Church Enstone Hall

Archaeological Evaluation Report

January 2022

Client: Antoine and Philippe Cornet

Issue No: draft
OA Reference No: CHENEV
NGR: SP 37831 25098

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Client Name:	Antoine and Philippe Cornet
Document Title:	Church Enstone Hall, Oxfordshire
Document Type:	Evaluation Report
Grid Reference:	SP 37831 25098
Site Code:	CHENH21
Invoice Code:	CHENHEV
Receiving Body:	Oxfordshire County Museum Service
Accession No.:	OXCMS:2021.123
OA Document File Location:	\\10.0.10.86\Projects\c\Church_Enstone_Hall\Report
OA Graphics File Location:	\\10.0.10.86\Projects\c\Church_Enstone_Hall\Report
Issue No:	1
Date:	January 2022
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Church Enstone Hall, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Tom Black

With contributions from John Cotter and Adrienne Powell and illustrations by Lucy Gane and Marjaana Kohtamaki

Contents

List of Figures

List of Plates

Summary

In November 2021, Oxford Archaeology undertook trial trench evaluation at the Church Enstone Hall, Oxfordshire. The evaluation comprised the excavation of a single trench measuring 20m by 1.8, within the footprint of a proposed swimming pool. A 13th century tithe barn (Scheduled Ancient Monument 1006350) is located within the site which previously formed part of the grounds of a Rectory.

Four ditches were identified within the trench along with a stone drain and a pit. All features were sealed by a sequence of levelling deposits and top soil. One of the ditches contained material of medieval date, the other features remain undated.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Antoine and Philippe Cornet for commissioning this project and to Richard Nares of Yiangou Architects for his support during the project. Thanks are also extended to Richard Oram who monitored the work on behalf of West Oxfordshire Council (WOC).

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was directed by Tom Black. Survey and digitising was carried out by Marjaana Kohtomaki. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the supervision of Leigh Allen, processed the environmental remains under the supervision of Rebecca Nicholson, and prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Antoine and Philippe Cornet to undertake an evaluation of the site of a proposed swimming pool.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in support of a Planning Application. Although the Local Planning Authority has not set a brief for the work, discussions with Richard Oram, Archaeological Advisor to West Oxfordshire Council (WOC) established the scope of work required; this document outlines how OA implemented those requirements.

1.1.3 All was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014a) and relevant *Standards and* Guidance (CIfA 2014b), and local and national planning policies

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is located within the village of Church Enstone, Oxfordshire, *c.* five miles from Chipping Norton. It is situated within the parish of Enstone in the Hundred of Chadlington and is currently in the administrative district of West Oxfordshire. The site lies at the north-west of the village and is 80m to the west of St Kenelm's church.

1.2.2 The site is located on the Ooidal Limestone Formations of the Clypeus Grit Member and the Chipping Norton Limestone Formation (BGS 2021). This sedimentary bedrock deposit was formed between 166 and 170 million years ago in environments of shallow carbonate seas.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in the Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (OA 2021a) and will not be reproduced here.

1.3.2 The site is located within the grounds of a lost medieval rectory. A rectorial tithe barn, Grade II* listed and scheduled monument 1006350, lies within the site, to the east of the proposed swimming pool. A series of medieval fish-ponds and the rectory lie immediately to the west of the site.

1.3.3 The proposed swimming pool is located within a terraced area believed to be associated with the rectory. A geophysical survey of the terraces and the area surrounding the tithe barn was undertaken in 2010 (Bartlett-Clark 2010; Fig. 2). The survey identified anomalies represented by 'diamond-shaped' patterns in the upper terrace. These features were interpreted as representing the remains of paths associated with formal gardens.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive,
i. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains,
ii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means,
iii. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains,
iv. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy,
v. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape,
vi. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive,
vii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status utility and social activity, and
viii. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

ix. To ground-truth the results of the geophysical survey, including targeting potential archaeological features.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 All works was undertaken in accordance with the methodology outlined in the Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2021b).

2.3.2 The trench was machine excavated in controlled spits of no more than 100mm by tracked a 360° mechanical excavator under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. All homogenous bulk deposits were removed in sequence down to the first archaeological horizon.

2.3.3 The archaeological features were then investigated by hand and records made, including section drawings, context descriptions and digital photographs.

2.3.4 The trench and its contents were surveyed using a GPS with a sub 25mm accuracy.

2.3.5 Upon agreement with Richard Oram, Archaeological Advisor to West Oxfordshire Council, the trench was backfilled with the arising in reverse order of excavation.

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 deposits within the trench. The full details of the trench with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The natural geology of Ooidal Limestone was exposed at a depth c. 140.90m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and was overlain by a levelling deposit and a buried topsoil layer. A further, more localised levelling deposit, was recorded at the southern end of the trench. The current grass surface sealed a final levelling deposit and a buried soil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site 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 Trench 1 contained four ditches, a stone drain and a pit.

3.4 Trench 1 (Figs. 2 and 3, Plates 1, 2 and 3)

3.4.1 In the south-eastern half of the trench the geology, 105, was cut by NE-SW aligned ditch 118 (Fig. 3; Plate 1; Section 100). The ditch measured 1.76m wide and 0.38m in depth and was filled by a single deposit, 119, from which a sherd of medieval (1050-1250 AD) cooking jar was recovered. An environmental soil sample was recovered from the fill of the ditch (Appendix C.1 sample 1). A high quantity of wheat grains were recovered, although a number were damaged or fragmented. A charred small legume and grass seed were also identified. Snails were common to the flot with multiple terrestrial species present.

3.4.2 Levelling deposit 104 partially filled the ditch 118, suggesting the ditch was not fully silted up when the leveling deposit was laid down.

3.4.3 Located slightly to the west of ditch 118 was ditch 116. Also aligned NE-SW, ditch 116 measured 2.54m wide and 0.54m+ in depth. This feature was not fully excavated due to health and safety constraints. No artefactual evidence was recovered from the sole fill of the ditch, 117 (Fig. 3; Plate 1; Section 100).

3.4.4 Ditch 114 was observed to be cut into the fill of ditch 116, suggest a re-establishment of the boundary they represent. The later ditch was considerably smaller measuring only 1.2m wide and 0.52m deep. A single fill was noted within the ditch, 115, from which no artefactual evidence was recovered (Fig. 3; Plate 1; Section 100).

3.4.5 The profiles of all three of these ditches are very similar, with straight sloping sides and flattish bases, suggesting that they all served a similar purpose, probably relating to drainage, although their size would also suggest they may have defined boundaries.

3.4.6 A stone drain, 106, was located towards the north-west end of the trench. The drain was constructed from roughly hewn blocks of limestone and measured 1.50m long 0.64m wide and 0.36m deep. No bonding material was present between the blocks. The internal channel was filled with a naturally accumulated silt, 108, and the rectangular construction cut, 109, had been backfilled with a mixed silty clay , neither of which contained any finds (Fig. 3; Plate 2; Section 101).

3.4.7 The drain was truncated on its south-eastern side by a fourth NE-SW aligned ditch, 112. This ditch measured 1.12m wide and 0.58m in depth and, unlike the other three ditches in the trench, had a 'V' shaped profile, suggesting a different purpose or phase. A single fill, 113, was recorded within ditch but no artefactual evidence was recovered (Fig. 3; Plate 2; Section 101).

3.4.8 The drain and ditch 112 were both truncated by pit 110. The pit was only partially observed within the trench, with the majority continuing underneath the SW trench baulk. Within the trench the feature was observed to be 0.30m wide and 2.0m long.

3.4.9 Stone rich deposit 104 was observed throughout the trench and sealed all archaeological features. The feature is likely to have accumulated as result of deliberate deposition and used to great a level ground surface. Deposit 104 was overlain by a buried topsoil 103 (Fig. 3; Plates 1 and 2; Sections 100 and 101).

3.4.10 At the south-eastern end of the trench, the buried topsoil, 103, was overlain by another levelling deposit, 102. This deposit only extended for 3m from the south-east end of the trench before petering out. Both deposits 103 and, where present, 104 were sealed by the current topsoil and turf.

3.5 Finds summary

3.5.1 Artefactual evidence was limited to a single sherd from a medieval cooking pot of Cotswold fabric type.

3.5.2 Two small fragments of animal bone, the fused distal half of a sheep/goat radius and the phalanx from the foot a large bird, possibly a duck, were recovered from an environmental sample taken from the sole fill of ditch 118.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The findings of the evaluation can be considered to be reliable. There were no adverse weather conditions, and the features were easy to distinguish from the natural geology and levelling deposits.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 Archaeological remains comprising four ditches, a drain and pit were identified within the trench.

4.2.2 Based on the results of the geophysical survey, the trench was positioned to enable the investigation of a series of diamond shaped anomalies interpreted as representing paths relating to the remains of formal gardens associated with the rectory (Fig. 2). No evidence of such features was identified within the trench.

4.2.3 Due to limited level of artefactual evidence recovered from the trench, detailed interpretation / phasing of the identified features is difficult. However, the absence of finds of a later medieval / post-medieval date suggest that the archaeology may be earlier in date rather than later. Similarly, the very limited level of artefactual evidence indicates that the features are probably located away from any settlement or other foci of activity.

4.2.4 The profile of the ditches and sterile nature of fills suggest that relate to land management and / or drainage.

4.2.5 The presence of levelling deposits sealing the archaeological features reflects the terraced landscape in which the trench is located. While the levelling deposits identified within the trench clearly indicate that the ground level has been raised to create the terraces, the possibility that ground reduction has occurred elsewhere cannot be ruled out at this time.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					**Orientation**	NW-SE
Trench contained four NE-SW aligned ditches a pit and a stone drain. These were overlain by a levelling deposit which was then overlain by a buried topsoil, this had another levelling deposit above with the present turf above that.					**Length (m)**	20
					Width (m)	1.5
					Avg. depth (m)	0.60
Context No.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Description**	**Finds**	**Date**
101	Layer	-	0.20	Topsoil: dark grey brown, clayey silt turf	-	-
102	Layer	3.0	0.30	Levelling deposit for turf at SE end of trench: compact, dark grey brown, silty clay and stone rubble.	-	-
103	Layer	-	0.16	Buried topsoil: soft, brownish black, clayey silt.	-	-
104	Layer	-	0.46	Levelling deposit for buried topsoil: mid-dark grey brown, silty clay and stone rubble.	-	-
105	Layer	-	-	Natural: degrading limestone in a matrix of yellow and orange clays.	-	-
106	Structure	0.64	0.36	Stone drain aligned NE-SW	-	-
107	Fill	0.20	0.34	Backfill of construction cut 109 for drain 106: mixed grey brown and orangey brown sandy clay with frequent stones. Deliberate backfill.	-	-
108	Fill	0.16	0.22	Drain channel fill: soft, dark grey brown, silty clay with moderate pea grit. Natural silting.	-	-
109	Cut	0.78	0.36	Construction cut for drain 106	-	-
110	Cut	2.0	-	Cut of pit (Unexcavated)	-	-
111	Fill	2.0	-	Fill of pit 110 (unexcavated): probable silting event.	-	-
112	Cut	1.12	0.58	NE-SW Ditch: 'V' shaped profile, probable drainage ditch.	-	-

113	Fill	1.12	0.58	Fill of ditch 112: firm, mid brownish orange, silty sandy clay with frequent stone. Natural silting.	-	-
114	Cut	1.20	0.52	NE-SW Ditch, recut of ditch 116: flat base, steep straight sides. Probable drainage/boundary ditch.	-	-
115	Fill	1.20	0.52	Fill of ditch 114: compact, light grey brown, stone rubble in a sandy clay matrix. Deliberate backfill.	-	-
116	Cut	2.54	0.54+	NE-SW Ditch: feature not bottomed due to safe working depth. Probable boundary/drainage ditch.	-	-
117	Fill	2.54	0.54+	Fill of ditch 116: firm, light orangey brown, sandy clay with frequent stone. Natural silting.	-	-
118	Cut	1.76	0.38	NE-SW Ditch: flat base, moderate straight sides. Probable boundary/drainage ditch.	-	-
119	Fill	1.76	0.26	Fill of ditch 118: firm, light orangey brown, sandy clay with frequents stone. Natural silting.	Pottery, animal bone	1050-1250 AD

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By John Cotter

Context	Description	Date
119	Single sagging base of cooking pot sherd, Cotswold type ware (OXAC). 57g	1050 – 1250 AD

APPENDIX C ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

C.1 Environmental Samples

By Richard Palmer

Introduction

C.1.1 A single thirty-six litre bulk sample was taken during the evaluation, primarily for the retrieval and assessment of ecofacts and the recovery of artefacts. The sampled sediment is described as a reddish yellow clay loam and contained abundant limestone fragments.

Method

C.1.2 The sample was processed in its entirety at Oxford Archaeology using a modified Siraf-type water flotation machine. The flot was collected in a 250µm mesh and the residue in a 500µm mesh and dried. The residue fractions were sorted by eye and with the aid of a magnet 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.

C.1.3 Nomenclature for identified species follows (Stace 2010). Cereal and chaff identifications are made with reference to Jacomet (2006).

Results

C.1.4 The sample and flot data are summarised in Table 1.

C.1.5 Fill 119 of ditch 118 was sampled producing a small flot. A good quantity of wheat grains (Triticum sp.) were recovered though a number are damaged or fragmented. A charred small legume half and grass seed (Poaceae) were also identified. Snails were common to the flot with multiple terrestrial species present, Trochulus hispidus and Valonia sp. are well represented along with a few specimens of several other species. The burrowing species Cecilioides acicula is also present but has not been quantified. A few fragments of bone were recovered from the residue.

Discussion

C.1.6 The sample indicates potential for recovery of charred material on site though on its own it is of limited interpretive value. The sample also indicates potential for mollusc preservation on site and further work may need to consider a strategy for recovery should the opportunity be available from sequences with good potential.

Recommendations for retention/disposal

C.1.7 The flot warrants retention until all works on site are complete though no further work is expected on it at this time. The sample may be of interest as part of a larger assemblage and in such a case should be deposited alongside the final site archive.

Sample no.	Context no.	Feature	Trench	Date	Sample vol. (L)	Flot vol. (ml)	Charcoal >2mm	Grain	Chaff	Weeds	Other Charred	Molluscs	Notes
1	119	118	1	Med	36	25	++	+++		+	+	+++	7.5YR 6/8 clay loam

Key: +=present (up to 5 items), ++=frequent (5-25), +++=common (25-100), ++++=abundant (100+).
Legumes are recorded under Other Charred
Table 1: Assessment of bulk sample.

C.2 Animal Bone

By Adrienne Powell

C.2.1 Two fragments of animal bone were recovered from environmental sample **1**, context 119: the >10mm residue contained the fused distal half of a sheep/goat (*Ovis*/*Capra*) left radius (9g) and the 10-4mm residue contained a phalanx from the foot of a large bird, possibly a duck (<1g). Both specimens were in moderate condition, the surface of the radius was covered in root etching but was otherwise sound and the bird bone appears digested.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

C.2.2 No further information can be gained from this material and retention in the archive is not merited.

APPENDIX D BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX E SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Church Enstone Hall, Oxfordshire
Site code:	CHENH21
Grid Reference	SP 37831 25098
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	16/11/21 – 17/11/21
Area of Site	Approx. 60m2
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxford County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2021.123 .
Summary of Results:	A single trench was excavated on the site of Church Enstone Hall in November 2021. Three ditches were identified within the trench along with a stone drain and a pit. All features were sealed by a sequence of levelling deposits and topsoil. Dateable material was only present in one of the ditches which was of medieval date.

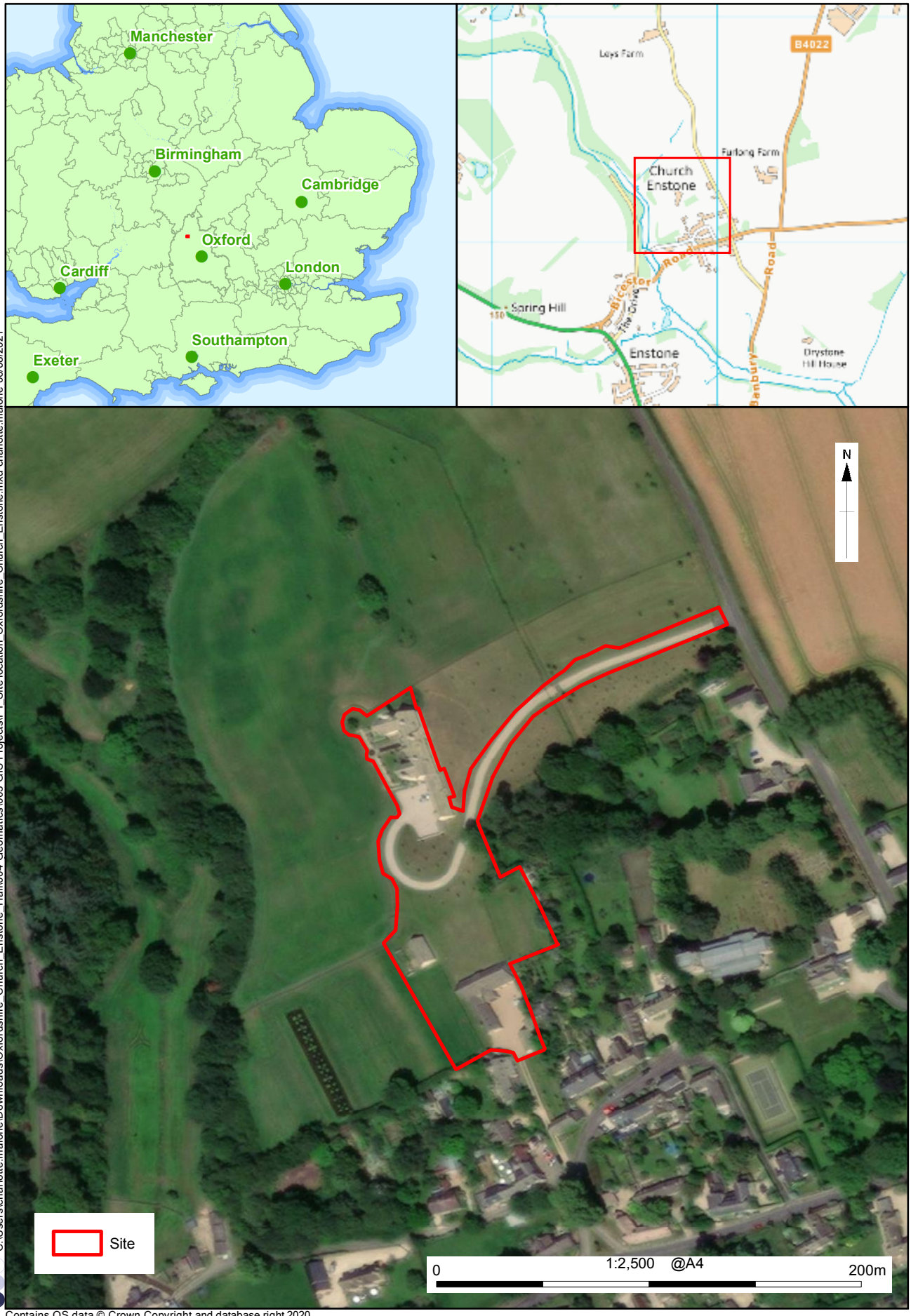

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Figure 1: Site location

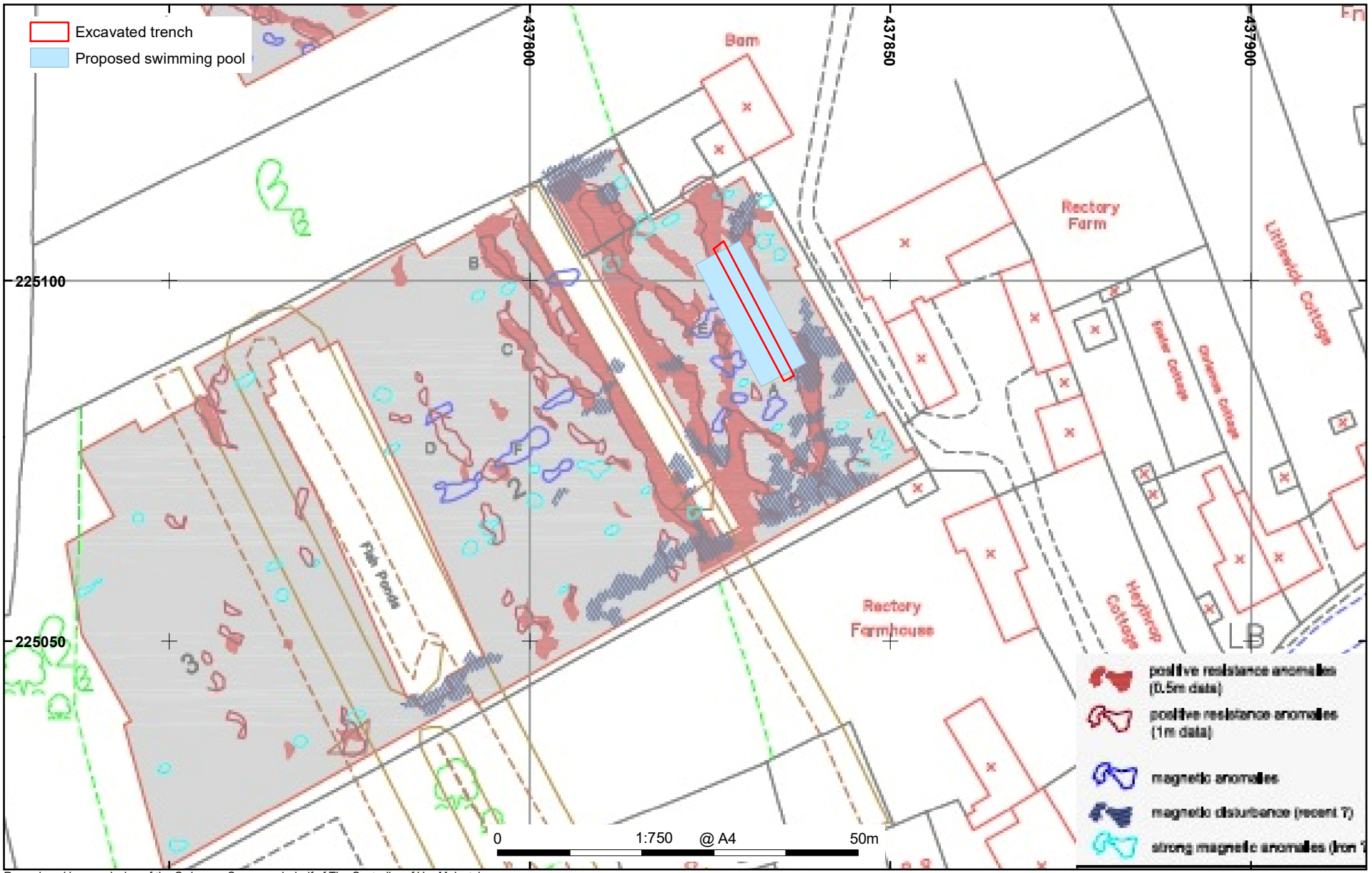

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Figure 2: Trench location and geophysical interpretation

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- Evaluation Trench
- LOE Bottom
- Intervention
- Feature
- Medieval drain
- Section

Plate 1: Ditches 114 116 and 118 view to North

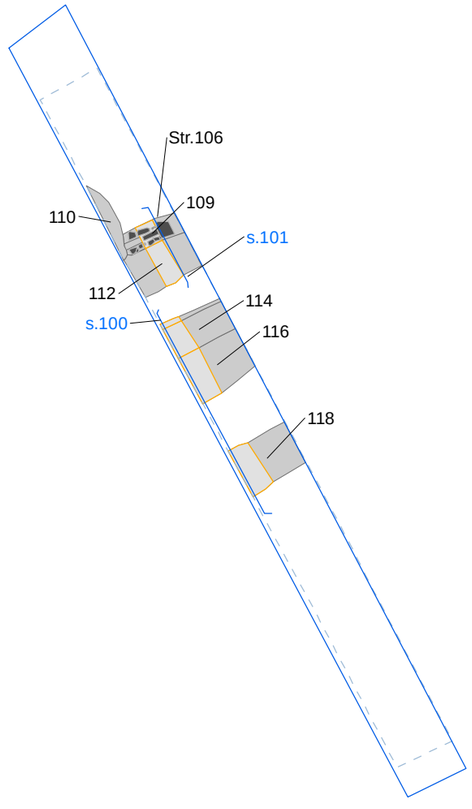
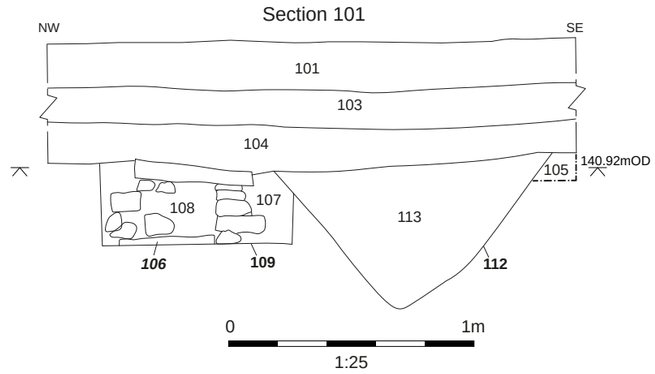
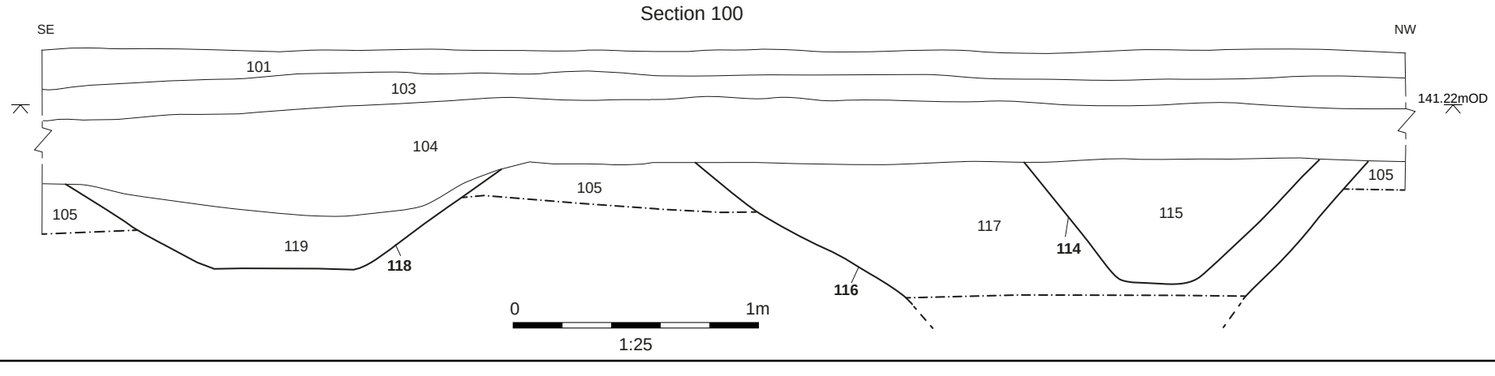


Plate 2: Ditch 109 and drain 106 view to South





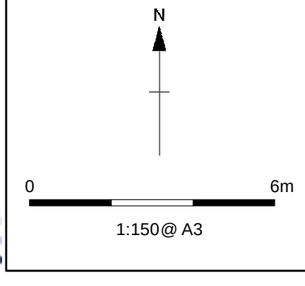


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Figure 3: Results

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