



# Nuffield Place Drainage Project, Nuffield, Oxfordshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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## Nuffield Place Drainage Project, Nuffield, Oxfordshire

### *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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Charles Rousseaux*

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## Summary

Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at Nuffield Place, Nuffield, Oxfordshire, in July 2018. The work was commissioned by the National Trust and involved the monitoring of groundworks associated with proposed improvements to sections of the existing sewerage system.

An area measuring c 1040m<sup>2</sup> located to the south of Nuffield Place had been stripped of topsoil prior to the arrival of the monitoring archaeologist. No archaeological finds or features were observed within this area.

The watching brief comprised the monitoring of the excavation of five trenches, each measuring c 2m by 2m, for sewer-pipe repairs within the stripped area. The monitoring of the groundworks revealed a stratigraphic sequence of subsoil/levelling deposit, c 0.1–0.3m thick, overlying the natural geology, which were encountered c 0.3m below ground level.

A single ditch was revealed within Trench 3 in the centre of the site, cut by the existing sewer pipe. Small quantities of prehistoric worked flint, undated pottery and charred cereal grains were recovered from the ditch, providing evidence of a limited presence in the wider landscape during the prehistoric period.

## Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank the National Trust for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Richard Oram who monitored the work on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was undertaken by Dan Sykes and Bob McIntosh. The figures were produced by Matt Bradley 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, processed the environmental remains under the supervision of Rebecca Nicholson and prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.



## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Scope of work**

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake a watching brief at Nuffield Place, Nuffield, Oxfordshire. The fieldwork monitored the excavation of five trenches for the proposed repair works on sections of the existing sewerage system.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (planning ref. P17/S3423/FUL). Although the local planning authority had not set a brief for the work, discussions with Richard Oram, Lead Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, established the scope of work required. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was produced outlining how the specified requirements would be implemented (OA 2018a).
- 1.1.3 The proposed programme of archaeological works comprised a combination of strip, map and sample excavation and archaeological watching brief during the installation of a new drainage infrastructure and repairs to the existing pipework (OA 2018a). However, proposals for the new drainage infrastructure were not implemented. Therefore, the archaeological works were limited to a watching brief during the excavation of access trenches to enable repairs to the existing sewer network.
- 1.1.4 The watching brief was undertaken in July 2018 and in accordance with local and national planning policies and appropriate Chartered Institute for Archaeologists guidance documents (CIfA 2014a; 2014b).

### **1.2 Location, topography and geology**

- 1.2.1 The site is located c 1km north-east of the village of Nuffield, Oxfordshire, on the north side of the A4130, formerly a major route linking Oxford to London (NGR SU 67857 87792; Fig. 1). It is bounded to the west by a large field, to the north by Huntercombe Prison and to the east by Park Wood and Nuffield Court. A small detached area, which also forms part of the National Trust landholding, is situated 125m to the north-west and comprises a former chalk quarry.
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed works consists of a downwards slope to the west, ranging from a maximum height of 214m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) at the eastern boundary to 204m aOD at the western boundary. The chalk quarry to the north-west of Nuffield Place lies at 195m aOD.
- 1.2.3 The site is situated within the chalk escarpment of the Chiltern Hills and lies on the western slope of a hill, the summit of which lies within Park Wood. The underlying geology is mapped as chalk overlain by clay-with-flints (BGS 2020).

### **1.3 Archaeological and historical background**

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in an archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) produced by OA (2017) and is summarised here.

### ***Prehistoric and Roman***

- 1.3.2 No prehistoric remains have been identified within the site. The landscape around the site is crossed by two prehistoric routeways: Grim's Ditch, which is a scheduled monument (List No. 1006368), and the Chiltern Ridgeway.
- 1.3.3 No Roman remains have been identified within the site or the wider area.

### ***Medieval***

- 1.3.4 No early medieval remains have been identified within the site or the wider area.
- 1.3.5 Later medieval remains focused on a manor house located within the grounds of Huntercombe Manor, which occupied the site of the present day Huntercombe Farm. A deer park surrounded the manor house, the full extent of which is unknown, but it is thought to have covered a 114ha area, which included Park Wood and a lawn. These features are shown on a map of the parkland dated to AD 1665. A possible park pale and other earthworks, which may have been associated with the medieval deer park, have been identified within the site.
- 1.3.6 A medieval ditch and a possible plough lynchet containing 12th- to 13th-century pottery were recorded to the north-west of the site during archaeological monitoring of the excavation ahead of the Nuffield–Ascot Gas Pipeline excavations in 1983 (OAU 1984).

### ***Post-medieval–modern***

- 1.3.7 Six Grade II listed buildings with a post-medieval date have been identified within the wider area. The closest listed buildings to the site are Huntercombe Manor, Huntercombe stables and barn, and the Crown Public House. The Grade II listed Huntercombe Manor lies directly to the north of the site. The manor is depicted on the Davis map of Oxfordshire and was built in the late 17th century as a farmhouse. The front of the building appears to have been altered during the mid-18th century, and two bays either side of the main structure were added during the 19th century.
- 1.3.8 The majority of the heritage assets identified within the site are associated with the early 20th-century Nuffield Place and its associated grounds. Nuffield Place is a country house located within the centre of the site, c 1km north-east of the village of Nuffield. The building was constructed on land originally used as paddocks associated with Huntercombe Manor House. Originally named 'Merrow Mount', the two-storey house was built in the Arts and Crafts style in 1914 for Sir John Bowring Wimble. The house and surrounding gardens were designed by Oswald Partridge Milne, a pupil of Edwin Lutyens. Its construction was finished in 1915, and it is most renowned as the home of millionaire motor manufacturer and philanthropist William Morris. Following the purchase of the property by William Morris in 1933, the house was extensively altered and renamed Nuffield Place (NT SMR 2016). On Morris' death in 1963, the house was bequeathed to Nuffield College, from whom it passed to the National Trust in 2010 and is now open to the public as a visitor attraction.
- 1.3.9 Three modern Grade II listed buildings are recorded within the wider area. The Grade II listed buildings Huntercombe Place and Huntercombe forecourt walls are located

400m to the north-west of the site. Huntercombe Place is an Arts and Crafts style building, built by Oswald Milne in the early 20th century.

- 1.3.10 Huntercombe Prison is a 20th-century prison located 150m north of the site. The prison was located on the site of a WWII internment camp, and in 1946 opened as a borstal school, an establishment in which offenders aged 15–21 could be detained for ‘corrective training’. The prison was decommissioned in 2010. The prison building was redeveloped throughout the 20th century, and as a result very few of the WWII structures survive.

### *Previous investigations*

- 1.3.11 In March 2018, OA monitored the excavation of a new fibre-optic-cable trench across the grounds of Nuffield Place (OA 2018b). No archaeological features or deposits were identified and no finds were recovered.
- 1.3.12 As part of the completion of the DBA, a review of LiDAR data covering the site and surrounding landscape identified several previously unknown features. Within Park Wood, a circular feature formed of two concentric earthworks, and ten evenly spaced pit-like features were identified. A large bank-and-ditch earthwork, interpreted as the remains of the medieval park pale, is also visible along the north, east and south boundaries of Park Wood. A walkover survey of the site, carried out in 2016, recorded earthworks associated with both the park pale and the circular feature (OA 2017). In addition, a previously unidentified enclosure of unknown function and date is visible immediately to the south of the route of the proposed sewer.

## 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The general aim of the archaeological works, as stated in the WSI (OA 2018a), were to mitigate the impacts on any buried archaeological remains during improvement works to the existing sewerage pipe route through preservation by record.
- 2.1.2 The specific aims and objectives of the archaeological works, as stated in the WSI (OA 2018a), were as follows:
- i. To mitigate the impacts of the proposed improvement works on any buried archaeological deposits or features;
  - ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
  - iii. To better understand past land use and economy through the analysis of environmental remains;
  - iv. To contextualise the findings within the local and regional landscapes; and
  - v. To make available the results of the archaeological works.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The methodology specified for the archaeological works can be found in full in the WSI (OA 2018a) and is summarised below.
- 2.2.2 The watching brief involved the monitoring of the excavation of five trenches required for the proposed repair works on sections of the existing sewerage system (Fig. 2). The trenches generally measured c 2m by 2m and were located within an area to the south of Nuffield Place, measuring c 1040m<sup>2</sup>, which had already been stripped of its topsoil prior to the arrival of the monitoring archaeologist.
- 2.2.3 Within the trenches, overburden deposits were removed by a mechanical digger fitted with a toothless bucket. The exposed surfaces were cleaned, where necessary, to allow for the identification of archaeological features or deposits.
- 2.2.4 Where exposed, archaeological features were investigated by hand to establish their character and date. Standard OA recording methodologies were employed throughout, with any exposed archaeological features and deposits issued with unique context numbers. Sections of features were drawn at a scale of 1:20. Finds, where present, were retrieved and collated by context.
- 2.2.5 A full digital photographic record was compiled comprising general views of the monitored areas.
- 2.2.6 All work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014b).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. Finds and environmental data are presented in Appendices A and B.

### 3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform. The natural geology of orange-brown clay and orange-yellow sand was overlain by a light brown to mid orange-brown silty clay subsoil/levelling deposit, c 0.1–0.3m thick, which in turn was overlain by topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief 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 A single archaeological feature was encountered during the monitoring works, revealed within Trench 3 in the centre of the site.

### 3.4 Topsoil removal (Fig. 2)

3.4.1 The removal of the topsoil of a lawned area to the south of Nuffield Place had been undertaken prior to the arrival of the monitoring archaeological on 6th July 2018. The area measured c 40m by 26m, and c 0.1m of topsoil had been removed.

3.4.2 This area was scanned for archaeological features and finds on 10th July 2018, neither of which were encountered.

### 3.5 Sewer-pipe repair trenches

#### *Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig. 2; Plates 2 and 3)*

3.5.1 The monitoring of the excavation of two conjoining trenches (Trenches 1 and 2) for sewer pipe repairs in the north-west of the stripped area took place on 6th July and 10th July 2018. Measuring c 5m by 2.5m in total, the trenches revealed a straightforward stratigraphic sequence of a light-brown clay/silt subsoil/levelling deposit with flint inclusions, c 0.2–0.3m thick, overlying the natural geology. Encountered c 0.3m below ground level (BGL), the natural geology comprised an orange-brown clay with flint inclusions. The NNW–SSE aligned sewer pipe trench was revealed within the trenches, though no archaeological remains were evident.

#### *Trench 3 (Fig. 3)*

3.5.2 The excavation of Trench 3 towards the centre of the stripped area for sewer pipe repairs was monitored and recorded on 10th–11th July 2018. Measuring c 2.5m by 2m, the trench revealed a stratigraphic sequence of a mid orange-brown silty-clay subsoil/levelling deposit (4) with flint inclusions, c 0.2–0.3m thick, overlying the natural orange clay (3).

3.5.3 The existing sewer pipe trench was exposed crossing Trench 3 on a NNW–SSE alignment. This cut a roughly NNE–SSW aligned ditch (1), which measured c 1m wide and 0.5m deep. The ditch continued to the north-east beyond the trench limit, though it was not seen continuing beyond the sewer pipe to the south-west. The ditch had moderately sloping sides, a concave base and contained a single fill (2). Two prehistoric worked flints and two tiny pieces of undated pottery were recovered from the ditch, though it is not clear if this material reflects the date of the feature. Bulk soil sample 1 was collected from the fill and produced 39 pieces of flint (comprising small chips, irregular waste and natural fragments), as well as charcoal and a small quantity of poorly preserved, charred cereal grains, including wheat.

#### ***Trenches 4 and 5 (Fig. 2; Plates 4 and 5)***

3.5.4 Monitoring of the excavation of Trenches 4 and 5, each measuring 2m by 2m, for sewer-pipe repairs in the south of the stripped area was undertaken on 17th July 2018. As elsewhere, both trenches revealed a stratigraphic sequence of a mid orange-brown silty-clay subsoil (4), c 0.1–0.3m thick, overlying natural orange-yellow sand (5). The existing sewer pipe trench was clearly observed within the trenches on a NNW–SSE alignment. No archaeological features were identified and no finds recovered.

### **3.6 Finds summary**

3.6.1 A very small assemblage of finds was hand collected during the monitoring works. This comprises two pieces of prehistoric worked flint and two tiny pieces of undated pottery. A further 39 pieces of flint, comprising small chips, irregular waste and natural fragments, were recovered from the bulk soil sample collected from ditch 1 in Trench 3.

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The weather during the investigation was largely favourable, with the monitoring work conducted in sunny conditions.

### 4.2 Watching brief objectives and results

4.2.1 The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological remains in order to mitigate the impact of the intrusive groundworks associated with the proposed improvements works relating to the existing drainage system.

4.2.2 A single archaeological feature was identified during the monitoring of the groundworks on site, comprising a ditch excavated and recorded in Trench 3. Small quantities of prehistoric worked flint, undated pottery and charred cereal grains were recovered from its fill. The limited quantity and range of archaeological remains, however, have little potential to inform on the nature of past land use and economy.

### 4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 Monitoring of the groundworks associated with improvements to the existing sewerage system confirmed the presence of a very low density of archaeological remains within the stripped areas. These limited results correlate with those of the watching brief undertaken on site in 2018, which identified no archaeological features or finds (OA 2018b).

4.3.2 The ditch recorded in Trench 3 contained small quantities of worked flint, undated pottery and charred cereal grains. Whilst it is not clear if this material reflects the date of the feature or was residual within it, the worked flint at least provides some evidence of a limited and perhaps transitory presence in the wider landscape during the prehistoric period. The proximity of two prehistoric routeways, Grim's Ditch and the Chiltern Ridgeway, to the site is further indicative of prehistoric activity within the landscape.

4.3.3 The lack of archaeological remains of later date corresponds with the limited remains previously recorded both on site and in the surrounding area, and is consistent with the site being under agricultural use and woodland during the medieval and post-medieval periods when it was associated with Huntercombe Manor.

4.3.4 The development of Nuffield Place and the surrounding area in the 20th century may have removed any potential archaeological remains that could have been present, though the lack of residual finds observed within overburden deposits in the monitored areas suggests low-level of activity on site predating the 20th century.

### 4.4 Significance

4.4.1 One archaeological feature and a minimal number of finds revealed by the monitoring works provide limited evidence of low-level activity probably during the prehistoric period. However, given the general paucity of archaeological remains including a lack of any residual finds, it is considered that the improvement works to the existing sewerage system will have negligible impact on heritage assets within the site.

## APPENDIX A FINDS REPORTS

### A.1 Pottery

*By Kate Brady*

- A.1.1 Two very small crumbs of sand-tempered pottery were recovered from the fill of ditch 1 (fill 2). Weighing less than 1g in total, they cannot be assigned a date.

### A.2 Flint

*By Geraldine Crann*

#### **Introduction**

- A.2.1 Two worked flints were recovered from the fill (context 2) of ditch 1 (Table 1). Thirty-nine small chips, irregular waste and natural pieces were also recovered from the environmental sample collected from the same fill.

Context	Description	Date
2	Flint blade with hinge termination, small winged butt, three dorsal scars, edge damage, 3g	Prehistoric
2	Flint blade-like flake with rough cortex at proximal end, winged butt, three dorsal scars, the proximal left margin retains some retouch partially removed by post-depositional damage. Distal end damaged possibly use-wear, 9g	Prehistoric
2	Sample 1. Twenty-six small chips, irregular waste and natural fragments, 4g	Prehistoric
2	Sample 1. Thirteen chips, irregular waste and natural fragments, 13g	Prehistoric

**Table 1: Flint assemblage**

- A.2.2 The flints are all potentially residual within the fill of the ditch, a feature that cut through the underlying geology of chalk with flints and clay. None of this material has any technologically diagnostic features that would enable it to be assigned to a specific period. The flints from the bulk soil sample 1 are a mix of worked chips, possible worked chips and naturally occurring fragments.
- A.2.3 The size and nature of the assemblage limits its interpretation, beyond attesting to a nearby human presence during the prehistoric period. As no evidence for prehistoric activity has previously been found in the area of the watching brief, the worked flints should be retained and integrated into any further analysis arising from future archaeological work on the site.



## APPENDIX B ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

### B.1 Environmental samples

*By Sharon Cook*

#### *Introduction*

- B.1.1 A single sample (1) was collected during the watching brief. The sample was collected to assess the presence and condition of any palaeoenvironmental remains and to recover any artefacts or other datable material.
- B.1.2 The sample was processed by water flotation (using a modified Siraf system) for the recovery of plant remains and any bones or artefacts that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.25mm nylon mesh, and the residues were sieved to 0.5mm. The flot and residues were allowed to air dry in a heated room, and any bones and artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds.
- B.1.3 Once dried, the flot was scanned under a low-power binocular microscope at magnifications between x10 to x20. Identifications of cereal were made with reference to published guides (eg Jacomet 2006).

#### *Results*

- B.1.4 Sample 1 was collected from the single fill of ditch 1. The 17l sample was a yellowish red (5YR 4/6) silty clay and it produced a flot of 6ml that included a small quantity of fine modern roots. Fragments of struck flint were extracted from the residue.
- B.1.5 The charcoal is generally small in size, typically <2mm in at least one plane, with only three fragments larger than 4mm. Consequently, most fragments are unidentifiable.
- B.1.6 Five cereal grains in a damaged condition are present, with three of them being too distorted and clinkered to identify further. The two remaining grains are wheat (*Triticum* sp.), but their condition is too poor to allow further identification. No other identified charred plant remains are present within the flot, although there are a small number of fungal sclerota.

#### *Discussion and conclusion*

- B.1.7 The small quantity of charred material within this sample is likely to reflect accidental incorporation of probable household waste within the fill of the ditch rather than the result of a deliberate disposal event.
- B.1.8 With only a single sample and such a small quantity of material, it is impossible to further interpret this sample.

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## APPENDIX D SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

<b>Site name:</b>	Nuffield Place Drainage Project, Nuffield, Oxfordshire
<b>Site code:</b>	NUFF18
<b>Grid Reference</b>	SU 67857 87792
<b>Type:</b>	Watching Brief
<b>Date and duration:</b>	July 2018
<b>Area of Site</b>	c 1040m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Location of archive:</b>	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2018.26.
<b>Summary of Results:</b>	<p>An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Nuffield Place monitoring groundworks associated with proposed improvements to sections of the existing sewerage system. An area measuring c 1040m<sup>2</sup> located to the south of Nuffield Place had been stripped of topsoil prior to the arrival of the monitoring archaeologist. No archaeological finds or features were observed within this area.</p> <p>The watching brief comprised the monitoring of the excavation of five trenches, each roughly measuring c 2m by 2m, for sewer-pipe repairs within the stripped area. This revealed a stratigraphic sequence of subsoil/levelling deposit, c 0.1–0.3m thick, overlying the natural deposits.</p> <p>A single ditch containing small quantities of prehistoric worked flint, undated pottery and charred cereal grains was revealed within Trench 3, providing evidence of a limited presence in the local area during the prehistoric period.</p>



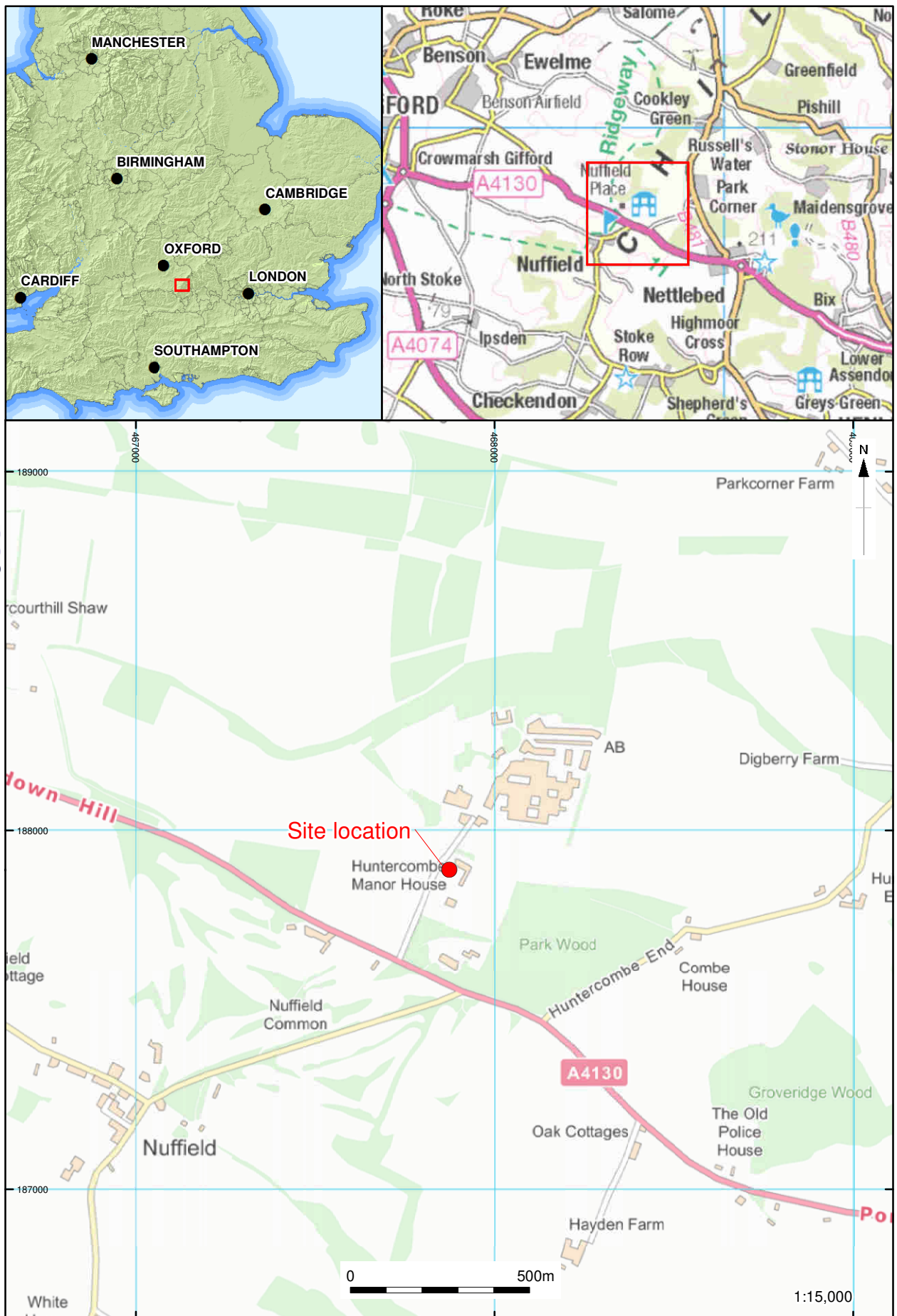


Figure 1: Site location



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0 1:250 @ A4 25 m

Figure 2: Trench locations

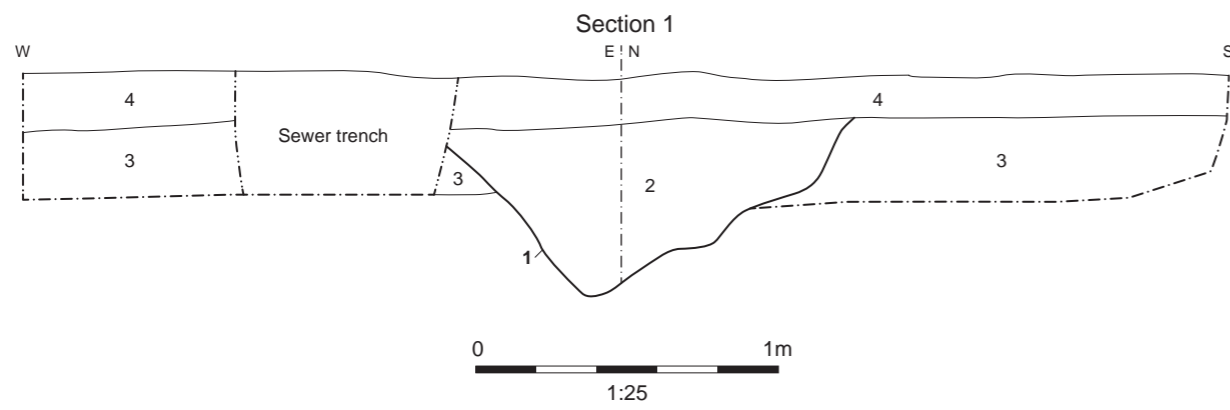
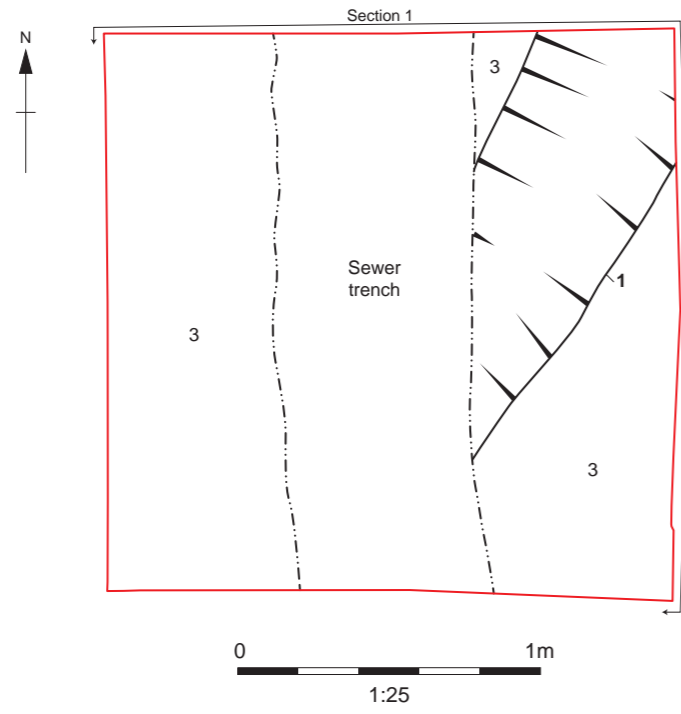


Figure 3: Trench 3 showing ditch 1



Plate 1: General view of works



Plate 2: Trench 1, view to N





Plate 3: Trench 2, view to N



Plate 4: Trench 4, view to S



Plate 5: Trench 5, view to S



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