Spring Lane, Radford Semele, Warwickshire

Archaeological Excavation Report

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Spring Lane, Radford Semele, Warwickshire

Archaeological Excavation Report

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological excavation on the site of a proposed residential development at Spring Lane, Radford Semele, Warwickshire for Prospect Archaeology Ltd on behalf of AC Lloyd. The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: APP/T3725/A/14/2221858).

The excavation uncovered part of a ditched boundary aligned N-S, with a return on the east side and an entrance, confirming the results of a previous geophysical survey. The features are likely to form part of a field system dating from the late Iron Age/Roman period, probably associated with an unidentified settlement located somewhere in the vicinity. The paucity of artefactual evidence suggests that the settlement was not particularly close.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Prospect Archaeology for commissioning this project on behalf of AC Lloyd. Thanks are also extended to John Robinson, the Warwickshire County Archaeological Advisor, for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was directed by Pete Vellett and Mariusz Gorniak, who were supported by Mike Sims, Jack Traill and BJ Ware. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Ben Brown. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen, processed the environmental sample under the management of Rebecca Nicholson, and prepared the archive under the management of Nicky Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological excavation on the site of a proposed residential development at Spring Lane, Radford Semele, Warwickshire for Prospect Archaeology Ltd on behalf of AC Lloyd.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: APP/T3725/A/14/2221858). Although the local planning authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions between Prospect Archaeology Ltd and John Robinson, the Warwickshire County Archaeological Advisor, established the scope of work required.

1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies and Chartered Institute for Archaeologists guidance.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site was located on the western side of the village of Radford Semele, south-east of Leamington Spa, and was centred on SP 34215 64219. The area of the proposed development consisted of an area of an arable field, bounded to the north by housing along Slade Meadow and Chapman Close, to the east by Spring Lane and to the south and west by further arable fields (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The development area lay at an elevation of *c* 71m aOD and was relatively flat, dipping only slightly to the south.

1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Mercia Mudstone overlain by the Wolston Sand and Gravel formation which formed around 3 million years ago (BGS website).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in a desk-based assessment (PA 2014).

1.3.2 A Roman villa located *c* 1.6km to the south of the village was excavated in the 1970s and found to be in a poor state of preservation. The Roman Fosse Way runs to the east of the village, some 3.2km from the site.

1.3.3 The site appears to have always lain beyond the historic core of the village, which was certainly present by the time of the Domesday survey and is named after a family from Saint-Pierre-de-Semilly in Normandy, who were lords of the manor from the 10th century.

1.3.4 A geophysical survey of the site was undertaken in 2014 and identified a number of anomalies of potential archaeological nature (MOLA 2014).

1.3.5 A trial trench evaluation (CFA 2016) was undertaken to test the geophysical anomalies and 'blank areas' of the site. In addition to the truncated bases of plough furrows, the evaluation revealed a single ditch in the northern part of the evaluated area which was dated from recovered pottery sherds to the Iron Age to early Roman periods.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The primary objectives of the investigation are to mitigate the effect of the development on the surviving buried archaeological remains through archaeological investigation and recording, analysis of the excavated data, dissemination of the results, and deposition of an ordered project archive with a local museum.

2.1.2 The objectives were to be realised through the achievement of the following specific aims:

- To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present;
- To excavate and record all archaeological features and deposits prior to their removal by construction;
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- To determine the environmental history of the site;
- To address, where applicable, relevant research aims as presented in the regional research framework;
- To make the results of the excavation available.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The excavation area measured 40 x 25m (0.01ha) and is shown on Figure 2.

2.2.2 Site-specific methodologies were as follows:

2.2.3 The excavation area was set out by an OA Surveyor using a GPS system with a sub-500mm accuracy. The area was CAT-scanned for buried services prior to and during mechanical excavation.

2.2.4 The excavation was undertaken by a suitably powered mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under close archaeological supervision.

2.2.5 Excavation ceased at the top of the natural geology, or first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

2.2.6 Spoil was stored like with like in weathered bunds in an area adjacent to the excavation. No provision was made to replace any of the excavated material.

2.2.7 Revealed features were planned and sample excavated. A reasonable sample of the revealed features was hand-excavated and recorded in order that the project aims could be fulfilled. The exact number and location of hand-excavated interventions required was discussed between the representatives of Prospect Archaeology Ltd, Oxford Archaeology and Warwickshire County Council.

2.2.8 All hand excavation and recording was undertaken as outlined in Appendix A of the Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2017).

2.2.9 A full photographic record was made of the excavations.

2.2.10 Archival photographs were black and white film. A digital photographic record was made to supplement the record but will not form part of the formal archive.

2.2.11 The only deposit that produced dating evidence, fill 10 of ditch 43, was sampled for the presence of environmental remains.

2.2.12 No area was handed over for construction until it had been signed off by the representative of Warwickshire County Council.

3 RESULTS

3.1.1 The natural substrate comprised a layer of friable, almost soft, light brownish yellow coarse sand with sandstone gravel and pebbles (3). The excavation exposed ditches (43, 44, 45) that formed part of a N-S aligned boundary with a return on the east side and an entrance (Plate 1). A few irregularly-shaped features were also identified, which were interpreted as tree holes.

3.1.2 Ditch 43 (Figs 2 and 3; Plates 2 and 3) was L-shaped in plan, extending on a N-S alignment for 33.5m from the northern edge of the excavation area before turning eastward and extending for a further 17m to the eastern baulk. The ditch was 2.05-2.65m wide and the N-S aligned part typically had a shallow profile, no more than 0.34-0.50m deep. The E-W part was deeper and more V-shaped, with a depth of 0.68-0.84m. The fills were composed of brown silty sand and appeared to be naturally derived. A few small fragments of late Iron Age/Roman pottery were recovered from the upper fill (10, Fig. 3 section 3). The ditch was cut by an oval pit (12) that measured 0.76-0.82m and 0.36m deep, from which a large sandstone weight was recovered. A possible recut was recorded in the section at the eastern baulk (34, Fig. 3 section 10, but the absence of corresponding features in the other interventions suggests that it may in fact have been a discrete feature cut into the ditch, similar to pit 12.

3.1.3 Ditch 44 (Figs 2 and 3; Plate 4) continued the alignment of the N-S part of ditch 43, albeit off-set very slightly to the west. It was exposed for a total distance of 6.45m and extended beyond the southern edge of the excavation area, where it had been recorded as a geophysical anomaly. It had a shallow, V-shaped profile and measured 1.5m wide and 0.36-0.52m deep. To the north it ended in a rounded terminus 1.90m from the outer edge of the corner of ditch 43, defining an entrance through the boundary. The fills were similar to those of ditch 43.

3.1.4 A short length of ditch (45) situated immediately west of the terminus of ditch 44 may have been associated with the entrance, perhaps representing the location of a screen that controlled the movement of livestock through the boundary. The ditch was less substantial than the main boundary ditches, measuring only 0.60-0.72m wide and 0.14m deep, and was 3.75m long.

3.1.5 The features were overlain by a brown, sandy subsoil (2) and a dark grey, humic topsoil (1).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1.1 The boundary ditches exposed by the excavation are likely to form part of a field system associated with an unidentified settlement somewhere in the vicinity. The paucity of artefactual evidence suggests that the settlement was not particularly close. The ditches formed a N-S boundary, with an entrance and a return on the east side that may have sub-divided this area. The results of a previous geophysical survey that had identified these features indicated that the boundary extended further south for at least 85m, although an evaluation trench to the south of the excavation area was unable to confirm the existence of the boundary ditch. The boundaries may be outlying features associated with a group of enclosures, linear ditches and pits that have been identified from cropmark evidence *c* 700 to the south-west, north of Radford Barn (PA 2014, 7).

4.1.2 Dating evidence was limited to a very small group of pottery, possibly originally from a single sherd, from ditch 43, although it was complemented by a slightly larger assemblage of 40 sherds (199g) that was recovered from the same feature during the evaluation (CFA 2016). The sherds were not particularly diagnostic and could only be dated broadly to the late Iron Age/Roman period.

4.1.3 The only non-ceramic artefact was a large weight recovered from pit 12. Similar weights have been recorded from Roman contexts at Didcot, Oxfordshire, and so the object could be broadly contemporary with the boundary ditches. However, this is not certain and it is possible that both the object and the pit that contained it are of later date.

APPENDIX A FINDS REPORTS

A.1 Pottery

By Paul Booth

A.1.1 The fieldwork produced pottery from a single context (context 10). This consisted of seven fragments (total weight 14g), probably originally from a single sherd, in a coarse sand-tempered fabric. The fabric has black surfaces and a brown core. The dominant, common, rounded quartz sand grains are typically up to *c* 0.6mm in size. Occasional larger quartz and flint grains are up to *c* 2mm. The flint is sub-rounded and a component of the sand, rather than a distinct inclusion type. Occasional organic and iron oxide inclusions are also present but are incidental occurrences. It is not possible to determine of the sherd was handmade or wheel thrown because the surfaces do not survive sufficiently well.

A.1.2 The appearance of the fabric is reminiscent of Dorset black-burnished ware (BB1), but the surfaces are not well preserved so the characteristic appearance of that ware is not certainly identifiable. The larger sand (etc) inclusions are not particularly typical of this fabric, and characteristic shale fragments, sometimes present, are not seen here. A tiny change of angle on the surface of the largest fragment suggests that the sherd is from the shoulder of a jar (though it could just be a surface irregularity). This would also be consistent with an identification as black-burnished ware, but could be matched on vessels in many other fabrics from the late Iron Age through the Roman period. Overall a late Iron Age to Roman date seems very likely, but closer dating within that range is not really possible. Identification of the fabric as black-burnished ware would suggest a date after *c* AD 120, but on balance this identification is considered to be possible rather than probable, and a more local origin most likely.

A.2 Worked stone

By Ruth Shaffrey

A.2.1 A single large sandstone weight was recovered from the fill of pit 12 (13). It is approximately a rectangular cuboid shape with a waist carefully fashioned around its middle. This form of weight is typical of medieval fishing weights, like those found on the River Ouze (Mynard 1979), but it is significantly heavier, with a likely original weight of 4kg. It seems most likely that it functioned as a door or gate weight – such weights are used to create a self-closing gate – but it could conceivably also have been a thatch weight. Crudely waisted weights of broadly comparable weight were found at Didcot, Oxfordshire, in contexts of late Roman date (Shaffrey in prep), so a Roman date for this item, contemporary with the pottery from ditch 143, is plausible.

Catalogue of worked stone

Large waisted weight. Fine-grained beige quartzitic sandstone. Large weight fashioned from a small boulder. Burnt and blackened on one side. The weight is roughly oblong in form with flat surfaces and with a waist carefully chipped away all round the middle (widthways). Approx 75% survives and the surviving portion weighs 3108g. Measures

200mm long x >155mm wide x 96mm thick. SF 1. Ctx 13, fill of pit 12, possibly Roman in date.

APPENDIX B ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

B.1 Environmental samples

By Sharon Cook

B.1.1 A single 35 litre bulk sample <1> was taken from the upper fill (10) of late Iron Age-Roman ditch 43. The sample was processed at Oxford Archaeology using a modified Siraf-type water flotation machine with the flot collected on a 250µm mesh and the heavy residues in a 500µm mesh. Both fractions were air dried. The residue fractions were sorted by eye while the flot material was sorted using a low power (x10) binocular microscope to extract cereal grains and chaff, smaller seeds and other quantifiable remains. Identifications were carried out using standard morphological criteria for the cereals (Jacomet 2006), identification of wild plant remains is with reference to the Digital Seed Atlas of the Netherlands (Cappers *et al*. 2006) and by comparison with modern reference material. Classification and nomenclature of plant material follows Stace (2010).

Results and discussion

B.1.2 The small flot of only 5ml includes poorly preserved charred grain, wild plant seeds, legumes and charcoal as well as some modern material including roots and wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum*) capsules. The charcoal is generally small-sized, often mineral-encrusted charcoal which is not sufficiently abundant to warrant analysis (Keepax 1988). There are a number of fragments of unidentifiable 'clinkered' material.

B.1.3 In total there are 62 fragments of indeterminate cereal grain as well as six grains of wheat (*Triticum* sp.) and nine grains which are likely to be wheat. A further five incomplete grains have morphological characteristics which indicate that they may be barley (*Hordeum* sp.). Four oat/brome (*Avena*/*Bromus*) grains are also present. The majority of grains are in poor condition with external surfaces largely missing and fragmentation and distortion caused by burning; two of the indeterminate grains appear to have collapsed upon themselves which may, tentatively, be an indication that they had begun to sprout.

B.1.4 The legumes are also in poor and fragmented condition. Seven of these are 2-4cm legumes, while a single badly damaged fragment appears to originate from a larger (>4cm) legume, possibly pea (*Pisum sativum*). A number of charred seeds from wild plant include a single goosefoot seed (*Chenopodium* sp.), seven stinking chamomiles (*Anthemis cotula*) and three corn marigold seeds (*Glebionis segetum*) as well as a single indeterminate fragment.

B.1.5 This assemblage is fairly typical of the period with wheat and barley being common crops throughout both the Iron Age and Roman period in Britain and wild oats and brome common cereal crop contaminants. Both stinking chamomile and corn marigolds are also commonly seen within assemblages of this date, with both being archaeophytes usually found growing within crops and around the periphery of arable land. The smaller legumes are most likely to be vetches which are also commonly found within crop debris.

Recommendations for retention/discard

B.1.6 The sample has produced only a small quantity of identifiable charred plant remains, the condition is generally very poor and, as the material adds no addition information to the understanding of the period, the flot does not warrant retention.

B.2 Animal bone

By Lee Broderick

B.2.1 A single bone was recovered - a shattered maxillary domestic cattle (*Bos taurus taurus*) tooth from the late Iron Age/Romano-British ditch fill context 24.

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APPENDIX D SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Spring Lane, Radford Semele, Warwickshire
Site code:	RASL17
Grid Reference	SP 34215 64219
Type:	Excavation
Date and duration:	19th October-2nd November 2017
Area of Site	0.01ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Warwickshire Museum in due course, under the following accession number: T/1646
Summary of Results:	The excavation uncovered part of a ditched boundary aligned N-S, with a return on the east side and an entrance, confirming the results of a previous geophysical survey. The features are likely to form part of a field system dating from the late Iron Age/Roman period, probably associated with an unidentified settlement located somewhere in the vicinity. The paucity of artefactual evidence suggests that the settlement was not particularly close.

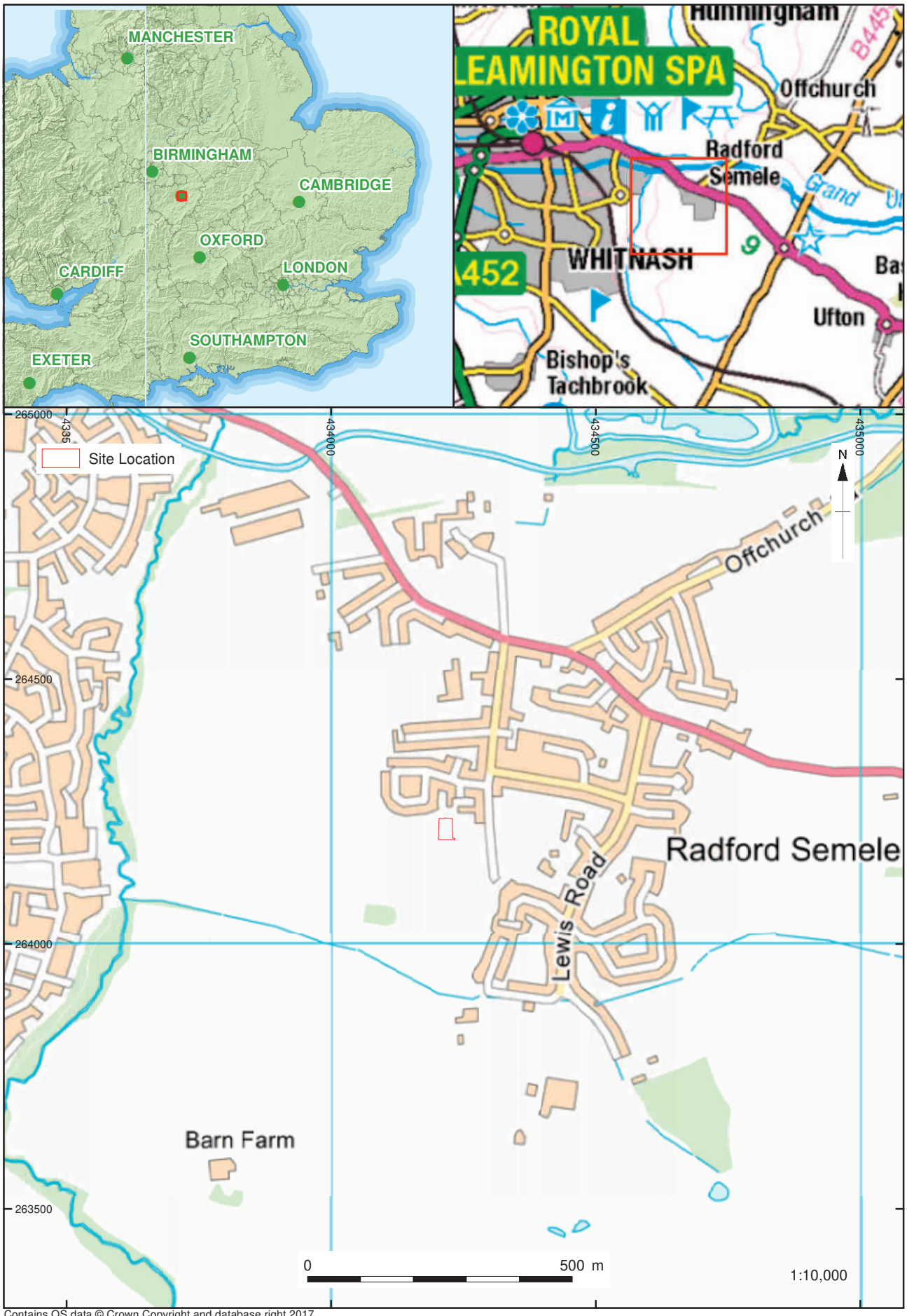

Figure 1: Site location

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Fig. 2: Plan of archaeological features

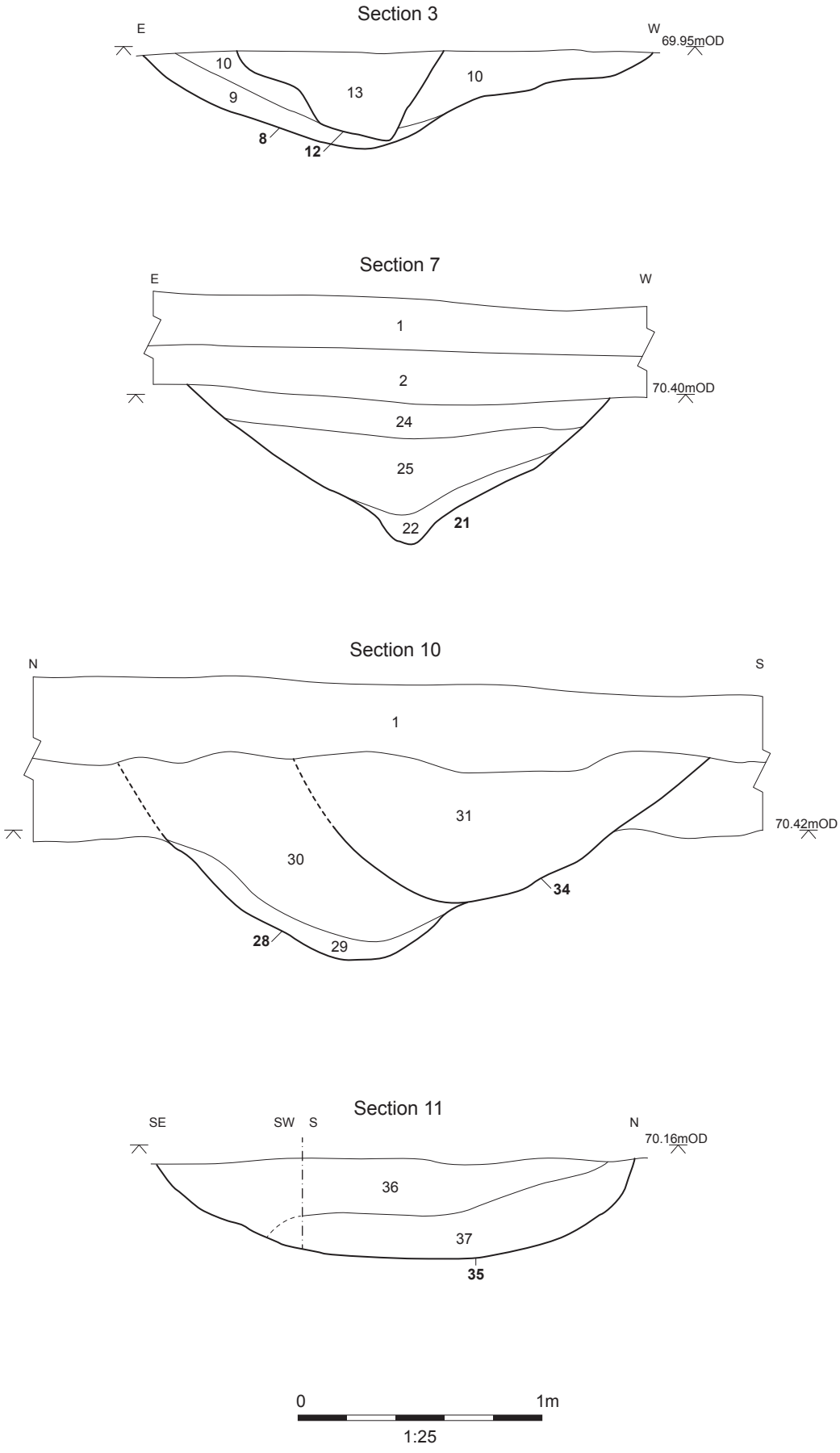

Figure 3: Sections of selected features

Plate 1: The site during excavation, looking north

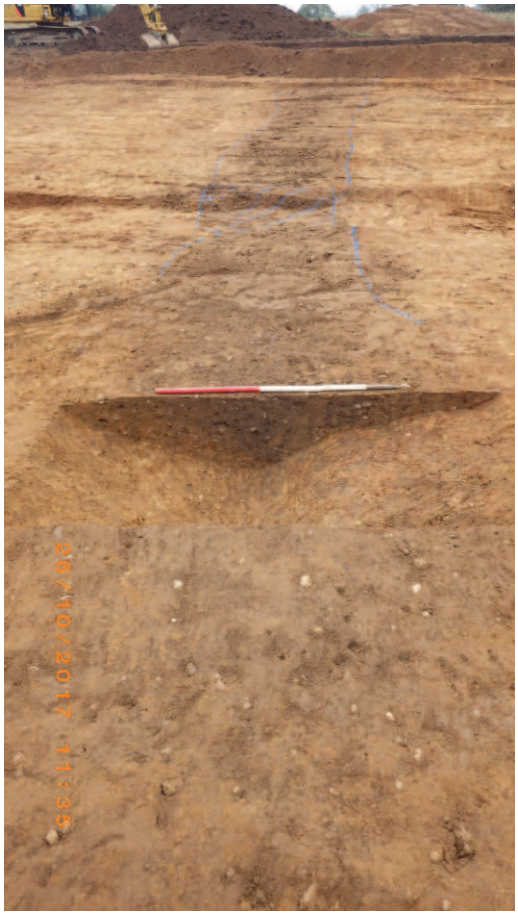

Plate 2: View along ditch 43, looking north

Plate 3: Section 10, ditch 43, looking east

Plate 4: Northern terminus of ditch 44, looking west

Plate 5: Plate 5: Stone weight from pit 12

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