



Oxford Northern Gateway

Phase 1

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Oxford Northern Gateway Phase 1

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

In April 2017 Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by EDP Ltd to conduct an archaeological evaluation on land to the north of the A44 Woodstock Road and to the east of the A40 Northern Bypass at Wolvercote, Oxford (NGR: SP 49489 10565).

The evaluation was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of an application for a proposed new retail and housing development as part of Phase 1 of the development.

The evaluation of the site follows on from the submission of an archaeological desk-based assessment, geophysical surveys and previous phases of evaluation that covered part of the development area. The geophysical survey identified the remains of medieval ridge and furrow.

The evaluation identified deposits and a linear feature representing the remains of the medieval field system which appears to have been truncated by later 19th-century plough horizon. No other significant archaeological remains were identified, indicating the site has low archaeological potential.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank EDP for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Carl Champness and John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was directed by Paul Murray, who was supported by Lauren McIntyre. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Markus Dylewski and Charles Rousseaux. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen. The archive was prepared under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by EDP to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of Oxford Northern Gateway (Phase 1), Wolvercote, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of a submission of a planning application. A brief was set by David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist, and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process (OA 2017). This document outlines the result of these investigations.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' 'Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation' (CIFA revised 2015) and local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies between the A40 Northern bypass to the south and the A40 Woodstock Road to the north and is south-east of the A34 (Figure 1: SP 49489 10565).
- 1.2.2 The area of the proposed development consists of agricultural fields and slopes gently down from west to east from 69 to 63m aOD (above Ordnance Datum).
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Oxford Clay Formations and West Walton Formations which include mudstones formed approximately 156 to 165 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (BGS 2017). The previous adjacent evaluation to the north-west recorded Wolvercote sands and gravels (MOLA 2015). The terrace gravels and the Wolvercote Channel are important geological deposits for early Prehistoric remains. No Wolvercote Channel or Wolvercote Terrace deposits are present west of the railway cutting, but may be found in the east.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 An extensive archaeological and historical background of the area including the present site has been described in detail in the Historic Environment Assessment (MOLA 2014a), which is only briefly summarized here.

Early Prehistoric period

- 1.3.2 Archaeological investigation has shown the potential for survival of *in-situ* Lower Palaeolithic remains within the Wolvercote Terrace gravels. In the area there have been exposures of an interglacial channel deposits containing Lower Palaeolithic faunal remains and artefacts within the poorly understood Wolvercote Gravel Terrace (third terrace). The interglacial Wolvercote Channel Deposit produced what appears to be an *in-situ*, or little disturbed, tool manufacturing site. This is currently the oldest and most significant Lower Palaeolithic assemblage known from the Upper Thames. Unfortunately, the exact location and orientation of the palaeochannel is yet to be established.

1.3.3 There has been considerable debate over the geo-archaeological sequence exposed at the Wolvercote Channel deposit. The artefact assemblage was recorded from sediments at the base of the interglacial channel in association with palaeontological and palaeobotanical remains. The channel was previously attributed to MIS 7 or 5e (summarised in Roe 1994: 13), but is now accepted as being most likely of MIS 9 age (Bridgeland 1994). The assemblage from the channel is probably in near primary context and is recognised as being of national importance. However, the channel deposits have not been exposed since the 1930s, despite several attempts in the 1980s to locate them, and as a result the context and dating remain uncertain.

Bronze Age period (2300-800BC)

1.3.4 A number of barrows (HER 1323, 1354) are recorded in the wider landscape of the site, suggesting that the area had become of some significance during this period. However, no cropmarks or prehistoric find-spots have been recorded close to the site.

Iron Age period (800BC-43AD)

1.3.5 A late Iron Age settlement site has been recorded, just north-west of the site, on the opposite side of the A34, although its limits are not well defined and so associated features may extend into the site. While no buried features, such as ditches, have been recorded from the study of aerial photographs, subsequent ploughing in later periods may be masking their presence.

Roman period (AD 43–410)

1.3.6 The site lies west of a possible Roman road and there have been a number of find-spots and excavated remains in the area, dated to the 2nd century AD onwards. It is known that an important area of Roman pottery production developed to the south-west of Oxford with a possible area developed further north of the site, indicating the potential importance of the area. Just north-west of the site, on the other side of the A34, evidence of a late Iron Age/early Roman farmstead was identified. There is a scatter of Roman finds across the area (HERs 1637 and 1653) showing that there is a level of occupation and activity within the wider Roman landscape.

Early Medieval (AD 410–1066)

1.3.7 Settlement sites such as Wolvercote, Water Eaton, and Yarnton became established and provided foci for the activity in this period. Areas surrounding these settlements became part of the agricultural landscape supporting them including the area of the site, which became part of the open fields of Wolvercote.

Medieval period (AD 1066–1485)

1.3.8 There are areas of surviving ridge and furrow earthworks within the site and the sinuous pattern and spacing is consistent with later medieval agricultural practices. The area east of the A44 is more pronounced in profile than that to the west, between the A44 and the A40. The site also contains surviving elements of hedgerows and other boundaries representing probable later medieval field boundaries. The ridge and

furrow is well preserved, and may have continued to be ploughed into the post-medieval period.

Post-medieval period (AD 1485–present)

- 1.3.9 The site was maintained as agricultural land throughout this period and remains so today. The area became more accessible with the opening of the canal between 1769–90, the railway line in 1846, and the modern roads such as the A40 bypass by 1959.
- 1.3.10 Red Barn Farm was established between 1834 and 1872 and exists to the north of the site today.

Geophysical survey

- 1.3.11 Two geophysical surveys were conducted over parts of the proposed development area in 2014 by MOLA (MOLA 2014b and c). The main survey (MOLA 2014b) did not identify any archaeological remains other than medieval to early post-medieval ridge and furrow. Nor did it identify any palaeochannels or other geological features which might contain significant Palaeolithic material. This suggests that no substantial archaeological sites are likely to exist within the areas surveyed. However, the presence of small or ephemeral remains (e.g. inhumations, timber structures) cannot be firmly excluded, as these often present very difficult targets for geophysical survey to identify.

Previous archaeological works in the area

- 1.3.12 To the north-east at the New Post House Hotel a watching brief on foundation and service trenches observed only modern made-up ground deposits overlying natural clay (TVAS 2000; CBA 2001).
- 1.3.13 To the south-east of the proposed development site an evaluation at The Oxford Hotel, Godstow Road, Wolvercote in 2001 revealed no archaeological remains (TVAS 2001; CBA 2002).
- 1.3.14 Also to the south-east at the BP Garage, Woodstock Road, a watching brief undertaken during construction of a new underground fuel tank storage pit. Due to the proximity to the old Wolvercote brick pit Palaeolithic site, there was potential for important Pleistocene deposits and Palaeolithic remains to be present. However, no Pleistocene deposits were observed. Modern disturbance across the site ranged from 0.6m below ground surface level to several meters. The underlying natural sediment was always Oxford Clay. The conclusion was reached that no Wolvercote Channel or Wolvercote Terrace deposits are present west of the railway cutting, but that they are likely to be found in the east (CAHOR 2012).
- 1.3.15 As part of the A34 Wolvercote viaduct replacement scheme the excavation revealed activity associated with a long-lived settlement spanning the Iron Age/early Roman period to the 4th century AD. Features, such as a possible enclosure, pits and areas of burning, attest to the presence of a Roman settlement. The low density of the features and the finds assemblage suggest a non-intensive, low-status, rural settlement (FA 2011).

1.3.16 An evaluation to the immediate north-west of the present site identified furrows of medieval to post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation (MOLA 2015). Several sherds of post-medieval pottery and a clay-tobacco pipe were recovered from some of the furrows. No earlier archaeological remains or finds were identified. No evidence of the gravel terrace was identified, nor any Lower Palaeolithic remains (MoLAS 2015).

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the development;
- ii. To assess vulnerability/sensitivity of any exposed remains;
- iii. To determine the potential of the Site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence;
- iv. To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable the archaeological implications of any proposed developments to be assessed;
- v. To assess the impact of previous land use on the Site;
- vi. To inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of any proposed development on surviving archaeological remains;
- vii. To disseminate the results through the production of a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Oxfordshire HER.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- viii. To fully characterize the nature of the ridge and furrow forming the probable medieval agricultural landscape.
- ix. To determine the presence of any earlier periods of archaeological activity, which may be masked by the ridge and furrow.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 An array of 12 trenches was excavated with a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist (Fig. 2). Of these 11 measured 50m x 2m and one trench measured 30m x 2m. This represented a 2% sample of the proposed Phase 1a development area.

2.3.2 Machining continued in spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology or the first archaeological horizon depending upon which was encountered first. Once archaeological deposits were exposed, further excavation proceeded by hand and the appropriate use of the machine (Plates 1-2).

2.3.3 A sample of potential features was excavated and recorded to an agreed strategy with the County Archaeologist. Sufficient excavation was undertaken to resolve the principal aims of the evaluation.

2.3.4 Recording and sampling was as outlined within the Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2017).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.
- 3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated e.g. pit 102 is a feature within Trench 1, while ditch 304 is a feature within Trench 3.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence between all trenches was fairly uniform. The natural geology of firm, mid brown clay was overlain by a soft, mid grey clay silt subsoil, which in turn was overlain by topsoil.
- 3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the trenches remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 A single archaeological feature was identified Trench 8.

3.4 Trench 8 (Fig. 3; Plate 3)

- 3.4.1 Trench 8 was aligned NW-SE and placed across the extant remnants of a hedge-line.
- 3.4.2 The geological horizon (803) was identified at a depth of 0.45m. The geological horizon was disturbed by roots, represented by amorphous grey deposits and decayed roots, corresponding to the extant hedge-line. A single linear feature (804) was identified cutting the geological horizon.
- 3.4.3 Linear 804 was aligned NE-SW, parallel to the extant hedge-line. It measured 0.55m in width and was 0.12m in depth, with 40° sides and a flat base (Plate 4). It was filled with moderately compact, mid grey clay silt (805) which produced a small and abraded fragment of 13th- to 15th-century pottery.

3.5 Finds summary

- 3.5.1 Nineteenth century china was recovered from the subsoil in Trenches 1 (102) and 8 (801). A small and abraded fragment of medieval Brill Boarstall ware pottery was recovered from the fill of Feature 804. Nineteenth century china was also noted within the topsoil, but was not retained.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was conducted in dry, bright conditions. The feature identified in Trench 8 was relatively well defined against the underlying geology.
- 4.1.2 The trenches were able to provide a good coverage of the site area without significant restrictions. It is therefore felt that the recorded absence of archaeology provides a generally accurate representation of the archaeological potential of the site as a whole.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were to fully characterise the ridge and furrow system forming the probable medieval agricultural landscape and to determine the presence of earlier periods of archaeological activity, which may be masked by the ridge and furrow system.
- 4.2.2 The linear feature (804) in Trench 8 corresponded with the alignment of the ridge and furrow system identified in the results of the geophysical survey. Evidence of the furrows was not identified within any other trenches. A subsoil deposit was identified in all of the trenches, generally between 0.15 and 0.2m thick, almost certainly representing the remains of the ridge and furrow system.
- 4.2.3 Extant remains of the medieval field system were not visible in the topography and the subsoil deposit produced fragments of china dated to the 19th century. This appears to indicate that the evidence for medieval agricultural practices has been truncated by later ploughing, probably in the 19th century.

4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The feature identified in Trench 8 almost certainly represents the base of a furrow. The furrow is parallel to an extant hedge line which appears to define the southern boundary to a medieval field.

4.4 Significance

- 4.4.1 The results of the evaluation represent the remains of medieval agricultural practices truncated by later 19th-century ploughing, as such the archaeological remains can be considered to be of low significance.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.40
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
101	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	0.30	Subsoil	Ceramics	19th C
103	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.30
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
201	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
203	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
301	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
303	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.40
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
401	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	-	-
403	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.40
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
501	Layer	-	0.20	Topsoil	-	-
502	Layer	-	0.20	Subsoil	-	-
503	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
601	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
603	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.40
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
701	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
702	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	-	-
703	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 8						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
801	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil	-	-
802	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	Ceramic	18th-19th C
803	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
804	Cut	0.55	0.12	Linear	-	-
805	Fill	0.55	0.12	Fill of 804	CBM, pot	13th-15th C

Trench 9						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
901	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
902	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	-	-
903	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 10						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1001	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil	-	-
1002	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil	-	-
1003	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 11						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.30
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1101	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
1102	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil	-	-
1103	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 12						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of firm, mid brown clay.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	2
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1201	Layer	-	0.15	Topsoil	-	-
1202	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
1203	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By *John Cotter*

B.1.1 The pottery assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work at this stage. It is summarised in the table below

Context	Description	Date
102	1 sherd transfer printed ware (TPW), 35g	1830 - 1900
802	Rim sherd of pearl ware dish with blue feather edged decoration, 19g	1780 - 1840
805	1 very worn jug body sherd in Brill Boarstall ware (OXAM) with red slip decoration, 6g	1225 - 1400

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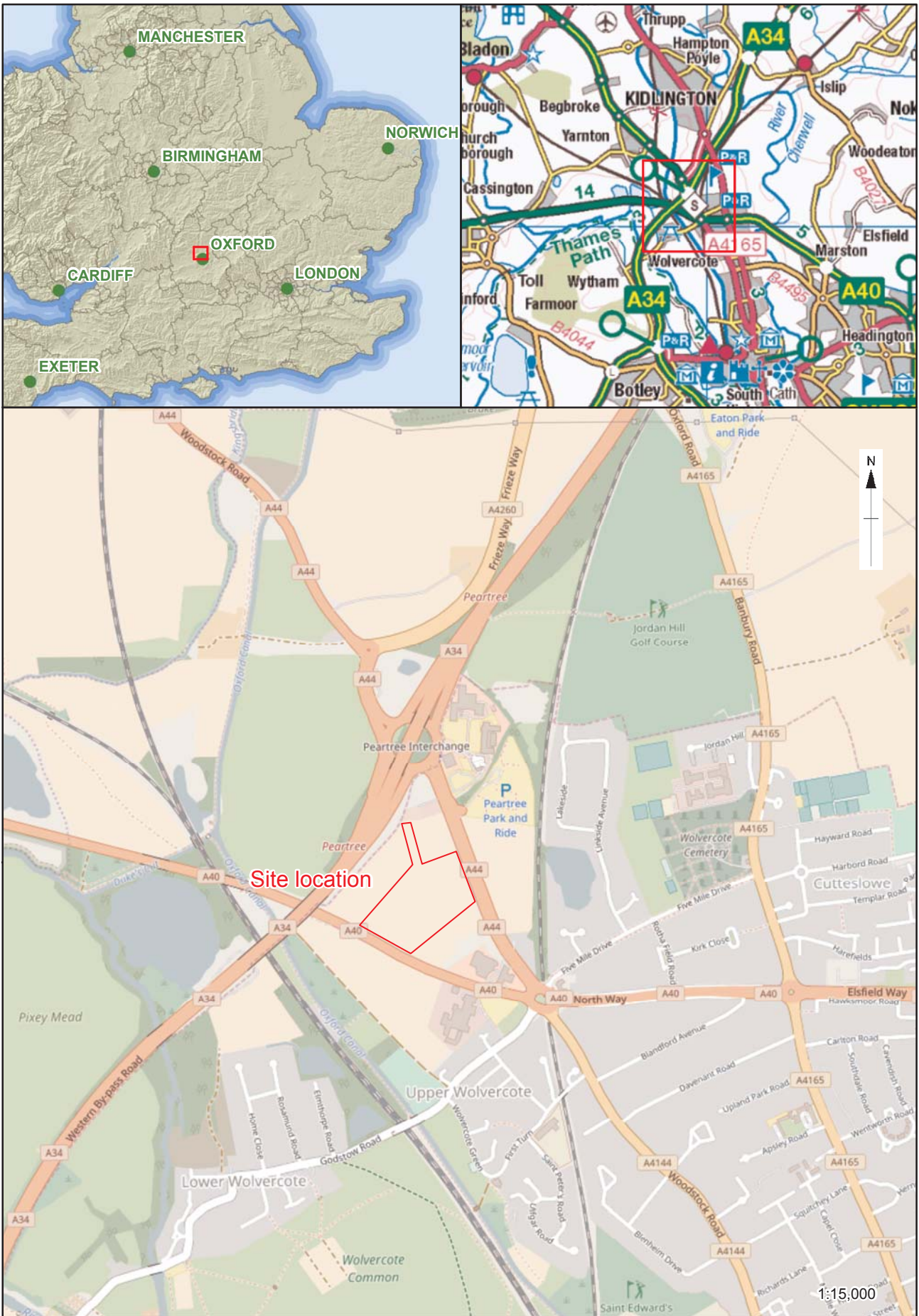
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APPENDIX D**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	Oxford Northern Gateway Phase 1
Site code:	WONG 17
Grid Reference	SP 49489 10565
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	3rd – 5th April 2017
Area of Site	5.82ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxford Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2017.53
Summary of Results:	The evaluation identified deposits and a linear feature representing the remains of the ridge and furrow system which appears to have been truncated by a 19th-century plough horizon. No other significant archaeological remains were identified.

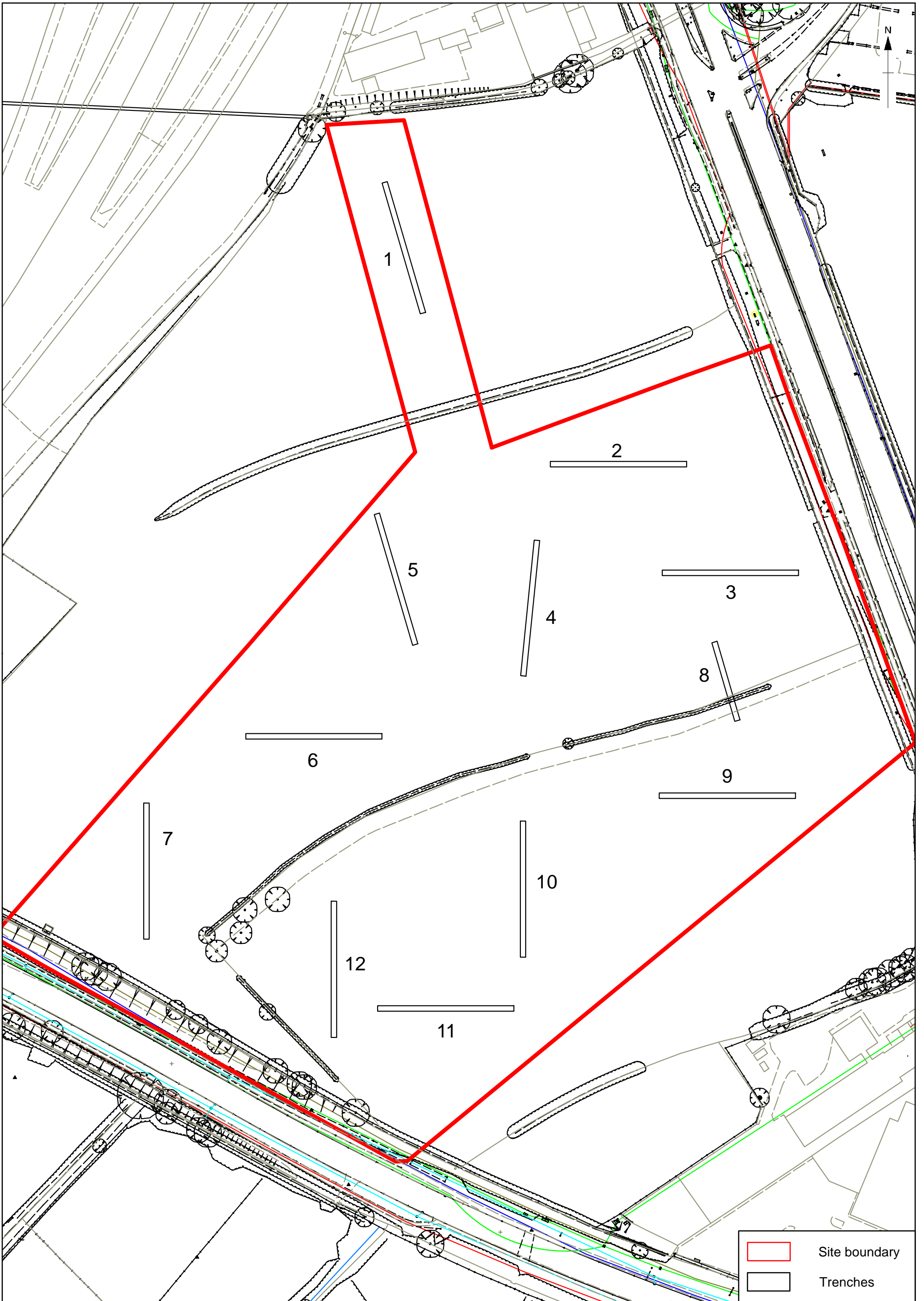


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Figure 1: Site location

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0 1:1,250 @ A3 50 m

Figure 2: Trench layout

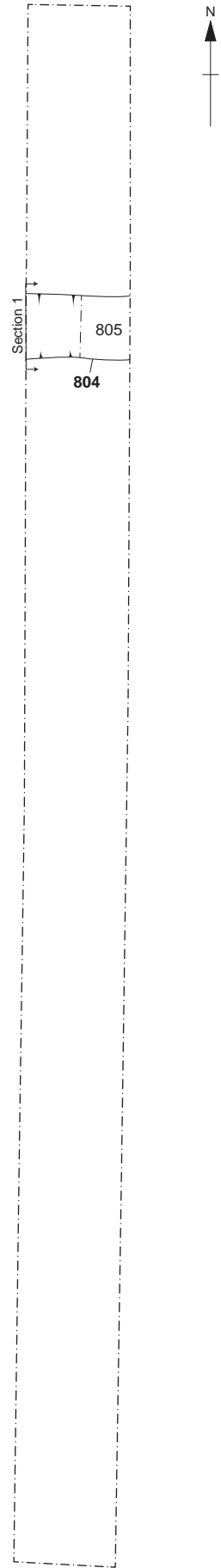
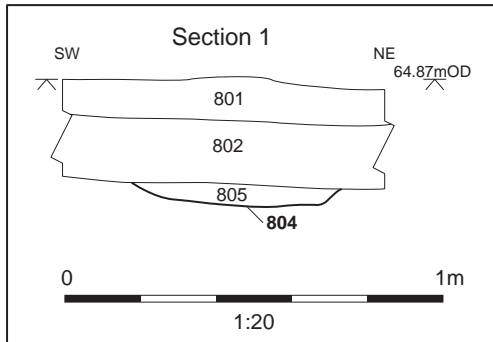


Figure 3: Trench 8 plan and section 1



Plate 1 General site shot



Plate 2 Trench 9 looking east (1m and 2m scale)



Plate 3 Trench 8 looking north (1m and 2m scale)



Plate 4 Section 801 looking northwest (1m scale)



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