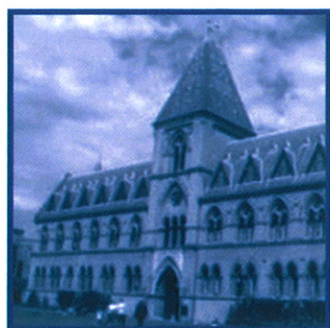


# Land Adjacent to The Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

December 2005

**Client: Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1

OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: JN 2857

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Prepared by: Steve Leech  
Position: Assistant Supervisor  
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Checked by: A Norton  
Position: Senior Project Manager  
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Approved by: J Hiller  
Position: Senior Project Manager  
Date: 7th December 2005

Signed. 

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**Oxford Archaeology**

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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## Land Adjacent to the Pitt Rivers Museum Parks Road, Oxford

### *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF*

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## SUMMARY

*Between August 2005 and November 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a watching brief on land adjacent to the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford on behalf of Sir Robert McAlpine Construction Ltd. The watching brief revealed seven north-south aligned ditches that were probably Roman in date. A large defensive ditch, probably dating to the Civil War, and two post-medieval quarry pits were also revealed. No evidence for prehistoric activity was found, although much of the site had been disturbed by the previous development of the site.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between August 2005 and October 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a watching brief on land adjacent to the Pitt Rivers Museum, which is situated at the junction of Parks Road and South Parks Road, Oxford. The work was on behalf of Sir Robert McAlpine Construction Ltd, in respect of a condition attached to planning consent for a new building (Planning Application No. CARC02). OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) outlining how it would deal with any exposed archaeological features (OA 2005b). The WSI was agreed with Brian Durham, Archaeologist for Oxford City Council. The development site is situated at NGR SP 5152 0693 and is 0.36 hectares in area.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on alluvial gravel deposits overlying Oxford Clay at 61.45 m above OD. Until recently the site was occupied by a building belonging to the museum and an open yard with buildings housing a radiation store and nitrogen tank.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief has been the subject of a separate desk study (OA 2004), the results of which are summarised below. Full references can be found in the desk study but also see Fig. 2. The site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence, although there are several known sites and locations with archaeological remains adjacent to the development site. An archaeological evaluation in February 2005 (OA 2005a) revealed post-medieval garden/orchard soils and a Victorian quarry pit. No other archaeological investigations have been carried out within the area of proposed development. However, several archaeological excavations have been carried out within the study area, and recording of archaeological deposits was carried out during the construction of a number of buildings within the University Science Area.

1.3.2 The most significant work of recent years in relation to the area of proposed development was carried out between 1999-2002 on the site of the New Chemistry



Laboratory (OA 16), c 130 m to the south-east. Evidence for prehistoric and Roman occupation and the line of the Civil War defences were identified. Similar archaeology was found in 1998-9 during an OAU excavation on the site of the Institute for American Studies (OA 14), c 170 m south-east of the area of proposed development. Between 1982 and 1996 a series of excavations by OAU around the Rex Richards and Rodney Porter Buildings c 150 m to the north found evidence for prehistoric and Roman activity including a Bronze Age ring ditch (OA 3, 10, 11). Another ring ditch (OA 2) was excavated when OA worked at the Gene Function Centre 200 m north of the development area in 2002.

- 1.3.3 A number of Bronze Age barrow ditches have been identified in central Oxford and it has been suggested that there was an extensive barrow cemetery dating to this period. Within the University Parks, north of the Study Area, aerial photographs show a concentration of cropmarks including a number of ring ditches, the ditches which surrounded prehistoric burial mounds or barrows (OA 36). Excavation has produced evidence for such features within the Study Area. A double ring ditch (OA 3) was identified in 1982 at the Rex Richards Building c 150 m to the north of the area of proposed development. In 2002 a ring ditch with four inhumations (OA 2) was excavated at the new Gene Function Centre, c 200 m to the north of the development site. Other ring ditches have also been found in excavations in St Michael's Street and at the Sackler Library around 750 m to the west of the site. Neolithic and Bronze Age pits were found at the Institute for American Studies site (OA 14), c 170 m south-east of the area of proposed development, and at the New Chemistry Laboratory (OA 16), c 130 m to the south-east. The aerial photographs also show evidence for settlement activity in the form of a complex of enclosures and trackways. The results of excavations in the Science Area to the south-west of the area of proposed development (OA 12, 14) have shown that there was activity from the early Iron Age. Further evidence for Iron Age occupation has been recovered from excavations, particularly at the Rex Richards Building in 1993 (OA 10), c 130 m to the north-east. Ditches, pottery and animal bone was recovered. More pottery was found at the Sir William Dunn Laboratory in 1995-6, c 200 m north-east of the site (OA 11).
- 1.3.4 The clearest evidence for Roman settlement came from the archaeological excavations to the west of Mansfield Road. Around 170 m south-east of the area of proposed development, at the Institute for American Studies site (OA 14), two phases of ditched enclosure were found, the later containing remains of a timber structure (Booth & Hayden 2002, 291). The New Chemistry Laboratory site, 130 m to the south-east, contained ditches, gullies and roof tiles (OA 16). An inhumation burial was also found (OA 2002, 9).
- 1.3.5 Finds of Roman material have been recorded across the Study Area from the 19th century onwards. In 1862-71, material including quern and mortarium fragments were recovered from the garden of No 2 South Parks Road (OA 7), 100 m to the south-east. Pottery, coins and jewellery were found during construction of the

University Museum (OA 6) and human remains, ditches and pottery from the open area between it and Parks Road in 1970-1 (OA 27). Other ditches were excavated at the Earth Sciences Building in 1990 (OA 30) and the Radcliffe Science Library in 1933 (OA 32). Roman pottery and bone were found in 1949 at the Physiology and Zoology Building (OA 37). These sites all lie within 100 m of the west side of the area of proposed development.

- 1.3.6 From the 9th century onwards Oxford developed into a substantial defended town, but this did not extend as far north as the area of proposed development. At that period the land belonged probably to the manor of Holywell, with which it was associated until the 19th century (Hibbert 1988, 315). It is probable that it was a mixture of arable land and meadow, the situation known to have existed during the later medieval and post-medieval periods. Holywell Manor was held by Robert D'Oilly in 1086, according to Domesday. In 1266 Henry III gave it to Merton College who still hold parts of the land. Much of the demesne land was enclosed in the 14th and 15th centuries. Throughout the medieval period the manor was not legally part of Oxford (Crossley 1979 VCH IV, 271-2).
- 1.3.7 The Development Area seems to have been used for agriculture and medieval ploughsoils were found at the William Dunn Laboratory (OA 11), c 200 m north of the area of proposed development. Medieval pottery was collected in the University Parks during the 19th century and some was found behind Nos 6-8 South Parks Road, the edge of the site, in 1996 (OA 13). Later historic maps such as Loggan (1675) and Faden (1789) appear to confirm that the area of proposed development was farmland at this period. Loggan shows it as a mixture of arable and pasture, Faden just as arable.
- 1.3.8 No significant changes occurred in the northern part of Holywell Manor, including the Study Area, until the Civil War in the 17th century. In 1642-4 a series of defences (OA 1) were constructed around Oxford, based on a plan produced by a military engineer, Bernard De Gomme. In the north of the city there were two lines and the area of proposed development is thought to have lain on the line of the outer defences. This is shown by Loggan's Map of Oxford, 1675, which clearly marks surviving stretches of the earthworks. The map only extends as far north as the defences and the area of proposed development lies on the edge of the coverage of the map. Archaeological excavations, most recently at the New Chemistry Laboratory (OA 16), have demonstrated the route taken by these defences. A 10 m wide ditch running north-south with a dog-leg was excavated and dated to the 17th century, as predicted from Loggan's map. Ditches thought to be part of the outer defensive line were also seen during construction of the University Museum in 1855-60 (OA 6), to the east of the area of proposed development in 1959 (OA 5), on Parks Road in 1970-1 (OA 19, 27) and at the Clarendon Laboratory in 1872 (OA 31).
- 1.3.9 The next available historic maps which shows at least part of the area of proposed development are Taylor's Map of 1751 and Faden's Map of 1789, which is largely based on Taylor. The site is shown within Holywell Parish, since 1667 part of the



city of Oxford and is within the Parks. The land still belonged to Merton College, who extended the park associated with Holywell Manor in the 18th century. Faden's map shows the earthworks gone and the site entirely in arable cultivation.

- 1.3.10 Around 1853 the University bought 91 acres of land from Merton College and began to lay out the formal University Parks, which then included the University Science Area. In 1855-60 the University Museum was constructed and buildings for the various science faculties followed, establishing the Science Area on the north side of South Parks Road. On the south side of the road a number of villas were built for senior members of the University (Hibbert 1988 436). The 1st Edition OS Map of 1876 shows the first phase of these developments with the area of proposed development occupying part of the grounds to the rear of the new museum.
- 1.3.11 By the 2nd Edition OS Map of 1900 the University Museum had been extended eastwards for what is now the Pitt Rivers Museum. The rest of the development site was still undeveloped. Development continued in the Parks area during the early 20th century with the existing Pitt Rivers annex building constructed before 1921. By 1939 the area of proposed development had achieved its current layout. The 1958 and 1984 OS maps show no further changes to the area of proposed development although the Science Area generally had been extensively built on.

## 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

- 2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) which the ground works will remove or damage within the development area.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The watching brief comprised archaeological monitoring of the excavation of 16 foundation trenches and service trenches. The overburden was removed by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 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. 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).



### 3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 The deposits encountered during the work were generally devoid of finds or appeared to be derived from redeposited supra-natural. No environmental samples were taken.

### 3.5 Presentation of results

- 3.5.1 A general description of archaeological observations by phase is presented in section 5. This includes individual context descriptions with archaeological deposits and features described from earliest to latest. Plans and sections, where appropriate, illustrate the sequence and context information is summarised in Appendix 1. Specialist information has been included in the general discussion of results but full specialist reports are presented in the appendices.

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The site is located on well drained river terrace gravels, allowing reasonable working conditions throughout the excavations. The site was disturbed by modern services and foundation trenches from the previous building, ranging from a depth of 0.6 m to 2.5 m.

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 Description of deposits

#### *Phase 1 Roman (Figs 3, 4 and 5)*

- 5.1.1 A north-south aligned ditch (1030) was observed along the western extent of site, visible in Trenches 2, 8 and 11. The ditch was 0.4 m wide, 0.4 m deep and 31 m in length. It was filled by a brown silty sand (1031) with occasional gravel inclusions, no finds were recovered. It was cut by a second north-south aligned ditch (1032), 1.9 m wide, 0.2 m deep, and 20 m in length. It was filled by 1033, an orange brown silty sand, with occasional gravel inclusions and sherds of Roman pottery. Five interventions were put through the ditches which was best illustrated by section 109 (Fig. 5).
- 5.1.2 A NE-SW aligned ditch was also revealed within Trench 2 (1014). It was 0.45 m wide, 0.2 m deep and filled with orange brown silt (1015). No relationship between this ditch and the north-south aligned ditches could be established. No finds were recovered although the fill was similar in nature to the Roman ditch fill 1033.

5.1.3 Four intercutting ditches, orientated north-south, were revealed along the eastern extent of the site within Trench 7. The features were only seen in section (Fig. 5; s. 112) and it is possible that they formed an area of intercutting pits. Ditch 1040 was 0.4 m wide, 0.48 m deep and filled by an orange brown silt with occasional gravel inclusions (1041). The ditch was cut by ditch 1042 that was 0.85 m wide, 0.32 m deep and filled by a brown grey silt with occasional gravel inclusions (1043). Ditch 1042 was disturbed by ditch 1044 that was 0.7 m wide, 0.42 m deep and filled by an orange grey silt with moderate amounts of gravel inclusions (1045). Ditch 1044 was subsequently cut by ditch 1046 that was 1.1 m wide, 0.3 m deep and was filled by gravel and grey orange silt (1047 and 1048). No finds were recovered from the ditches, but they have been tentatively placed within the Roman period due to them sharing the same north-south alignment and fill types as ditch 1032 to the west.

#### *Phase 2 post-medieval (Figs 3 and 5)*

5.1.4 To the north of the site an east-west aligned ditch was observed within Trenches 9 and 11 and 12, which was seen to cut ditch 1032. The ditch (1028) was 6.5 m wide and excavated to a depth of 1.3 m. The base was not seen but the upper sections of the sides of the ditch were moderately sloping. The ditch was filled by a single homogenous brown silt with moderate amounts of gravel inclusions, possibly indicative of deliberate backfilling. Sherds of pottery dating from 1550 to 1725 and a clay pipe bowl dating from 1660-1680 were recovered. The ditch was cut by modern pitting, probably associated with the construction of the Pitt Rivers museum. However, within Trench 12 natural gravels were encountered at 3 m, after the removal of modern dumped deposits. It is likely, therefore, that the ditch was less than 3 m deep.

#### *Phase 3 19th century onwards (Figs 3 and 4)*

- 5.1.5 Two quarry pits were revealed to the south of the site. Pit 1003, seen in Trench 1, was irregular in shape, 1.6 m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.5 m. It was filled by (1004) a mid brown silty loam with moderate amounts of gravel inclusions. Quarry pit 1022, seen within Trench 6, was circular in shape, 5.1 m in diameter and excavated to a depth of 1.1 m. It was filled by a brown grey silty loam (1023) with moderate amounts of gravel inclusions. Both of the pits contained post-medieval roof slates, bricks and glass.
- 5.1.6 An undated posthole (1000) was seen to the west of quarry 1003. It was 0.15 m deep, 0.25 m wide and filled with brown silts (1001 and 1002).

## **5.2 Finds**

### *Pottery*

5.2.1 The assemblage comprises a total of eight sherds of pottery weighing 62g and is in scrappy condition. Four sherds from context 1033 are Roman dating to c 250-400, and are in a fresher condition. These comprise a single sherd of Oxford colour coated ware and three sherds (possibly from a single vessel) in a local coarse sandy grey



ware. The other four sherds are post-medieval and include common 16th-17th century types such as German Frechen stoneware and Surrey/Hampshire Border ware.

#### *Clay tobacco pipes*

- 5.2.2 The site produced only two fragments of clay pipe weighing 16g. Both pieces are of 17th century date and include a damaged pipe bowl of c 1660-80 and a worn stem fragment.

#### *Glass*

- 5.2.3 A sherd of post-medieval bottle glass was recovered from context 1039, a fill of the Civil War Ditch.

#### *Animal bone by Kristopher Poole*

- 5.2.4 Three refitted fragments, weighing 31g, were recovered in total. Context 1039 (from the Civil War Ditch) contained a large-mammal long bone fragment. Context 1029 (also from the Civil War Ditch) contained a medium-mammal long bone fragment and a left cattle mandible, which dental ageing indicates came from a senile animal.

## **6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION**

### *Reliability of field investigation*

- 6.1.1 The site suffered from varying degrees of modern disturbance, with truncation by modern services and foundation trenches of up to 1 m depth across most of the site. The northern part of site was also disturbed by modern pitting, probably associated with the construction of the Pitt Rivers museum. The western area of site, Trenches 1, 2, and 8, suffered less truncation to the archaeological features and the supra-natural was preserved. Apart from the western part of site it is likely that the disturbance to the site would have removed any shallower features.
- 6.1.2 Much of the archaeology comprised undated north-south aligned ditches. One of the ditches produced Roman pottery, and because of the similarity in fills between the ditches all the ditches have been provisionally interpreted as Roman features.

## **6.2 Overall interpretation**

### *Summary of results*

- 6.2.1 North-south aligned ditches were revealed on the western and eastern limits of the site. The ditches were c 20 m apart and had been re-cut several times. It is likely that the ditches formed part of a Roman field system. The undated posthole revealed within Trench 1 may be associated with this field system. The land is thought to have comprised fields of arable and pastoral use during the medieval and post-medieval periods, it is likely that the land had a similar use during the Roman period. The limited number of material remains also suggests that the site lay some distance from the centre of any settlement.



- 6.2.2 The upper fills of the large ditch revealed to the north of the site were dated from 1550 to 1725, and it is likely that it formed part of the 17th century Civil War defences as planned by De Gomme (Fig. 2). It probably formed the outer defensive ditch and was 6.5 m wide and between 1.3 and 3 m deep. The recent work at the New Chemistry Site (OA 2002) also revealed part of these defences. Here the ditch averaged 10 m in width and varied in depth between 1.85 m and 2.6 m. The ditch fills were dated to the 18th century but similarly, very few artefacts were recovered. The ditch is slightly to the north of the predicted line of the ditch plotted by De Gomme, but this is probably due to inaccuracies in the original plan.
- 6.2.3 Quarry pits were observed to the north and south of the site. These were probably dug to extract gravel during the initial construction of the museum buildings.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	Ctxt No	Type	Width (m)	Thick (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date	Trench dimension
all	1010	layer		0.1	Supra-natural				
all	1011	layer		0.35	Ploughsoil				
all	1012	layer		0.35	Overburden				
all	1013	layer			Natural gravels				
1	1000	cut	0.3	0.18	Posthole				5 m x 6 m
1	1001	fill	0.3	0.18	Fill of 1000				
1	1002	fill	0.2	0.11	Fill of 1000				
1	1003	cut	1.6	0.5	Quarry pit				
1	1004	fill	1.6	0.5	Fill of 1003				
1	1005	cut	0.3	0.2	Modern cut				
1	1006	fill	0.3	0.2	Modern fill				
2	1014	cut	0.44	0.19	Gully N/S				5 m x 5 m
2	1015	fill	0.44	0.19	Fill of 1014				
2	1016	cut	1	0.3	Ditch N/S				
2	1017	fill	1	0.3	Fill of 1016				
2	1018	cut	0.4	0.1	Ditch N/S				
2	1019	fill	0.4	0.1	Fill of 1018				
2	1020	cut	0.5	0.15	Ditch N/S				
2	1021	fill	0.5	0.15	Fill of 1020				
4					No archaeology				2.5 m x 2.5 m
5					No archaeology				2.5 m x 2.5 m
6	1022	cut	5.1	1.1	Pit				6 m x 10 m
6	1023	fill	5.1	1.1	Fill of 1022				
7	1040	cut	0.4	0.48	Ditch N/S				6 m x 12 m
7	1041	fill	0.4	0.48	Fill of 1040				
7	1042	cut	0.85	0.32	Ditch N/S				
7	1043	fill	0.85	0.32	Fill of 1042				
7	1044	cut	0.7	0.42	Ditch N/S				
7	1045	fill	0.7	0.42	Fill of 1044				
7	1046	cut	1.1	0.3	Ditch N/S				
7	1047	fill	0.5	0.18	Fill of 1046				
7	1048	fill	0.9	0.2	Fill of 1046				
8	1026	cut	2.1	0.4	Ditch N/S				8 m x 17 m
8	1027	fill	2.1	0.4	Fill of 1026				
8	1030	cut	0.4	0.38	Ditch N/S				
8	1031	fill	0.4	0.38	Fill of 1030				
8	1032	cut	1.8	0.2	Ditch N/S				
8	1033	fill	1.8	0.2	Fill of 1032	pottery	4	ROM	
9	1028	cut	6.5	1.3	Civil war ditch E/W				3.5 m x 8 m
9	1029	fill	6.5	1.3	Fill of 1028	Pottery bone	1/2	PM	
10					Modern disturbance				7 m x 3 m
11	1034	cut	0.5	0.1	Ditch N/S				8 m x 11 m
11	1035	fill	0.5	0.1	Fill of 1034				
11	1036	cut	6		Civil war ditch E/W				

Trench	Ctxt No	Type	Width (m)	Thick (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date	Trench dimension
11	1037	fill	6		Fill of 1036				
12	1038	cut	7	0.8	Civil war ditch E/W				3 m x 7 m
12	1039	fill	7	0.8	Fill of 1038	pottery bone glass	3/1	PM	
13					No archaeology				4 m x 3.5 m
14					No archaeology				4 m x 3.5 m
15					Modern disturbance				7 m x 7m
16					No archaeology				3 m x 3m

## APPENDIX 2 POTTERY AND CLAY PIPE ASSESSMENT

*By John Cotter*

### The Pottery: Introduction and Methodology

The assemblage comprises a total of 8 sherds of pottery weighing 62g.

All the pottery was examined and spot-dated during the present assessment stage. For each context the total pottery sherd count and weight were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet, followed by the context spot-date which is the date-bracket during which the latest pottery types in the context are estimated to have been produced or were in general circulation. Comments on the presence of datable types were also recorded, usually with mention of vessel form (jugs, bowls etc.) and any other attributes worthy of note (e.g. decoration etc.).

### Date and Nature of the Assemblage

The assemblage consists of fairly small scrappy sherds. The four sherds from context 1033 are Roman, dating to *c.* 250-400, and are in a fresher condition. These comprise a single sherd of Oxford colour coated ware and three sherds (possibly from a single vessel) in a local coarse sandy grey ware. The other four sherds are post-medieval and include common 16th-17th century types such as German Frechen stoneware and Surrey/Hampshire Border ware.

### Potential of the Material and Recommendations for further work

Given its poor condition and the small size of the assemblage the pottery appears to have little further potential for research.

### The Clay Pipes

The site produced only two fragments of clay pipe weighing 16g. These were recorded in a similar way to the pottery. Both pieces are of 17th century date and include a damaged pipe bowl of *c.* 1660-80 and a worn stem fragment. These appear to have little further potential for research.



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**APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Pitt Rivers Museum

**Site code:** OXPRM05

**Grid reference:** NGR SP 5152 0693

**Date and duration of project:** 15/08/05 - 12/10/05

**Area of site:** 0.36 ha

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed six inter-cutting north-south aligned ditches likely to be Roman in date. Two of the ditches were cut by a section of a ditch that formed part of the Civil War defences. Two post-medieval quarry pits and an undated posthole were also revealed.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Ashmolean Museum in due course.





Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



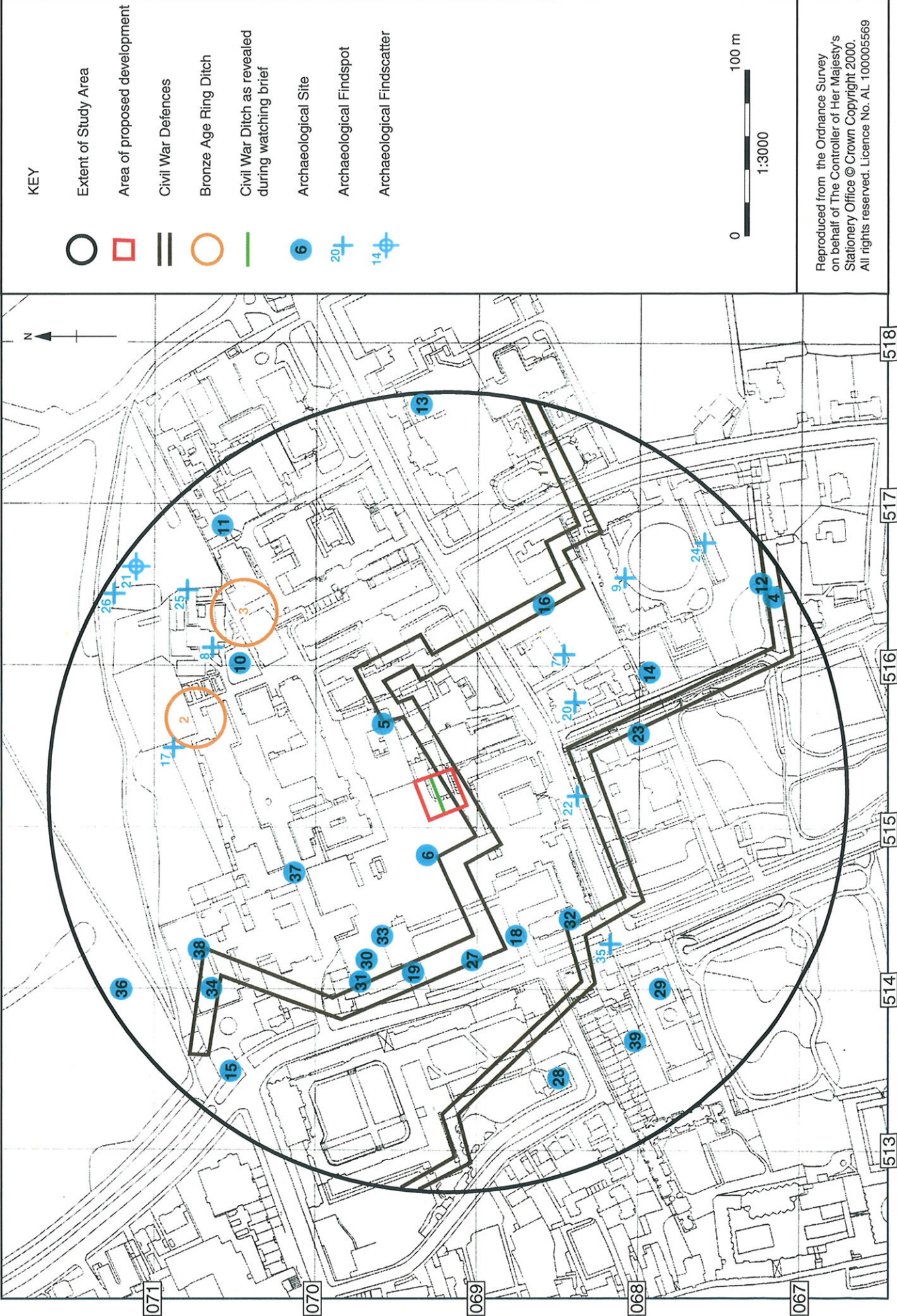


Figure 2: Archaeological Features Map



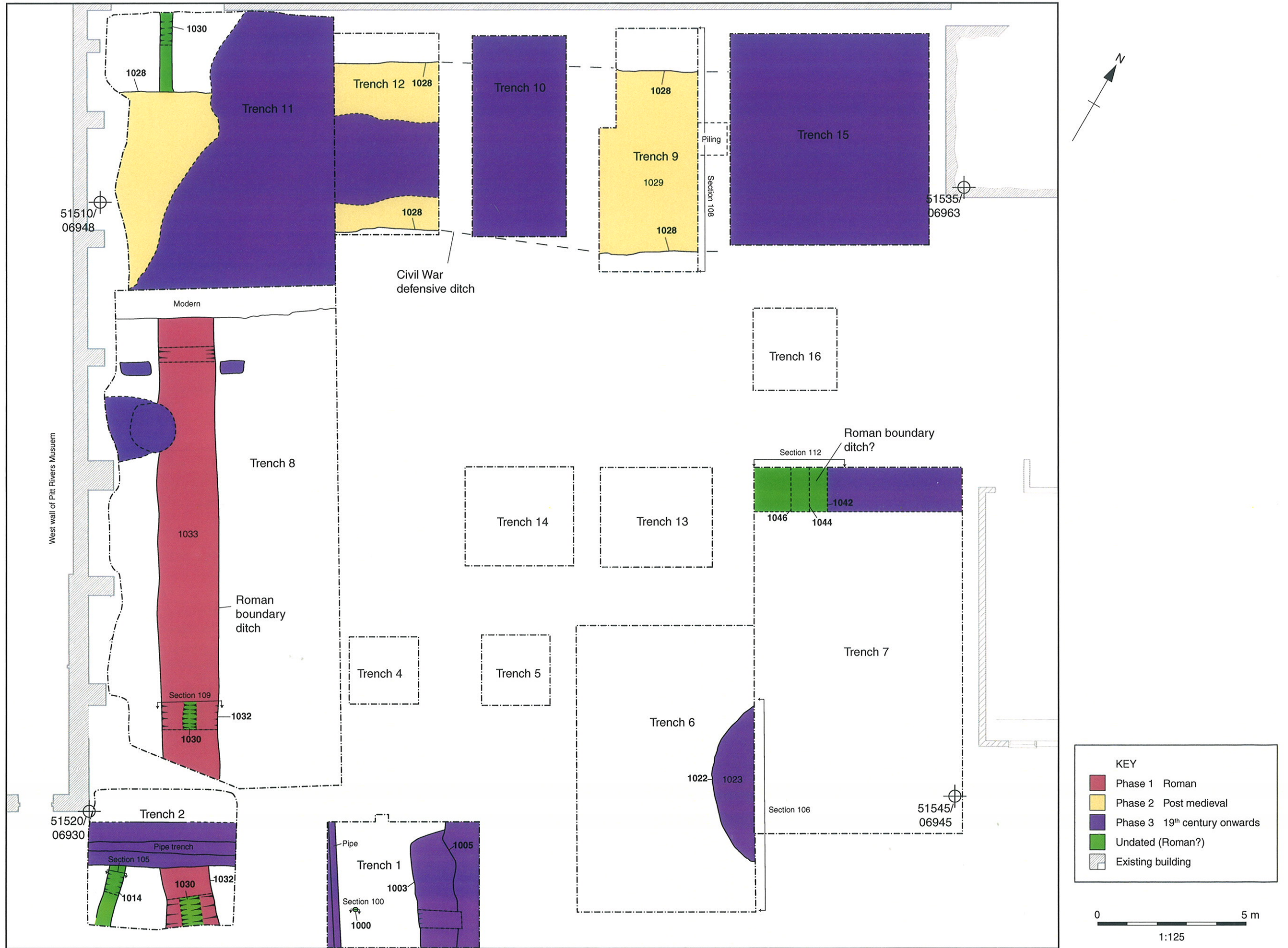
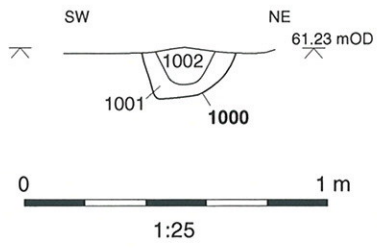
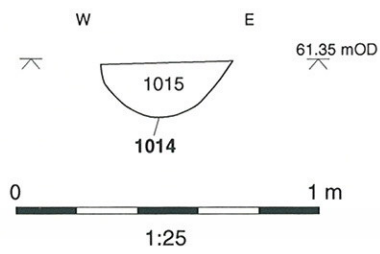


Figure 3: Site Plan

### Trench 1 Section 100



### Trench 2 Section 105



### Trench 6 Section 106

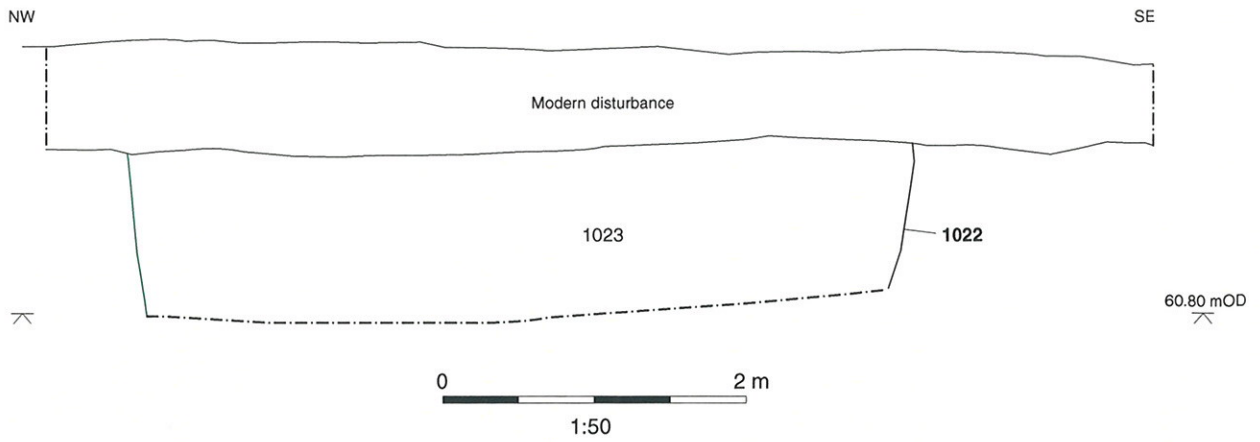
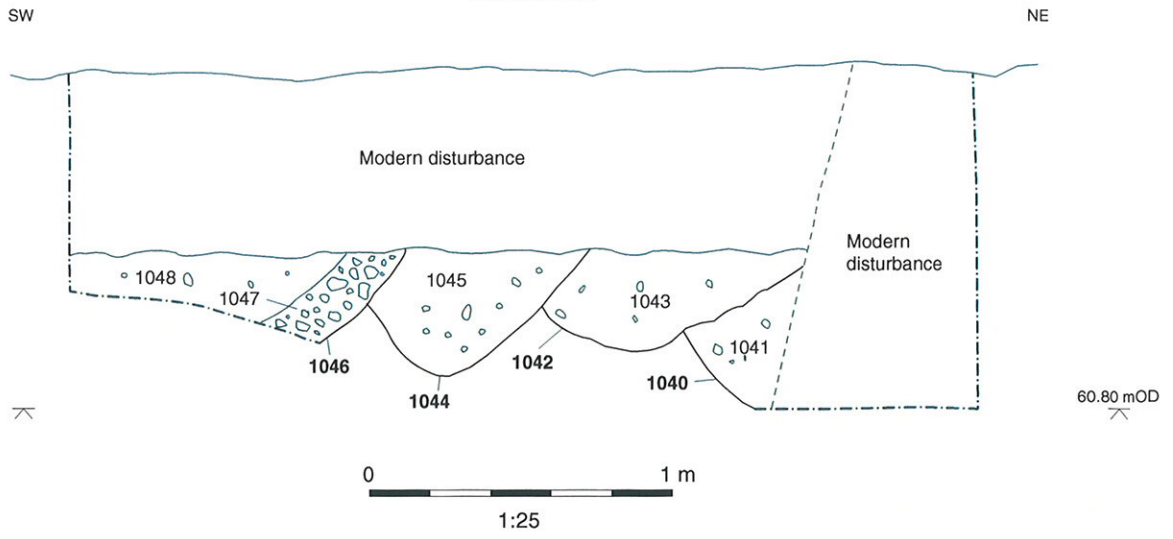
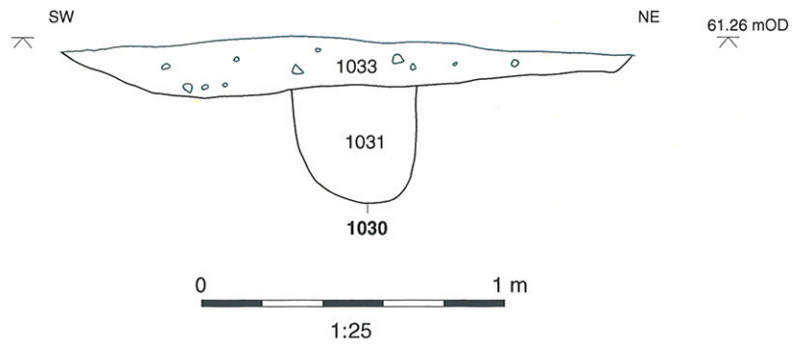


Figure 4: Trenches 1, 2 and 6, sections

### Trench 7 Section 112



### Trench 8 Section 109



### Trench 9 Section 108

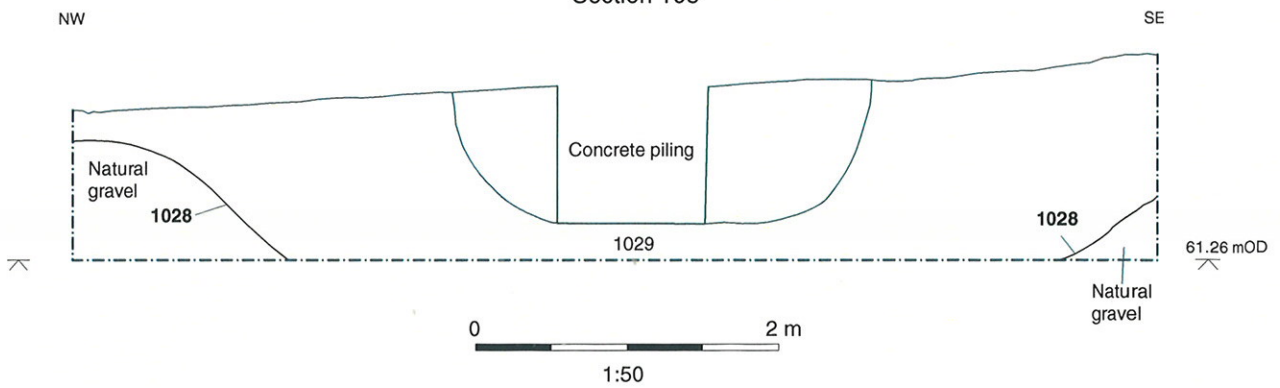















Figure 5: Trenches 7-9, sections



	Section line and number
	Section through feature not illustrated with section drawing
	Limit of excavation
	Sondage / Interior limit of excavation
	Fill line and number
	Cut line and number
	Structure number
	Unclear boundary
	Stones
	Hachures indicate inclination of slope inside excavated feature
	Levels
	Grid point
	Continuation line (trench edge continues)



### **Oxford Archaeology**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800  
f: (0044) 01865 793496  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



### **Oxford Archaeology North**

Storey Institute  
Meeting House Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 541000  
f: (0044) 01524 848606  
e: [lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



**Director:** David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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**Registered Office:**

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES