

Black Walnut Field Ankerwyke Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Black Walnut Field Ankerwycke Priory, Near Wraysbury, Berkshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

On the 16th and 17th of April 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Black Walnut Field, Ankerwycke Priory, near Wraysbury, Berkshire (NGR: TQ 0055 7248). The work was commissioned by the National Trust in advance of the excavation of 17 postholes as part of the scheme to stock proof the perimeter of the field. The watching brief revealed a sequence of alluvial deposits throughout the area of the field, one of which sealed a probable palaeo-channel, which produced fragments of prehistoric flint-tempered pottery, adjacent to the current course of the River Thames.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 On the 16th and 17th of April 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Black Walnut Field, Ankerwycke Priory, near Wraysbury, Berkshire (NGR: TQ 0055 7248). The work was commissioned by the National Trust in respect of a proposal to excavate 17 postholes as part of the scheme to stock proof the perimeter of the field.

1.1.2 Due to the works being within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 19022), a condition was placed on the works requiring that a scheme of archaeological work be undertaken at the site. This work was undertaken in the form of an archaeological watching brief during the period of the excavations.

1.1.3 A project brief was set by Gary Marshall, the Archaeologist for the Thames and Solent Region for the National Trust detailing the requirements for the watching brief (NT, 2006).

1.1.4 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2007).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.1.5 The site is situated 3 km north-west of the town of Staines and is located on the north bank of the River Thames, immediately south of Ankerwycke Priory (SAM 123105). The site is level and lies at approximately 15 m AOD, occupying an area of 1.8 hectares and currently used as meadowland. The underlying geology is Terrace Gravels overlying London Clay (British Geological Survey, sheet no.269).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.1.6 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2007) and is reproduced overleaf.

- 1.1.7 The proposed development lies within an area of known archaeological potential. Specifically to the north lies Ankerwycke Priory (SAM 123105). This was subject to archaeological evaluation in 1993 and a full historical background is contained in that report (OAU 1993). Briefly, the priory was a Benedictine nunnery founded not before c.1160. The site is not mentioned in the Domesday survey. Field survey work carried out in 1992 showed a series of fish ponds, terracing (?for fields) and a pronounced platform that appears to contain the footprints of a number of ancillary buildings (RCHME 1992).
- 1.1.8 The field evaluation carried out in 1993 by Oxford Archaeological Unit was designed to attempt to ascertain the function and date of the Priory earthworks through trial trenching. Although the results showed only a series of 'dumped' layers relating mainly to the immediate post dissolution use of the Priory site and its later re-use as a Victorian garden, it was expected to tie-in the results from this watching brief with the 1993 investigation - at least as far as the sedimentary sequences were concerned (As noted in a previous auger survey - alluvium deposits were identified on the southern bank of the Thames, but were absent on the north bank. (ARCUS 1993).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 1.1.9 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 1.1.10 To preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the excavations.
- 1.1.11 To correlate the results from this investigation to those from the 1993 investigation.
- 1.1.12 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 1.1.13 The postholes were all hand excavated and consisted of 2 different sizes, 3 measuring 0.8 m by 0.4 m and 14 measuring 0.4 m square, all dug to a depth of 1m (where possible). A continuous watching brief was maintained during the period of excavation and details of all the stratigraphy encountered within each hole was recorded.
- 1.1.14 An overall plan showing the location of the holes was drawn at a scale of 1:1000 (Fig. 2) and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. A sample of the excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

1.1.15 The results of the investigation can be divided into 5 distinct groups of postholes. Each group will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

Group 1 (Postholes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 17)

1.1.16 At the base of posthole 7, a layer of compact dark blue-grey clay (21) was encountered (Fig. 3, section 1). This material contained numerous minute fragments of shell and chalk and may represent an early estuarine deposit. This was sealed by a layer of light grey clay silt (20) measuring 0.2 m deep. This deposit contained flecking of blue-grey clay whose density increased with depth and probably represents an alluvial deposit.

1.1.17 Overlying this was a layer of yellow-brown clay silt (19) measuring between 0.4 m and 0.6 m in depth. This deposit produced very occasional sub-angular river flint and is a probable alluvial deposit. This was overlaid by a layer of dark grey brown clay loam (18) measuring between 0.2 m and 0.3 m in depth. This produced occasional fragments of red clay roofing tile and represents the current topsoil and turf.

Group 2 (Postholes 9 and 10)

1.1.18 These two postholes were situated on the edge of a shallow man-made depression situated south of the field. In posthole 10 the layer of the light grey alluvium (20) was encountered 0.85 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, section 3). This was overlaid by a 0.7 m deep layer of the yellow-brown alluvium (19). Sealing this was a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (23). This deposit contained many pebbles and sub-angular river flints and appears to be material dredged out from the river, possibly during the excavation of the depression to the south.

1.1.19 Within posthole 9 the yellow brown alluvium (19) was encountered 0.4 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, section 2). This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt containing many pebbles, a continuation of the dredged material, (23). Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of dark grey clay loam (22) which contained many fragments of concrete and modern brick and which appears to be a dump of made ground.

Group 3 (Postholes 11, 12 and 13)

1.1.20 These 3 postholes were grouped within the south-western corner of the site. Although the full depth of 1 m was obtained in all the post holes, the full depth of layer 19 was not penetrated (Fig. 3, section 4).

1.1.21 The top of the yellow-brown alluvium (19) was encountered 0.3 m below the current

ground level and was sealed by a 0.3 m deep layer of the topsoil (18). The depth of deposit 19 within this location may be a peculiarity of the local topography such as the silting up of a palaeo-channel.

Group 4 (Posthole 14)

1.1.22 Within this posthole a layer of light grey-brown clay silt (24) was encountered at a depth of 0.75 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, section 5). This was a very gritty deposit which contained flecks of chalk and produced 5 fragments of flint tempered pottery. Within the small confines of the post hole it was impossible to determine if this was the fill of a feature or an occupation layer. It is more probable that this deposit represents the fill of a palaeo-channel.

1.1.23 This layer was sealed by a 0.45 m deep layer of the yellow-brown alluvium (19) which was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of topsoil, (18).

Group 5 (Postholes 15 and 16)

1.1.24 A continuation of the light grey clay silt alluvium (20) was encountered 0.8 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, section 6). This was overlaid by a 0.55 m deep layer of yellow-brown clay silt alluvium (19). This was sealed by a 0.05 m deep layer of dark grey brown clay silt (25) which contained many sub-angular fragments of chalk and fragments of red clay roof tile. This material may be the result of dumping of demolition material from the 19th-century farmhouse within the vicinity of the field gateway.

1.1.25 Overlying this was a 0.18 m deep layer of the topsoil (18).

3.2 Finds

1.1.26 Five fragments of flint-tempered black pottery were recovered from one area of excavation. These have been spot dated as prehistoric in origin but no specific pottery type could be assigned. Many fragments of red clay tile were observed within the topsoil 18. This may originate from the demolition of the house on the priory site in the early 19th-century. This material was recorded but not retained.

1.1.27 The modern material from the area of posthole 9 (concrete, fragments of brick stamped LBC) was recorded, but not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

1.1.28 The material available from the excavations was too small in quantity to make sampling viable.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

1.1.29 The watching brief showed that there were general deposits of alluvial material over the entire area of the field sealing what appears to be estuarine clay deposits. The

presence of the probable palaeo-channel containing pre-historic pottery below the upper layer of alluvium suggests that the last phase of alluvial deposition took place within the last 2000 years.

- 1.1.30 Correlation of these results from this watching brief and those of the 1993 evaluation is difficult since the locations of the trenches in 1993 were chosen in order to locate them over known, man-made features and the stratigraphy described consists of mostly redeposited material. Examination of the auger record, particularly holes 1-7 showed that the stratigraphy in open field areas, west of the priory remains, consisted of 0.25 m of topsoil over a single deposit of clay averaging 1.1 m in depth sealing terrace gravel deposits. The stratigraphy exposed within this watching brief showed 3 distinct layers of deposits (layers 19, 20 and 21) with no gravel deposits being encountered. The composition and number of these deposits, together with the evidence of layer 19 sealing a probable palaeo-channel (24), suggests that they are alluvial deposits rather than glacial and may possibly be evidence of silting up of an earlier course of the river.
- 1.1.31 Closer examination of the geological maps (British Geological Survey, sheet no.269, 1999 edition) showed that while the majority of the priory site is situated over Shepperton Terrace gravel deposits, there are alluvium deposits located immediately to the south and south-east of the field on the north bank of the Thames (these deposits are not shown on the 1981 edition). There is the possibility therefore that these deposits may extend further to the north-west than previously thought.
- 1.1.32 The watching brief encountered no evidence for activity associated with the priory such as fish ponds or water meadows extending within the area of the field.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
2	Cut	1.0 m	0.8 m	Strainer and gate post hole	-	-
3	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
4	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
5	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
6	Cut	1.0 m	0.8 m	Strainer and gate post hole	-	-
7	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
8	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
9	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
10	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
11	Cut	1.0 m	0.8 m	Strainer and gate post hole	-	-
12	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
13	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
14	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
15	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
16	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
17	Cut	1.0 m	0.4 m	Post hole for straining post	-	-
18	Layer	0.15 m - 0.3 m	-	Topsoil and turf	Clay tile, bottle glass, pottery	C19th to C20th
19	Layer	0.4 m - 0.6 m	-	Alluvium	-	Post Roman
20	Layer	0.2 m	-	Alluvium	-	-
21	Layer	> 0.1 m	-	Natural clay, Estuarine deposit ?	-	-
22	Layer	0.2 m	-	Made ground	Brick, concrete	C20th
23	Layer	0.15 m	-	Made ground, possibly material dredged from river ?	-	-
24	Layer	> 0.25 m	-	Silting deposit ? backfill of palaeo-channel ?	Pottery	Pre- historic
25	Layer	0.05 m	-	Made ground	Clay tile	C19th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

ArchaeoScape Consulting 2001 *The Runnymede and Ankerwycke Estates - Historic Environment Assessment - II. Ankerwycke*

IFA 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

Marshall, G 2007 *Information for Brief for archaeological Watching Brief* (unpublished)

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual*, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OAU 1993 *Ankerwycke Priory, Wraysbury, Berkshire - Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA 2000 *OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling* (first edition, July 2000)

OA 2007, *Ankerwyche Railings, Near Wraysbury, Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Black Walnut Field, Ankerwyche Priory, Near Wraysbury, Berkshire

Site code: WRAYAR 07

Grid reference: TQ 055 248

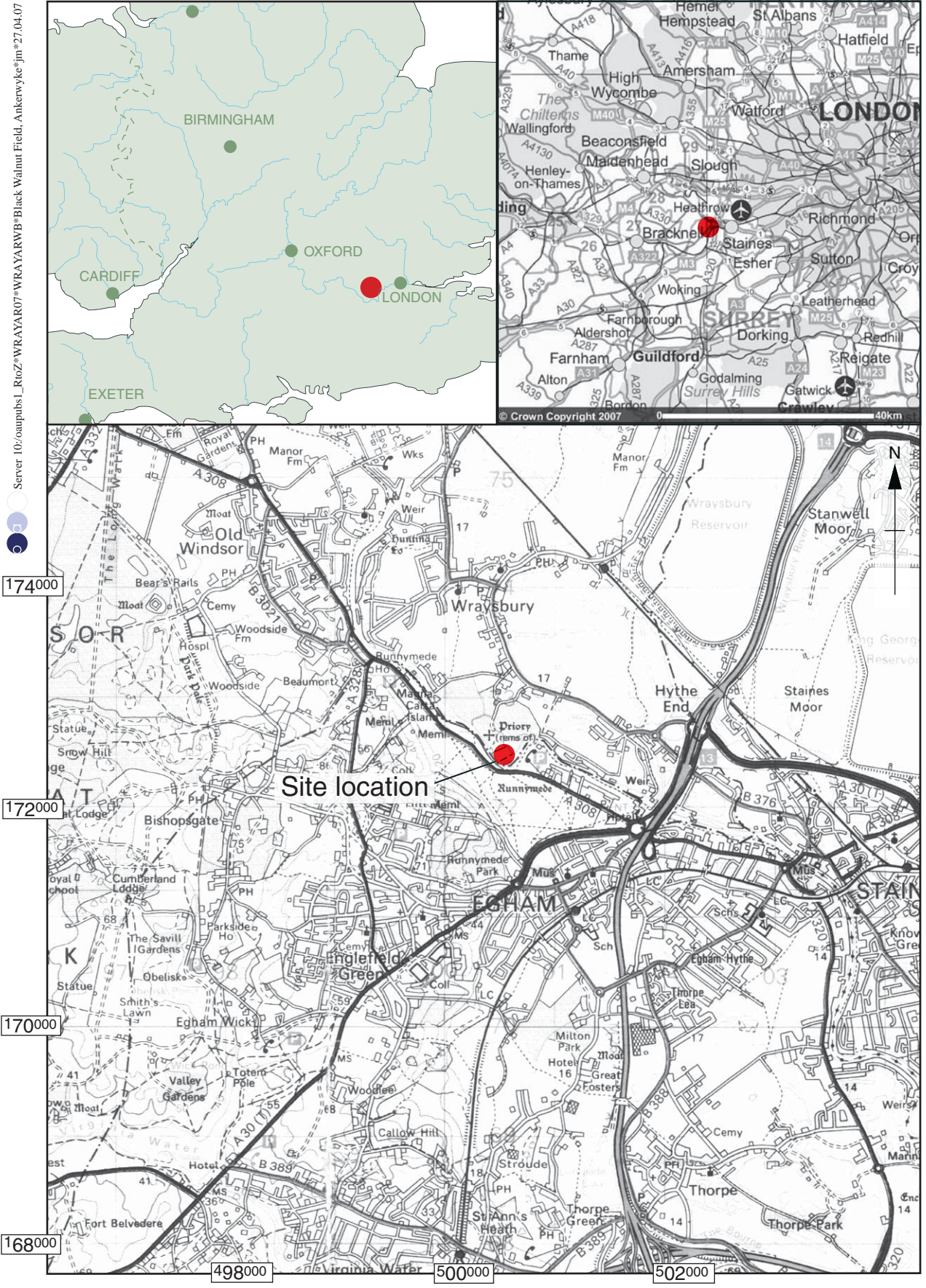
Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of 17 postholes within the area of a Scheduled Ancient Monument

Date and duration of project: 16th and 17th April 2007, 2 days

Area of site: 1.8 hectares

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed a sequence of alluvial deposits throughout the area of the field, one of which sealed a probable palaeo-channel, which produced fragments of prehistoric flint-tempered pottery and is sited adjacent to the current course of the River Thames

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



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Figure 1: Site location

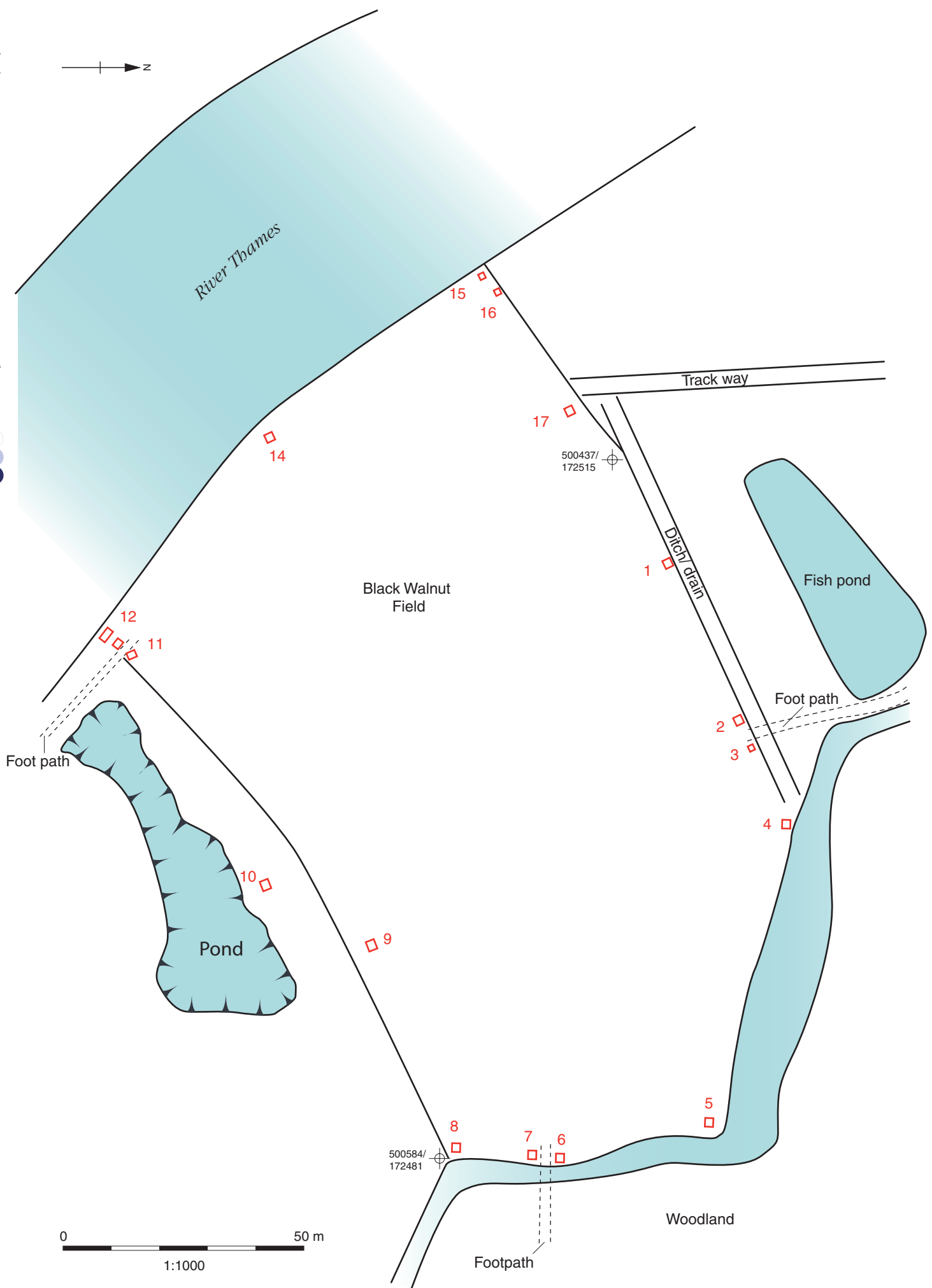


Figure 2: Site plan, showing location of postholes

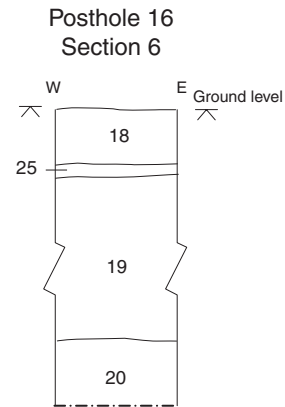
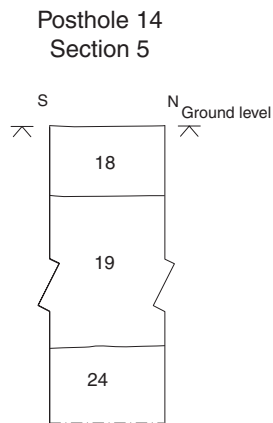
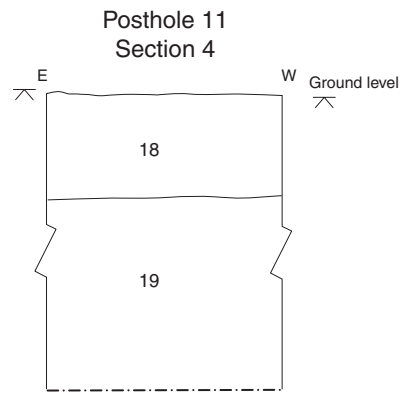
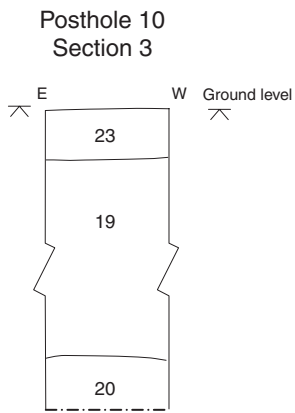
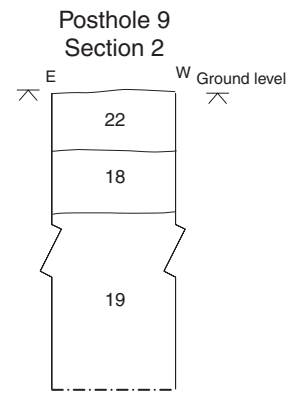
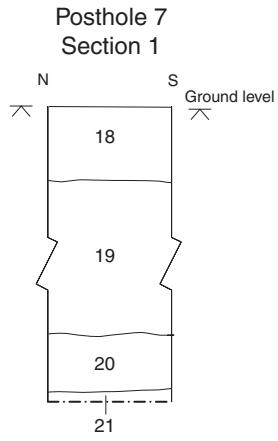


Figure 3: Sections