



St Frideswide Farm, Cutteslowe, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

February 2020

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St Frideswide Farm, Cutteslowe, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Contents

Summary.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Scope of work.....	1
1.2 Location, topography and geology.....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	1
2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY.....	5
2.1 Aims.....	5
2.2 Methodology.....	5
3 RESULTS.....	6
3.1 Introduction and presentation of results.....	6
3.2 General soils and ground conditions.....	6
3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits.....	6
3.4 Finds summary.....	6
4 DISCUSSION.....	7
4.1 Reliability of field investigation.....	7
4.2 Evaluation objectives and results.....	7
4.3 Interpretation.....	7
APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY.....	8
APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	12
APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS.....	13

List of Figures

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Trench locations with geophysics
Figure 3	Section 300, Trench 3
Figure 4	Trench 3 with geophysics and archaeology

List of Plates

Plate 1	Trench 3
Plate 2	Trench 10
Plate 3	Section 300, Trench 3

Summary

Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on the site of a proposed residential development at St Frideswide's Farm, Cutteslowe, Oxford in November 2020. The fieldwork was commissioned by Tetra Tech on behalf of Croudace Homes in advance of a planning application.

A geophysical survey of the 3.6ha site carried out prior to the works starting detected a small number of geophysical anomalies of possible archaeological origin.

A total of 11 trenches were excavated across the site, the majority of which targeted the geophysical anomalies previously identified. Of these 11 trenches, one contained a potential archaeological feature and the majority of anomalies were identified as natural features and remnants of a ridge and furrow system. A good correlation between the results of the geophysical survey and archaeological evaluation was demonstrated.

The single feature, identified within Trench 3 correlated with a north-east to south-west aligned linear geophysical anomaly. The feature was very shallow and contained no dateable material and may relate to a former trackway to nearby farm buildings.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Martin Brown of Tetra Tech who commissioned the work on behalf of Croudace Homes. Thanks are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was directed by Jim Mumford, who was supported by Lee Sparks, Chris Pickard, Sally Jones, Rebecca Coombes and Samantha Jenkins. Survey and digitising was carried out by Sally Jones and Caroline Souday. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicky Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Tetra Tech on behalf of Croudace Homes to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed residential development.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of a submission of a Planning Application. A specification was set by David Radford (OCC) 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 2020). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies to the north of Oxford, immediately north of Cutteslowe, and its eastern and northern edges run along the administrative border between Oxford City and Cherwell districts. The site is centred on NGR SP 50462 10899. The site is bounded to the west by the A4620 Oxford Road, to the north and east by arable fields and to the south by the premises of the North Oxford Lawn Tennis Club and Oxford Hawks Hockey Club.
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development consists of the western part of a larger sub-rectangular arable field situated at c. 68m above ordnance datum.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formation, mudstone formed around 157-166 million years ago during the Jurassic period (BGS online).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in a Desk Based Assessment (WYG 2020), the results of which are summarized below.

Prehistoric

- 1.3.2 Palaeolithic evidence within the study area is quite extensive, with finds including 75 handaxes and numerous retouched flakes identified from Wolvercote in a former channel of the Thames, with further Palaeolithic flint flakes identified during foundation excavations at Davenant Road and 6 handaxes found in a drainage trench close to Banbury Road. Findspots of Mesolithic material culture have also been variously recorded within the study area and include a Quartzite pebble macehead found at Water Eaton and a micro-burin.
- 1.3.3 There is documentary evidence for a Neolithic long barrow in the vicinity of Cutteslowe, which was reputedly levelled in 1261 by the Sherriff because it had been used as a retreat by robbers. Neolithic activity is also indicated by two findspots including, a Neolithic Cushion Macehead which was identified in a field potentially associated with Woodeaton Villa, and a fragment of a Neolithic flint adze-blade recovered to the south of the site, near the recreation ground.

- 1.3.4 Bronze Age evidence from the study area includes four probable barrows, including: a probable ring ditch to the south-west of Water Eaton; a round barrow thought to be located in the area now occupied by the North Oxford Golf course; and a pair of barrows to the immediate north of site, located in the field north of the track leading to St Frideswide Farmhouse. The barrows to the north of the site and the barrow formerly located at the golf course are all illustrated as sizeable mounds on early Ordnance Survey mapping. A number of anomalies identified in geophysical survey has been interpreted as a D-shaped enclosure and a series of ring ditches, both Prehistoric in origin. The ring ditches have been interpreted as indicating round barrows. The barrows are located east of the site, on a low ridge. They are not currently included on the Historic Environment Record.
- 1.3.5 There is a possible trackway and settlement located to the south-west of Water Eaton and north-east of the site. Two incomplete rectangular enclosures and associated trackways are visible as cropmarks in NMR aerial photos and the settlement is likely to be of early Iron Age to Roman-British date. There are also various findspots of Iron Age material from the study area, including; two Greek Iron Age bronze coins- one of Vella, one of Boeotia; a bronze chape/scabbard of La Tene date; and a scatter of pottery sherds, including indeterminate Iron Age and Romano-British sherds.

Romano-British

- 1.3.6 Oxford itself was never established as a major settlement following the conquest, and much of the evidence from the period suggests that Oxford was largely characterised by industry, with several pottery kiln sites in the city and surrounding area. Evidence of villas in the surrounding countryside does exist, together with a temple at nearby Woodeaton, to the northeast of the study area. The temple was excavated in the 1950s and 1960s and consisted of a rectangular Romano-Celtic temple off-set within a rectangular temenos enclosure. Two distinct structural phases, broadly dated by pottery and coin evidence, indicate that the first temple dated from the later 1st century CE, with a second temple of typical Roman-Celtic form in the mid-2nd century CE, and evidence for continued use into the late 4th/early 5th century CE. Banbury Road may have formed part of a north-south route from Kings Sutton to central Oxford during the Roman period.
- 1.3.7 Evidence for rural Roman occupation is well represented within the study area, and includes a possible villa site at Cutteslowe, and the edge of a Roman settlement at the North Oxford Park and Ride site, suggested by several ditches including one of Roman date (1st-2nd century CE), pottery sherds and storage jars. Further indications of Roman activity are located throughout the study area and include: pieces of Roman pottery, chiefly mortaria, and coarse grey ware found at a slight depth below the surface in the Brickfield at Pear Tree Hill; Roman coins from Davenant Road, Woodeaton and from the River Ray, south of Islip; and Roman to post-medieval pottery found at 37 Blandford Avenue, including calcite gritted (late Iron Age-Roman) rims and body sherds, 3 Samian sherds, red and white wares including 3rd/4th century colour coated, 3 mortaria and grey ware ubiquitous with the 1st-4th century.

Early medieval/Anglo-Saxon

- 1.3.8 Cutteslowe is mentioned in 1004 when St Frideswide's was recorded as holding two hides of land there, while a medieval assize roll of 13th century date refers to two murders 'by or near the how [mound, tumulus] of Cutteslowe' which is presumed to be a reference to the destroyed chambered long barrow discussed above. Evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity within the study area is indicated by several findspots, including a small ornamented bronze strap fitting of 9th century date (HER26214) and a weaving batten that was auctioned at Christie's in 1962, and though to have come from a female grave in the Islip area. A findspot of Roman coins from the River Ray, south of Islip was supposedly located near other, unrelated material, including a skull and other objects of Saxon or later date.

Medieval

- 1.3.9 During the medieval period Cutteslowe was an extra-parochial area derived from an early grant to St Frideswide's minister in Oxford of 2 hides of a 5-hide estate. A confirmation of the minister's possessions in 1004 indicates an area roughly comparable with the later estate, with Banbury Road marking the western boundary of the estate, and a stream marking the eastern boundary. By the beginning of the 11th century, St Frideswide's church had attracted 'a considerable endowment' which included 'what may be called small manors at Cowly, Whitehill in Tackley and Cutslow [sic].
- 1.3.10 Documentary evidence suggests that Cutteslowe was a late Saxon village, first being mentioned in 1004 when St Frideswide's, Oxford, held 2 hides of land there. There is an entry for Cutteslowe in the Domesday book which mentions the canons of Oxford (St Frideswide) as lords in 1086 and may refer to the monastic community in Oxford supposedly founded by the saint. St Frideswide's parish closed in 1298, and in 1341, Cutteslowe was recorded as forming part of St Edward's parish in Oxford, who had taken over St Frideswide's parish church and assumed the parochial functions. Following the dissolution, the priory seems to have been incorporated into Christ Church, Oxford, and it is assumed that Cutteslowe was likewise incorporated in Christ Church at this date. Historic mapping dating from 1832 indicates that the 'estate of Cutslow [sic] belonged to Christchurch at this time'.
- 1.3.11 Cutteslowe Deserted Medieval Village is located to the immediate east of St Frideswide's farm/ south-east of the listed farmhouse. It includes poor quality earthwork remains of the village, which was deserted sometime between 1350-1450. There was also a medieval moat at Cutteslow which is located to the north of St Frideswide's Farmhouse. The enclosed area does not appear to have supported any buildings in the past and has been occupied by an orchard since the 19th century, if not earlier. The location of the moated site and deserted medieval village suggest that St Frideswide's Farmhouse (Grade II*), which is 16th century in date, could have replaced an earlier manor building on the site. There is a collection of farm buildings to the south of the Farmhouse, which include both modern and historic ranges forming an irregular courtyard. The northern range includes a stone barn which could potentially be of medieval (12th century) date, although this has not been verified during the research undertaken to date.

1.3.12 The geophysical survey undertaken for the adjacent North Oxford site (WYAS 2020) identified extensive anomalies interpreted as the remains of medieval and post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation. They were considered likely to extend onto site.

Post-medieval, Industrial and Modern

1.3.13 Further post -medieval remains from within the study area include a quantity of pottery found alongside Roman sherds at 37 Blandford Avenue. Finds included: early glazed pieced, Tudor Greenwares of 16th century date and one rim of 16th/17th century origin; a possible 17th century Bellarmine neck of Rhenish ware, and bottle glass mainly of 18th century date. Unstamped pipe stems and a decorated bowl probably dating to the 19th Century were also identified.

1.3.14 The main asset dating to the Industrial era within the study area is the former Tollhouse (Grade II), located at 566 Banbury Road to the immediate south of the site. Banbury Road was turnpiked in 1755, and the Tollhouse was built in the early/mid-19th century. The toll house and road are associated with a Turnpike Milestone, which is located on a grass verge against a hedge outside of No. 423 Banbury Road. Further milestones within the study area are located 0.47km to the north of the application site, and c 1.5km to the south-west of the application site.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.
- ii. To determine the approximate extent of any surviving remains.
- iii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.
- iv. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- v. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- 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 or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.
- viii. To ground truth the results of the geophysical survey (AS 2020).

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The trial trench evaluation was focused upon a 3.6ha area that will be directly impacted upon by the proposed development. The evaluation comprised the excavation of 11 trenches in total, with 4 measuring 25m long by 1.90m wide and 7 measuring 50m long by 1.90m wide. The trenches were positioned in order to investigate anomalies identified by the preceding geophysical survey.

2.2.2 The trenches were located in accordance with the WSI (OA 2020) and laid out using a GPS with sub-15mm accuracy. The trenches were excavated using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Spoil was stored adjacent to, but at a safe distance from, the trench edges. Machining continued in even spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural deposits or the first archaeological horizon.

2.2.3 The exposed surfaces were sufficiently cleaned to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains.

2.2.4 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was completed in accordance with established best practice and the OA Field Manual.

2.2.5 A full photographic record comprising digital photos was collated and all archaeological features, deposits and trenches were photographed.

2.2.6 Upon completion of the works and in agreement with the Local Planning Archaeologist, David Radford, the trenches were backfilled with the arisings 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 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.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in the trenches was fairly uniform. The natural geology of yellow-brown gravel rich sandy clays, mixed with blue-grey clays was overlain by a grey-brown sandy clay subsoil, which in turn was overlain by ploughsoil.

3.2.2 The site had been heavily ploughed prior to the trial trenching exercise, to the extent that both subsoil and natural geology were visible in patches on the field surface.

3.2.3 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site remained mostly 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 linear feature, 302, was present in the south-eastern end of Trench 3 and was orientated north-east to south-west. The feature was a good match to a linear geophysical anomaly, and measured around 1.8m wide with diffuse edges (Fig. 4). The single fill, 303 (Fig 3, Plate 3) was a grey-brown sandy clay identical to the overlying subsoil, and was only 0.02m in depth. Although the original intervention was extended to aid finds recovery, none were present. Given the shallow nature of the fill, and its similarity to the overlying subsoil, it was not possible to establish a relationship between the two deposits.

3.3.2 No significant archaeological features were present in the other trenches, but remnants of the largely ploughed out ridge and furrow system were seen in two of the trenches to the north of the site (Trenches 6 and 11).

3.4 Finds summary

3.4.1 No finds were recovered during the course of the evaluation.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The trenches provided a good coverage of the proposed development area and were located to maximize the potential for exposing archaeological remains. The machining was carried out cleanly in generally fair weather, providing good visibility of deposits in the evaluation trenches.
- 4.1.2 The general lack of archaeological features identified can be relied upon as an accurate representation of the site.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 All trenches consisted of ploughsoil overlying subsoil and natural geology, though recent heavy ploughing had almost certainly reduced the depth of subsoil remaining in the stratigraphy. As such archaeological features sealed by the subsoil would have survived had they been present. There was a single potential archaeological feature of interest identified, although this was extremely shallow and its relationship with the overlying subsoil could not be determined. The majority of the geophysical anomalies were caused by ridge and furrow, land drains or localised changes in geology. No artefactual evidence was recovered from the site, and no environmental samples were taken.

4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The linear geophysical anomaly identified as the shallow feature within Trench 3 potentially continued to the north-east into the adjacent site (OA forthcoming), and was identified by geophysical survey (AS 2020), where it is described as a “curving linear ditch categorised as having a possible archaeological origin. The ditch is magnetically strong and has a magnetic signature that is akin to archaeological features, however the responses correspond to a footpath marked on old mapping from 1876 to 1955” (p. 4).
- 4.3.2 The footpath is mapped running in an almost west-east direction within the current site, to the north of the position of the linear anomaly, (where it would have crossed Trenches 5 and 9 – but was not present), and is unlikely to account for it, unless the footpath’s location changed over time. Given the linear feature’s shallow nature and the lack of any dateable material it is difficult to interpret further.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy clay					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.36
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.24	Ploughsoil- Dark grey brown sandy silts	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.12	Subsoil- grey brown sandy clay	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light grey brown sandy clay	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy silts					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.47
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.30	Ploughsoil- Dark grey brown sandy silts	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.17	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy clay	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light grey brown sandy silts	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of gravelly clay					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.31	Ploughsoil- Dark grey brown sandy silts	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.14	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy clay	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light grey clay with blue grey clay and gravels	-	-
303	Cut	1.8	0.02	Linear	-	-
304	Fill	1.8	0.02	Fill of 303	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of gravelly clay					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.43
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.33	Ploughsoil- Dark grey brown sandy silts	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.10	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy silts	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural- Light brown grey clay with blue grey clay and gravels	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of silty sand with gravels					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.38
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.21	Ploughsoil- Dark red brown sandy silts	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.17	Subsoil- Dark yellow brown sandy silts	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural – Yellow brown silty sand with gravels	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay and gravels					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.38
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.38	Ploughsoil- Dark brown sandy silts	-	-
601	Layer	-	0.10	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy clay	-	-
602	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light blue clay with gravels	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay and gravels					Length (m)	25
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.47

Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.37	Ploughsoil- Dark brown sandy silts	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.10	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy clay	-	-
702	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light blue grey clay with gravels	-	-

Trench 8						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy clay					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.56
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
800	Layer	-	0.39	Ploughsoil- Dark red-brown sandy silts	-	-
801	Layer	-	0.13	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy silts	-	-
802	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light grey brown sandy clay	-	-

Trench 9						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay and gravels					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.37
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
900	Layer	-	0.27	Ploughsoil- Dark grey brown sandy silts	-	-
901	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil- Light orange brown sandy clay	-	-
902	Layer	-	-	Natural- Light orange grey clay with gravels	-	-

Trench 10						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay and gravels					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.34
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.30	Ploughsoil- Dark brown sandy silts	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.18	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy clay	-	-

1002	Layer	-	-	Natural- Light orange grey clay with gravels	-	-
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Trench 11						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of Sandy clay and gravels					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.90
					Avg. depth (m)	0.40
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1100	Layer	-	0.20	Ploughsoil- Dark red-brown sandy silts	-	-
1101	Layer	-	0.17	Subsoil- Orange brown sandy clay	-	-
1102	Layer	-	-	Natural – Light grey brown sandy clay with gravels	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

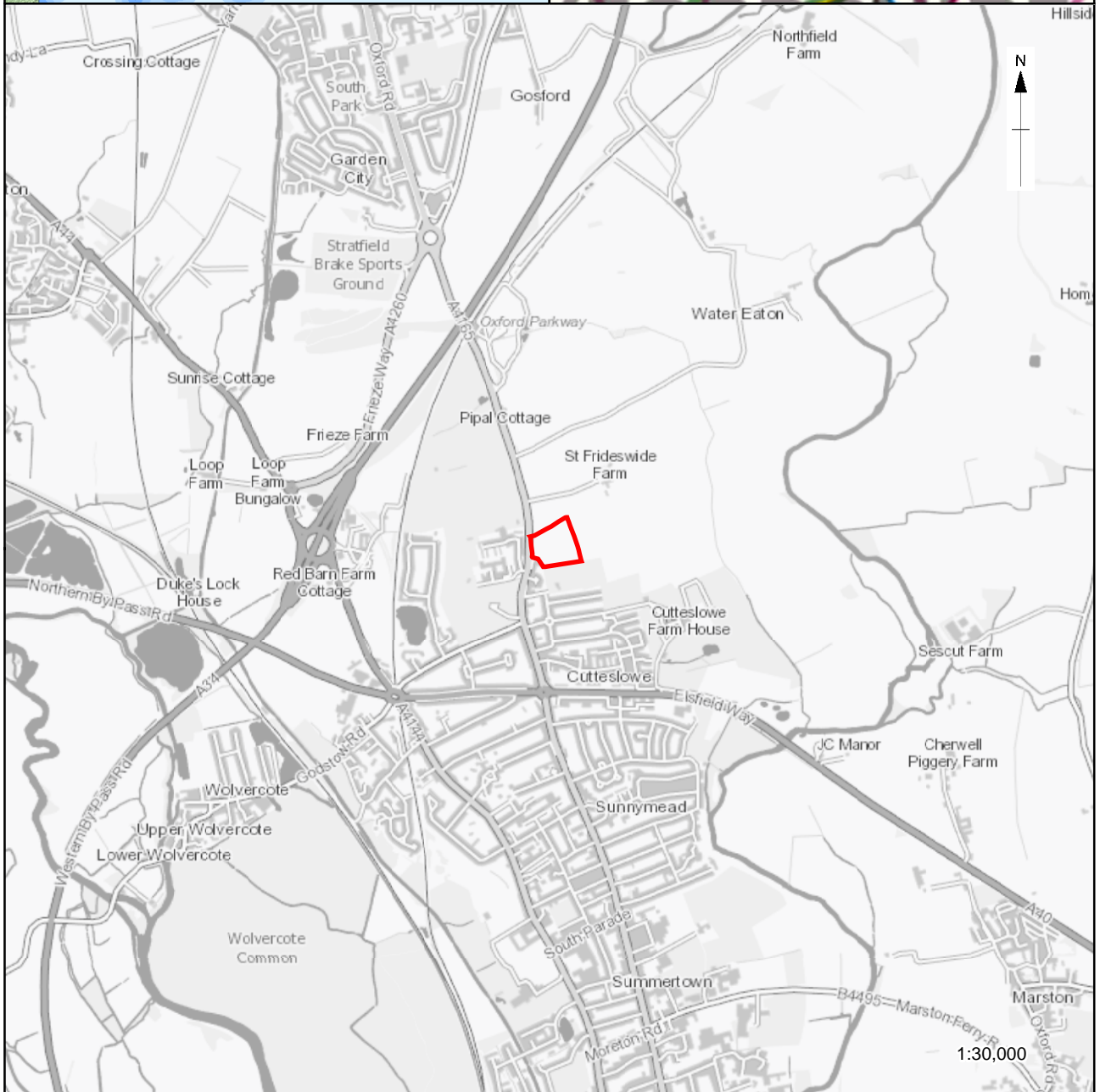
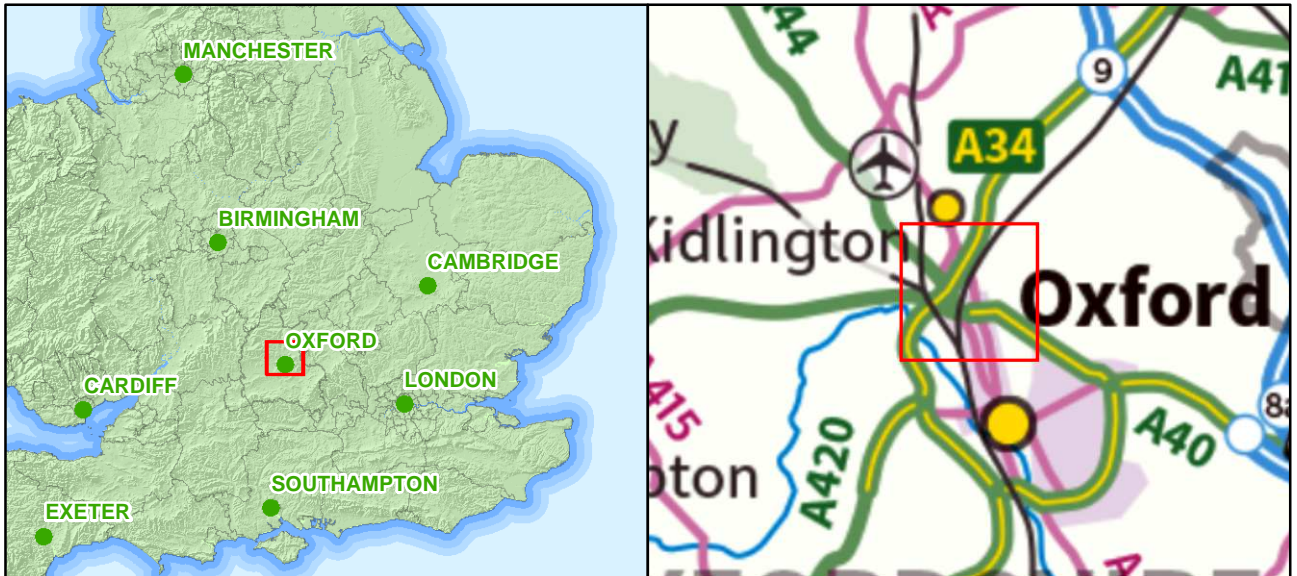
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APPENDIX C**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	St Frideswide's Farm, Cutteslowe, Oxford
Site code:	OXSFR120
Grid Reference	SP 50462 10899
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	November 2020
Area of Site	3.58 ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Oxford, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2020.83.
Summary of Results:	<p>A total of 11 trenches were excavated across the site, the majority of which targeted the geophysical anomalies previously identified. Of these 11 trenches, one contained a potential archaeological feature and the majority of anomalies were identified as natural features and remnants of a ridge and furrow system. A good correlation between the results of the geophysical survey and archaeological evaluation was demonstrated.</p> <p>The single feature, identified within Trench 3 correlated with a north-east to south-west aligned linear geophysical anomaly. The feature was very shallow and contained no dateable material and may relate to a former trackway to nearby farm buildings.</p>



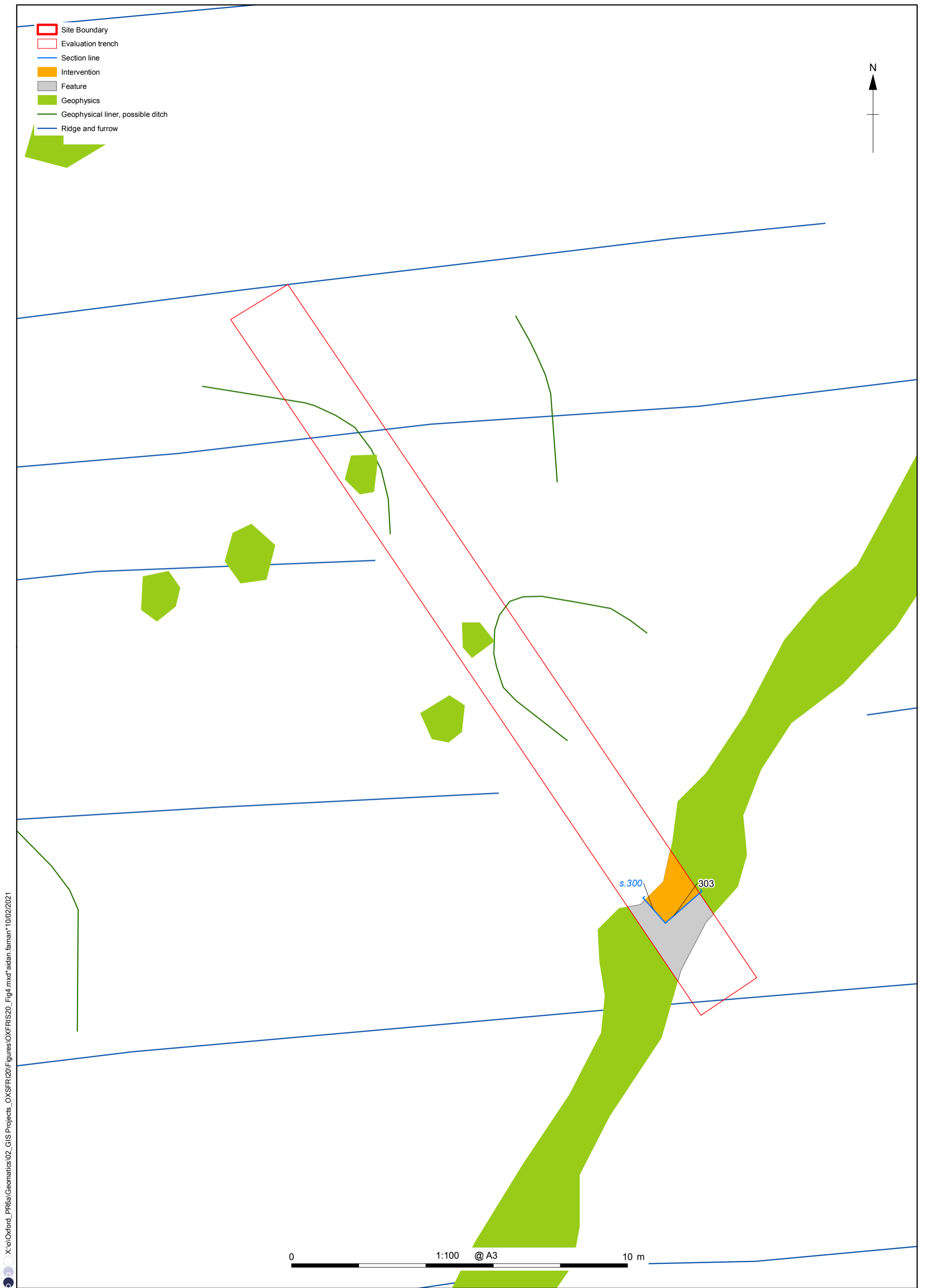
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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Proposed trench locations with geophysics



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Figure 4: Trench 3 with geophysics and archaeology

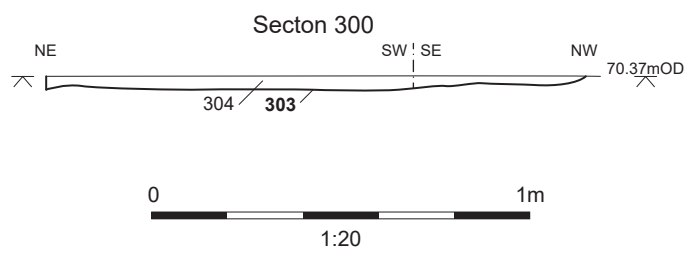


Figure 3: Section 300, Trench 3



Plate 1: Trench 3



Plate 2: Trench 10



Plate 3: Section 300, Trench 3



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