Greys Court', National Trust



APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	New Car Park. Greys Court, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire
Site code:	HEGC 12
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SU 725834
Type of watching brief:	Survey of extant earthwork and observation of topsoil removal prior to construction and landscaping of an eco-car park
Date and duration of project:	17 th February 2012; 9 -10 th and 15 th October 2012
Area of site:	Overall site: approximately 92m wide and 100m long Area of excavation: 21m wide, 24m long
Summary of results:	The watching brief identified two approximately parallel linear features aligned north-east to south-west, relating to a post-medieval hollow way partially surviving as surface earthworks and which was known to have gone out of use between 1768 and 1792. This date was corroborated by finds recovered in excavation.
Location of archive:	National Trust. Greys Court, Henley-on-Thames (NT Event No. ENA6977)



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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Site plan

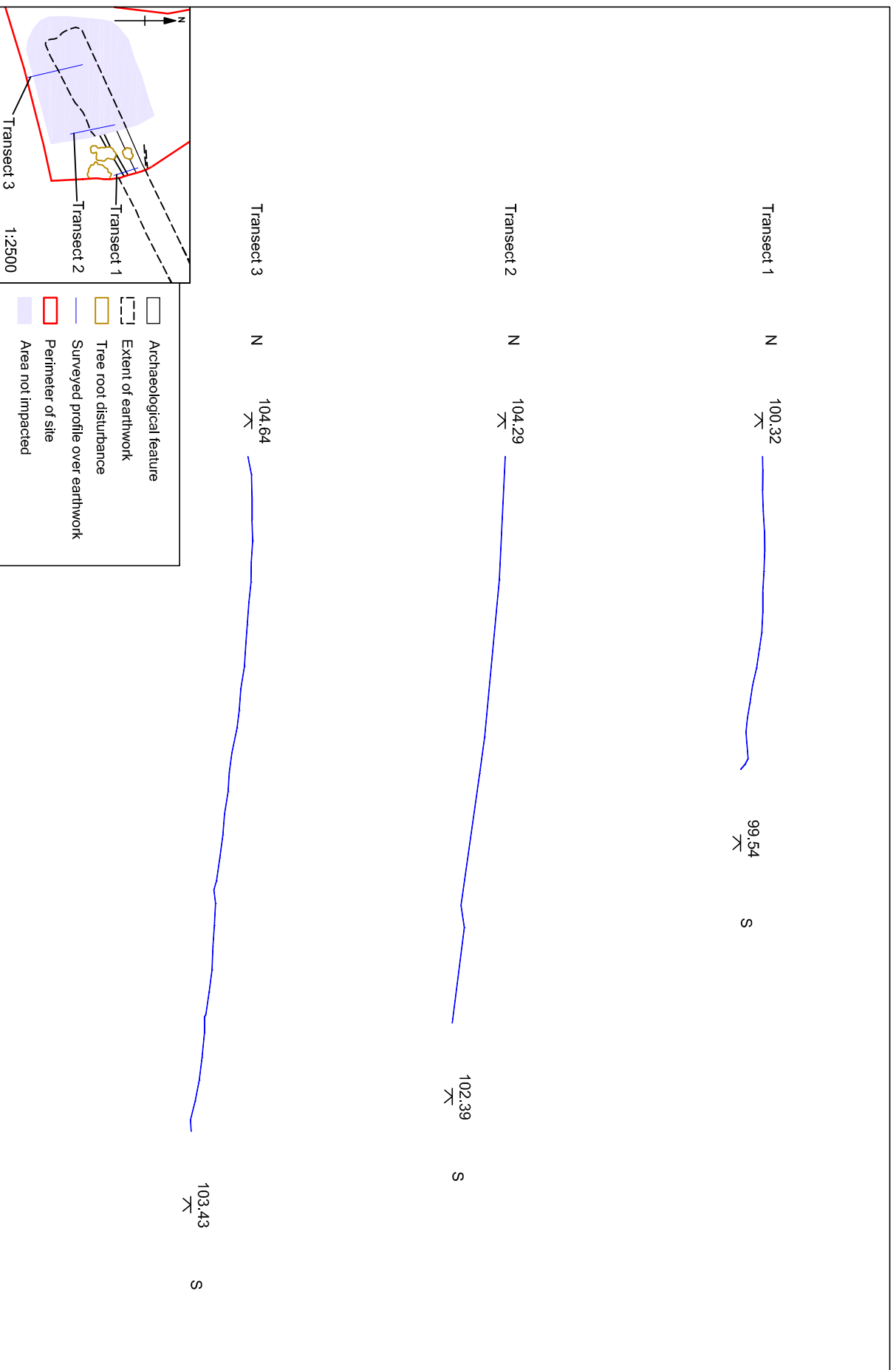


Figure 3: Section view of surveyed profiles over earthwork prior to topsoil strip

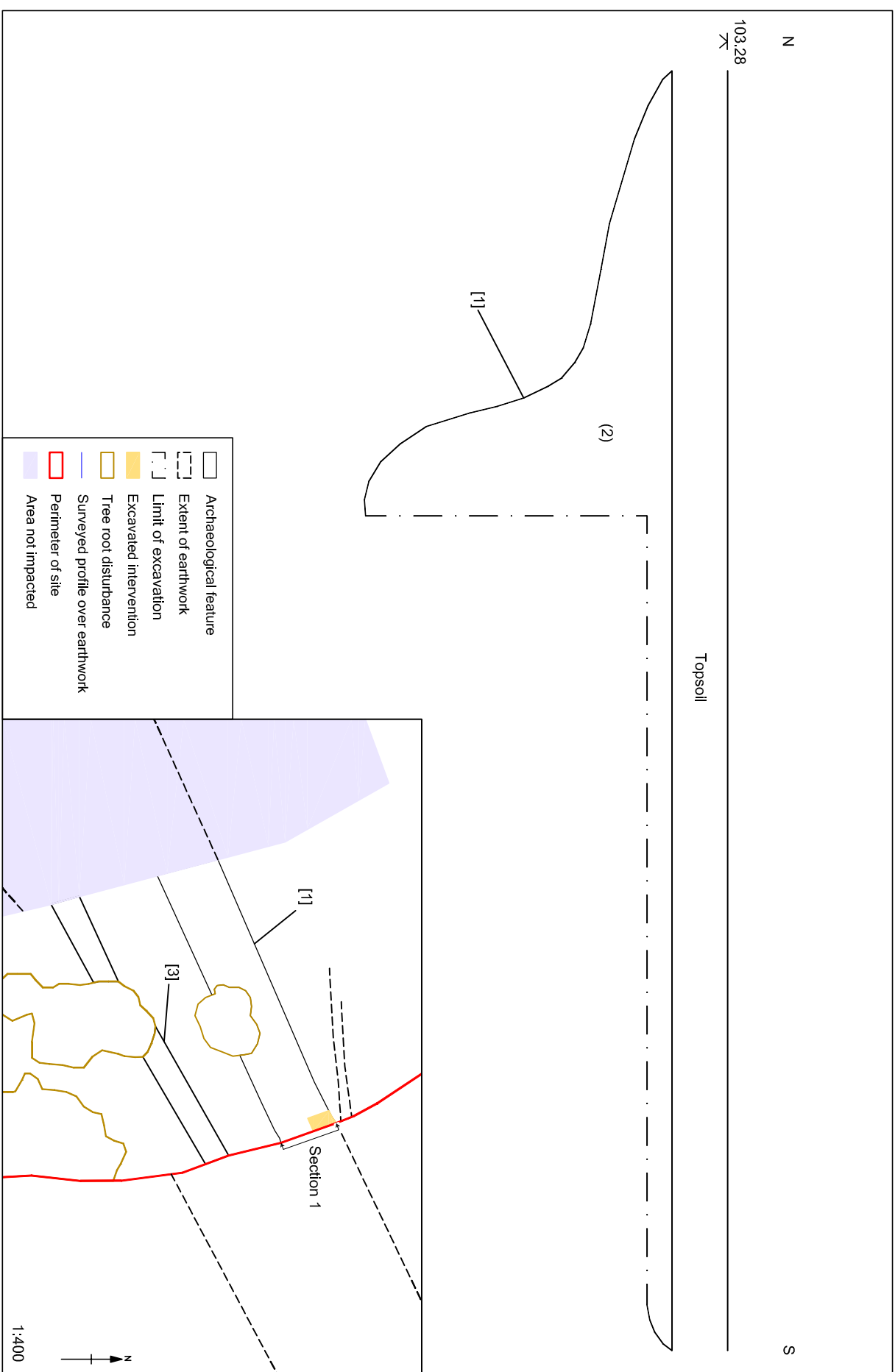


Figure 4: Section 1, south west facing



Plate 1: View of the earthwork during topographic survey, looking west toward site.



Plate 2: View of the earthwork during topographic survey, looking east across site and showing damage done by vehicles



Plate 3: Area of main watching brief after the removal of trees and modern fence, looking north east



Plate 4: View of Ditch 3, looking south east



Plate 5: working shot of Ditch 1 under excavation, looking north east



Plate 6: Excavated intervention in Ditch 1, looking west



Plate 7: View of topsoil strip across the north of site after rotovation of the grass, looking north east



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